

RECLAIMING A LANGUAGE TAKEN

BUCKLEY, Sandra: *Broken Silence – Voices of Japanese Feminism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. 382 pp., \$ 15,95.

SCHALOW, Paul Gordon and Janet A. WALKER (Hg.): *The Woman's Hand. Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996. 511 pp., \$ 18,00.

Reviewed by Nicola LISCUTIN

"To write is to become," declares TRINH T. Minh-ha. "Not to become a writer (or a poet), but to become, intransitively" (1989: 18). In more than one sense, *Broken Silence* and *The Woman's Hand* seem to attest to this process. Already in their titles, the books allude to the voices that are now heard and which cannot so easily be effaced or silenced any more, and to the instruments both physically, bodily, and in terms of a women's language, employed by women to utter themselves, or to write their bodies.

In *Broken Silence* Sandra BUCKLEY interviews ten leading contemporary Japanese feminists and puts a definite end to the myth, still held dear in the West, that there is no such "thing" as Japanese feminism. These Japanese feminists have been speaking up and out for well over two decades now, I thus take it that the rather misleading title of BUCKLEY's book is meant to refer to our silence/ignorance in the West. Each of the interviews is contextualised by BUCKLEY's careful and lucid introductions, and by excerpts of these feminists' writings translated into English. The whole is rounded off by a timeline and a contact list of Japanese women's organisations, which increase the book's appeal to both activists and academic audiences. This fascinating book, with its fresh approach, not only gives answers to those who wondered about the whereabouts of "serious feminist theorists" in Japan (p. xi), but it can also be seen as a response to the rightly angry criticism by Audre LORDE and other "Third World feminists" of the ignorance and arrogance of white academic feminists towards their "sisters of colour."¹ For far too long, such attitudes have relegated "Third World feminists" to

¹ TRINH T. Minh-ha, associate professor of cinema at San Francisco State University, is a writer, filmmaker, composer, and one of the major representatives of "Third World Feminism" in the States. In her well-known book *Woman, Native,*

the "Special Issues" section of feminist conferences and journals; more importantly, they have demonstrated a refusal "to recognize difference as crucial strength" in feminist projects (LORDE 1983: 100). It is exactly here where the strength and importance of this book lies, as it engages with, and pays respect to, the "difference" of Japanese feminism.

The Woman's Hand is a collection of essays on Japanese women's writing that will be greatly welcomed by anyone interested in the subject. In particular, teachers and undergraduate students of modern Japanese women's literature, who, in the past, have spent long and frustrating hours searching for useful material in English, will find the twelve studies enriching and stimulating, and the comprehensive bibliographies of English translations and secondary texts an invaluable source of information. Given the relative scarcity of monographs dealing with modern Japanese women's writing, the present work harks back to Anglo-American and European projects of the earlier phases of feminist literary scholarship, by aiming "to recover a feminine tradition erased in the predominant focus of translators and critics on male writing" (p. xv). At the same time, the essays demonstrate a concern with later forms of criticism, in particular French feminism and postmodern thought as they are discussed and understood within North American academic discourse. The volume as a whole is innovative by employing feminist and gender criticism to the analysis of Japanese texts. No doubt, the book will become a "must" on reading lists for courses on Japanese women's literature.

But I would insist upon both books appearing on reading lists together, that one is not read without the other. For, as the following detailed discussion of *Broken Silence* and *The Woman's Hand* intends to demonstrate, these two volumes complement each other in important ways as much as they pursue contesting, though certainly not mutually exclusive, strategies.

Other (1989), from which the quotation at the beginning of this review has been taken, she explains that the term "Third World" as in "Third World Feminism" has positive connotations "when understood sociopolitically as a subversive, 'non-aligned' force" that is directed "against all forms of Western dominance." It includes "developed" countries such as Japan, as well as countries with a socialist system like China, Cuba, or Ethiopia, or countries that chose a "capitalist mode of development" such as India, Brazil, or Nigeria. TRINH stresses that "Third World dwells on diversity" and, therefore, cannot be considered a unified category, let alone a unified "other." When used by "non-white" feminists, "Third World Feminism," which includes "women of colour" living and working in the "First World," works actually as a provocation, particularly in the North American context. I am using the term here with TRINH's words in mind (1989: 97-100).

