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Recent Historical Fiction

Nawata Kazuo

Although historical fiction by definition draws on the past for its subject matter, the novels themselves necessarily reflect the circumstances of the period in which they were written.

If we look at works published last year, for example, what we find depicted there is none other than our present reality: the aftermath of the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the rudderless political leadership of the Democratic Party of Japan, the government's impotent economic strategy and wishy-washy foreign policy, and a recession that seems to drag on and on.

Since last year's disaster, for example, an unusual number of novels have dealt with the preciousness of human life. One example is Hamuro Rin's *Higurashi no ki* [Chronicle of the Cicadas] (Shōdensha, 2011), which won the 146th Naoki Prize. The novel opens with the story of Toda Shūkoku, a former provincial magistrate found guilty of adultery with the concubine of the previous feudal lord. He is sentenced to confinement and ordered to compile a history of the domain and its ruling family. He has 10 years to complete his task, after which he must take his own life by performing *seppuku*. One thing differentiating our modern-day sensibilities from the samurai of former times is that the samurai were constantly aware of death in their daily lives. The novel's hero is a man named Danno Shōzaburō, who is sent to the remote village to which Shūkoku has been banished to guard over him and ensure that he completes his task. He soon realizes that Shūkoku could never have committed the crimes of which he has been accused. Shōzaburō begins to investigate, and uncovers a number of uncomfortable truths. Soon afterward, the young farmer's son who has protected Shūkoku's house is tortured to death. The heartrending events that follow bring a tear to the eye. In such times, how should a true samurai conduct himself? Even Shūkoku's young son, Ikutarō, somehow possesses the resolve and spirit necessary to do the right thing. Part of what makes the samurai's resolve to look death in the eye so impressive is its ability to convey at the same time a profound awareness of the preciousness of human life.

Kenshin no gunbaisha [Kenshin's General] by Togashi Rintarō (Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011) uses a different approach but conveys a similar sense of the importance of human life. The novel's climax is the battle of Kawanakajima. Most readers will already be familiar with the sad fate awaiting Yamamoto Kansuke, the general who fought under Takeda Shingen against Uesugi Kenshin. This knowledge brings added poignancy to scenes such as that in which Kansuke, overcome with elation after the birth of a son, asks himself: "For how long will I be able to watch over my Tarōmaru?" Scenes like this evoke the fleetingness of life, as the baton is passed from the present to the future. Paradoxically, the parts of the book that leave the strongest impression are not the powerful battle scenes but the quiet interludes between conflicts, in which we see the characters yearning for an ordinary life and longing for peace.

Nehan no yuki [Nirvana's Snow] by Saijō Naka (Kōbunsha, 2011) takes aim at another aspect of the present day and offers a fierce criticism of the lack of direction in contemporary politics. Featuring a cast of characters who oppose the Tenpō Reforms (1841–43), the plot centers on the figure of a defiant law-enforcement officer working for the shogunate, Takayasu Monsuke. One of the appealing aspects of the novel is its refusal to indulge in stereotypes. One character undertakes a fast in protest against the shogunate and starves to death as a result. We might expect this behavior to be praised as conduct befitting a noble samurai. Instead, it is contrasted with the reaction of the character O-Uno to the death of her brother. As a former prostitute, O-Uno subsists at the bottom of society. "It wasn't that he refused to eat; there was nothing for him to eat if he'd wanted to!" Implicit in the novel's depiction of the Tenpō Reforms is a barbed criticism of the present government, made up of ineffectual, self-serving politicians who have done nothing to address the dire economic outlook beyond protecting themselves and their own vested interests. At one point in the novel Torii Yōzō, a government magistrate who suppressed Western learning, says: "We must never forget that the luxury enjoyed by people in Edo is made possible by the hardship endured by the peasants and farmers." It is tempting to read his remarks as a comment on the standard of living enjoyed by Tokyo and the whole of postwar Japan, built as it is on the hard work and forbearance of people in Tōhoku and the frustrations of Okinawa.

The 18th recipient of the Matsumoto Seichō Prize, Aoyama Bunpei's *Shirakashi no ki no shita de* [Beneath the Bamboo Leaf Oak] (Bungei Shunjū, 2011), introduces Murakami Noboru, a destitute vassal of the shogunate, and depicts his search for identity as a samurai. The saying goes that even a worm will turn when trodden on, but although the characters here realize the miserable nature of their plight, they are unwilling or unable to summon the strength of spirit to retaliate. It is hard not to see parallels with their modern-day descendents, grinding away uncomplainingly at our uninspiring jobs for the sake of two or three million yen a year. Perhaps no other work in recent years has probed the character of the samurai so effectively.

A number of other novels point an accusatory finger at Japan's ineffectual foreign policy. Japan's generous-minded people often make the mistake of thinking that foreign policy is all about creating friendly ties between

nations. Far from it! The harsh reality is that foreign policy is about countries competing with one another for their own national interests.

Perī [Matthew Calbraith Perry] by Satō Ken'ichi (Kadokawa Shoten, 2011) is a case in point. The historical Perry was an intimidating figure who forced Japan to open her doors to the outside world. In this respect, the Perry who appears in the book is no different. Where the fictional version differs is in its depiction of Perry's inner thought processes as he struggles to come to terms with the disconcerting speed at which the Japanese are able to absorb new knowledge and their alarming perceptiveness. Despite his misgivings, Perry has no choice but to conclude a treaty of friendship with Japan. As an emerging power, the United States had at long last overcome its inferiority complex with regard to Great Britain and frustrated the ulterior motives of the Dutch; it needed Japan as a convenient base for whaling and trade with Qing China. These essentials would remain unchanged when the motives shifted to militaristic purposes. When Japan signed the instrument of surrender aboard the USS *Missouri* at the end of World War II, a framed 31-star US flag was displayed on deck. This same flag had flown on board one of Perry's ships when he visited Japan at the end of the Edo period. It hardly needs to be added that Japan became a major military base for the United States in the Far East following the war. In the novel, the author has Perry declare to Japan that the United States will be unstinting in its military support if Japan ever goes to war with another country. The book manages to encompass the entire history of modern Japanese treaty negotiations with the United States, from the closing days of the Tokugawa shogunate to the 1960 Security Treaty that remains in place today.

Two further novels serve as a reminder to the Japanese people, with their poor ability to handle a crisis, of how diplomacy can easily be turned to war by the actions of those in power.

The first is *Kurohae no umi* [Seas of the Southerly Wind] (PHP Kenkyūsho, 2011). The subtitle of the novel is "Unknown Tales of Katō Kiyomasa and the Invasions of Korea." As this suggests, the book examines Hideyoshi's wars of aggression on the Korean peninsula in the 1590s from a new perspective. There has been considerable debate over the years about the historicity of "Sayaka," the Japanese general under the command of Katō Kiyomasa, who according to some accounts deserted to the Korean side. Out of these accounts, the author has created the character Sano Kahei, a member of the Japanese armies who longs for peace. Kahei and a Korean counterpart by the name of Kim Kwan are treated as traitors by their own sides and end their lives in the country of the enemy after attaining high status there.

The second work in this category is another novel by Hamuro Rin titled *Toi nyūkō: Fujiwara Takaie no tatakai* [The Toi Invasion: The Battles of Fujiwara Takaie] (Jitsugyō no Nihon Sha, 2011). Based in the middle of the Heian period (794–1185), the novel is a tour de force account of how Takaie engaged the Toi pirates, who had advanced from Iki to Tsushima and then to Hakata by following the predictions of the legendary Taoist diviner Abe no Seimei. After repulsing the Toi, Takaie chased them back as far as Tsushima. Takaie displayed superlative political acumen in managing to avoid a territorial dispute with Goryeo (a state on the Korean peninsula). We are left to regret the lack of similar adroitness in the politicians of the present day, who would doubtless be thrown into disarray by any threat to the nation on this scale.

