

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A HISTORY OF LITERARY ART

12.1 Toward a Reformulation of the “History of Literature”

The “history of modern Japanese literature” elaborated by mainstream literary criticism after World War II has adopted the standpoints of (1) “history of a single national literature (culture)” and (2) promotion of modernization or re-modernization. It has then defined accordingly the standard for “modern literature” from those standpoints and (3) ranked each modern or contemporary Japanese literary current or “school” (*école*) from a developmental perspective, taking the role of arbiter in each case. (4) However, this approach has lapsed into concentration on the literature of the intellectuals (“pure literature”). Thus the combination of these four elements has ended up concealing the real character of individual works. The tactics needed for the dissolution and reformulation of existing “literary history” can therefore be summarized under the following four headings.

- (1) Restoring an international perspective to the “history of [Japanese] national literature” approach.
 - a. The task of clarifying how the ambition (one especially obvious after the Russo-Japanese War) to “catch up” with the European and American literary arts of the time combined with the surviving legacy and memory of the literary arts of the past; in other words, the task of clarifying the peculiarly Japanese character of Japanese literature.
 - b. The task of clarifying the true condition of Japanese literary art as it developed in twentieth-century East Asia, as well as its regional and historical character.
- (2) Purging “modernizationism” (*kindaikashugi* 近代化主義) from literary history.
 - a. Abandoning the model abstracted from “modern” Europe and the attempt to discover, in disregard of the cultural differences on each side, the degree to which this model was or was not accepted in Japan. Clarifying the development of similarity and difference by identifying the receptors that affected the adoption of various elements of modern European culture.
 - b. Elucidating the creation of values that transcend the “modern.” The task of clarifying how methodological attempts to break loose from the conventions of “modern” expression developed in twentieth-century Japan. Concerning the literary art of the prewar Shōwa period, clarifying the truth of “Shōwa

modernism”; determining the onset in Japan of the “novel within the novel” (*shōsetsu no shōsetsu*) mode of thought, and investigating its prehistory; then excavating its merger with parodic techniques as well as with traditional, oral literary art, and elucidating its historical significance.

- c. The task of clarifying the process of escape from conceptions of modern art. For example, clarification of the shift away from the schematic opposition between “objective description” and “subjective expression,” and toward “expression of life” unifying both, or toward recognition of the objective character of expression—i.e., the dynamism between the objective character of the work in progress and the expression of subjectivity; and, on that basis, clarification of the reality of the work.
- (3) A move from the history of literary “schools” to a synoptic view of literary art.
- a. Overthrowing all such “school” classifications as *shizenshugi* 自然主義 (naturalism), Shirakaba-ha 白樺派 (Shirakaba school), Tanbi-ha 耽美派 (aestheticist school), *purōretaria bungaku* プロレタリア文学 (proletarian literature), Shinkō Geijutsu-ha 新興芸術派 (new art school); and all such dualisms as *riarizumu* (realism) vs. anti-*shizenshugi* (romanticism, fantasy literature), or *shishōsetsu* 私小説 (“I-fiction”) vs. *honkaku shōsetsu* 本格小説 (true novel), or “pure literature” and “popular literature,” etc. To grasp the literature of each period in its totality and to reclassify its content. By this means to encourage the re-reading of each work and to elucidate the relative values of the period at issue.
 - b. The task of gaining a fresh grasp on the internal reality and historical evolution of the categories just mentioned—categories that have obscured the truth of the works involved, and that have stood in the way of all attempts to reach it. For example, a complete reappraisal of naturalism is required. Then, building on that, the task of relativizing the views of literature held by all the separate writers, critics, and scholars involved.
- (4) An effort to clarify the role of literary art within the thought and mood of the time, and within the context of intellectual history.
- a. In contradistinction to the entrenched historical tendency to view the cultural conditions of prewar Japan as “semi-feudal” and to criticize them in terms urging “modernization,” the task of clarifying as the reality of a Japan defined by international relations (relations in which Japan itself played a distinct part) such twentieth-century political, economic, and cultural developments as industrialization, mass urbanization (modern urban culture), and imperialist encroachment in Asia. The task of then grasping anew the mode of thought formed in active reaction to this reality, and of elucidating the role of literary art in this context.
 - b. The task of elucidating the significance of the fact that “literature” and

