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Motoori Norinaga's Hermeneutic of *Mono no Aware*

The Link between Ideal and Tradition

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THE TERM *"mono no aware"* has been often used by both Japanese and Westerners to exemplify an important aspect of what is seen as a traditional Japanese aesthetic consciousness, or *bi-ishiki.* In the spoken language, the component *"aware"* depicts sorrow or misery; *"mono no"* attributes this *"aware"* to the things of the world, taken either in the particular or more usually the abstract sense. This literal sorrow or misery of things is taken often to signify a sad, fleeting beauty that is conspicuous in traditional Japanese cultural expressions. Thus regarded, *mono no aware* is easily connected to the Buddhist notion of transience (Skt., *anitya;* Jpn., *mujō*), which claims that no thing in the world is permanent, that all things, both beautiful and painful, must inevitably pass away. It has been claimed that the Japanese have a special penchant for finding beauty in such incessant change, and their love of the cherry blossom, which blooms brilliantly for about a week and then is quickly scattered by the wind, is often cited as evidence.

It is not my intention to attempt to evaluate the function of this term as a general signifier of some kind of fundamental Japanese aesthetic consciousness. Rather, I wish to analyze one important link in the process by which this term came to possess such an important place in the dialogue concerning aesthetics in Japan. The word itself has a long history: *aware* appears in several poems in the *Kojiki* (714), and *mono no aware* is first seen in the *Tosa Nikki* (935). Both have been used frequently in literature to this day. While investigating the history of such literary usage might indeed give us a clue as to why this term came to be so important, it would also lead to an unending accumulation of passages wherein the term is used in rather variant ways. Thus, a hermeneutic investigation into how the term has been explicitly theorized and

interpreted, how certain thinkers have attempted to explicate its meaning and connect it with the Japanese literary tradition, seems to me a better approach.

My analysis will focus on the writings of Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) on the nature of literature and poetry. I chose Norinaga because he did more than anyone else to thrust this term into the public consciousness in connection with aesthetic feeling. Because the manner in which he used the word is well known by people in the field, I will refrain from giving a general account of his theory and focus instead on a relatively unexplored aspect, his hermeneutic project of recovering this ancient poetic term and making it the cornerstone of his explanation of the origin and purpose of both fiction and poetry.[1]

To better demonstrate the distinctive character of Norinaga's hermeneutics, I will first briefly introduce explications of the term by two twentieth-century scholars, Watsuji Tetsurō and Ōnishi Yoshinori, both of whom carry their training in Western philosophy into their work. To interpret this word from amidst a tradition, I will focus on methodology. One goal underlying my project is to demonstrate that *mono no aware* is not a cultural given: However unconscious the understanding of it may be among Japanese to whom it has been taught from childhood, it possesses a hermeneutic history out of which has grown whatever significance it today possesses. Any attempt to theorize this term, then, must inevitably grapple with this history. Therefore, in reading these theories we should ask how this history was appropriated and what new level of meaning was given to the term. Only once this groundwork is laid will we realize the wealth of meaning possessed by this term, and only then will we be able to begin considering what it means to say that *mono no aware* characterizes a certain important element in Japanese aesthetic consciousness.

Watsuji begins his short piece "Mono no Aware ni Tsuite" (Concerning Mono no Aware, 1922) with an explicit consideration of the term as discussed by Norinaga. After looking at Norinaga's definitions of both *"aware"* and *"mono,"* Watsuji analyzes the conditions that Norinaga set for what it means for a person to *know mono no aware.*[2] Watsuji is concerned, however, not so much with the surface meaning of Norinaga's words as with their underlying support. What, he asks, is the justification for Norinaga's thought? This is an important question, he claims, because Norinaga makes a normative claim in his theory on *mono no aware:* knowing *mono no aware* is not merely an "is" (or a "was"); it is an "ought." If we are to know it today, claimed Norinaga, our hearts will be purified, and we will know the upright way of the ancients.[3] What, Watsuji asks, is the basis for making such a claim? Norinaga himself fails to do it proper justice, and thus Watsuji concludes that Norinaga has merely accepted the worldview of Murasaki Shikibu, author of the *Tale of Genji,* as the grounding point for his theory—a shaky grounding point from

which to create a universal theory and yet one that describes well the view of life of a court woman in Heian Japan.[4] *Mono no aware,* Watsuji then concludes, is the longing for eternity and permanence that is found in the topsy-turvy emotional life of women in the Heian court, such as Murasaki. Not quite deserving the designation as a universal imperative that Norinaga gave to it and yet still somehow reflecting the lot of all of us, *mono no aware* is read by Watsuji as the expression of a frustration and its accompanying sorrow that these women have sublimated into aestheticism and hedonism. He points out that they were politically and economically disenfranchised and, even more important, they were at the mercy of their lovers' whims, waiting night after night, wondering whether their men would show their faces on the verandas of the estates that were their prisons.

