

Genji Monogatari and the Discourse of Modernity

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1: Orikuchi Shinobu

As Japan claimed its superiority to China in order to justify its leadership in the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during World War II, Orikuchi Shinobu, anthropologist, claimed the superiority of (*The Tale of Genji*, ca.1005; Murasaki Shikibu) over any pieces of Chinese literature. He wrote “Nihon no sōi: *Genji monogatari* wo shiranu hito ni yosu” (“Originality of Japanese Literature: for the People Who Do Not Know *The Tale of Genji*”) in 1944 as an attempt to prove the superior quality of Japanese literature over Chinese literature. Orikuchi extols *Genji monogatari* as an expression of the national essence of Japan:

This novel [*The Tale of Genji*] perfectly evinces the themes and ideals which Japanese novels should have. In these terms, it is absolutely different from Chinese novels Courtly literature in Japan extends its scope beyond the court and the palaces of aristocracy as far as landscapes and lives in foreign countries. Courtly literature and fairy tales in China, on the contrary, limit their scope to the gardens of aristocratic houses and abodes of fairies. To be concrete and realistic are our national characteristics.¹

Orikuchi attributes these characteristics of Japanese literature—the concrete and realistic—to the “innate superiority of Japanese literature.”² He argues further that fairies in the imaginary landscapes in Chinese literature were excellently transformed, after adapted into Japanese literature, as more realistic stories of men of nobility who suffer from a series of ill fortunes after exile but finally get reconciled with their fates.³ Those stories formed a literary motif called “stories of nobility

¹ Orikuchi, “Nihon no sōi” 273-74. The translation is mine.

² Orikuchi, “Nihon no sōi” 281.

³ Orikuchi, “Nihon no sōi” 282-83.

exiled” (*kishu ryūri tan*) in Japan. Orikuchi might have felt uncomfortable, as we imagine, with the fact that the literary motif of *kishu ryūri tan* was originally a Chinese one, in spite of the fact that it makes an integral part in many pieces of Japanese literature. Orikuchi’s article is an expression of his unswerving faith in the native values of Japanese literature. His admiration of Japanese literature makes, at the same time, a discourse of glorification of Japan as a nation-state vis-à-vis China, although Japan had much influences and inspirations from China in earlier ages.

Orikuchi tries to encapsulate the anchoring moments of Japanese literature through a classic, *Genji monogatari*. It is not Natsume Sōseki or Mori Ōgai or any other novelist after the Meiji Restoration, but *Genji monogatari*, by which Orikuchi tries to rediscover the epitome of Japanese literary tradition. T. S. Eliot is so fascinated by the Grail legend that he organizes his *Waste Land* through the images of the Fisher King—the barren land and its eventual regeneration. It is because of the appeal of ancientness that *Genji monogatari* and the Grail legend have. The sheer primordial-ness of those literary works and literary images seduces Orikuchi and T. S. Eliot to make a trip back toward the putative origin of their nations or cultures.

Orikuchi was concerned with the moment of “the emergence of Japanese literature.” He wrote about it almost ten times throughout his life. His theory⁴ that Japanese literature emerged from “*norito*,” sacred words that Shinto priests utter as if possessed by godly beings (*marebito*), has had a great influence in criticism of Japanese literature in Japan. It evinces the idea of the spiritual efficacy of

⁴ What follows is a paraphrase of Orikuchi, “Yamatojidai no bungaku” (“Literature in the Yamato Period”) 93-158. “The Yamato Period” is the beginning period of Japanese history. By the early fourteenth-century, the clan leader in the Yamato area in the south-west part of Japan began to assume the dominance among other clans, to be dignified as *tennō*. The first *tennō* was called Jimmu, who claimed a descent from divine ancestors. Jimmu Tennō held power during some historic age, probably in the first century A.D. The age vaguely called Yamato covers the long period between the rise of the Yamato clan and the transference of the royal power to Nara, which is in the vicinity of Yamato, in 710. Therefore, “literature” in the Yamato Period can be called “literature” only retrospectively if one tries to find the origin of literature as far back as the Yamato Period.

Japanese words (the myth of *kotodama*). Moreover, it helped to establish the myth of the godly origin of the imperial house, since those godly beings are invoked by the supernatural power of *tennō*. In Orikuchi's theory, *tennō* functions in this ritual as the supreme transmitter of godly words, as a mediator between godly beings and his people. As godly envoys the lesser transmitters send out the sacred words to the clans of various provinces in Japan.

