A Literary Life

Kōda Aya (1904–1990) never wanted to be like her father, the dedicated and prolific writer Kōda Rohan (1867–1947). Most of her life, Kōda had stayed at home raising a daughter and caring for her father in his old age. Far from her father’s world of art and literature, she devoted herself to work in the kitchen. After Rohan’s death in 1947, Kōda took up writing herself, primarily as a means of supplementing her income. In her own words:

My motivation for writing was purely commercial. Because my father was a writer, I knew what writers were like and I found it most disagreeable. When I was a child, Father always sat at his desk writing, and all we ever saw of him was his back. I thought that writing was a dull, dreadful occupation. After my father died, all I had was myself and my memories. I was asked to write them down, and I did, that’s all. No learning, no art, just a way to make it through the world. Japan had, after all, lost the war.

Despite Kōda’s practical intentions, her short stories, novels, and essays won high praise from readers and critics. With penetrating insight her works addressed subjects close at hand: the lives of women, the family, traditional culture in a rapidly changing world. Her style proved subtle, elegant, and accomplished.

The reading public took pleasure in the fact that some of Rohan’s brilliance and artistry had rubbed off on his child. At the same time, critics found it difficult to compare the works and attitudes of the father with those of the daughter. Rohan was not simply a writer, he was a Renaissance man, the last of the bunjin, or literati. Literary historians count Rohan as one of the major figures of modern Japanese letters, and most critics revere Rohan’s erudition and his unshakable respect for the Asian literary and philosophical heritage. In his youth, he made his mark as a novelist—above all for The Five-Story Pagoda (Gojū no tō; 1891). Later Rohan turned to historical works and also produced books and articles on the classical literature of China and Japan. He wrote authoritatively on a wide range of subjects: urban planning, Edo-period culture and literature, Asian thought and religion, history, the Bible, fishing, and for-
eign films. Rohan’s style varied, but it tended to challenge the reader with dif-
ficult vocabulary and allusions to the Chinese classics. Over the course of his
long career, Rohan won numerous honors and awards. Kyoto Imperial Univer-
sity (present-day Kyoto University) conferred on him the honorary degree of
Doctor of Literature.

While Rohan reveled in portraying historical figures and events on a grand
scale and pondering metaphysical and religious matters, most of Köda’s stories,
novels, and essays concentrate on the domestic scene. In her eyes, the home is
the setting for some of life’s most significant dramas: the battles of adolescence,
the trauma and disillusionment of adulthood, the acceptance of old age and
death. Köda has created many fascinating portraits of women who are strong-
willed, hardworking, and independent: an idealistic teenager who struggles
with her troubled, nonconformist family; a woman whose avocation is attend-
ing funerals; a middle-age widow who works as a maid in a geisha house. The
unity of Köda’s thematically and generically diverse body of writings lies in a
positive, mature worldview that is attentive to the forces of time and decay and
insists on the importance of past lives. In the ensuing chapters we will look at
the forces that shaped Köda’s literary career and her works and examine the
place of Köda’s writings in modern Japanese letters.

In a number of ways, Köda’s career as a writer is anomalous. She did not
belong to the literary establishment and had no literary ambitions or artistic
pretensions. She made her debut during the turbulent early postwar era, when
the wartime experience and the nation’s defeat figured prominently in the writ-
ings of young and old alike. Köda neither joined the people of her own age in
reexamining the writer’s place in the military effort and wartime guilt, nor did
she share the younger generation’s aspirations for a new life and a new begin-
nning for Japanese literature. She entered the debate from an entirely different
angle by presenting the positive aspects of tradition and a firm sense of values.
Köda’s writings do not represent a nostalgic view of the past; nor do they pan-
der to a desire to return to the good old days. Readers accepted—and continue
to accept—her works with enthusiasm because they represent a maturity and
certainty missing from much of modern Japanese letters.

The maturity and wisdom evident in Köda’s prose have much to do, no
doubt, with the advanced age at which she began her career. Although she had
regular contact with writers and publishers from her youth, Köda exhibited no
interest in writing until she produced her first essay at age forty-three. As a
youth, she read a wide variety of books—from Thomas Hardy to Edo-period
fiction and classical verse at her father’s bidding—but was not particularly
enthusiastic about any of them. Köda resented her father’s writing and her
Kōda’s Life and Career

Kōda Aya was born on 1 September 1904 in Mukōjima, Tokyo, near the banks of the Sumida River. Her parents came from radically different backgrounds. Rohan’s father Kōda Shigenobu (1839–1914) worked as an adviser to the Tokugawa shogunate on matters of protocol and bore the title of chabōzu (tea monk), a post that demanded a high level of literacy, and his mother Yū ran a strict household. Like many families formerly associated with the Edo government, the Kōdas’ fortunes waned upon the abolishment of the shogunate in the Meiji Restoration. Even though the Kōda family lacked financial resources, Rohan’s parents taught all the children attitudes toward study and discipline that contributed to their extraordinarily successful careers later in life. Kōda’s mother Kimiko (1873–1910), by contrast, grew up in a merchant family that did not emphasize learning. The Meiji government’s reforms had banished the class distinctions that had been central tenets of Edo society, and therefore no one looked askance at Rohan for marrying the daughter of a merchant. Kimiko did, however, encounter resistance to her engagement with Rohan because of his profession as a writer. Writing had not been regarded as a worthy occupation during the Edo period, and this scorn for the creators of fictitious narratives continued into the Meiji period. Despite parental opposition, the couple proved compatible and Kimiko’s skills at homemaking and stretching a writer’s modest earnings allowed Rohan to write happily and without interruption.

Kōda had an older sister, Utako (1901–1912), and a younger brother, Shigetoyo (known as Ichirō; 1907–1926). Kōda Aya remembers her sister Utako as a bright, well-behaved girl. Rohan doted on Utako and, pleased by her curiosity about the world around her, had their small garden landscaped with fruit trees and plants, so that Utako could study them close at hand. If Utako distinguished herself by merit of her intelligence and enthusiasm, then Ichirō received favor because he was a boy. To the adult Kōda, the writer of memoirs, Rohan did not differ from other fathers in Japan in his desire for a male heir. Indeed, she portrays Ichirō’s birth as a moment of ecstasy:

I can well imagine how my father felt upon the arrival of his long-awaited son. Early spring; sunlight shining softly through the white papered screens; plum blossoms aglow with their sweet scent. In the distance, the drum signaling the
noon hour echoed, low and muted. Father made a toast and sat savoring his wine. In the other room Mother, feeling both satisfied and exhausted, dozed peacefully. When I think of this moment now, I sense a certain poignance in its very auspiciousness. Doubtless that was the happiest time in my father’s home life.6

