

# LITERARY STUDIES EAST AND WEST

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## Literary Relations East and West

Selected Essays

Volume 4

Edited by  
Jean Toyama  
Nobuko Ochner



University of Hawaii

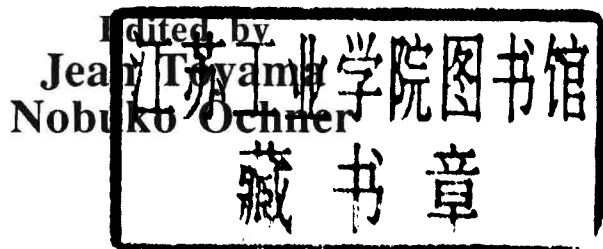


East-West Center

# LITERARY RELATIONS EAST AND WEST

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*Selected Essays*



Production Assistant  
Grace Elizabeth Ray

College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature,  
University of Hawaii at Manoa  
and the  
East-West Center

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## NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

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This volume comprises the proceedings of the international conference entitled "Literary Relations: East and West," co-sponsored by the University of Hawaii, the East-West Center, and Ryūkoku University, held at the Fukakusa campus of Ryūkoku University, Kyoto, during May 18-20, 1989. Because of the generous and gracious welcome of our colleagues at Ryūkoku University, in particular Professors Katsuzō Kimura, Sōken Togami, Itsuyo Higashinaka, and Hisao Kondō, we all worked under pleasant and congenial conditions. We would like to thank them for their combined efforts in making the conference a success.

The conference treated diverse but related topics in comparative studies of literature and culture such as the relationship of literature and the visual arts, literary typology and social role in biography, literary imagination and religious thought, and literature and cross-cultural interaction. In addition, Mr. Yasushi Inoue, a doyen of Japanese letters, gave an address in Japanese concerning his most recent literary endeavor.

From the work of these participants have emerged these proceedings. The order of the articles in the present volume, however, has been rearranged according to the following topic areas: literature, biography, religion, translation and language, and cross-cultural interactions. The editors wish to acknowledge that, in addition to the articles included in this volume, the following people, in alphabetical order, participated in the conference: Dr. Dan Furst, Professor Tōru Haga, Professor Isoo Munemasa, Dr. Marc Pachter, Mrs. Miiko Sakai, Mr. Hisahide Sugimori and Professor Cyril Watters.

Names of the authors of articles are given in the conventional Western manner, with given names preceding surnames. However, the names of Japanese and Chinese writers referred to in the articles, except one by Dissanayake, follow the usual Japanese or Chinese manner, i.e., surname preceding given name. English titles of works not yet published in translation are in roman letters enclosed in quotation marks and parentheses, those published in English are in italics within parentheses.

The transliteration of Japanese names and terms follow the system used in *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, with long vowels represented by macrons over them, except such well-known place names like Tokyo and Kyushu. The transliteration of Chinese names and terms follow the Wade-Giles system as in *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary*. Diacritical marks in other languages such as French and Sanskrit were reproduced to the best of the computer's capability.

Any undertaking like the creation of a book, especially one using more than one language, is the result of the efforts of many people. We would like

especially to thank Professor Saeki for his assistance in making Mr. Inoue's participation possible through the support of the Konishi Foundation for International Exchange and for his help in reviewing the transcription of Mr. Inoue's address. As for its translation and commentary we would like to thank Professor Seidensticker for his expert help in unusual circumstances. We acknowledge the work of Taeko Wellington who provided the written transcription of the address and Masako Lackey, Todd Fukushima, and Evelyn Nakanishi for their work on the computer input of the Japanese texts, including the synopses, some of which were translated by Dr. Mildred Tahara, Narahiko Inoue, and Diana Bethel. For the technical advice on word processing in Japanese we thank Dr. David Ashworth, Dr. James M. Unger, and Dr. Gerald B. Mathias.

In addition, we would like to thank Janet Heavenridge and the University of Hawaii Press for their expert help and flexibility.

A special thanks goes to Steve Bradbury for his keen editing sense, his sharp proofreading eye, and his helpful suggestions. And in this age of computers and their attendant complexities we thank Grace Elizabeth Ray, our own recent M. A. recipient in German, whose expertise in desktop publishing, problem solving, and formatting made possible what we consider a handsome volume. In addition, we thank Vivian Nakata for her proofreading skills.

Finally we would like to thank the distinguished contributors of this volume, whose care, patience, and goodwill were most appreciated.

