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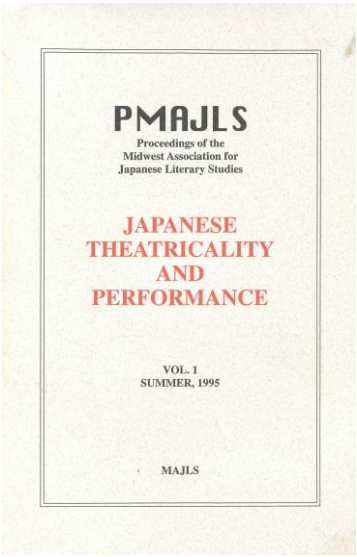

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FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE: WHAT LIGHT CAN IT SHED ON LITERARY PERFORMANCE?

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I believe that the endeavor implied in the above title becomes most interesting when we limit festival performance to *matsuri* and literature to *shishōsetsu*, particularly that of the Taishō period. While there are obvious differences between these two cultural manifestations, regardless of the perspective we choose to apply, both entail rituals of performance that take place within given spheres of ludic performance and enable individuals to affirm their identities as members of given groups, not least of which is the nation we call Japan.

Both the *shishōsetsu* and *matsuri* have been essentialized as distinctively and even uniquely "Japanese" experiences; the *shishōsetsu* as a Japanese alternative to the western novel; *matsurii* as a Japanese way of expressing religious proclivities and needs. Reflecting Japanese communal life and encoding nostalgia for an idealized past, both have lent themselves to expressions of nationalistic sentiment.

Both figured prominently at times when dichotomous distinctions between *uchi* and *soto*--a sharpened sense of what constitutes a Japanese identity vis a vis the outside world--were highlighted in public discourse. And this often happened when feelings of national vulnerability were stirred by circumstances perceived as threats from the outside.

Debate about the *shishōsetsu* began in earnest when the literary world was awash with European literary fashions of an increasingly incomprehensible nature. Italian Futurism, introduced in the early 1920's, was followed by Dadaism and Surrealism, literary movements far more alien and bewildering than the earlier Naturalist and Realist movements, which had been accommodated and nativized at the turn of the century. These alienating trends, moreover, entered Japan at a time when more traditional writers who had been able to publish their works without difficulty in early Taishō, were finding themselves marginalized by the new wave of Proletarian and other socially conscious writers whose works had come to dominate the literary magazines.[1] (One may also imagine that the sense of uncertainty created by the challenges posed by these new voices was compounded by the devastating destruction of the port of Yokohama, and a good part of Tokyo in the Great Earthquake of 1923.)

These were times of need for reassurance, times when the *shishōsetsu* seemed to represent a familiar Japanese way of mediating the world through a sensibility that harkened back to the traditions of classical *monogatari* and medieval *zuihitsu*, in which expressions of intuition, feeling, and sensitivity to nature moved the reader to appreciate the 'truth' of the sad and moving transience of life.

In a now famous essay published in 1925, "Shishōsetsu to Shinkyō shōsetsu," Kume Masao declared the *shishōsetsu* to be the *hondō* or "main road" and the *furusato* or "old home village" of Japanese literature, as opposed to the foreign-born

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[1] An account of these times can be found in Hirotsu Kazuo's "Ano Jidai" (Those Times, first published in 1950 in *Gunzō*, later republished in *Gendai Nihon Bungaku Taikei*, vol. 46 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1961).

honkaku shōsetsu (an obviously fictional novel) whose roots in the native soil were shallow and weak.[2]

Furusato was more than just a colorful metaphor. The *furusato* trope figured in the longing for an imagined but inaccessible simple 'natural' way of life that haunted many an alienated *shishōsetsu* protagonist who made his way through the unwelcoming landscape of a denatured urban environment. The sensibility of those *shishōsetsu* protagonists was moreover linked to a kind of 'nature' that might be experienced in the *furusato*: an awareness of growing plants, of the sounds of insects and small animals and birds; and a sensitivity to the passing of the seasons.

The lonely *shishōsetsu* protagonist often longed for the kind of intimacy that was a part of communal life in the *furusato*, and in the *shishōsetsu* 's direct, disarmingly simple and unpretentious language, and its seemingly uncomplicated point of view, this intellectual traveler could lay down his burden of abstract western book learning and 'return home.'

