

# Aware as the Essence of Japanese Literature: The Modern View

Mark MELI

Kansai University

## INTRODUCTION: MOTOORI NORINAGA

It is common knowledge among scholars of Japanese literary history that nativist Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801) described *mono no aware* 物のあはれ as the *hon'i* 本意, the original intention, or essence, if you will, of both *monogatari* fiction, particularly the *Tale of Genji*, and waka poetry (really all kinds of *uta* 宇多 “songs”). Norinaga’s first statement to this effect comes in his short tract entitled *Aware ben* 阿波禮弁 (Considerations of *Aware*), written in 1757. This is the first place where Norinaga writes in any depth about the ancient term that would later come to be often spoken in the same breath as his own name. Even at this early stage, however, some six years before the careful positivist hermeneutic of *Shibun yōryō* 紫文要領 (*The Essence of Murasaki’s Writings*, his first book dealing with the *Tale of Genji*) and *Isonokami sasamegoto* 石上私淑言 (*Poetic Whisperings*, his second full-length work on poetic theory, and the first heavily incorporating the notion of *mono no aware*) would be introduced, Norinaga already hints at his future direction.

If we look at our ancient writings and consider them deeply, we shall see that in general, the full significance of the way of poetry is fully expressed by the single word ‘*aware*.’ From the age of the gods down until the present, and even from now until the end of time, all of the waka that have been or will be composed go back to this one word. Thus should we attempt to grasp the final significance of this way of poetry, it lies nowhere other than here. Further, should we go on to ask what be the essence of such tales as *Genji monogatari* and *Ise monogatari*, we shall again reply with the single word ‘*aware*’ ... All waka are born from the knowledge of *mono no aware*. And we must realize that all tales like *Genji* and *Ise* are works that express *mono no aware*, and do so in order that the people who read them might themselves come to know *mono no aware*. Apart from this, there is no other meaning in such works.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Norinaga, in arguing against the forced interpretations of literature and poetry that had come as the result of reading these in terms of Buddhist or Confucian philosophy, used the notion of ‘*mono no aware*’ to represent the *hon’i* of both *waka* and *monogatari*, is well known. The question that I want to approach here, however, deals with how this notion, the notion that this thing called *aware* or *mono no aware* (however these be understood—the definition of these terms shall not be a purpose of this paper) somehow expresses the original intention, or the essence, of the Japanese literary tradition, or the creative spring from which the works of that tradition well forth, has been explained in modern Japan.

### ENTERING THE MODERN ERA: FROM HARUMICHI TO WATSUJI TETSURŌ

From the time of Norinaga through the mid-Meiji period, this notion of *mono no aware* appears in the writings of several scholars of nativism and literature. Although it is not until the Taisho period that any new research is made into the significance of the term itself, and not until even later that the connection between the term and Japanese literary history as a whole is thoroughly re-examined, a brief look at some of what was written concerning the term will help set the context for the works we will examine later.

An in-depth discussion of Norinaga’s theory of *mono no aware* appears in Hagiwara Hiromichi’s 萩原廣道 *Genji monogatari hyōshaku* 源氏物語評釈, the first portion of which was published in 1854. While contesting Norinaga’s theory on certain points,<sup>2</sup> Hiromichi generally agrees with the notion that the *Tale* is an expression of the *mono no aware* that the author Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 felt in her own life; he then goes on to expand on Norinaga’s ideas and develop his own theory of interpretation. In general, while agreeing with the man he considered his mentor, Hiromichi begins to take a broader view of literature, one that examines various elements of literature beyond the notion of *mono no aware*, and that seems to eschew many of the ideological nuances of Norinaga’s work.<sup>3</sup>

More than a century after Norinaga wrote his first discussions of literature and poetry, Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙 was a young student in Tokyo, studying art and literature under the American Hegelian Ernest Fenollosa. Shōyō, in writing a critique of Hamlet, resorted to precisely the kind of Confucian didacticism that Norinaga had argued against using the notion of *mono no aware*. Shōyō gave his interpretation of the play in terms of *kanzen chōaku* 勸善懲惡 (rewarding good, chastising evil), and for that was chided by his teacher, who saw literary art as possessing an existence independent of morality. The young Shōyō came himself to agree, and later wrote *Shōsetsu shinzui*

小説神髓 (*The Essence of the Novel*) in order to state his newly-formed views. Unlike Norinaga, Shōyō does not center his argument around the term ‘aware,’ but the term does appear. Shōyō, in the section where he discusses and criticizes the notion of *kanzen chōaku*, casually mentions the notion of knowing *mono no aware* as part of the literary experience that such didacticism cannot comprehend. Of course, Shōyō’s manner of conceptualizing the term here follows Norinaga’s quite closely.

