Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature

Volume 8
Number 1 *Fall 2009/Spring 2010*

Article 6

Fall 2009

Review of William Gardner, Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s.

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William Gardner, *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s*. Cambridge Mass.: **Harvard University Asia Center; Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2006. 349 pp. ISBN 9780674021297.**

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William O. Gardner's *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s* joins a growing body of English-language scholarship dealing with modernist and avant-garde writers and literary movements in interwar Japan; prior landmark studies include Miryam Sas's *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford UP, 2001) and Seiji Lippit's *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (Columbia UP, 2002). Gardner takes an explicitly historicist approach to his subject, writing that this work embraces the challenge "of probing the relationship between the modernist literatures that made a vivid appearance in the 1920s, and the rapidly transforming experience of urban life during the same period. In other words, it explores the relationship between Japanese modernism and Japanese modernity" (8). This is an ambitious goal as formulated, because the relationships between modernity and modernism in Japan were no less complex or fraught with contradictions and idiosyncrasies than the relationships between the modernities and modernisms of Western Europe or the United States. Although one of the distinguishing features of modernism was its self-declared "international" or transnational character, its local (and particularly non-Western) manifestations belie a diversity of practices and concerns that make area-specific studies of modernism such as this one absolutely essential.

The pluralism of these co-existing modernities is set in high relief by the Japanese case examined here, and Gardner does an excellent job of describing, in all of its richness and paradox, the cultural moment that was Japan in the 1920s. Although he focuses primarily on two authors, the relatively obscure avant-garde poet Hagiwara Kyōjirō (1899-1938) and the popular feminist novelist Hayashi Fumiko (1903-51), he offers a panoramic and meticulously researched view of the cultural, social, and material context in which these two worked and makes a fairly persuasive case for why they (as opposed to dozens of other potential candidates) are worthy of our sustained consideration. Hayashi has already been the object of some critical attention in the United States, most notably by Joan Ericson in her *Be a Woman: Hayashi Fumiko and Modern Japanese Women's Literature* (U of Hawaii P, 1997) as well as by Seiji Lippit in the study mentioned above.

Gardner adds to this discussion by situating Hayashi's autobiographical novel, *Hōrōki* (*Diary of a Vagabond*, 1928-30), at the interstices of mass literature (*taishū bungaku*) and modernist practice. Hayashi, by reflecting on her own position as both producer and consumer of cultural and material commodities and by bringing a sophisticated consciousness of class and, especially, gender to the fore in unprecedented ways, is able to represent the kaleidoscopic identities of the modern urban subject in Japan in all of their intensity and instability. These multiplicities are manifest, first of all, in the heteroglossia of the text: "Hayashi juxtaposes the multiple languages of feminism, anarchism, *shishōsetsu* (the I-novel), Proletarian Literature, fashionable modernism, the sentimentalism associated with the *katei shōsetsu* (domestic novel) and *shimpa* drama, and the classical tradition of *nikki bungaku*, or 'diary literature', to name only a few" (120). Multiplicity and multivalence are also expressed through the text's shifting temporalities and

montage-style cuts, as well as in Hayashi's concern with the "ethnographic" details of her urban environment:

> Cultural markers of various types--place names; song titles and fragments; reading lists; descriptions of food, clothing, and housing conditions; and the (often ironic) use of popular phrases and slang expressions--are enfolded into Hayashi's textual montage, not only for their utility in telling a personal narrative, but also, I believe, in order to construct a narrative of Japanese modernity. (123)

Gardner's discussion of Hayashi's work is a good deal more far-ranging than what can be addressed here, touching on the urban/rural, center/periphery dichotomy that defines the work of so many modern Japanese authors (including, even more acutely, Hagiwara), the vicissitudes of Hayashi's working life, and the relationships of women--to men, to one another, and to the conditions of modernity and commodity culture--in ways that make it well worth reading even for those who are already familiar with the existing work in English on this author.

