



Discourses of Seduction

History, Evil, Desire,
and Modern Japanese Literature

Hosea Hirata



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In memory of
Earl Miner, Kin'ya Tsuruta,
and Masao Hirata

Acknowledgments

This book on modern Japanese literature collects my essays written over a decade. Its rather haphazard contents bespeak the long span of time it took for me to mold this collection into some semblance of unity. Still, as the awkwardly long title of the book indicates, I speak of many things. What, then, is the central question?

I began writing these essays with a very naive question: “Why do I still read literature?” Such a question arose because I had begun to feel, as a professional reader and teacher of literature, that most academic writings on modern Japanese literature did not offer me a clue why I should be reading literature—or more precisely, why I was still so madly in love with literature. I felt that only I could try to answer such a personal question. So I began rereading the works of the authors treated here, for they seemed to speak to my initial question, each in his own unique manner, with unparalleled passion. (I admit my guilt on the charge of omitting women authors.)

In thinking about literature in general, I began to sense a need to establish its counterparts in order to clarify its elusive contours by envisioning what it is not. My obvious and rather indecorous choice for this was “history,” among other discourses of modern knowledge-production. Another important issue that obsessed me was an apparent link between history and ethics. Iconoclastically, I attempted to place literature in opposition to our desire for truth and good.

There are many discourses in this world. They may appear as various academic (or industrial) disciplines or as different approaches to knowledge and wisdom. We subscribe to some and reject or ignore others. I sense that each discourse has its own seductive power to capture us *so that it can survive us*. I trace in this

book the itinerary of my seduction by a particular discourse named literature.

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