“history of literature,” and education concerning them, were given a central place in the formation and development of “national culture” (*kokumin bunka* 国民文化), itself founded on the idea of the nation-state; and the task of clarifying their periodic role in history.¹

The items listed above represent the present state of the conclusions I have reached after a process of repeated trial and error. (Concerning 1b, however, the enterprise of critique and study has made considerable progress by now, and what is needed at present is to organize the results into a comprehensive, critically examined whole. There no doubt is also a need to bring to light in an orderly manner basic materials that are still missing.)

Needless to say, all these items are intimately related to one another. An outstanding example, mentioned in 3b, is the task of elucidating the evolution of the idea of “I-fiction.” This effort will require (1a) clarifying the ways in which “I-fiction” is related to the European and American *ichroman*, *bildungs roman*, autobiographical novel, and confessional novel, as well as the ways in which it differs from them. It will be natural then to inquire into what conception of expression supported this genre (2b); into the connection between this conception and the twentieth-century European and American “philosophy of consciousness,” as well as between it and the “philosophy of life” or “life-centrism” intimately associated with it (1a, 4); into Japanese literary art and trends of thought that acted as receptors for such ideas; and into the contemporary social conditions (4, 4a) that favored this reception. Another requirement will be to clarify the historical character of the literary and cultural assumptions that helped make “I-fiction” a unique literary tradition of modern Japan (1, 4b).

The reader should understand that the method proposed here for reformulating the “history of literature” is not one I have simply elaborated in the privacy of my own thoughts. In Chapter 11, I outlined the tentative, present state of my ideas; I can only leave it to the reader to judge whether they have progressed beyond the stage of being mere hypotheses. For myself, of course, I intend to continue examining and reflecting on them into the future.

“History of literary art” (*bungei shi* 文芸史) is what I myself call the field reformulated as I suggest.² That is because it is based on a concept reformulated after the thorough relativization and dissolution of the existing concept of “literature,” formed as this concept was thanks to the adoption of the modern European concept of “literature.” In this book I have not, as I did with “bungaku” or “literature,” put the term “literary art” within quotation marks. But what is literary art? I must answer this obvious question, and I will attempt to do so below.

12.2 Toward a History of Literary Art

There is nothing exceptional about the concept of literary art. It is extremely simple, referring as it does to the art of words that arouse emotion in others (*tasha o kandō saseru kotoba no gei* 他者を感じさせる言葉の芸). This book has considered the ancient Chinese “wenxue,” the polysemic

1 Based, with some modifications, on the section “Kenkyū no sutorateji” 研究のストラテジー in Suzuki Sadami, “Kajii Motojirō kenkyū” 梶井基次郎研究 (Doctoral dissertation submitted to Sōgō Kenkyū Daigakuin Daigaku), 1997; published as *Kajii Motojirō no sekai*, Sakuhinsha, 2001.

2 The methods of “literary history” (*bungei shi* 文芸史) are clearly outlined in Suzuki Sadami 1986a.

European “literature,” and the various aspects of the encounter between these two. Although only incompletely, it has surveyed the twentieth-century attempt to leave behind the modern concept of “literature,” and on that basis it has concluded that this utterly simple concept alone can transcend all earlier differences and stand as universal.

Consequently, literary art can be seen as centered on a mode of expression (*hyōgen keitai* 表現形態) that arouses emotion in others; that is, in other words, addressed to others with the aim of evoking in them an aesthetic response. However, one must remain aware of the fact that expression of this kind is scattered throughout all sorts of linguistic works intended to serve practical or other purposes. For example, in the realm of magic or sorcery, words are used to change the world and are thus both a technology and a means of weaving illusion (fiction); and in that sense they constitute an art (*geijutsu* 芸術). Being undifferentiated, this art can constitute the words of sorcery. For the one who utters these words and the one who receives them, they have meaning because they directly unite practical purpose and art. Therefore we can abstract the artistic elements from myth as well and appreciate them as literary art. Again, it is possible to imagine for words, too, perfection of practically oriented technique, that is to say, functional beauty. Thus all linguistic works can become the object of analysis. It is only comparative study of the artistic elements in all linguistic works that makes inquiry into literary art possible. On this basis one can then at last measure the relative worth of linguistic works, the aim of which is artistic quality.

