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## REVIEWS

### ***Enduring Postwar: Yasuoka Shōtarō and Literary Memory in Japan***

By **Kendall Heitzman**. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2019. xiii, 225 pp. \$24.95.

#### ***Reviewed by*** **Timothy Iles**

Kendall Heitzman's work on Yasuoka Shōtarō (1920–2013) gives English-language speakers a critically solid, theoretically intriguing insight into the themes and range of this quintessentially postwar Japanese author, situating him in his times and his context with sensitivity, depth, and truly accessible scholarship. Although not an exhaustive engagement with Yasuoka, it is thorough and comprehensive, and gives a sympathetic portrait of his life and the themes that enrich his writing.

The book consists of five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. There is a bibliography, an index, and an appendix which lists the works of Yasuoka available in English translation—of these, there are surprisingly few, with the most recent coming in a collection by Royall Tyler from 2008. The bibliography is extensive, and the index is thorough. Periodic photographs throughout the text illustrate the material and allow the reader to put faces to the names that accompany the development and presentation of the argument.

Heitzman characterizes his book as containing “one writer’s conception of individual and collective memory, which requires a reworking of the way we approach contemporary memory studies” (18).



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He argues that “the assumptions that memory studies make—about canon and archive, about generation, about social and cultural memory—do not apply to an individual writer’s engagement with collective memory and institutional history, nor do they apply in this particular Japanese context” (18). Thus, the book becomes a way of placing an individual writer onto the dual planes of personal and national histories, in order to allow “new modes of engaging with memory [to] emerge—some of these modes originate with Yasuoka, and others are ... informed by Yasuoka’s individual take on historical moment” (18).

The better to focus on the thematic trajectory of Yasuoka’s writings, Heitzman resists arranging his chapters strictly, or even fundamentally, chronologically. Instead, he prefers to follow the issues that emerge in Yasuoka’s writings while remaining sensitive to the periods in which he wrote. Following the Introduction, in which he identifies the principal structure and aim of his study, Heitzman gives us chapters that build on each other, all centered on the functions of history and memory that operate throughout Yasuoka’s oeuvre. Heitzman asserts that his study will demonstrate the necessarily political character of Yasuoka’s writings, political because of Yasuoka’s consistent view of himself as isolated and alien to the wider social milieu in which he lived. The arrangement of Heitzman’s chapters highlights this argument.

In “Politics by Other Means: Allegories of Resistance and the Endless War,” Heitzman argues that, contrary to the views of Japanese literature that see postwar “Third Generation” authors as basically apolitical, Yasuoka was resolutely politically-minded, through his deliberate focus on his “outsider” status in relation to what might have been a “typical” wartime experience, or a willingness to see August 14, 1945, and the subsequent American Occupation of Japan, as truly marking an end to the war. Heitzman allows Yasuoka’s style and choice of words to highlight the political nature of his writing, often quite subtly. A good example of this occurs when Heitzman discusses the Japanese readings of the Japanese title of Yasuoka’s *A View of the Sea* (Kaihen no kōkei, 海辺の光景, 1959), which, although it should typically be pronounced *umibe*, literally “in the vicinity of the sea,” Yasuoka referred to this as *kaihen*. Heitzman suggests this reading could be a play on words, “a deliberate homophone for... *kaihen*, meaning ‘change’...” (57), the title thus becoming “a view of change.” This type of playful relationship to words and their diverse meanings reminds the reader that writers in general, but Yasuoka in particular, worked with “competing storylines, much like the narration of

the nation in war and postwar” (60). In short, it reminds readers that writers are political regardless of any claims to the contrary.

In “The Generation of Deception: Canon and Archive in the Fiction of the Long Postwar,” Heitzman problematizes the classification of writers according to conventional, chronological means, into “generations” following a typically arbitrary date, but in Japan’s case, following the end of Japan’s war in Asia. As Heitzman puts it, the “standard accounting of Yasuoka’s place in literary history as a member of the Third Generation is only half the story, and behind it lies a shadow history” (63). Heitzman’s second goal in this chapter is to understand Yasuoka’s situation as a canonical, postwar writer by better understanding him as a product and shaper of the writings around him, as one able to respond to and challenge the thematic influences his personal history had in relation to the larger, national history. In this way, this chapter also problematizes the conception of the *shi-shōsetsu*, or I-novel, as basically autobiographical, by pointing to the ways in which Yasuoka deliberately fictionalized episodes that did have biographical roots.

The next chapter, “Local History, Global History, and the Triangulation of Memory,” gives an account of Yasuoka’s time as a Rockefeller Foundation scholar in Nashville, Tennessee, attached to the English Department at Vanderbilt University. Heitzman begins with a remembrance of the importance of Nashville in the American Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s, thus placing Yasuoka within another period of conflict and change. The chapter further places Yasuoka within a history of other Japanese writers who had visited the United States, although not necessarily the South, and overlaps Japan’s postwar with that of the still-lingering feeling of “post-Civil War” in Nashville. Memory and history thus respond to and reflect each other across not only time but a vast cultural divide that, in fact, seems not so very vast, after all.