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# Introduction: The Literary Turn in the Human Sciences

Wimal Dissanayake  
*East-West Center*

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Today literary theory has come to dominate the intellectual landscape as never before, inflecting and shaping conceptualities, discursivities, methodologies associated with a broad array of disciplines ranging from anthropology to legal studies. In the modern world, literary theorists are on a par with, and enjoy the same privileged position as, creative writers; their writings have inspired what can be usefully termed a literary turn in the human sciences with deep and far reaching consequences.

Broadly speaking, we can identify three important phases related to the evolution of modern literary theory. In the first phase literary works were examined in terms of authenticity and the value of the experiences communicated, the adequacy of form and style, the significance of the visions projected, and so forth. Here, the focus was clearly on the work of literature and its significance as a human and artistic document. In the second phase, literary theorists began to examine works of literature in terms of the structure, the literariness, and their status as a verbal icon. The emphasis was decidedly on the self-containedness of the literary work in question. In the third phase—or the contemporary phase—literary theorists have begun to widen the field of inquiry, making use of literary works as ways of reading the wider cultural discourse of which they are an integral part. The constitutive role of language, the importance of ideology, the relationship between power and knowledge, functions of narrativity, the decentering of subjectivity and its consequences are some of the issues that have assumed a position of centrality. The writings of such diverse thinkers as Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, Barthes, Bakhtin, Williams, de Man, Bloom, Said, and Kristeva, to name but a few, have exercised a profound influence in the shaping of modern literary theory and have pushed it to the center of the modern intellectual landscape. Literary theory, today, is almost synonymous with cultural theory.

Due to the remarkable ascendancy of literary theory in the domain of humanistic scholarship and its fecundating influence, we can discern a distinct literary turn in the human sciences. This phenomenon is clearly in evidence in a number of disciplines. Let us first consider the situation in anthropology. Here the impact of literary theory is pervasive and unmistakable, especially in the work of the younger scholars.<sup>1</sup> Anthropological texts and ethnographies are seen as constructed texts and not transparent descriptions; hence questions of rhetoric and textuality have assumed significance and a compelling power as never before. Literary style and figurality are deemed not as external embellishments but as

vital components of meaning in the representation of alien cultures and life-worlds. As James Clifford points out, the writing and reading of ethnography are overdetermined by a plurality of forces that lie beyond the control of an author or an interpretive community. Contingencies of language, history, rhetoric, power, and ideology need to be openly confronted in the process of writing.<sup>2</sup>

Modern anthropologists—or at least a significant number among them—subscribe to the notion that ethnographies are essentially rhetorical performances designed to narrate a convincing story. They see these stories as generating an important body of cultural knowledge through the encounters of self and other. It is now generally accepted that cultural descriptions are historically contingent and contestable, and that a focus on the modalities of textual production themselves open a valuable path of access to the central dilemmas of anthropology. Questions such as authenticity, epistemology, ethnographic authority, and domestication can be productively and purposefully analyzed only by placing language, tropes, figurality, and the constructedness of ethnography at the center of the discussions in the way that literary theorists do.

In anthropology, researchers go to distant lands and foreign cultures to observe the behavior of the “natives,” their life-worlds, their rituals, and how they make sense of their lives and to write up these observations in the form of ethnographies. These ethnographies straddle two cultures and decode one culture for the purpose of recoding it for another. Human culture is not an object that can be readily displayed. The anthropologists produce a culture through their writing, through their narrativizations. Ethnography is as much deskwork as it is field work, hence, the importance of understanding the modes of textuality and textual production. It is here that anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, George Marcus, James Boon, Renato Rosaldo, and Vincent Crapanzano, to name only a few, have demonstrated the centrality of literary theory. They, in their different ways, call attention to the problems of the translation of intimate fieldwork into pieces of ethnography by drawing on the theorizations and practices of modern literary theorists.

What the literary turn in anthropology has succeeded in emphasizing is the fact that cultural description is fundamentally an interpretive process closely associated with the dynamics of writing. The older view that ethnography is a transparent form of documentation has rightly been discarded in favor of the conviction that it is a form of writing where figurality and narrativity are central and that epistemology and rhetoric are inseparably linked. As Paul Rabinow says: “The self-consciousness of style, rhetoric, and dialectic in the production of anthropological texts should lead us to a finer awareness of other, more imaginative ways to write.”<sup>3</sup>