This classification and critique of literary art is carried out according to the nature of the emotion it evokes in the reader. However, from one period to another the kind of emotion sought by readers can change, and for that reason the evaluation of the pioneering works of each period inevitably changes too, to a greater or lesser degree. Consequently, inquiry into linguistic art must always take into account changes in critical standards, that is to say, changes in accepted values. What allows one who critiques a work to relativize his personal standards (tastes)—standards that belong within historically formed value judgments—is, on the one hand, comparative scrutiny of the critical standards of others, and, on the other hand, knowledge of the historical evolution of value judgments.

The critical judgment passed on each work becomes a relative judgment based on comparison with other works. In my case, however, my main concern is to clarify historical, relative values. Of course, a value judgment founded on the enterprise of historical relativization is not to be made on the basis of an externally determined verdict. It is only on the basis of attitudes inherent in the age of the work itself that we, from our own, contemporary perspective must relativize our view and issue our value judgment.

Where, then, is the standard for this value judgment to be found? The fundamental character of linguistic art is defined by the expressive technique that produces it. Without that technique no work could exist, nor could any artistic quality be inherent in it. From the standpoint of one who analyzes a work, this technique is equivalent to the method supporting the mode of expression (form and content). In a manner of speaking, this amounts to placing the intellectual significance of the method at the center of the critique. Needless to say, “mode” (*keitai* 形態) refers at once to form and to content, each of which defines the other. In the case of historical critique, the result is a critique of the novelty inherent in the work, thanks to a method that yields a new mode and transcends established boundaries. “New mode of expression” means a mode that breaks the

boundaries of value judgments, jolts the norms of people's sensibility, and brings about radical change. In short, such a critique amounts to questioning the historical values of the method (the technique for structuring fiction) that supports the mode of expression.

Where, in all this, is the author? Is the author "dead"? The author lives, owns copyright, and enjoys the privilege of revising even a published work. Roland Barthes' announcement of the death of the author is no more than an extreme expression of the critical method adopted by the French *nouvelle critique*. It is a declaration meant to remove the author from the position of creator of his or her own work—one issued as a result of success in immobilizing every conception of influence by regarding the text as a "fabric of quotations." Let us then ask who this weaver could be, who "quotes" various cultural elements and weaves them into a new "fabric." Who is it, if not the author? Is it the text? Or is it the critic (the reader) who is granted this privilege in the author's place? The text cannot in the end escape the curse of consisting of words set out in lines, and of having a beginning and an end. It is not the reader (the critic), either, who enjoys the privilege of dissolving the text. To read just half and insist one has read the whole is to fall into error. Besides, the reader, too, is a historically limited entity, one relativized along with all other readers. The only absolute is the work (the text) itself—more precisely, the work (text) posited as absolute. Positing the work (text) as absolute. More precisely still, allowing only other works the privilege of relativizing the work.

However, this does not mean essentializing (*jittai* 実体化) the work (text). The theory of the "open text" is merely the reverse side of the essentialization of the text. The work (text) is originally produced to be opened by others, and it exists within society. Yes, the answer is very simple and utterly natural. The weaver is the producer of the text. The text's producer—precisely the corpse of the author killed by Roland Barthes—is the new weaver. "The weaver" is a romantic simile, but what Barthes killed is in fact no more than the romantic illusion of the author. The problem, in short, was the "mythical function" attributed to the absolute being who creates a work of unalloyed originality thanks to the genius conferred by heaven on an entity known as the author.³

