Gray (Florida State Univ.), author of Muslim Women on the Move (CH, Nov'08, 46-1784), provides a comprehensive overview of current discourses on women's rights in Morocco through analysis and interviews. In chapter 1 she explains how debates over women's rights invariably intersect with larger questions of national and religious identity. She offers an interview with Muslim feminist Fatima Mernissi and a fascinating account of a conversation that took place among unrelated passengers on a five-and-a-half-hour train ride. "Feminism and its Discontents" provides an equally pointed critique of Western feminism and women-led Islamist organizations in Morocco. Chapter 3 depicts a "third way" beyond Islamism and feminism as an "alternative paradigm" that "de-secularizes" gender equality without engaging the West. This middle ground calls for a reinterpretation of Islam in the light of its reformist spirit rather than its historically specific laws. Gray situates gender at the center of the recent developments in the Middle East and ponders the future of Morocco. Overall, by dwelling on the case of Morocco, the author counters pedestrian analyses that often overlook the specificity of women's conditions in Muslim-majority countries.

**Summing Up:** Recommended.

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**African & Middle Eastern**

51-0115  PL248  2012-43694 CIP

Blasing, Mutlu Konuk. **Nâzım Hikmet: the life and times of Turkey's world poet.** Persea, 2013. 294p index afp ISBN 0892554177, $27.95; ISBN 9780892554171, $27.95

Nâzım Hikmet (1902-63) was the towering poet of 20th-century Turkey. In spite of his fame and influence, his life and personality are difficult for a biographer to separate from the legends—many self-created—that grew up around this charismatic figure. While any biography is an interpretation of its subject's life, with Hikmet the biographer must be steeped in the Turkish language, sensitive to the subtleties of a dynamic, experimental poetry, and willing to risk constructing a vividly lived but underdocumented life. Blasing (Brown Univ.), herself Turkish and coauthor-translator of Hikmet's epic poetry in Human Landscapes from My Country (CH, Nov'02, 40-1368), has succeeded admirably. Her picture of Hikmet is plausible and believable. Born into an old, educated, elite family, Hikmet early developed a powerful social conscience expressed in poetic language and forms that he had to invent. Under the influence of Russian formalism, he discarded the old Ottoman forms and poetic vocabulary and wrote in a style that he wanted the common person to understand. Thought to be a Communist, he spent 13 years imprisoned in Turkey and 18 years exiled in Moscow, where he is buried. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended.

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**Asian & Oceanian**

51-0118  HQ1170  2012-29539 CIP


Ratti (Salisbury Univ.) examines the limits of religion and secularism (hence "postsecularism") by analyzing the literature of South Asia (India, Sri
Reviews

Humanities

Lanka, Bangladesh) produced in the global or transnational context of rapid exchange. Works examined are by Michael Orduña, Salman Rushdie, Shaun Singh Baldwin, Amitav Ghosh, and Allan Sekula. The author argues that the relation between religion and secularism is unbridgeable, and shows how questioning the politics of nationalism and the orthodoxies of religion have allowed these writers to compromise and produce affirmative values (friendship, love, hybridity, “newness”) within a secular structure in pursuit of “semiotic” aims. For some, “diasporic” considerations are relevant, while for others the foreign location lends meaning. Some writers posit community as a metaphor or introduce the gender dimension in the aestheticization of the religious for the sake of humanitarian pursuits. Others examine the relationships between religion, politics, and the nation-state. The originality of Ratti’s book resides in dealing with literary works as temporal products in which secular tenets have an impact on belief systems, while still recognizing the relevance of the latter. It shares much in common with Saba Mahmood’s Politics of Piety (2005), J.-A. Mbembe’s On the Postcolony (2001), and Talal Asad’s Formations of the Secular (2003).