Between 1988 and 1991, BUCKLEY conducted interviews with a number of important Japanese feminists. Ten of these interviews came to form the core of this book. The voices which break into our silence are those of the independent scholar and critic Aoki Yayoi; the linguistics professor Ide Sachiko; the lawyer Kanazumi Fumiko; the poet and critic Kōra Rumiko; the senior staff editor of *Asahi Shinbun* Matsui Yayori; the freelance writer and critic Miya Yoshiko; the owner-manager of Shōkadō Women's Bookstore, Nakanishi Toyoko; the author and owner-manager of Crayon House, Ochiai Keiko; the founding editor of the feminist journal *Agora*, Saitō Chiyo; and the sociology professor Ueno Chizuko. All of the participants were involved throughout in the transcription, the selection of additional texts, and the translating and editing stages, which thus turned, as Brett De Bary rightly emphasizes, "into a dynamic process of political collaboration" (back-cover).

The questions are carefully balanced between those addressing central issues within the Japanese feminist debate and those inquiring about the specific concerns in each of the critics' work. Thus, we find a rich array of answers to such topics as the presence and representation of women in the media, the relationship of women to parliamentary and party politics, the communication between academic feminists and grass-root movements, the treatment of women in medicine and law, the alleged power of Japanese women in the private domain, violence against women, prostitution and pornography, and the relationship between Japanese feminism and Asian women, on the one side, and between Japanese feminists and "western" feminism, on the other side. The result, much enhanced by the way in which BUCKLEY introduces her interviewees, is a fascinating dialogue between these Japanese feminists, BUCKLEY and the reader, as well as among the interviewees themselves. These dialogues reveal both the plurality and the specificity of Japanese feminist thinking and, likewise, the differences in opinions, aims and approaches. Clearly a question of great concern for all of these feminists is the present and future roles of feminism within Japanese society.

In view of some of the more dramatic economic, political and social events of the last six years, such as the "burst of the bubble economy;" the shake-up and excitement over Hosokawa's election as prime minister in 1993, or the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, one can easily imagine that, today, BUCKLEY would want to ask additional questions. And, one may equally imagine that quite a few changes have occurred in the views and debates of Japanese feminists. For example, most of the ten interviewees were worried about the seeming complacency and political conservatism of Japanese middle-class women when it comes to national elections. Yet it seems to have been women who were the strongest supporters of the

Hosokawa government, and the number of women members in government and parliament from 1993 to 1995 was the highest in recent years. Although since then the women's vote appears to have swung back to the right, this may have been caused less by complacency than by an acute sense of uncertainty over the economic future of Japan. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was another event which boosted the spirits, confidence and activities of women's organisations remarkably. Matsui Yayori, who retired in 1994 from her post of senior staff editor at the *Asahi Shinbun* and founded the Asian Women's Resource Center in 1994/5, was one of the leading figures in organising the group of 500 Japanese delegates for the NGO Forum at Beijing. Thereafter, the Resource Center has been reporting on and encouraging the work of Asian women's NGOs in its Japanese and English publications.

In a book project of this size and complexity, it is probably inevitable that, at the point of publication, some aspects appear slightly outdated. It should be stressed, however, that the western reader is provided with a wealth of essential information and insight into Japanese feminism, which outweigh considerations of the book's timeliness. Some of the fundamental issues discussed in the book deserve to be elaborated upon, as they connect in important ways to the studies in *The Woman's Hand*.

A common concern among the interviewees is the lack of awareness of women's sexuality, a lack which appears to have significant repercussions on other problematic social phenomena. The lawyer Kanazumi Fumiko, for example, who established the Women's Cooperative Legal Service in the 1970s, suggests "that there is a link ... between the need for a recognition of women's sexuality and the various forms of emotional and physical violence we see manifested in the Japanese family today" (p. 77). She insists upon the necessity of "a total reassessment of the state of the family. Central to this is a frank reappraisal of the nature of sexuality and its role in child development and a reappraisal of the formation of family relations between husband and wife, and parents and children" (p. 78). Her essays, translated in this volume, further highlight the need for an increasing awareness of women's sexuality in questions surrounding women's reproductive rights/health. Only recently (Asahi TV evening news, May 1997) in the discussion of infertility treatments and surrogate mothers, Kanazumi reiterated her critical stance towards any legal changes that would allow surrogacy, a view that some readers may find irritating. Aoki Yayoi, who is regarded as a representative of Japanese eco-feminism, shares certain views with Kanazumi, although her main concern is the revolution in reproductive and biogenetic technologies which, if they remain unmonitored, pose a great risk to women's self-determination, empowerment and, most basically, to their health (p. 3).

What becomes evident in these interviews and texts is that women have hitherto been faced with the enormous difficulty of finding a language in which they could comfortably and confidently express their own experiences of their bodies and sexuality against the overwhelming authority of medical and legal languages that have come to frame women's relationships to their bodies. Whether, as Miya Yoshiko discusses, in patient-doctor relationships or the therapies for women with anorexia, or in divorce or rape cases, as Kanazumi and Ochiai Keiko point out, "a language of their own" forms the central problem.

Nakanishi Toyoko, the owner of the first Women's Bookstore (Ōsaka), thus took up a major task when she initiated the project of translating *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and adapting it for a Japanese readership. Excerpts of the resulting volume are provided in BUCKLEY's book (pp. 199–225). The book does nothing less than providing "a new vocabulary to replace the medical language." Nakanishi describes the process, "We give both the medical term and the new word for the first time it occurs and then drop the medical word after that. For example, we frequently opted to replace the character for 'blood' with the character for 'sexuality' in words describing a female bodily function. We were aiming at positively redefining these functions as sexual, rather than negatively marking them as polluted" (p. 193). Nakanishi points here to a crucial issue, namely that it is often not "a question of what is said but what *cannot* be said" (p. 195, my italics). As most of the interviewees agree, "the virtual taboo that has silenced women" (p. 192) does not only extend to voicing the physical reality of what has been socially defined as "women's diseases," but also to subjects such as rape or incest. A good example for the latter was the enormous response, both enthusiastic and outraged, to Ochiai Keiko's novel *The Rape* (excerpt on pp. 239–44). Another example is the stir which Ueno Chizuko's texts on the phenomenon of *mazākon* (mother complex) or her book *Women's Play* created (pp. 272–74).

A further area where the failure to recognise women's sexuality, particularly once they are married, proves to be pivotal is in society's "disguise" of "the continuity between the institution of marriage and prostitution" (p. 289). Matsui Yayori, who made a name for herself in fighting Japanese sex-tourism to Asian countries and the "traffic in Asian women" brought to Japan for the domestic sex industry, suggests that Japan can be accurately described as a "prostitution culture." Matsui, never afraid of causing controversy, regards prostitution as "a central characteristic not only of Japanese society but also of Japan's relations with other countries" (p. 140). She believes that "it is not possible to discuss the status of Filipino prostitutes in Japan or the nature of the sex industry without looking at questions of sexuality and gender in the Japanese family" (p. 141). Al-

though Ueno opposes Matsui's anti-prostitution stance, she argues, also in her sociological studies, for a fairly direct link between the silence that surrounds women's sexuality within the family and the flourishing sex industry (p. 289–90).

Indeed, the problem of women's sexuality is intimately linked to the concept of the family in Japan, and specifically to the "maternal function." The assumption that women will, and have to, forsake and repress their sexual desires once they become mothers/wives, for instance, seems to be still the dominant notion. Ideas (and fantasies) about motherhood appear to be astonishingly powerful – from the perspective of a western reader – in creating and constantly reproducing, if not perpetuating, gender-segregated social structures which place and bind women into an intricate net of expectations, responsibilities, pressures, yet also grant them a high level of esteem.² The issue of motherhood figures prominently in all of the interviews, and most of the interviewees regard the maternal function as a crucial point of difference between American and Japanese feminist theories. They stress the necessity to see the development of Japanese women's movements and feminism within their very specific historical and social contexts, in which "motherhood" has taken a prominent position. Thus, the development and changes of the "modern family" in Japan have always been central issues in Japanese feminist theory. Subsequently, all of the interviewees reject the idea that Japanese women's movements/feminism emerged under the direct influence and as imitation of American women's movements.

"The mothering, nurturing function" as a key concern within Japanese feminism is also, as Ueno admits, a "double-edged sword" for its critical and political agenda (p. 280). On the one side, Japanese women's movements have always placed great emphasis on the protection of the maternal function. Thus the "primary goal" for Japanese feminists "according to Ueno is not to be like men but to value what it means to be a woman" (p. 280). On the other side, Japanese feminists are acutely aware that by stressing the mothering role, they may run the risk of upholding ideological structures that are detrimental to women's empowerment. The central political and theoretical pursuits of Japanese feminism are, thus, a re-definition and re-evaluation of the maternal function with the declared aim of effecting changes in the social structures. In this regard, Saitō Chiyo and Aoki Yayoi believe that Japanese feminism is at an important turning point, in that new political strategies are required to counter the wave of

² The studies of the cultural anthropologist Anne ALLISON (1994; 1996) should be mentioned here, as they provide another instructive and fascinating perspective on the subject.

