**Introduction**

Some critics believe that the age of autobiography is over, that autobiography is no longer relevant to our postmodern world. Others contend that all writing must be taken as autobiographical. Regardless of what critics proclaim, however, autobiography remains a remarkably popular and resilient mode of reading—and writing. Why is the act of reading autobiographies so appealing? Obviously, it affords the reader a unique insight into the “times” and into the worldview of the narrator. For the historian, the appeal of self-representational narratives may be rooted in what new historicist Stephen Greenblatt refers to as a “desire to speak with the dead.”¹ As he explains, it was the fact that “the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves” behind that initially drew him to the study of history. He comments:

> Many of the traces have little resonance, though every one, even the most trivial or tedious, contains some fragment of lost life; others seem uncannily full of the will to be heard.²

For anyone interested in recovering “some fragment of lost life” or in discovering voices that manifest this “will to be heard,” then self-representational narratives are excellent resources to explore.

But there is more to the appeal of autobiographies than just mining them for their “content.” Discerning readers may wish to reflect on the process by which autobiographical meaning or “truth” is constructed. In autobiography, there is a presumed relationship between a narrating subject and lived experience, between a self, its patterns of internal growth and development, and external reality. But it is now readily accepted that the “self” we observe remembering and recreating its past in a text is little more than a “fictive structure.”³ If the individual is nothing more than a discursive formation, then autobiography must be seen as one of the major forms of discourse by which myths about the individual and self-

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formation are produced and sustained. But autobiography has not always been perceived in this way. Initially, autobiography criticism was a thoroughly hegemonic practice, one that privileged “a teleological narrative enshrining the ‘individual’ and ‘his’ uniqueness.” This traditional view of autobiography, which was largely based on readings and critical analyses of such seminal texts as those by St. Augustine, Goethe, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry Adams, and Benjamin Franklin, was thoroughly masculinist. The universalizing agenda that it embraced left little room for the kind of multiple, contradicted subjectivities that might be encountered in women’s self-writing. Recognizing that reading is not a neutral or innocent act and that things like race, gender, class, and nationality shape how we approach a text, feminist scholars have challenged the traditional way of looking at autobiography, suggesting instead that self-writing can be seen as “a medium of resistance and counter discourse” and that it has “provide[d] locations where subjects disrupted dominant conceptions of the bourgeois self.”

**Feminist Criticism of Self-Writing**

By introducing the notion of gender, then, this already complex, multi-layered discourse on autobiography revolving around individualism, the self, and identity instantly becomes much more complicated. Back in the late 1970s, when I first began exploring autobiography criticism, a bibliographic search on the subject would yield only a handful of monographs, almost all written by males and almost all of them exclusively about male autobiographers. But by the 1980s, feminist critics had begun to challenge the idea that a single, essentialist conception of the self is adequate to define the narrative practices of diverse subjects who struggle to find their voice from a position other than of the privileged center. The first person to focus attention on the absence of women’s texts and to bring the feminist perspective to critical discussions of self-writing was Estelle Jelinek, who discovered in the late 1970s that there was “practically no criticism on women’s autobiographies, except for that on Gertrude Stein’s.” Her two works, *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (1980) and *The Tradition of Women’s Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present* (1986) did much to emphasize the discontinuous and fragmented nature of women’s autobiographies. A central argument put forth by Jelinek but echoed by many others after her is that since there is a discernible difference in the lived reality of men and women, this must
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somehow translate into differences in their texts. One of the standard ways of conceptualizing this is to argue that male texts are thought to feature coherence and linearity while those by women are characterized by discontinuity, fragmentation, and a focus on personal or private matters as opposed to public ones. As Jelinek notes in Women in Autobiography,

Irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portraits by women. The narratives of their lives are often not chronological and progressive, but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters.8

Obviously, signs of disruption, fragmentation, and discontinuity can occur in any autobiography regardless of the gender of the author. But, speaking in the broadest terms, many of the classical (male) texts do follow a chronological, linear path of development, culminating in the triumph of an individual over some circumstances, where those by females often do not. On the other hand, as this study will show, many autobiographies by Japanese women essentially follow a linear, chronological trajectory from birth to the narrative present, yet they are far from unmarked by disruptions and discontinuities.