A look at the trends in historical novels over the past 10 years shows how they have reflected the changing times.

Let us look at an example from 10 years ago: Yamamoto Ichiriki's *Akanezora* [A Crimson Sky] (Bungei Shunjū, 2001), which won the 126th Naoki Prize. The author wrote his novel in a desperate attempt to pay off hundreds of millions of yen in debts that he had racked up at the tail end of the bubble era. By the time the novel came out, Japan was in recession, but the book became a remarkable success, achieving bestseller status and receiving the Naoki Prize. This followed the All Yomimono Prize for New Writers, which the author received in 1997. The novel tells the touching story of a tofu seller who moves from Kyoto to Edo, where he sets up shop, starts a family, and overcomes a succession of problems before eventually handing on his business to the next generation. Every family had its problems in the past. But in previous eras, the whole family would join together and do whatever it took to solve these problems. Over the past decade or so, there has been a steady rise in the number of rash and senseless murders within families. It was against this background that Yamamoto championed the power of families to overcome adversity. The city of Edo as it is portrayed in the novel might seem like a kind of utopia—but the depiction is shot through with a hardnosed understanding of the need to rise above life's painful experiences.

Painful experiences are not confined to the lives of commoners: the same applies when writing about samurai. Author Otokawa Yūzaburō, who won the 127th Naoki Prize for *Ikiru* [Alive] (Bungei Shunjū, 2002), has said of his work: "As long as people are alive, there will always be misfortune and obstacles to overcome." These works convey a realistic sense of the lives of people who persevere in the face of life's difficulties.

Women writers have also produced a number of highly accomplished novels in recent years. Family is the key theme at the heart of Morota Reiko's popular series *Otorimi nyōbō* [The Falconer's Wife] (Shinchōsha, 2001–11). The eponymous heroine is forced to look after the household alone after her husband is sent on a secret mission to a distant province. In the background to the story, although it is not directly mentioned in the text, there is almost certainly political strife and bloody war. And yet the story itself presents what appears at first glance to be peaceful domestic harmony. In its depiction of peace and quiet at home while violence rages offstage, the series suggests a parallel with the situation of families in postwar Japan, growing steadily more prosperous while the Korean and Vietnam Wars raged unseen in the background.

I want to finish with one of the most accomplished works to have appeared in the genre in recent years. This is Hasegawa Taku's *Saka watari* [Journeying on a Separate Path] (Mainichi Shimbunsha, 2011).

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION

Enjoe Toh

Born in 1972. Graduated from Tōhoku University with a degree in physics and did a doctorate at the University of Tokyo. Won the Bungakukai Prize for New Writers in 2007 with Obu za bēsubōru *[Of the Baseball] and the Noma Prize for New Writers in 2010 with* Uyū shitan *[No Such Story]. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 2011 for this book.*

Dōkeshi no chō [Clown's Butterfly]

By Enjoe Toh

Kōdansha, 2012. 194 x 133 mm. 175 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-06-217561-6.

Enjoe Toh is rapidly developing a reputation as a creator of richly imaginative fictional worlds underpinned by a specialist's knowledge of the natural sciences. Using a sometimes difficult style, the author has ranged freely across genres, taking in everything from science fiction, fantasy, and metafiction to philosophical thought experiments. Over the past few years, he has opened up new ground in the hitherto little-explored genre of "speculative fiction." This volume comprises the Akutagawa Prize–winning title story and another piece with the title "*Matsu no e no ki*" [Branches of the Pine]. The title story abounds in intricate wordplay, Nabokovian homages, and a playful, boundary-confounding sensibility. The story centers on Tomoyuki Tomoyuki, an enigmatic, cosmopolitan-minded author who writes in the various languages he picks up as he travels the world. The complex, multilayered plot defies easy summary. "*Matsu no e no ki,*" the companion piece, might be described as a novella that deals with translation theory. The first-person novelist and another (American?) author, never referred to by name, are the translators of one another's works. The translations gradually grow freer and wilder, and the protagonist becomes engrossed in the curious pastime of reverse-translating his own stories. What is the meaning of writing, translation, originality? In his experimental style, Enjoe is exploring some of the most fundamental questions in contemporary literature. (Numano)

Subete mayonaka no koibitotachi [All Lovers of Midnight]

By Kawakami Mieko

Kōdansha, 2011. 193 x 132 mm. 311 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-217286-8.

In the novel *Hevun* [Heaven] (see *JBN* No. 63), Kawakami Mieko dealt with the shocking subject of bullying among junior-high-school children and the horrific violence it can lead to. In this, her first full-length novel in the two years since *Hevun,* Kawakami takes a bold stylistic turn and breaks new thematic ground. Her latest work depicts the quiet romance between a socially awkward and romantically unsuccessful man and woman. The protagonist is a lonely 34-year-old singleton woman eking out a dull existence as a freelance proofreader. Unassertive and shy, she has practically no experience when it comes to men. An odd series of coincidences leads her to become attracted to a middle-aged high-school physics teacher. But since this attraction never culminates in any kind of conventional love affair, perhaps the book would be better described as an "anti-romance." The story contains no shocking events, no glitzy romance, and no hints of physical ecstasy. The conversations that take place between the man and woman remain oddly formal throughout. In a sense, this is a work that is out of step with its time. But that is part of what gives the novel its unusual power. The clarity and grace of the poetic language are evocative of the reverberations from a tightly tuned string on a crisp winter's day. (Numano)

Kawakami Mieko

Born in 1976. Novelist, musician, and poet. Received the Akutagawa Prize in 2008 for Chichi to ran *[Breasts and Egg] (see* JBN *No. 57). In 2010, her novel* Hevun *[Heaven] (see* JBN *No. 63) won the Minister of Education Encouragement Prize for New Artists and the Murasaki Shikibu Prize for Literature.*

Maruya Saiichi

Born in 1925. Graduated from the University of Tokyo with a degree in English literature. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 1968 for Toshi no nokori *[The Rest of the Year] and the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize in 1972 for* Tatta hitori no hanran *[trans.* Singular Rebellion*]. His 1993 bestseller* Onnazakari *[trans.* A Mature Woman*] was made into a film. Works cover a wide range of genres, from novels to essays, criticism, and translations. In 2009, published a new translation of James Joyce's* Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

Mochi omori suru bara no hana
[Roses That Weigh Heavy in the Hand]

By Maruya Saiichi

Shinchōsha, 2011. 196 x 131 mm. 208 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-320609-5.

During a period on secondment in New York, company worker Kajii Genji meets the young members of a string quartet. Soon after, the quartet wins first prize in a competition, and the four members start down the road to musical success. Meanwhile, Kajii returns to head office, where he is promoted to vice-president and becomes a force to be reckoned with in the Japanese business world. But life is not all plain sailing. When the first violinist remarries, his relationships with his fellow musicians become strained, and he quits the group. The other members of the group go through relationship problems of their own, as well as their share of disappointments and reversals in their musical careers.

Kajii and Nohara, the man to whom he tells his story, are no exception. Despite his professional success, Kajii suffers a series of frustrations and disappointments in his private life.

The real pleasure of this novel lies in the variety of its content and form. The plot twists and turns in the style of a page-turning tale of illicit romance or crime. These elements of popular fiction are woven skillfully into the larger framework of an original and elegantly plotted novel. Sordid human squabbles and scenes of earthy sensuality are juxtaposed with rarified discussions of music. The two elements are woven skillfully together, with no sense of incongruity. This is a work that makes skillful use of the wealth of storytelling experience Maruya has accumulated over the course of his sixty-year literary career. (Chō)

Heisei saru kani kassen zu
[The Battle of the Monkey and the Crab: A Modern Portrait]

By Yoshida Shūichi

Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., 2011. 194 x 133 mm. 504 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-02-250892-8.