During this rosy period when the children were little, the Ködas moved into a new home in Mukōjima. Rohan, who had designed the house himself, called it Kagyūan, the Snail’s Hut.7 The Ködas’ lot bordered on the vast garden of a fancy, exclusive club (ryōtei) called Unsui. Replete with persimmon trees, laurel, arborvitae, tall bamboo, a pond, and even an artificial mountain, the landscape on the other side of the fence could be appropriated to make the Ködas’ modest garden seem lush and even spacious.8 Rohan forbade Köda and her siblings from venturing outside their own gates, but the three, weary of the family garden, would on occasion steal into the huge expanse of land next door where they could play and explore.9

The Terajima area of Tokyo’s Mukōjima, where the Ködas lived, was located directly across the Sumida River from bustling Asakusa. In those days, the hundreds of cherry trees lining the river at Mukōjima attracted crowds from near and far in the springtime. Strictly speaking, Mukōjima was part of Tokyo’s shitamachi (“Low City”)—areas of the city populated by working people.10 Merchants, artisans, and others who had served the daimyo and samurai during the Edo period made up the greater part of the shitamachi population.11

The area around Köda’s childhood home in Mukōjima was partly rural. Rice paddies, vegetable patches, and an abundance of flowering cherry and plum trees flourished in profusion only a short distance from the Ködas’ home.12 Once Köda started school and was able to wander beyond the confines of her cultured household, she enjoyed this natural aspect of her neighborhood. At the same time, Rohan would berate Köda if he spotted even a hint of the countryside in her behavior or speech and would call her “Ayako, the night soil bucket hauler.”13 Although Rohan was among the most loyal of the literary types who had chosen Mukōjima for its natural beauty and relative seclusion, ultimately he retained a deep-seated attachment to his urban origins.

Mukōjima had won fame as one of the most scenic spots in the city. The daimyo, during the Edo period, and the rich and powerful, in the Meiji period, claimed as prime sites for their villas the area’s pleasant water frontage, distant as it was from the High City.14 Mukōjima appears in such Edo-period narratives as Tamenaga Shunsui’s (1790–1843) Shunshoku umegoyomi (Colors of Spring: Plum Blossom Calendar; 1832–1833). Edo authors chose the area as a
perfect setting for “fashionable promenades.” Even during the Meiji period, people crowded the Sumida River pleasure boats that floated past Mukōjima’s famous cherry trees. Old temples, shrines, and historical sites abounded in Mukōjima. A spacious grove of plum trees, once used by cultured Edo townspeople as a kind of salon for poetry composition, still attracted visitors during the Meiji period. The popularity of Mukōjima as a scenic spot also resulted in the appearance of other types of entertainment for visitors. Customers at Unsui, for example, could enjoy the company of geisha. Before the end of the Meiji period, however, the area began showing signs of decline. The Sumida River had an ugly tendency to overflow its banks, and in the summer flood of 1910 it dramatically displayed its powers by submerging vast areas of shitamachi. Mukōjima’s residents, dwelling as they did on the banks of the river, suffered great loss. Rohan sent the children to their Aunt Nobuko’s in hilly Köjimachi and then set about the arduous task of drying hundreds of books that had been drenched by the rising waters. After the flood, many of the wealthier people who lived in the area decided to move away. The Kōdas chose to stay put.

When the children were still quite young, Kimiko died, leaving the busy, successful Rohan to raise them by himself. Although Rohan did his writing at home, he was so involved in his work that he found it difficult to devote time to the children’s care and maintain the household. Various relatives helped the Kōdas during this trying time. Sorrow visited the family again in May 1912 when Kōda’s elder sister Utako came down with scarlet fever and died. In the autumn of that year, Rohan agreed to an arranged marriage with Kodama Yayoko (d. 1945). Since Rohan’s life with Kimiko had been happy, the family greeted Yayoko with high expectations. Rohan’s first marriage had been one of choice, and his partner was a woman whose self-effacing personality and diligence in family affairs complemented Rohan’s self-absorption and devotion to his career. His second marriage was prompted less by emotional attachment than by pressure from his family and friends and a personal desire to bring symmetry to his family. The couple did not get along well, however. Yayoko, in her forties when she entered the Kōda household, led an active, independent life as a poet and a devout Christian. She quickly realized that the new roles of housewife and mother did not suit her. Yayoko suffered from various debilitating ailments, as well, and Kōda therefore shouldered much of the work required to maintain a household, even as a young student. In her early essays from the 1940s and 1950s, Kōda drew a portrait of Yayoko—describing her as inattentive and lacking in motherly attributes—that was far from complimen-
tary. One of Rohan’s biographers reinforced this negative view by portraying Yayoko as “cold hearted” despite her avowal of Christian notions of love.\(^{17}\) In her later works, however, Kōda presented a different picture of her stepmother, one that acknowledged the clash between Yayoko’s progressive attitudes and prewar Japan’s rigid definitions of female roles in society.

Before her marriage to Rohan, Yayoko had taught in a missionary school and wrote poetry.\(^{18}\) She devoted much of her time to Bible study, prayer, and church activities. One of the greatest influences in her life was the Reverend Uemura Masahisa (1857–1925), a well-known, charismatic leader of one of the largest Protestant churches in prewar Japan.\(^{19}\) Uemura denounced the sexism of Japanese society and advocated improving the status of women. He fought for the ordination of women as elders in the Japanese church, and he condemned sexist language such as “gusai” (literally “foolish wife” but used to mean “my wife”).\(^{20}\) Although Yayoko adhered to Uemura’s philosophy and had remained single for years, life was not easy, either financially or socially, for unmarried women in prewar Japan.

Yayoko did not marry an ordinary man—Rohan stood out even among writers and intellectuals of his generation as an extraordinary and, in many ways, enlightened person—but she did join a household that expected her to play the traditional nurturing roles of wife and mother. Rohan recognized that Yayoko, like himself, would need a place where she could study and write, and he even had a room built for her exclusive use.\(^{21}\) Both he and the children, however, grew impatient when Yayoko spent too much time away from the rest of the family. When Yayoko would not come home from church or a literary event in time to take care of the evening meal, Rohan complained. Kōda later recalled her fascination with the Bible stories that her stepmother told her. But she feared for her father, who was fond of drinking, when she heard Yayoko talk about sin.