The Shinto priests' function to speak "norito" was later taken over by clans specialized in it. One clan was in charge of celebratory decree, and the other clan was in charge of appeasing spirits which, according to Shintō⁵ beliefs, haunt houses and other places in nature. The practices at court were imitated by clans and priests in provinces, making, as a result, a number of *norito*. Since priests are possessed by divine power when they recite *norito*, *norito* were considered to be sacred, although they seem to have originated in political decrees. The ideologies working behind these practices were to stabilize the position of *tennō* as an undisputable one among many powerful clans in the Yamato area. *Norito* makes an original point of Japanese literature in Orikuchi's theory. Orikuchi's definition of *mono* of *monogatari* as "a spirit" and *katari* (*gatari*) as a conjugated form of the verb which means "to possess/captivate" derives naturally from his theory of the sacred origin of Japanese language and also of a Japanese genre, *monogatari*. Therefore, it is quite natural for Orikuchi to define the original form of *monogatari* as a narrative which a narrator reads aloud as if possessed by a spirit.

Those sacred words uttered by Shinto priests make the origin of *monogatari* so that *monogatari* acquire a magical quality. What we observe here is not only the attempt to affirm the legitimacies of the Japanese imperial house as sanctified by the divinity but also the idea of *monogatari* as the

⁵ Buddhism was introduced to Japan in 538 or 552 from India through China. The religion Japanese had prior to it was Shintō. The object of Shintō, called *kami* (divinity), is diverse in its manifestations. The divinity in Shintō are multiple and not absolutely heavenly. The rigid dichotomy between heaven and earth is an idea foreign to Shintō, whose mentality remained even after Buddhism became the dominant religion in Japan. The divinity in Shintō are not only multiple but can be identified with various natural objects, places, and people. They easily merge with other spiritual beings from other cults or religions.

high pronouncements of traditional Japanese values connected closely with the divine origin of tenno.

The anthropological study of Orikuchi informs, consciously or unconsciously, Japanese critics' search for the origin of *monogatari*. Many critics are concerned with when and how *monogatari* was created. Fujii Sadakazu's huge book entitled *Monogatari bungaku no seiritsu shi (History of the Rise of Monogatari Literature, 1987)* treats carefully and extensively how *monogatari* evolved from its putative original point.⁶ Recapitulating various critics' attempts toward the definition of *monogatari*, he divides them into the school of *katari* and the school of *mono* as his naming goes. The *katari* school defines *monogatari* as an explanation or interpretation (*katari*) about "things" (*mono*): we get *mono wo kataru* here with an emphasis on *wo* as a denominator of the object of the verb *kataru*. The *mono* school focuses on the identity of *mono*, interpreting *monogatari* as a story narrated by *mono* (a spirit) acting as an agent: we get *mono ga kataru* with an emphasis on *ga* as a denominator of the subject of the verb *kataru*. Orikuchi is included in the *mono* school, as the inaugurator of the definition of *mono* as "a spirit." Mitani Eiichi adapts and alters Orikuchi's theory. People imagined the souls of their ancestors as heavenly beings. They talked about them. Those stories became a legacy of the family. Later on they were circulated outside of the family to give joy to people in the larger society.⁷ Mitani Kuniaki thinks that *mono* effects objectification of narrating activities: *mono* is an "object" acting as a mediator between the narrator and the recipient.⁸ Takahashi Tōru annuls differences of *mono* as a spirit and as an object: in pre-modern ages objects and phenomena were conceived as spiritual beings.⁹

These are only bits and pieces of the vast criticism in Japan on the origin and development of *monogatari*. It seems that one could not study *monogatari* in Japan without being concerned with its original moment. The anthropological

⁶ What follows is a paraphrase of pp. 628-46 of his book.

⁷ Mitani Eiichi 11-20.

⁸ Mitani Kuniaki, "Monogatari to wa nani ka" 382.

⁹ Takahashi, "Monogatari gengo josetsu" 123.

desire of those *monogatari* critics gravitates toward the origins of *monogatari*, piercing through the density of new and old *monogatari*. Those stories of the emerging moments of *monogatari* advocate an intensification of fidelity to what is primordial about Japanese literature.

Yamaori Tetsuo remarks interesting similarities and differences between Orikuchi Shinobu and Yanagida Kunio, both of whom were active in the early twentieth-century before and during World War II, in terms of their concerns with “origins.” Yamaori compares Orikuchi’s article “Okina no hassei” (“the Emergence of an Old Man”) with Yanagida’s article “Momotarō no tanjo” (“the Birth of the Peach Boy”). Momotarō, a herō in children’s tales, makes an archetype, from which the history of the cult of “a little man in the water” began. In other words, Momotarō makes a starting point of a literary motif which people in later ages modify and recast in various ways. On the other hand, *okina* in Orikuchi has been transformed into *marebito* (a godly being or a heavenly alien) to be repeated throughout history. *Okina/marebito* as an origin retains its origin-ness wherever it appears. Yamaori observes that the primary power of emergence in Orikuchi remains ever active to move along the flow of time back again toward the moment of emergence. “Emergence” repeats itself on the synchronic plane without being historicized. For Orikuchi, “emergence” in Japanese literature is inscribed in various texts at various historical moments; therefore, the originality of Japanese literature remains pure and intact.

