

AFTERWORD

Teaching Removal

How might queer reading dislodge restrictive notions of evidence, empiricism, or expertise—the epistemological assumptions anchoring disciplinary identities and investments? What should rigor look, sound, and feel like if it were attuned to a queer frequency? While I’m not sure, my intuition says things would likely feel different than they tend to now. I wonder, for instance, about how a dispersive textual energy I mark as queer—*Genji*’s irrevocable unclosure—might encourage the curiosity of students. For all the formidable research done on premodern Japanese literature, passages remain whose conceptual resources rest untapped because the proficiencies we’ve inherited prove too coarse to make other futures tangible—especially for folks who’ve been offered little reason to invest their precious time and energy in this queer little corner of the map called premodern Japanese studies. The most authorized notions of competency can obscure the value of transformative insights. But this value may prove more legible to learners still unimprisoned by discipline.

This book has tried to oppose a deadening tendency within the field to break students down rather than build them up. This tendency seems to stem from a particular machismo underpinning the discipline, one I’ve hoped to queer—to question and rework—through interpretive gestures explored herein. In this sense, the book embodies an effort to make my current disciplinary home more livable, both for myself and for those learners who might aspire toward something other than what “expert” customarily delimits.

A *Proximate Remove* revisits loose ends, theorizing relations that exceeded the readings of mortality and calligraphy *Textures of Mourning* (2018) performed.

Additionally, this book has also held space to recommend less circumscribed ways of apprehending premodern Japan. Its approach has refused the finitude of a strain of positivist inquiry untrained to welcome creative, questioning students who “are perfectly capable of re-situating themselves to handle what may at first seem alien,” students who “are often quite willing to allow themselves and their received notions of ‘literature’ to be subjected to transformation in the process.”¹

This quotation from Hideki Richard Okada foregrounds a queer potentiality activated through pedagogical encounters with literature. This capacity for students—and teachers, too—to resituate themselves toward initially alien phenomena and this willingness to allow themselves and their received knowledge to be transformed both raise the specter of violent disorientation or a paranoid hunt but convey it toward a more reparative interpretive pose. Okada tried to locate a viable balance between disciplinary norms and a kind of intellectual work more valuable than mere profession. For him, to stress *Genji*’s unclosure was to resist efforts to diminish its meanings and transformative potential. Those domesticating efforts would truncate or straighten *Genji*’s constitutive queer arcs. Therefore, *A Proximate Remove*’s readings have sought not to deaden those textual energies but to reconjure them. Hopefully I’ve been able to destabilize certain normalizing notions and chart *Genji*’s queer gestures without inducing the nauseating horror Merleau-Ponty notes.

Concluding this book, I’m reminded that my first graduate school essays were written for Okada. The first was on “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”; the second examined intertextuality in “Suma.” “Good start,” he commented, but there was much more happening that deserved consideration. Indeed. As it happens, those essays’ ideas inspired this book’s fourth chapter. Time flies. These two essays were the only ones I ever got written comments on. This could seem—as it did to me then—negligent and undisciplined. But in retrospect, it has also proven instructive. For whatever frustration I felt then gave way to a renewed sense of what truly mattered in the grander scheme of things: the worth of my own ideas, irrespective of what professorial or institutional appraisals dictated, and the incalculable value of sharing wonderful conversations. Written comments paled against the push and pull of debates that filled seminars and spilled out into countless impromptu chats over the years. At the end of the day, those invaluable exchanges still resonate with lessons—positive and negative, conscious and unconscious—that I carry close in the wake of his departure.

This book lingers with that ellipsis, in what I hope is a palpably reparative spirit, continuing a conversation we can no longer enjoy in person. Hideki is removed yet still proximate in readings that continue to draw vitality from his thoughtful presence. With this, my mourning work is ended. Taking my leave, I turn to look back, and wish my teacher and friend farewell.