



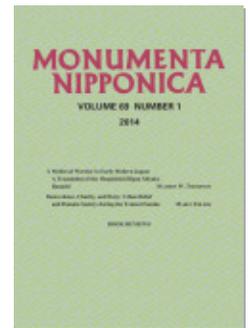
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Negotiating Identity: Nakagami Kenji's Kiseki and the Power of the Tale, and: Nakagami, Japan: Buraku and the Writing of Ethnicity (review)

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suiting for those new to this subject area. It is instead both a masterly summation of the current state of buraku studies and a fresh contribution in its own right, as it suggests new ways of reading this literature. *Embodying Difference* demonstrates the value of postmodern critiques of structuralist approaches in the hands of an author who is sensitive to his material.

Negotiating Identity: Nakagami Kenji's Kiseki and the Power of the Tale. By Anne Helene Thelle. Munich: Iudicium, 2010. 246 pages. Softcover €29.00.

Nakagami, Japan: Buraku and the Writing of Ethnicity. By Anne McKnight. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 296 pages. Hardcover \$75.00; softcover \$25.00.

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The two volumes under review are part of the recent rise in representation and identity studies. Both examine Nakagami Kenji's (1946–1992) negotiation of *buraku* minority identity in relation to the Japanese mainstream, considering his works in terms of how he used *monogatari* (narrative/tale) to challenge and problematize his positioning within national literature. While Anne Helene Thelle analyzes one work, *Kiseki* (Miracles, 1989), in depth, Anne McKnight takes a broader view, contextualizing Nakagami's literary oeuvre in relation to the field of ethnography, New Aka (new academicist) criticism, and Japan's colonial relationship with Korea.

Negotiating Identity is a revision of Thelle's doctoral thesis. It focuses on *Kiseki* to show how Nakagami evokes and then dismantles origin myths in respect to both *buraku* and national communities, emphasizing his struggle with the idea of "national literature" and one of its major forms, the *monogatari*. The introduction provides a good summary of *Kiseki* as well as Thelle's own argument, which is then clearly articulated in easily identifiable parts and sections. Part 1 examines Nakagami's construction of myth in the novel using *monogatari* forms; part 2 analyzes his dismantling of the myth; and part 3 looks at the discrepancies in Nakagami's text in order to ascertain the significance of *Kiseki* in his oeuvre and Japanese literature as a whole.

The two main weaknesses of the book are an abundance of typographical and grammatical errors and a tendency toward repetition and signposting. Perhaps the argument would have been better disseminated as a journal article, where brevity and concision could have made for sharper focus and greater impact. The great strength of the book is its willingness to entertain the many contradictions in Nakagami's work, specifically the discursive violence of textual representation and the paradoxical positioning of one within a community utilizing the discourse of those outside it. Thelle asserts that when Nakagami uses the stereotypes and discursive structures of "*burakumin* literature" written by nonmembers of the community, his own writing enacts a kind of violence to *buraku* identity. This realization brings us back to Edward Said and his paradox of exteriority—can one ever critique or utilize a discourse of which one is an object? Can the written object become writing subject? Although Thelle does not directly engage with Said or postcolonial theory, her work helps investigate the main question posed by studies of Self and Other in a colonial or minority context.

Thelle argues that Nakagami faced the challenge of writing against national literature “head on” (p. 21), even though *Kiseki* shows that he was unable to escape the linguistic systems of nation and empire altogether. Thelle succeeds in her aim to show the frustrations and discrepancies of the text, countering the overly positive views of Karatani Kōjin and critics within his circle. Her approach is very similar to that taken by three of these critics—Eve Zimmerman, Alan Tansman, and Anne McKnight—emphasizing the process of negotiation and conflict within Nakagami’s work. It is sometimes difficult to tell how Thelle’s analysis is significantly different from Zimmerman’s, but she skillfully employs critical intermediaries in her analysis of the text: Mikhail Bakhtin is used via Linda Hutcheon’s applications to parody, while Maruyama Masao’s thoughts on nature and the state are filtered through Julia Thomas’s analysis. This makes for an interesting and multilayered approach to the text. Thelle also makes extensive use of the Japanese critics Watanabe Naomi, Yomota Inuhiko, and Hasumi Shigehiko. English-speaking readers of Japanese literature and literary theory need this kind of summary of the Japanese reception, and Thelle is to be commended for her careful consideration of these key Japanese sources.