Forgetting or pretending to forget Japanese literature’s indebtedness to Chinese literature, Orikuchi narrativizes the history of Japanese literature from its putatively primordial past, when tennō already always existed, and thus fixates the origins of the national tradition as an image of an absolute past sanctified by the sacredness of the imperial house. Benedict Anderson’s remark concerning the formation of “an imagined community” is quite relevant here. He says that “an imagined community” “loom[s] out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide[s] into a limitless future.”¹⁰ Anderson argues further:

¹⁰ Anderson 12.

Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time'—towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam. This fashioning, however, is marked by deaths, which, in a curious inversions of conventional genealogy, start from an originary present. World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel.¹¹

History, which consists of multiple and fragmented meanings and diverse and separate events, needs to forget some things to remember other things. A particular moment of the past is chosen as an absolute past from which the national history starts. What to forget and what to remember change the way we understand the past. Homi K. Bhabha puts it: "It is this forgetting—a minus in the origin—that constitutes the *beginning* of the nation's narrative."¹² He further observes that when "the unified present of the will to nationhood" as the enunciatory present intersects with the past, the history of the nation and the nation-people is articulated. He argues:

To be obliged to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that *performs* the problematic totalization of the national will.¹³

"The national will" of Japan was abnormally keen on constitution of a totality by excluding inassimilable elements in 1944, when Orikuchi published his article "Nihon no soi—*Genji monogatari* wo shiranu hito ni yosu." At its height of imperialism, Japan's national will was in favor of justification of its invasions of China and Korea. As imperial Japan claimed its superior position among Asian countries in order to dominate Asia, so did Orikuchi's Japanese literature claim superiority over Chinese literature. "The enunciative present of the nation" of

¹¹ Anderson 205.

¹² Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 310. Italics are Bhabha's.

¹³ Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 311. Italics are Bhabha's.

Japan ignores the discontinuities and heterogeneousness of the history of Japan, or the history of any other country.

Thus, something political is to be deciphered from Orikuchi's concern with the origin and originality of *monogatari*. We wonder why he wanted to go back to antiquity. The very need to emphasize the tradition implies the fact that the tradition is being endangered by something that comes from abroad. In order to counterpoise those threatening powers, Orikuchi tried to affirm their loyalty to the unique and continuous tradition of Japan. Only when one compares Japanese literature with its presumed opponents such as Chinese literature or Western literature, one gets concerned with how to prove its superiority. Only then one might want to consolidate the tradition of Japanese literature against foreign literatures. The obsession with the originality of Japanese literature would not make much sense except in relation to what is different from it. To call Japanese literature as "one's own" as Orikuchi does necessarily comes with the awareness that "one's own" literature is being challenged by a foreign/other literature. When threatened by a foreign power, nationalism is evoked most strongly.

2: "The West" and Japan

Orikuchi speaks toward Chinese people, whom he calls "the people who do not know *Genji monogatari*." However, the real audience he addresses is "the West," against which he claims the superiority of Japan vis-à-vis China. The absolute Other is postulated as "the West" with or without his consciousness, when Orikuchi speaks for Chinese people. Without a judge somewhere at a higher point, which is superior, Japan or China, would never be decided. The dynamics of attraction and repulsion toward the powerful Other, which used to be China in pre-modern Japan and is now a putative entity called "the West," encourage Japan to legitimize its own national culture. Orikuchi's acclaim of *Genji monogatari* is apparently motivated by his competitive feelings toward Chinese literature; however, his intended audience is "the West," toward which he means to assure

Japan's position as the center of Asia.

It is Naoki Sakai who observes that the opposition of Japan and the West has got firmly installed in the discourse of Japanese intellectual history in modern Japan after the Meiji Period:

In the field of Japanese intellectual history since the Meiji Period, few works have been written that have no explicit or implicit reference to the history of Western thought. The history of Japanese thought was created as a symmetrical equivalent to the history of Western thought or of Western philosophy, so that this field has been dominated from the outset by demands for symmetry and equality.¹⁴

Discussing Watsuji Tetsurō in particular and Japanese intellectual history in general, Sakai argues that the Japanese ethos is essentially grasped as “homogeneous difference” from the putative West. The obsession with the West, unwittingly, leads many Japanese intellectuals to refer to themselves as “we” Japanese, transhistorically united and substantiated as the national-ethnic community.

Japan's belated experience with the Western imperialist threat in the late nineteenth-century, which put an end to the two hundred years' seclusion policy¹⁵ of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1639-1854), was so overpowering that the system of values they had taken for granted for a long time was overturned in the face of the Western value system. The Meiji government was established by the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which led to the downfall of the Shogunate (which had assumed the supreme power after dispossessing tennō of his power in 1192) and the restoration of the royal regime. With a sudden confrontation with Western

¹⁴ Sakai 48.