Summing Up: Recommended. ★★★ Upper-division undergraduates through faculty.—K. M. Kapanga, University of Richmond

51-0119 PL768 2012-36924 CIP


Kidnappings, tortures, and gruesome murders: the eight stories in this collection—many translated for the first time—are disturbing and at times poignant. Several stories conform to the category of sekkō, or “Buddhist lessons.” Others are derived from ko-jūrari (“old jūrari”), referring to the Japanese puppet plays that were performed prior to the era of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725). The protagonists in these tales are often young children born in response to their parents’ fervent prayers, yet they are “sold, cursed, beaten, abandoned, branded”; it is difficult to reconcile such brutality with Buddhist teachings. The stories play to the fundamental human fear of bodily harm. At the same time, however, by featuring the most vulnerable members of society who persevere against all odds, the stories also celebrate the wondrous capacity of the human spirit to endure. The brief introduction by translator Kimbrough (Univ. of Colorado, Boulder) offers important contextualization, as do numerous illustrations throughout the text. The translations are brisk, colloquial, and easily accessible. This compilation complements other studies of Japanese literature and arts, including Susan Matsuo’s Legend of Semimaru (1978); Engendering Faith (CH, Nov’03, 41-1493), edited by Barbara Ruch; and Flowering Trees (1992), edited by James Sanford, William LaFleur, and Masamichi Nagatomi. Summing Up: Recommended. ★★★ Lower-division undergraduates through faculty.—R. L. Capeland, Washington University

51-0120 DG297 2012-28547 CIP


Adams (Univ. of Tasmania, Australia) provides a welcome précis of his biographical-literary methods that reveal the intensely aretological aspect (narrating the mythical or miraculous deeds of a hero or god) in the Vita Marcus Antonini Philostratis, set within the larger context of the historically and textually problematic Historia Augusta. The author acknowledges the earlier contributions of Joseph Schwendemann, André Chastagnol, Ronald Syme, and Robin Birley, and claims to publish the first in-depth commentary on the Vita Marci. He validates his claims through an insightful thematic analysis that focuses on the biographer’s motivations, the probity of the Vita as a historical source, and the romantic memorialization of Marcus Aurelius as the ideal princeps. Adams presents a trenchantly detailed literary dissection of the Vita using a distinctive approach (complete with graphs) that focuses on the biographical elevation of thematic progression over historical fact. By contextualizing the Vita Marci, Adams demonstrates the consistent partiality toward the “character” of Marcus Aurelius evidenced within the entire corpus of the Historia Augusta. This is a highly specialized literary study demonstrating (and demanding) a virtuosic command of scholarship. It cuts across a broad spectrum of scholarly issues, and should appeal to advanced students of Roman imperial history and biography. Summing Up: Highly recommended. ★★★ Upper-division undergraduates and above.—J. S. Lounsinen, St. Francis College, Brooklyn, NY

51-0121 PA3545 2012-46382 CIP


Historically, Greek tragedy and Noh have nothing to do with each other, having developed in different eras and geographical regions. Yet both theatrical traditions tell stories of human suffering and action, and they evoke emotional response in audiences past and present. Noh plays are most familiar as mugen or “spirit noh,” in which a wandering soul recounts an event in his or her life that is the cause of longing or torment. There are also genzai or “realistic noh,” which deal with living people and present action. Some of the best-loved plays in the repertoire are genzai noh: Bunza Benkei, Sumidagawa, and Ataka. Smetustro (Univ. of Pittsburgh), author of The Artistry of Aeschylus and Zeami (CH, Oct ’98, 27-0776) uses Aristotle’s views on tragedy to analyze the plot structure in a group of lesser-known genzai noh texts, comparing them to examples of tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides. She examines the writers’ use of action in these noh plays and their incorporation of third-person speech at the plot climax, features that correspond to Aristotle’s principle that a tragedy can have only three actors. Smetustro’s study of noh texts is uniquely illuminating for scholars of tragedy. Summing Up: Recommended. ★★★ Upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.—C. Lam, University of the Fraser Valley

English & American

51-0122 PN1109 2012-25276 CIP


Abate (Hollins Univ.) introduces her book with a brief historical overview of the American fascination with murder, which has ranged from Cotton Mather’s execution sermons and early American captivity...