“new conservatism” and its implication for the concept of the Japanese family (pp. 8–10; pp. 248–250). Further, as Ueno underlines, it is of crucial importance to insist that the maternal function is *not* “the only acceptable and worthwhile function for all women” (p. 281).

Going through all the interviews and texts, the reader gains a sense that the issue of biological essentialism and, for that matter, the construction of gender, may well mean something quite different to Japanese feminists than within the American feminist debates of the last ten or fifteen years, or, again, within “European” feminism, although one might detect certain similarities between the latter and Japanese feminist theories. Feminist readers may find it puzzling that a fair number of Japanese feminists see nothing wrong with essentialism and a gender-binarism provided, that is, “woman” or a “feminine principle/essence” are given equal significance and positive value to “man.” Even Ueno’s stance on essentialism is not as clear-cut as her vehement opposition to eco-feminism suggests. Moreover, the Japanese feminist debate of the maternal function, in all its subtleties and complexities, is probably the one most difficult for western feminists to grasp and to appreciate fully. The interview with the linguistics professor Ide Sachiko illustrates these impressions rather effectively, it, therefore, seems opportune to quote it at some length. Asked about the western criticism of essentialist notions in Japanese feminism, Ide answers that:

there is something fundamental to Japanese feminism and questions of female identity that cannot be fathomed without reference to *boseiai*. When I speak about the concept in English, even though I know that “maternal love” is a perfectly reasonable translation, I still resort to the Japanese expression. There is something quite specific about its significance within Japanese society and gender relations.

The function of *boseiai* is not limited to the relationship between mother and child. The bonding of couples is often founded on *boseiai*. It is a fundamental social relationship, which is central to the female identity in Japanese society. Women don’t consider *boseiai* as oppressive or something to be overcome. After all, it is preferable that the maternal or nurturing function should be one of the basic structures of social relations rather than more aggressive – what might be characterized as masculine or patriarchal – forms of power ...

For me, the practice of *boseiai* is not limited to the domestic or private world. I see myself extending that role into my professional world as well. In the past men ran universities, departments, and committees according to a style that depended on more traditional notions of power and position. I feel, as a woman who is committed to the values

of *boseiai*, that it is appropriate for me to use my own preferred style when taking on the same responsibilities within these institutions (p. 38).

Of course, not all of the interviewed feminists would agree with Ide's positive appraisal of *boseiai* and, particularly, the activists among them highlight the danger of conservatism inherent in this concept. Interestingly, though, many women's organisations seem to function on the basis of a matricentric principle, as criticisms of a generation gap within some women's movements suggest. The introduction to and the interview with Saitō Chiyo of the feminist journal *Agora* may be instructive in this regard (pp. 245–70). The mothering nurturing function and *boseiai* can certainly be attributed positive values provided they are *not* exclusively assigned to women, but are extended to include men in a process that Ueno describes as "feminization of the male" (pp. 282–84). The crux, however, apparently lies in the institutional pressures (e.g. of the education and welfare systems as well as the gendered labour-market) which consign *boseiai* to women only and which promote the mothers' active, though possibly unintentional, replication of gender roles in the education of their children. In these discussions the reader is left with the somewhat irritating impression that the stance of Japanese feminism towards the education system is far from clear or, rather, would have deserved further critical scrutiny. It is undoubtedly a subject for future research and should also be expected to be high on the political agenda of Japanese feminists.

