

JAPAN

CHILDS, MARGARET HELEN. *Rethinking Sorrow. Revelatory Tales of Late Medieval Japan*. Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies Number 6. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1991. xiii+181 pages. Bibliography, index. Cloth US \$27.95; ISBN 0-939512-42-4.

Some, such as Teruoka Yasutaka, study literature "so as to combat the mediocre and the lowly within the self, to lift up the self that is otherwise full of shame" (TERUOKA 1948, 3).

The tales of late medieval Japan do not fend off vulgarism within ourselves, or ennoble our character. But they depict forces and ideas of the turbulent Kamakura and Muromachi times (12c-16c), and in a raw manner they are entertaining. Unlike the refined literature of the preceding Heian period (10c-12c), the medieval tales rely heavily on swift progress of plots and are conveyed in artless phrases that override introspection and sensitivity. They cover murder, revenge, stepchildren, beasts, revelations of Buddhas, love, jealousy, homosexuality, envy, heroes, filial piety, retirement, entering into religion, and so on. The diversity of themes continues to make the problem of classification a topic of scholarly argument. Since authors are unknown and the plots imitate and overlap each other, the origin and interrelationship of the tales are impossible to clarify.

That is why this book is significant. Two of the four tales in the book, "The Tale of Genmu" and "Tales Told on Mount Kōya" are available in Japanese only in transcribed form with unpunctuated hiragana syllabary and make-shift Chinese characters (*ate-ji* 当て字), in *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei* (YOKOYAMA et al 1976, 398-416 and 547-67). "The Seven Nuns" has been collated (KOKUMIN TOSHO 1928, 171-226) but with no explanatory notes. Only "The Three Monks" has been annotated in *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (ICHIKO 1963, 434-59). The effort the author made to produce a readable, lively English text must have been tremendous.

The author earlier concluded that delineation of the medieval tales should be "judged according to the motivations that inspired their composition" (CHILDS 1980, 131). Here we have a group of tales thus delineated, telling of the painful secular experiences that made the characters world-weary, which led them into religious commitment. Reading these tales, we suspect that the unknown authors were indeed such monks and nuns, who told the tales to affirm their fate.

The analyses are most intriguing and enjoyable. Before I raise my inane questions about them, I refer the reader to the preface. In the process of translation "minor obscure details" were omitted, some "poetic diction" was abandoned "as unwieldy," and in the match between accuracy and readability the latter prevailed because "readability had been a priority in the original texts."

Hence we have the analysis: "Genmu catches sight of the lovely youth whose hair has the luster of dew-touched cherry blossoms and composes poetry comparing the snow on the trees to spring blossoms" (145). The translated text referred to is: "The luster of his disheveled hair brought to mind cherry blossoms drooping under a spring rain on a quiet evening" (34). There is another possible translation of the original text: "His secular attire was of quiet (subdued) nature, like that of a cherry blossom limp in spring rain at night." (YOKOYAMA et al 1976, 402. Translated by the reviewer.)

I respect the author's judgement that such details are minor and obscure. They

are irrelevant to the whole picture, even though the analysis based on such a translation does not quite hold. The above example is therefore only a reminder to myself, that from the point of view of the creator of the original texts, the value of a translator lies primarily in faithfulness and not in beauty adorned by the creative ability of the translator. But a faithful translation, like a faithful woman in the prefeminist era, is often ugly. Therefore, since it brings forward an aspect of medieval Japan beautifully, I consider this book a service to the English reader.

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KONISHI JIN'ICHI. *A History of Japanese Literature. Volume Three: The High Middle Ages*. Translated by Aileen Gatten and Mark Harbison. Edited by Earl Miner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. xix+654 pages. Appendices, chronological table, bibliography, index, illustrations, maps. Paperback US\$24.95; ISBN 0-691-10248-1. Cloth US\$74.50.

This is the third of the five volumes of Konishi's *History*, and the latest to be translated into English. The use of the term "High Middle Ages" will strike many readers as puzzling; it is but one of many instances when Konishi deliberately strives to jolt one out of one's complacency. As he explains in the general introduction to the *History* (KONISHI 1984, 52-68), he rejects the commonly accepted periodization based on political events (and reflected in the names of changing seats of government) in favor of an approach that seeks to distinguish the qualities of Japanese culture by considering its relation to foreign cultures, or "by placing Japanese literature within the spatial coordinates of the world" (KONISHI 1984, 55). Thus, volume 1 covers the Archaic Age, when only indigenous Japanese culture exists, and the Ancient Age, when changes start to occur with the introduction of Chinese culture. The Middle Ages are set off as a period when literary awareness undergoes change as the foreign culture is accepted. Konishi subdivides the period by certain key concepts: the Early Middle Ages (KONISHI 1986) hinges on the concept of *fūryū* 風流 (aristocratic beauty), the