From Yayoko’s point of view, the arrangement proved equally unsatisfactory. Not only did she resent the pressure to occupy herself with the care of the children, but she refused to sit and listen passively to Rohan’s diatribes on nothingness and other philosophical issues. Disturbed also by Rohan’s lack of Christian faith, she would preach about hell and damnation to him and the children. Born to a prosperous provincial family, Yayoko was well educated and sophisticated. She felt out of place in the midst of what she regarded as a bunch of entertainers.\(^{22}\) Although Rohan devoted much of his time to scholarship, he had started his career as a writer of fiction, even then a despised occupation.
Kōda entered Terajima Elementary School at age six. Because Rohan had not allowed her to play with other children in the neighborhood, this was her first real exposure to the outside world. Although the Kōdas were by no means rich, Kōda was startled by the stark contrast between her own home life and that of the children of the many poor rural and working-class families in the neighborhood. The differences lay not only in financial resources but in education as well. In the memoir Good for Nothing (Misokkasu; 1949), Kōda describes her surprise one day at school when she realized that not all of the other children’s fathers were as knowledgeable and interested in their children’s learning as her father. It was also at this time that Kōda became aware of her father’s fame and the extraordinary talents of her extended family.

From 1917 to 1922, Kōda attended a missionary school called Joshi Gakuin (Girls’ Academy), located in Kōjimachi Ward in the heart of Tokyo, a considerable distance from her home in Mukōjima. As she had done poorly on the entrance examination for the more prestigious Ochanomizu Middle School for girls, she instead enrolled in Joshi Gakuin, a Christian school. Despite Rohan’s Confucian and Taoist leanings, such an education won the approval of the whole family: not only had Yayoko taught at a mission school before her marriage, but Rohan’s parents and siblings had converted to Christianity as well. Although Rohan himself was not a believer, he recognized the importance of learning about Western systems of belief and the English language. Each day after classes ended at Joshi Gakuin, Kōda made the long journey through the city and across the Sumida River to Mukōjima. Once home, she began another set of lessons. Rohan taught Kōda about housework, took her to see Western and Japanese films, gave her Edo-period stories and translated English novels to read, and instructed her in the Confucian classics and the composition of traditional Japanese verse. Her mother carefully monitored her studies and classes at school and helped her with English, Japanese, and Bible lessons.

Rohan possessed a definite philosophy of education that was based on his adherence to the principle of kakubutsu chichi. This phrase, found in the Confucian classic Great Learning (Chinese Daxue; Japanese Daigaku), means “investigation of all things” with the goal of spiritual cultivation. This principle was elaborated upon and advocated in China by Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and later in Japan by Edo-period Neo-Confucian thinkers. Rohan studied Chinese thought from his youth and passed on aspects of his own Confucian-inspired philosophy to Kōda. Even when teaching his daughter about practical household matters, Rohan told Kōda that one must know things of this world and investigate them thoroughly as a means of self-cultivation. The water in a
bucket is not just a tool for cleaning; it is a substance to be scrutinized and contemplated:

I had lessons in handling water. Father started them with the fearful message that “Water is a frightening thing, and an undisciplined person cannot use it well.” I grew up in an area that flooded often, and I feared water in those amounts. But water in a bucket? How could it be frightening?27

The years after Köda’s graduation from Joshi Gakuin were difficult. In 1923, the Great Kantō Earthquake and the ensuing fires ravaged much of Tokyo. Because of flooding and an increasing number of factories in the area, most of the other Mukōjima writers had moved away years before, and Rohan had become known as the last of the Mukōjima bunjin (literati).28 The destruction brought on by the 1923 catastrophe, however, made the neighborhood’s future uncertain. Although the Ködas’ home still stood after the quake, they decided to leave. The family found a new house in Koishikawa in Tokyo, the neighborhood where Köda lived until her death.29

The Köda household in Koishikawa had little resemblance to the harmonious young family that had started out in Mukōjima. Both strongly opinionated, self-absorbed people, Rohan and Yayoko either fought or ignored each other most of the time. Adolescence proved to be a difficult time for Ichirō, Köda’s younger brother. He felt alienated from the foreign priests and religion at the missionary school he attended and had trouble adjusting. After being expelled from school, Ichirō fell in with a group of rough boys. Köda became his most trusted ally and stood up for him even during hard times. In 1926, at the age of nineteen, Ichirō contracted tuberculosis and died. His troubled life later inspired Köda to write one of her most popular works, the novel Little Brother (Otōto; 1956).

Köda left her father’s home in 1928 to marry Mitsuhashi Ikunosuke, the third son of a Tokyo merchant family. In the following year, she bore their only child, Tama. The Mitsuhashi family ran a wholesale liquor business, and they gave Ikunosuke the opportunity to participate in the family business. He did not inherit his parents’ business acumen, however, nor the stamina to withstand the rigors of commerce. Despite her lack of experience, Köda threw herself into running their small retail sake shop. Köda came from a cultured, learned family, but she did her best to fit into the merchant culture of her husband’s family. The marriage, however, proved far from an ideal match. Not only did the couple barely scrape by financially but, to make matters worse, Köda and Ikunosuke’s relationship lacked mutual respect and affection.
Although Köda refrained from recording her married life in much detail, her essays suggest the unhappiness of this period. In 1938, Köda divorced her husband and went to live with her father once again.\textsuperscript{30}

The reconstituted household now consisted of Köda, Tama, and Rohan because, several years before Köda’s divorce, Yayoko had left Rohan to live near her family’s home in Nagano prefecture.\textsuperscript{31} Köda spent her days in Koishikawa as a homemaker raising her daughter and caring for her aging father. Despite his advanced age, Rohan continued his literary activities. Köda played hostess to a stream of writers, publishers, editors, and admirers who came to the house to speak with Rohan or assist him with his writing. As Rohan’s health declined rapidly in the autumn of 1944, Köda and several of his loyal colleagues spent countless hours taking dictation of his commentaries on Bashō’s poetry, his final works. Rohan’s deathbed vigor fit nicely into literary history, as it paralleled the final years of the renowned and well-loved poet Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902)—a fellow devotee of Bashō and reformer of poetry who, although bedridden, spent the last six years of his life working “with almost unbelievable energy... writing, dictating, editing, publishing” in the company of his “haiku disciples.”\textsuperscript{32}

The family was so absorbed in Rohan’s care that the raging Pacific War seemed remote. In the spring of 1945, however, the Ködas, along with hundreds of thousands of other Tokyoites, were forced by news of the U.S. military’s massive bombing raids of Japanese cities to consider the personal consequences of Japan’s involvement in the world war. Rohan resisted evacuation, but at last the sound of bombs nearby made him acquiesce to Köda’s plan to leave the city. When they finally left Tokyo in March, with books and a few precious belongings, Rohan had to be carried out on a stretcher. The Ködas evacuated to Nagano prefecture, where they stayed in the house where Yayoko had lived until her death earlier that year. The Ködas’ Koishikawa house was destroyed in May, during the Allied incendiary bombing attacks, and so after the war ended the family moved to Sugano in Ichikawa city, Chiba prefecture, rather than returning to Tokyo. Rohan, who suffered from diabetes, died in July 1947 before a new home in Koishikawa could be completed.