Nature and *furusato* figure centrally in both *shishōsetsu* writing and in *matsuri* . *Matsuri* rites are rooted in ancient agricultural observances, and the rhythms of *matsuri* cycles are closely tied to the passage of the seasons. Whether it be a *kami* of the mountain or of the field, a *kami* of growth, the sun, or fire that the *matsuri* celebrates, Shintō worship is centered upon the natural world, and its imagery and rhetoric are drawn from nature.

Like *shishōsetsu* , *matsuri* were 'rediscovered' and their significance to Japanese identity was realized at a time when

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[2] Kume Masao, "Sanbun geijutsu no hongo shinzui" and "Shishōsetsu to shinkyō shōsetsu" in *Bungei kōza*, January and February, 1925.

rapid modernization of the Japanese state under a centralized bureaucracy created a sense of spiritual disassociation, to which some intellectuals reacted by seeking out past traditions that would affirm the value of native customs. For Yanagita Kunio, the founder of the Japanese folklore movement, one of the aspects of folk culture that was most revealing of Japanese mores was *matsuri* . In the influential essay published in *Asahi shimbun* in 1919, "Sairei to seken" (Rites, Festivals, and Society), he stressed the importance of those festivals in Japan, which he saw as being closely interwoven with the group spirit of the people [3] *Matsuri* linked men and *kami* and contributed to social solidarity in the country village in the same way that the rites performed by the emperor linked heaven and earth and all the beings in the realm.[4] In *matsuri* performance, as in no other activity, one could find an expression of the collective consciousness of the folk.

In the late twentieth century at a time when *kokusaika* ("inter-nationalization") was being promoted by the Japanese government and the press, *furusato zukuri* ("old village making") was also being touted, and within the rhetoric of *furusato zukuri* , *matsuri* was turned into a metaphor for *furusato*, and by extension, for Japanese identity in the modern world. As Jennifer Robertson points out in her study, *Native and Newcomer*, *furusato zukuri* was "both a reaction to postwar changes and an attempt to control change by restoring a sense of sociocultural continuity to something that seems to verge

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[3] *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū*, Supplemental. vol. 1, p. 112, cited in Ronald A. Morse, *Yanagita Kunio and the Folklore Movement: The Search for Japan's National Character and Distinctiveness* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990), p. 69.

[4] Ibid., p. 70.

on the discontinuous.[5]" According to Robertson, the series of campaigns known collectively as *furusato zukuri* seems to have been sparked by the "oil shocks" of the early 1970's when it again stirred the latent national sense of vulnerability.[6] Local and national leaders and media began to attempt to define a national identity in part by evoking the communal rural roots that the majority of Japanese presumably shared. Images of village life appeared in a widespread campaign to reawaken and, in the case of the majority of urban born Japanese who had never experienced village life first hand, to construct a sense of nostalgia for their common ancestral past. Tourism to provincial localities, and an appreciation of local cuisines, scenery, and customs, especially, local *matsuri* , were promoted on television and in newspapers and magazines and in ads in public places such as train stations and post offices. The Japan Railroad company sponsored special fares to take urban residents on trips "to the heartland." National daily newspapers featured articles on local *matsuri* and printed schedules of *matsuri* events. National network television broadcasted programs about 'unusual *matsuri* ' held in different regions of the country.

Perhaps not surprisingly, genres of cultural performance that embody group values and solidify group identity often also provide individual group members with some sort of means to temporarily escape the pressures to conform.

Shishōsetsu and *matsuri* offer socially sanctioned occasions for self-indulgence. By giving individuals a chance

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[5] Jennifer Robertson, *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 33.

[6] Ibid., p. 28.

to engage in wild narcissistic behaviors, including displaying the body (often in a semi-naked state) and rejoicing in its physicality, *matsuri* enable young men to release tension and aggressivity generated by interdictions ordinarily placed upon the spontaneous uninhibited expression of opinion, feeling and desire.