In the first attempt to make a modern Japanese translation of the *Tale of Genji*, an project which was never completed, we see *mono no aware* conceptualized in a narrower, more particular manner. In the preface to the first volume, published in 1911, Sassa Seisetsu 佐々醒説 justified a modern translation of the tale by speaking not only of the greatness of the work when seen in the context of world literature, but also by pointing to the wonderful culture, unparalleled in the world, of the Heian court, which this work reveals. It is indeed that time and place where *mono no aware* flowered:

When in the world, where in the world, has there been a culture like that of our Heian court, so utterly ruled by sensibility? Where in the world have the moon and the flowers been so admired? In what period has there been such fondness for *mono no aware*?<sup>4</sup>

Here then, while the claim is never made that *mono no aware* was something possessed exclusively by the Heian court, we do indeed see a special connection drawn between this term and that historical setting. If there has never in the world been a period as fond of *mono no aware* as Heian Japan, then certainly there has been no other period in Japanese history with such fondness for *mono no aware* as the Heian. In all of the research on these terms which is to come, we shall see a continuing tension that will be rooted in this dichotomy between *aware* or *mono no aware* as a regional aesthetic value set in Heian Japan on the one hand, and as a universal Japanese value on the other. The former view gains further positive strength simply through evidence of word usage: in no other period were these words used with such frequency as the Heian period. In the *Genji monogatari* alone, ‘aware’ appears over 1,040 times. That would equal about once per page of the Seidensticker translation. This dichotomy is something that we shall return to discuss later.

Knowledge of Norinaga and his ideas seemed to become generally common among educated Japanese with the publication of Muraoka Tsunetsugu’s 村岡典嗣 book *Motoori Norinaga* in 1911. Generally speaking, the percentage of this book given to discussion of literature and poetry is extremely small: most of the work is concerned with Norinaga’s writings on the way of the *kami*. It is worthwhile mentioning however, that

Muraoka here describes Norinaga's *mono no aware ron* as a theory of literature (文学説), and this appears to be the first time Norinaga's thought had been described with this new, translated term.

In this discussion, Muraoka is primarily concerned with making clear what Norinaga thought about fiction and poetry, particularly about the *Tale of Genji*. The discussion begins with the point that Norinaga set up *mono no aware* as the foundation of all literature in reaction to previous Buddhist and Confucian theories about the meaning and significance of the *Tale of Genji*. He states:

The fundamental significance of both of these works (*Shibun yōryō* and *Isonokami sasamegoto*) is the idea that the essential characteristic of literature is to be found in *mono no aware*.<sup>5</sup>

He summarizes Norinaga: the significance of literature is in neither the teaching of religious precepts nor in *kanzen chōaku*, rather it is found in the extent to which the author has been able to translate her very own feelings of *mono no aware* to the brush, and thus to the reader. And it is through this that the heart of the author is released of its burden to tell, and that of the reader is comforted in its own grief. Consequently good and evil in literature are to be judged using a standard different from those we apply in everyday life, from those taught to us by Buddhism or Confucianism. Muraoka also stresses that Norinaga took his ideas from the *Tale of Genji* itself, especially from the discussion between Genji and Tamakazura in the “Hotaru” chapter.<sup>6</sup>

By the time the young philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 published his article “‘Mono no aware’ ni tsuite” 「物のあはれ」について (Regarding ‘Mono no aware’) in 1922, the notion that Norinaga used this concept to argue for the independent value of literature over and against moralistic interpretation had become the common interpretation. Watsuji begins:

The forceful explanation of *mono no aware* as the original intent (*hon'i*) of all literature was one of Motoori Norinaga's greatest accomplishments. Through his understanding of the literature of the Heian Court, particularly the *Tale of Genji*, he arrived at the position that the purpose of literature is neither ethical admonition nor the explanation of profound doctrines—as a utilitarian device literature serves no purpose at all—all it can do is to show *mono no aware*. It is in this, however, that literature finds both its independence and its value. Coming at a time when Confucianism's power was at its peak, and consequently when no value was recognized in literature apart

from its use as an aid in morals or government, such a forceful claim as this certainly stands as an epoch-making event in the history of Japanese thought.<sup>7</sup>

It is with Watsuji's essay, the first dedicated entirely to the elucidation of this concept, that *mono no aware* became a favored topic for people writing on Japanese literature, and especially for those who bring with them a methodology rooted in the study of European philosophy and aesthetic theory. Discussions of the term by such people become quite numerous over the two decades after Watsuji published this short essay. In the following work, however, *aware* comes to be seen within a new context, one wherein several other Japanese literary / aesthetic concepts share the spotlight. In all of this, however, there remains a certain sense, in the spirit of Norinaga, that it is '*aware*,' or '*mono no aware*,' that, more than any other word or concept, reflects the basic essence of Japanese literature.

