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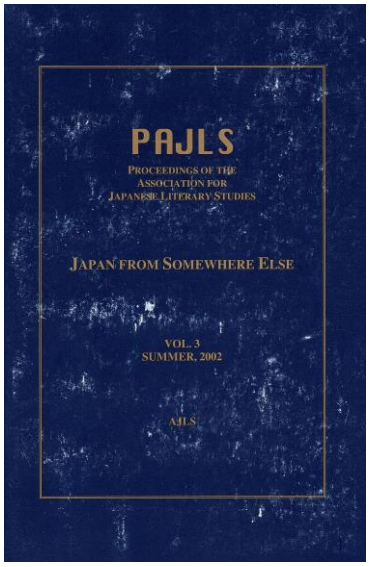

PAJLS 3:
Japan From Somewhere Else.
Eiji Sekine, Editor; Joyce L. Detzner, Production Editor.

PAJLS

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JAPAN FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE

VOL. 3
SUMMER, 2002

AJLS

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PAJLS PUBLICATION: All papers presented during the annual meeting can be included in the PAJLS. All contributors are allowed to revise their papers after their presentation. The proceedings of the annual meeting is published the following year.

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

HOSEA HIRATA..... iii

THE NEW JAPANESE LITERATURE: TRANSNATIONALISM AND HETEROGENEITY

THE POETICS OF COLONIAL NOSTALGIA: A CASE FOR *TAIWAN MANYŌSHŪ*

FAYE YUAN KLEEMAN..... 2

WHERE IS MY HOME: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

KEIKO NAKANO..... 12

BEYOND EAST AND WEST: TAWADA YOKO AND LEVY HIDEO

REIKO TACHIBANA..... 23

"JAPAN" AS SOMEWHERE ELSE: "MULTI-LINGUALISM" AND "TRANSLATION"

MYSTERY PLANE: SAKAMOTO KYŪ AND THE TRANSLATIONS OF ROCKABILLY

MICHAEL BOURDAGHS..... 38

GLOBALITY, AND JAPAN'S SOMEWHERE ELSE
TOM LOOSER..... 51
GODZILLA, THE MONSTER MADE IN JAPAN
JAMES REICHERT..... 63

JAPAN AS LITERARY FORM, HEIAN TO NOW

RHETORIC OF TAXONOMY: THE PILLOW BOOKS OF SEI SHŌNAGON, PETER GREENAWAY, AND RUTH L. OZEKI
NAOMI FUKUMORI..... 71

"MERICAN-JAP" AND MODERNITY: TANI JŌJI'S POPULAR NEGOTIATION OF THE FOREIGN
KYOKO OMORI..... 83

"READING" THE FEMALE READER IN LIZA DALBY AND HER *TALE OF MURASAKI*
CATHERINE RYU..... 97

AND THERE, BEFORE ME, JAPAN: MIZUMURA MINAE AND THE ORTHODOX NOVEL
ANN SHERIF.....117

ESSAYS BY CREATIVE WRITERS

JAPAN THROUGH A FOREIGNER'S EYES: A FAMILY VISIT
MAKO YOSHIKAWA.....126

YEAR OF THE DOGS AND WHAT JAPAN MEANT TO ME
HOLLY UYEMOTO.....133

TIME AND PLACE: "JAPAN FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE"
KYOKO MORI.....138

ふたごたちの旅 (FUTAGOTCHI NO TABI)
多和田葉子 (TAWADA YŌKO)..... 143

無題 (MUDAI)
伊藤比呂美 (ITŌ HIROMI)..... 145

ABOUT GUEST WRITERS

.....148

FOREWORD

JAPAN FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE

In the spring of 1871, a seventeen-year old French boy was feverishly formulating his visionary poetics in his letters, later known as "Lettres du Voyant," repeatedly proclaiming "Je est un autre." Rimbaud seemed to be attempting to revive an oracular strain in the tradition of poetic production, albeit this time without God's original words. We now see that his youthful attempt at displacing the self as the central agent of poetry marked the emergence of Modernism proper, later being spearheaded by the French Surrealists at the beginning of the twentieth century.

We are here now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, teaching Japanese literature in North America. We have long lost Rimbaud's feverish pitch to lose ourselves "through long, immense and calculated derangement of all the senses." After navigating through the rough waves of various postmodern theories in the past several decades (which, after all, were rehashing Rimbaud's incoherent screams in ever-obscure philosophical languages), we stand here still haunted by some gnawing sense of displacement – be it from the self, from the origin, from one's own language, or from home.

