Front Matter for


Including a Preface by Massimiliano Tomasi

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Massimiliano Tomasi
# Table of Contents

Preface........................................................................................................................................... vii  
Massimiliano Tomasi

**Keynote Address**

“Kindai nihon bungaku ni okeru shūkyō oyobi supirichuariti:” Kindai nihon bungaku ni okeru “kami” to “kamigami” to ............................................................. 1  
Miyasaka Satoru

**Early Intersections of Religious and Literary Discourse in the Medieval Period**

 Million Dollar Question: Does the Woman’s Body Matter?  
An Examination into Female Salvation as Represented in *The Tale of the Heike* ................................................................. 25  
Nicolette Lee

**Parodies of the Afterlife, Salvation and Intertextuality: Literary Negotiations in the Realm of the Spiritual in Edo Japan**

 Monks as Advocates of Filial Piety:  
The History of Buddhist Kōshiden in the Early Edo Period................. 35  
Motoi Katsumata

Two Views of Saikaku in the Underworld............................................. 45  
Dylan McGee

**From Engagement to Representation: The Discontinuous Continuity of Religious Elements in Literature**

 Buddhist Verses in Classical *Renga* and the Performance of Impermanence ................................................................. 55  
Bonnie McClure
# Table of Contents

**Renditions of Christianity in Modern Japanese Literature**

Christianity and the Question of Faith in Kunikida Doppo’s Thought ................................................................. 65
  Massimiliano Tomasi

“A Superfool Constantly Dreaming of the Future:”
Christ as Poet in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s
“Saihō no hito” (1927) ................................................................. 85
  Pau Pitarch Fernández

The “Pure Novel” of the Lost Home:
Yokomitsu Ri’ichi’s *A Traveler’s Sadness* ........................................... 99
  Maeri Megumi

**Demonology, Divination and Supernatural Abductions**

Ghosts from the Past:
The Fortune of *Hyaku Monogatari* in Post-Meiji Japan ....................... 115
  Diego Cucinelli

*Kamikakushi* 神隠し: An Artist’s Salvation? ............................................. 127
  Maryellen Toman Mori

Furui Yoshikiji’s *Hijiri*:
Spiritual Traditions Engulfed by Modernity ......................................... 143
  Jennifer Scott

**Metaphorical Representations of the Sacred**

Local Festivals and Exotic Customs:
Nishikawa Mitsuru and Gaichi Bungaku in Taiwan .............................. 159
  Yongfei Yi

“Yamiichi” no Maria: Sata Ineko “Kaze ni najinda uta”
ni miru sengo no yakeato kara no shuppatsu ..................................... 171
  Ihara Miyoshi
# Table of Contents

**Spirituality and the Other in Postwar and Contemporary Japanese Narrative**

Mothers with Demon Masks in
Yamagishi Ryōko’s Shōjo Manga .......................................................... 195
  Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase

Unaccomplished Desire for Japanese Aesthetics in
Tachihara Masaaki’s Novels................................................................. 209
  Yoshiko Matsuura

Spiritual Recovery in Yoshimoto Banana’s *Amrita* .............................. 221
  Yuko Ogawa

Yasuoka Shōtarō and His M/Other ....................................................... 231
  Eiji Sekine

**Revising Yogācāra: Rendition and Interpretation of Yuishiki in Modern Japanese Literary Discourses**

Mystical Experience as Literary Locus
in Ishikawa Jun’s “Fugen”
(The Bodhisattva or Samantabhadra).................................................... 243
  Yoshihiro Yasuhara

**Narratives of Healing**

Ghosts, Spirituality and Healing in Post-Fukushima Literature:
Yoshimoto Banana’s Bibliotherapy for National Recovery ................. 257
  Lisette Gebhartd

List of Contributors............................................................................... 277
Preface

Massimiliano Tomasi
Chair, 23rd AJLS Conference Organizing Committee

The 23rd Annual Meeting of AJLS was hosted by the Center for East Asian Studies at Western Washington University on October 10-11, 2014. The theme of the conference was "Religion and Spirituality in Japanese Literature," a topic that had fascinated me for years. In examining this theme, the conference explored intersections between the spiritual and artistic domains in a wide range of literary texts, within the cultural and epistemological settings of different periods. I hoped to attract a diverse group of scholars of modern, pre-modern and classical literature interested in the dialectics between literature and religion, the negotiations between creativity and spiritual formation, and the artistic representation of faith, the sacred and the divine.

Scholars from across the globe submitted proposals, and thirty-four papers were selected for presentation. Every paper and panel was presented to the group as a whole, and the presence of scholars from different parts of the world, approaching topics from a variety of perspectives, enriched the content of the conference beyond expectations. Discussion was vigorous, in a warm and convivial setting.

The keynote address was given by Prof. Miyasaka Satoru, President of the International Society for Akutagawa Ryūnosuke Studies, and the conference also featured a roundtable discussion in which Prof. Miyasaka and Prof. Tsuboi Hideto of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies discussed the relationship between religion and art in contemporary Japanese intellectual discourse. This was moderated by Prof. Eiji Sekine of Purdue University.

The 23rd Annual Meeting of AJLS benefited from a grant from the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission and the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, and from financial support from a number of units across Western Washington University campus, including the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Japanese program, and the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. Needless to say, it was the Center for East Asian Studies that provided the logistics and the critical financial support without which this event would not have been possible. The Center serves as a focal point for Western Washington University’s interaction with East Asia, and
an arena for vibrant intellectual cross-pollination from a variety of disciplines, promoting rigorous training in East Asian languages and cultural traditions. As a complement to its academic offerings and as a service to the campus and local communities, the Center also sponsors lectures, presentations and other activities related to East Asia. The Center’s hosting of the annual meeting of AJLS, and publication of the proceedings by its East Asian Studies Press, are an attestation of the Center’s commitment to support East Asian Studies at Western and desire to leave an easily accessible record of the cutting-edge scholarship presented during the conference. As the Director of the Center, I am grateful for the opportunity to add my own piece to the eighteen articles that are included in this volume.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. Eiji Sekine for his assistance and encouragement at various stages of the project, and to Stephanie Wanne, the East Asian Studies Program Manager, and Prof. Scott Pearce, the Managing Editor of the Press, for their invaluable help in organizing the meeting and preparing the proceedings.
Religion and Spirituality in Japanese Literature