¹⁵ Mainly because the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867) was afraid that the poor peasants might stand up to rebellion in the name of Christianity as they did several times, and that the provincial lords seated in the west end of the country but holding greatest power might reinforce their weapons and vessels through trading with foreign countries, it decided to forbid the Japanese people to go and come back from abroad and foreigners to come to Japan except Chinese and Dutch, who were, though, kept under strict supervision. The final closing down was effected in 1639.

countries, the Meiji government tried to break with the past through a deliberate and hurried strategy of modernization and Westernization. One of the slogans of the Meiji government was “Eastern ethics and Western science” (*wakon yōsai*). The encounter with Western civilization at the end of the nineteenth-century confused Japan enormously, as it still does to some extent.

Japan’s subjugation to Chinese thought between the third-century and the late ninth-century was voluntarily chosen. The interaction with the West in the late nineteenth-century was inaugurated by the West in the form of imperial expansion. Encountering the West in the discursive contours of cultural colonialism, Japan feels both attraction and repulsion against the powerful Other. The West is overpowering in the Japanese eye. Because it is overpowering, it encourages Japan to appeal to its own historical past as the unifying power to defend itself against it. The sense of tension arising from the sudden recognition of the powerful Other appears in the continuing practices to locate insular society on the international map, and, further, as attempts to resituate Japanese culture as timeless cultural forms. Masao Miyoshi observes this Japanese tendency in terms of its twentieth-century situation after World War II. He says that nationalism has a dual nature in Japan—“self-hatred and self-infatuation”—both of which are the result of the lack of experience on the international scene.¹⁶ Western culture came to Japan with such an overwhelming power that Japanese ever since have had feelings of mental inferiority toward the West.

Before World War II, “West” for Japan was both Europe and the United States. After World War II, it is the United States that obsesses and predominates Japan as the representative of the West. In the last part of his *Orientalism* Edward Said remarks on the fact that America took over the function of Europe in the twentieth-century: “[t]he fact is that Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism [of America], where its ruling paradigms do not contest, and even confirm, the continuing imperial design to dominate Asia.”¹⁷

While Said observes that “The Arab world today is an intellectual, political,

¹⁶ Miyoshi, “Bashers and Bashing in the World” 92-93.

¹⁷ Said, *Orientalism* 322.

and cultural satellite of the United States,”¹⁸ a Japanese critic, Etō Jun, discloses his strong preoccupation with the idea that Japan exists “under the umbrella of the United States.” Etō’s series of books—*Amerika to watashi* (*America and I*, 1965), *Seijuku to sōshitsu* (*Maturity and Loss*, 1967), and *Jiyū to kinki* (*Freedom and Forbidding*, 1984)—argue that Japanese fear of and anxiety toward America is implicated in a subtle way in the post-World War II Japanese novels. Etō discerns the political in the most non-political sentence uttered by the protagonist, Nashida, of *Uragoe de utae kimigayo* (*Sing the National Anthem in Falsetto*, 1982) written by Maruya Saiichi (b.1925): 日本といふのは特にそんな感じのする国ですね。ただ存在する. . . / “Japan exists in the world most nonchalantly without specific national goals.”¹⁹ Etō analyzes the ideological implication of this seemingly non-ideological remark. He holds that the non-political guise of this utterance reveals more than it conceals how the American cultural domination, to say nothing of the political and economical, penetrates every corner of Japanese discourse. The subtlety of its penetration is such that the character in Maruya’s novel, as well as Japanese people in general, assumes that Japan is not committed to any ideology in the world, while it is obviously an ally of the United States. It is subtle even in the politico-economical scenes. It is even subtler in the aesthetic domain so as to define its expressional possibilities as in Maruya’s novel.²⁰

The Occupation Army of the United States gave Japan after the end of World War II the very structure on which Japan began its new life crossing out its militaristic past. It gave the constitution, the anti-monopoly Law, the 6-3-3 educational system, and other measures. Americanism became complete in the context of the Korean War and the Cold War in the 1950s. The Korean War accelerated Japan’s economic rehabilitation, bringing *tokuju* (emergency demands for Japan due to the outbreak of the war) to Japan. The Cold War encouraged the United States to make an ally out of Japan in defense against the power of Communism trying to overcome the whole Asia. The Conference on Modern

¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism* 322.

¹⁹ *Uragoe de utae kimigayo* 397. The translation is mine.

²⁰ Eto, *Jiyū to kinki* 37.