Shishōsetsu also provide a vehicle for a type of uninhibited self-expression. Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit has pointed out how *shishōsetsu* writing affords authors a conduit through which to act out their narcissism.[7] The *shishōsetsu* provide a space and an occasion for dwelling exclusively upon the self and writing things of a nature that one might never venture to say in public, where one is "mindful" of the reactions of one's listeners. Readers, for their part, are given a means for satisfying voyeuristic impulses.[8] The tendency of *shishōsetsu* to present the author-narrator in a negative light also provides the reader with the satisfaction of seeing another person who is 'worse off.'[9]

One may also use aspects of the psychology of *amae* to shed additional light on the popularity of the *shishōsetsu* e.g. the drive to be understood and indulged. The writer opens himself and writes as if his readers would understand and accept him as he is--with all his imperfections. Similarly, the *ujiko* reveler can shock and titillate viewers by stripping himself half-naked, and engaging in rambunctious and even

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[7] Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit, "The Stubborn Persistence of a Much Abused Genre: On the Popularity of *Shishōsetsu in* Contemporary Japanese Literature," in *Europe Interprets Japan*, edited by Gordon Daniels, (Tenterden, Kent, England: Paul Norbury Publications, 1984), p. 177.

[8] Ibid. p. 178.

[9] Ibid.

destructive behavior, secure in the knowledge that all will be forgiven.

And as the *shishōsetsu* provides the reader with the experience of intimacy with the inner feelings and highly personal thoughts of another human being (a sense of closeness that may well be denied him or her in actual life), so the *matsuri* affirms the *ujiko* parishioner in his identity as a member of the *ujigami* clan and gives him the sense of total oneness with the group, and, at the height of celebration, perchance with the *kami* itself.

The ability of *matsuri* and *shishōsetsu* to facilitate the formation of a group ethos is facilitated by the accessibility of these forms of cultural performance, by the fact that they appear to be relatively 'easy to perform.' This was especially so for the Taishō writer, for whom the *shishōsetsu* genre opened up a world of literary potential. Unlike the professional writers of the Meiji period who were expected to have at their command a considerable baggage of knowledge of traditional literary language before they could publish, the Taishō novelists, writing after the revolutionary reforms of prose literature which legitimatized the spoken language as a literary medium, had a considerably easier time producing "literature." And this was particularly so after writers such as Kikuchi Kan, Mushanokōji Saneatsu and Uno Kōji further advanced the notion of using colloquial language in their narratives by openly advocating "write as you speak.[10]" When combined with this simple straightforward approach, the *shishōsetsu* , which took its content from the writer's own life, and

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[10] Kawamori Yoshizō, "Uno Kōji to no Ichijikan," *Bungakkai,* March 1950, pp. 128-30.

dispensed with complicated formal structures, was easily the most accessible and inviting of formats for new inexperienced writers.

For *ujiko*, the distinctive semiotic codes of *matsuri* create spheres within which performance can be undertaken easily and effectively and with a maximum degree of psychological bonding with the group. Village boys and young men are organized into cohorts assigned specific functions during *matsuri* , and growth is marked by the transition from the boys' groups, assigned ancillary tasks, to the young men's associations encharged with carrying the *mikoshi*. Later in life, some of those same youths may serve as *ujiko sōdai*, senior parish representatives who perform ceremonial roles in rituals led by priests that are a part of each *matsuri* .

Within an area served by a given shrine, *ujiko* parishioners from different communities mark their common origins by wearing costumes such as *happi* coats that are distinguished from those of other groups by color, insignia, etc. Groups further distinguish themselves from neighboring groups by singing virtually the same festival song in a different way, with slightly different lyrics. The sense of belonging to a group is also heightened by the various kinds of competitions that come into play as different units vie with one another to put on a good festival show. These contests are oftentimes of a long standing nature. (Competition between teams of villagers pulling pillars in the Suwa Pillar Festival, for instance, escalated to the point of rock fights resulting in serious injuries and deaths in the Meiji period.) The highly codified set of behaviors specific to *matsuri* in effect enables local residents to realize their identities as *ujiko*, or more accurately stated perhaps, to play at being *ujiko* for the duration of the festival. By wearing special clothing, uttering special

vocalizations, and using special body gestures, the participant dons the metaphorical mask of a child (*ko*) of the clan (*uji*) and along with dozens and hundreds of other similarly clad individuals, assumes the additional identity of *ujiko*. The communal past is evoked and one's ancestral identity reclaimed through the consciousness of repeating the gestures and the utterances of the generations who performed the *matsuri* in the past.

Participants in *matsuri* perform 'as if' the *kami* were in their midst and "as if" their lives and their honor really did depend upon getting a pillar to a shrine at a specified time, and 'as if' not to perform the *matsuri* would invite dire consequences for the community. Onlookers are caught up in the spirit of identification and can be seen straining their own bodies in sympathy with the youths who exert themselves, carrying *mikoshi* shrines, wading in streams, running down mountain sides, shinnying up ropes and pillars, and performing the countless other acts, including death-defying acts, that characterize *matsuri*.