Minato Keiji is a cellist and celebrity host of three weekly TV shows. One day, he is involved in a hit-and-run incident but avoids arrest when his brother takes the blame. Hamamoto Junpei, a young man working in a Kabukichō club, happens to witness the incident and together with an accomplice attempts to blackmail Minato.

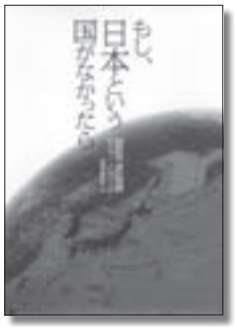
A woman in Minato's office named Sono Yūko discovers what is happening and pulls strings to get the situation resolved. Almost immediately, however, events take a sudden twist when Hamamoto Junpei is mysteriously abducted. A prominent politician mistakenly believes that the victim of the hit-and-run incident was carrying papers exposing his illegal fundraising, and he calls in the yakuza to help him get the papers back. Sono Yūko turns the scheme on its head and uses the politician's influence to get Hamamoto into the National Diet.

The thrilling plot makes the book an irresistible page-turner. But unlike a conventional entertainment mystery, this novel also contains a probing examination of contemporary society. The title refers to a folktale about a group of crabs who band together to take revenge on an evil monkey. The novel borrows the narrative techniques of the detective story to expose the absurdities and injustices of modern society. It depicts weak individuals bravely fighting back against a system that might otherwise threaten to gobble them up. (Chō)

Yoshida Shūichi

Born in 1968. Won the Bungakukai Prize for New Writers in 1997 for Saigo no musuko *[The Last Son]. Other honors include the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for* Parēdo *[Parade] and the Akutagawa Prize for* Pāku raifu *[Park Life] in 2002, as well as the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award and Osaragi Jirō Prize in 2007 for* Akunin *[trans.* Villain*] (see* JBN *No. 54).*

ESSAY



Roger Pulvers

Born in 1944. Author, playwright, and theater director. Head of the Tokyo Institute of Technology's Center for the Study of World Civilizations. Completed a master's in Russian at Harvard and came to Japan in 1967 after studying in Warsaw and Paris. Besides translations of works by Miyazawa Kenji, Inoue Hisashi, and other Japanese writers, has published numerous books in English and Japanese, including The Dream of Lafcadio Hearn, Raisu *[Rice], and* Eigo de yomitoku Kenji no sekai *[Reading Miyazawa Kenji in English].*

Moshi Nihon to iu kuni ga nakattara [If Japan Did Not Exist]

By Roger Pulvers

Shūeisha International, 2011. 187 x 130 mm. 319 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-7976-7221-3.

Roger Pulvers has spent his life traveling the world, and is a master of transcending borders. After leaving the United States, he picked up Russian, Polish, and Japanese and now moves with ease between Australia and Japan. But his has not been the life of a rootless exile. Pulvers is more like a gifted carpenter with the skills to build himself a home anywhere in the world. His latest book is an experimental examination of the culture of Japan, where Pulvers has spent much of his time since his first visit in 1967. The book is shot through with passionate paeans to the beauty of Japanese culture and heartfelt words of encouragement for the Japanese people, many of whom have lost confidence in the global era. In Japan, Pulvers made a name for himself as one of the first of a pioneering generation of foreign-born commentators fluent in Japanese. But he is also a fine novelist, playwright, and theater director in his own right. The book, as a synthesis of his wide-ranging experience of this country, is full of views that deserve a wide hearing—such as the idea that Japan can lead by example as a "genuinely non-religious developed country." Drawing on examples from the works of artists such as Miyazawa Kenji, Inoue Hisashi, and Ōshima Nagisa, Pulvers builds a convincing case for Japan as an indispensable presence on the world stage. (Numano)

CRITICISM

Efude no nashonarizumu [Paintbrush Nationalism]

By Shibasaki Shinzō

Genki Shobō, 2011. 196 x 134 mm. 240 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-901998-76-5.

Fujita Tsuguharu and Yokoyama Taikan are two painters with international reputations, but very different styles. Fujita used soft brushstrokes to paint numerous portraits of women, characterized by their milky-white skin. Although Fujita, known as "the darling of the École de Paris," became well known internationally, for a long time in Japan he was dismissed as a frivolous painter. Taikan, on the other hand, used his political connections to maintain his popularity as war approached, and painted natural landscapes using traditional Japanese techniques. Lurking in the background to his popularity was the rise of modern Japanese nationalism.

For a time, the lives of these diametrically opposed painters intersected. At the height of World War II, both artists painted a succession of "war paintings" (*sensō-ga*). During the 1930s, Taikan played a leading role in the national policy of using painting to boost morale, producing a succession of large-scale paintings of Mount Fuji in an attempt to rouse national pride. Fujita, recently returned from France, changed his style dramatically and attempted to rebrand himself as a "patriotic painter," incorporating battlefront scenes and other militaristic motifs into his work for the first time. When the war ended, Fujita returned despondent to France in the face of scathing criticism.

The book uses the vicissitudinous careers of these two very different artists to depict a subtle and nuanced picture of the cultural collision between East and West and the role played by painting as "media." (Yonahara)

Shibasaki Shinzō

Born in 1946. Journalist. Joined the Nihon Keizai Shimbun *after graduating from Keiō University with a degree in political science. Currently teaches university courses on media, culture, and the modern information society.*

Wada Atsuhiko

Born in 1965. Teaches at Waseda University, where his specialties include modern Japanese literature and literacy. Works include Shomotsu no Nichi-Bei kankei *[Printed Matter and the Japan-US Relationship] and* Media no naka no dokusha *[Readers in the Media].*

Ekkyō suru shomotsu [Books Across Borders]

By Wada Atsuhiko

Shinyōsha, 2011. 215 x 150 mm. 364 pp. ¥4,300. ISBN 978-4-7885-1250-4.

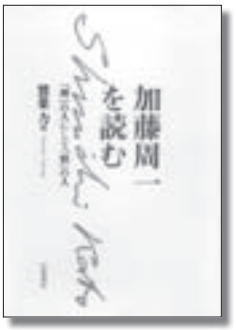
Until recently, books were bound objects with physical mass, stored in libraries, bookstores, and studies. It was in such spaces that readers developed their relationships with the written word. At the same time, they were also portable objects, collected and carried across national borders. This remarkable study examines the movement of printed materials within the context of postwar relations between Japan and the United States. Especially interesting is a section tracing how enormous volumes of materials commandeered during the occupation of Japan were transported to the United States. The Prange Collection at the University of Maryland is famous as the largest collection of occupation-era materials. The book recounts the circumstances that brought the collection to the University of Maryland rather than more prominent universities, such as Michigan or Stanford. It also provides details of the even larger collections amassed at the Washington Document Center and transferred to the Library of Congress and the National Archives. One of the revelations of the book is the extent to which American universities continued to amass printed materials from all over Japan during the Cold War, when Japan was a vital strategic base in East Asia. At a time when the Internet and e-books have obscured the political import of collecting and relocating printed materials, this study sheds useful new light on the significance of our period. It is to be hoped that this valuable study will be translated into English. (Yoshimi)

Katō Shūichi o yomu [Reading Katō Shūichi]

By Washizu Tsutomu

Iwanami Shoten, 2011. 193 x 132 mm. 376 pp. ¥2,700. ISBN 978-4-00-025821-0.