Japan held in Hakone in 1960 was not only for the academic study of Japan's modernization. It instilled Americanism into Japan in a subtler but stronger way. The topic was how to evaluate the history of Japan from the Meiji Restoration up to that point, and to identify the particularities of Japan's modernization compared with other countries in Asia. Those debates are called as a whole "the modernization theory," which was frequently staged on academic scenes after the Hakone conference.²¹ Various panelists both from the United States and Japan talked about the topic in various ways. There are three points to be noticed in their talk. One is that the process of modernization is emplotted with the history of the United States as the positive reference point. The theory of the five stages of modernization argued by W. W. Rostow ostensibly promotes the ethos of the United States by putting the stage of mass consumption as the final stage of modernization, which the United States entered as early as the 1920s and Western Europe and Japan in the 1950s.²² The second point is that the conference bracketed the history of Japan and narrativized it as the process how it came to join the West. Harootunian remarks concerning the argument made by Reischauer, who was appointed as an ambassador to Japan in the year after the conference:

The argument suggested that Japan was really not other to the West . . . and, therefore, already enjoyed the identity of selfsameness rather than difference and lack that marked the place of otherness reserved for Third World societies in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and China. Japan became Echo to America's Narcissus.²³

²¹ Kinbara 3. For the following account of "modernization theory," I am indebted to Kinbara and Harootunian. Harootunian, in his turn, acknowledges his indebtedness to Kinbara. Harootunian emphasizes more the ideologically charged strategy of the United States than Kinbara does. Their arguments are, however, similar in many points. In the following notes, I mention the relevant pages in both of them, when both of them argue in the same way.

²² Kinbara 59-64.

²³ Harootunian 207.

Japan is considered to have attained the same “modern” stage of development as the West, while other countries in Asia and those in Africa are designated as the Third World. Reischauer’s theory gave Japan a unique place as an Asian country.

The third point is the turn toward Japonism in their arguments. Reischauer attributes the reason Japan has achieved superiority among Asian countries to the fact that Japan has passed through feudal ages. What is admirable about Japan is, as he further states, that it has transformed its feudalism into democracy without much revolutionary upheaval through the Meiji Restoration.²⁴

The Hakone conference gave a new exclusivist myth to Japan. Japan has retrieved its past, whose story is a continuous success story with imperialistic invasions into China and Korea during World War II as merely a deviation from its history. The Japanese tradition continuous from its immemorial past has driven its nation through ups and downs of its history toward modernization. And it is now on equal standing with the United States in terms of mass consumption. The myth was constructed together with “America’s Japan,” which Japan thinks of as “Japan’s Japan,” as the title of Harootunian’s article suggests.

Being modernized is, thus, encoded as being Americanized in Japan after World War II. Americanism masquerades as a faceless power in Japan. It is faceless, because the United States does not uphold self-centered benefits as its objectives. Instead it claims itself as working for the world at large. Democracy and the world’s peace are ideals the United States claims that it is working for. Saeki Keishi defines Americanism as “the amalgam of those notions such as liberalism, democracy, market economy, all of which the modern world thinks as universal and by all of which the modern civilization is supported by.”²⁵

The modern unilaterally equated with the West—particularly America in the context of the twentieth-century—imposes its norms under the disguise of universality and transhistorically superior values. Modernization was encoded as being Westernized or Americanized in Japan. Etō Jun is one of those who notice

²⁴ Kinbara 123-134.

²⁵ Saeki 284. The translation is mine.

something artificially imposed in Japan's modernity—the fact that Japanese do not know that “Japan's Japan” is in reality “America's Japan.” He is at a loss, however, what to do with this situation, since he knows that Japan could not exist outside of “the umbrella of America.” His obsession with the American Occupation in Japan is not, therefore, formulated as anti-Americanism. He is not explicit about his nationalism. Therefore his nationalism comes out in an abrupt way. In *Seijuku to sōshitsu* he analyzes the structures of Japanese society and American society respectively as matrilineal and patriarchal. He notices a loss in Japanese society—a loss of “father” which used to manifest himself as “God,” “the way of Confucianism,” or “Meiji Tennō” during the Edo Period and the Meiji Period.²⁶ The existence of “God” used to offer stability and order to Japanese society, as he says. He sounds quite envious of American society:

A cowboy starts as a lonely “individual” for the frontier in the west driving “an orphan cow.” His personal footsteps are, however, identified with those of the United States' national and public goal of expanding its territory. He settles down in the frontier and meets “friends” “Father” as “the nation” proves to be more influential on him than “mother,” who hides herself somewhere in order to make her son more independent. The cowboy as an independent boy can easily identify himself with “the nation/” the father,” which is imaged, in its turn, as a boy who protested against Europe and gained independence from it. The cowboy is, in this way, brought up in patriarchal society.²⁷

Etō thinks that American society is patriarchal, while Japanese society is maternal. American society is imaged as a wandering cowboy. Japanese society is described as populated by farmers who have settled down in one fixed place and therefore do not have to be quite independent. The maternal love was lost because it was judged inferior when the American Occupation claimed the unquestionable superiority of the modern industrial society of the United States. Japan lost its

²⁶ Etō, *Seijuku to sōshitsu* 61.