The mimesis at the heart of *matsuri* is also manifested in obvious and literal ways, through the mask. Revelers don weird, outrageous or silly costumes and make-up. Common people dress up as samurai, a child is placed on a horse and paraded through the town as a feudal lord. Men wear women's clothing, some paint their faces.

Mimesis is just as fundamental to the *shishōsetsu* writer, who is engaged in projecting factuality, sincerity, and "reality" in his writing. The lies he tells must seem plausible. He must write 'as if' he were telling the truth. Moreover he is held to a certain degree of consistency in his projected persona from one work to another.

As in *matsuri* , to perform 'as if' it were true is critical to the success of the undertaking. Some *shishōsetsu* authors who elicited the highest praise were those figures who evidenced their sincerity in the extremes to which they carried out their determination to write. Kasai Zenzō, for example, went to desperate lengths to pursue his calling as a novelist--his story, *Ko o tsurete* (Children in Tow, 1918), records the time, when penniless, he had to beg for shelter for his two children, yet was determined to continue to write.

The *shishōsetsu* language games were at times so convincing that the production and consumption of the genre took on a semi-religious aura. This was evident both in the *shishōsetsu* themselves, with their intensely introspective and at times self-excoriating rhetoric, and in the commentary on the *shishōsetsu*. Critics wrote encomiums in language that sometimes bordered on worshipful awe, and were most worshipful of those writers who seemed to have bored mercilessly into the very core of their beings. In *shishōsetsu* criticism, in Taishō and early Showa especially, commentators might make reference to the purifying effects of the author's harrowing life experiences, his conversion, his redemption, and his "new life." As in the case of rituals surrounding *matsuri* , it was not only what the ritualists did that mattered, but the manner in which they performed their tasks--with the miens and inflections of sincerity and devotion.

Matsuri , like *shishōsetsu* , are self-reflective performances that embody images of the past. They tell the histories and identities of their communities in semiotic codes that have been maintained and exhibited over hundreds of years. Through traditional festival clothing, vocalizations, music, gestures, and foods the past lives on in the present during

matsuri . In some *matsuri* , special kin-related terms dating back hundreds of years, and actual families who hold hereditary ritual roles, provide additional living links to the past. For example, in the Suwa Pillar Festival in Suwa City, Nagano prefecture, hereditary families of shrine wood attendants (*yamazukuri*) and ritual rope-winders (*tsunamaki*) and other holders of given ritual functions, have performed these same activities since the Edo period.[11]

Like texts, *matsuri* are also capable of becoming self-reflexive, as well as self-reflective performances, as participants consciously modify their performances from year to year in a manner to comment upon the performances of previous years.

Matsuri enact stories. And the story that is basic to virtually all *matsuri* --the national tale repeated throughout Japan about the *kami* who comes, unites with its *ujiko* celebrants, and then departs--is performed within a common national syntax of *matsuri* , whose components are: 1. greeting the *kami* (*kami mukae*), 2. entertaining the *kami* (*kami asobu*) and 3. sending the *kami* back home (*kami okuru).*

Kami mukae and *kami okuri* are transitive phases in which *ujiko* or parishioners effect happenings in the world and cause the *kami* to perform in given ways by uttering special phrases or chants. In the Suwa Pillar Festival, for example, after drawing the *kami* out of the mountain by pulling giant logs (in which the *kami* resides) down the mountain side, the *ujiko* chant an imperative statement directed at the *kami,* telling it to return to its mountain home. To *asobu* (entertain the *kami*)

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11 An analysis of this festival titled, "The Suwa Pillar Festival Revisited," by Elaine Gerbert, is scheduled to appear in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* June 1996.

one need not be directly mindful of performing an action of welcoming or sending home. One can entertain a *kami* by literally losing oneself in bacchanalian celebration with music, dance, and sake. The experience of vertigo and loss of self-awareness resulting from these activities may in itself constitute evidence of the *kami*'s presence.