Evidence that a considerable number of women in contrast to Ide regard *boseiai* as oppressive, and very much so, can be found not only in the disturbing phenomenon of "coin locker babies" (abandoned infants) in the 1970s, but also in women's writing of the late 1960s and the 1970s, as the analyses of texts by Ōba Minako, Takahashi Takako, and Kōno Taeko in *The Woman's Hand* demonstrate. One could easily add more writers to this list, such as Saegusa Kazuko, Tomioka Taeko, Kurahashi Yumiko, or Itō Hiromi. In a round table discussion, SAEGUSA, TOMIOKA, and UENO (1985) described women's literature of the 1970s as characterised by strong anti-motherhood sentiments, sometimes going as far as to express hatred and murderous intent against mothers and children. The topics of the family and motherhood (and the implied denial of women's sexuality) seem to have lost nothing in their currency for many contemporary Japanese women writers, although they are, of course, tackled in fresh, that is subversive, fantastic, parodic, and humorous ways. The literary outburst of "mother-hating" in the 1970s can be understood as a reaction to the stifling effects of a socially defined, ideologically instrumental concept of *boseiai*.

This brings us back to the tricky relationship, mentioned earlier, of women to language, and to the question of women's language. What appears to happen in many of the women writers' and feminists' texts is nothing less than the effort "to become, intransitively." In my view, the most illuminating and significant chapter in BUCKLEY's volume concerning these issues is the one introducing the work of Kōra Rumiko. Kōra is well-known both for her poetry and for her critical essays on literature or women's issues, but she has also made herself a name by introducing Asian and African poetry through translation. The interview and her poetry and prose texts, given in English translation, bespeak with enormous intensity her struggle "to become" – a struggle, precisely because what was there to use was only "the language of others; the language of men" (p. 129). It is worthwhile to listen to her voice and to watch her hand, so beautifully translated by BUCKLEY. In the interview, for instance, she says:

from the time I was a small child, I was intensely aware of language. I felt even as a child that language was not mine, that I existed outside the language that surrounded me, like a foreigner. The warmth and familiarity of a language that was my own, wrapped gently around me, remained a dream, unknown. ... In my own experience there has been confrontation, even war, and yet when I try to communicate these experiences, as I remember them, I find only an empty language that cannot accommodate me. I began reading foreign verse and found escape there, especially in French poetry. I came back to Japanese and began to experiment with words, breaking down the boundaries between language and self, allowing words to disappear into me, and me into words, in moments of struggle and confusion (pp. 104–105).

And the translated excerpt of her essay "Words and Objects" ends on the following note,

My life sat there before me like one more object. It was like an unspeakable word. To speak it, I had only the language of others. To speak my life, I chose my words paradoxically. This was an act of treason against their language – the language of men (p. 129).

Kōra's experiences not only find an echo in the difficulties addressed by other women in this volume, but they also closely resemble those issues addressed and strategies explored by TRINH T. Minh-ha in her book *Woman, Native, Other* (1989). Simultaneously, Kōra's writing appears to have certain aspects in common with that of Hélène CIXOUS, especially in the latter's essay "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" (1986). Like Cixous, Kōra emphasizes biological difference and supports a feminine

identity based on a critical re-evaluation of the maternal function. She also believes in the potential of a women's language and proposes that Japanese women re-appropriate this language and make it "work for them. To speak the language rather than be spoken" (p. 115). The bottom line is, still, that it is far from easy for a woman to find a language in which to write herself, even if there exists a tradition of a language written by women, such as the Heian-period "woman's hand" (*onnade*), or a spoken women's language. SAEGUSA (e.g. 1984, 1992, 1993, 1996) and TOMIOKA (e.g. 1984, 1989, 1991) should be mentioned here for their extensive engagement with similar questions.

The critical texts of these women writers actually bring into question the claim by the editors of *The Woman's Hand*, Janet WALKER and Paul SCHALOW, that "in Japanese women writers' *confident ownership* of a 'woman's language,' their discursive experience most diverges from that of non-Japanese women writers" (p. 5; my italics). This view is shared, it appears, by a fair number, though clearly not all, of the contributors. Why, one may wonder, does there exist such a gap between the perception of writers like Kōra, Saegusa, and Tomioka and that of some of the scholars who contributed to the *Woman's Hand*? What could bring about this gap? One deceptively simple answer might be that the texts of these three writers are not discussed in the volume, and that they may be the only ones concerned with the issue of women's language. The matter is, of course, more complicated, and shall thus be addressed in the following discussion of *The Woman's Hand*.

The idea for this volume of essays emerged from the Rutgers Conference on Japanese Women Writers in 1993. Half of the essays are based on papers originally given at the conference, and a further six scholars were invited to contribute essays to the book. The writer ŌBA Minako presented a special address entitled "Without Beginning, Without End," which opens the collection of essays.