²⁷ Etō, *Seijuku to sōshitsu* 44. The translation is mine.

“mother” at this moment. It had already lost its “father”—Confucianism or Meiji Tennō—earlier in history when it decided to follow the Western footsteps for modern industrial society. Japan lost an ideal against which it could measure itself. On the other hand, American people model their own individual lives on the history of their own nation.

Etō’s argument is quite perceptive in that it discloses the “self-deception” inhering in Japanese people’s minds ever since they encountered “the West.” Whether Japanese are proud of its status in the First World or they try to defend Japanese culture for its traditions, there is always “the West” in their minds. The “self-deception” of Japanese people is the “self-deception” of Etō, though, in that he is too enfeebled to articulate the necessity of nationalism in Japan.

3: Retrospective Formation of *Monogatari* as a Genre

Only when bounded by “the West” or China or some other form of “Other,” Japanese literature is perceived as such. And when Japanese literature is perceived as an evidence of Japanese ethnic triumph, it is classical Japanese literature that is identified retrospectively as the residuum of values of Japan as a nation-state. Something old is retrospectively defined as old and therefore indigenous through modernity, since it is the modern desire to rediscover the old and present it as an ideal lost to them.

Modernity makes pre-modernity, paradoxically. Karatani Kōjin argues in *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* (*Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 1988) that *monogatari* was defined as such only retroactively in the perspectival configuration which came as an effect of the construction of modernity in the particular milieu of the Meiji period (1868-1911). One of the effects that the hurried strategies of Westernization in the Meiji Period had on literature was that the novel as a new genre was introduced through translation of European novels. The sudden appearance of those novels written in a fashion quite new in the eyes of Japanese people shifted a paradigm of criticism radically. Things that came

before were labeled as pre-modern, as Karatani argues.²⁸ The emergence of the novel prompted people to go back in history toward the original moment of Japanese literary tradition, in a search for authenticity. A linear history of progress from *monogatari* to novel was constructed at this moment. It is not the case that *monogatari* as a pre-modern form and the novel as a modern form have independent and autonomous realities; the division between *monogatari* and the novel is made possible only when we get a particular paradigm. *Monogatari* was conceived as a genre when it was retroactively defined by the perspective of the novel. Karatani says: “*monogatari* may be seen as a space that was excluded, becoming visible in the process of being excluded, by what was established as system in the third decade of the Meiji Period and by the homogeneous space of one-point perspective.”²⁹ When the novel came to Japan with its Western and therefore modern outlook, *monogatari* was pushed back along with history to be designated as pre-modern.

The paradigm of modernity in Japanese literature exists in the later nineteenth- and the earlier twentieth-centuries, which was created when Japan found itself suddenly squarely between East and West. The desire for a linear progressive history was activated at that moment, as it is activated in different ways in different places in the world. We know that we owe our new way of perceiving reality as a discursive contour to Michel Foucault. His *Madness and Civilization* (1964) proved to be influential in its deconstruction of the assumed division of sanity and insanity. It is meant to show that the new episteme of the eighteenth-century linked madness, which was a commonplace spectacle or even an object of romanticism in the Renaissance, to confinement for the sake of the very symbol of confinement. His archaeology of the emergence of “madness” revealed the existence of madness as an inscription of particular discursive environments of eighteenth-century Europe. For Hobsbawm and Ranger, the Industrial Revolution evoked people’s nostalgia toward the past. The

²⁸ What follows is a paraphrase the chapter 6 “Kōsei ryoku ni tsuite” (“On the Power to Construct”) of Karatani.

²⁹ De Bary 162; Karatani 232.

royal rituals, once popular in the age of Elizabeth I and later declined, were reinvigorated to assume “those attributes of uniqueness, tradition and permanence.”³⁰ The tradition was invented in the perspectival configuration of the Industrial Revolution, as Hobsbawm and Ranger argue. Ernest Gellner considers the replacement of “low culture” by “high culture,” which comes with the spread of standardized education, as the pivotal point for the rise of nationalism in Europe.

Hayden White gives us a perspective relevant to the Japanese case. His *Metahistory*, treating Hegel, Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and others, comes to grips with issues of historical consciousness and historical knowledge in nineteenth-century Europe. It concludes that those histories written in nineteenth-century Europe are nothing but manifestations of “the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship not only to cultures and civilizations preceding it but also to those contemporary with it in time and contiguous with it in space” in order to satisfy “a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated.”³¹ To consider Western civilization as the positive point of reference central to human history predicates history on the episteme of the Western modernity.