An important commentary that has generated much useful discussion among ethnographers is James Clifford’s essay “On Ethnographic Authority.”<sup>4</sup> His main argument is that anthropological writing, by and large, has tended to ignore the dialogic features of field work thereby allowing the anthropologist to take full control of the text. He wishes to point out how newer forms of writing, drawing on literary models, would provide a way of rectifying the situation

precipitated by the suppression of this dialogue. He says that "ethnography is invaded by heteroglossia." "If accorded an autonomous textual space, transcribed at sufficient length, indigenous terms make sense on terms different from those of the arranging ethnographer. . . . This suggests an alternative textual strategy, a utopia of plural authorship that accords to collaborators not merely the status of independent enunciators, but that of writers."<sup>5</sup> Marcus and Fischer, in their influential book, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, observe that, "While we do not presume to do the work of literary scholars in our treatment of recent texts, an understanding of the controversial importance of literary awareness of anthropological rhetoric has clearly informed our characterization of present trends."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, we can consider the field of history. Up until recent times, history was seen essentially as a domain of inquiry with a positivistic propensity. The task of the historian was considered to be the accurate and objective reporting of incidents that took place in the past. This is still the dominant credo in the field. However, thanks to the efforts of metahistorians like Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra, who are heavily influenced by modern literary theory, an alternate mode of historical inquiry has opened up, and this is rapidly gaining momentum. This newer approach to historiography that focuses attention on the problematics of representation, in the way that modern literary theorists do, underlines the crucial role of language, modalities of textual production and narrativization in the description of historical reality. Hayden White says:

Theorists of historiography generally agree that all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inextinguishable element of interpretation. The historian has to interpret his materials in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored. And this [is] because the historical record is both too full and too sparse. On the one hand, there are always more facts in the record than the historian can possibly include in his narrative representation of a given segment of the historical process. And so the historian must "interpret" his data by excluding certain facts from his account [of some event or complex of events] as irrelevant to his narrative purpose. On the other hand, in his efforts to reconstruct "what happened" in any given period of history, the historian inevitably must include in his narrative an account of some event or complex of events for which the facts that would permit a plausible explanation of its occurrence are lacking. And this means that the historian must "interpret" his materials by filling in the gaps in his information on inferential or speculative grounds. A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

It is Hayden White's conviction that interpretation in history consists of the generation of plot structures for a sequence of actions or events so that their nature as an understandable process is exhibited by their figurality as a story of a particular kind. A sequence of events that one historian may emplot as a tragedy, another may emplot as a romance or a comedy. Drawing on Northrop Frye's and Roman Jakobson's ideas, White has elaborated this in detail. He states in no uncertain terms the importance of literary theory in the writing of history.

In my view, history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of *appearing* scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal. By drawing historiography back once more to an intimate connection with its literary basis, we should not only be putting ourselves on guard against *merely* ideological distortions; we should be by way of arriving at that "theory" of history without which it cannot pass for a "discipline" at all.<sup>8</sup>

The two scholars who stand out most clearly as espousing the importance of literary theory in the writing of history as mentioned earlier are Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra. They both underline the significance of literary theory in understanding the codes and rhetorical conventions upon which historians normally depend. There are, of course, differences of emphasis between them. White draws on such scholars as Northrop Frye, Kenneth Burke, Roman Jakobson, and Michel Foucault. LaCapra, on the other hand, is indebted to Martin Heidegger, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jacques Derrida. However, their similarities far outweigh their differences.

Drawing on the literary critical tradition, White in his pioneering study of nineteenth-century historians, *Metahistory*, has sought to explicate the literary codes underlying classical historiography.<sup>9</sup> According to him, all works of history contain deep structural content that can be termed generally poetic and that serves as the pre-critically accepted paradigms of what a recognizably historical explanation should be. He says that "[T]he historian performs an essentially *poetic* act, in which he *prefigures* the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it."<sup>10</sup>

Dominick LaCapra, for his part, draws on the work of Bakhtin to enforce the point that modern historians can usefully draw on Bakhtin to investigate the complex ways in which language and meaning traverse all aspects of human existence—social, political, cultural, and personal. He makes the point that historians might learn the art of writing in novel ways if they were to follow writers of fiction into those domains of experience and language where critical voices, much in the manner of Bakhtin's polyphony, would challenge the controlling optics of cultures, both modern and historical.

Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, and others who subscribe to a literature-inspired historiography are not saying that historical events and fictional events are the same. Historic events take place at a specific time and place and are in principle observable, whereas fictional events are largely imaginary and invented. The nature of the respective events that historians and writers of fiction deal with is not the point at issue. What is at issue is the question of representation through language. As Hayden White observes, "Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same. In addition, in my view, the techniques or strategies that they use in the composition of their discourses can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or dictional, level of their texts."<sup>11</sup>

Philosophy, as it has been taught up until recent times, paid scant attention to the way philosophical texts were linguistically constructed, and the centrality of writing and figurality in the textual production of philosophical works were neglected. This resulted in the logocentric bias which tended to equate speech, consciousness, and truth as self-presence. Philosophers like Jacques Derrida have maintained that Western philosophy from Plato to Hegel, who were preoccupied with reaching an ultimate and absolutizing truth, ignored tropes and rhetorical strategies that are central to the construction of any verbal text, philosophical or otherwise. Deconstructive philosophers have emphatically called attention to this deficiency. This is, of course, not to suggest that such sentiments were not expressed before the emergence of deconstructive philosophers in the 1960s. Nietzsche, for example, says that truth is "A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are . . ."<sup>12</sup> However, it is with the writings of Derrida and others like him, who have had a profound influence on modern literary theory, that this approach to philosophical inquiry began to gain widespread acceptance.