The essays are grouped under four headings according to the way in which "critics have generally defined women's discursive practice in terms of four major gender-related categories or contexts: literary-historical, biological, experiential, and cultural" (p. 1). An explanation or note would certainly have been helpful here, in order to clarify the questions of which critics the editors have in mind, and to which specific theoretical positions these four categories refer. Sometimes, the connection between the essays and these categories is rather unclear, and particularly the category of the cultural appears fairly vague.

In the first category "Situating the Woman Writer in Japanese Literature," we find ŌBA Minako's witty and novel reading of Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, as well as an additional excerpt from one of her texts. This is

followed, surprisingly, by Lynne MIYAKE's study of *The Tosa Diary*, written by the male courtier Ki no Tsurayuki, and her discussion of the gender (or anti-gender?) politics of writing in this text. Joan ERICSON's essay on "The Origins of the Concept of 'Women's Literature'" thoroughly and thoughtfully analyzes how, for instance, institutions such as modern criticism and scholarship effected the emergence and consolidation of the critical category "women's literature."

Part II is concerned with "Narrating the Body" and includes Sharalyn ORBAUGH's essay "The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction," which focuses particularly on a number of troubling short stories by Kanai Mieko; Doris BARGEN's close reading of Enchi Fumiko's "A Bond for Two Lifetimes – Gleanings," with particular regard to the aspects of translation and reproduction; as well as "The Quest for *Jouissance* in Takahashi Takako's Texts" by Maryellen TOMAN MORI, which provides a challenging and original interpretation of Takahashi's fiction.

Part III takes issue with "Defining the Female Voice," and one might expect to find here a discussion of those problems regarding women and language addressed earlier. Two of the three essays in this group deal with the writings of Ōba Minako – Meera VISWANATHAN's "In Pursuit of the Yamamba: The Question of Female Resistance," which approaches a topos that figures prominently in many of Ōba's short texts, and Michiko NIKUNI WILSON's highly appreciative essay, which looks at two of Ōba's novels, and reconsiders the question of the "female destiny" in these narratives, whereas John Whittier TREAT's essay provides an interesting analysis of the work of "Hayashi Kyōko and the Gender of Ground Zero." The combination is not as far-fetched as it might seem on first sight, given that Ōba has written extensively in her novels (e. g. *Urashimasō*, *Funakui mushi*) and essays (*Mae, mae katatsumuri*) about the experience of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, although these texts are not the subject of the essays in this volume. More importantly, however, TREAT shows how Hayashi's texts lead inevitably to a questioning of theories of an *écriture féminine*. It thus fits the category of a "female voice" in an intriguing manner.

Finally, Part IV aims at "Locating 'Woman' in Culture." It starts with an essay by Noriko MIZUTA dealing with "The Wandering Woman in Hayashi Fumiko's *Drifting Clouds*." Next is Chieko ARIGA's instructive study of the commentaries added to paperback editions of Japanese literature, and of how the frequent contradictions between male commentary and women writer's text engender and highlight "Struggles over the Cultural Meanings of 'Woman.'" Livia MONNET presents an enormously complex analysis of the short story "The Chrysanthemum Beetle" by Tsushima Yūko, entitled "*Connaissance délicateuse*, or the Science of Jealousy." This

part, and the volume, are concluded with an essay by Nina CORNYETZ on "Power and Gender in the Narratives of Yamada Eimi."

The thirteen studies discuss the texts of, altogether, ten Japanese women writers. Apart from the seven already mentioned, Kōno Taeko's work is briefly analysed in Orbaugh and Mori, while Ariga's essay focuses on Kōno's short story collection *Toddler Hunting*, Nakazawa Kei's *Umi o kan-jiru toki* [When you feel the sea] and Matsumoto Yūko's *Kyoshokushō no ake-nai yoake* [The excessive overeater: a day without dawning]. Some of the essays provide intriguingly different views on the work of one and the same author. For instance, whereas Ericson addresses the problem of Hayashi Fumiko's participation in the war effort, Mizuta leaves this thorny question out in her discussion of *Diary of a Vagabond* and *Drifting Clouds*, thus suggesting an unbroken continuity in the subject matter of Hayashi's narratives.