Thelle is also extremely clear on the features of *monogatari* and exactly where they appear in the text of *Kiseki*. She quotes from the novel at length and in detail, providing ample evidence to support her argument. Her definitions of literary terms (such as parody, polyglossia, and so on) are extremely clear and applied in a consistent way. Particularly interesting were the sections on Buddhist imagery and figural language, as well as those discussing Nakagami’s use of kanji versus syllabaries in signaling the difference between written and oral narrative. This kind of self-reflexive play on the textual possibilities of Japanese is not new—one thinks of Meiji writers in Europe playing with various languages as *furigana* to demonstrate their knowledge of foreign pronunciations—but the distinguishing feature of Nakagami is the positing of written Japaneseness against *buraku* orality. Thelle concludes that Nakagami could not escape the “power of the tale” since he bases his alternatives on the very *monogatari* that defined and oppressed his people: “What Nakagami demonstrates, more than anything, are the limitations of language, and the limitations of text” (p. 209).

Thelle ends her book with a thought-provoking consideration of the prolonged nature of the Shōwa emperor’s decline and demise. *Kiseki* appeared in 1989, the year of Hirohito’s death. Nakagami was keenly aware of the impossibility of the death of the mainstream Japanese linguistic/literary/imperial system and the impossibility of overcoming what Zimmerman and McKnight have called “imperial syntax.” In linking *Kiseki* so strongly to Hirohito’s death, however, Thelle minimizes the impact of the imperial system on history, memory, and the Japanese twentieth century. Imperialism is put forward as a system of the emperor and language, without linking it to the Japanese colonialist enterprise. This is the main difference between Thelle and McKnight, who sets out to extend the existing criticism of Nakagami and his struggle with imperial syntax by considering the effect of that syntax on Others both inside and outside Japan.

McKnight opens *Nakagami, Japan* with a new approach to Nakagami’s work, using the idea of “parallax” from visual studies in order to posit two different but simultaneous interpretations of the same object. The term “parallax” is clearly defined and explained and is applied consistently throughout the book. Once the reader gets used to the idea of entertaining two completely different visions of the same object at the same time, parallax allows the relationality between poles to come forward—thus Self and Other, *buraku* and emperor, Japan and Korea, occupier and occupied appear not as two irreconcilable extremes in a static binary system, but as two entities in relation to each other, defined not by the gaps or fissures

between them but by effect, influence, and interdependence. The more one reads this work, the more one realizes that there may actually be a solution to the problem of “gap theory” and binary systems. Although McKnight did not push her analysis so far, her approach may prove an excellent antidote to the postcolonial chestnut of “closure.” In other words, one does not need to be “outside the text” in order to become the writing subject. Using parallax, the writer can be at one and the same time subject and object, as well as whatever it is that lies between. This is a very exciting way to push the boundaries of literary studies, and one would hope that this book finds its way onto the shelves of specialists in other languages, where it would surely resonate with other studies of minority and national literature.

Like Thelle, McKnight focuses on the process of identity negotiation that Nakagami experienced in trying to write the *buraku* into *kokubungaku*, or national literature. However, McKnight also emphasizes Nakagami’s great interest in ethnography and how it informed all his writing. Nakagami drew on a vast archive of *buraku* rhetoric, including the Suiheisha Manifesto of 1922, and used his own fieldwork to create his vision of the *roji*—a *buraku* ghetto that is never named as *buraku*. McKnight pays close attention to this lack of name, arguing for “hidden transcripts” and “hidden polemics” that would be understood by an informed reader. She outlines Nakagami’s major works starting with *Misaki* (The Cape, 1975) and shows how the *roji* functions across the whole oeuvre, how it is constructed and narrated, and how it is targeted at the “discursive reader” (p. 6). By making the reader fill in the gaps between *roji* and *buraku*, Nakagami made them complicit in the production of knowledge. McKnight argues that Nakagami succeeded in writing the *buraku* into national cultural forms, as well as writing ethnography into mainstream literature, but refused to be representative of the *burakumin* in the way that activists wanted. This leads to a parallax reading of his work as at once *jun bungaku* (pure literature) and an engagement with the idea of “representation” itself. This reading of Nakagami gives us a new reason to analyze him in terms of representation studies—not just as a minority writer, but as a writer interested in representation for its own sake.