Jelinek’s pioneering effort was followed by Domna C. Stanton’s The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century, the preface of which states clearly that

The subject of this volume—female autobiographies memoirs, letters and diaries—represents one of those cases of maddening neglect that have motivated feminist scholarship since 1970.9

This collection of essays on women’s autobiography includes Stanton’s own classic introductory essay, “Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?” where she states her belief that there exists

a fundamental deviance that pervaded autogynographies and produced conflicts in the divided self: the act of writing itself. For a symbolic order that equates the idea of author with a phallic pen transmitted from father to son places the female writer in contradiction to the dominant definition of woman and casts her as the usurper of male prerogatives.10

And further,
Because of woman's different status in the symbolic order, autogynography, I concluded, dramatized the fundamental alterity and non-presence of the subject, even as it asserts itself discursively and strives toward an always impossible self possession.11

Stanton points directly to differences not only in lived experiences, or in the sociopolitical order, but also in the very act of writing itself. Specifically, she alludes to a kind of difference in female self-writing that preserves the “otherness” of the female voice and interferes with its full presence in the text.

Frustration over the “maddening neglect” of women’s self-writing inspired a number of other feminist scholars to turn their attention to women’s autobiography. The pioneering work of one of these scholars, Sidonie Smith, stands out among all the others. In her first book, *The Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (1987), Smith notes that although “gender ideologies and the boundaries they place around women’s proper life script, textual inscription and speaking voice” have operated to hamper women’s attempts at self-representation,

there have always been women who cross the line between private and public utterance, unmasking their desire for the empowering self-interpretation of autobiography as they unmasked in their life the desire for publicity. Such women approach the autobiographical territory from their position as speakers at the margins of discourse. In so doing, they find themselves implicated in a complex posture toward the engendering of autobiographical narrative.12

This notion of female autobiographers as voices who must speak from the margins of discourse—“always removed from the center of power within the culture she inhabits”—is central to Smith’s argument. Simply put,

Autobiography is itself one of the forms of selfhood constituting the idea of man and in turn promoting the idea. Choosing to write autobiography, therefore, she unmasks her transgressive desire for cultural and literary authority. But the story of man is not exactly her story; and so her relationship to the empowering figure of male selfhood is inevitably problematic. To complicate matters further, she must also engage the fictions of selfhood that constitute the idea of woman and that specify the parameters of female subjectivity, including women’s problematic relationship to language, desire, power, and meaning. Since the ideology of gender makes of woman’s life
script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap on the patriarchal culture, the ideal woman is self-effacing rather than self-promoting, and her “natural” story shapes itself not around the public, heroic life but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that, according to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography.\textsuperscript{13}

Smith’s observations that “the story of man is not exactly her story” and “the ideology of gender makes of woman’s life script a nonstory, a silent space, a gap” echo Jelinek’s argument about women’s autobiography avoiding “the public, heroic life” in favor of more “circumstantial, contingent” features of her experience. But both Stanton and Smith also raise important issues about the “transgressive” nature of women’s desire to develop their own voice and tell their own story. Smith sees the female autobiographer as caught in a double bind: if she elects to say nothing or little, she is silenced; but when she tries speak, to recount her life, she goes up against all the patriarchal assumptions about what an individual self is and how its story should be told.

Smith’s way of conceptualizing the issues and problems that female self-writing poses was fresh and insightful and inspired other feminist scholars to pursue these kinds of questions further. Following closely on the heels of these path-breaking works by Jelinek, Stanton, and Smith, there was an outpouring of feminist autobiography criticism. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, for example, were explicit about the position of their own work when they observed in the introduction to *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography* (1988) that,

\begin{quote}
[c]riticism of women’s autobiography over the past five years reflects important shifts in feminist argument and commitment. This book was conceived as a complement to Estelle Jelinek’s groundbreaking *Women’s Autobiography* and Domna Stanton’s recently reissued *The Female Autograph*.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Other works followed in rapid succession, ranging from Shari Benstock’s *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women’s Autobiographical Writings* (1988) to Leigh Gilmore’s very important study, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* (1994).\textsuperscript{15} The thrust of these studies was both to reveal the existence of many autobiographical texts by female authors that were heretofore unknown and to demonstrate that these and other texts could yield different readings than traditional reading practices might suggest. These scholars argue convincingly that
women, as the “Other,” are trapped in bodies that define their identity, while males are free to construct themselves as individuals in search of souls, in search of their true, inner, noncorporeal identity. Moreover, they contend that because the canon consists of traditional studies of male texts, the experience of the male subject has been universalized and the assumptions of the patriarchy effortlessly “reproduced” in the “genre” we know as autobiography. The problem is articulated quite succinctly by Judy Long.