Extending the text metaphor, we may regard the costumes, the sacra, the *matsuri* body language and the *matsuri* vocalizations as elements of a rhetoric whereby the *matsuri* creates certain emotional experiences within the participant and the viewer. The body is emphasized as it moves in an exaggerated, rhythmic, and highly stylized manner. Putting special attire on it, or baring it, draws further attention to it as an expressive instrument for celebrating the *kami.* The voice qua voice is similarly highlighted as it is transformed into an instrument of celebration. No longer used for speaking the everyday language of communication, it is rendered into an instrument for sounding repeated loud chants and cries. e.g. "*Wasshoi! Wasshoi*!.

The performative play of *matsuri* involves both national and local sets of symbols and rhetoric. Sacra such as *shimenawa* (twisted straw rope hung with zigzag paper strips), *sakaki, gohei* (sticks with streamers attached), the robes and *eboshi* hats of Shinto priests, are found throughout Japan. The *norito* prayers containing invocations to Amaterasu the Sun Goddess who watches over all Japanese are similarly national.

Other sacra are specific to local *matsuri* . In the Suwa Pillar Festival there are unusual bird-shaped metal plates (*nagigama*) that are hammered into the trees selected to become pillars erected in the shrine precincts. There are also local 'dialectical' inflections of the national vocabulary, such as

the oversized *gohei* called *ombei* that are used only in the Suwa *matsuri*.

One special vocalization unique to that festival is the *kiyari,* an ancient high pitched wailing woodman's song that is heard on mountain sides, on river banks, in the fields, and throughout the town for the duration of the *matsuri* , from February into early June. The importance that local people attach to the *kiyari* is not only manifested in its ubiquity during the festival. It is sold on cassette tape during the whole year, and young boys of Suwa are organized into singing troops that meet on weekends specifically for *kiyari* practice.

We may consider these *matsuri* sacra, costumes, and utterances as constituting the 'vocabulary' operating within what one may think of as the 'grammar' of *matsuri* rhetoric--the particular rules governing the relationships of 'vocabulary' items and their inflections in given *matsuri* . In preparing the fire for purifying the saws and axes to be used to cut the trees a precisely defined order of steps must be followed. Each step requires special utensils, wielded by specially clad ritual specialists, in a series of prescribed gestures, to the accompaniment of special ritual utterances, in a given space. In cutting the trees, a specific number of strokes must be executed, in a specific order, with a specific instrument wielded by a specific ritualist. To break the order of motions and utterances would be to destroy the 'efficacy of the rite and ultimately of the *matsuri.*

Shishōsetsu , like *matsuri* , are festive occasions, in the sense that they constitute recurrent performances, exhibitions, and competitions, often in an atmosphere of conviviality. Innumerable *zadankai* are testimony to the celebratory urge. Writers and critics gather together to discuss author X's most

recent *shishōsetsu* , to celebrate Y's come back, to welcome Z into the fold. The literary albums of the *bundan* are filled with photos of banquets held to commemorate the publication of given writers' latest works. Its annals overflow with anecdotes about how writer X struggled to overcome a crisis, break through an impasse, or simply meet an editor's deadline. And the manner in which these anecdotes are kept alive--repeated and passed along from publication to publication--takes on a ritualistic quality as compelling as the ritual of confession itself. In short, through the rituals of *shishōsetsu* writing and verbal and written commentaries on those *shishōsetsu* , writers are celebrated in what amounts to an ongoing series of exhibitions and festive gatherings.

Indeed, in spite of the *shi* or 'private' affixed to it, the production and consumption of *shishōsetsu* are intensely communal activities that create a sense of intimacy and community among their readers even today. This was all the more so in the pre-war years, particularly in Taishō and early Showa, when the literary society i.e. the *bundan* was much smaller and more closely knit. At that time, by inviting readers to consider the life of the author behind the work, *shishōsetsu* and the voluminous commentary on it generated communal ties in a way that obviously fictional writings did not. *Shishōsetsu* invited speculations on how writer X coped with a love affair or an illegitimate child; overcame an illness or a spiritual crisis, etc. And as critics speculated, and referred to each other's opinions and speculations, their self-referential writings strengthened and extended the net of affiliative ties within the *bundan* . *Shishōsetsu* texts which were read as extensions of the author's inner life also generated cults of personality, and this too served to solidify the *bundan* 's sense of community and its self-conscious awareness of its identity.

(More recently, the *shishōsetsu* genre has served women writers and facilitated a burgeoning "women's literature," as many of the leading female authors have creatively adapted its form to their voices.)