Now, the author and the reader confront each other over the work. The work is seen as central. In this schema the author is posited by the reader (critic, scholar) as the essence (*jittai* 実体) behind the work. For the reader, the author is an essence called into being, by force of the imagination, through and behind the work. The author in this sense is relatively independent of the flesh-and-blood author. The experience and ideas of the flesh-and-blood author constitute the ground upon which the work takes shape. However, this ground remains meaningless until the work actually does so. One can narrate or write of a sad experience in a jocular tone. Consequently, it is not possible to bring the work back to the flesh-and-blood, actually existing author. Moreover, judging from the expressive behavior of people at large, changes and transformations occur in the flesh-and-blood author in the process of bringing the work into being. (In the course of this process, the expressing subject naturally moves from the fields [*ba* 場] of emotion and cognition to the field of expression. The process of making the work so as to appeal to and be accepted by others cannot be a one-way process of self-expression. The expressing subject moves the making of the work

3 Roland Barthes wrote in *The Pleasure of the Text*, "As an institution the author is dead" and, "But in the text, in a way, *I desire* the author. I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection)." Barthes 1975, p. 27.

forward, all the while judging whether it will bear the scrutiny of those who will first receive and appreciate it, and adjusting its course accordingly. In this way the expressing subject is defined by the work in progress. The field in which this subject and the work mutually define each other is the field of expression. In the expressive activity of the artistic genres, the author himself or herself is, in the field of expression, defined by the norms of the genre.)⁴

Consequently, the author that the reader's imagination posits behind the work is the author transposed into the field of expression, not the author of flesh and blood. In that sense, the experience and ideas of the flesh and blood author are always of value for understanding the ground of the work.

Analysis of any individual work addresses the various shapes and sounds received by the author (the living author as the ground of the work) from the cultural environment, and the ways in which these are refashioned and given individual form in the field of expression; and it elucidates the work's special characteristics in terms of the way these shapes and sounds uniquely combine. These characteristics are determined by comparing the work at hand with others by the same author (the one whose seal announces to the reader that they are from the same hand), with works by other authors of the same period, and with yet others from the history of literary art. To aim to clarify the position of the work at hand in the same author's oeuvre and in the literary art of its time, and to make clear its value in the history of literary art, is the very meaning of historical relativization.

By addressing the question of the position occupied by a particular work in the history of literary art (meaning the history of the work as the result of expressive activity and as the object of [reader] reception), this kind of critique can contribute to literary criticism as a whole; and, depending on the type of contribution made, allows measurement of the work's validity, i.e., of its value. The business of rereading individual works and clarifying their historically relative value means clarifying their value for us today, and this task inevitably urges constant reformulation of the total picture of the history of literary art. It is the accumulation of historically relativized value judgments on individual works that builds up this picture; and it is this picture that determines the historically relative position of each work.

To the extent that the enterprise in question gives up confining itself within the bounds of "literature" and opens itself to cultural and intellectual history, it is the history of literary art that then comes to occupy a central position. That is because, among the various expressive techniques that structure fiction thanks to the power of the imagination, literary art is the one mediated by language. It is literary art that stands at the meeting point of two fundamental human capacities: fictionality and language.

However, some will no doubt object, in opposition to the perspective and method proposed here, that "literature" is no mere technique. This criticism issues from the view that "literature" is to be understood as an expression of the ideas and imagination of the author. Such a view is often called the "theory of expression" (*hyōgen riron* 表現理論).

4 See Suzuki Sadami 1992a.

12.3 A Critique of the Concept of Expression

The theory of art set forth in Robin George Collingwood's (1889-1943) *The Idea of History* (1956) is often cited as a representative example of the "theory of expression." Collingwood wrote, "There is therefore a history of art, but no history of artistic problems, as there is a history of scientific or philosophical problems." He also wrote:

The point at which [the artist] begins creating a work of art is the point at which that work is grafted on the body of his unreflective experience: his immediate sensitive and emotional life with its development, rational but unconscious, through memory and perception. The problem with which he is confronted is the problem of feeling this experience into a work of art.⁵

In sum, artistic expression refers back to the author's "unreflective experience" (experience prior to the workings of reflective consciousness—the state of consciousness only, or intuition, which William James and his follower Nishida Kitarō termed "direct" or "pure experience"); and the individuality and fullness of the author's consciousness is the life and substance of art.