Ōnishi, writing later, makes it clear from the beginning that he wants to find the aesthetic significance of *aware,* as opposed to some mere linguistic or psychological meaning.[5] For him, this means avoiding empirical consideration of the word *"aware"* as it occurs in literary works[6] and trying rather to uncover what he calls the "aesthetic essence" *(biteki honshitsu)* of *aware* as a concept *(gainen).*[7] Revealing the extent to which he was influenced by the aesthetic thought of the phenomenological school, particularly Moritz Geiger, Ōnishi searches for objective value in *aware,* value that might be directly intuited in its essential nature. This value is eventually defined as a derivative mode of beauty found in the midst of pain and sorrow. Ōnishi especially stresses that the intuition of natural beauty is a central part of *"aware"* significance, a beauty that emerges from the atmosphere of *Weltschmertz,* or world pain, which constituted the world of the Heian court and can be recognized even today.

While both philosophers put forth interesting interpretations of *aware,* we can easily point to problems when we begin to question the grounding point of their investigations. On what are these theories based? On the surface, Watsuji and Ōnishi both base their theories on the work of Norinaga. For his part, Watsuji starts out his essay as if it were simply a discussion of Norinaga's theory itself. Then, having found that Norinaga provides no adequate justification for his views, Watsuji himself goes on to explain where he thinks Norinaga's theory does indeed take its base. Watsuji is relatively consistent throughout in using the term as Norinaga explained it and can be seen as having analyzed *"mono no aware"* as a concept created by Norinaga. Watsuji is to be applauded for staying within recognizable boundaries when dealing with this concept. If he is to be criticized, it is because (this will be clarified later) he takes a very limited and simplistic view of Norinaga's notion of *mono no aware.* To reduce it to a presentation of the worldview of Murasaki Shikibu is to limit its range of reference severely and to ignore many of the ways in which Norinaga used the term. To make such a direct link to Murasaki is also tenuous. As much re-

cent research has shown, Norinaga did not simply copy what he saw in the *Genji* and name it *mono no aware.* The effect of contemporary thought and society on his work is unmistakable.[8]

The link between Ōnishi's theory and the traditional meaning of the term is more tenuous. First characterizing Norinaga as one among many researchers who had sought to uncover the meaning of the term *"aware,"* Ōnishi then bases the weight of his argument on certain portions of Norinaga's theory. He is particularly concerned with the discussion of emotional depth, concentrating on Norinaga's statement that *aware* is found more fully in darker emotions such as sorrow, melancholy, and longing than in happy emotions because darker emotions are deeper.[9] From here, Ōnishi's trajectory leads him into discussions of European poetry and philosophy as well as life and literature in the Heian court. He then argues in general about the relationship between beauty and sorrow. His theory is at all times pulled along by an overarching aim: the notion that *aware* is what he calls a "derivative aesthetic category," one phase of the beautiful, with certain aspects that set it apart from other such categories (such as the tragic, comic, and sublime as well as *yūgen* and *sabi* in the Japanese tradition).[10]

The major problem with Ōnishi's account is that his *aware* has been removed from its historical context. While he quotes freely from classical sources to show how the word has been used, he also quotes just as freely passages where the word does not appear and yet where, he says, *aware* is demonstrated.[11] It is hard to judge what role such quotation is meant to play; it is certainly not a hermeneutic one. Ōnishi may simply wish to illustrate his own ideas through these passages. We can conclude that the relationship between Ōnishi's argument and the tradition from which this concept has emerged is at best unclear.