The generic/male subject nests within a masculine canon built upon commentary from male critics. Male experience is foundational. Correlatively, in almost all cases males are selected to typify knowledge, culture, and history. A mutual magnification operates among these elements that acts to naturalize the hegemony of the male subject and the male canon. Female subjects are correspondingly diminished. The same critical processes that elevate the male subject disadvantage the female.16

This notion of the male experience as foundational is a central argument for feminist critics because it brings with it the belief that “female subjects are correspondingly diminished.” The female autobiographical subject often has to turn to “the story and speaking position of the representative man” for inspiration and direction, instead of to a female figure, which means that she must silence or repress that part of her which is female.17 This can undoubtedly be a source of tension in the text. The narratives we encounter in this volume are often fragmented and manifest a tension between the goals and plans articulated by the narrator and the social and political reality in which these desires unfold. To draw again upon Long.

Female autobiography is not autobiography as usual. Women’s self-writing is animated by the tension between external control of women and the assertion of female subjectivity, a tension visible in women’s personal narratives of whatever form. For the woman autobiographer, the process of self-discovery is accompanied by a sense of contestation and risk. Autobiographical strategies employed by women convey some degree of challenge to the all-male tradition of autobiography and often a feeling of threat. Women subjects anticipate difficulty in being “read” or “heard” by a male audience. And women writing their lives for a public cannot escape the terrors and penalties of trespassing on male turf. Women subjects are at risk because the requirements of autobiography and the requirements of femininity are at odds.18
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When women assert their own subjectivity through self-writing, when they articulate their desire for political and economic independence, they challenge the system of social and political controls arrayed against them. This is why their enterprise must be characterized by a sense of “contestation and risk.” How the autobiographies examined in Telling Lives manifest this sense of contestation and risk is the primary question underlying this study; however, it will be useful in the next few pages to review how this topic originally presented itself.

Background: Encountering a “Fierceness with Reality”

I first came to be interested in Japanese female self-writing after I had begun reading autobiographies by radical socialist critics such as Taoka Reiun, Sakai Toshihiko, and Kinoshita Naoe. But once I encountered the memoirs of one of their contemporaries, Fukuda Hideko, I began to ponder whether certain “differences” I was experiencing as a reader were not the result of gender. While the narratives by male authors hovered somewhat naturally around the story of a self’s coming to awareness of itself, Fukuda’s narrative seemed to be more de-centered and fragmented. Her story was often told from multiple perspectives; doubts and uncertainties were often inscribed at the very core of the narrative. As I resumed my reading of autobiography theory, with special attention to women’s self-writing and how it may differ from that of male authors, I found myself at the center of this outpouring of new critical literature on autobiography from the feminist perspective. While reading Fukuda’s My Life at Mid-Point (Warawa no hanseigai), I was reminded of a phrase I had encountered very early on in my reading about autobiographical practice, a phrase that appears as an epigraph by Florida Scott-Maxwell in the first chapter of Janet Varner Gunn’s study, Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience.

When you truly possess all that you have been and done, which may take some time, you are fierce with reality.

This phrase seemed like a profoundly insightful way to characterize the autobiographical act, a way to capture some of the intensity one finds in self-writing. Once narrators go back over the ground of lived experience, they are somehow in a better position to confront their lives. As I began reading Japanese women’s autobiographies, I encountered texts in which the authors manifested just such a fierceness with reality, most notably in
Fukuda Hideko’s *My Life at Mid-Point* (1904) and Takamure Itsue’s *Diary of a Woman from the Land of Fire* (*Hi no kuni no onna no nikki*) (1964). Fukuda wrote with passion and intensity about being a *magaimono*—a sham, a counterfeit—because she confounded gendered expectations.\(^{21}\) She also wrote poignantly about the pain involved in telling her life. As she notes in her preface—the first line of which makes reference to the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin—writing her life was a painful process, at times encircling her in a “fortress of pain”:

> But I never conceived of this text as a means to forget my pain. On the contrary, the very act of writing itself is a source of pain. With each letter, each word, each line, the pain intensifies.