## THE DISCOURSE ON AESTHETIC CATEGORIES AND AWARE AS THE ESSENCE OF LITERATURE

Those writing about *aware* in the decades following Watsuji share one thing in common: a thorough familiarity with European aesthetic theory and philosophical methods. This becomes particularly evident in one respect: their knowledge and application of the notion of aesthetic categories, the idea that our aesthetic experience can be broken down into distinct and yet interconnected, (and in the minds of some, universal) categories, each of which describes part of our aesthetic view of the world. Japanese learned of this notion of categories from German idealist aesthetics, such as those of von Hartmann, Vischer, and Lipps, starting at the turn of the twentieth century. It took some time, however, before scholars of aesthetics and literature found ways to adapt this concept to the Japanese tradition. (In fact, by the time this adaptation took place, these notions were already close to forgotten in Europe.)

A forerunner, if you will, to that project was philosopher Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造, whose '*Iki*' no *kōzō* 「いき」の構造 was the first book-length and thoroughly systematic philosophical analysis of a traditional Japanese aesthetic term. Kuki identifies his methodology in the book as hermeneutic-phenomenological, and indeed his terminology and approach bear that out. There is no specific mention of the notion of aesthetic categories in this work, so we cannot say that he was explicitly influenced by this then popular notion in aesthetics. Nevertheless, Kuki gives, for example, a graphic illustration of the "extensive structure of *iki*" (「いき」の外延的な構造) that is, the relationship

between *iki* and various other aesthetic moments or possibilities, and it is hard to understand this and the other diagrams Kuki gives in a context severed from the systematic project of making categorical distinctions in aesthetic experience.<sup>8</sup>

Of course Ōnishi Yoshinori 大西克禮 is best known for the application of the notion of aesthetic categories to Japanese aesthetics. Starting with his *Yūgen and Aware* 幽玄とあはれ in 1939 he laid out his basic plan for demonstrating that the Japanese concepts *aware*, *yūgen* 幽玄, and *sabi* さび were in fact derivative categories of the universal aesthetic categories beauty, sublimity, and humor. His system of categories spanning both East and West came to its most perfect form only with the publication of his two-volume *Bigaku* 美学 after his death.

Some five years before Ōnishi first published his work on *aware*, however, the influence of these notions appears in the work of Okazaki Yoshie 岡崎義恵, albeit in a relatively primitive, non-systematic way. In his first book, *Nihon bungeigaku* 日本文芸学 (*The Literary Arts of Japan*), Okazaki, in an article dealing with the term ‘*aware*,’ states that his overall project, the beginnings of which are represented in this book, is “to seek the essence of Japanese literature from within our particular Japanese aesthetic consciousness and literary thought, and to establish a history of Japanese literature as the appearance and development of these.”<sup>9</sup> This task he breaks into two parts, the theoretical and the historical, the former coming from a “dissection and systemization of the aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic theory” found in the literary sphere, and the latter from a “confirmation of the concrete facts” found there and a working out of their relationships. And without doing both together, the results, he claims, are bound to be slanted in one direction, so that neither project will be complete, as theory alone will be led off track by logical speculation if not guided by historical fact, and the attempt to write a history of Japanese literature without a theoretical direction will ultimately fail to give meaning to the special cultural characteristics which come together to form the thing called Japanese literary history.

Okazaki next goes on to tell us that his search for a traditional Japanese aesthetic consciousness and a literary theory by which to guide his investigation will be centered around the historical usage of technical terms (*jutsugo* 術語). He recognizes the difficulty in grappling with such terms, as they are used by different people in different ways, and have no univocal significance. We can only speculate as to why Okazaki feels that the elucidation of technical terms is the best way to approach his topic. We might guess that in this he was influenced by Kuki, whose ‘*Iki*’ *no kōzō*, published about five years earlier, was already a well-known example of the progress that could be made by focusing on an aesthetic elucidation of one such term.

It is probably no coincidence that the first such term that Okazaki seeks to clarify

is ‘aware.’ As to the criteria by which Okazaki decided upon ‘aware,’ he merely tells us that this term is a major artery regulating the flow of Japanese literature, and one of interest to general readers. Moreover, he explains that even though it has been treated previously in an admirable manner by other scholars, there remain many problems relating to it.