I do not pretend to have done justice to either of these philosopher's works in this short space. Each does indeed form an important link in the history of the concept and thus deserves fuller consideration. This will have to wait for the time being, however, for I must now move on to look at how Norinaga dealt with the tradition that preceded his own work. We have seen that each of the theorists cited previously based their work to a great extent on Norinaga's "*mono no aware* theory." Such an approach is understandable, as Norinaga was indeed the first to attempt anything close to a theoretical formulation of the meaning of *"mono no aware"* and as it is this formulation that has come to be most closely associated with the significance of the term. I will now attempt to uncover how Norinaga himself adapted these terms from the Japanese classics and fit them to his own theory—how he interpreted them and attempted to show that the significance he attributed to them was there all along, visible at the heart of the traditions of *waka* and *monogatari.* Although many volumes of schol-

arship have been produced concerning the way Norinaga conceived and evaluated fiction and poetry, as well as how his ideas fit into the major philosophical trends of his day, little to nothing has been said about the hermeneutic he used in developing his theories. Analyzing that hermeneutic will, I hope, shed some light on the present task of interpreting Japanese aesthetic terminology.

We are accustomed in speaking of Norinaga's theory to calling it his *"mono no aware ron,"* a phrase that can imply either one or more theories. In fact, however, the prevailing notion suggests that there is but one theory of *mono no aware* and that it is best represented in his *Genji Monogatari Tama no Ogushi,* the last work Norinaga wrote in which *mono no aware* played a major role. In his final work he presents us with an authoritative and compact statement of the meaning of the word *"aware,"* one that is quite well known:

> Regarding this phrase *"mono no aware":* first of all, *"aware"* originally signified the sighing voice felt in and emitted from the heart when one sees, hears, or otherwise touches some object in the world, and as such is no different from the interjections "ah" and *"hare"* of our common colloquial speech. For example, when we are moved upon the sight of cherry blossoms or the moon, we say things like, "Ah, what beautiful flowers," and "*Hare,* isn't the moon lovely tonight?" *"Aware"* is formed by the combination of this *"ah"* and *"hare."*

Though this is perhaps Norinaga's most concise statement concerning the meaning of *"aware,"* it appears in the last of a number of works in which the term plays a major role, in a work that is something of a consolidation of earlier projects. That all these works are usually read as if they constituted one consistent whole is evident in the way most scholars, including Ōnishi and, to a lesser extent, Watsuji, quote freely from several of them when relaying Norinaga's ideas. Their approach is misleading, however, for we can notice various subtle but important differences in the "theories" presented within each work. The first of these, *Aware Ben* (1758), is a short set of notes on the meaning of the word *"aware"* as it is used in classical literary texts, and while it amounts to no "theory" at all, it points out the direction that Norinaga's more developed thought will later take. Each of the next three works, *Shibun Yōryō* (1763), *Isonokami Sasamegoto* (1763), and *Genji Monogatari Tama no Ogushi* (1796), contains what might be termed its own respective *mono no aware ron.* The first two were produced in the same year, 1763, while the third, the first two chapters of which are a slightly revised version of *Shibun Yōryō,* was completed more than three decades later. It is unfortunate that many scholars who are interested in tracing Norinaga's thought seem to focus on this later work; although it may be the most mature work of the three, giving it priority fails to show the process by which the concept was developed. Further, the theory in the

later work combines aspects of the two earlier theories and thus tends to take attention away from how the two earlier theories, created for slightly different purposes, present *aware* somewhat differently and mark distinctly different interpretive trails. Watsuji is one scholar who, though also quoting from the earlier works, based his analysis almost completely on the *Tama no Ogushi* and by doing so misses out on much of what Norinaga said, in *Isonokami Sasamegoto* for instance, concerning the relationship between *mono no aware* and *waka* poetry. In the following section, I will focus on the theories contained in these two earlier works, paying particular attention to the manner in which Norinaga makes use of classical literary texts in developing his ideas.

Shibun Yōryō: Uncovering Murasaki Shikibu's Original Intent

To create an interpretive scheme by which to counter what he saw as overly ideological, unnatural, and forced Confucian and Buddhistic interpretations of the *Tale of Genji,* Norinaga sought to describe the essence of *monogatari* seen in and for itself, without the application of any interpretive apparatus derived from foreign philosophical systems. He sought to uncover this essential nature in the words of the *Genji* itself, in its references to other literary works, reading such statements as the beliefs of the author Murasaki Shikibu put into the mouths of her characters. The positivistic hermeneutic in which he was engaged was one wherein he sought to let the text speak for itself by lifting out what is said in the work about literature and then applying that on a higher level to interpret the nature of the work itself.[12] Norinaga's stated intention, as seen in the following quote, was not, then, to establish some new theory of his own but to somehow find the essence of *monogatari* by showing the author's original intent in writing it:

> In order to ascertain the flavor *(omomuki)* of ancient *monogatari* and the emotional reactions of the people who read them, we ought to look at the various places in the chapters of the *Tale of Genji* wherein people are reading such tales. (Hino Tatsuo, ed., *Motoori Norinaga Shū, SNKBS,* p. 41 [hereafter cited as *MNS*])