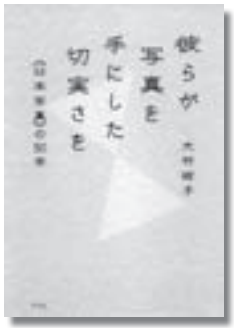
This is the definitive critical biography of the eminent Japanese postwar literary and cultural critic Katō Shūichi. The author, who worked as Katō's editor for many years, presents a sharply drawn portrait of the important encounters in Katō's life and their relationship to his intellectual development. Like Mori Ōgai, Katō started out with one foot in the medical profession and the other in the literary world, and passionately soaked up knowledge from a broad range of fields. He began to focus on comparative literature during his time as a student in France. The author's lively style and personal affection for Katō make the book a pleasure to read. He sees Katō as an "encyclopedist" and regards him as part of a literary heritage that stretches from Mori Ōgai to Hayashi Tatsuo. In this sense, Katō was the natural choice to succeed Hayashi as editor-in-chief of the Heibonsha World Encyclopedia. Katō seems to have combined a polymath's interest in all fields of human knowledge with a comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand and a keen Enlightenment sensibility. This book suggests that the inspiration for Katō's approach can be found in an 88-volume encyclopedia for elementary school pupils that he read avidly as a boy. For Katō, an encyclopedia was the embodiment of an intellectual struggle to connect and unify diverse types of knowledge. Spurred on by his Enlightenment spirit, Katō continued to engage in a dialogue with his times and fought alongside his comrades until the very end of his life. His was a tenacious spirit, and this book shows us how that tenacity came into being. (Yoshimi)



Washizu Tsutomu

Born in 1944. Freelance journalist and part-time university lecturer. Joined Heibonsha after graduating from the University of Tokyo. Edited works by Katō Shūichi and served as editor-in-chief of Taiyō *magazine. Publications include* Jidō hanbaiki no bunkashi *[A Cultural History of Vending Machines],* Takuhaibin 130-nen sensō *[Parcel Delivery Services: 130 Years of Warfare], and* Kōkyō kūkan to shite no konbini *[Convenience Stores as Public Spaces].*

PHOTOGRAPHY



Ōtake Akiko

Born in 1950. Writing spans a variety of genres, including nonfiction, essays, novels, and photography criticism. Author of Zuiji kengaku ka *[Visitors Welcome Anytime] and* Yomu to dareka ni kataritaku naru *[When I Read I Want to Tell Someone About It].*

Karera ga shashin o te ni shita setsujitsusa o [The Emotional Power of Photography]

By Ōtake Akiko

Heibonsha, 2011. 193 x 134 mm. 301 pp. ¥2,100. ISBN 978-4-582-23119-9.

Japanese photographers are a major presence in international art photography, showing at large-scale exhibitions in Europe and attracting the attention of collectors around the world.

For Ōtake Akiko, Japanese photography is distinguished by "a readiness to confront the reality of the human condition head-on, in all its chaos." The book uses interviews with several leading Japanese photographers to trace the development of the art form in Japan. This historical account develops into a deeper theoretical discussion of the art of photography itself.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first deals with four photographers born in the thirties and forties (among them Moriyama Daidō and Araki Nobuyoshi). The second treats six photographers born in the sixties and seventies, including Fujishiro Meisa and Nagashima Yurie. In a series of probing interviews, Ōtake draws out detailed accounts of what drove her subjects to choose photography as an artistic medium, their aims, and the challenges they have encountered in their work to date.

Although conditioned by the culture of the times, each artist's approach to photography is unique. But Ōtake's definition of Japanese photography provides a new way of looking at these two generations and creates a strong sense of the dialogue that has taken place between them. Uniting them is a deeply felt emotion that could not be satisfied except through the medium of photography.

This thrilling study explores the source of the energy that emanates from photographs. (Yonahara)

CULTURE

Josei hyōshō no kindai [Representations of Women in Modern Times]

By Seki Reiko

Kanrin Shobō, 2011. 214 x 153 mm. 448 pp. ¥3,800. ISBN 978-4-87737-319-1.

The study of modern portrayals of women and the gender roles that women have performed through the act of being depicted involves an inquiry into the nature of modernity itself. This book carries the study forward by focusing on two periods, before and after the three wars that determined the fate of modern Japan: the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), and World War II. The book analyzes the lives of women from across society through the eyes of their contemporaries, from Haruko, wife of the Meiji emperor, to the writers Higuchi Ichiyō and Yosano Akiko, the feminist Itō Noe, and the actresses Matsui Sumako and Tanaka Kinuyo. The first half of the book evokes the images of *hime* (women of noble birth) in traditional poetry and court literature, which matched the slogans of imperial restoration that characterized the early part of the Meiji era (1868–1912). The author provides a fascinating account of how the clashes between this mode of representation and the established order of Edo-period (1603–1868) literature were translated by Higuchi Ichiyō and Yosano Akiko into a new fusion with modernity. The case of Nakae Toki, who provided the illustrations to Higuchi's work, suggests a fascinating origin for the representations of women later seen in *shōjo manga*. The author suggests that Itō Noe, who was murdered by the Imperial Police in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, was excluded from female literary circles because of her humble background. Each of these fascinating subjects would merit a book of its own. (Yoshimi)

Seki Reiko

Born in 1949. Professor of Japanese literature at Chūō University. Publications include Kataru onna tachi no jidai: Higuchi Ichiyō to Meiji josei hyōgen *[Giving Voice to Women: Higuchi Ichiyō and Artistic Self-Expression among Meiji-Era Women] and* Higuchi Ichiyō.

Inoue Shigeyoshi

Born in 1939. In 1974, opened the Inoue Folk Toy Museum in a small space in his own home. This was renamed the Japan Toy Museum in 1984. Currently serves as the museum's director. Has helped to promote regional development and tourism through the folk toy tradition.

Furusato omocha zukan [An Illustrated Guide to Regional Folk Toys]

By Inoue Shigeyoshi

Heibonsha, 2011. 199 x 147 mm. 160 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-582-83536-6.

Every region of Japan has its own folk toys, born out of the local people's hopes for their children. Most are small and unsophisticated, made from humble everyday materials like paper, wood, earth, and bamboo, colorfully and playfully decorated. The wide range of latitudes in Japan gives rise to a diverse range of local customs and lifestyles, from the snowy winters of the north to the year-round sunshine of the south. The variety of traditional toys is a direct result of this regional diversity.

Manufacture of these toys began in the mid-eighteenth century, as popular culture began to flourish. They were mainly produced by farming households for supplementary income. Among them are the roots of the popular paper dolls that were manufactured by women working in Edo Castle. As well as keeping local children entertained, for many years these toys were popular as souvenirs of distant regions. Folk toys fell out of fashion with the dramatic changes that swept through rural society in the modern era, but have come to be valued by many collectors in recent years.

The toys are quite diverse: dolls carved from wood or fired in clay, kites emblazoned with drawings of samurai, balls made from beautiful thread, flower-baskets, miniature tea-sets, and flutes. Many of them incorporate adorable designs depicting cats, dogs, cows, bears, snakes, and birds. This book uses illustrations and simple explanations to introduce the traditional handcrafted toys produced by the sophisticated local arts cultures that thrived throughout Japan. (Yonahara)

Bon odori [Origins of the Bon Odori Dance]

By Shimokawa Koushi

Sakuhinsha, 2011. 196 x 132 mm. 244 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN978-4-86182-338-1.

The Bon Odori is a traditional folk dance associated with the midsummer festival of the dead, in which the members of a local community come together at night to dance to music. The dance exists in diverse forms around the country. In some places, people dance around tall turret-like platforms; in others, they parade through the streets with musical instruments. Drawing on a wide variety of documentary evidence, this study argues that the origins of the tradition lie in a folk culture that from ancient times had a permissive attitude to sexual freedom.