This view makes use of the theories of twentieth-century philosophy, but its conception no doubt springs from the modern European, romantic idea that the essence of art lies in the imaginary world vouchsafed by natural genius and inspiration, and in the pure interiority of the individual. This romantic concept of expression restores to the individual member of civil society the ancient Greek notion of inspiration or divine afflatus. Thus it is manifestly a product of the urge to confer transcendent value on art. This myth of the imaginary world vouchsafed by heaven, and of the originality of the artist, crumbled as the influence of positivism rose, and in its place the *shajitsu* 写実 concept of expression, meaning faithful depiction of the objective reality of civil society, came to wield considerable power. However, in the twentieth century the conception of expression slowly moved back from representation of reality to expression of interiority. The powerful urges rising from within were given pride of place, and under the influence of the philosophy of "consciousness" the ideal became a state of consciousness in which subject and object conjoin; or else cosmic "life" was posited as the source of these things, and it was argued that the new expression was expression of this "life." Such a view can be found scattered throughout the avant-garde artistic manifestos of both Europe and Japan. In Japan it was given a philosophical underpinning by Nishida Kitarō's "Bi no honshitsu" 美の本質 (1920) and other such essays. This twentieth-century concept of expression—a concept that might be called a theory of vitalism in art—rested upon a universal idea of "life" and thus can be said to have appealed for realization to an external power. However, Collingwood's theory can be said to have returned this early twentieth-century concept

5 Collingwood 1956, pp. 313-14. A critique of this argument was proposed for example by Rudolf A. Makkreel in *Dilthey: Philosopher of Human Studies* (1975). Makkreel noted the following defect. If the work expresses a purely imaginary world and itself constitutes a world, and if its quality is to be judged on the completeness of this world and its fidelity to it, then to reduce expression to direct (unreflecting) experience and reject the importance of formed concepts amounts to ignoring the historicity of form and style.

of expression to nineteenth century-style self-realization. In sum, the romantic view of the essence of art came to be replaced, after a passage through theories of *shajitsu* and representation, by the Jamesian doctrine of the author's direct, unrepeatable, and unmediated experience.

This doctrine might be criticized under the following headings. First, to posit direct, unreflecting, pure experience as unique and unrepeatable is to fall into an idealism according to which no experience can be influenced in any way by any other. Second, this reduction to direct, etc., experience virtually ignores the indispensable practice in expression required in order to capture the configuration of reality. Consequently, it ends up ignoring the various norms that act upon the technique and methods of expression, and their historical character. More fundamentally speaking, this concept of expression remains unaware of its own historicity.

In Meiji Japan Mori Ōgai favored a romantic concept of expression, but it appears that at the same time he emphasized opportunities for technical practice in externalizing the world of the imagination. Moreover, the very historicity of the tendency to reduce this concept to expression of the inner world recalls the premodern dominance of a concept of expression that heeds above all the effect of expression on others and focuses on the outcomes of governance. It also recalls the appearance in the twentieth century of the concept of expression as *objet*. Thus the exclusive concern with the inner world is relativized easily enough.

In this way, the issue of how to think about expression is fundamental to artistic theory, hence to theories of literary art. Still, in practice the norms shaped by various concepts concerning genre distinctions and artistic quality surround any concept of expression. It is in modern Europe that genres aiming at artistic quality as such acquired a value independent of religion. Nonetheless, recognition of artistic quality for what it is—that is to say, recognition of the types of expression that move readers and listeners—is undoubtedly ubiquitous both historically and geographically. Normally, however, this recognition was subsumed under religious and practical values and incorporated within them. Even after the appearance of modern concepts of art, the late nineteenth century symbolist movement, for example, exploited what one might call a religious sort of beauty without coming under the domination of any particular religion. Consequently, it is inadequate to critique artistic qualities bound to values of other kinds solely on the basis of the circumscribed artistic theories of modern Europe.

As I have often stated above, twentieth-century literary art followed a course of self-renewal, in which the literary work itself has questioned modern concepts of linguistic art. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that this period was one during which this questioning amounted almost to an obsession. It went forward in different ways and variously established positive bonds with other values. In that sense, the modern notion of linguistic art is invalid as a standard for appraising twentieth-century literary art. The actual works themselves have constantly declared it to be so. A fundamental review of the modern view of “literature,” and of the notion of “modern literature,” is now required.