Like participation in *matsuri* , *shishōsetsu* writing has functioned as a kind of rite of passage for newcomers to the society. In the Taishō period many if not most writers began their careers by producing *shishōsetsu* . The *shishōsetsu* form introduced the new writer to the group in a way that was more personal and direct than the obviously fictional *honkaku shōsetsu* could accomplish.

The expectation that a writer would naturally compose a narrative based on his life was encouraged by the existence of close-knit social groupings within the *bundan*, whose members were well acquainted with one another and cared about one another enough to be quite interested in those self-revelatory writings. Oftentimes members of a given coterie were joined by a common school affiliation. (The Kiseki coterie, for example--most of whom wrote *shishōsetsu* and one of whom i.e. Kasai Zenzō became famous as an exemplary practitioner of the genre--were all at one time students at Waseda University.[12] Another group known for its first person centered literature, namely the Shirakaba-ha, were graduates of Gakushūin.[13] Personal affiliations were also established through literary clubs that gathered around given senior authors. The Nichiyōkai that met on Sundays with Uno Kōji,

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[12] *Kiseki*, Waseda University's *dōjin zasshi*, was founded in September 1912. Members included Hirotsu Kazuo, Tanizaki Seiji, Kasai Zenzō, Sōma Taizō, Funaki Shigeo, Negishi Kōsaku, Kobayashi Tokusaburō, Kawakami Kuni, and Waseda professor Sōma Gyofū.

[13] The group's two most famous members at the time, Mushanokōji Saneatsu and Shiga Naoya, were both prominent *shishōsetsu authors.*

for example, attracted young writers who wrote, primarily, *shishōsetsu* [14] In spite of the strong influence of western literature and the rhetoric about the search for the individuated 'modern self' (*kindai jiga*), modes of association continued to follow along the familiar Japanese tracks of *shūdan seikatsu* (group living) and *sempai/ kōhai* (senior/ junior) relations.

Shishōsetsu, more than any other prose genre in modern Japanese literature, have generated communities of discourse. Writers and critics, to this day, are still engaged in arguing the merits and demerits of the genre, identifying it with a Japanese mode of literary consciousness and expression, tracing its origins in a given life experience, and looking to it to confirm a life. The *shishōsetsu* about a personal life becomes an extension of that life, and performance comes to impregnate not only the art, but the life, which is the source of that art, and in some cases comes to be lived as art.

Like *matsuri* , the world of *shishōsetsu* has its cadre of ritual specialists. Those of *matsuri* conduct their offices in an ambience of great solemnity and are on display for all to see, their presence conspicuously affirmed in processions through the communities in sacred Shinto garb, to affirm social hierarchy and the continuation of tradition. The specialists of the literary world--senior writers who function as gatekeepers to the promised land vis a vis new aspirants--although less visible, play roles no less hieratic as they solemnly comment upon the creative efforts of members of that society. In the Taishō period especially, some established authors acquired a

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[14] These included Kambayashi Akatsuki, Nakayama Gishū, Noguchi Fujio, Shibukawa Gyō, Takami Jun, Kurahashi Mikazu, Inagaki Taruho, and Takatori Tadasu.

status that was almost god-like e.g. Shiga Naoya was known as "Bungaku no Kamisama," the deity of literature. Literary histories are filled with stories of how young aspiring writers yearned for the public endorsement of those respected senior literary figures. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, for instance, recalls (albeit perhaps with tongue-in-cheek, using 'himself' to point to others) the ecstasy of opening with crazily trembling hands the magazine in which one of those "living gods," Nagai Kafū bestowed words of praise upon his early story, *Shisei* (The Tattooer, 1910)[15]

Within the liminal sphere of *matsuri* , marginal members of society participate side by side with more respectable figures of the community. *Matsuri* attract itinerant peddlars and hawkers, who set up their stalls along the roadside, proffering cheap toys and sweets to passersby who indulge in food of questionable culinary value, all in the name of *matsuri* . Processions of boisterous revelers challenged everyday social rule and order, but as they became standard features of *matsuri* , even the potentially disruptive was conventionalized and absorbed into a ritual that worked to maintain social hierarchy.