The book opens with an account of the *utagaki,* a kind of licentious poetry party described in the *Manyōshū* (compiled 759) and other early sources. During a prescribed period of several days, men and women would gather to exchange love poems and form temporary sexual liaisons. The *utagaki* spread throughout the country and had a substantial influence on court culture.

Later, the *fūryū* movement, with its emphasis on earthy, showy beauty, led to the birth of numerous art forms and folk entertainments, among them the Bon Odori. Although the dance became more refined over time, it retained distinctly sexual connotations. The festival and its dances represented a moment of liberation for ordinary people.

As Japan modernized under Western influence, government regulations and changing social mores led to a taboo on overt expressions of sexuality. The author contends that this led to the collapse of traditional communities that previously thrived throughout Japan. (Yonahara)

Shimokawa Koushi

Born in 1942. Graduated from Waseda University and worked at the Sankei Shimbun *before becoming a freelance editor. Has published numerous books on Japanese domestic culture and sexual mores. Publications include* Yūkaku o miru *[Looking at the Pleasure Quarters] (as coauthor),* Shitai to sensō *[Corpses and War], and* Nihon ero shashin shi *[History of Japanese Erotic Photography].*

BIOGRAPHY

Hoshino Hiromi

Born in 1966. Author and photographer. Won the Ōya Sōichi Prize for Nonfiction in 2001 for Korogaru Honkon ni koke wa haenai *[A Rolling Hong Kong Gathers No Moss]. Author of* Shieshie! Chainīzu *[Xie Xie! Chinese],* Sentō no megami *[Goddess of the Bathhouse], and other works. Has also published photography books including* Kanan taikan *[Feeling Huanan] and* Honkon Furawā *[Hong Kong Flowers].*

Konnyakuya hyōryūki [Adrift: Wanders in Search of the *Konnyakuya*]

By Hoshino Hiromi

Bungei Shunjū, 2011. 193 x 133 mm. 400 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-16-374260-1.

This is a nonfiction account of a journey that Hoshino Hiromi made in search of her roots through Tokyo, Chiba, and Wakayama Prefectures. The author wanders around Japan (and back through time) without any particular destination in mind, compiling the reminiscences and anecdotes shared by her relatives. The result is a family saga set against the backdrop of modern Japanese history. Hoshino's parents ran a small factory in Tokyo, but her ancestors were fishermen. Her grandfather, originally from Sotobō on the Pacific Coast of Chiba Prefecture, moved to Tokyo and started the factory business. The family was known by the curious professional name of "Konnyakuya" (the "*konnyaku* sellers," where *konnyaku* refers to a food made from a tuber known as "devil's tongue")—a puzzling name with no obvious connection to the sea. The author's research brings her to the memoirs of her beloved grandfather, where she discovers that her forebears on the "Konnyakuya" side of the family originally emigrated to Sotobō from the distant land of Kii (modern Wakayama Prefecture). The book brings vividly to life the cheerful plebeian ways of this fishing family, full of energy and laughter. The writing is imbued with a rich sense of the excitement and joy of discovery as the author's untiring fieldwork leads her on to new discoveries—an enthusiasm that has captured the imagination of many readers. (Numano)

HISTORY

Kantō daishinsai no shakaishi [A Social History of the Great Kantō Earthquake]

By Kitahara Itoko

Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., 2011. 187 x 125 mm. 374 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-02-259981-0.

Most studies of the Great Kantō Earthquake focus on Gotō Shinpei's reconstruction plans for Tokyo or the massacres of ethnic Koreans that took place in the aftermath of the quake. More recently, however, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 and the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011 have served as a reminder of other important issues—the impact on survivors' lives, the efficiency of relief supply efforts and aid, the progress of work to construct temporary housing, and the compulsory relocation of thousands of people. The author of this volume, the preeminent authority on the history of natural disasters in Japan, has already produced an excellent study on the Ansei Great Earthquakes of the mid-nineteenth century. In this book on the Great Kantō Earthquake, she shows how it is possible to present the history of a natural disaster from the perspective of those who bore the brunt of it. She provides a detailed examination of the barracks that were built to house earthquake refugees and sheds new light on the overall picture by poring over local documents concerning refugees who fled from Tokyo to other areas. Even in the aftermath of the earthquake, administrative procedures in rural areas were carried out in a remarkably orderly manner, and the author's painstaking research has brought highly detailed records to light. From these records the author has constructed a vivid picture of the reception given to refugees all over Japan, and in doing so has radically shifted the paradigm for future research on the Great Kantō Earthquake. (Yoshimi)

Kitahara Itoko

Born in 1939. Graduated from Tsuda College with a degree in English and received a master's in Japanese history from the Tokyo University of Education. Currently a special invitation professor at the Research Center for Disaster Mitigation of Urban Cultural Heritage, Ritsumeikan University. Recently served as chair of the Society of Historical Earthquake Studies. Author of Ansei Ōjishin to minshū *[The Ansei Great Earthquakes and the People], which deals with ordinary people's responses to disaster in the Edo period (1603–1868).*

Hashiguchi Kōnosuke

Born in 1947. In 1974, started work at Seishindō Shoten, a bookstore specializing in traditional Japanese books and calligraphy. Became owner in 1984. Author of Wahon nyūmon *[Introduction to Japanese Books]. Currently teaches a university course that explores Japanese attitudes to books from a philological approach.*

Wahon e no shōtai: Nihonjin to shomotsu no rekishi [An Invitation to *Wahon*: A History of the Book in Japan]

By Hashiguchi Kōnosuke

Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2011. 189 x 126 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-04-703492-1.

Traditional Japanese books, or *wahon,* have a long history, and were the commonest form of bound reading matter in Japan from the Heian period (794–1185) until the early years of the Meiji era (1868–1912). *Wahon* were popular for their attractive paper and unique designs, and could be preserved without deterioration for many years. Even after knowledge of Western methods of printing and binding became widespread, the traditional *wahon* continued unchallenged as the dominant format for vernacular printed matter. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find *wahon* some 300 or 400 years old on sale in used bookstores and book fairs even today. But until now there has been no readily accessible history of *wahon* for the general reader.

The book opens with an account of the *kansubon* scrolls that were the major format for reading matter in Heian Japan, roughly a thousand years ago. *Wahon* were known by a variety of different names (such as *kansubon, orihon, sasshi*) derived from the physical appearance of the books or scrolls. Improvements were made over the years as papermaking techniques and bookmaking technology advanced. The author provides a clear account of the historical process, illustrated with pictures.

As the subtitle makes clear, the study is not concerned merely with books as physical objects. It also covers printing, publishing, bookshops, and even the content and design of books. This is an extremely useful guide to how books were produced and distributed in premodern Japan. (Chō)

MANGA

Watashi no shōjo manga shi [The History of Girls' Comics in Japan: A Personal Account]

By Konagai Nobumasa

Nishida Shoten, 2011. 187 x 128 mm. 268 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-88866-544-5.

Shōjo manga comics for girls remain extremely popular in Japan. Although a number of studies have appeared in recent years, this is the first written from the perspective of the people who produce the comics.

The author has worked as an editor of *shōjo manga* for fifty years, first at Shūeisha and latterly at Hakusensha. He was editor of *Bessatsu Māgaretto,* the first girls' monthly to achieve a circulation of a million copies, and after the launch of the Hakusensha publishing company brought out numerous hit magazines, among them *Hana to Yume* and *LaLa*.

This book is written from the perspective of an editor looking back over a long career at the rise and relative decline of *shōjo manga* as a genre. As a result, it differs somewhat from a conventional study. The author's privileged vantage point at the heart of the production process enables him to write with authority about the industry from the inside: how an editor sets about unearthing new talent, how reader feedback is incorporated, and precious insights into the relationships between editors and artists.