That said, Gardner's chapters on Hagiwara Kyōjirō really break new ground. Gardner identifies in modernity both "centripetal" and "centrifugal" cultural forces--that is, impulses toward standardization and homogenization (exemplified in the Japanese instance by the *genbun itchi* movement to standardize--and, in some ways, to bring closer to spoken Japanese--the written language) as well as impulses toward fragmentation and heterogeneity. Hagiwara's work falls squarely into the latter category. Combining typographical experimentation, Surrealist and Futurist imagery, jagged rhythms, and a rather large number of exclamation marks, Hagiwara's 1925 collection, *Shikei senkoku* (*Death Sentence*), expresses what Gardner calls a "proto-cybernetic" view of the relationship between the self and the environment. The poetic crystallization of this concept is the image of the poet as "advertising tower," as desubjectivized "node in the transfer of messages." Gardner writes:

> On the one hand, this view problematizes the idea of an "autonomous individual" who would be the agent of political activity in Enlightenment philosophy. On the other hand, it precludes any recourse to the "self" as a place of refuge or retreat from "society." Even an attempt to bracket "society" in favor of an intense scrutiny on the "self" will, Hagiwara suggests, only reveal the viscera of society. (92)

Gardner charts the development of Hagiwara's thought by considering his involvement in the radical MAVO art group, and then places that thought in the historical context of the competing notions of selfhood and subjectivity that evolved in Japan after the opening to the West that came with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. A sampling of Hagiwara's work in translation is provided as an appendix.

Another appendix offers a number of short biographies of Hayashi, Hagiwara, and twenty-four other key figures in Japanese modernism. The list is by no means comprehensive, but it does constitute a handy reference and starting point for further exploration. Two of the figures included, the poet Anzai Fuyue (1898-1965) and the Korean author Yi Sang (1910-1937), receive more extended consideration in the body of the text as well, with Anzai (who was active

in the literary journal *A* in Dalian, Manchuria) exemplifying the poet as colonizer while Yi serves the role of colonized poet.

Although this detracts only slightly from the book's manifest strengths, it must be pointed out that Gardner raises a number of issues that he chooses never fully to engage. Both Hagiwara and Hayashi came to embrace, with varying degrees of fervor, the nationalist and militarist path upon which Japan embarked in the following decade. Gardner ends the book with the following observation:

> In the work of Hagiwara Kyōjirō, we can see a continuity in the simultaneous attraction to heroic individual agency and an exploration of alternative forms of intersubjectivity, initially envisioned as a challenge to public authority, and yet eventually fusing with a nationalist and imperialist vision of the Japanese people and polity. While the ultimate forms of these particular convergences were by no means inevitable, they point to deep-seated confluences between modernist ideas and imperialist ideologies with significant implications for our own ostensibly postcolonial and postmodern era. (211)

Claiming affinities between modernism and imperialism and/or fascism is, at present, a somewhat fashionable move, but it still remains contentious. One could argue for the anti-authoritarian bent of modernism just as convincingly, and the temporary or final ideological landing zone of this or that modernist writer or artist remains nothing more than evidence of the most anecdotal variety. I suspect that, had Gardner *begun* rather than *ended* his book with this claim he would have felt a bit more compelled to identify and discuss these "deep-seated confluences" instead of taking them as a given.

Similarly, Gardner raises the question of modernist and avant-garde literary practice in the Japanese colonies with his tantalizingly brief consideration of Anzai Fuyue and Yi Sang only in order to quickly move on to other things. Although recent years have seen growth in the long-overdue study of colonial Japanese literary practice, the important story of Japan's role as mediator of modernism between Europe and the Asian mainland is one that has yet to be adequately told in English (perhaps because doing so would require advanced reading knowledge of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean).

Advertising Tower is indispensable reading for those who have an interest in and some background knowledge of Japanese modernism, but its selection of subjects is perhaps a bit too obscure for it to serve as a useful primer for those who are completely new to the subject. For that, one should turn first to Lippit's excellent *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* and to William J. Tyler's anthology, *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938* (U of Hawaii P, 2008). Although Gardner's analysis remains limited to Japan, comparative modernists who wish to broaden their purview beyond the usual Euro-American suspects are likely to find much of value in these pages.