In this essay, “Aware no kōsatsu” あはれの考察, Okazaki is primarily involved in an interpretation of the word, without concerning himself with the discussion of how it relates to the history of Japanese literature in general. There are numerous other places in his writings, however, where Okazaki does deal with that connection, seeming not exactly sure to just what extent ‘aware’ does indeed describe the essence of that literature. In some of his earlier work on the *Man’yōshū* 万葉集, for instance, Okazaki again gets involved in a theoretical discussion about *jutsugo*, or the term or terms that should be used to represent or idealize the nature of *Man’yō* aesthetic value.<sup>10</sup> Before settling on the epic / lyric distinction that he finds in the West and applying that to the collection, Okazaki considers what it might mean to describe its poetry in terms of ‘aware.’

If we ask whether or not ‘aware,’ which in the *Man’yōshū* shows a rich expression of feelings and forms the essence of lyricism, can actually be seen as the center point of that collection, we must answer that such a way of thinking, while not being impossible, would make it difficult to draw a distinction between the world of the *Man’yōshū* and that of the *Kokinshū* and the *Tale of Genji*. Especially since the word ‘aware’ appears in the *Man’yōshū* in only about eight places, it would be impossible to try to use it (in reference to this work) in the way Norinaga did to describe the *Tale of Genji*.<sup>11</sup>

So while Okazaki here rejects ‘aware’ as the keyword with which to represent the particular beauty of the *Man’yōshū*, it is precisely on account of this term’s breadth that he does so: while expressing “the essence of lyricism” in general, it cannot express what it is that is special about the poetry of this collection. It could just as well be used, he implies, to describe the *Kokinshū* 古今集 or the *Genji*.

Much later, in 1969, Okazaki seemed to have changed his thinking about the significance of the term ‘aware.’ He states in an article that “Signifying the style of the *Man’yōshū* in a single word presents much difficulty, but if I was compelled to give the one term that I thought was the most fitting, it would, after all, be ‘aware.’”<sup>12</sup> While discussing the different shades of meaning the word possesses in the ancient histories, the *Man’yōshū*, and the Heian period, ‘aware,’ he says, is the beauty of human emotion, and he then references Norinaga in claiming that this term represents the basis of

waka. Here Okazaki puts himself fully in Norinaga's camp: the poems of the *Man'yōshū*, as lyric poetry, are essentially described by the word 'aware.' It seems as if Okazaki's thinking has taken a bit of a traditional turn in the later days of his life.

While often making such general statements (comments which actually have a logical structure behind them, one that we cannot completely do justice to here), Okazaki already realized early on that the aesthetic breadth of Japanese literary history could not adequately be described by this single term alone. As we mentioned above, he first decides to systematize the aesthetics of the *Man'yōshū* using neither 'aware' nor any other Japanese term, but by drawing a parallel between the poetry found there and two modes of poetry that have dominated in the West since Classical Greece: the epic and the lyric. To the former he matches the *chōka*, especially as perfected in the work of Kakinomoto Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂; to the latter he matches the *tanka*. Thus while Okazaki continually recognizes the special connection that *aware* has to Heian literature, his statements exhibit a tension towards seeing *aware* as "the essence of lyricism" itself, and as a more general aesthetic concept.

One important consequence of the popularity of the concept of aesthetic categories to our present discussion is that *aware*, which had up until this time played the role of the essential concept in Japanese literature generally, had to somehow be reconciled with all of the other categories that were being dug out of the Japanese literary tradition, concepts like *makoto*, *yūgen*, *sabi*, *yojō* 余情, *iki*, etc. Therefore from this point on *aware*, while still somehow being seen as the essence of Japanese literature, has to be fit into a grid of various aesthetic terms—concepts or categories, that begin to emerge and call for systematic explanation.

Okazaki also relies upon an analogy with Greek poetic forms when he further draws the context within which 'aware' fits when used to speak generally of Japanese literature. Every high school student in present-day Japan is taught the difference between two ideals as a way of categorizing Heian literature and aesthetics. As opposed to 'aware' or 'mono no aware,' which is seen as revealing the pathos-laden, mournful longing of the *Tale of Genji*, 'okashi' をかし is said to epitomize the wit and often sardonic humor of Sei Shonagon 清少納言 as seen in her *Pillow Book* 枕草子 (*Makura no sōshi*). This distinction between the two terms is not altogether new. Both words can be seen rather frequently in the *uta-awase* 歌合 judgments left from the Heian period, particularly those of Fujiwara Shunzei 藤原俊成. Motoori Norinaga himself noted that 'aware' and 'okashi' were often contrasted as opposites even by his time, but he saw this as just one limited way of viewing their relationship. For him, 'aware' meant something much broader than its popular, negative meaning implied, so broad, in fact, that in general terms, 'okashi' itself was included within the broad signification of



'aware.' He thought that *okashi* was simply one emotion that, when felt deeply enough, could reach the extent of *aware*. It was, however, a positive emotion that as such rarely reached the depths seen in those emotions which are out of our power to control, emotions like sorrow and longing.<sup>13</sup>

