

Sari Kawana, *The Uses of literature in modern Japan: histories and cultures of the book*. SOAS Studies in Modern and Contemporary Japan. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. ix+280pages. Hardcover \$79.80. ISBN 9781350024915.

Reviewed by Molly Des Jardin, University of Pennsylvania  
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This monograph sets out to answer an interesting and important question: "why do some literary works survive while others simply fade?" (2) As Kawana asserts, "it is more natural for a literary work to be forgotten over time" than to continue to be immediately relevant to audiences beyond its original publication (if it was ever relevant at all). (2) With so much literature being produced over time, there may not be a reason for readers to engage with works from the past, when they are surrounded by newly relevant, contemporary works. Kawana's question forces us to think critically about canonicity, popular reception, and ultimately literary history itself. What is it that gives some literary works lasting life, that makes them engaging to audiences long after their initial publication dates and contexts have passed? In Kawana's words, how do acts of "translation" -- into a variety of other media -- "[cement] the status of these texts in the cultural canon?" (7)

It is rare to see literature framed in terms of "use value," as it is here. This term may seem too corporate or utilitarian for such an aesthetic field, and indeed Kawana admits that "in most formal literary criticism, the potential of literary works to be 'useful' has been neglected -- or even discouraged -- as a frame of reference in favor of artistic quality." (3) However, it is an apt way to assess how, and why literature can be initially relevant, and stay relevant, to its audiences. What good is literature to these audiences? And what is the particular good of any specific work of literature? How is it "useful" in terms of entertainment, edification, or even status? In other words, what makes literature matter? This is the central question that Kawana sets out for the book.

At the same time, Kawana points to a key aspect of the preservation of literary works:

Fiction does not survive simply because it is easy fodder for adaptation and reuse; on the contrary, it is nourished and nurtured into longevity through the care and creativity of its literary custodians who see new and different possibilities in 'raw material.' (12)

Here, we see the actors involved in making literature relevant and keeping it alive, perhaps long past its original production and dissemination. This perspective is a fresh way to look at the functioning of literature in society, and involves parties other than author and audience, ones that are often neglected in the study of literature. In adopting the perspective of actors engaging in making literature "useful," Kawana takes an important step toward uniting literary criticism and book history, two fields that strongly complement each other but whose connection remains relatively neglected in English-language study of Japanese literature.

These questions of use value, and about the labor involved in creating it, are a fascinating way to approach literary history and canonicity, and a novel perspective in looking back at the lifespan of some twentieth-century works. However, the organization of the monograph itself does not help advance a coherent and cohesive argument about how use value functions and, moreover, not just how producers attempt to give work use value but *why* works may have relevance for audiences in different contexts over time. In other words, how does use value itself work? What does it look like for audiences? And how are audiences actors in consuming as well as reacting to literature? Kawana falls short of answering these central questions, in part due to a disjointed organization and an overuse of rhetoric without direct evidential support, and because of this, is ultimately unsuccessful in persuading the reader of the importance, or value, of "use value."

The book's overall structure is weakened by a disjointed organization and lack of coherence, which carries over into individual chapters' structure as well. It can be difficult to connect the individual cases Kawana analyzes to each other, and this structural issue is both reflective of, and contributes to, a lack of a clear and cohesive argument to advance the book's central point. More explicit connections between the cases would be necessary to bring the chapters together, and this could work more successfully to demonstrate the relevance of use value to the analysis of literature. In particular, it is not obvious how chapters reinterpreting a specific point of Sōseki's *Kokoro* and describing literary tourist sites relate to use value, other than demonstrating that certain literary works or authors *are* somehow relevant to contemporary audiences (and, in the case of *Kokoro*, that Kawana finds the novel to have enough relevance to spend a chapter analyzing it). Ironically, the copious illustrations that accompany Kawana's analysis of *Kokoro*, such as stills from film adaptations, amply demonstrate use value in that the work is clearly being continually adapted and made relevant to audiences over time. An analysis

of such adaptations would have been far more successful in proving Kawana's point than the detailed literary criticism found in the chapter.