It was during the year of her father’s death that Köda started writing. As Rohan’s constant companion, Köda seemed the logical source for intimate details and a precise account of the frail but venerable writer’s domestic life. Noda Utarō (1906–1985), the editor of a literary journal called \textit{Geirin kanpo} (A Stroll Through the Arts), asked Köda to write about Rohan early in 1947, before Rohan’s death, but this first effort appeared in print only after Rohan’s
death. Even though it was the first thing she had written since her school days, the forty-three-year-old homemaker succeeded in producing a very fine short sketch. In “Random Notes” (Zakki; 1947), “His Last Hours” (Shūen; 1947), “A Record of the Funeral” (Sōsō no ki; 1947), and “Notes from Sugano” (Sugano no ki; 1949), Kōda focused on the subject suggested by Noda and other editors: Rohan and his family life. From the beginning, the inexperienced writer held her audience’s interest with her rhythmic colloquial style, sense of humor, and careful attention to detail.

These early works describe Kōda’s relationship with her father and her emotional reactions to his illness and death. Her analysis of her own psychological state is nuanced. Kōda could never simply write “I felt horrified when I realized that my father was dying.” Instead she evokes death metaphorically, as a visitor, and carefully analyzes its manner of imposing itself on the body. Kōda does not offer rosy sketches of this period when her father died or misty accounts of their relationship. Rather, she presents her father’s deteriorating condition in astonishing and vivid detail, from the pallor of his skin to his appearance as death overtook his body. She describes her desperation as she wonders to whom she can turn for help. Far from romanticizing the ailing Rohan, Kōda shows his stubbornness and brutal frankness. Though not consciously the artist, Kōda transforms the events surrounding her father’s illness into a literary text through a variety of tropes and a vivid and concise use of language. Aside from these well-received essays about Rohan, Kōda wrote, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a number of longer works about her own childhood and life with her father in his younger days. These fragments of autobiography exhibit the fledgling writer’s surprisingly mature and elegant style as well as her talent for transforming ordinary childhood incidents into appealing stories.

With her father’s death, Kōda became not only a writer but a textual persona. The conventions of modern Japanese literature value the evocation of a literary persona that does not differ a great deal from the historical author, as the poetics of the watakushi shōsetsu (personal fiction, I-novel) show. Shiga Naoya, Uno Chiyo, Dazai Osamu, and many other writers all presented a literary alter ego in their works—a voice that readers understand as the authentic voice of the “author,” performing a discursive version of lived experience, a sincere discourse portraying interiority. For reasons of readerly expectation and authorial self-presentation, Kōda’s autobiographically inspired narratives do not fit neatly into the generic category of watakushi shōsetsu. As Tomi Suzuki, Dennis Washburn, and others have reminded us, the parameters of the watakushi shōsetsu genre have evolved less from formal, rhetorical, or structural fea-
tures of texts and more from conventions of reading, print culture, and social and critical practices instrumental in the formation of the canon. That is, the reader who seeks a consistent set of common formal features in the corpus of texts conventionally classified as *watakushi shōsetsu* will simply not find them. Rather, as the hallmark of this genre, both the author and reader agree to understand the text as closely related to the life of the historical individual who produced the text and as a work of art/literature. The quality of sincerity (*makoto*) is also demanded of the creative act of writing and being read as *watakushi shōsetsu*. Suzuki further notes that the “I-novel,” as she calls it, is a “historically constructed dominant reading and interpretive paradigm—which soon became a generative cultural discourse.”

Critics and scholars have amply illustrated the mediating nature of texts and discursive practices—even those aimed at relating actual events and facts or the course of a person’s life. Given the evocative, highly idiosyncratic, and refined nature of Kōda’s writing style, Japanese readers and critics do not regard Kōda’s works that focus on her childhood and Rohan as a devalued form of nonfiction writing. At the start, Kōda concentrated on the past and succeeded through her writing in making herself into something she had never been before in the public’s eye: the great Rohan’s child, a role she could play only by resurrecting, or creating, her life with him in textual form. Thus Rohan is not the central figure in her narratives. In fact, Rohan rarely appears as a fully developed individual. The father, when he does appear, tends to be faintly sketched and speaks in a stilted, archaic manner. Even the very first essays—ostensibly about life with father—focus more on the daughter and her perceptions than on the famous Rohan. She acknowledges her original audience, made up of Rohan’s followers, in various ways. She writes of her own discomfort at having to use her father’s famous name in order to get help during his illness, for example, and she describes the involvement of his literary colleagues, such as publishers, editors, and his biographer Shiotani San, in their life.

The voice that narrates all the tales of childhood and the enigmatic father is above all distinctive. It was not until several decades later, however, that Kōda began to write essays that give the reader a sense of the face behind the voice, of a contemporary reality, and this was when she was in her sixties. Even in her fictional works (autobiographically inspired or not), the present is veiled in a cloak of remembrance—not the bittersweet longing of nostalgia but a frank exploration of memories. This quality reflects Rohan’s emphasis on the importance of investigating in detail the qualities of the world around us and, in this case, the contents of Kōda’s recollections.

During the first several decades of her career, the past offered certainty for
Kōda in the face of an unstable personal life and the uncertain world around her. The bomb and the defeat delivered a devastating blow to national identity. Kōda’s reliance on memory and the authority of her father’s intellect contrasted starkly with the sengoha (postwar school) writers, who sought a new beginning for Japan’s literature, and the younger daisan no shinjin writers (“third generation of new writers”), who plunged into examinations of the trials and battles of postwar life. For this predominantly male group of writers, the end of the war spelled the “erosion of the deified self” and the collapse of the patriarchal family system that had figured as central tenets of prewar fiction, especially the watakushi shōsetsu tradition. Kōda’s writings also defy identification with several significant trends in fiction by other female writers of the early postwar era. Even as she was criticized for wartime collaboration, for example, Hayashi Fumiko (1903–1951) produced illuminating portraits of women who were buffeted by the social upheaval and deprivation of the early postwar days. Consistently throughout her career, Ariyoshi Sawako (1931–1984) confronted pressing current social and political issues such as pollution and an aging population in her realist fiction. Kōda’s contemporary Enchi Fumiko (1905–1986) boldly explored in her novels the mythical, spiritual, and erotic potential of women, with frequent reference to premodern Japanese literature.

