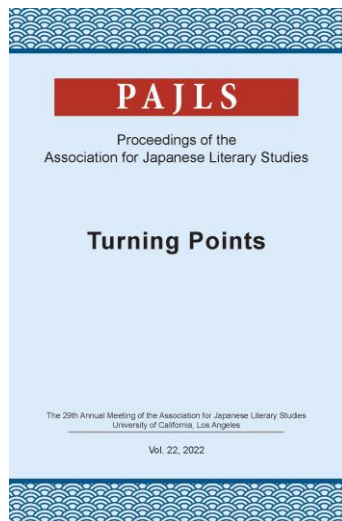


Front matter for *PAJLS 22*:

Including a foreword by Torquil Duthie 

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## Turning Points

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MATTHEW FRALEIGH, MANAGING EDITOR

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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

The twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies was held on May 12–14, 2022, at the University of California, Los Angeles. Originally scheduled for the spring of 2021, the conference had to be postponed for more than a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The “call for papers” took the form of two roundtable conversations on the conference theme of “Turning Points,” recorded in March of 2021.

The conference featured fourteen panels with fifty-eight presenters, and a total of almost one hundred participants. Because the conference took place at a time when there was still a relatively high risk of contagion, in-person participants were required to wear masks at all times and test every day on site. A number of panels and presenters had to move their presentations to a virtual format, in some cases only days before the conference. In the end, of the fourteen panels, six were fully in-person, three were fully remote, and five were hybrid, with some panel presenters in-person and others remote.

When my UCLA colleagues and I met in early 2020 to think of a theme for the twenty-ninth AJLS conference, we came up with the idea of “Turning Points” as a capacious theme to focus on the relationship between literature and historical change in Japan. In broad terms, we were thinking of how literary texts respond to and participate in moments of historical rupture in which the future appears uncertain and available forms of linguistic and literary expression no longer seem adequate to describe new realities. We were also thinking of 3.11 as a key turning point in contemporary Japanese literary criticism, and of how the concept of a turning point provides structure to the ways in which we describe literary history. As the Covid-19 pandemic set in, however, we became increasingly aware of the fact that we were living through a major global turning point in the present. This sense was further intensified during the George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests in the spring and summer of 2020. These issues and others were discussed in the two roundtable “call for papers” videos published in March 2021.

By the time of the conference in May 2022, the mood had shifted once again and the pandemic now appeared to be more like an endless turning tunnel than a turning point. The conference featured a wonderfully apt keynote lecture by Furukawa Hideo (not included in these proceedings) titled “Turning Point Now” that questioned the very possibility of identifying a turning point in the present within the limitations of literary expression, and concluded with a dramatic reading that interspersed his

2016 modern Japanese translation of the *Tale of the Heike* with Royall Tyler's 2012 English translation and with the original Kakuichibon *Heike* text. Most of the conference presentations focused, as we expected, on certain key historical moments—the medieval period, late Meiji, the Great Kantō earthquake, the postwar, 3.11, and so on—and these key historical “turning points” are also strongly represented in the essays in this volume, but there were also other papers that developed the “turning point” theme in unexpected and interesting ways.

I would like to thank my UCLA colleagues and co-organizers of the conference: Michael Emmerich, Seiji Lippit, Satoko Shimazaki, and Junko Yamazaki; thanks are also due to the other participants in the roundtable call for papers: Michael Bourdaghs, Will Bridges, Mimi Long, David Lurie, Sharalyn Orbaugh, and Vyjayanthi Selinger; to the staff of my department of Asian Languages and Cultures at UCLA, especially Shan Shan Chi-Au, Taka Imai, and Timothy Yu; and to the UCLA graduate students who assisted throughout the three days of the conference: Yasmine Krings, Kanako Mabuchi, Zelin Min, Debbie Price, Kristen Schreiner, and Suong Thai. Financial and logistical support was provided by the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities, the Haruhisa Handa Professorship of Shintō Studies, and the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at UCLA. I would especially like to convey my gratitude to Matthew Fraleigh, Managing Editor of *PAJLS*, for his assistance at every stage of planning the conference, and for putting this volume of proceedings together.

The AJLS Meeting at UCLA began with two panels dedicated to the memory of the late Sari Kawana, who until her untimely death in October of 2020 was professor of Japanese literature at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. As noted in the panel abstract, Kawana's work was very much focused on the kinds of questions raised by the theme of the conference, and she responded to these questions in ways that recognized that we inhabit our own turning points and that our scholarly methods need to be continually rethought in order to describe the changing realities of our field. To quote from the panel abstract, “her unconventional readings perform what criticism at its best does—convincing readers to see the world anew.” Of the five papers that were presented at the AJLS conference in the “Kawana Mode”—one described by her colleagues and friends as “comparative, playful, and rooted in close reading,” two are published here as bookends to this volume of proceedings.

Torquil Duthie  
August 2023