Panel 5: Place, Poetics, and Other Operations on Language (October 13: 10:30 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.)

Shu Sakaguchi, Jissen Women's University
“An Introduction to the Theory of ‘Hypnotic Literature’: the Japanese Romantic Symbolism in the Early 20th Century Novels”

Abstract: This essay’s objective is to investigate the lineage of how the imported psychological concept “hypnosis” became “indigenized” in the “Japanese Modern Novel”. Before modernization, it is waka that the 18th-century romantic thought placed much value on the “Japanese” aesthetics. After the end of 19th century, however, the initiative was taken over by haiku. The arrival of the modern literature in Japan was marked by the orientation of “objectification of things,” ushering the age of “byosha” (depiction). But the so-called “discovery of landscape” had been half accomplished by the Edo haikai, which was “discovered” in the haiku reform movement of the Meiji period. Unsurprisingly, the movement quickly invaded the prose territory in the name of shasei (sketching). However, since “landscape” is a conceptual subcategory of ‘nature’ and being easily mixed up together, another aspect of haiku was ‘re-discovered’ as the essence of “Japanese nature” through Naturalism after the Meiji 40’s, while succeeding the idea of shasei. Against this background, the ideological change of the haiku spirit concurrently occurred with the literary acceptance of “hypnosis”, which was to be identified with an ideal state of mental ‘nature’ (subconscious). This essay will delineate such a literary current by focusing around the Taisho writers. Especially, looking through the figurative meaning of the physiological “cerebral anemia,” which was a contrasting term of “neurasthenia,” how both of these symptoms were transformed into aesthetic thoughts, and how the awareness of the former synchronized with that of the “Japan-specific” in the modernity, will be shown.

Joe DeLong, University of Cincinnati
“The Vocabulary of Orientation’ in the Poetry of Sekiguchi Ryoko”

Abstract: Like many writers with distinctly postmodern sensibilities, poet Sekiguchi Ryoko concerns herself with the operations of language and the cultural determinants thereof. She composed the books Heliotropes and Two Markets, Once Again simultaneously in both her native Japanese and French. The former is set in a botanical garden on the Iberian Peninsula, and the latter is set in the vicinity of a market that does not seem wholly real. In Heliotropes, the profusion of life calls into question the power of language to describe and classify. In Two Markets, Once Again, the author focuses on interactions with others through the recognition of ethnic difference, commerce, and the erotic. Visiting the market, the speaker acquires “the vocabulary of orientation.” She attempts to describe her location, even as the book implies that the act of description itself is what is creating the market. On a conceptual level, these books model the experience of acquiring a foreign language in an unfamiliar locale, with the sense that something is always escaping articulation. The diction veers from ellipsis to pedantic precision. With references to the environment and to other cultures, especially Muslim ones, the poems suggest social context and political responsibility, but at the same time this frame of reference is incomplete. Ultimately Sekiguchi explores the navigation of place and language in a way that awakens the reader to the contingency of both, with disorientation creating opportunities for discovery, connection, and self-definition.

Leith D. Morton, Tokyo Institute of Technology
“Yamato as Cultural Memory: Maekawa Samio’s Poetry on Nara”

Abstract: Simon Schama in his acclaimed 1995 book ‘Landscape & Memory’ writes that, ‘Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product…this is a cause not for guilt or sorrow but celebration.’ Maekawa Samio (1903-1990) was one of the most important tanka poets in twentieth century Japan, and was second to none in celebrating in verse the landscape of Nara, his homeland, and more generally, the Yamato region where he was raised and lived for most of his life. In this paper, I will trace the significance of Nara on his poetry by a detailed analysis of the two major works he wrote on this region. The first work is a collection of poetry entitled ‘Yamato Roppyakuka’ (Six Hundred Verses on Yamato), published in 1971. Maekawa’s final expression of what Nara meant to him is his 1982 book entitled ‘Yamato mahoroba no ki’ (Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed), a combination of travel diary, personal poetic record and almanac chronicling the geographic, historic, cultural and literary achievements and monuments of the region. A reading of the poems he wrote on Nara included in this last volume will serve to illustrate the changes in Maekawa’s understanding of the notion of travel writing/regionality/landscape itself, as well as the continuing attraction that this rural Arcadia held for him.

Dylan McGee, Nagoya University
“Communities of Reception: Edo Period Lending Libraries, their Readers, and Communal Practices of Inscriptive and Tactile Book Defacement”

Abstract: While great attention has been paid to the role of enunciation in early modern reading practices, following Maeda Ai’s landmark essay in this area, there is a vast body of underexplored archival evidence to suggest that deliberate inscriptive and tactile interaction with text and illustration—what we might view today as defacement—was just as integral an aspect of reading. If the early modern reader read aloud, as is now commonly thought, we should also imagine him with a finger ever ready to rub out the face of clearly identifiable villains in illustrations, scribble salacious jokes in the margin of a page, or record a complaint about the high lending fees of the local kashihon’ya lending library on the back cover of a borrowed book. While there are preponderant examples of book defacement in privately owned and circulated books from the Edo period, the volume and frequency of inscriptive and tactile defacement is even more pronounced in books that circulated through lending libraries. Taken together, this vast corpus of undocumented shigiko, marginal commentary, finger rubbings, poems, supplemented character dialogue, and various other forms of graffiti, constitute an invaluable resource for learning about early modern readers, how they read and responded to popular literary works of the time, as well as how they communicated with other readers via the medium of borrowed books. Based on an archival survey of over two-thousand books that once circulated through early modern lending libraries, this paper will introduce varieties of textual defacement that were common to most regions of Japan during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In keeping with the theme of the conference, it will also highlight identifiable regional and local differences, through detailed comparisons of books that circulated through large scale libraries, such as the Daisō in Nagoya, with those of smaller operations based on Nōtō Peninsula, Kishū Domain, Matsumoto, Niigata, and various lodges and other sites along the Tōkaidō and Nakasendō.

Updated: 9/14/12