

“cowboy” does not work well as a dominant trope in the book, and even the frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner once famously claimed, disappears.

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In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-Male Sexuality in Meiji Literature. Jim Reichert. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. viii+282.

This book is an unusually solid and thoroughly readable addition both to critical readings of Japanese literature in general and, more specifically, to the modestly growing number of studies on various forms in which male homosexualities have been represented in modern and pre-modern cultures alike. With closely attentive readings of well-chosen individual works by Meiji-period (1867–1912) authors, Reichert develops a large, overarching historical observation, supported by a broad range of theoretical comments on shifts in the languages used in literature during this era and the influx of Western cultural and social values.

With much telling detail, Reichert advances the argument that, particularly in the first three decades or so of Meiji prior to the turn of the century, a variety of narratives were created (all in prose save for one poetry collection) in which certain premodern traditions of portraying erotic and romantic bonds between men are emulated but also modified for a readership whose rapidly shifting interests and values did not yet exclude such relationships. At the same time he tracks the eventual demise of such literature, as the culture of late Meiji as a whole comes under “the regime of compulsory heterosexuality” (7). Concerning this demise, here and there throughout the book Reichert expresses regrets, in an elegiac tone, over the silencing of the homoerotic as a subject for literary treatment and the missed opportunities for resisting contemporary Euro-American norms in this area.

To organize this study Reichert has chosen to use the received periodization of Meiji literary history into four stages: (1) the first fifteen years or so when Edo standards are still determinative; (2) the years of intense reform, especially the late 1880s, when radical changes in both literary language and forms are experimented with; (3) the neo-classical trend of the 1890s, when prominent writers sought to revive various versions of the literary past; (4) the first decade or so of the

twentieth century, when mainstream authors committed themselves to a common new form of semicolloquialized writing and at least the outward forms of essentially Western genres.

As a point of departure for his alternative readings of Meiji literature, Reichert focuses on two quite different but similarly backward-looking works: an anonymous work that in fact dated from the Edo period, whose conventional depiction of samurai lovers as paragons of mutual loyalty still struck a sympathetic chord with many readers, particularly young men; and a putatively “true” account of a wanton, deceitful kabuki actor who specialized in female roles, a lurid narrative that capitalized on the fascination in early Meiji popular culture with so-called *dokufu* (“vamps”).

But it is sections 2–4 of the book that carry the main burden of Reichert’s argument, treating works by several major authors of the period: Tsubouchi Shōyō, Yamada Bimyō, Kōda Rohan, Natsume Sōseki, and Mori Ōgai. In two works by the first and last named of these authors, *Tōsei shosei katagi* (The characters of modern students; 1886) and *Vita sexualis* (the original title appears in roman letters, phonetically glossed in Japanese; 1909), most of the narrative focus is trained on the lifestyles of male students at elite preparatory schools and universities (principally Tokyo [Imperial]) who belong to the first generation and a half or so to come of age in the Meiji period. A conspicuous feature of these lifestyles as here portrayed is a curious dualistic typology that was devised by the students in this period to describe two different approaches to life and love (or, at any rate, lust): *kōha* and *nampa*: literally, the hard and soft factions. Somewhat counter-intuitively, perhaps even for present-day Japanese on first encountering this usage, under the “hard” side of this binary coalesce such characteristics as frugality, interest in Chinese classics and German philosophy alike, a preference for the shabbier forms of traditional dress, and a predatory eye for winsome younger schoolmates; under the “soft” crop up a frivolous garrulity, indebtedness, a taste for belletristic literature (Japanese and foreign), the occasional donning of a Western-style garment, and an open longing for the opposite sex (sporadically fulfilled in Tokyo’s thriving red-light districts), as well as the affectation, at least, of what was in part perceived as Euro-American-style love. Despite Shōyō’s famous call in his recent treatise *The Essence of Fiction* (*Shōsetsu shinzui*; 1885) for a new form of fiction based on Western models, to be informed by a realistic depiction of individualized characters and the natural, nondidactic development of serious themes, which therefore might emerge only ambiguously, here he harks back to the satirical style of Edo-period fiction known as *gesaku*

(“playful works”) and, as his title “Characters of . . .” would imply, in fact presents us for the most part with stereotypes.