In neither the words of Norinaga nor the use of these terms in Shunzei, however, do we find the kind of distinction between the two terms as ideals that has come to be recognized at the level of common sense by Japanese today. It seems to me that this categorical distinction may have gained impetus in the work of Okazaki, who in sorting out these categories looks for his paradigm in classical Greek poetry, where he sees that the two major thematic types were tragedy and comedy, with the former consistently given aesthetic precedence. Okazaki asks if we might not find matching concepts in the Japanese tradition. He responds, "I suppose that in Japan the aesthetic spheres which are applicable to these are 'aware' and 'okashi.'"<sup>14</sup>

In drawing his analogy, he reasons from Aristotle, who claimed that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear. In Japanese terms, should that pitiful side become predominant, we have *mono no aware*. There is, however, none of the struggle, none of the battling, in *aware* that we see in Greek tragedy, and none of the fear. *Aware* does not fight against fate, it reconciles itself and learns to live with it. Thus Okazaki claims that the dramatic element does not fully develop as it does in tragedy, and this inevitably leads to lyricism.<sup>15</sup>

*Okashi*, on the other hand, represents the Japanese form of comedy, the essence of which consists of sarcasm and laughter. Although, as opposed to Greek comedy, *okashi* has none of the vigorous exposition of human ugliness that we see in the former. It is, in comparison, relatively forgiving, seeking, as does *aware*, harmony and sympathy.<sup>16</sup>

One important point to bring out here is that, as he did when applying 'aware' to the *Man'yōshū*, Okazaki takes these two terms out of their original Heian context and begins to apply them liberally to later literary works, and this without really answering the question of how this might be justified. For example, he states that Chikamatsu's plays might be said to be the closest thing to tragedy in the Japanese tradition, but actually they express not the tragic in its pure form as seen in the West, but *mono no aware*.<sup>17</sup> *Kyōgen*, on the other hand, can be seen as Japanese comedy, although it differs from Greek comedy in important ways and is thus better characterized as *okashi*. He thinks that *kyōgen* is not on as high a level as Greek comedy. It merely causes laughter, and fails to point at the ugliness in mankind and expose it, and thus is not really serious. Thus *kyōgen*, and with it the general Japanese beauty of *okashi*, does not incorporate real observation and criticism of the human condition.<sup>18</sup>

So we see here that for Okazaki, the two terms ‘*aware*’ and ‘*okashi*’ have become regulating concepts, the context of which has ceased to be Heian literature, and has come to be all of Japanese literary history. Interesting to note is that Okazaki emphasizes the uniquely Japanese character of both of these categories, and the difference between them and their Western counterparts. The major difference, he says, is that each of these is rooted in emotion and love, whereas the Greek ideals are more intellectual and confrontational. This is a kind of notion that is of course widely seen in work on culture in imperial Japan.

### HISAMATSU SEN’ICHI AND THE EVOLVING AWARE

Hisamatsu Sen’ichi 久松潜一 is another author who tries to explain ‘*aware*’ within an historical context while still affording it a certain privileged place in the pantheon of Japanese aesthetic concepts. His approach, which can be seen as an attempt to situate this concept with the “spiritual history” 精神史 of the nation, removes *aware* from the realm of language and describes it as an evolving form of particularly Japanese impression (感動—in the sense of something in the world being emotionally or aesthetically impressed upon one’s sensibilities), one that takes on certain particular attributes in every historical period, but that seems to hold on to one unchanging essence.

Hisamatsu’s writings on this and other categories are both numerous and rather unsystematic, so I will here focus on his ideas as explained in one short essay, “‘Aware’ no shisō ni tsuite” 「あはれ」の思想について (On the Philosophy of ‘Aware’), in his gigantic *Nihon bungaku hyōronshi* 日本文学評論史 (History of Japanese Literary Criticism). In this essay, he is trying to flesh out the notion that the history of Japanese aesthetic consciousness might be told through the history of this one term and its many transfigurations.

First he emphasizes the cultural peculiarity of ‘*aware*,’ as well as its fundamental status within the Japanese tradition, saying that *aware* is the “common impression (感動) of our nation and ethnic group,” and that “Japanese poetry would not exist were it not for ‘*aware*,’ that Japanese impression.”<sup>19</sup> So for Hisamatsu *aware* is, in effect, the basis not only of Japanese literature or poetry, but of the Japanese aesthetic consciousness in general—it describes the manner in which the Japanese have traditionally come into contact with the world and been impressed upon or moved by that contact. As such, *aware* is also “the womb of Japanese beauty” (日本の美の母胎).<sup>20</sup> Wanting to discuss Japanese aesthetic and poetic consciousness in terms of “spiritual history,” Hisamatsu’s main task is to lay out how *aware* fits into that history as a whole, especially as this term has typically been used to describe the aesthetic consciousness of the