> My agony only grows stronger, but it is not necessarily the case that I wish to forget my past. No, my longings for the past grow stronger with the pain of each word and each line I write. . . . My journey through life has been one failure after another; yet I have always fought on. I have never once wavered. As long as blood flows through my veins, I will continue to struggle. It is my calling, my mission to fight crimes against humanity. The more conscious of my mission I become, the more willing I am to endure these pain filled memories.

> There is no cure for the pain of confession but more pain. My mission is to struggle against the crimes of this world and against my own sins. At first, I attacked our oligarchic political structure. Now I know that the real struggle is against monopoly capitalism. I am seeking to aid the poor and miserable people of this world. I will ignore the wild, unfounded criticism against me and try to tell my life story as it happened, as frankly as possible, hiding nothing. But I make no attempt to erase my guilt with confession. Rather, my text is my pledge to renew my struggle with myself and with the world.\(^{22}\)

The fierceness evident in these lines is rooted in a concern with political oppression and social inequality. Fukuda’s text is her pledge to continue her struggle with the forces aligned against her in the world and inside herself. Her trajectory from the popular rights movement to socialism is what gives her text its shape. The power of her language is found not only in the links that she forges between memory, pain, and writing, but in the distortions and tensions, the contradictions and paradoxes, with which she wrestles. The narrative describes Fukuda’s attraction to the radical wing of the most progressive political movement of her day, the popular rights movement, and her participation in the Osaka Incident of 1885, an act
that resulted in her arrest for trying to smuggle explosives onto a ship bound for Korea. She spent time in prison and had a humiliating affair with a married member of her group, some details of which became public. Then, she married a man for love, over his family’s objections, only to have him suffer a mental breakdown and die prematurely. Widowed at age thirty-five with three children, she understood well the difficulties facing women trying to make their way in the world independently.

Fukuda wanted to create opportunities for women to live their lives free of dependence on men, so her aim was to open a school for young women to teach them skills that would enable them to establish economic independence. Hence, the specific conditions surrounding the production of her text come into play and shape the way it must be read. The manifesto for her proposed technical school for women, which constitutes the closing portion of her text, announces her plans to open such a school, and the readers understand that the funds she raises through the sale of her life story will provide the capital needed to open the school. Facing an uncertain future, Fukuda ends her text with these lines:

Standing at the precipice overlooking life and death, there is but one path to tread: to do everything in my power to bring about truth and justice and then await my destiny.23

In this passage, the narrator positions herself both in relation to her text and to the dominant discourse. Although her gaze may be steady, the ground on which she stands is far less stable. Who is speaking at this point in the text is not the “I” of a single, unitary self, but one that has been formed out of multiple discourses and multiple encounters (collisions) with forces ranged against her. Her stance in this passage also operates to bridge the conditions of production and reception of the text. Fukuda is not looking back over a full life as a woman of sixty or seventy; she is only midway through her life, a point that the title of her text reinforces strongly. Yet at the moment she writes, she is facing a most uncertain future. She feels distorted and riven by contradictions. Where should she place her energies? How would she support herself and her children? These kinds of questions brought her face-to-face with her own reality, and the language of her text bristles with this fierceness.

There was a similar kind of fierceness evident in the language of Takamure Itsue’s Hi no kuni no onna no nikki, a text whose central concern is the narrator’s relationship to her spouse and her struggle to preserve her own
identity and a space for her to conduct her work within the framework of her marriage. Born in 1894 in Kumamoto Prefecture, Takamure was not particularly politically active, considering herself more of a philosophical anarchist. When young, she had undertaken the Buddhist pilgrimage on the island of Shikoku and written about her journey. But she became extremely interested in feminism and women’s issues and wrote prolifically about them throughout her career. In addition, during the 1920s she published several volumes of poetry. She also engaged other feminists like Yamakawa Kikue, Itô Noe, and Yamada Waka in debates on feminist issues in the pages of various journals of the day. In 1930 she was involved in publishing an anarchist journal, Women’s Front (Fujin sensen), and also began an independent research project on the marriage system in ancient Japan. In 1936 she published the first volume of A Women’s History of Greater Japan (Dai Nippon joseishi), which was titled Studies on the Matriarchal System in Japan (Bokeisei no kenkyû). So it is primarily as Japan’s first scholar of women’s history that Takamure is remembered today.