One of the most valuable aspects of the first half of the book is the attention paid to Japanese literary criticism as a field and how it has interacted with ethnography, structuralism, and post-structuralism in Japan. The relationship is explored primarily through that of Nakagami and his friend Karatani Kōjin, one of the so-called New Aka, whose *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (Duke University Press, 1993) had a profound effect on Japanese literary studies in North America. McKnight gives example after example of how Nakagami’s thinking challenged and critiqued Karatani’s ideas on landscape and confession, whether in his novels, in roundtables and interviews, or in his critical essays. If Nakagami Kenji is not famed as a literary critic or ethnographic philosopher, perhaps that should now change. McKnight’s book has the potential to change not only our view of Nakagami Kenji, but also our understanding of New Aka criticism and its role in shaping our study of Japanese literature to date.

Examining Nakagami’s relationship to earlier *buraku* literature by both *buraku* and non-*buraku* authors, McKnight shows how Nakagami drew on both kinds of representation as well as the more political rhetoric of *buraku* activism. Nakagami saw the Japanese-language narrative (*monogatari*) at work not just in fiction but in the legal and imperial systems as well. A major point that distinguishes McKnight’s work from prior analyses is her linkage of this imperial syntax with real-world colonialism and dynamics of power still operating in Asia. She clearly demonstrates how imperial syntax determines not only *buraku* literature but also the narratives of Others such as Korea. The generalized Other to Japanese imperial syntax is posited as a “South,” recalling William Faulkner’s work after the American civil

war. In Nakagami's hands, this South is transformed into and superimposed upon such Others as the *buraku*, Kishū, Kumano, Korea, the Philippines, and the Nan'yō (South Sea) islands and examined in terms of state violence and oppression. McKnight further shows how Nakagami's interest in structuralism and ethnography led him to think about issues of writing and representation in terms of power, and how he used Jacques Derrida and other theorists to show "how cultural forms of Japan's South have both underwritten and been excluded from the seemingly organic category of *kokubungaku*" (p. 98). Although many critics agree that Nakagami's most important concept was that of *monogatari* as "law and system" as well as oral narrative, McKnight adds that he was "the only writer to use both these registers of *monogatari* and also include the subtexts of race and ethnicity that has infused the French writings on structuralism and textual analysis" (p. 123). Just as we cannot divorce French structuralism from Algeria, it seems we cannot separate *kokubungaku* and its critical apparatus from either the *buraku* or the colonies.

Nakagami's fieldwork in Korea through the 1970s and his many roundtables in the 1980s show his adaptability to working in different media as well as his ability to apply his theories of literature and ethnography to new objects of analysis. Nakagami found a vitality and spontaneity in Korean performance and marketplaces that he found missing in Japan. More could have been made here of Nakagami's subject-position vis-à-vis the Korean colonial object, particularly since the aim of the book is to revisit Nakagami's own relationship to the Japanese mainstream (and its dominant forms of subject-positioning). McKnight argues that Southern spaces enabled Nakagami to "reimagin[e] Japan in terms of a regional Asian identity," his later works featuring Japanese nationals identifying with "Southern regions of their own country" and even "the Souths of Japan's historical past" (p. 199), bringing war complicity into focus. Her last chapter examines two works featuring young Japanese men revisiting sites that the Japanese military had invaded or occupied. Although Japanese and Western critics alike have assumed that popular modes of discourse have no serious confrontation with historical issues, this chapter demonstrates that Nakagami did grapple with such matters in manga and genre fiction.