The transcendental subject tries to secure a fixed status for itself to see the object frozen once and for all, by which it purports to substantiate its superior position. In the same way the discourse of modernity conceals irruptions and disjunctions in literary history for the sake of a smooth evolutionary history beginning with antique myths and culminating with the rise of the novel. The categorical imperatives of modernity install retrospective hypotheses to construct *monogatari* in the perspectival configuration with modernity as its vanishing point. The modern gets itself defined in the trace of the premodern, which, in its turn, is defined retroactively by being excluded by the modern, leaving a trace in the semantic layers of the modern. Karatani’s deconstruction of modern Japanese literature, putting it into a bracket to deny its autonomous existence, should be

³⁰ Hobsbawm and Ranger 150.

³¹ White 2.

understood as a ground-breaking attempt to free critics of Japanese literature from their obsession with equating the modern type of novel with the Western type of novel and to consider it superior to pre-modern genres such as *monogatari*. It is no wonder that our perspective comes from modernity, since we live in the modern age; we should be aware, though, that the one-point perspective of the modern impedes our view of literary history, and that our own language tries to appropriate what came before in the interest of our own age.

4: Nationalism

Thus Karatani gives us a new perspective to look at *monogatari* as a space excluded by modernity. He further observes in *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* that Mori Ōgai starts to write historical novels such as *Abe ichizoku* (*Abe Family*, 1913) after some period of writing Western type of novels. Ōgai seems to resist unifying his novels by transcendental meaning and through a vanishing point. His juxtaposition of fragmented meanings prevent the readers from constructing a fixed meaning or theme in these novels:

The aversion to “tying the strands together,” which some writers have called an aversion to “construction,” or *kōsei*, was to become a dominant trend embodied in the *shishōsetsu*, paralleling Ōgai’s increasing inclination toward the historical novel. If one considers perspectival configuration rather than meaning and content, Ōgai’s historical novels and the *shishōsetsu* shared a common movement.³²

Ōgai begins to be inclined toward historical novels, when, by coincidence,

³² De Bary 154; Karatani 219.

*shishōsetsu*³³ begins to dominate Japanese literary scenes in the early twentieth-century, because, as Karatani analyzes, “the perspectival configuration of modern literature was generally felt to be unnatural.”³⁴ “Aversion to construction” characterizes Ogai’s historical novels, as Karatani observes. “Aversion to construction” is, at the same time, a dominant trend of *shishōsetsu*. As *shishōsetsu* resists structure, *monogatari* simply repeats some fixed patterns or motifs:

Monogatari is pattern, nothing more, nothing less. Paradoxically this fits well with what is *shishōsetsu*-like. Whereas the *shishōsetsu* lacks structure, the *monogatari* is nothing but a structure.³⁵

In this way Karatani assimilates the innately Japanese to *shishōsetsu* and *monogatari*, by positing the lack of the center as the hallmark of Japanese literature. Karatani discusses that the innately Japanese manifests as simple repetitions of patterns in *monogatari* and as anti-structure in *shishōsetsu*. His argument effects a return to the indigenously Japanese. His former argument of pre-modernity and modernity as discursive formations changes its tone, to essentialize *monogatari* and *shishōsetsu* as genres natural and congenial to the Japanese mentality. Pre-modernity formulated by the discourse of modernity is made to plead for the uniqueness of Japanese culture.

Karatani cannot resist the temptation of *monogatari*, which incites many of us toward the existential locus of Japanese identity preforeign and therefore

³³ *Shishōsetsu* is a Japanese translation of “ich-roman” or “I-novel” and adaptation of realism and naturalism in the European fictions in the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries. Realism and naturalism, though, take on different implications in Japanese novels. In Japan a novelist describes his/her everyday lives in minute details in an undisguised way without orienting the meaning in any specific direction. It appeared in the early twentieth-century and has remained a dominant mode of the novel in Japan ever after. Japanese novelists’ various attempts after the twentieth-century to write in various novelistic forms can be defined more or less as attempts to follow or evade this mode.

³⁴ De Bary 158; Karatani 227.

³⁵ De Bary 164; Karatani 236.

traditional. For many people, *monogatari* seems to advocate a sense of the continuing literary tradition of Japan by its ancient outlook. Masao Miyoshi calls for what is indigenous to Japanese literature with *monogatari* as one of his advocates for the return to the traditional Japanese literature:

Just as the novel form took its shape from an ensemble of epic, Renaissance drama, folktale, and ballad, so does the *shōsetsu* range over the *monogatari* and *utamonogatari*, *noh*, *nikki* and *tabinikki*, Buddhist sermons, *renga*, *kabuki*, and so forth Ise, the *noh*, and linked poetry are not marginal elements in Japanese writing. In fact, their salient features are evident in such other genres as prose tales, essays, and diaries, and they are conspicuous in the *shōsetsu*. In all of these forms, textuality is perceived of not in terms of autonomy, but of interrelation. Authorship is seen as more public and communal than private and individual. The modality of art tends to be not representation and mimetic, but presentational and linguistic; not “realistic,” but reflexive. Less emphasis is placed on the acute sense of separation between the inside and outside, subjectivity and objectivity, artistic space and life space, than on the intense experience of fusion and collapse of such isolations. Taxonomical perception, too, seems focused on the rejection of separation and discreteness rather than the insistent detection of differences.³⁶