Perhaps the most notable current in postwar literature, for both women’s and men’s writing, was the growing fascination with stories that celebrated in explicit detail sex and eroticism—those based outside the “real world, in a complete, fully articulated world of fantasy,” a fictional realm where “it is possible to explore freely the implications of overturning the dominant hierarchies.” While a writer such as Uno Chiyo (1897–1996) had even in the prewar period focused on obsessive love, sex, blood, and death in her fiction, the postwar literary scene is marked by a predominance of fiction concerning what Sharalyn Orbaugh has called “disturbing themes” and images, such as “incest, explicit sado-masochism, amnesia, infanticide, cannibalism, murder, dismemberment, disfiguration, and so on.” The writers do not employ such themes merely for shock value or simply to titillate readers. Rather, Kōno Taeko (b. 1926), Takahashi Takako (b. 1932), and others view such “shocking appropriations of violent elements of the discourse of the body” as a means of political expression. Kōda, however, had lived apart from elaborate notions of a deified self and patriarchy and fantasy and the discourses of the body and sexuality. Her starting point, even after she became involved in writing, was that of a homemaker. For Kōda, modesty was a virtue and art was something that
belonged to others, such as her father and her aunts, who were accomplished musicians.

When Kōda mentions her writing activities, it is ostensibly to denigrate her efforts. In April 1950, for example, nestled in among peculiar tales of robbery and the latest in Paris fashions, an article by the fledgling author appeared in the *Mainichi Shinbun*:

Certainly I have worked hard on my writing, but the effort involved is nothing compared with Father. In fact, it hardly qualifies as real writing at all, when you consider that I have never done it with a sense of dedication. . . .

When first asked for an essay, I was so overjoyed that I almost forgot my own family. For forty years, I had always been the good-for-nothing. I had never won recognition for anything. At Father’s side, I became timorous, and was constantly being scolded, and never praised. Even when Father was pleased with a meal I had prepared, he would inevitably attribute its success to his own good advice. This, then, was my first experience with love. . . .

To the extent that I do not devote myself to my writing, I have been insincere to those who take the trouble to read my essays. Morally this is inexcusable. . . . I have thus made the decision to quit writing, although someday I may have the urge to take it up again. If that day comes, I must abandon these remembrances of my father and write about other things.43

Although Kōda writes extensively about her own life, her works are not classified by critics as *watakushi shōsetsu*. If anything her resistance to the concept of transcendent art and sincerity is a defining characteristic of her texts and career. She lacked “dedication” and devotion and saw herself as working outside the orthodox realm of modern Japanese letters and the hallowed notion of artistic sincerity. This also speaks to the distance between Kōda and the “modern Japanese concern for, and preoccupation with, Western notions of love, sexuality, nature, and ‘truth,’ which . . . constituted a major axis of I-novel discourse and radiated from the privileged signifier of modernity, the ‘self.’”44

Titled “Kōda Aya Abandons Her Writing Brush,” the newspaper article just cited has been interpreted by some readers as marking Kōda’s break with her past.45 The conceit of humility appears in other essays, as well, but the notion that writing also meant for her recognition and love—her first experience with love—is communicated with even greater force than the recurring humility theme.46 The praise for her writing from readers and critics and the repeated requests from publishers astonished and pleased her. Kōda had lived most of her life, unknown to the public, in the shadow of a famous, egotistical man.
Kōda’s essays suggest that Rohan constantly corrected and criticized her and that she felt unworthy and unloved.\textsuperscript{47} She also measured herself against other family members who had earned public recognition and fame, such as her aunts Kōda Nobuko and Andō Kōko, who were renowned musicians and tutors to Japan’s imperial family. Her stepmother Yayoko, moreover, possessed an intellect and interests far beyond those expected of a Japanese woman of her day.

If the act of writing and having a reading audience signified love and acceptance for Kōda, then the textual arena itself was a place where she could illustrate the deep bond between herself and the renowned Rohan. Even as she claims that she was an “unlovable child” and last in her father’s affections, she asserts the affinities between her father and herself. In “Notes from Sugano,” Kōda ostensibly sets out to restate her lack of favor in the family but ends up demonstrating the shared experience that leads to an identification between herself and her father. In one passage, Kōda has prepared a birthday dinner for her bedridden father. Despite the near impossibility of procuring proper ingredients in the lean years immediately after the war, she manages to scrape a respectable meal together. When Rohan sees the tray laden with the dishes she has cooked—sea bream (tai) and sekihan, a rice dish prepared for special occasions—he smiles broadly. He is so ill that he cannot take a bite of the meal, but even so he does not let Kōda remove the tray. Rohan goes into a daze, and Kōda conjectures that he is recalling a meal that his mother prepared for him as a child. At length, he urges Kōda to eat his birthday meal.

As in many of her memoirs, the reader understands that such subtle depiction of Rohan’s pleasure at her efforts represents a recognition of his affection for her. His association of the meal she prepared with one from his past signifies to her the special bond between them:

Father used to say that his mother did not love him. Despite this, Father surprised me and my brother by collapsing in tears when he heard that our grandmother had passed away. I also thought that Father did not love me. My Aunt Nobuko told me, “Your father said that he didn’t really like you, you know. All the kids he loved died and you’re the only one left. But you’re still taking care of him, even though he’s hard on you and makes you cry. I think you’re wonderful.” Her words of support soothed me in rough times and helped me to survive. Unlike my cousins who had artistic talent and had done well in school, I was qualified only as a homemaker, though an unwilling one.

Mr. Kuramoto, one of Father’s students, once told me, “Your father loved Utako and Ichirō so much.” I interpreted that to mean that Father didn’t love me. I heard that Mr. Urushiyama told Mr. Kobayashi, “Ayako, unfortunately,
was just never easy to like, even as a child.” . . . It made me sad that I was always the outsider, and, in time, my sadness grew into resentment. As time passed, I became stubborn. I really wanted to be loved by Father.48

Critics and readers tend to define Kōda primarily in terms of her relationship with her father, ignoring others who had a significant influence on her life. Kōda’s own writings, however, reveal the importance of women in her life and the wide variety of role models she had, even in a day and age when women’s spheres of activity in Japan were severely circumscribed. Kōda indeed struggled with her relationship with Rohan—more because he tended to dominate and demand a great deal of attention than because she wanted to be like him or take his place. She focused on Rohan in her writings in response to the public and the publishing world’s interests. In the textual realm that Kōda created, he was a justification for her writing and a reason for the persona to exist. Although she continued to employ this literary creation called Rohan throughout her career, his presence faded in time and portraits of other people, especially other women, came to occupy center stage.