While fully recognizing that the figure who embodies the hard faction (Kiryama) is a crude caricature, Reichert finds in the contrasting character of Moriyama in this work the prototype of what will be established in this decade as a “new masculine icon” (140), the model *seinen* (a term for “young man” that acquired a new currency at this time) as elaborated by popular journalism: even-tempered, ambitious, and wholly indifferent to any homoerotic attachments, if clearly still committed to solid homosocial friendships. Indeed, this chapter invokes “The Institutionalization of Compulsory Male Heterosexuality,” a social-historical process that appears much more fully accomplished in Ōgai’s *Vita sexualis*, published close to the end of the Meiji, and the last of the works to be discussed by Reichert. The dispassionate self-detachment with which the ostensibly confessional, first-person narrator here describes how he fought off the advances of upperclassmen of the hard faction in his school days, perhaps proved more persuasive with contemporary readers than Shōyō’s grotesquely overdrawn *kōha* character in stigmatizing modern-day students who, in however debased a form, clung to the vestiges of the idealized, strictly age-graded relationships between samurai lovers of yesteryear. That Ōgai had begun his distinguished career as an army doctor, even serving as surgeon-general, lent his treatment of the subject the authority of science, which had been increasingly invoked, as Reichert observes at length, first to “medicalize” homosexuality as abnormal then to link it to a whole pseudoscientific discourse on “degeneracy.”

Because Reichert’s selection of Shōyō’s post-*gesaku* *Characters* and Ōgai’s *Vita* (only the second venture by this writer into the by now entrenched semicolloquial written style collectively forged since the mid-1880s) serves well to bookend his various discussions of Meiji representations of male-male bonds, it is tempting to accept his overall periodization. This four-part scheme roughly corresponds to the four-plus decades of this era which has been long established in Japanese literary histories. As mentioned above, this is a long-established four-part periodization along both linguistic and thematic lines. But given his focus on a significant shift in deep-rooted social norms and cultural values, the scheme seems unnecessarily constricting and cannot avoid developmentalist overtones—here of course tied to a notion of decline rather than progress. Fortunately, these implications are not so pronounced as to distort his overall argument. To be sure, most of us interested in the pre-World War II modern literature have at times been unduly swayed by the standard periodizations. But besides the

issues raised by Reichert's study, there are a number of other fundamental trends and agendas that, although they were first addressed within the confines of the Meiji period, recurred, with differing degrees of intensity and in some cases as an ongoing dialectical process, down to at least the 1930s, when totalitarian repression put an end to nearly all productive foment for some years.

For me, the most provocative, by and large persuasive interpretations Reichert brings to bear in support of his general thesis have to do with specific styles of language used in the texts under consideration, a topic explored with particular incisiveness in his treatment of Yamada Bimyō's *Shōnen sugata* (On the beauty of youths) and Kōda Rohan's *Hige otoko* (The bearded man). He pursues two separate if closely related lines of argument in this area, one of them more convincing than the other. Both concern the very broad category of the "Japanese-Chinese hybrid style" (a common literal rendering of *wakon konkōbun*) used in most of the works he treats, the exceptions including Yamada Bimyō's *Musashino*, Natsume Sōseki's *Nowaki*, and the aforementioned *Vita* by Ōgai. In one line of argument, Reichert's treatment delves into the interesting but frequently nebulous zone where claims are made about fixed associations of particular styles with this or that gender and sexual orientation: that is, the sociolinguistics of what are, in this case, by definition written languages. Reichert states that while the hybrid form "might appear to have nothing to do with *nanshoku*, . . . variations of it functioned over the years as a device for representing male-male sexuality" (103), and that "this convention played upon pre-conceived notions about the gendered qualities attributed to Japanese and Chinese discourse" (103). Finally, he quotes Komori Yōichi as remarking in a *zadankai* (transcribed roundtable discussions that, virtually unedited as they have become, tend to be unreliable sources for otherwise thoughtful scholars' opinions) that in the light of the association of *nanshoku* writings with the hybrid style, "the entire tradition of literary texts composed in *waken kōkonbun*, from the *Tales of the Heiki* on, needs to be reconsidered" (103). There would seem to be a false syllogism somewhere here. While there has been voluminous sociolinguistic work on gendering in the spoken language, there does not appear to be a great deal of disciplinary attention to this issue where written languages are concerned, although certainly both modern and premodern authors and scholars of literature have had things to say on the subject. It might be instructive, and certainly fun, to take a close look at the highly impressionistic gender-related views expressed by Tanizaki Jun'ichiro in his *Bunshō tokukuhon* (Tokyo: Chūo koronsha, 1934; see, e.g., 110–13), but space constraints do not permit. I must content my-

self, then, in quoting this wonderfully laconic observation of Motoori Norinaga in his *Uiyamabumi*: “and for that matter, where the differences between men’s and women’s styles are concerned, they are of no great importance (03/15/07 [<http://www.norinagakinenkan.com/norinaga/shiryu/uiyamabumi.html>]).”

