

Asian Languages and Literature

The Andrew L. Markus Memorial Lecture

Andrew Lawrence Markus taught Japanese language and literature at the University of Washington from 1986 to the time of his death in 1995. Established through the generosity of family and friends, this annual lecture honors Professor Markus' contribution to the study of Asian Languages and Literature.

Norma Field

University of Chicago

What Counts as Literature?

The Astonishing Revival of *The Cannery Ship* (1929) in Recession-era Japan

Kobayashi Takiji (1903-33) is arguably the best known of the writers who joined the proletarian culture movement. These writers believed in the necessity of fundamental social change, and they sought to participate in the struggle through their art. How a work of literature was to change the world, however, was never self-evident, and the question was intensely debated by the writers themselves even as they challenged established writers and critics who argued that art was not art that was dedicated to a political purpose.

Against all odds, his best-known work, *The Cannery Ship*, came to renewed attention in 2008 with one paperback edition alone enjoying a print run of 500,000 copies. How can we understand this phenomenon socially and politically? What are the implications for modern Japanese literature, as well as our sense of literature generally?

Norma Field is the *Robert S. Ingersoll Distinguished Service Professor of Japanese Studies* at the University of Chicago. Beginning in the field of classical literary studies, she took some of what she learned about the emperor from *The Tale of Genji* (*The Splendor of Longing in The Tale of Genji*, 1987), to contemporary Japan (*In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*, 1991).

After a period of studying issues of responsibility related to the aftermath of WWII, she has spent the last several years studying the proletarian literature movement and is preparing, with Heather Bowen-Struyk, an anthology of the same (*For Dignity, Justice, and Revolution: An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Literature*).

Her most recent publication is in Japanese: *Kobayashi Takiji: 21seiki ni dō yomu ka* (*Kobayashi Takiji: Reading him for the 21st Century*).



Thursday, May 7, 2009

Kane Hall
Walker Ames Room

7:30 p.m.

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW