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Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600-1900  
(review)

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## Book Reviews

**EARLY MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE: AN ANTHOLOGY, 1600–1900.** Edited by Haruo Shirane. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. 1027 + xxiv pp. Cloth \$77.00; paper \$27.50.

This comprehensive anthology of early modern literature offers an extensive range of prose fiction, poetry, drama, essays, treatises, and literary criticism. More than two hundred woodblock prints and photographs illustrate the text, giving a sense of how the material looked on the page in the original Japanese, as well as how it appears on stage. While the collection overall is aimed at students of Japanese literature, much of the material is of interest to Japanese theatre specialists, with numerous introductions and translations elucidating integral relationships between the world of the theatre and other aspects of society. Certainly the most relevant selections are the eleven *kabuki* and puppet plays, including both *sewamono* (contemporary domestic plays) and *jidai-mono* (period plays). Less known but of benefit to the theatre teacher, practitioner, and student are selected translations of the *dangibon* (satiric sermons), *kibyōshi* (satiric and didactic picture books), *sharebon* (books of wit and fashion), *yomihon* (reading books), and *kokkeibon* (books of humor).

Chapter 1 is a multifaceted introduction providing a solid context for the Edo period (1600–1867) literature in the volume. The author includes brief, insightful sections on the social hierarchy; the economies of the cities of Edo, Osaka, and Kyoto; courtesans and female entertainers; literacy and printing; women and readership; warrior and urban commoner attitudes; and popular and elite literature. The concepts and developments discussed provide information useful for understanding the mindset of the Edo period populace that both fueled and consumed the literary and dramatic material included, as well as a better understanding of circumstances and character motivations in plays. One notable factor is the periodization framework Shirane uses for Edo period literature. Though the Edo period was more than 350 years long, the focus of Edo literary and dramatic achievements is often the two “peaks”

of the Genroku era, from the late seventeenth century through the first two decades of the eighteenth century, and the Bunka-Bunsei era, the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Shirane instead breaks the period into four sections, discussing a transitional period prior to the Genroku era and placing great importance on the century between the two peaks. Understanding this third period of time, marked by “a remarkable fusion of high and popular styles of cultures” (p. 19) and a tendency toward richly imaginative explorations of other worlds, offers rich insights into the dramatic developments of the Bunka-Bunsei era that followed.

Chapter 3, “Ihara Saikaku and the Books of the Floating World” (*uki-yozōshi*) is devoted to the writings of this prolific Genroku era author, who was as important to popular fiction as his contemporary Chikamatsu Monzaemon was to popular drama. Saikaku briefly wrote plays for the noted *ningyō jōruri* (later known as *bunraku*) chanter Uji Kaganojō in 1685, competing with Chikamatsu, who was writing for Takemoto Gidayū. The influence of this experience is clear in Saikaku’s famous 1686 work, *Five Sensuous Women* (*Koshoku gonin onna*), particularly his use of “stage conventions such as the *michiyuki* (travel scene), the focus on dramatic scene and dialogue, and the use of *sekai* (established world) and *shukō* (innovation) in which an established story is given a new twist or interpretation.” (p. 60) In the *Great Mirror of Male Love* (*Nanshoku Ōkagami*, 1687), Saikaku addresses the practice of male-male love. Though only one story is included here, a published translation of the full volume (Stanford University Press, 1990) includes twenty stories in the second half focusing on young *kabuki* actors and boy prostitutes in the theatre. Similar to much of the *ningyō jōruri* drama of the period, the stories depict the conflict between societal duty and personal feelings (*giri* and *ninjō*) while painting a colorful picture of the off-stage world of the Genroku *kabuki* actor.

Chapter 6, “Chikamatsu Monzaemon and Puppet Theater,” begins with introductions to early *jōruri* and *kabuki* and to Chikamatsu. Three *sewa-mono* from Donald Keene’s *Major Plays of Chikamatsu* are reprinted in full or part. Sections of two *jidaimono*, *Battles of Coxinga* and *The Heike and the Island of Women*, are newly translated here by Michael Brownstein and C. Andrew Gerstle, respectively. The chapter finishes with the preface to *Souvenirs of Naniwa* (*Naniwa Miyage*, 1738), written by the little-known Confucian scholar Hozumi Ikan, a devotee of the puppet theatre and consultant for the Takemoto Theatre who worked closely there with Chikamatsu. This preface is extremely valuable, as it “contains the only extended comments we have on *jōruri* in Chikamatsu’s own words” (p. 347), addressing his attitudes toward the creation of characters, the use of language, and the nature of art (*gei*) itself. Overall this chapter provides a well-rounded sampling of the works and philosophy of one of the most important playwrights in Japanese theatre.

Chapter 10, “The Golden Age of the Puppet Theatre” begins with a concise introduction outlining important developments in *bunraku* from Chikamatsu, through the peak years in the 1740s when *kabuki* borrowed heavily from the puppet theatre, to the closing of the Takemoto and Toyotake theatres in the 1760s. Excerpts from two classics, *Chūshingura* and *Chronicle of the*

*Battle of Ichinotani*, are included. Unfortunately, both of these selections are of adapted *kabuki* scripts rather than the original *jōruri*. While the introduction and footnotes point out some of the variances in the modern Edo/Tokyo *kabuki Chūshingura* text of Act VI translated here, the reading cannot present an accurate picture of the 1748 original that won such acclaim. On a positive note, one could take the opportunity to compare Act VI of the *kabuki* version here with the *jōruri* version translated by Donald Keene in *Chūshingura: A Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (Columbia University Press, 1971). A third selection in the chapter, excerpts from *Gappō at the Crossroads* (*Sesshū Gappō ga Tsuji*, 1773), by Suga Sensuke, a lesser-known contemporary of Chikamatsu Hanji, is a superb translation by C. Andrew Gerstle of the original *jōruri* text.

Chapter 21, “Ghosts and Nineteenth-Century Kabuki” focuses on “one of the pioneers of the ghost-story genre (*kaidan mono*) in *kabuki*” (p. 843), Tsuruya Namboku IV. A brief introduction points out key developments in Bunka-Bunsei era *kabuki*, such as the appearance of “evil women” (*akuba*) characters, the increased emphasis on physical expressiveness of the actors as evidenced by quick change dance pieces (*hengemono*), and the portrayal of a negative dark side of society, glorifying low-class and outcast erotic “heroes,” for which Namboku is known. Acts II and III of *Ghost Stories at Yotsuya* (*Yotsuya Kaidan*, 1825) translated by Mark Oshima, are included, richly illustrated by reproductions of pages from a bound picture book edition (*gōkan*) of the story published in 1826. More examples of Namboku’s works would have created a more accurate picture of his broad range, though interested readers may find translations of several other Namboku plays in *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Darkness and Desire, 1804–1864* (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), edited by James R. Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter.

The importance of ghost stories in Edo culture is evident in subsequent development, as shown in chapter 22, “Late Yomihon: History and the Supernatural Revisited.” This contains a translation of four chapters of *The Eight Dog Chronicles* (*Hakkenden*, 1814–1842), Kyokutei Bakin’s famous “historical novel of the strange and supernatural” (p. 887). One of the world’s longest novels, *The Eight Dog Chronicles* is perhaps best known in theatre by Ichikawa Ennosuke III’s 1993 Super *Kabuki* version of the same title. Chapter 27, “Rakugo” includes one example of this solo story telling tradition, which still flourishes in Japan. *Peony Lantern Ghost Story* (*Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, 1861), by San'yūtei Enchō, known for his “composition and performance of long ghost-love stories” (p. 962) is important for two reasons. First, there are few published translations of this popular performance genre. Second, this particular selection is a fine example of the influence which *rakugo* had on *kabuki* in the latter part of the nineteenth century, becoming a hit play starring Onoe Kikugorō V in 1892.

Several other chapters in the anthology illustrate the close ties between popular vernacular fiction and the stage during the Edo period. Chapter 11, “*Dangibon* (Satiric Teachings) and the Birth of Edo Popular Literature” includes a selection from *Modern Style Lousy Sermons* (*Imayō heta dangi*, 1752) by Jōkanbō Kōa titled “The Spirit of Kudō Suketsune Criticizes the

Theater.” In it the spirit of Suketsune appears to a traveling flunky *kabuki* actor, Bagyū (literally “horse cow,” named for the lowly characters he plays on stage), to complain about his unfair portrayals in Soga brothers plays, which by this time were a mainstay of Edo *kabuki*. This selection shows not only what contemporary criticisms of the theatre may have been, but the centrality of the Soga brothers phenomenon in *kabuki*.

In chapter 16, “Sharebon: Books of Wit and Fashion,” one discovers that a text of this late eighteenth-century genre “resembles a play script centered on dialogue, with occasional prose descriptions,” (p. 656) and often deals with situations commonly found in the theatre. Selections from Santō Kyōden’s *Forty-Eight Techniques for Success with Courtesans* (*Keiseikai Shijū Hattē*, 1790) illustrates the conflicts between true love and a man’s economic ability to obtain the women he loves. Selections in chapter 17, “Kibyōshi: Satiric and Didactic Picture Books,” also have numerous allusions to *kabuki* performances, actors, and theatrical conventions, including ending stories with the phrase “that’s all for today,” a common practice in *kabuki* at the time. Stories from these genres could be great companion readings to plays of the late eighteenth century. Chapter 18, “Kokkeibon: Comic Fiction for Commoners” includes selections from book four of Jippensha Ikku’s *Travels on the Eastern Seaboard* (*Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige* 1802–1822). Inspired by Tarōkaja and Jirōkaja of *kyōgen*, the *Travels*’ protagonists, Yajirōbei and Kitahachi, in turn became popular figures in numerous *kabuki* over the following century.

Insights into the reasons for *giri-ninjō* conflicts central in so many *jōruri* and *kabuki* plays can be garnered from the extensive selections included in chapters 7 and 8, on Confucian studies and related literature. Numerous characters that made their way to and from the stage can be found in the many genres of literature represented. Useful tables on coins, weights, distances, and historical periods also provide a handy reference. *Early Modern Japanese Literature* has a great deal more than can be detailed here. Whether searching for a reference, reading materials for a course, or background materials for lectures or research, this volume has much to offer both students and scholars of Japanese theatre.

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**HEROES OF THE KABUKI STAGE.** By Arendie and Henk Herwig. Amsterdam: Hotei Publishing, KIT Publishers, 2004. 359 pp. 280 color illustrations. Cloth \$130.00.

In the preface to *Heroes of the Kabuki Stage*, the authors write, “Our motivation in writing this book is to share the information we have gathered with other collectors whose only connection to the world of *kabuki* are the prints in their collection” (p. 7). The book accomplishes that goal and more by providing a