The *shishōsetsu* society that exalted the composed conduct and limpid prose styles of a "Bungaku no Kamisama," also had a place for the unconventional styles of writers such as Uno Kōji, Chikamatsu Shūkō, Kasai Zenzō ,and Dazai Osamu: reprobate figures on the fringes of society whose writing was often marked by hyperbole, mock clowning, childlike talk, and other obvious deviations from the norms of the day. In

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15 The passage in which Tanizaki relates the incident is translated in Ken Ito's *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 28.

short, *shishōsetsu* language *games* incorporate both ludic (controlled, classical, rule-oriented) and paidaic (free, spontaneous, bordering on the chaotic) forms of expression.[16] And as the potentially anti-social behavior of costumed celebrants of *matsuri* is socialized and conventionalized in the ritualized performances of *matsuri* , language challenging behavioral and stylistic norms is aestheticized in experimental literary play. Eventually those verbal challenges to conventional stylistic norms generate new vocabularies and rules, which serve in turn as the basis of other new performances.

To maximize the convincing 'as if' quality of performance to produce a compelling role-play in both *matsuri* and *shishōsetsu* , a state of transport (*muchū*) ("self-forgetfulness") was (and is) oftentimes sought [17]

In *matsuri* this euphoric self-forgetfulness is created both from within and from without. The pulsating rhythms of the drums, chants, and shouts, and the intoxicating effects of sake, and of vigorous and steady physical exertions within a large group of similarly intoxicated celebrants, produces a state of vertigo, in which sensation is heightened to the point of ecstasy

Overcoming the inhibiting effects of a detached critical consciousness is a challenge for creative writers no less than

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[16] The terms ludic and paidaic are derived from Roger Caillois' theory of play. Elaborated definitions of these and other commonly used categories (agon, alea, mimesis, vertigo) can be found in *Les jeux et les hommes*, translated by Meyer Barash as *Man, Play and Games*, (New York: The Free Press, 1961).

[17] For an account of the state of muchū or ecstasy produced by *matsuri* see Yanagawa Keiichi, "The Sensation of Matsuri," in *Matsuri: Festival and Rite in Japanese Life*, Contemporary Papers on Japanese Religion I (Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1988).

for festival celebrants. Artistic creation requires a 'new' visioning, a way of making strange what is ordinary. In a country such as Japan, where social convention exerts a strong pull on the individual, we may find writers who are short on inclination for physical and mental adventuring into unknown spaces. But there have been, even among *shishōsetsu* writers, individuals who displayed an exemplary willingness to risk everything to feed their art. For Kasai inebriation was as much a requisite for writing as was his desk; eventually the alcohol, poverty, loneliness, and tuberculosis--the subjects that filled his *shishōsetsu* --took their toll, but not before he produced some of his critically most acclaimed writings. Dazai Osamu and Oda Sakunosuke took the sharpness off too critical a state of consciousness by leading lives of frenetic dissipation. Other writers took less dramatic, more passive measures to create continuously new and novel perspectives from which to view the world. They moved their lodgings constantly, or changed their mistresses frequently, or retreated to dark, dingy studies, to which they assigned names with incantatory poetic power ("Deep Mountains, Mysterious Ravines"). Uno Kōji, for example, sequestered himself in a futon, in a dark room which he called his "dream-weaving place" ("Yumeoriba").

And agon is not the least part of *matsuri* and *shishōsetsu* performance. Parishioner youths compete with other youths, whether it be in running, climbing, lifting, carrying or beating the festival drum. Indeed, this competitive urge is an important aspect of the construction of a certain image of masculinity through *matsuri* activities. Entire communities compete to put on the best *matsuri* , the most unique *matsuri* , the *matsuri* with the biggest crowds, the most spectacular attractions. And as television and film bring local *matsuri* to the attention of the nation as a whole, the incentives to work to make one's *matsuri*

outstanding among other *matsuri* are magnified. And as the frequent broadcasting of *matsuri* on television nowadays suggests, *matsuri* has also come to be identified with a certain notion of Japanese-ness vis a vis other countries in the world.(20) *Matsuri* in other words has been incorporated into the ongoing game of competition that Japan engages in with other 'first world' nations.