Norinaga then goes on to quote a number of passages in which characters in the tale give their impressions on reading various other works. A couple examples should suffice:

> Hearing the events recorded in old *monogatari,* when, for instance, some young courtesan is reading one aloud, I grasp the kinds of things related and can readily surmise the improbability of such things, with a slight feeling of disgust, when I think

> rationally about them. There are also times, however, when my heart is moved, and I am led to think that ours is truly a world in which every nook and cranny is filled with things of *aware.* (*MNS,* p. 43)

and

> As for those who knew not of the events recorded in the picture diary (which told of Genji's life in exile), were they persons of even just a little feeling, even they were filled with *aware* and shed unrestrained tears upon viewing it. (*MNS,* p. 45)

Notice that in each of these quotations, the word "*aware*" is used to relay the emotional reaction of the reader (or hearer) of a fictional work. In each, the word is used quite incidentally, in line with its rather normal Heian-period function as, in this case, an adjective. In both, emotionally charged but otherwise very general events are described as *"aware nari,"* or "moving." These are just two of a number of passages Norinaga quotes, all of which display the same notion that fiction has an emotional affect on its readers. It is only in these two, however, that the word *"aware"* appears. In the other passages, it seems, Murasaki could adequately express such sentiments without reliance on this one term.

Next, in briefly summarizing what has been referenced, Norinaga latches onto this term, introducing his notion of "knowing the *aware* of things" *(mono no aware wo shiru koto),* which he employs to signify the general mechanism by which people are moved emotionally by fiction:

> As shown in these quotations, through reading *monogatari* we come to compare the present with the past and vice-versa, and by doing so know the way of things and the emotions of the people of the world—we know *mono no aware.* In fact, knowing *mono no aware* is the first and foremost point to reading such tales; it comes forth through knowing the heart of things, which is born of knowing the ways of the world and being familiar with the emotions of the people of the world. (*MNS,* p. 46)

Notice that the predication of what is "shown" in the preceding quotations taken from the *Tale of Genji* is unclear. While they indeed showed people coming to reflect on the past as presented in fiction, they made no claim at all about the nature of knowing *mono no aware* or about the "foremost point" of reading fiction. Thus, while Norinaga has created a link between his own thought and the literary tradition, using a line of argument that even works to obscure the distinction between Murasaki Shikibu and himself, the positivistic connection he has made between the words of the *Tale of Genji* and the term *"mono no aware"* is still tenuous—there is as yet no sound logical link. He proceeds to make a more determined attempt, deepening his ideas by systematically analyzing a debate between Hikaru Genji and Tamakazura on the

significance and value of fiction in the "Hotaru" chapter of the work. This debate—more than in the various scattered and fragmentary passages referenced earlier—is where Norinaga locates the clearest statement of the author's intent in writing the work. He goes so far as to state that the characters' opinions on *monogatari* possess a hidden meaning, revealing the author's true ideas (*MNS,* p. 47).

Though more detailed, the tenor of the "Hotaru" discussion is similar to that seen in the previous passages: Fiction gives us knowledge of the lives of people and their times; this is not, however, merely intellectual knowledge, as it also moves us, emotionally, to feel what they felt. Within the passage this emotional reaction is once again expressed using the word *"aware,"* this time in a stronger sense than before because it is used as a noun signifying something expressed in the fictional work. Genji states,

> Amidst all of these lies, however, sometimes the story is spun in a manner in which *aware* is shown and we are delighted to think that such events could occur. Though we know all the time that it is the most silly little piece of fiction, our hearts are nevertheless moved by it. (*MNS,* p. 51)

Norinaga uses this quotation to make a positive connection between his use of the term *"mono no aware"* and what he has read as the original intent of Murasaki Shikibu. He says that in the statement "*aware* is shown and we are surprised to think that such an event could occur" lies the very essence of the *Tale of Genji* and the reason that Murasaki wrote it—she herself merely intended to reveal *mono no aware* to her readers. Furthermore, Norinaga goes on, "this notion of 'knowing *mono no aware*' (as I have been using it) comes from this quotation [*mono no aware wo shiru to iu wa, koko no koto nari*]" (*MNS,* p. 51). That is, he explicitly makes the point that the *"aware"* that appears in this passage carries the same meaning as the *"mono no aware wo shiru"* that he seeks to establish as the foundation of his theory and further that he has taken that meaning from this passage. He attributes, then, all that he is saying to Murasaki herself—she has said it already, but all her previous commentators, swayed by foreign ideology, have failed to notice.