The way in which philosophers and literary theorists have responded to Derrida's writings is extremely illuminating. Although Derrida has written on classical philosophical texts with great acuity and discernment, his influence among philosophers is far less when compared with the kind of phenomenal impact he has had on literary theorists, mostly in the United States. Deconstruction which is the central strand in contemporary literary theory is largely an outgrowth of Derrida's writings.

The works of literary theorists like the late Paul de Man, who was considerably influenced by Derrida, tend to propagate the view that philosophical texts should be treated as literary texts. He says that "philosophy turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature."<sup>13</sup> He calls attention to the centrality of rhetoric in the constitution of philosophical texts. Traditionally, philosophers have considered conceptual analysis the proper domain of philosophy and close reading and tropological analysis that of

literature. But what philosophers like Derrida and literary theorists like de Man point out is that epistemology and rhetoric are closely allied.

The work of Richard Rorty, whom Harold Bloom has described as the most interesting philosopher in the world today, is extremely important in this regard. His works, such as *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*,<sup>14</sup> *Consequences of Pragmatism*,<sup>15</sup> and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*,<sup>16</sup> have generated much productive and illuminating philosophical discussions. Rorty, who can be characterized as an anti-foundationalist and pragmatic philosopher, is extremely critical of the efforts to construct a systematic philosophy that valorizes the notion that the task of philosophy is to discover authentic foundations and arrive at universal truths and that philosophy as a mode of human inquiry can transcend the dictates of history. He feels that this is a futile effort and that philosophers should see their charge as one of conversation and not of inquiry. Rorty, much in the manner of modern literary theorists, emphasizes the importance of language and rhetoric and the complex ways in which philosophical language games arise and disappear.

Our access to reality is conditioned by language and the specific historical moment and what it stipulates as what counts as knowledge. Hence the usual claim by philosophers that philosophy adjudicates between truth and non-truth is questionable. From the seventeenth century onward in Western philosophy, the idea of representation has been central to any discussion of philosophy. The mind was seen as a mirror that reflected reality and knowledge that dealt with those reflections. And the task of philosophy was to design the strategies by which this body of knowledge could be obtained. Rorty discards this view. He finds that effort to discover the correspondence between language and the world futile. His aim is to refashion philosophy as a mode of conversation with culture, and to him questions of historicity and language are crucial. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, he maintains that the search for knowledge and epistemological certainty has always been a victim of its own figurality. As he says, "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions."<sup>17</sup> Rorty's conviction that philosophy is a form of conversation rather than a mode of inquiry, and that it is best conceived as a form of writing has much in common with modern literary theory.

Richard Rorty makes the point that philosophers like Nietzsche and Wittgenstein have made it possible for societies to conceive of themselves as historical contingencies instead of articulations of essentialistic, transcendental, and suprahistorical human nature. While he recognizes the importance of this ironic stance, he feels that this needs to be supplemented with a sense of human solidarity. It is here that he finds creative writers most helpful. It is in this light that he discusses extensively the works of such novelists as Nabokov and Orwell. Rorty, who in many ways embodies this new literary turn in philosophy, has stated emphatically that a society that takes its moral vocabulary from novels rather than from ontotheological or ontico-moral treatises would not interrogate itself with questions regarding the essential



human nature or the meaning of human existence. Instead, it would ask itself the kind of things that can be done so that citizens of any given society can live harmoniously and productively, and how society can be arranged so that every person's right to be understood has a far better chance of being fulfilled.