But her route to this life of an independent scholar was not an easy one. Although she proclaimed an absolute love for her husband, Hashimoto Kenzô (whom she calls “K” in her narrative), she could not thrive in their marriage as it was constituted. As she notes in the diary she kept at the time,

K’s egoism grew in inverse proportion to my distortion. I had never felt my faults to be so revealed as they were during that period.

In this contest of wills, it was Takamure’s identity, her ego, her sense of self, that had to shrink and become distorted as K’s ego expanded into the space of their married life. In the process, she felt not only small and distorted, but exposed and vulnerable. It is her shortcomings, not his, that are on display. She elaborates:

I had to engage in self-reflection (hansei) on my many shortcomings. I didn’t necessarily feel that I was a budding scholar or poet, but there was something there and it made me somewhat of a contemplative woman. This did not bode well for my life as a “service wife.” . . . Anyway, needless to say, this absurd, illusory love state that I was in did not fit at all with K’s demand for a wife who would take care of him. His hot-temper would flare up and he would beat me violently.

K’s violence toward me was the first of any kind I had ever experienced
so I was caught by surprise. Except what worried me most was that K would have a complete nervous breakdown. When he became so enraged, his face would become pale and distorted as he shook his fists uncontrollably—I could hardly stand to look at him. I finally resolved to separate from him.27

Takamure’s crisis took on new dimensions precipitated by the physical violence against her. She acknowledges that although she did not yet know what she was destined for, something was pulling her toward the “contemplative” life, the life of a writer or an intellectual. This urge was not likely to mesh smoothly with K’s need for a “service wife” to cater to his needs. The slow, psychological abuse had taken its toll, but she survived. However, physical abuse was not something she was willing to endure. So she left him the following note and boarded a train to return to her home.

I am afraid of time; I am afraid of space. Hour after hour, I could no longer even imagine what space is. Good-bye. Your little bird is flying away. Please throw out all the belongings I am leaving behind. I am sad. I love you.28

Her pain, confusion and disorientation were profound. So, too, was the fear of losing something vital inside herself, of giving up the very core of her identity. Such feelings come through strongly in these passages, as does the depth of her psychological trauma. Her life is riddled by both pain and paradox as she attempts to create as a writer while functioning as a wife. Along with her sense of self, even her sense of space and time are disrupted. As readers, we feel her tottering, about to fall into a frightening abyss. But in the end, she rights herself, at least temporarily, regaining her balance and actually experiencing an “emotional revolution” (kanjō kakumei) that sparked an outpouring of poetry. She states, “Looking back on it, I underwent an emotional revolution, which gave birth for the first time to the poet in me.”

Once Takamure became a successful writer, though, the friction with her husband, to whom she had returned, only grew more intense. She was publishing poetry and articles. She had deadlines to meet and was earning manuscript fees. But her husband enjoyed inviting his friends over to drink, and he expected his wife to help with the entertainment chores. Caught in a classic version of the double bind, Takamure resents the demands placed on her time and energies but feels it is wrong for her to protest. She reproduces in her text diary-like entries from 1924 that function as a powerful reminder of the multilayeredness of her text and of the contradictions and tensions at work in it. She records as follows.
Oct. 19
Today’s reflection: I am lazy. If I remain idle, the housework piles up. Today I feel languid and sleepy; my brain is addled. I have a stomachache.

Oct. 30
Today’s reflection: my mind is twisted, my behavior is wretched. I have become the prisoner of some wicked demon. You wicked demon! Throw me away, I am weak.

I am poised at the summit of my pain.

Nov. 25
Today’s reflection: I disturbed my husband. He said we are strangers. He also told me to get out again (mata ie o dete-ike to mo itta). He also hit me again until Kida-san stopped him. I wonder where I can go? Tonight I need to work on my essay, “She Who Gives Birth to Poems,” and I should work on my novel but it isn’t going well.

Dec. 6
My husband told me to get out. Tolstoy refers to marriage as a vice that women are burdened with. I do not have a single redeeming feature. My existence is a complete minus (watashi no sonzai wa mainasu da). Is it a crime to stay with my husband any longer?

