

Megumi Kato. *Narrating the Other: Australian Literary Perceptions of Japan*.

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This book is the first extensive examination and analysis of Japan in the Australian literary consciousness—one that is remarkably overdue given the wealth of primary sources about Japan and the Japanese that has been published in Australia since the late nineteenth century. *Narrating the Other* builds on earlier, more-focused studies by Alison Broinowski, Robin Gerster, Neville Meaney and David Walker, amongst others, on Australian images of Asia or Japan, as well as analysis by those who have studied national or international literature of a specific period or sub-genre, such as World War II prisoner-of-war fiction or invasion narratives. In addition, this book forms a solid complement to similar works on representations of China and the Chinese in Australian literature by Ouyang Yu and Dai Yin.

Based on the author's PhD thesis, this is a comprehensive but not exhaustive study of Australian 'narrations' of the Japanese; it is largely limited to novels, short stories and non-fictional war memoirs. The form of the novel is of particular importance, in the author's view, because of its 'wide scope' in representing character, setting and plot (190). As a result, however, the book only occasionally mentions other literary forms such as plays and poems, and does not broach radio, television or film sources at all.

The book is divided into chronological sections, broadly in three parts: early contact and impressions; war-time encounters; and the post-World War II to the 1990s, although the author does venture into works published in the early twenty-first century. Each section explores the patterns of Australian representations of Japan and the Japanese, how those patterns have transformed over time and how those patterns may or may not contributed to the formation of wider Australian views of Japan. One of the first significant authors in the 'early contacts and impressions' period, for example, was journalist and scholar James Murdoch (1856-1921), who not only wrote several notable literary works about or set in Japan during his thirty year career but also became lecturer of Japanese at Duntroon (1917) and the first professor of Oriental Studies at Sydney University (1918). Yet, as Kato observes, even Murdoch was apt to utilise stereotypical images of Japan and the Japanese.

Since the late nineteenth century, as Kato demonstrates, images of Japan as 'Madame Butterfly', the 'yellow peril', the hated enemy and, later, the ally or valued partner, have emerged and re-emerged. The author is careful to acknowledge that even at the height of certain representations of Japan and the Japanese, other representations were still present. In the late nineteenth century, for example, works in romantic genres sat side by side with novels about a Japanese invasion of Australia. Moreover, authors such as Rosa Praed resisted stereotypes in favour of drawing complex and nuanced characters: Praed produced detailed and intricate female characters at a time when the 'Madame Butterfly' view of Japanese women prevailed.

Kato's argument is that, over time, the changing political, economic, cultural and social relationships between Australia and Japan, as well as the influence of post-colonialism and post-modernism, allowed other, richer and more complex stories involving Japan to appear and, indeed, to come to the forefront of Australian literature on Japan. Such stories include, for example, World War II as seen from the Japanese side and by Japanese characters, such as in Roger Pulvers' novel *The Death of Urashima Taro* (1980). At the same time, Japanese characters in Australian literature have become less of an anonymous, collective horde and now have 'names, faces and characters' (95). Gradually, the presence of individualised Japanese even became a 'less extraordinary' feature of Australian literature (166). In Kato's view, Australian authors have become more confident in dealing with Japanese characters, although she believes that there is still room for confidence to grow in the twenty-first century (187, 191).

Despite an increasing complexity in our knowledge and understanding of Japan, and the literary genres in which that complexity is expressed, Kato observes that narratives of old continue. Japanese military invasions of Australia take place in John Vader's novel *Battle of Sydney* (1971) and John Hooker's *The Bush Soldiers* (1984), for example. Economic or business 'invasions' appear in John Brown's *Zaibatsu* (1983), Peter Corris' *The Japanese Job* (1992) and John Lynch's *The Proposal* (1995). Kato's conclusion seems to be that despite the plurality, involvedness and, eventually, the inclusivity, of representations of Japan and the Japanese on display in Australian literature over time, Japan has nonetheless still remained the 'different other' to many Australians—historically, traditionally, racially and culturally (3). In making this argument, she relies broadly on aspects of post-colonial theory enunciated by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. However, she acknowledges that Australian perceptions of 'others' have been for a long time characterised by Australia's own status as a colony in a region far from Europe and have thus differed from expressions elsewhere regarding the 'Other'.