It is evident, then, that Richard Rorty draws not only on modern literary theory but also finds novelists far more illuminating than philosophers when it comes to questions of individual fulfillment and social solidarity that Rorty sees as the task of philosophical discourse. For example, he compares the novelist Milan Kundera and the philosopher Martin Heidegger, two writers he admires enormously. He sees both of them as seeking to challenge the Western metaphysical tradition that tries to delineate the unitary pattern that underlies the apparent diversity. However, according to Rorty, there is a substantial difference between the two of them as they go about their task. As Heidegger sees it, the counterforce to metaphysics is the openness to Being, a state of mind that can be attained more easily in peasant communities that have not been subject to the transforming power of technology, and where customs are relatively stable. As Rorty says, "Heidegger's utopia is pastoral, a sparsely populated valley in the mountains, a valley in which life is given shape by its relationship to the primordial Fourfold—earth, sky, man, and gods. Kundera's utopia is carnivalesque, Dickensian, a crowd of eccentrics rejoicing in each other's idiosyncracies, curious for novelty rather than nostalgic for primordiality."<sup>18</sup> It is evident that Rorty finds Kundera's approach far more relevant for modern times.

In the area of religion, too, the impact of modern literary theory is felt very strongly. The relationship between literature and religion has always been a very strong one; religious themes, motifs have inspired writers from the very beginning, and religious works have been examined in terms of their willed literary art. Many studies have been published that deal with the influence of the Bible on English literature, and in recent times a number of stimulating studies have been produced that seek to investigate its literary worth. Lately, the effort to examine literary religious works in terms of conscious and willed literary art has moved to a higher plane of analyticity, thanks to the impact of contemporary literary theory. In this regard the work of Mieke Bal is most interesting. In her book, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*,<sup>19</sup> she examines a collection of love stories centering around wicked and wily women from the standpoint of modern critical narrative theory. As she remarks, "The enterprise was one of confrontation: a confrontation between the ancient texts, the modern rewritings of them, and extant narrative theory."<sup>20</sup> In her next book, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death*,<sup>21</sup> the two versions of the murder of Sisera, in Judges 4 and 5 (Old Testament), are examined from a semiotic perspective. Using sophisticated modes of analysis developed by modern semiotics, she shows how biblical scholarship would stand to gain from such an endeavor. Her next book, *Death and Dissymmetry*,<sup>22</sup> is concerned with the reinterpretation of the Book of Judges as well as the modalities of its reception and understanding in the West. Making careful use of

modern literary theory as well as feminist theory, she demonstrates how the political and ideological coherence is achieved in the Book of Judges by misrepresenting and underrepresenting the predicaments of women. Instead of taking the text as a transparent medium, a window opened onto the world of reality, Mieke Bal shows the text as a figuration of the reality that brought it into existence and to which it is responding. She has sought to demonstrate how the linguistic and literary choices made in the text both conceal and exhibit a reality with which it interacts. Calling to mind the valorizations of modern literary theorists in her introduction to *Death and Dissymmetry*, the author says that she hopes to show how we can see ancient narratives, not as sources for knowledge that lie outside them, but as the materialization of a social reality that they do not simply and passively reflect, but of which they are a part and to which they respond. The work of Mieke Bal and others emblemize the invigorating influence of contemporary literary theory on religious studies.

Another area of scholarly exploration in which the impact of modern literary theory is increasingly felt is that of visual studies. Let us, for example, consider the study of painting and sculpture. This area of investigation was dominated by psychologically-oriented approaches up until very recent times. The writings of E. H. Gombrich and Rudolph Arnheim, which exercised a profound influence, are a case in point. However, during the last decade or so we have seen the way in which literary theory has moved up to center stage in visual studies. Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*,<sup>23</sup> in my judgment, generated a great deal of interest in these newer modalities of thinking. In this book, Barthes points out how not only books and paintings representing high art but also food, mass entertainment, wrestling matches, modern rituals, and such signify ideologically loaded meanings while appearing to be natural. His project was to de-naturalize and expose the constructedness of these diverse signifying systems. Similarly, a book like John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*,<sup>24</sup> written for popular consumption, demonstrates how paintings produce spectators and how they are representative of wider cultural discourses. Books such as these are emblematic of the newer quest for meaning and significance in the visual arts.

This trend is clearly seen in the works of such scholars as Linda Nochlin, Grieselda Pollock, Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, Victor Burgin, and Norman Bryson. For example, Victor Burgin in his book *The End of Art Theory*,<sup>25</sup> points out the need to examine works of art in relation to the political and socioeconomic discursivities rather than in terms of traditional aesthetic theories. He centers his discussion of art on the registers of discourse. He rejects the notion that discourse is only a means of giving expression to a pre-existent entity (such as individuals, social groups, political parties, and aesthetic conventions) conceived as independently constituted outside discourse. What he wishes to underline is the fact that discourse is itself a determinate and determining form of cultural practice. Burgin makes the point that discourse does not express meanings of a pre-existent social order but that it constitutes those meanings and that order. Such an approach to visuality and scopic regimes clearly bears the imprint of modern literary theory.