In summary, we might first judge that the very endeavor to uncover Murasaki Shikibu's original intent in writing the *Tale of Genji* is in itself rather dubious. We have of course been convinced for some time that original intent is to be found neither in literature nor in law. Leaving that aside, however, and even granting for the sake of argument that in the *Genji* the notion is often expressed that literature exists to move the reader emotionally, we must consider whether Norinaga's use of the term *"mono no aware"* has any positive connection to the significance that the term holds in the *Genji* passages. I think that

we must conclude, based on what we have seen, that any connection is rather tenuous. Even if we agree that the emotional experience of readers of fiction is important in the passages, it is hard to see that *"mono no aware"* or even *"aware"* alone has more than an incidental connection to it. It is clear that Norinaga's use of *"mono no aware"* is vastly underdetermined by its significance in the passages he cites. This fact might then lead us to look elsewhere to discover how Norinaga became attached to this term. Hino Tatsuo, for instance, claims that the term as used in popular Edo culture held the very signification Norinaga ascribes to it, and he quotes from *bunraku* and *kabuki* texts to demonstrate this.[13] At any rate, we can safely conclude that it was important for Norinaga to somehow attach this key word of his to an older and established authority. To make *"mono no aware"* Murasaki's term rather than simply his own seemed to ensure, in his mind, that his readers would accept it. Of course, we can only speculate on his intentions, but Norinaga's reverence for literary authority becomes even clearer in his next work, *Isonokami Sasamegoto,* which deals not with the relatively urbane genre of *monogatari* but with *waka,* which had from ancient times been held as the supreme Japanese literary art, linked to the very existence of the nation itself.

Isonokami Sasamegoto: *Mono no Aware* and the Birth of *Waka*

In his major work on *waka* theory, *Isonokami Sasamegoto,* written, it is believed, in 1763 after the completion of *Shibun Yōryō,* Norinaga deals even more deeply with the significance of his new key word, trying all the more laboriously to link his ideas to literary tradition. Norinaga's methodology, however, shows a great advance over that seen in the previous work, despite how little time had passed between the two. Eschewing a straightforward positivistic approach, Norinaga links *mono no aware* to the Japanese poetic tradition through a three-step hermeneutic within which is built a detailed expressivist account of the creation of poetry. First, he introduces his term by drawing an analogy between it and Ki no Tsurayuki's famous statement on the nature of Japanese poetry in the preface to the *Kokin Wakashū* and then by imitating Tsurayuki's conception in his own theory of poetic expression. Second, he traces the meaning of *"aware"* in classical poems, where it is primarily an interjection spoken out when people are moved by things of the world. Third, he quotes specific poems and interprets them as demonstrating that the experience that leads us to exclaim *"aware,"*—that is, in which we know the *aware* of things—is precisely that which leads to the composition of poetry.

When asked, "Just how is it that the individual poem is born?" Norinaga responds, "Poems are born from the knowledge of *mono no aware,*" and when

next asked, "Just what does it mean to 'know *mono no aware?*'" he gives the following explanation, borrowing the opening words of Tsurayuki's well-known preface:

> In the preface to the *Kokinshū* it is written, "Japanese poetry has a single heart as its seed, and grows forth into innumerable leaf-like words." This heart is the heart that knows *mono no aware.* It further says, "When people in this world have stimulating experiences, they come to speak out their heart-felt feelings in terms of the things they see and hear." Likewise does this phrase "heart-felt feelings" refer to the heart that knows *mono no aware.* (*MNS,* pp. 280–281)

Norinaga quoted from the *Genji* to show the essence of *monogatari;* now, in discussing *waka,* he quotes from the first and most famous statement in Japanese concerning its nature. Unlike his method in *Shibun Yōryō,* however, Norinaga is not claiming that this previous authority on *waka* had himself held this position. *"Mono no aware"* is not supposed to be Tsurayuki's term; it is Norinaga's own. The analogy he draws can be read as an attempt to explain the term by linking it to a standard theory familiar to all his readers, one that stood at the fountainhead of all poetic theory in Japan. Thus, Norinaga uses Tsurayuki to get across his point: "What is the heart that knows *mono no aware?*" he asks rhetorically. "Well, it is the heart that acts like the one Tsurayuki describes, the one that is impressed by the world and is thus led to compose *waka.*" Thus this notion of a heart from which poetry springs, a notion that had played a key role in virtually all poetic theory in Japan after Tsurayuki, is reexplained by Norinaga in terms of *mono no aware.* He thereby gives his reader a firm place to stand, one that would not likely have been provided through the relatively obscure passages he quoted from the *Genji* that we saw earlier.

