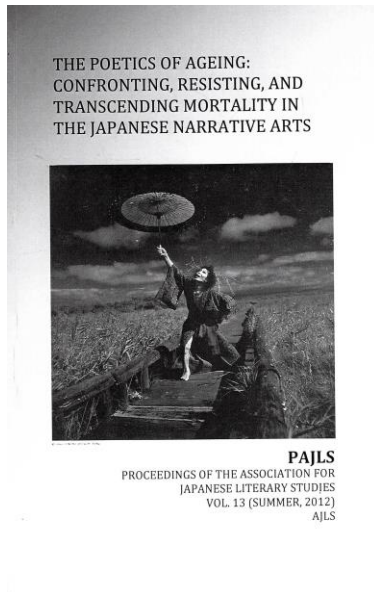


“Goodbye!”

John Solt 

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PAJLS 13:

*The Poetics of Ageing: Confronting, Resisting, and
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Karen Thornber



13 photo EIKOH HOSOE 1994

Goodbye!

John Solt

for Ohno Kazuo
(27 October 1906-1 June 2010)

I

how do i say goodbye
to a 103 year old
who is immortal?

i ask myself
facing a wall
sitting calmly

you must have seen
something awful
during the war

to transform you
into a saint

i am afraid
to contemplate
the depth of despair
you sank to

when you saw
man as wolf to man

i'm only sure
you took it in
with your eyes

and never became
the wolf to man

we met more
than fifty times
you danced at my home
i visited yours
dozens of times

i never thought
to ask you
about the war

even though i posed
other pointed questions
like how you felt when
your 21 year old son
was buggered on stage
by Hijikata Tatsumi
in the 1959 debut
butoh performance

you answered
“it was such
an honor”

in disbelief
i asked you
twice again

and you smiled
saying only
“it was
a great
honor”

4 GOODBYE!

II

how do i say goodbye
to a 103 year old
dance legend?

i first met you
when you were in
your mid-seventies
about 30 years ago
when i was just 30

i thought the first
meeting might be
the very last

each time
we said farewell
i wondered
if we'd meet
again

this became
a mental charade
after countless times

in the end
i spoke with you
about you
while you were semi-conscious

i had expected
not to see you
for so long
i thought i would
take it in stride
when you actually passed

so i was shocked

how sad i felt
despite the absurdity
of wishing longer life
on a 103 year old

your passing
allowed me
to congeal
the feeling for you
not that it
isn't fluid
despite the absoluteness
of death

then i saw again
what i had intuited
all along

you were the saint
in a woman's dress
dancing the night away

you were the only man
who was constantly
pregnant
maybe that's why
you lived so long

how could a war-torn
cross-dressing surreal
dancer live
to such a ripe old age?

your frail body
was built
for the long run

or was the saint
just moving

6 GOODBYE!

as pure spirit?

III

how can i say goodbye
to a 103 year old
dear friend?

the wall dissolves
i smile, stand up
and walk away

you were never here
neither was i
that's why i won't
say goodbye