Quoting medieval legends: Itô Hiromi and Tsuhima Yûko

Many contemporary Japanese novels have borrowed motifs from medieval buddhist tales, legends and history, and incorporated them into their contemporary settings.

About the project

Tsushima Yûko’s 2004 novel, Nara ripoôto (Nara Report), is richly infused with intertextual bits and pieces from the medieval times, adding an extra dimension to the dynamics in the male protagonist’s relationship with his mother in the twenty-first century. One sees similar patterns of borrowing of motifs in works by Itô Hiromi such as Nihon no fushigu na hanashi (Japanese Mysterisou tales 2004), and Togenuki sugamo jizô engi (The Thorn-Puller: New Tales of the Sugamo Jizô, 2007) on which I have published an article earlier.

These works are written in such a way as to awaken collective memories of the past to raise awareness about our own temporal and existential positionality so that we can reexamine it from ‘historical’ perspectives, thereby enriching our understanding of it. These works are also interesting in terms of genre, because of their complex narratological structure which defies conventional boundaries between prose and poetry, realism and magic realism, and history and fiction.

Objectives

Using theoretical work on collective memory, intertexts, quotations, and genre, this project aims to do a close reading of the works of the Japanese female writers mentioned above.