Although Norinaga's explanation of how *waka* is born from the human heart closely follows that of Tsurayuki, Norinaga goes into much more detail. Humans are always perceiving things in the world, and when a thing is somehow emotionally charged and a person comes to recognize that and is emotionally moved by the object, he or she has come to know the essence or "heart" *(kokoro)* of that thing and can be said to know the *aware* of it. Especially for people who are particularly good at knowing *mono no aware,* that is, those who are particularly sensitive to things of the world, this *aware* builds up within their hearts to the point where they can no longer keep it inside and, in a cathartic act of expression, they are led almost involuntarily to compose poetry. Of course, the act of creation is not involuntary in every sense: It takes knowledge and work to make a good poem, but the desire to compose, the impulse to create, is something that builds up in the heart of the sensitive person naturally in the course of life experience—indeed, *mono no aware* that guarantees this.[14]

Next, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of his project in *Shibun Yōryō,* Norinaga proceeds to show why it is that he calls this thing about the world, this ability it has to move people to poetic expression, *"mono no aware."* He is not simply borrowing the term from Tsurayuki, but neither will Norinaga reveal it as his original signification. He again goes to great lengths to show that *mono no aware* inheres in the Japanese literary tradition, doing so by drawing a link between his notion of poetic composition as cathartic expression and the significance of the word *"aware"* in classical *waka.* Thus, in the second stage of his interpretation, Norinaga conducts a meticulous analysis of the syntactical usage of *"aware"* in *waka* up through the eleventh century. He begins,

> *"Aware"* was originally an interjection, speaking of things felt deeply in the heart without concern for what in fact occasioned those feelings. Whether one came in contact with something noble or something vulgar, *"aware"* was the exclamation that was occasioned. (*MNS,* p. 285)

That poetic exclamation emerges out of spontaneous emotion was something that Norinaga had argued some five years earlier in his first work, *Ashiwake Obune.* It is to cultivate this thought that he goes on to cite over forty *waka* in which the word *"aware"* appears, first showing the term's original meaning as an interjection or exclamation, as in the following from the *Nihon Shoki,* wherein the word is clearly used in such a form:

Ohari ni	Toward Ohari
Tada ni mukaeru	Straightaway are you facing,
Hitotsu matsu aware	One pine—*aware*
Hitotsu matsu	One pine.
Hito ni ariseba	If you were a man,
Koromo kimashi wo	Clothes I would give to you,
Tachi hakemashi wo	A sword I would gird you with.

Norinaga then traces the various grammatical forms in which the word appears in later poetry, explaining each in accord with his etymological assertion that the word was originally an interjectory sigh. *"Aware chō koto"* (the word/thing *aware*) speaks directly of the spoken sigh,[15] *"aware to iu"* (say *"aware"*) indicates the act of saying that exclamation,[16] *"aware to omou"* (think/feel *aware*) speaks of sighing *"aware"* in one's heart on thinking/feeling something,[17] and *"aware to miru"* (see in *aware*) signifies the same sigh uttered in the heart, this time occasioned by visual experience.[18] Thus, no matter what the form, *"aware"* is always still expressive of a sigh, an exclamation made when one is moved emotionally by some thing in the world.

Up to this point, Norinaga's argument, seen alongside the numerous poetic examples he quotes, is fairly convincing. He traces a consistent line through

various actual occurrences of the term. Each of the variations in the usage of the word maintains, according to him, a somatic connection to the act of sighing when coming into contact with some object. He even goes on to explain the adjectival and nominal forms of the word in a similar vein. He reads *"aware naru"* as a description of an object that has led us to exclaim *"aware,"*[19] one that refers to that object as "*aware*-ful." The nominal form takes the abstraction one step further and labels such an emotionally impressive object itself *"aware."* Norinaga is bold in making the point that *"aware"* can also be seen in noun form, but his explanation of this form is rather disappointing, especially in light of this initial boldness. A good explanation might indeed have cleared up the manner in which he himself has come to use this interjection as a noun. Also disappointing is his failure to explain the significance of the *"mono no"* that occurs alongside *"aware"* in the following poem, which he quotes:

