Sketching Out the Critical Tradition: Yanagita Kunio and the Reappraisal of Realism
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While recent criticism has challenged prevailing conceptions about the development of literary narrative(s) in Japan, there has been little recognition of earlier dissenting voices. Much in the way that the boundaries of *bungaku* have been determined retrospectively, so too has membership in that apparent arbiter of literary style, the Meiji *bundan*. What was in fact an informal network of ever-changing allegiances to compatriots, journals and literary trends has emerged as a seemingly unified institution peopled by monumental figures (e.g. Shimazaki Tôson) who ostensibly embody various stages of Japanese literature's passage into the modern age.

Looking at literary journals, which contain the critical and conversational writing that in many ways constitutes the formal record of these fealties, provides not only a context for reexamining the contemporary *bundan* understanding of narrativity, but also exposes many diverse viewpoints that were subsequently overlooked. One such marginalized perspective is expressed in Yanagita Kunio's earliest essays, a group of short *zuihitsu* published in the literary journal *Bunshô sekai* between 1907 and 1909.

Critical discourse generally discounts Yanagita's early membership in the *bundan* because of his later career as native ethnologist, but these essays clearly reveal an insider both sensitive to the internal workings of Meiji literary production and critical of conventional interpretations of narrative realism. This presentation will explore how these essays bridge the discursive gap between *bungaku* and Yanagita's *minzokugaku*, and how that connection, in turn, may help us reassess the critical tradition that has defined the narrative space of modern Japanese literature so narrowly.