Heian Court more than any other time or place. He starts, then, at the beginning of Japanese poetic history and attempts to show from whence *aware* emerged. He says that *aware* has as its basis (根底) *makoto*, the concept that has been used to describe the age of the *Man'yōshū* ever since Kamo no Mabuchi 鴨真淵 proclaimed it the central spiritual concept of that work. According to Hisamatsu, *makoto* describes not only the beautiful, but the true and the good as well (真善美の一体となつてゐる). When the aesthetic aspect of this is emphasized, we have *aware*, which can thus be used to describe the beauty of the *Man'yōshū*, its aesthetic element.<sup>21</sup> One interesting point here is that Hisamatsu acknowledges that the term appears a mere nine times in the *Man'yōshū*, so it is clear that his act of connecting the term with the spirit of the work is based not upon any positive connection between the two, but upon an underlying notion that the essence which 'aware' signifies is at work even when the word itself remains unsaid.

It is this basic notion that gives a special flavor to Hisamatsu's project, for he then tries to tie *aware* to many of the other aesthetic terms of importance in Japanese history, even where there is no positive etymological or philological link between the terms. 'Aware' is most abundantly used in the Heian period, and thus seems to have a special connection with the aesthetic of that time; indeed it is then that the term 'mono no aware' is born, and this, Hisamatsu states, should be read as speaking specifically of the Heian-era form of *aware*. There are two other terms that also mainly function to describe Heian aesthetic consciousness, however, those being 'okashi' and 'taketakashi' 長高し. It is not perfectly clear to what extent each of these is thought to be included within 'aware' or 'mono no aware,' except that 'okashi,' for one, is said to have been much closer in signification to 'aware' than it is now, in that both were fundamentally expressions of elegance 優雅. One thing that is abundantly clear here is that Hisamatsu was influenced by the notion of aesthetic categories in this layout. Here 'aware' corresponds to elegance, while 'okashi' and 'taketakashi' correspond to humor and the sublime, respectively.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to see the new categories that Hisamatsu describes as coming from the evolution of *aware* and its combination with other categories. When *aware* combines with *taketakashi*, *yūgen* is the result. In the medieval period, *aware* breaks into three, *aware nari*, which takes on the more sorrowful and pitiful sense that later came to be the every-day signification of the term, as well as *en* 艶, which holds onto much of the elegance of the earlier *aware*, and *yushinbi* 有心美, a new poetic concept, often seen as having a meaning close to *yūgen*, which he says has *aware* at its heart.

The system continues down into the Edo period, but what is important here is not so much what Hisamatsu sees as the later forms of *aware* as the simple fact that he finds it useful to connect all of these different concepts, which come from different historical

periods and have been used in different literary genres, back to one basic concept, *aware*. Why is it that *aware* forms the central core?

The answer goes back to the manner in which Hisamatsu defined *aware* to begin with. He borrows Norinaga's etymological definition of the term as an interjection (感動詞) that is emitted from our hearts when one is emotionally moved (感動) in his perception of the outside world. Thus *aware* comes to signify the fundamental emotional reaction to the world for the Japanese. Hisamatsu does not bother to explain why it is that this is the essentially *Japanese* impression: it would seem to be based upon no other than the historical accident that the word came from two Japanese interjections, 'ah' and 'hare.' This is the manner in which Norinaga explained the term, and Hisamatsu, while not directly stating that this notion is correct, does indeed give it as "something that is said."

## CONCLUSION

By tracing Hisamatsu's reasoning we have come to a point where we shall be able to understand just how it has been possible that this single concept be used to express the essence of the Japanese literary of aesthetic tradition as a whole, and yet at the same time, I think we have found something that will overturn that entire project. It is only by borrowing Norinaga's etymological explanation of 'aware' as an interjection that is spoken when we are moved in our hearts in the act of sensing the outside world, and then by understanding the meaning of this term as such general impression—and such general impression alone, that Hisamatsu has been able to relate all of these various Japanese aesthetic concept back to 'aware.' In effect, what he has done is make 'aware' the signifier of the general Japanese response to the world: to be moved by something in the world is to know and experience *aware*. The term, then, comes to signify something like "emotional / aesthetic impression," and comes to lose any regional particularities that might be related specifically to the Heian Court. In Hisamatsu's case, this problem is remedied by his use of 'mono no aware' to signify that particular aesthetic, the particularly Heian form of *aware*. This is simply his own construction, however, and not a usage that can be justified with positive evidence from Heian period texts.<sup>23</sup> This connection is further explained in another of Hisamatsu's essays, "Three Spirits Flowing through National Literature" (国文学を流れる三つの精神) contained in that same collection. As the third of these "Spirits" he deals with *mono no aware*, which he explains as the historically unchanging spirit of Heian period aesthetics, whereas *aware* alone is, as explained above, general Japanese impression or "exclamation" (詠嘆), which changes throughout history.<sup>24</sup>