Miyoshi argues against the first world’s attempts to “domesticate or neutralize the exoticism of the text” in the third world. He is quite keen to the colonialistic encounter of Japan and the West so that he posits Japan in the third world, at least culturally. In the site of the interactions of the colonizing and the colonized, the texts of the third world are easily domesticated by the point of view of the first world. Miyoshi’s acute sense of Japan’s subjugation to the Western hegemonic discourse tries to exoticize Japanese literature in its “native grain” against the domesticating efforts of the first world. To retreat to an antiquity authenticating it by presumably enduring cultural forms and claiming total differences of Japanese

³⁶ Miyoshi, “Against the Native Grain” 159-165.

literary forms from those of the West is to establish a binary opposition of Japan and the West. It is true that “the *monogatari* and *utamonogatari*, *noh*, *nikki* and *tabinikki*, Buddhist sermons, *renga*, *kabuki*” are Japanese literary forms. What is necessary is, however, to situate them on the international scene claiming not only differences but also similarities, in other words, simultaneously constructing and deconstructing what is putatively indigenous to Japan.

5: Decenter the Canon

The projects of Orikuchi Shinobu, Etō Jun, Karatani Kōjin, and Masao Miyoshi are implicated by categorical imperatives of modernity, which try to authenticate the tradition of Japanese literature by virtue of its pre-modern literature or pre-modern elements in modern literature. Teleological or anthropological, the discursive activities make a linear narrative progress sprinkled by canonical works through history. They make an illusion that canons of literary monuments have been handed down through their innately canonical powers. By being committed to search for anteriority, Japanese critics are participating in the formation of *monogatari* as a canon. They are not aware that their modern subjectivity necessarily interacts with those historical moments they treat, through which they gain some of their identities while the past texts gain some of their identities from modernity. The image of the present is inscribed in the representation of the past, which influences the present by its representation. We should be aware of both the “historicity of texts” and the “textuality of histories.”³⁷ Texts are inscribed by historical contingencies, and histories of texts are formed in textual spaces.

Homi Bhabha remarks about the strategies of modernity, as he discusses colonial discourse which exploits other cultures in the name of modernity and superiority:

³⁷ Montrose 410.

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.³⁸

Bhabha, based on the notion of Orientalism introduced by Said, effects a shift of emphasis by applying Lacan's idea of identity. While Said argues that the prevailing culture imposes its discourse on the other cultures, Bhabha turns his attention from the colonizing to the colonized, by revealing the liability of the colonized to resort to "the natural(ized), unifying discourse of 'nation,' 'people,' or authentic 'folk' tradition, these embedded myths of culture's particularity."³⁹ His focus is more on "the deconstruction of the 'sign,' the emphasis on indeterminism,"⁴⁰ which is derived from the shifting claims to cultural identity and hierarchy. The colonized countries' claiming their superiority over the colonizing countries by authenticating their particularities would simply set up another binary structure of opposition of the First World and the Third World. Bhabha's suggestion is to be aware of the process of signification of locating and relocating our own places and identities, which are destined to prove different from our own as soon as we thought we got them.

When we speak from the position continuous from our national culture, we are likely to become propagandists of its narcissistic celebration. Orikuchi's argument on *Genji monogatari* as the epitome of Japanese literature is made from the position that is continuous with Japanese literature. He addresses foreigners, who could never share common grounds with him, because he has his identity as a Japanese.

³⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 35.

³⁹ Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism" 438.

⁴⁰ Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism" 443.

Criticisms on *Genji monogatari* and *monogatari* in general in Japan, by constructing *monogatari* through their discourses, manufacture the continuity of Japanese literature on the basis of the continuity of *mono* and *katari* in antique ritual forms into *monogatari*, which, in its turn, continues into the novel, and thus endorses the identity of Japanese literature as an entity. The nationalistic impetus in the criticism of Orikuchi, Etō, Karatani, and Miyoshi comes from their enunciative position as Japanese, from which they address their readers. We need to dislocate our “home.” To be simply Japanese does not give anyone an ideal space from which to offer “objective” criticism. The West must be decentered; Japan must relocate itself in some other sphere than its putative national identity. To be emancipated from binary closure of the West and Japan, one needs to be free from our home. In order to avoid being complicit with Japan’s desire for unity as the national-ethnic community, I suggest to myself, too, that I should dislocate my “home,” in order to observe the shifting configuration of identities and incessant signifying process of discourse of Japanese literature.

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