Rohan may not have commended Kōda for her efforts in their home, but neither did he ignore her. Like many fathers in prewar Japan, he reserved his highest hopes for his firstborn son. At the same time, because of the good examples of his sisters and his second wife, he had every reason to believe that women could succeed in public careers and engage in intellectual and artistic pursuits. Rohan regarded his role as parent and teacher to his daughter Aya quite seriously. He taught Kōda about literature, finances, philosophy, housekeeping, and social matters. Kōda took pride in creating a literary persona and a narrative realm in which she stands steadfastly as a survivor and an example of an upright individual steeped in Rohan’s intellectual, moral, and literary teachings. She also brings to life the personalities and wisdom of figures such as her stepmother, who, although not nearly so prominent as Rohan in the public’s eye, influenced her life profoundly.

Kōda did not spend all of her time writing after her father’s death. In the winter of 1951–1952, Kōda worked as a maid for four months in a geisha house (okiya) in the Yanagibashi district of Tokyo. Disillusioned with her efforts at writing, despite her success, she decided to make an honest living at a job that did not provoke in her anxiety about dedication to art, sincerity, and her illustrious family’s shadow. Her tenure as a maid did not last long, however, because the financially strapped okiya demanded that Kōda survive solely on rice and salty pickles.49 Physically weakened, Kōda returned to her writing desk in Koishikawa.
Kōda was intrigued by the women who worked at the okiya, and she observed them closely during her brief stay. She remembered passing by geisha houses as a child in Mukōjima, and her fascination with these seemingly free and vibrant beings had not waned. Several years after her experience at the geisha house, Kōda wrote what was to become one of her most famous works: *Flowing* (Nagareru; 1955). *Flowing* concerns a financially troubled geisha house in early postwar Tokyo and the women there. The central figure is Rika, a widow who has come to work as a maid at the house. Although autobiographically inspired, *Flowing* is regarded by most readers and critics as a novel marking a new phase in Kōda’s literary career. It is her first sustained, full-length narrative that focuses on a topic other than Rohan and her childhood.

In the context of Japanese narrative, the alternative of writing “imaginative” fiction about other worlds, times, and characters did not immediately present itself to Kōda. In twentieth-century Japanese literature, the predominance of personal fiction—the vaguely defined genre of the watakushi shōsetsu—encouraged Kōda to choose the more familiar route: fashioning personal experience into fictional discourse by blending autobiographical and fictional fact. Kōda’s works also reflect the extreme subjectivity and celebration of the artist’s consciousness said to be inherent in this tradition. Thus the quality of the narrative voice and the use of imagery tend to be more pronounced than matters of plot or characterization.

During the second decade of her career, Kōda turned increasingly to short fiction and novels. She won literary prizes for *The Black Kimono* (Kuroi suso; 1955), a collection of short stories, and for her novel *Flowing*. Film versions of *Flowing* and *Little Brother* received awards as well. The first multivolume collection (zenshū) of Kōda’s works appeared in 1958–1959, a decade after she started writing. She also edited volumes of her father’s correspondence, essays, and collected works. Subsequently Kōda tried her hand at different types of writing, especially full-length novels. In these novels she employs a third-person narrator and concentrates on the mechanics of the plot. Like many of her works, the novels appeared first in serialized form in journals. *The Sadness of the North* (Hokushū; 1959) revolves around a young woman named Asogi, her failing marriage, and her friendship with her cousin Junji.

*The Struggle* (Tō; 1965) represents a further departure from Kōda’s accustomed realm. It involves the patients and staff at a tuberculosis sanatorium. Kōda drew inspiration from her son-in-law, a physician, and from the loss of her own brother to the disease. In *The Struggle*, Kōda employs an omniscient narrator and tries her hand at fully wrought male characters. *The Struggle* is not
so much an effort to emulate Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* as an earnest attempt to portray daily life at a TB hospital in an era before effective treatments for the disease had been discovered. Because of its subject, *The Struggle* appealed to a broad audience and received popular acclaim. In 1973, Köda was awarded the Joryū Bungaku Shō literary prize for women writers for *The Struggle*.

**Kōda as Mature Narrator**

During the 1960s and 1970s—an era of high economic growth—Kōda enjoyed the fruits of Tokyo’s material prosperity and domestic stability. Her reputation as an author well established and the ghosts of Rohan and her childhood largely quelled, Kōda boldly expanded her sphere of activity and the focus of her writing. Despite her apparent lack of feminist sentiments, Kōda celebrated, in her work from this period, the merits of living independently as an older woman. From the 1960s, Kōda composed numerous essays about growing old: “A Friend for Life” (Mono iwanu isshō no tomo; 1966), “Living Alone” (Hitorigurashi; 1962), “Just My Age” (Onai doshi; 1963), “A Good Day” (Tama no ii hi; 1965), and “Whistle of Grass” (Kusabue; 1977) exhibit Kōda’s characteristic style, powers of observation, and interest in the past. In 1966, Kōda published a remarkable coming-of-age novel, titled *Kimono*, in which she frankly and skillfully explores the contradictions of heterosexual marriage and celebrates the sensuality and self-awareness of female adolescence. Because *Kimono* was serialized in a journal and did not appear in single-volume form until after Köda’s death, the novel did not at the time receive the critical and readerly consideration that it deserved.

Consistent in her lack of commentary on pressing political issues, Kōda never became engaged in the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (ANPO) controversy, or in citizens’ movements protesting unchecked economic and industrial growth, or in the debate about war guilt. Even when asked to contribute an essay to a special journal issue on the topic of 15 August 1956, the eleventh anniversary of the emperor’s radio broadcast announcing Japan’s surrender in World War II, Kōda’s response is characteristically oblique:

> The night before, my photography friends had reminded me that they would be coming to take a picture for a book, so that morning I woke up thinking of their visit. I did look at the garden carefully, because I wanted to remember what it looked like that day. I counted seven bright red hollyhock stalks in bloom.
In the morning, I had a bit of writing to get done. Again and again, I would write three or four lines on a piece of paper, only to set it aside and start over with a clean sheet. When at last I finished the essay, I set about erasing all the writing from the wasted pieces of paper and making it into new paper. This was the same way I always treated paper, because I found that it calmed me down after writing.

At 1:30, I did a recording for a radio program. Rather than reading from a written script, I would usually try to speak only from an outline, but that day I realized that I needed two more minutes of material. I added what I thought would take about that much time, but then I ended up going over by a full minute. I became so flustered that I could feel my temperature rise. That, combined with the blast of the air conditioner on my skin, made me shudder.