McKnight points out here that scholars of Japanese culture tend to focus either on literature or on visual culture, but rarely both together. Literature is divorced from its cultural context, while visual culture is studied as "subculture." McKnight's attempts to study literature in the context of other popular forms is both timely and needful. Her argument that many popular forms have their roots in postwar Japanese cultural nationalism opens up promising avenues for future research. However, an opportunity has been missed in this chapter to discuss the "South" of culture studies itself, where anything that is not fine fiction or classical cinema is deemed to be subculture. Manga, anime, light novels, genre fiction, and photo-essays all fall into this category. McKnight does not question the use of the term "subculture" to refer to manga or anime, either in the main text or in the notes. She examines the genealogy of the word in Japan through Ōe Kenzaburō's dismissal of Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana, as well as through the New Aka production of Nakagami's collected works, which included unfinished novels and film scripts but not photo-essays or other mixed media works. However, no explanation is given for her own use of the term. Considering McKnight's attention to definition in the rest of the book and the care she takes to differentiate between terms such as "discrimination" and "racism" (pp. 3–4), it seems odd that a term so loaded with meaning as "subculture" slips by uncontested.

As course material, Thelle's book could easily be used for undergraduates working on *Kiseki* or the Akiyuki trilogy. Her summaries of other critics' viewpoints provide a quick

reference for Nakagami's reception in Japan and the West, while the structure and formatting of the book make facts and arguments easy to locate. Students should have no difficulty using this book while pursuing their own research. McKnight's book, however, provides more opportunity for class discussion. Some of the big concepts—parallax, subculture—may need explanation and expansion on the part of the teacher, but with such guidance students should be able to apply these concepts not only to Nakagami's work but also to other texts in a comparative framework. Her points on *kokubungaku* and the makeup of Japanese national literature could be used in class to discuss canon formation and minority literature more generally, while the final chapter on subculture could be used in many contexts to discuss the relationship between prose literature and other media such as manga, anime, and photography.

Thinking of these books in terms of their possible impact on the field, McKnight's effort stands out. She reinstates Nakagami as a real thinker and theorist, issues a challenge to literary criticism to take account of non-prose works, and shows a real interconnectedness between Korea and Japan in Nakagami's work that goes beyond the colonial relationship. People reading this book should exercise caution and block off large amounts of time in their future work schedules to accommodate the many new articles they will surely be inspired to write on the basis of what they learn.

Japan im Pazifischen Krieg: Herrschaftssystem, politische Willensbildung und Friedenssuche. By Gerhard Krebs. Munich: Iudicium, 2010. 936 pages. Hardcover €98.00.

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Upon finishing this formidable tome of almost one thousand pages, my sense was that readers could only find it, as I did, emotionally stirring. The book—whose title translates into English as *Japan in the Pacific War: The System of Government, the Political Decision-making Process, and the Quest for Peace*—tells the story of the rise and fall, and the fortunes and misfortunes, of an influential Japanese elite—events constituting the most dramatic years in modern Japanese history. By choosing the ideals of civilization and enlightenment, Japan joined the West to become a responsible member of the international community, its diplomats an asset to the nation. The country then took a path that would lead to dire consequences. How did all this come about? Why, during the 1930s, did Japan turn so militaristic? Aggressive toward its neighbors and ruthlessly exploiting the interests of other powers, Japan justified its crimes with a litany of excuses about their necessity for security and prosperity while suffocating its population under the guise of patriotism.

Gerhard Krebs focuses on the Pacific War and on the opportunities Japan missed to maintain a peaceful status quo. The book begins at a time when the clear leadership that circumstances called for was not forthcoming and foreign relations had become conspicuously messy. The government, under the control of the army and navy, who—as the constitution unfortunately allowed—overturned the cabinet *ad libitum*, was caught up in the wrong kind of choices. Britain and the United States could no longer accept Japan's expansionism to the south and into the Asian continent, especially not its undeclared war in China. The situation