An overreliance on analysis of the producer side of literary publication and adaptation further detracts from the book's persuasiveness. While it can be difficult to impossible to find explicit evidence of audience reception, Kawana nevertheless errs on the side of assuming that producer endeavors were effective; it seems taken for granted that audiences took advertising campaigns at face value and were persuaded by the points that publishers used to sell the works. We cannot know if this advertising rhetoric reflects the actual reasons that readers purchased *enpon* in the interwar period, however, nor is there significant evidence that, as Kawana attempts to argue, publishers in the early twentieth century were operating with more altruistic motives than in the present day. Surprisingly, Kawana introduces the idea of use value by positing that "media content [was] put into motion by (but not fully under the control of) authors, publishers, and readers." (6) Despite this promising start, the remainder of the book focuses almost exclusively on producers, as though they did indeed have full control over audiences in their advertising campaigns.

Of course, Kawana does not take all producer rhetoric at face value, and rightly contests the acceptance of propaganda at face value, pushing back against the notion that audiences simply believed the rhetoric of the Japanese government and censorship-bound publishers during the Pacific War. (At the same time, this felt like a straw man: who has made the extreme claim that audiences always believe overt government propaganda?) Yet, simultaneously, the memoirs of Japanese authors who recalled their reading habits during the war are accepted as candid and honest. This kind of ready use is problematic when we take into account that the memoirs were published long after the fact, for a postwar audience that was no longer awash in propaganda; it is no surprise that writers would later insist that they were not fooled by government-propagated discourse during the war. Although it may be impossible to get at audience responses to literary works without using memoirs, interviews, diaries, oral histories, and the like, we must also take into account the audience (if any) for those recollections and the settings in which they are recorded for posterity.

Another point of contention in Kawana's argument is the novelty of "media mix" in the twentieth century, and the phenomenon of "contemporary readers" (*gendai dokusha*, using Ueda Yasuo's term) who anticipate such multi-media adaptations of their favorite stories. (125) I do not find a strong case for seeing this modern and contemporary mix -- films, comics, tourist sites,

republishing, and other adaptations in addition to the "original" works themselves -- as a markedly new phenomenon, however, despite rhetoric implying that it is. The "contemporary reader" is the idea of an audience that doesn't just consume works in multiple media but expects to do so, and seeks out alternate forms of their favorite stories to enjoy more than once. Yet Kawana sets this up with the example of Shikitei Sanba, an Edo-period writer, who collaborated on kabuki productions of his works timed to come out simultaneously with his fiction. (124-5) (Surprisingly, we then jump over the entire Edo through mid-Shōwa periods on the next page, with Japanese textual history skipping somehow directly from pre-modern manuscripts to the "post-printing press era" with no analysis of what came between. (126)) There is little evidence presented here to convince the reader of how Sanba's differs qualitatively from that of Kikuchi Kan's story *Shinju fujin* adapted for film in the 1980s or the stills we see (without analysis) from *Kokoro*. Similarly, in another chapter, Kawana coins a term for "repetitive and nostalgic reading" (*gakudo sokai*) that boys engaged in during WWII, when this kind of behavior has surely been conducted by readers long before the 1930s and 1940s for a variety of reasons. (56)

Is this kind of audience behavior -- wanting to (repetitively and perhaps nostalgically) continue enjoying the story, characters, and setting of a favorite work beyond its initial "ending" -- truly something unique to the latter half of the twentieth century and the present day? If so, and this type of audience is truly "contemporary," what about the example of Ozaki Kōyō's illustrated, serialized novel *Konjiki yasha* and its multiple adaptations in the mid-Meiji period, which Kawana also cites? While it is a clear case of early media mix, Kawana simultaneously undermines the argument that this kind of multimedia franchise is a contemporary phenomenon, and that readers have somehow changed since the nineteenth century in a fundamental way. If even Edo readers already expected to be able to enjoy their favorites in the theater as well as on the page, it is an important aspect of the history of use value to explore, although it may be out of scope for this particular book; it should at least be acknowledged, if it cannot be pursued here.