Even if we allow the use of this rather unwarranted distinction between ‘*aware*’ and ‘*mono no aware*’ to pass, we still come up with a bigger problem lurking behind these claims. That is, if ‘*aware*’ no longer signifies anything with a special connection to the Heian court, and instead points to the essential Japanese way of being impressed by the things in the world, what is it that makes this experience particularly Japanese? In other words, what makes this different from the aesthetic and emotional experiences of any other nation or ethnic group? By explaining ‘*aware*’ in this manner, Hisamatsu has created a logic that can be re-stated as follows: When Japanese people see, hear, smell, or otherwise sense things in this world, they are moved emotionally and aesthetically so that they take those impressions into their hearts. These impressions, stored up in the heart, find their ultimate release in poetry, literature, and the other arts. This is in fact a statement of a type of expressive theory of art creation the elements of which can be seen in many cultures all over the globe. Hisamatsu, however, following Okazaki and others before him, wants to say that this process is somehow peculiar to Japan. I find no ground for such a claim. Even Norinaga himself in no way attempted to limit *aware* in such a manner. Although his work certainly was aimed at pointing out the *hon’i* of works of Japanese literature such as the *Genji Monogatari* and waka, Norinaga admits that early Chinese poetry, for instance that of the *Book of Songs* 詩經, also shows a spirit similar to that seen in Japanese waka, one permeated with *aware*.<sup>25</sup> Although he argues against interpreting Japanese literature poetry according to the philosophies of Confucianism or Buddhism, Norinaga even goes so far as to state that Confucius, the Buddha, and other sages were men who knew *mono no aware* deeply.<sup>26</sup> It is their followers, caught up in a later Chinese spirit of ratiocination and moralizing, who have come to lose what Norinaga saw as the essentially human (not essentially Japanese) mode of being.

In winding up this investigation, we clearly see the further work that needs to be done: the historical relationship between these two terms, ‘*aware*’ and ‘*mono no aware*,’ two terms that Norinaga used almost interchangeably, needs to be further clarified. Indeed, Okazaki, in discussing various treatments of *aware* that came before his own, criticizes Norinaga for not recognizing enough of the particular element in *aware*—Norinaga has gone too far in interpreting it as a general, non-emotionally-specific interjection.<sup>27</sup> This criticism certainly calls for consideration, as does the fact that Norinaga did not seem to care about the distinction between the two terms. If a positivistic philological approach does not find a clear distinction between the two, we are left in a situation somewhat close to that of Hisamatsu: how do we explain the two senses within which these pair of words has been used, the narrow and the broad meanings they have held? Ōnishi Yoshinori actually finds *five* different levels of meaning to ‘*aware*,’ but

his levels are not sorted out historically—the progression he gives is fit not to historical evidence, but to his own demands which he places upon *aware* as a derivative aesthetic category.<sup>28</sup> We might find a clue to our problem from his work, but the route out of an arbitrary dichotomy between these meanings has yet to be made clear.

At present, the conclusion we are left with is that if *aware* in its general meaning is taken to be the essence of Japanese literature or aesthetics, then what we have is the rather blunted statement that Japanese literature is produced when people are moved by the things of the world and feel the urge to express their experience in writing. While this notion certainly carried substantial weight when Norinaga used it to argue against rival interpretations stemming from Confucianism and Buddhism, it seems to lose its power when used to describe what is special about Japanese literature as opposed to other literatures of the world. If we take the other interpretation, namely that *aware* or *mono no aware* in its particular sense expresses the essence of Japanese literature, then, as Watsuji already pointed out,<sup>29</sup> we are left in the dubious position of either trying to relate various genres and types of aesthetic expression forward or back to that of the Heian era, or of showing that it is simply the expression of that *one* era that is essentially Japanese.