Also interesting is the author's account of the "manga school" system. Training new manga artists and expanding the readership are vital parts of the editor's job. The golden age of manga would never have been possible without the efforts of these unsung heroes behind the scenes. (Chō)

Konagai Nobumasa

Born in 1930. During his time at Shūeisha, worked on the editorial team of Omoshiro bukku *[Funny Book], a magazine for boys and girls, and of the girls' manga magazine* Ribon *[Ribbon] before becoming chief editor of* Bessatsu Māgaretto *[The Margaret Supplement]. Joined Hakusensha from its founding in 1973. Launched girls' manga magazines including* Hana to Yume *[Flowers and Dreams] and* LaLa. *Retired as Hakusensha president in 2005.*

No. 10: Nagai Kafū

This final installment in our series takes a look at the works of Nagai Kafū (1879–1959), a cosmopolitan writer who rejected the superficial sheen of modern Japan and found beauty in the shadowy world of the pleasure quarters and the lingering vestiges of a vanishing world.

Flowers in the Shadows

Born in 1879, Nagai Kafū lived through the sweeping reforms of the Meji era, the democracy and high modernism of the Taishō years, and the turbulence of early Shōwa Japan. He finally passed away, at the age of 79, in 1959. He is a rare example of a writer who experienced much of modern Japanese history at first hand.

Kafū was a member of the generation that came between Meiji-era writers like Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki and twentieth-century masters like Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. In Meiji Japan, modernization was seen as the key to national prosperity, and the intellectual elite tended to focus their studies on practical fields such as law or science rather than literature. Mori Ōgai was a military doctor as well as a novelist, and Natsume Sōseki was a university professor of English literature.

From the perspective of Meiji-era values, Kafū's devotion to literature from an early age would have seemed frivolous. He studied abroad in the United States and France as a young man, but his mind was always preoccupied with the "useless" pursuit of literature. The contrast with writers like Ōgai and Sōseki, who had studied practical subjects to help advance the modernization of Japan, was striking. Perhaps such frivolity was a prerogative of the younger generation.

Kafū was fortunate that his father's elite position in the Meiji government freed him from financial worries. He had no personal experience of the poverty that afflicted all too many Japanese literary figures of the time.

Kafū's experiences abroad established him as a member of the elite. A series of colorful pieces published shortly after his return to Japan made him the darling of the age. In a period dominated by naturalist literature portraying the grim and impoverished lives of writers, Kafū's work shone out with a rare brilliance.

But the true essence of Kafū's work lies elsewhere. After his initial success as a writer, Kafū came to feel uncomfortable in a rapidly modernizing Japan and began to distance himself from the age. His work took on an air of anti-modernity.

But this reaction against the spirit of the times did not take the form of an open all-out attack. Like the gentlemen scholars of the Middle Ages, he chose to become a hermit and stepped away from center stage. He came to prefer the shadows to the bright lights; the back alleys of the city to its main streets.

Many of Kafū's works feature "working girls" as their main characters: geishas, café waitresses, kept women, and dancing girls. Ordinary housewives, such as those who appear in the works of Sōseki or Ōgai, are conspicuous by their absence.

By writing about women of the pleasure quarters, Kafū was following a long-established tradition. But there was another reason for choosing this theme: although these women appear glamorous at first glance, their real appeal for Kafū lay in their status on the shadowy underside of modern society.

For Kafū, alienated from an impatiently modernizing Japan that seemed to be destroying one tradition after another, the modest beauty of these outcast women of the shadows exerted a powerful appeal.

Tsuyu no atosaki [Before and After the Rains] (1931), for example, portrayed the libertine life of a café waitress in the modernist metropolis of Tokyo, then rebuilding after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. *Bokutō kitan* [trans. *A Strange Tale from East of the River*] (1936) depicts the lowest of Tokyo's low—a prostitute in the red-light district of Tamanoi in Mukōjima, located on the unfashionable east side of the Sumida River. In both these pieces, Kafū shines a light on the inner beauty of supposedly corrupted and degraded women. Typical examples of Kafū at his best, these two stories continue to be widely loved and read to this day. It would be no exaggeration to describe Oyuki, the prostitute heroine of *Bokutō kitan,* as one of the greatest muses in all of Japanese literature. Kafū's brilliance lay in his ability to see the hidden beauty in the back alleys and shadows.

Kafū's work brings together elements drawn from the earlier tradition of Japanese erotic literature, the French literature that enthralled him as a young man, and the Confucian-styled stoicism of the Meiji era. But perhaps the biggest influence of all was his beloved Tokyo—the city where he was born and died.

Kafū loved the city of Tokyo in the way that Baudelaire loved Paris. Solitary strolls through the streets of Tokyo remained one of Kafū's greatest pleasures throughout his life. Solitary by nature, Kafū tended to keep his distance from the literary world and the reading public. Instead, Kafū poured his personal thoughts and feelings into *Danchōtei Nichijō,* the diaries he kept until shortly before his death. These are now considered among the masterpieces of modern Japanese diary literature.

The diaries contain further evidence of Kafū's shrewd eye for the society and the times he lived in. The character they reveal is no misanthropic loner, but rather a man who preferred to observe the lives and actions of his fellow human beings from a distance. Most of all, they show the self-contained solitude of a literary *flâneur,* wandering the streets of Tokyo at his leisure. Kafū's works represent the pinnacle of metropolitan literature in Japanese.

One final characteristic of Kafū's work: much of it is elderly in perspective. The narrator of *Bokutō kitan,* for example, is an old man. By making his protagonist an elderly figure already slightly removed from the hurly-burly of the world, Kafū subtly rejects the hectic modernization

and fetish for novelty that distinguished the Japanese society of his time.

Perhaps it is this last quality that explains the resurgence in popularity that Kafū's work has enjoyed in recent years. As Japan becomes increasingly a society of senior citizens, Kafū and his works are perhaps more in tune with the times than ever before.

(Kawamoto Saburō,
literary and film critic)

An Introduction to the Films

Bokutō kitan [The Twilight Story] (1960)
Directed by Toyoda Shirō

Although the film adaptation of Kafū's classic novel *A Strange Tale from East of the River* retains its original title in Japanese, in English the film was released as *The Twilight Story*. Mishima Yukio once said that the essence of Kafū's writing lies in his "beautiful depictions of corrupted women." The film, in which the role of the prostitute Oyuki is played by Yamamoto Fujiko, one of the most beautiful actresses in Japanese film history, encapsulates this aspect of Kafū's work perfectly. The scrupulous evocation of the Tamanoi locale during the late 1930s and 1940s is particularly impressive, although the plot of the film differs slightly from the original novel.

Wataridori itsu kaeru [When Will the Migratory Bird Return?] (1955)
Directed by Hisamatsu Seiji

This film combines three of Kafū's post–World War II short stories into a single work: "Nigirimeshi" [Riceball], "Shunjō Hato no Machi" [Lust in Hato no Machi], and "Wataridori itsu kaeru" [When Will the Migratory Bird Return?]. The story is set in the postwar red-light district of Hato no Machi, located east of the Sumida River, and depicts the joys and sorrows of the women who live there. While it is not a particularly well-regarded piece of cinema history, I personally consider it to be one of the best film adaptations of Kafū's fiction, for its vivid evocation of Kafū's regard for the "women of the shadows."

Yume no onna [Yearning] (1993)
Directed by Bandō Tamasaburō

This unique film was directed by Bandō Tamasaburō, a kabuki actor who is perhaps the most famous *onna-gata* (a specialist in female roles) on the stage today. In typical Kafū fashion, the main character is a high-ranking courtesan in the pleasure quarters. The story is set during the Meiji period, when the samurai class that had ruled the country for centuries was stripped of its privileges. A beautiful daughter from a samurai household is forced to sell herself into prostitution to support her family. The story is typical of Kafū and his fascination with the "women of the shadows." The heroine is played by Yoshinaga Sayuri, a famous actress whose career dates back to the 1960s.