Moreover, we should hardly be surprised by this phenomenon in the first place. Any contemporary fan (viewer, reader, or player) of the *Game of Thrones* or *Star Wars* franchises, which take the form of multiple media that nonetheless repetitively appeal to audiences, would likely see it as natural to want to continue enjoying their favorite settings, characters, and stories after the end of their original encounter. Perhaps it is more productive to look at use value as something that has been functioning for centuries, tying audiences together in different contexts and historical settings, rather than attempting to present it as new and unique to our present time.

Kawana does, in fact, bring up the long tradition of successful media mix, but not until the fourth chapter, and the point is buried in another argument. Bringing this point out and investigating it explicitly as a central aspect of the monograph may make "use value" a more convincing avenue of literary criticism for reluctant scholars.

The conclusion, while out of place and suffering from misinterpretations of legal aspects of copyright and related terminology, does bring us back to a potentially fruitful way of thinking about literature and its lifespan that is set up in the introduction. There, Kawana writes:

[Creative agents'] seeming acts of 'subtraction' or 'derivation' [from an original story] are actually powerful forces of 'multiplication' that create different forms of existence through which literary works can outlive their expected lifespans.

(12)

However, the conclusion never quite frames the non-official actors it brings up, such as the volunteers behind the Aozora Bunko digital library project, as active contributors to such multiplication. Where, in this picture, are fans? Where are *dōjinshi* and fanfiction, or consumers of the material artifacts surrounding their favorite works? Where is, broadening the view from prose literature to fiction franchises more generally, cosplay? With such a vibrant fan community in contemporary Japan, the lack of engagement with this type of actor seems a remarkable oversight. Simple availability and advertisement, provided by producers, is necessary but not sufficient to create use value, and fans have a long history; like the media-mix reader, they are hardly a novel phenomenon unique to the twenty-first century. No matter whether we are looking at of a literary work's "origin" or its "multiplication," audiences must be involved actively at some point and Kawana largely neglects their experiences as well as their reciprocal actions.

This oversight is likely related to the rhetoric of a "crisis of literature" that Kawana employs, especially in the conclusion. In this view, audiences are no longer interested in literature in the present day and modern literature is at risk of disappearing from the collective consciousness. In reality, this is far from the state of affairs in twenty-first century Japan. The market is saturated with literature, appearing in countless magazines -- including variety of genres, not just literary -- and pocket *bunkobon* editions, and there are more annual prizes than any reader can be expected to keep track of. These works are being adapted into film and comic form, and likewise, films and comics are being novelized. Literature is in no danger of disappearing. Presenting literature as being in crisis is a missed opportunity: this is a perfect way

to make the case for use value as explaining the remarkable relevance of some earlier works even in the midst of this prolific contemporary literary scene. The reason most texts do not survive is that they are almost immediately replaced by a continual flood of new works. Turning Kawana's sense of crisis on its head, it is actually surprising that a novel like Sōseki's *Kokoro* could manage to stay alive for twenty-first century readers at all, when they have so many contemporary, seemingly more contextually-relevant works to enjoy.

Ultimately, this kind of missed opportunity is indicative of the issues with Kawana's presentation of the overarching argument. While certainly innovative, and an important step in bridging the fields of Japanese literary criticism and book history in English, Kawana's implementation of use value here is not successful due to the organization and structure of the argument, as well as the ways in which evidence has been selected and analyzed. While this book identifies a unique perspective on modern and contemporary literature and literary history, it falls to future scholarship to fully explore this perspective and to convince us of the relevance of "use value" itself for our work.