## NOTES

- 1 *Motoori Norinaga zenshū*, 本居宣長全集, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō 1969, vol. 4, p. 585. In this essay, I follow a convention of philosophical writing by using single quotation marks when I wish to refer to the term itself rather than to that which the term might signify. Thus, ‘*aware*’ (enclosed in single inverted commas) refers to a word, while *aware* (without quotation marks) refers to a value, quality, or some other thing in, or thought to be in, the world.
- 2 In particular, Hiromichi disputed Norinaga’s claim regarding the etymology of the word, namely that it was a conjunction of the two exclamations ‘*ah*’ and ‘*hare*.’ Hiromichi notes that he had come across the latter exclamation in neither classical nor modern Japanese. See the discussion of this in P.W. Caddeau, *Hagiwara Hiromichi’s Genji Monogatari Hyōshaku: Criticism and Commentary on The Tale of Genji*, Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1998, pp. 67-8.
- 3 For a more detailed discussion see *ibid.*, p. 67-76, as well as Sasaki Nobutsuna 佐佐木信綱, “Hagiwara Hiromichi no ‘mono no aware’ setsu” 萩原廣道の「物のあはれ」説, *Kokugo to kokubungaku* 16:5 (1939), pp. 1-14.
- 4 Sassa Seisetsu (佐々醒説), Jo 序 (Preface) in Sassa Seisetsu et al. (trans.) *Shinshaku genji monogatari* 新釈源氏物語 2 vols. Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1911, vol. 1, pp. 1-11.

- Translation is quoted from G. G. Rowley, "Literary Canon and National Identity: *The Tale of Genji* in Meiji Japan," *Japan Forum* 9:1 (1997), p. 9.
- 5 Muraoka Tsunetsugu 村岡典嗣, *Motoori Norinaga* 本居宣長, Tokyo: Keiseisha, 1911, p. 272.
- 6 Ibid. p. 273.
- 7 Watsuji, *Nihon seishinshi kenkyū* 日本精神史研究 (Research in Japanese Spiritual History), Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1992, p. 221.
- 8 Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造, '*Iki*' no kōzō 「いき」の構造 (The structure of '*Iki*'), Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1979, p. 44.
- 9 Okazaki Yoshie 岡崎義恵, *Nihon bungeigaku* 日本文芸学 (The Literary Arts of Japan), Tokyo: Iwanami, 1935, p. 406.
- 10 Okazaki Yoshie, *Man'yōshū no tankyū* 万葉集の探究 (An Investigation of the *Man'yōshū*) in *Okazaki Yoshie chosaku shū*, vol. 4, Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1960, p. 40.
- 11 Ibid. p. 41.
- 12 *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 国文学解釈と教材の研究, 14:9 (1969), p. 10.
- 13 *Motoori Norinaga shū* 本居宣長集, Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei, Tokyo: Shinchō, 1983, p. 298.
- 14 Okazaki Yoshie, *Nihon bungei no yōshiki to tenkai* 日本文芸の様式と展開 (The Style and Development of Japanese Literary Art), in *Okazaki Yoshie chosakushū*, Tokyo: Hōbunkan, 1938, p. 86.
- 15 Ibid., p. 87.
- 16 Ibid., p. 88.
- 17 Ibid., p. 87.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
- 19 Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, "'Aware' no shisō ni tsuite" 「あはれ」の思想について (On the Philosophy of 'Aware') in *Nihon bungaku hyōronshi: sōron, karon, keitairon* 日本文学評論史 (総論・歌論・形態論) (History of Japanese Literary Criticism: General Ideas, Poetic Theory, Form), *Hisamatsu Sen'ichi zenshū*, vol. 5, Tokyo: Shibundō 1938, p. 407.
- 20 Ibid., pp. 407-8.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 It should be noted that in the most famous and thorough work on Japanese aesthetic categories, Ōnishi Yoshinori has connected *sabi*, and not *okashi*, to the category of the comic. See his *Bigaku*, vol. 2.
- 23 While it is impossible to go into this problem in the present essay, and indeed difficult to sort out the difference between these two related terms, my research has

shown that Heian literature does not justify this distinction. Indeed, one is often led to think that there was little to no difference at all between the manner in which Heian writers understood each of these terms. For further reading, see my “Mono no aware no mittsu no yōso” 物のあはれの三つの要素 (Three Elements of ‘*Mono no Aware*’), in *Shirin* 詞林 28 (Journal of the Osaka University Ancient and Medieval Japanese Literature Research Association), October 2000, and “‘Aware’ as a Critical Term in Classical Japanese Poetics,” *Japan Review* 13 (2001).

24 *Complete Works of Hisamatsu Sen'ichi*, vol. 9, pp. 30-33.

25 *Motoori Norinaga shū*, pp. 403-5.

26 It should be noted that Norinaga does not make the kind of distinction between *aware* and *mono no aware* that we have seen in Hisamatsu. When he speaks of knowledge, Norinaga uses the phrase “to know *mono no aware*” (物のあはれを知る) exclusively, but this should in no way be taken as meaning something different than “to know *aware*.”

27 *Literary Arts*, p. 430.

28 Ōnishi Yoshinori 大西克礼, *Yūgen to aware* 幽玄とあはれ, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1939, pp. 145-151.

29 Watsuji, *Ibid.* pp. 232-3.