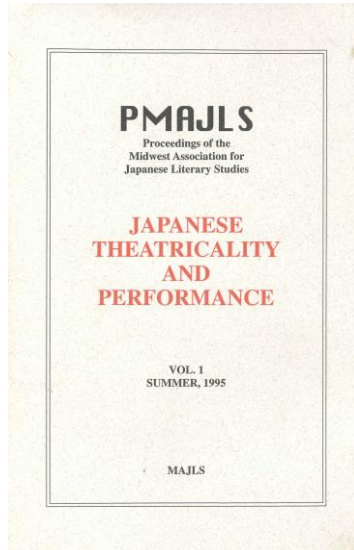


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## Japanese Theatricality and Performance

### CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	iii
<b>KEYNOTE ADDRESS</b>	
Japan: The Presentational Urge	
DONALD RICHIE.....	2
<b>PERFORMANCE IN TRADITIONAL THEATER</b>	
Japanese Classical Drama as Viable English Playscript	
ANDREW TSUBAKI.....	9
Critical Perspectives on the Noh Play <i>Izutsu</i>	
SHELLEY PENNO QUINN.....	23
<i>Commedia dell'Arte</i> and <i>Kyōgen</i> : Two Popular Theaters at the Opposite Sides of the <i>Silk Road</i>	
FABIO MANGOLINI.....	39
Zeami's <i>Riken</i> and Godamer's <i>Spiel</i> : A Comparative Analysis of the Performative Space	
TAKBYOSHI NISHIUCHI.....	54

Signs of Performance: Benten Kozō  
by Kawatake Mokuami

HARUE TSUTSUMI..... 61

## **(RE)PRESENTATION OF VISUAL TEXTS**

High Metabilism: *Manga* circa Shōwa 50's

CHARLES QUINN..... 70

Liquid Cinema: Topologies of Emulsion  
in Two Japanese Films

AKIRA MIZUTA LIPPIT.....111

Santō Kyōden's *The Merchandise You All Know*  
as Merchandise: Self-Reflective Promotion  
across Two Media:

ADAM KERN.....121

## **TEXTS IN THE MAKING: MUSIC, FOLKLORE, AND FESTIVAL**

Kawatake Mokuami as Lyricist

ROGER THOMAS.....134

*Tōno monogatari* as Performance : Literary  
Representation of Tōno Legends  
by Yanagita Kunio

KIYO SAKAMOTO.....172

Festival Performance: What Light Can It Shed  
on Literary Performance?

ELAINE GERBERT.....189

## **REPORT ON ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION**

The Teaching of Japanese Theater and Film

JAMES O'BRIEN (Chair)  
MARVIN MARCUS; ROBERT MORRELL  
PHYLLIS LYONS; SUMIE JONES.....213

## Foreword

After the 1992 and 1993 conferences which featured Japanese poeiticity and narrativity respectively, another Japanese literature conference, focusing on Japanese theatricality, was organized at Purdue University on October 29-30, 1994. It was held under the title of "*THEATRICALITY AND PERFORMANCE: Third Midwest Research/Pedagogy Seminar on Japanese Literature.*"

When I announced the call for papers for that conference, I stressed the following aspects as something important for the understanding of the terms of 'theatricality and performance': (i) a positive valuation of orality and dialogical interactions; (ii) a dynamic interface between linguistic texts and visual/musical texts; and (iii) a multi-voiced, performance-based mode of (re)presentation.

These aspects of literary expressiveness become particularly important when we reexamine the complex nature of the so-called opposition between tradition and modernity in Japanese literature. On the one hand, traditional texts, encompassing different literary genres, seem to contain theatrical and presentational quality. The majority of classical prose narratives, for instance, stress orality and are ready to be recited. Group poetry collaboration, exercised by *rengal/haikai* poets, indicates that an exchange of multi-voices in the form of performance is understood as an integral part of the poetic tradition. And of course, traditional theater shows an elaborately orchestrated model of theatrical elements.

On the other hand, the canon of modern narratives may be characterized as an anti-model of theatricality, with the stress

on literacy, word-centrism, and a linear approach to the thematic structuring. Can we say that unconventional writing in modern literature challenges the modern canon by exploring channels to theatrical expressiveness? Also theatricality may be one of the key notions to shed light on the current popularity of audio-visual texts (*manga*, TV, cinema/video, etc.) over conventionally printed books. If theatrical expressiveness has currently (re)gained popularity, how should that be explained, namely, in relationship to the modernity/tradition context? It is interestingly controversial because the phenomenon seems to overlap a global context (associated with postmodern sensibility) and a local context (a parallelism often pointed out between the current cultural unconscious and the Edo *gesaku* culture).

The collection of papers we have here dynamically responds to the diversity and complexity of this year's seminar theme: Approximately one-half of the papers deal with classical texts, while the other half discuss modern texts; selected topics cover traditional theater, through *manga* and cinema, by way of *kibyōshi*, *jōruri*, folklore, and the modern I-novel. It was extremely fortunate and gratifying to have Mr. Donald Richie as keynote speaker. It was also nice to have a number of theater and film specialists (including researchers/teachers, a playwright, an actor, and theater directors). As a whole, the meeting gave us an overwhelmingly refreshing impression--twelve out of fifteen panel participants presented papers for the first time for our conference. The meeting was well attended and enthusiastically welcomed by the participants and audience.

After the conference, the steering committee decided to start a new association, the "Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies (MAJLS)." Thus, this issue is the third volume

of the Purdue meeting's proceedings, yet it is the first issue for the newly founded association's publication. From this year on, the *Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies (PMAJLS)* will be an officially registered serial title.

The organization of the theatricality conference, as well as the current publication of the proceedings, were funded by the Japan-United States Friendship Commission and the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies. There is no word to describe my appreciation for their generous and steady support, without which our group could not have been developed this quickly. Internally, Purdue University's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and the School of Liberal Arts Dean's Office have been reliable and encouraging supporters of our activities. I am extremely thankful for their sponsorship for three consecutive years. Finally, I thank all the contributors and subscribers of this issue, who have enabled us to disseminate our activities nationwide.

Eiji Sekine