"What am I doing here?" One may wonder about trying to "teach" Japanese literature in translation to some young American MTV-philes born in the mid-80's. The gap between what we teach (Japanese literature) and what our students have been exposed to may seem absurd. But, then, how about our own relationship to "what we teach," Japanese literature, culture, or say, Japan? Are we intimately connected to "Japan"? Do we ever feel at home with Japanese literature? Of course, the undeniable fact is that we are not "there," in Japan, where Japanese literature is written, for whose denizens, Ōe proclaimed, it is written. We do not use their language. Are we inevitably and essentially displaced from "what we teach"? Yes, we imagine Japan from somewhere else. We create Japan from somewhere else.

Without implying a hint of irony, we may say that the shattering of any stable identity has now become another academic cliché. The identity of "Japan" is no exception. How many papers do we have to read, whose sole objective is to expose and criticize such essentialism in any given topic related to "Japan"? Rimbaud's fervor is gone but its cold, petrified

formula remains in our academic discourse. We seem to be in a transitional period again, residing in the post-post-whatever-theory era, wondering what will be the next trend in our pedantic business.

Certainly, modern Japanese literature began as what Kobayashi Hideo called "Literature of the Lost Home [故郷を失った文学]." Most likely, the loss of Japan's stable identity (if there ever was one) comprises the essential core of what has been driving the enterprise of "modern Japanese literature." But do we simply keep gloating over the serendipity of our academic desire nicely befitting the condition of its topic – that is, the displacement of a cultural identity seen at the core of "modern Japanese literature" conveniently meeting our academic desire for displacement? I am afraid we may be forgetting that the genuine pathos of losing one's home appears only when one's longing for home is desperately felt.

It is time to rethink our desire for displacement as well as our desire for home. When we look at contemporary Japanese writers, we notice that many of them have gone abroad to write. Consider, for example, the number of recent Akutagawa-prize recipients who wrote their works residing in foreign countries: Ōba Minako in 1968, Ikeda Masuo in 1977, Takahashi Michitsuna in 1978, Aono Sō in 1979, Mori Reiko in 1979, Kometani Fumiko in 1986, and Tawada Yōko in 1993. Many established writers have also spent extended periods of time abroad, including Ōe Kenzaburō, Tsushima Yūko, Nakagami Kenji, Kōno Taeko, Shimada Masahiko, and Murakami Haruki. What does this tendency toward self-exile mean for contemporary Japanese literature? Is something compelling them to write "Japan" from somewhere else?

In our midst, we also perceive an emerging literature of displacement and identity, which seems to relate somehow to the topic of "Japan from Somewhere Else": works by Japanese-American (Canadian, British, and others) writers. The organizing committee for the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies began to see some interesting possibilities in staging a meeting between some self-exiled Japanese writers and Japanese-American writers. How do they relate to Japan from somewhere else? How do they imagine Japan from somewhere else? What is the essential difference between the voluntary exile of Japanese writers and the involuntary exile of Japanese-American writers from Japan? And ultimately, what sort of "Japan" is produced from their discourses of displacement?

The organizing committee sent out invitations to some illustrious writers and filmmakers. When many of them confirmed their participation, we were of course pleased but at the same time faced the task of envisioning a new format for an academic conference. In the end, we decided to limit the number of paper presentations and include many readings by the participating creative writers. The result, judging from the post-conference comments from many participants, was a smashing success. To listen to the voices of the creative writers was an invigorating, inspiring, and moving experience. In a way, it is impossible to recreate the excitement we all felt at the conference within the pages of this volume of *Proceedings*. You had to be there. I do not mean to belittle the valuable contributions by the academic participants. But we all tacitly agreed that a glaring truth was emerging: that the expressive level of presentations by the creative writers was far superior to that of our usual academic paper presentations. Of course it was expected. We are not creative writers. We write in a different genre, which demands a less "expressive" use of language. Still, I felt defeated and elated by the expressive voices of creative writers. They made me rethink and confirm why I am in this field in the first place. The ghost of Rimbaud was still alive and kicking.

The conference took place only two months after the tragedies on September 11, 2001. We received cancellations from some people, who did not feel ready to travel yet. But most of you came. And we talked. We truly appreciated that you all came. We needed to talk to each other.

We would like to thank the following sponsors that made the conference possible: The Japan Foundation, Tufts University Diversity Fund, The Toupin-Bolwell Fund, Atom Transportation, Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, The Kathryn Wasserman Davis '28 Fund (Wellesley College), The Committee on Lectures and Cultural Events (Wellesley College), The Writing Program (Wellesley College).

Also our special thanks go to our new President of Tufts University, Lawrence Bacow for his opening remarks, to Professor Vida Johnson, Chair of our Department, for hosting the banquet, and our most capable and beloved secretaries, Vicky Cirrone and Karen Perry.

Hosea Hirata

The 2001 AJLS Annual Meeting Organizing Committee:

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