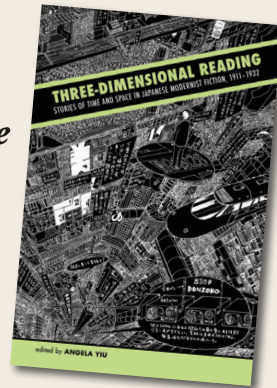


## BOOK REVIEW

*Three-Dimensional Reading:  
Stories of Time and Space in Japanese  
Modernist Fiction, 1911–1932*

Edited by Angela Yiu

University of Hawai'i Press, 2013  
280 pages. ISBN 978-0-8248-3801-0



The 1910s through early 1930s comprised one of the most adventurous and fascinating times for Japanese literature. These years bridged the initial modernist movement after the Meiji Restoration (1868) to the mature modernism of the early Showa period (1926–89). It was a time when literary imagination responded to the nation's transformation, as Japan went through major industrialization, and expanded and asserted its presence in Asia. During the early decades of the twentieth century, writers dealt with the internalization of self, thereby establishing the I-Novel genre. In the Taishō period (1912–26), they transitioned from confessional and I-Novel formats to novels that expressed imaginary internal reality. This was also an exciting time of literary experimentation in which writers tested Marxist thinking, proletarian motifs, cosmopolitanism, the avant-garde, Dadaism, futurism, formalism, surrealism, anarchism, and utopianism in their fictional works. Many writers featured in Angela Yiu's anthology *Three-Dimensional Reading*, such as those of the *Shinkankaku-ha* (New Sensationalism), pursued new methodologies and art theories in the form of versatile modes of expression, narrative strategy, and languages.

In *Three-Dimensional Reading*, editor Angela Yiu thoughtfully curates a collection of fourteen short stories published between 1911 and 1932 with a central theme—"a discovery of a conceptual depth" in the fictional imagination's response to Japanese modernism, and its spatial, temporal and abstract representation of modern consciousness (p. 3). In describing critic Maeda Ai's contribution to the study of Japanese modernity, urbanization, space and temporality, Harry Harootunian stated in his article "A Walker in the City" that Maeda "made Japan's inflection interchangeable with modernizing experiences found elsewhere throughout the globe and thus as accessible as any other instance of the modern to seekers of the meaning of modernity" (Harootunian 2004, p. xii). Yiu aims for a similar result by introducing these works to English-speaking readers within the contextual framework of time and space from both Western and Japanese terminology, and by using the concepts and theories of Heidegger, Bachelard, Lefebvre, de Certeau, Harvey, Benjamin, Blanchot, Isoda Kōichi and Maeda Ai himself.

All of the pieces in *Three-Dimensional Reading* are newly translated into English, and represent modern consciousness through what Seiji Lippit calls "multiple textual allusions" with their diverse forms, aesthetics and styles (Lippit 2002, p. 56): they are serious, humorous, farcical, grotesque, beautiful, melancholic, despondent, obsessive, and

phantasmal. Readers, who have not yet been introduced to the wide variety of modernist writings by such well-known writers as Natsume Sōseki, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Kawabata Yasunari, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Satō Haruo, will be surprised and delighted. All are supplemented by Yiu's introduction, in which she displays her thorough knowledge of the literature, literary theory, and history of this period. With great skill, she places each author, his distinctive and innovative usage of urban space, and his contributions to the development of Japanese modernism within a cultural and historical context. Despite an uneven amount of biographical, background information, additional introductions penned by the editor help the reader visualize the spatial construction of each story. For example, Tamura Taijirō's arresting drawing of his vision (pp. 88–100) and Yokomitsu Riichi's detailed mapping of a town (pp. 103–108) resonate with Yiu's reference to cubist theory and to Western modern paintings. Moreover, the stories become increasingly three-dimensional and textured when they are complemented by contemporary artist Sakaguchi Kyōhei's illustrations. Yiu's intention is thus successfully realized: she creates a visualization of the multi-layered, "multiperspective" internal consciousness expressed in phantasmal, modernist spatial and temporal construction (p. 2).

Part One of the anthology begins with a section titled "Scenes of the Mind" comprising four short stories, published between 1911 and 1926. They demonstrate the ways in which modernist authors depicted interiority as they portrayed the blurred boundary between intimate, enclosed space and open, urban exteriority. Part Two, "Time and Urban Space" introduces six short fictions, including those by Tamura and Ryūtanji Yū (pp. 125–42), never before available to English speaking readers. The urban spaces featured here embody proletarian social criticism—a criticism against materialism and the many facets of colonization. These spaces range from a homemade fantasy of outer space and the landscape of the age of machines to "a sinister periphery" of society, and to colonized Korea (Maeda 2004, p. 150). Here, Yui attempts to "establish the possibility of multiple imaginary crossings in which different temporal dimensions (of past, present, future and existential moment) intersect to engender a rich and deep reading experience" (p. 4). The thematic attention to time is not confined to the stories in Part Two. Rather, the entire collection demands that the reader attend to the modernist temporal impulse that is intricately related to "spatial configuration" (p. 8). However, "Landscape with an Officer: A Sketch in 1923" by Nakajima Atsushi (set in colonized Korea) stands out in terms of its specific reference to historical time.

In Part Three, "Utopia and Dystopia," Yiu presents a rich variety of utopian, dystopian literature. Here, stories are located in a fantasy West/East hodgepodge of a space which is created variously out of a man's vision of aesthetic perfection in Tanizaki's "A Golden Death" (pp. 162–200); an island in a Gulliver-like satirical dream in Akutagawa's "Wonder Island" (pp. 202–210); a cylinder shaped totalitarian utopian/dystopian nation, a spatial actualization of Foucault's Panopticism in Satō Haruo's "A Record of Nonchalant" (pp. 213–39); and a utopian, remote island in Yumeno Kyūsaku's "Hell in a Bottle" (pp. 242–50).

The works included in this anthology are also a good representation of the time when "[modernism's] relationship with language" was being tested (Lippit 2002, p. 31). Earlier, around the turn of the century, a movement toward unification of the spoken and written language (*genbun itchi*) had started. The fictions in this anthology were written during the

transitory time when Japanese writers were expressing modern consciousness in both “the language for writing” and colloquial language. Writers such as Akutagawa and Yokomitsu resisted the vogue of using colloquial language, and were still writing in formal language while others (Satō and Uno being major advocates) experimented with vernacular styles and forms. Given this background, it is vital that the translated texts keep the integrity and authenticity of the original. This anthology is indeed translated intelligently and skillfully. The translation of Kajii Motojirō’s hauntingly evocative passages is typical. Uno Kōji’s “The Law Student in the Garret” attempts to retain the original narrative rhythm. The different voices that narrate “Hell in a Bottle” by Yumeno, known for his playfulness with words, are rendered in such a way as to convey the dystopian horror and despair felt by the protagonist over the gradual collapse of innocence due to his incestuous relationship in a utopian space.

Yiu’s use of these fourteen short stories to locate Japanese modernist experimentation in fiction within a global exchange by introducing the reader to their responses to urban transformation and “the aestheticization of local, regional or national politics” should be applauded (p. 7). Readers will find this anthology a fertile and relevant source for modern Japanese literature, comparative studies and translation studies. Moreover, the works of fiction in this collection will give the reader the pure enjoyment of reading good and varied stories.

## REFERENCES

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