It is to the author's credit that the book does, for the most part, avoid becoming an annotated bibliography. The book did, however, need more attention to the overall argument in some sections—it is often only at the end of each chapter and in the conclusion that the threads of argument are drawn together. Moreover, the research to set her analysis in context is sometimes limited. To open her discussion of Australian literary works on a Japanese invasion, for example, Kato cites British author Sir George Tomkyns Chesney's novel *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (1871) and William Le Queux's 1906 (not 1916 as the author states) novel *The Invasion of 1910*—the former is widely acknowledged as the seminal work in 'invasion' literature. Kato then distinguishes Australian works about Japanese invasion from earlier works on invasion from China, such as 'White or Yellow? A Story of the Race War of AD 1908', published by 'Sketcher' in *Boomerang* in 1888 and Kenneth Mackay's novel *The Yellow Wave* (1895). These, she argues, were predominantly about the increasing (and unnerving to many) presence of Chinese in Australia; the works on Japan, by contrast, were about 'international politics'. While drawing a distinction between fears of invasion from China and from Japan, Kato nevertheless fails to mention earlier Australian literature that focused on fears of invasion from other countries, principally Russia, France and Germany, arguably fears based on international politics. One of the earliest examples of a narrative of a French invasion, for example, was David Burn's

burlesque 1845 play ‘Sydney Delivered; or, the Princely Buccaneer’, which was not performed at the time but was published under the attribution of ‘Tasso Australasicatticus’ in the *Australian* in that year. The play is thought to have been spurred by France taking possession of the Society Islands, including Tahiti, in 1843-44, (particularly as a main character was the deposed Queen Pomare IV) and a belief that the Australian colonies were militarily under-defended. Moreover, the author fails to mention what is, perhaps, the first substantial written work of Australian invasion fear-inspired literature: W. H. Walker’s (George Ranken) novel *The Invasion* (1877), which told the story of a Russian invasion. Such works were, in essence, the forerunners to the works on Japan she discusses.

That the book is the product of considerable research in cataloguing, locating and examining the literature is clear. It is well-referenced to those sources; however, one does wonder why the sixty-three endnotes and thirty-two entries in the glossary, including such well-known terms as *manga* (comics) and *sake* (rice wine), could not have been placed in the text. The bibliography is less well drafted: it does not include, for example, references to the works by Chesney, Le Queux, ‘Sketcher’ and Kenneth Mackay, mentioned above. The end material does contain a useful short chronology of significant events in the relationship between Australia and Japan, beginning with the landing of the Australian whaling ship *Lady Rowena* at Hokkaido in 1831 and ending with the 2006 Australia-Japan Year of Exchange. The chronology is interspersed with details of major Australian works relating to Japan as they were published. This chronology can be used to identify literary booms, such as appear to have occurred in the 1890s, the immediate post-World War II period, 1965 and the 1980s. It may have been more helpful for readers, however, to have included an index, which would enable quick location of references to particular topics or themes in the literature.

Kato certainly answers most of the questions about the changing nature and power of representations of Japan and the Japanese in Australian literature that she asks in her introduction, even if none of the answers are particularly startling to those familiar with Australian images, representations or perceptions of Japan since the late nineteenth century. However, the strength of this book is in the breadth of evidence it supplies to support those answers. This is an invaluable work for those seeking access to Australian literature on Japan and the Japanese, some of which can be very obscure. Moreover, in her conclusion Kato poses a very interesting question that is essentially a call to the pen: who will represent Japan and the Japanese in Australian literature in the twenty-first century? She observes that while Japanese Studies continues to develop (if not exactly thrive) in Australia, it is non-Japanese Australian writers will continue to be responsible for most fictional writings about Japan, as the number of ‘hyphenated’ Japanese-Australians remains small and the number of writers from that group even smaller. One hopes that at least some readers of this book may be inspired to take up their own (informed) pens to add to the literature.

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