(Continued from page 3)

The title of the novel, *Saka watari,* is the author's own coinage. It refers to a practice carried out by a group of fictional nomadic mountain people, whereby the elderly separate themselves from the rest of the group and begin a solitary journey to their deaths once they reach a certain age. Effectively, this is a voluntary form of "*oba-sute*," a historical practice in which the elderly members of certain communities were abandoned in remote areas when they became too great a burden. The story is set against the backdrop of the battles that took place in the mountainous regions around modern-day Niigata and Nagano Prefectures between the medieval warlords Takeda Shingen and Uesugi Kenshin. Again and again the mountain people, who are skilled in medicine, are pressed into the battle. It is in this context that the elderly Tsukikusa decides to start his final journey alone. Cradling his dead wife's bones in his arms, he weathers winter in the mountains before heading to the cherry tree where his wife asked to be buried. Ecological concerns are the true subject of this book—a problem that we need to address on a global level. Is it not the case that true respect for the environment lies in giving up your body to nature when you die, and receiving its blessings with gratitude while you still have life? This novel deals with the natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth. To have built a work of historical fiction around a subject of such universal concern is an achievement in which the author can take justifiable pride.

Nawata Kazuo

Born in 1958. Critic specializing in historical fiction. Author of Jidai shōsetsu no yomidokoro *[The Appeal of Historical Fiction] and* Miyamoto Musashi towa nanika *[Who Was Miyamoto Musashi?]. Won the Award for Research in Popular Literature in 1995 for* Torimonochō no keifu *[A History of Detective Stories Set in the Edo Period]. Editor of* Jidai Shōsetsu Ansorojī *[An Anthology of Historical Fiction].*

Events and Trends

Publication of Donald Keene's Selected Works

The first volume of a 15-volume edition of the collected works of Donald Keene, the eminent scholar of Japanese literature, was published by Shinchōsha in December 2011. The series will cover the whole of Keene's five-decade career, from *Aoi me no Tarō Kaja* [Blue-Eyed Tarōkaja], the first essay he published in Japanese back in 1957, right up to his most recent writing.

Keene's fascination with Japanese literature dates back to the age of eighteen, when he came across Arthur Waley's translation of *Genji monogatari* [The Tale of Genji]. Following the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami disaster last year, Keene decided to take Japanese citizenship and live out the rest of his life in Japan.

Winner of the 2012 Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize Announced

The 2012 Hon'ya Prize, chosen by bookstores across the country, went to Naoki Prize–winner Miura Shion for her novel *Fune o amu* [Building a Boat] (Kōbunsha). The central character concerns an oddball employee at a publishing company and his efforts to compile a new Japanese dictionary. The story deals with his passion and sensitivity for language and the obstacles he encounters as he and his team struggle to complete the dictionary. This heartwarming novel features a cast of eccentric editors and is marked with a deep appreciation for the pleasures and profundity of language.

Although most people have used a dictionary at some point in their lives, very few give any thought to how they are put together. This entertaining and highly readable novel draws in readers with its well-paced narrative and introduces them to the compilation process.

Obituary

Yoshimoto Takaaki, 87, critic, March 16, 2012.

One of the leading critics of the postwar era, Yoshimoto Takaaki first came to prominence for his criticism of the ideological capitulation of several leading literary figures and left-wing activists in the lead-up to World War II. He harshly criticized the prewar leftist movement for its drift into intellectualism, which he believed had alienated it from the concerns of ordinary people. He declared his own intention to live an ordinary life and remain in touch with the concerns of the masses. He became a charismatic figure for the young people who took part in the All Campus Joint Struggle and the protests against the United States–Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s.

Yoshimoto carved out a distinctive niche for himself as a public intellectual, producing a succession of groundbreakingly original works that included the literary essay *Kotoba ni totte bi to wa nanika* [What Is Beauty for Language?] and the political piece *Kyōdō gensō ron* [The Common Illusion], based on the idea that the nation-state is an illusion created by people. Yoshimoto also published widely on subjects such as subculture, rock music, manga, fashion and television commercials. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, he contributed to discussions on nuclear power and scientific technology.

His daughter is the popular author Yoshimoto Banana.

Other Titles of Interest

Due to space limitations only 16 books can be introduced in the "New Titles" section. The following are additional works selected by the Advisory Board as worth sharing with Japanese Book News *readers.*

- *Kamisama 2011* [God Bless You, 2011]. By Kawakami Hiromi, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-217232-5. A subtle reworking of the author's debut work from 18 years ago, depicting the world after the Tōhoku earthquake/tsunami and nuclear disaster.
- *Sora o mitemasu naitemasu* [I Look at the Sky and Weep]. By Shiina Makoto, Bungei Shunjū, 2011. ISBN 978-4-16-380960-1. A memoir of the author's youth, interspersed with accounts of his off-the-beaten-track travels around the world.
- *Dattan no uma* [The Tartar's Horse]. By Tsujihara Noboru, Nikkei Publishing Inc., 2011. ISBN 978-4-532-17108-7. A magnificent novel of adventure and romance set in the 18th century. Following secret orders, a young Japanese man travels through the Korean peninsula and the plains of Mongolia.
- *Tōkyō kankō* [Tokyo Sightseeing]. By Nakajima Kyōko, Shūeisha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-08-771405-0. This collection of seven short stories by a former Naoki Prize–winner employs a wide variety of styles, including erotically charged horror, humorous nostalgia, and coming-of-age stories.
- *Kawaisōdane?* [You Poor Little Thing?]. By Wataya Risa, Bungei Shunjū, 2011. ISBN 978-4-16-380950-2. Two love stories shot through with the author's black humor and keen sense of observation.
- *Ikyō no hidamari* [Sunlit Places in Distant Lands]. By Nomiyama Gyōji, Seikatsu no Tomosha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-915919-75-6. The latest collection of essays from a painter still active in his 90s, who has earned himself a growing reputation as a first-rate essayist.
- *Tabi suru Sōseki-sensei* [Sōseki as Traveler]. By Makimura Ken'ichirō, Shōgakukan, 2011. ISBN 978-4-09-388204-0. A journalist travels in the footsteps of Natsume Sōseki to learn more about the social settings that provided the background to his works.
- *Yōgakatachi no Tōkyō* [Western-style Painters in Tokyo]. By Kondō Yū, Sairyūsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-7791-1631-5. Tokyo was at the forefront of the Western-style painting movement in Japan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This book offers a flesh-and-bones account of what life was like for the talented painters drawn to the capital from around the country.
- *Fukushima no genpatsu jiko o megutte* [The Fukushima Nuclear Accident]. By Yamamoto Yoshitaka, Misuzu Shobō, 2011. ISBN 978-4-622-07644-5. A physics teacher offers his thoughts on nuclear issues and Japan's dependence on nuclear power.
- *Higashi Ajia no kioku no ba* [Loci of Memory in East Asia]. Written and edited by Itagaki Ryūta, Jeon Ji-Yeong, and Iwasaki Minoru, Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-309-22542-5. Examines 14 places and people in East Asia and the memories associated with them, including Confucian temples, the professional wrestler Rikidōzan, Mount Kongō, and cherry blossoms.
- *Genpatsu to genbaku* [Nuclear Power and the Bomb]. By Kawamura Minato, Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-309-62434-1. A study of how public views of nuclear power and atomic weapons have changed over time, drawing on a variety of sources including Godzilla, Astro Boy, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind,* and literary works dealing with nuclear subjects.
- *Doragon bōru no manga gaku* [*Dragon Ball*: A Manga Study]. By Misaki Tetsu, Sairyūsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-7791-1564-6. An examination of the structure and techniques of the world-famous *Dragon Ball* manga and its unique characters.
- *1985-nen no kurasshu gyaruzu* [Crash Gals of 1985]. By Yanagisawa Takeshi, Bungei Shunjū, 2011. ISBN 978-4-16-374490-2. For a brief period in the 1980s female pro-wrestlers were all the rage in Japan, culminating in the Crash Gals duo. This book looks at the scene and the lives of Japanese women at the time.
- *Nihon no daitenkan* [Major Turning Point for Japan]. By Nakazawa Shin'ichi, Shūeisha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-08-720606-7. A scholar of religion sketches the path that Japan needs to take from its present turning point, following the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident.
- *Zetsubō no kuni no kōfuku na wakamonotachi* [Happy Young People in a Country of Despair]. By Furuichi Noritoshi, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-217065-9. Interviews with happy young people in contemporary Japan. A fresh new study of the rising generation by a young sociologist.
- *Waga gaikō jinsei* [My Life as a Diplomat]. By Tamba Minoru, Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-12-004246-1. A Japanese diplomat's memoir of his career at Japan's embassies in the United States, Russia, and China.
- *Jiburi no tetsugaku* [The Ghibli Philosophy]. By Suzuki Toshio, Iwanami Shoten, 2011. ISBN 978-4-00-023495-5. The author looks back on his twenty-year career as a producer at Studio Ghibli, depicting the diverse exchanges and conversations that go into the process of creating the studio's *anime* masterpieces.
- *Hideyoshi no taigai sensō* [Hideyoshi's Foreign Wars]. By Inoue Yasushi and Kim Shiduck, Kasama Shoin, 2011. ISBN 978-4-305-70551-8. Examines Japanese and Korean historical views of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea, beginning in 1592, from the Edo era (1603–1868) to the Sino-Japanese War that began in 1894.
- *Shōdo no kioku* [Scorched Earth Memories]. By Fukuma Yoshiaki, Shinyōsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-7885-1243-6. A social historian focuses on personal accounts of the battle for Okinawa and the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to examine the qualities that made World War II different from anything that had come before.
- *Yama ni ikiru* [Life in the Mines]. By Yamamoto Sakubei, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-217171-7. A new edition of a collection of sketches first published in 1967, recently included on UNESCO's "Memory of the World Programme" list.