> In Springtime we have the blooming
> Of the cherries, but that alone.
> It is in Autumn that the *aware* of things is truly shown.[20]

He chooses to make no positive connection between this poem and his own use of the term, instead relying on the following poem by Tsurayuki along with its headnotes to demonstrate why it is that knowing *mono no aware* is the key to poetic expression:

> In a certain place, I was seated in front of a bamboo screen with various others, retelling old tales, when I heard the voice of a woman, who had been listening to me from behind the screen, say, "Oh, the gentleman with a face that strangely shows he knows *mono no aware!*"
>
> In the word *"aware"* lies no special function,
> It is but the thing that we exclaim
> In just those times we cannot help but speak it.
>
> —Tsurayuki[21]

Norinaga then explains the connection between this passage and his notion of *mono no aware* as the source of poetic composition in the following manner:

> Because poems are born out of *mono no aware,* it is quite interesting that "with a face that strangely shows he knows *mono no aware*" is said of the man who was so great as to be considered a true "poetic genius." And "the word *aware*" which is spoken of in the poem is, like in the cases explained earlier, the word of exclamation that comes forth from the depths of one's emotion. The poem says that these words *"aware aware"* which are exclaimed serve no special purpose, but are spoken at times when

> the *aware* of things is unbearable and it is impossible not to say them. By the way, this "with a face that strangely shows he *knows mono no aware,*" written in the headnotes, which we know refers to Tsurayuki himself, is merely a euphemism for "with the face of a man who can compose poetry." Tsurayuki's poetic response shows that he understands this, and the underlying meaning to his words are that while composing poetry serves no special function, we cannot but create poems at times when the *mono no aware* is more than we can bear. (*MNS,* p. 302)

In the final analysis, then, Norinaga depicts Tsurayuki composing his own *waka* after the manner Norinaga has detailed. Tsurayuki, the brilliant poet of his generation, is pictured as a man who knows *mono no aware* and, furthermore, knows that he knows it. Therefore, whenever he is moved by something in the world, he cannot help but exclaim *"aa—hare."* Moreover, he also shows that this exclamatory experience leads to poetic expression in that he responds to the woman's words with a poem. No response in ordinary language could possibly express all that he felt in his heart or his understanding of what having a *mono no aware shiri gao* means. Tsurayuki is himself portrayed as subscribing to his own version of a *mono no aware ron;* he is at least admitting that the act of touching things in the world and being moved by them does indeed have a link to *"aware"* the exclamation and that knowing these things that move one can, at least in some cases, give birth to poetry.

Again, as in *Shibun Yōryō,* we might conclude that Norinaga's use of the term *"mono no aware"* is underdetermined by the passages he quotes. He sees the experience of knowing *mono no aware* as the essence of poetic exclamation, a sufficient condition that borders on being a necessary one as well. For Tsurayuki, *knowing mono no aware* might be said to be a sufficient condition for the composition of poetry, although such a claim is tenuous. Taking the connection between headnotes and poem as a statement of the poet's conception of poetry, as Norinaga has done, involves a considerable stretch in interpretation. In the case of imperial anthologies, and especially in that of the *Gosenshū,* we know that many of the headnotes were added by the editors. In the most widely used versions of Tsurayuki's personal collection, this poem appears with no headnote at all.

Conclusion

In evaluating Norinaga's hermeneutic strategy, there are numerous points that should be touched on. We have already seen that as a positive hermeneutic that claims to be discovering *mono no aware* in the words of Murasaki and Tsurayuki and from there merely elucidating its traditional meaning, Norinaga's endeavor sounds somewhat dubious to the modern ear. Without a doubt, he has

not conclusively demonstrated that *"mono no aware,"* with all the connotations it possesses as he uses it, is something that he borrowed "right from these quotes." This said, it also seems to me that it would be strange if indeed we were fully convinced by Norinaga's logic. He did not write for us.

Two other points seem to me more worthy of further consideration. First is the extent to which Norinaga both was cognizant of the tradition that preceded him and incorporated the words of that tradition into his own writings. The second point is the extent to which Norinaga seems not to have wanted to claim responsibility for his own child: *mono no aware* is never presented as his own concept but always something he has picked up. Both of these points relate to our present task when we attempt to deal with the historical formation of concepts or ideals in Japanese literature and aesthetics.