In “Long Shots in *Tokyo Olympiad*,” we have a consideration of Yasuoka’s collaboration with the film director, Ichikawa Kon (1915–2008), on his project to document the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In this chapter, Heitzman highlights how these two outsiders, Ichikawa and Yasuoka—outsiders because of their mutual lack of interest in sports—create a film which “forgets what it has been tasked to remember for the sake of remembering a greater truth” (131).

The final chapter, “Bakumatsu, Postwar, and Memories of Survival,” sees Yasuoka writing history that is “not-history,” or, as Heitzman puts it, “Yasuoka is piecing together a narrative between modes” (158). By this he

means that Yasuoka, in writing about the vicissitudes his family faced at the end of the Tokugawa Era (1603–1868) and beginning of the Meiji Era (1868–1912), captures personal memories from even before his birth and weaves them into non-fictional accounts of events that helped transform Japan from a feudal, agrarian, isolated island into the modern nation it remains today. This brings the book to a strong conclusion, highlighting the circular, reflexive aspects of history, memory, and fiction, which weave together in the creative process of writing. In the conclusion proper, Heitzman injects his own personal memories of his meeting with Yasuoka, very late in the author's life, and the ways in which Yasuoka, through his writing, prepared the ground for younger writers to confront and present their own histories and memories and the ways in which Japan's continuing postwar period remains both relevant and controversial for Japan and its neighbors.

Taken together, the chapters build a readable, erudite, theoretically rich portrait of a writer whose own work also builds a portrait, but one that is as often fictional as it is accurate. The strengths of Heitzman's book come from the considerations of memory and history as both personal and social, and from the opportunity to think of how the life of one writer can stand both in- and outside of the flow of events through the process of recording them. This book offers a superb form of biography: one that engages its subject not only through events, people, meetings, and so on, but through the works of that subject, and their intersections with the moments to which they speak. Heitzman creates a truly sympathetic biography of Yasuoka, bringing us from his boyhood illnesses and first forays into creativity, to the inevitable end to a long, productive life.

Make no mistake: this book is first and foremost a *biography* of Yasuoka, rather than an extended literary analysis, even though engagement with literature does form a substantial portion of the work. As such, the role of memory and Heitzman's critical considerations of it are vital components, and rightly so. Biography is nothing if not an external representation of the internal memories of the subject's life, and for Yasuoka, who wrote so consistently about his life and times, even though through fiction rather than pure autobiography, memories and their persistence were a starting point and point of grounding throughout his career. Heitzman's focus on memory mirrors that of Yasuoka's own central concerns, but while Yasuoka's engagement with memory becomes art, Heitzman's becomes scholarship—this is not meant to imply a hierarchy between the two, but simply to indicate the differing goals each achieves.

Yasuoka creates an image of himself as an outsider, one able to observe the unfolding of history around him and capture that unfolding in a form of recreation, of reconstruction of himself and that very history. Heitzman creates an image of himself, as well, as one sympathetic to the image Yasuoka has built, and as one able to point out the artistic, literary merits of that image. The better to do so, Heitzman establishes an intellectual context of theory and research, and does so intelligently and successfully, drawing on scholars of memory, of history, and of literature. Heitzman's research is extensive, sometimes even surprisingly so, and able to create a comprehensive situation of Yasuoka's times and travels. His research is also personal—here, too, sometimes surprisingly, even touchingly so—especially when he recounts his meeting with Yasuoka and his attendance at Yasuoka's memorial. The warmth with which Heitzman presents Yasuoka Shōtarō is human, humane, and contagious; at the end of the book, the reader has met two writers whose friendship and memories are valuable, provocative, artistic, and now, their own. This is the goal of good biography, to help the reader become more than merely familiar with the life of the subject: to make the reader wish for a chance to have met that person, at least once, to share a conversation. Heitzman's book achieves this goal through its readability, its research, its clarity, and its sensitivity to the things, themes, times, and trials of its subject, Yasuoka Shōtarō, who emerges as a living memory, and the creator of stories worth reading for their inherent value but also for their own presentation of the living memories of Japan's *national* life in this enduring, evolving postwar.

***The Typographic Imagination: Reading and Writing in Japan's Age of Modern Print Media***

By **Nathan Shockey**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.  
xi, 314 pp. \$65.00.

***Reviewed by***  
**Jonathan E. Abel**

A tension runs through Nathan Shockey's well-researched book of essays on the topic of the medial transition to print culture; it is this: does the value of print material lie within its semantic content or within its market