
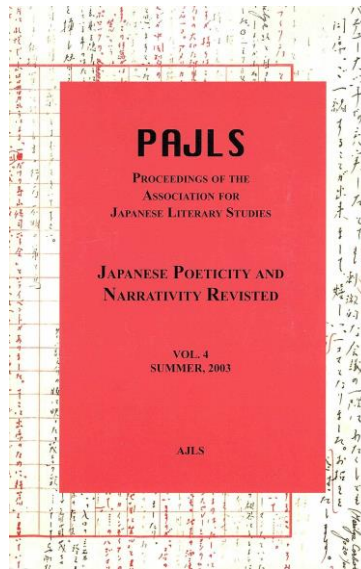


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NARRATIVITY REVISITED**

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## **JAPANESE POETICITY AND NARRATIVITY REVISITED**

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## FOREWORD

After the exciting tenth annual meeting in Boston, we came back in 2002 to Purdue University, the location where our activities had started. Topic-wise also, we returned to the basics by highlighting the themes featured at our first and second meetings—*uta* and *monogatari*. The conference organizer solicited to revisit Japanese poetry and narrative with new approaches in mind, encouraging discussions of the topics that had been less elaborated so far; in particular, we called for papers that focused on topics such as issues of translation, the comedic/playful literary tradition, and examinations of critical writings. We accepted thirty paper proposals, which had responded to our call with a variety of topics and approaches. Revised essays of most of the presented papers are included in these proceedings. As you see, we examine a lot of topics—poetics and narratology, traditional texts and contemporary writings, translation and critical essays, as well as aspects of literary politics.

One thing I noted, with pleasant surprise, was the fact that the three keynote speakers we had invited all talked about poetry rather than novels and tales. Professor Kojima Naoko, who is known as an expert of *Taketori monogatari* and *Genji monogatari*, discussed a *shintaiishi* poem from the early Meiji period. Professor Mizuta Noriko, who is known for her extensive critical reading of women novelists, examined two contemporary women poets, Ishigaki Rin and Shiraishi Kazuko. Professor Yoshimasu Gōzō, a leading poet of *gendaishi*, shared his discovery of a way to enjoy modern *tanka* poems. When given the general idea of the conference as a return to the basics of literary studies, they all chose poetry and poetics as their topics. This coincidence interests and impresses me.

The majority of us, Japanese literature researchers today in this country, are students equipped with structuralist, post-structuralist and later theories. We are all familiar with critical analyses of canonical discourses, that is, criticisms of the master narratives that rule the cultural unconscious of different local communities at different historical moments. With Karatani Kōjin and Hasumi Shigehiko, we also have become accustomed to a critical eye to view *monogatari* as a Japanese equivalent of the canon production machine. *Uta* or poetry can be discovered in this context as an interesting genre of expression, which necessarily resists the formation and completion of *monogatari*'s symbolic/semanticist order. Our keynote speakers' choice of poetry as the topic of their addresses seems to indicate their conscious or intuitive

interest in this subversive power of poetry as a foundational energy for literary creativity. The two keynote essays we include in this proceedings are inspiring to me in the sense that they both shed insightful light on the secret of poetic resistance by paying specific attention to the creative processes of different compositions.

As critical readers of literary discourses, we tend to automatically politicize literature by focusing attention on hegemonic conflicts that structure the discursive texts. Before engaging ourselves exclusively in these analyses of textual politics, however, it is worth pondering over what literature means for us personally and for literary studies in general. One of the essential questions we should ask is how to understand literature in terms of a relationship between individuals and society. Is literature written as a celebration of individual expressiveness or as a politically and morally charged message advocating social justice and goodness? The two essays provide us with remarkable answers to this basic question and help us reflect on what we really want to do with literature.

Professor Mizuta's essay displays a well-balanced discussion on the individualities of particular poets and the political dimension of their works' messages in terms of gender issues. At one level, this is an exemplary feminist essay, which finds in two contemporary women poets' works keen criticisms of their gendered society from the outcast observers' eyes. At another level, this essay delineates two individual poets' particular and thorough soul-searching processes through their long and devoted expressive practices. The author praises the transcendental loneliness and peacefulness the two women artists have acquired at the conclusive stage of their creative enterprises.

Professor Yoshimasu's performance during the conference was fascinating. He mixed his poetry reading with his wife, Marilya's, dramatic singing performance, and then gave us a lecture that included cassette tape-recorded poetry readings by Saitō Mokichi and Yosano Akiko. The essay we include here corresponds to the lecture portion of Professor Yoshimasu's conference presentation. We witness here in what a, say, nakedly intimate manner this creative writer interacts with the expressive nuances of different poetic languages. His essay implicitly claims that the original joy of reading poems resides in the endless processes of personal learning, and in the mysteries of different individual voices. Isn't this a wonderfully fundamental message—thrilling and challenging—for a conference intending to return to the basics of literature and literary studies?



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Eiji Sekine  
The 2002 AJLS Conference Chair