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief
Tsuka Hiroko, Managing Director
Arts and Culture Department
The Japan Foundation
4-4-1 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku
Tokyo 160-0004 Japan
Tel: +81-3-5369-6064; Fax: +81-3-5369-6038
Email: booknews@jpf.go.jp

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Tales of Simpler Times

Less than two centuries ago, Japan was cut off from the rest of the world. The lives of ordinary people were materially poor, but rich in spirit. Today, when the country has become a major economic power, its people have lost sight of the traditional Japanese virtues of patience, prudence, hard work, and resilience. That, at least, is the view of Yamamoto Ichiriki, one of Japan's most highly acclaimed historical novelists.

"Things used to be different," Yamamoto says. "I cherish the soul of old Japan, and I always try to keep that spirit in mind when I'm writing."

The characters in Yamamoto's novels are often guileless commoners, accepting of their place in the feudalistic society of the late Edo period (1603-1868). Despite the lack of famous samurai warriors and other stock elements of Japanese historical fiction, his works continue to draw readers in with their human drama, period detail, and sense of inner peace and energy.

Yamamoto's favorite themes are family ties and perseverance in the face of hardship: subjects that have a nostalgic appeal for many Japanese readers.

Most of Yamamoto's novels take place in the late Edo period and are set in the Fukagawa area of Tokyo, where the writer now resides. This unpretentious neighborhood of merchants and artisans still retains many traces of the old "low town" atmosphere, providing constant inspiration to the novelist with its reminders of old Edo.

"When I walk down the cobbled streets, it is as though I can sense the footsteps of the merchants who used to live here during the Edo period," says Yamamoto. "If I ever get stuck for ideas, I take a walk down to the Tomioka Hachiman Shrine close to where I live. There's a stone-carved guardian dog in front of the shrine that I like to pat on the head for good luck. He's been keeping an eye on all the changes in the neighborhood since 1727."

Today, at the age of 64, Yamamoto is a writer with an established reputation. But Yamamoto freely confesses that for many years he had no intention of becoming a novelist. After starting work as a tour guide, Yamamoto changed jobs around 10 times and saddled himself with debts of ¥200 million. Eventually, he decided that he had no option but to write books to repay the loans. "And to cover the huge debts I had racked up, I needed to swing for the fences and make sure I came up with a bestseller," he says with a laugh.

For a man whose previous writing experience was limited to copywriting and magazine editing, it seemed a reckless gamble. But Yamamoto, then 46, and his wife were confident he could do it. They turned out to be right. Incorporating what he had learned from his own rocky life into his Edo-period stories, Yamamoto wrote a series of novels that won him prestigious awards and a devoted readership. He is currently at work on serialized novels for 22 different newspapers and magazines, including *Guniya Denzō* [Pawnshop Owner Denzō], the story of a conscientious pawnshop owner whose words of advice help his troubled customers to get their lives back on an even keel. This is currently appearing in weekly installments in the *Shūkan Asahi* magazine

Part of the appeal of Yamamoto's novels is the way they bring readers into contact with the old Edo professions and a way of life that has changed beyond recognition since the onset of the Industrial Revolution. In *Omiki dokkuri* [Two Peas in a Pod], the two main characters are *kagokaki,* or palanquin bearers—the taxi drivers of Edo society. The protagonist in *Akae no sakura* [A Red Painted Cherry] is a *sonryōya,* running what in the present day might be called a leasing business.

Yamamoto uses painstaking research into historical records to recreate vividly the daily lives of craftsmen and traders, allowing readers to travel back in time to the middle of the nineteenth century.

What is it that draws Yamamoto to the Edo period as the setting for his stories? The author says that as well as the kindness and mutual support typical of Edo society, another major part of the appeal is the distinctive language of the period. "Unlike the modern language, full of foreign loanwords, the Edo language was indigenous to the region and maintained the elegance and dignity of the ancient Japanese culture," he says. "And historical novels don't grow old. A story in a contemporary setting will be out of date in a few years. But our settings are already old anyway, so there is no way they can become obsolete!" he grins.

Yamamoto is currently working on two epic novels about famous historical figures from his home prefecture of Kōchi, on the island of Shikoku: Sakamoto Ryōma, a key figure in the events that led to the downfall of the shogunate, and John Manjirō (or John Mung), the shipwrecked fisherman who became one of the first Japanese to visit the United States and served as an interpreter when Japan opened its doors to the outside world in the closing years of the Edo period.

Yamamoto uses two overlapping storylines to shed light on the personalities of his characters—in *Ryōma hashiru* [Ryōma Scrambles] one part depicts Ryōma himself while the other deals with his lifelong friend and partner Nakaoka Shintarō . In *Jon Man* [John Mung], he alternates between the perspectives of John Mung and William H. Whitefield, the captain of the American whaling vessel that rescued Mung and brought him to the United States.

Yamamoto's books have the power to take readers back to a simpler time, refreshing their spirits with a reminder of the simplicity and sincerity of the traditional Japanese way of life.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Yamamoto Ichiriki

Born in Kōchi in 1948 and moved to Tokyo at the age of 14. After a number of different jobs, became a writer of historical fiction in an attempt to pay off his debts. Won the All Yomimono Prize for New Writers for *Sōryū* [Blue Dragon] in 1997 and the Naoki Prize in 2002 for *Akanezora* [A Crimson Sky], which was made into a film in 2006.