Because of the attention he paid to traditional texts and the extent to which he quoted them, Norinaga's theory is more helpful in tracing the history of the word and revealing how the concept was formed than are either of the two other theories we saw. His words are in no small measure grounded in the texts he is discussing. The context is clear, the texts are visible, and his interpretations are lined up beside them; it is open and easy for the reader to see the stretches and to judge the end result. We know where all this is coming. The other authors claim to be interpreting a traditional phenomenon, and yet where is the phenomenon? It is certainly not placed before us in any concrete sense. Ōnishi, for instance, is ostensibly working with this theory of Norinaga as his basis, but in talking about *aware* as a "derivative aesthetic category" and about its "aesthetic essence," he has gone in completely new directions, and his link to the past has vanished, only to reappear in the end, in the form of quotations from Heian-period literature that are used to give evidence for a theory already stated. Norinaga—and this is probably closely connected to his reverence for and feeling of the importance of living language—goes right to the words, puts them before us, and tries to grapple with what they signify. It is above all this concern with language that makes his hermeneutic attractive, for all the stretches and ideology that can be found within it. Rather than dealing with concepts, categories, and the emotions of people long since past, the analysis of language is a sure and concrete task, and, in literary analysis, the past is made present to us only through the medium of the language.

Norinaga's *mono no aware* has a tradition, that much is clear. We might want to know, however, to just what extent he thought he actually found the term in the words of the classics. Of course, we will never know precisely. I have cited others' research that shows the connection between the term as Norinaga used it and the cultural and social setting of the day. Such theories as these must be taken into consideration, and yet, simply to say, as does Momokawa

Takahito, that Norinaga's *mono no aware* merely describes the emotional life of Edo townspeople and has little to no actual connection to the *Genji Monogatari* (the example he treats) is also less than convincing.[22] Signs of Norinaga's crafting of this concept are everywhere visible, and they do show traces of influence from such things as Edo merchant society, popular literature (see Hino), and *waka* circles (see Takahashi). However, to deny any positive link whatsoever between Norinaga's concept and the past is to overlook much evidence. This is, however, evidence that is in fact easily overlooked, as it is not presented by Norinaga in his own works.

To quickly take up the case of Tsurayuki, he too has used the term *"mono no aware"* in his own work. In fact, the first extant instance of the term is found in his *Tosa Nikki.* This diary tells of the return of a courtier and his entourage to the Heian capital from the provinces. On departure, a group comes to see off the entourage, engaging in the customary farewell practices of drinking sake and exchanging poems of parting in both Chinese and Japanese. In the midst of the exchange of poems, however, it is said of the boat's helmsman, a laborer of the lower classes, "Unknowing of *mono no aware,* and having guzzled his share of sake, (he) wanted to set out quickly. 'The tide is high, the wind is rising' he clamored, and set to board the boat."

The helmsman is chastised for not knowing *mono no aware,* and it is clear that this criticism is a response to his insensitivity to the parting scene. His heart was unopened to the sorrow of parting, and thus his lack of emotion is being chastised. Moreover, the man is chastised as being boorish and lacking taste. For Heian courtiers, a parting without sake and poetry was simply unthinkable, yet this man is unable to respond to such a poetic situation. Interestingly enough, for Norinaga, knowing *mono no aware* consists, more than anything else, in feeling the correct emotion and correctly recognizing aesthetic value in the situations one encounters in life. In fact, Tsurayuki's use of the term has much in common with Norinaga's later one, and we might be led to wonder why Norinaga did not make use of this passage in his work. Another statement by Tsurayuki that *waka* can make even "gods and demons feel *aware,*" included in the *Kokinshū* preface, is also consonant with Norinaga's own use of the term, although Norinaga never mentions it.

This is not the place to attempt to show exactly what *mono no aware* was before Norinaga made it a key word in his literary theories. Such a task, with its implications for the question of *mono no aware*'s role in a "Japanese aesthetic consciousness," will have to wait. I hope that I have shown, however, the extent of Norinaga's historical consciousness in his treatment of the term and, through that, to have given a concrete hint at why our research into Japanese aesthetic concepts must itself be hermeneutic. *Mono no aware* had some kind of existence before Motoori Norinaga dug it up and restyled it. It had a lin-

guistic existence and certainly played a role in the aesthetic perceptions and judgments of earlier writers. Because we have no direct access to the conscious aesthetic experience of such writers, we are limited to focusing on *"mono no aware"* as it was used and argued in extant texts, such as those of Norinaga, Murasaki, and Tsurayuki. Our hermeneutic is to trace how the word has been used and how the concept has thereby been developed. As we have seen, Norinaga shared a somewhat similar viewpoint.