1. I am not lazy but neither am I quick or clever.
2. I cannot fit in with his friends.
3. I am lacking in talent.
4. I can write novels, but they do not sell. I can write essays, but they do not sell either. A spring no longer wells up in my head.
5. I am shy and I hate going out. Therefore, it never works out when I have to run errands for his friends.
6. I am becoming ugly.

Sometime next spring I will leave. Until then, I will put all my energies into looking after my husband and his friends. I am amazed at the strength of the temptation that I might become the kind of person who can successfully take good care of him and have my career too. However, in the end it is the best thing for both of us if I leave.

When all is said and done, my husband needs someone who is not like me for a wife. It’s just a repetition of what we went through before, but it is the way I feel.29

Takamure clearly experiences the painful paradox of being pulled in too many different directions at once; she must also confront the reality
that her subjectivity is the product of multiple, conflicting discourses. The emotions she records in her diary at that time reveal the depth of her pain, as well as the feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing brought on by the double bind in which she finds herself. She portrays herself as twisted, contorted, warped, and divided against herself. And yet she experiences the seductive power of the urge to try and do it all, to take care of K and pursue her own writing. We can hear in her words, then, the voice of a woman whose self-esteem is eroding and whose creative powers are waning before her very eyes. She even feels her beauty ebbing. She is on the verge of complete erasure but summons up the courage to contest her fate and confront the oppression she faces at the source. She leaves again and this time refuses to return until her husband agrees to change his ways. He does, and they undergo a virtual role reversal whereby K took care of the house and home while Takamure devoted herself to her research and writing. To depict this kind of struggle openly in her autobiography is undoubtedly to become fierce with reality.

As I continued to read autobiographies by Japanese women, however, I did not always find the same degree of intensity and fierceness that I had discovered in Fukuda’s and Takamure’s texts. This was puzzling because, by all rights, I knew it should have been there. But, as often as not, autobiographers like Oku Mumeo, Takai Toshio, Nishi Kiyoko, Sata Ineko, and Fukunaga Misao were able to write matter-of-factly, or even obliquely, about events that should have elicited the same kind of passion found in Fukuda’s and Takamure’s texts. What I have come to appreciate over the years, however, is that while fierceness may actually be present, it is often masked, muted, or buried beneath the surface of the text. Because of autobiographical conventions and cultural paradigms that relegate women writers to the margins of discourse, the language of contemporary Japanese women’s autobiographies is self-effacing and reticent. But beneath that placid surface, tensions, anger, and conflicts do exist. No doubt I was expecting Japanese women’s autobiographies to embrace feminism more aggressively, or perhaps to rage more openly against the patriarchy. What I encountered, however, were these even-handed, self-effacing narratives that succeed in driving their points home but not necessarily with the fierceness that I was anticipating.

At this juncture, I found it useful to recall Rita Felski’s assertion that when considering feminist texts, it is important “to encompass all those texts that reveal a critical awareness of women’s subordinate position and of gender as a problematic category, however this is expressed.”30 If we
incorporate in our assessment the degree to which the texts in this study are concerned with women’s subordinate position and their willingness to problematize the question of gender, then we can readily appreciate how a certain “fierceness with reality”—subtle and understated though it may be—may indeed be uncovered through careful reading. Felski makes another important argument about female self-writing when she points out that the act of offering up experiences with which women readers can identify helps forge a sense of community among women writers and readers, something she calls a “feminist counter-public sphere.” Drawing in part on Habermas’ notion of the “bourgeois public sphere,” Felski describes “the historical emergence of an influential oppositional ideology which seeks to challenge the existing reality of gender subordination.” A principal argument of this book is that the “emergence of an influential oppositional ideology” certainly did occur in Japan during the 1920s. Although it was still in its infancy when Fukuda wrote in 1904, both she, and later Takamure, were present at its birth and helped to shape it. Moreover, they did so fully conscious that their subject positions and their arguments were often conflicted and contradictory. The women whose narratives comprise *Telling Lives* inherited this legacy. Although, as we shall see, their stories are often filled with paradox and contradiction too, it is fair to say that they share with their predecessors the aim of telling their own stories, in their own voices, as directly and as compellingly as possible.