Though August the fifteenth of this year scarcely differed from any other day for me, I must admit that ever since that day in 1945 I have been able to pray, with my eyes open, even in the midst of a meal. Today I sat, with my cat in my lap, looked out at the green persimmons hanging from the branches, and prayed about the horrors of war. Several friends came to visit.51

As Kōda matured, she produced fewer fictional works set in the social realm. Instead she became interested in writing about places in Japan she had visited, especially the sites of huge and catastrophic landslides, tall stands of virgin forest, the high seas—all places far from her home, her childhood, her Tokyo. Kōda’s interest in the natural world, apparent in many essays written during the last three decades of her life, makes sense in biographical, narrative, and social contexts. These extended essays about her journeys to places where terrible landslides had occurred include “Ore” (Jigane; 1968), Landslides (Kuzure; 1976), and Trees (Ki; 1971). Her motives for this unexpected change in focus vary: Kōda reported that she traveled to see old trees and landslides and the like because she found beauty in the process of the earth changing or trees growing.52 These journeys also provided her with an opportunity to ponder her own life and the process of growing old. In the face of vast and ever changing nature, Kōda expresses amazement at how she survived so long in what she terms her safe and narrow world.53

In her own way, in these later works Kōda was also addressing issues articulated widely from the 1960s about Japan’s natural environment and the threats posed by rapid and initially unquestioned economic and industrial growth. Kōda’s essays remind the reader that Japan is more than just a collection of massive, sprawling urban areas and painstakingly tended and subsidized
rice paddies and fields of tea. She examines precisely the barren and eroding mountainsides and steep valleys, the vast and constantly changing oceans, the untouched forests protected from logging companies. Köda reminds us of the enormous potential for change and destruction—as well as renewal—often forgotten in the seeming certainty and solidity of urban structures, economic affluence, even the earth beneath our feet. Indeed, she comments that most people forget all about natural disasters such as landslides until one happens. In *Landslides*, Köda recalls her initial efforts to become a student of geology:

In order to understand landslides, one must start by learning about what is happening deep within the earth, and then about the constitution of the continents and the oceans; how mountains are formed; the properties of boulders, rocks, earth, and sand; the earth’s time line; climate change, the four seasons, and botany; the properties of water; the disposition of rivers; and on and on. Only then can one truly understand landslides, I learned to my amazement. It was beyond me. In the first place, I personally did not have that many years left in me, and even as a child I had not had much affinity for studying. . . . So I decided to call it quits as a scholar of landslides. . . . But I did have the capacity to venture out and see landslides with my own two eyes, and to grasp the feeling (*kandō*) of landslides. I would be satisfied if I could create in words that emotion and convey it to my readers.

Her works from this period abound in detailed and precise description: from place-names to dates to detailed descriptions of the sights and sounds of the avalanches of earth and rock and the other natural phenomena she observed. Her method clearly reflects the training she received from Rohan—based on his belief in the investigation of things, careful observation, and narrative expression—and her subsequent refinement of this intellectual, aesthetic, and moral attitude and practice. She expresses only temporary disappointment in her lack of aptitude for the discipline of geology presented in books.

She also takes advantage of the knowledge of her many guides in the mountains, constantly asking questions about the sites they visit. Despite her advanced age and physical limitations, Köda remains determined to climb Mount Fuji to a famous landslide area:

Every time [my guide] explained something to me, he would talk about things with which I was not familiar, and I would have even more questions. “Why is that?” I would ask. “Could you explain the reason for that?” And so his explanations became increasingly detailed and complex, and I would try all the
more feverishly to set my poor memory into motion and remember what he was saying. . . Then I asked, “Basically, what is a landslide? Why does the earth crumble like that?”

“Well,” he said. After pausing for a moment, he replied: “It happens at a weak spot in the earth, a structural weakness.” A weak spot. Weak. This one word had the effect of calming me, instantly, like a tranquilizer. I felt so surprised at his explanation, because up until that moment I had always considered landslides to be something that one could see happening on the surface—as destruction, as the earth’s ruin, as erosion, as an absence. But a structural weakness is not something visible on the surface of the soil. Rather, it suggests the depth of the earth’s outer crust, and gestures toward the causes of that weakness.56

In her essays about trees and landslides, Köda rarely mentions Rohan directly or her connection to him. In fact, a pivotal moment appears early in Landslides when she visits a bookstore that specializes in geology and science in order to find out more about the natural phenomenon she plans to observe in the mountains. Flustered at the bookstore manager’s request for her name card, she simply introduces herself as “an old woman who lives in Koishikawa and writes random essays.”57

Köda did not turn away from human affairs entirely, however. She became actively involved in the reconstruction of a pagoda at Hōrinji Temple in Nara and subsequently published a series of essays about the structure. For someone whose life had revolved around the home, such public activity appears unusual. In the context of Köda’s writings, however, her attention to the pagoda seems consistent because it is commemorative in nature.58 Her father Rohan’s most famous piece of fiction, The Five-Story Pagoda, concerned an idealistic carpenter named Jübei who, against all odds, successfully builds a pagoda (an act of great religious merit) and proudly watches it survive a fierce storm.59 In this way Köda Aya’s writing came full circle: from the depiction of memories of her father to the commemoration of his literary works and ideals in her own narratives.

Since her death from heart failure in 1990, Köda’s fiction and essays have enjoyed new popularity, even with younger readers. This posthumous revival has brought to light her novel Kimono (1965–1966), as well as the reissue of Trees and Landslides, and occasioned a reconsideration of the texts she wrote and indeed her literary career. While some critics laud her works primarily for the excellent style and her beautiful Japanese, others have sought to reevaluate Köda’s writings in the context of feminist and reader response criticism. In the
following chapters I discuss the work and life of Köda Aya in light of changes in critical horizons, readership, and especially constructions of gender and the family in the latter half of the twentieth century. For although Köda’s ideas about herself as a writer and the purposes of narrative seem simple and straightforward, many widespread attitudes toward the value of prose narrative and the ambiguous zone that circumscribes habits of reading and writing a wide variety of genres—novels (shōsetsu), essays, memoirs, biography, and poetry—are suggested in the shifting reception of her works and the course of her professional life as a writer. Moreover, I wish to examine the means by which Köda establishes her mature professional and artistic reputation by claiming the importance of affect or heightened emotion (kandō) in ways that appeal directly to constructions and conceptions of affect in premodern and modern Japanese literature and culture. At the same time, however, I suggest an idiosyncratic spin, or inversion, on the relationship between affect and narrative, text and reader.

Because Köda Aya was a prolific writer, I have chosen in this study to focus on her most accomplished and provocative works and their reception rather than surveying her entire oeuvre. To broaden her English-speaking audience, moreover, I include a number of my own translations of her essays and short stories.

Notes

1. I refer to this author as Köda, rather than Aya, because Japanese critics and scholars usually refer to authors by their family name rather than their personal name (Enchi, for example, or Tanizaki)—unless they use a pen name (such as Rohan andIchiyō).