The agonistic contests that writers engage in begin with the struggle against the recalcitrant nature of language itself. Writers must meet and exceed the measure of their previous work. They also engage in contestatory relationships with their readers, for writers who cannot measure up to and surpass their reader's anticipation are quickly forgotten. There is the contest with tradition and past authority, and the struggle to overcome one's literary 'patriarchy' and to define oneself anew. And as Harold Bloom also reminds us, "not only writing, but reading and interpreting are "implicitly hierarchical, and cannot proceed without a usurpation of authority." [18]

A kind of agonistic play engendered especially by the *shishōsetsu* is the one where the writer challenges and teases his readership by inserting materials that he knows his readers know to be 'untrue' or possibly untrue to life. The kind of guessing game that critics of *shishōsetsu* often engage in may be illustrated by the following round table discussion between critics Hirotsu Kazuo, Nakamura Murao, and Kanō Sakujirō

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[18] Harold Bloom, "Agon, Revision and Critical Personality," in *The Art of the Critic, Literary Theory and Criticism from the Greeks to the Present,* vol. 10, edited by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990), p. 640.

shortly after the appearance of Kasai's "Shiji o umu" (Giving Birth to a Dead Child, 1925).[19]

Hirotsu: Kasai is obviously writing about himself, and yet here he says that his child was born on 3 April [sic] even though the magazine that published the story has a deadline sometime in March.

Nakamura: Maybe he means last April! (Laughter)

Hirotsu: Kasai makes his baby die in "Shiji o umu" and he makes [Osei] get pregnant in "Ugomeku mono." He can't seem to write a story without tacking on this sort of catastrophic ending.

Kanō I haven't read this story yet. Did the baby really die?

Hirotsu: No, of course not. After all, he writes that the baby was born in 3 April in a story which had to have been submitted sometime in March. And he's writing about the present....But that Kasai is a strange one, isn't he? He's not happy unless he kills the baby off...

Kanō He does that sort of thing quite often, doesn't he? Like writing a few years back that he had coughed blood...as if he were a consumptive, when in fact nothing was wrong with him.

A *honkaku shōsetsu* simply would not challenge Hirotsu, Nakamura and Kanō to measure the discrepancy between narrative and facts known about the author's life or to speculate about the motivations behind the author's 'lies' and

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19 *Kasai Zenzō zenshū*, vol. 4, edited by Osanai Tokio (Hirosaki: Tsugaru Shobō, 1974-75), p. 439, translated by Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Fiction, Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 270.

lying games. Nor would a *honkaku shōsetsu* that makes no pretension to facticity invite Kasai to 'tease' his readers by tacking on incredible 'catastrophic endings' to presumably factual narratives. Critics would not be able to indulge in the sort of second-guessing games exemplified by the conversation above. One might wish to argue that it is not a dearth of imaginative power and over-reliance upon facticity that propels the Japanese literary establishment in the direction of the *shishōsetsu* , but rather a *love of play* and particularly the opportunities for speculative play between reader and author that the *shishōsetsu* form engenders.

In sum, we may look upon the performances of *matsuri* and *shishōsetsu* as products of a liminal play sphere marked by frames wherein sectors of sociocultural action are discriminated from the general on going process of the nation's life.

The special sphere of *shishōsetsu* production is defined by a particular use of literary language, which entails conventions governing narration and the relationship between the author and the text, and the reader and the text. One of those conventions dictates that texts are to be read as if the narrative frames were somehow more porous than in other kinds of fiction, allowing their contents to filter into the lives of their authors, and events in the lives of their authors to seep back into the narratives.

Matsuri ritual frames are clearly demarcated. Festivals have definite temporal beginnings and endings, marked liturgically through opening and closing rites, Their performance spaces are physical and well-defined. Signs (costumes, sacra, special vocalizations and gesture) signifying *matsuri* and a syntactical

arrangement of festival time invite the onlooker to adopt a ludic perspective on reality.

Both of these cultural manifestations are performed according to ritual forms by given communities which are in turn defined and strengthened in their identities through these performances. Whether purely linguistic, in written form, and produced by a single writer, as in the case of *shishōsetsu* , or involving body gestures, oral performances and various sacra and staged by many individuals, as in the case of *matsuri* , both entail mimesis, competition, and the search for self-transcendence, a kind of vertigo.

Seeking the reflection of *shishōsetsu* in the mirror of *matsuri* may remind us once again of the communal and oftentimes celebratory context in which this Japanese literary genre is produced and consumed. Considering *matsuri* as a 'text' that tells a story reminds us anew of the historical continuity of these festivals and of their rhetorical power to instill in participants a sense of their historical identities as *ujiko.*

Explorations of these "performances" not only suggest why they have been identified as "essentially" Japanese cultural performances, closely tied to nature and the rhetoric of *furusato,* and functioning to strengthen group identity. They are also useful reminders of the abiding presence of *play (asobi)* in Japanese culture.