But, interestingly, *The Woman's Hand* appears also to be a book "about" Ōba Minako and her writings. Ōba's speech, and even more so the added translation (by SCHALOW) of Chapter 26 of her *Long Ago, There Was A Woman* very much set the tone for this volume in that the texts address the tensions and differences between men's reading/writing and women's reading/writing, as well as Ōba's undaunted, indeed confident, approach to writing "as a woman." Read together with the two rather different essays of VISWANATHAN and NIKUNI WILSON and a few remarks by ORBAUGH, one gains a fairly good, though certainly preliminary, insight into the complexity of some of Ōba's major texts, the plurality of her writing strategies, as well as a few inconsistencies in her *yawarakai feminizumu* (soft feminism) approach.³ One might, for example, detect a certain contradiction between her confidence as a woman writer and critic and the passage of *Long Ago, There Was A Woman* which describes the effect of a casual remark by "this man, her husband." The remark, "Do you expect to be able to say whatever is on your mind? If you think you can do that and survive, you are wrong," made the woman/writer feel that his words "stabbed her to the depths of her being, opening a wound that would be with her for as long as she lived" (p. 35). NIKUNI WILSON's enthusiastic appraisal of Ōba – "her sense of equality with male writers and her secure identity as a female writer are absolute. In this respect, Ōba, it seems to me, is a breed apart from contemporary Japanese women writers" (p. 294) and her "subversive intent as a writer" (p. 303) – forms an interesting contrast to VISWANATHAN's analysis of the topos of the *yamamba*, in which VISWANATHAN comes to the less upbeat conclusion that Ōba's texts don't seem to allow an

³ *Yawarakai feminizumu* is also the title of a collection of talks with Ōba Minako. Seidosha (1992).

identification of aberrant female characters with female resistance (p. 255–58).

The Woman's Hand offers a variety of readings, some more convincing than others, of modern Japanese women's writing, and much food for thought. Obviously, the essays cannot be discussed in detail within the limits of this review, instead I shall focus on the subtitle of the book, *Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, and its implications and problems as they become apparent in the essays.

The question of gender is certainly a tricky one, and so it comes as no surprise if some of the contributors are struggling with it. The cause of this struggle seems to lie in a difficult, possibly even futile, balancing act of a (political) position that considers "essentializing" to be "a necessary 'strategy' for any collective and transformative politics against oppression" (ARIGA, p. 354) with the tendencies of postmodern criticism to reject all binary models, such as that of maleness and femaleness, as totalizing and limiting. Although the attempt to overcome the polarisation of male and female is to be welcomed, the application of this postmodern premise seems forced or questionable in some of the essays, for instance, in the discussion of Enchi's "Gleanings," or in the suggestion that the Heian-period *Tosa Diary* engaged in a remarkable performance of a narrative production of multi-gendered selves" (MIYAKE, p. 65). One may also wonder whether postmodern criticism can be applied, without questioning, to Japanese women's writing, in view of the fact that some of the Japanese women writers are declared supporters of an essentialist stance.⁴

The second crucial term in the subtitle is "theory." But is it really "theory in Japanese women's writing" or is it "theory of" or "theory upon" – that is imposed? And whose theory is it? This shifting ground is actually shaped by the slightly confusing statements in the introduction. For one "aim of this volume" is "to suggest how theories derived primarily from Western discursive practice can be fruitfully applied in a description of the linkages between gender and writing in Japan" (p. 2), while the collection of essays is also said to "mirror," simultaneously, "postcolonial concern with woman as defined by aspects of acculturation such as ethnicity and

⁴ That having been said, the whole debate of female essence/ identity vs. postmodern "anti-binarism" appears superfluous, indeed cynical, in the context of the writing of a *hibakusha* like Hayashi Kyōko. As TREAT, in his sharp and deeply moving analysis of her texts points out, "Once, woman's body was meant for uniquely female things: the conception and bearing of children and, with that, the promise of a human future. But after August Ninth, that same body risks being the sterile, and thus reproductively *genderless*, *hibakusha* body" (p. 280; my italics).

class" (p. xv). The set aim is reflected in the frequent application of French feminist theories of "the female body as sites of resistance" in a fair number of essays and with some interesting results, such as in ORBAUGH's, MORI's or VISWANATHAN's texts. There is, however, very little evidence to suggest that postcolonial theories have been employed in a reflective manner. A quick examination of the essays' bibliographies hints at the overwhelming presence of Western (with a capital W, also for white) feminist, poststructuralist, psychoanalytical, and postmodern theories, and one will look in vain for any serious impact on the essays (with a few exceptions, e.g. Monnet) of the writings of SPIVAK (1988), CHOW (1989; 1991), TRINH (1989), LORDE (1984), SANDOVAL (1991) or MOHANTY (1985), to mention only a few of the prominent thinkers of "Third World Feminism." Of course, this is not to deny the validity and value of western feminist and other theories in the reading of Japanese texts, on the contrary. But this collection of essays exhibits a tendency towards exclusion which I find troubling.