4. Van Gessel claims that for male authors of the katei shōsetsu (domestic novel) genre, the home was “the ultimate human battlefield, the ground on which the most painful conflicts are waged, and where human relations are subjected to their most poignant tests.” It is significant that Gessel elects to use metaphors of war (a male arena) for the home. This metaphor assumes that male experience must be used to dignify and justify the works of male authors who write about a traditionally female, and thus marginal, realm. Köda’s works are not usually classified as katei shōsetsu. See Van Gessel, The Sting of Life: Four Contemporary Japanese Novelists (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 31.


7. The family moved into Kagyüan in Mukōjima in February 1908. In premodern Japan, it was traditional for writers to name their residences. See Shiotani, Köda Rohan, 2:36.

8. Ibid., p. 38.

9. Ibid., p. 120.

10. Edward Seidensticker identifies the residents of shitamachi as primarily “plebeian” in Low City, High City: Tokyo from Edo to the Earthquake (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1984), pp. 8 and 249.

11. From these parts of the city arose a vital culture—as opposed to the staid milieu of yamanote, the “High City,” where daimyo and aristocrats had once resided. The Low City bustled with urbanites who valued flexibility and outspokenness. The Low City dweller spoke a direct, crisply rhythmed dialect that differed sharply from the nuanced, refined speech of yamanote.


14. Seidensticker, Low City, High City, p. 249.


16. Later, in the 1930s, author Nagai Kafū would write about his visits to the Tamanoi, a less exclusive pleasure district adjacent to Mukōjima. Seidensticker surmises that Tamanoi appeared after the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, when geisha and prostitute houses moved there from Asakusa. See Edward Seidensticker, Kafū the Scribbler: The Life and Writings of Nagai Kafū (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 144.


18. Yayoko’s poetry appeared in an anthology called the Shin-Manyoshū under her pen name, Kodama Teruko.

19. Uemura performed Rohan and Yayoko’s wedding ceremony. He also had earlier contacts with Rohan’s family because he baptized Rohan’s parents and siblings. (Rohan was working in Hokkaido at the time.) Poet Masamune Hakuchō (1879–1962) and novelist Kunikida Doppo (1871–1908) were among Uemura’s followers.

21. Poet and sculptor Takamura Kōtarō and aspiring painter Chieko are another example of a married couple who, despite declarations of equal opportunities for both male and female in their artistic pursuits, ended up in a quite traditional division of labor. In Chieko’s case, especially, this early attempt at a new type of marriage proved disastrous.

22. Rohan’s two sisters, Andö Köko and Kōda Nobuko, were well-respected Western classical musicians.


24. Ibid., pp. 92–94.


26. *Konna koto, KAZS* 1:164–166. Kōda states that the only time she felt close to her stepmother was during this period when Yayoko showed interest in her studies.

27. The long series of essays titled “Atomiyosowaka” (Incantations; 1948) concerns the way Rohan taught Kōda; *Konna koto, KAZS* 1:121–122.

28. As a result of the prosperity brought to Japan by World War I, a growing number of factories had appeared on the easily accessible east bank of the river.

29. Rohan’s sister Nobuko had lived in Koishikawa, but by this time she had moved to Kōjimachi. The sister of writer Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896) helped the Kōdas find their first Koishikawa house.


31. Although Rohan and Yayoko were not compatible, they did not divorce. Divorce was rather uncommon in prewar Japan and would have made life very difficult for both of them. See Shiotani, *Kōda Rohan*, 2:195 and 3:209–210.

32. Brower further comments about Shiki that it “is not difficult to understand why his premature death at the age of thirty-five should have been so deeply felt, or why his memory became a cult with his most loyal followers.” See Robert Brower, “Masaoka Shiki and Tanka Reform,” in *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald H. Shively (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 386–387.

33. Noda Utarō was active in reviving *Geirin kanpo* soon after the end of the war. He was known as a poet and author of numerous books about literature, including the well-known *bungaku sanpo* (literary stroll) series.

34. All are included in *KAZS* 1.
35. Notable autobiographical pieces include *Misokkasu* (Good for Nothing; 1949) and *Kusa no hana* (Flowers in the Grass; 1951).


The use of factual materials is not always the sole criterion for distinguishing fiction and nonfiction. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has discussed the importance of the author’s and readers’ assumptions in defining categories of fiction and nonfiction. See Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 47 and 141–144. Also relevant to this question of literature and reality is Todorov’s assertion that while literary works do “evoke life . . . the absence of a rigorous relation of truth must at the same time make us extremely cautious: the text can ‘reflect’ social life but can just as well incarnate its exact opposite. Such a perspective [of viewing literary works as a means of understanding culture and societies at certain points in history] is quite legitimate, but leads us beyond poetics: by putting literature on the same level as any other document, we are obviously no longer concerned with its specific literary qualities.” See Tsvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 18.


38. “Sugano no ki,” KAZS 1:13ff; 47ff.


40. Gessel, Sting of Life, p. 68.


42. Ibid., pp. 127–128.

43. Yükan Mainichi Shinbun, 7 April 1950, p. 5.


46. Humility is a common aspect of discourse in Japanese, even in narrative. It is a culturally acceptable form of self-presentation, whether it originates in sincere self-deprecation or as a socially sanctioned rhetorical style.

47. Because Rohan and his biographers did not write much about the dynamics of their life together, there is little corroborating evidence for Kōda’s view of her relationship with her father. If anything, the account by Aoki Tama, Kōda’s daughter, portrays her mother as a strong and sometimes difficult individual who could hold her own in confrontations with Rohan. See Aoki Tama, Koishikawa no uchi (Kōdansha, 1994). See also a public lecture by Kōda on her personal and professional development and her family relations, “Kōen: ‘Deai to kandō’ Iwanami no bunka kōenkai nite,” in KAZS 22 (cassette tape).


49. Interview with the author, 21 May 1986.

50. Many of these essays appear in the volume Daidokoro no Oto (Kōdansha, 1992).


52. Interview with the author, 21 May 1986.
53. Collections of these essays were published posthumously in the volumes _Kuzure_ (Landslides; Kōdansha, 1991) and _Ki_ (Trees; Shinchōsha, 1992) and also in _KAZS_ 19 and 21.


55. Ibid., pp. 24–25.

56. Ibid., pp. 28–30.

57. Ibid., p. 20.

58. Vance defines commemoration as “any gesture, ritualized or not, whose end is to recover, in the name of collectivity, some being or event either anterior in time or outside of time in order to . . . animate, or make meaningful a moment in the present.” See Eugene Vance, “Roland and the Poetics of Memory,” in _Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism_, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 374.