

Communications to the Editor

On Review of *Ukifune: Love in the Tale of Genji*

Upon reading Earl Jackson, Jr.'s review of *Ukifune: Love in the Tale of Genji*, edited by Andrew Pekarik (in *JAS* 43 [February 1984]:333–36), I found myself feeling disturbed at certain implications on the part of the reviewer.

Jackson's contempt for some of his colleagues is based upon his view that they are old-fashioned in their critical method. Ultimately, the problem is that they have not embraced Barthes, Derrida, et al., the champions of modernist criticism. I agree with Jackson that we all can benefit from paying closer attention to such matters as manipulated narrative voice and complexity of relationship among literary images. The problem with Jackson's position, as I see it, is his unfounded assumption that the text is a self-contained verbal system that takes priority over everything else. This, of course, is the fundamental axiom of modernist criticism, which follows in the footsteps of Romanticism by grandiosely substituting the writer for God, and therefore the critic for His priest, and the text for Holy Scripture.

Such criticism likes to masquerade as "science," progressive and more sophisticated than anything that went before. As Gary S. Vasilash writes in a review of a recent major book on semiotics, "There has been a veritable sign mania within the past several years, as people have been seeking out signifieds and signifiers. . . . It all sounds very scientific and sophisticated. . . . [Actually] it is a bid for status. . . . There are those who use the word semiotics as a sort of talisman that automatically confers intellectual respectability." Hence, as Vasilash goes on to show, criticism becomes "a practice for a secular priesthood or a club devoted to the marginalia of existence" (*Chronicles of Culture* 8 [March 1984]: 7–11).

Myopically entrapped within the text, Jackson appears to lack the intellectual acuity—and moral sense—to realize that reality is our first priority; were it not for life, there would be no art. The artist's imagination creates not *ex nihilo*, but in a process of interaction with something beyond itself.

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Response to Jonathan Chaves's Letter

I would like to begin with a passage from an article written in 1926 by the folklorist, tanka poet, and *Manyōshū* scholar, Orikuchi Shinobu:

Although it seems to have been determined in [recent] discussions, that criticism is not subordinate to the literary work, this has actually been the case for a very long time. . . . The principle subject of a given work . . . is often not within the author's conscious control. To extract this and make it concrete is the real task of the critic. . . . In this respect, the critic must be a philosopher. (Orikuchi Shinobu, *Zenshū*, vol. 27, p. 283)

In my book review, I did not intend to express "contempt" for an individual or for a particular approach to the text; I merely wished to point out the resistance to critical