For instance, "political correctness" features prominently in the book as regards both the group of contributors and the generally positive appraisal of the women writers whose texts are analysed. Yet, strangely, it seems that this attempt to be "pc" is mainly aimed at a North-American readership for whom, as the editors declare and admit, the book is primarily designed. Thus, one not only has to register an almost complete absence of the writings of "Third World Feminists," but much more important and worrying is the lack of any serious engagement with the critical writings of Japanese feminist writers and scholars in the textual analyses. They do not even appear in the book's final bibliography. The notable exceptions are the studies of ERICSON and ARIGA, and to a certain extent of MONNET. Elsewhere – where are KŌRA's thoughts on and her experiments with language (e.g. 1992), SAEGUSA's and TOMIOKA's critical writings mentioned earlier, UENO's ideas regarding *mazākon* or the "difference" of Japanese feminist theory (e.g. 1986), Ide's linguistic analyses of women's language, or any of the many studies of the relationship of women to writing and self-expression such as, for instance, the volumes edited by MIZUTA (e.g. 1991; 1993) or the critiques by YONAHARA (e.g. 1991; 1992). One could almost believe they did not exist or could not be considered serious ... if we did not know better since *Broken Silence*.

Likewise if Lynne MIYAKE attacks "in short" and in general "the Japanese scholarly world" because it "fails to see that gender is crucial in shaping literary production in Heian Japan" (p. 42), she will have to accept the criticism that she is either out of touch or has ignored the studies of KOMASHAKU Kimi (1991), BABA Mitsuko (1987) or TANAKA Takako (1992), and that, moreover, she fails to see the reality of the institution of *Kokubungaku*

research in which women scholars, let alone feminists, are still marginalised.⁵

MONNET criticizes, in a footnote, "the current proliferation of 'politically correct' interpretive strategies, theories, and methodologies in American literary and cultural studies" that often "tend to overlook the fact that the practice of 'speaking for others' also effectively covers their voices, once again silencing or misrepresenting them" (p. 416, n. 6). One possible effect of the neglect of "Third World Feminism" and, in the case of the *Woman's Hand*, particularly of Japanese Feminism is that a binarism or hierarchy might re-emerge, in which Western theory is the dominant term and the Japanese literary text is positioned as an isolated object of analysis and, thereby, turns once again into an "Other." One could ask, for instance, whether the Japanese texts and/or authors have been selected *because* they appeared to fit those four categories of (Western?) women's discursive practice which Western "critics have generally defined" (p. 1)? "Third World Feminists" have taught us to question the universalism of Western categories and theories, moreover, they have urged us to recognize the inapplicability of white Western theory to explain the relation between cultural history and cultural mixtures which also informs "Third World" women's writings. SANDOVAL, for instance, offers instead "a mobile unity, constantly weaving and interweaving an interaction of differences into coalition" (1991: 18), others have focused on the simultaneity of discourses which produce relationships of both difference and identification.

At a time when feminism is, once again, at the forefront of a critical debate such as that on nationalism and gender (see also UENO 1996), a debate which seeks to overcome the conceptual boundaries of the nation-state and to move, within this context, beyond the polarisation of femaleness and maleness, it is regrettable that a scholarship concerned with gender issues appears to be re-building exactly those boundaries.

What Japanese feminist theory and/or "Third World" feminist criticism give us is a new definition of "difference" and a fresh sense of plurality. Therefore, should we not pursue an approach that highlights "difference" by giving voice to and engaging with the efforts of Japanese feminists and women writers in "reclaiming a language taken"? The title of this review derives from a rendering in "translation" of the title of an essay collection by KÖRA Rumiko, *Ushinawareta kotoba o motomete* (1992).

⁵ That neither the European (feminist) scholarship on gender issues in Japanese literature nor any of the numerous translations of Japanese women writers' texts into French, German or Italian, are mentioned may be regarded as peripheral but related to the same phenomenon.

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