Finally, Reichert’s second general point about the hybrid style seems the more cogent of his two lines of argument on this subject, and indeed one that makes an especially compelling case for his alternative readings of the texts he treats. As it is succinctly expressed in his discussion of *Hige otokoko*, “Here the narrative exploits the possibility of producing multiple layers of signification inherent in the Japanese-Chinese hybrid style to inject an element of eroticism and desire” (152). Here and there throughout his discussion of Meiji fiction, where the hybrid style is deployed in a particularly rich fashion—in none of his texts is it wholly absent, but only few approach the prolix virtuosity of Takizawa Bakin’s prose, the premodern exemplar of this style—Reichert pauses to underscore the appropriateness of this language’s contrapuntal tensions and ambiguities, punctuated by harmonious resolutions, for the depiction of homoerotic bonds, which are presented as both an abiding trope for a pure, loyal love and the very embodiment of evanescence, not only because of inherent age restrictions, but because of the changing times and mores.

Sharing the concluding section with Ōgai’s *Vita*, there is a poignant, perhaps unavoidably ambivalent critique of Sōseki’s *Nowaki* (Autumn wind; 1907), which, I might point out, is written in Sōseki’s own influential version of an only semicolloquialized hybrid style. (For Tanizaki’s view of this style see *Bunshō tokuhon*, 111.) Here, as in so many of Sōseki’s novels, the reader is kept mostly in the company of men, as Reichert shows, in this case a trio of contrasting male characters, one of them older than the other two and married to, again characteristically, a long-suffering wife. As will continue to occur throughout this author’s major works down to *Kokoro* (with the exception of *Mon*), the great preponderance of the narrative is devoted to interactions among these male characters, which as Reichert convincingly argues are at times charged with homoerotic undercurrents. (I cannot, however, agree with his adducing as extratextual evidence for such undercurrents [188–90] what Sōseki writes about Walt Whitman’s “manly love of comrades” in his youthful essay of 1892 [*Natsume Sōseki zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1967), XII, 98–109]. In my no doubt imperfect reading, Sōseki seems rather to take all references to bodily love in Whitman, whether outwardly homoerotic or heteroerotic, to be metaphors for a universal, egalitarian love of an essentially spiritual nature.) While the plots of many of this author’s major works all revolve around

love triangles of the sort described by Eve Sedgwick in her celebrated *Between Men* (Columbia University Press, 1985), and so are saturated with what she was the first to term “homosocial desire,” Reichert’s stimulating alternative reading of *Nowaki* persuasively conveys that, owing both to deeply rooted narrative traditions and to the supple medium of the hybrid Japanese-Chinese style of writing, here, and by implication in later works of Sōseki (as well as others one can think of), the homoerotic often coexists with the homosocial in a fashion that the codification of Sedgwick’s thesis by queer studies would not allow for.

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The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form. *Debarati Sanyal*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. Pp. vii+276.

In this enjoyable and thought-provoking book on Baudelaire and his legacy, Debarati Sanyal presents a persuasive case for rethinking current assumptions about literary modernity. The book develops two main lines of argument. First, the author incisively points out the limits of the fashionable interpretative categories of trauma, testimony, and crisis. Today’s discourse of universal victimhood, Sanyal claims, privileges “affect over analysis” (2) and fails to challenge the violence of history. Second, Sanyal argues that modernism’s apparent “retreat into form” (5), usually seen as a symptomatic rejection of ethical and political commitment, in fact has contestatory power. Self-reflexivity and irony emerge here as key aspects of a current in modernism that subjects social and aesthetic violence to analysis and critique.

The book successfully combines the historical and ethical concerns of cultural studies with a resolute focus on the aesthetic specificity of literary texts. Close readings play a central role in Sanyal’s account of the dynamic relationship between form and history. Part 1, “Violence and Representation in Baudelaire,” offers a study of Baudelaire’s poetry and prose. Chapter 1 revisits critical accounts of Baudelaire as “traumatophile” (22), from Walter Benjamin’s notion of shock to contemporary critics’ more problematic emphasis on the tragic rupture between poetry and history (Ulrich Baer). Sanyal argues that the concept of trauma risks reducing literature to a symptom and placing the poet in the passive role of victim. She suggests that the notion of vio-