

interdisciplinary territories, and there is material of interest to students and scholars in a variety of fields.

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PLUTSCHOW, HERBERT E. *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature*. Brill's Japanese Studies Library 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990. xii+284 pages. Bibliography, index. Cloth Dfl 125.— (ca. US\$62.50); ISBN 90-0408628-5.

This study is divided into four unequal parts: on "ritual and literature," on "Shinto ritual in Japanese literature," on the "Shinto-Buddhist synthesis and the ritual arts," and on "literature and exorcism." A major premise of the book is that ritual has played a structuring role in Japanese aesthetics, poetical and literary forms, and theater, either because "ritual forms" pervade the modes of production of culture, or because the genres under consideration were performed in ritual settings. Those are very different issues, but they are treated throughout the book as though production and performance, simply because of their ritual settings, are equivalent for the purpose of analysis. However, not one single ritual is ever discussed, even though that is the only thing that might shed light on what the author means by ritual.

The dominant theme echoing through this interesting but flawed study is that it is quite improper to study Japanese early and medieval culture without knowing ritual modalities of action in the religious systems of classical Japan. I believe this to be true, but I also believe that that "truth" cannot be demonstrated without a serious look at the ways in which scholarship treats ritual, and it is here that problems begin. The author is adamant that he will not review ritual theories, because it is a book about literature, but that is not enough of a precaution when dealing precisely with the issue of ritual and its relationship to cultural forms; some current theories might properly reinforce some of the author's contentions, while others might, also properly, put them in serious jeopardy. Disregarding theory is no guarantee of objectivity, especially when authors such as Eliade and Jung are used as though they were the object of agreement among scholars, and as bastions of unquestionable authority. Nonetheless, we have here one of the very few attempts at communication between historians of literature and of religion, and in that sense, the book is welcome.

While some readers might be annoyed, like this reader, by some of the sweeping generalizations, followed by overinterpretations, that mar an otherwise honest and erudite discussion, others will be attracted by some insights that are well worth pondering. For example, while it seems that the author conflates, with too much complacency, the categories of ritual, symbol, practice, and religious literature in too brief of an entry into his subject, he then offers a problematic analysis of one poem by Bashō, and it is not clear at all what, in that discussion, is supposed to explain what: does knowledge of classical ritual forms actually help produce a more incisive interpretation of Bashō? Not in the least. I do not know whether the author visited the Yamadera (Ryūshaku-ji) in Yamagata prefecture, where Bashō composed his famous "*shizukesa-ya / iwa ni shimi-iru / semi no koe*" haiku, but it *is* important to go there in this case, because the rocks that dot the slopes of that mountain temple are filled with holes that were the result of erosion, and it then becomes obvious that the poet's image to the

effect that the cicadas' shrill sounds pierce the rocks is no more than an elegant and thoroughly appropriate image that has *nothing* to do with ritual, and *everything* to do with landscape. The author might reply that, precisely, landscapes in Japan were imbued with *mysterium tremendum*, and that that is what the poet was shocked by and wanted to transmit. Indeed, the author writes: "The rocks symbolize the permanent world beyond . . . Bashō must have felt his own existence to be short-lived as the cicada's . . . he therefore addressed his poem to the world beyond, hoping perhaps that, like the cicada's buzzing, it would penetrate the rocks and reach the timeless realm . . . [the poem's] circumstances of composition suggest that the poem was a ritual one, and that it uses a ritual symbolism" (p. 19). That, I think, is going much too far.

The point I wish to make is that, if all we can end up doing is bickering over personal interpretations, without a shred of theoretical clarity as to what is meant by "ritual symbolism" or as to where "ritual" will take us when interpreting literary works, then we have not advanced one step. And when such discussions are followed by the statement that "the art of poetry . . . maintained its basic orderly form of lines of five, seven, five syllables . . . from the *Manyōshū* times to the present because, in my opinion, its form reflected the continuity of Japan's political order," (p. 32), then I think we have tumbled into a deep pool without possible exit. That kind of statement fundamentally detracts from dispassionate enquiry and functions to obfuscate the social, political, and ideological components of artistic performance: people did not write poems to satisfy a ritual form, they wrote because they wanted to express themselves, satisfy others, woo others, etc. When the author tells us that "consensus is reached through symbols whose meanings the community agrees upon" (p. 35), he forbids himself (and his audience) from investigating how and by whom a symbol is constituted, and for what purpose. Japanese cultural history is actually teeming with dances, poems, songs, and performances of protest, it is swarming with stifled voices crushed under the "consensus" of unbroken and happy tradition. I can only say: "Why not read the *Ryōjin-hishō* again and examine how the good old political order was being subverted by ritual (and women), and why not look at the history of cults whose management by very real people led them from participation in the political order to its undoing?" A good place to start would be to abandon bland discussions of *kotodama* ("the soul of words") and investigate, instead, how people manipulated that concept, in practice, in the utterance of oracles whose purpose it was to manipulate the so-called political order. This book offers no study of the complex politics of oracular religion in early or medieval Japan, even though that may be said to be the natural point of entry into the problem.

Another fundamental, though related, problem with the approach followed in this study concerns historicity. In his discussion of Shinto ritual in Japanese literature, the author claims that he can "refer to a prototype attained by deduction from modern, still observable festivals. Yet since these festivals have been repeated more or less regularly for centuries, the prototype I have devised applies to both ancient and modern festivals" (42). There is no such thing as a blissful escape from historical change into a warm, never-changing tradition, particularly in the realm of cultural performances (the *matsuri*) whose oft-stated (but never reached) goal is the maintenance and repetition of specific forms. It can be maintained and established that *matsuri* have changed drastically over the years, and it is important to show and elucidate the breaks of radical difference that have occurred in their performance, their reception, and their purpose. A more critical stance concerning the philosophy of time that seems to be inherent to ritual performance is called for in this respect.

However, we should not be so naive as to accept uncritically that the contemporary performance of a *matsuri* is a fairly faithful rendition of past models. To wit: most *kagura* dances one sees in Shinto shrines today are Meiji creations, and many *matsuri* have been thoroughly “revamped” to project the illusory image of an idealized past. Shinto itself, as we can see it today, is a *modern* invention (or, perhaps better put, a symptom of “modernity” as that term is used by Anthony Giddens) to begin with. Who would dare claim that the On-matsuri of the Kasuga Wakamiya Shrine in Nara is “old”? Most of its Buddhist elements, which were essential to both its constitution and performance over the past few centuries, have been stripped!

An Eliade-type of unquestioning and uncritical approach will not do any more, and we cannot go on ignoring history, conflict, etc. Especially so in the case of Japan, where rituals not only have served, in part, to manipulate and “reenforce” social and political order, but where they have also constantly been the object of manipulation for ideological purposes (that is, often enough, the case today). Even when one goes to see “an old *matsuri*,” one in fact never sees more than what has been carefully chosen for show: documents of all kinds reveal that entire and important, if not central, parts of *matsuri* have been deleted (or added) for various reasons that one may choose to investigate or ignore, with attendant consequences.

Similarly, while it is true that many poems had a magical purpose, it is necessary to show how the direction of the magic in question changed over time; a case in point is that of Kitano Tenjin (Sugawara no Michizane), whose wrathful spirit was pacified by *darani* uttered by priests and, who, once exorcised, turned around and became a source of inspiration for poets who dedicated their poems to Michizane’s spirit but were not attempting to pacify it any more: they were pacifying themselves.

On the positive side of things, this book suggests a number of important issues that, although I believe they are not fully treated in the study, can be regarded as topics for necessary further discussion. I would not go so far as Yamaori Tetsuo, who contends that “*chinkon* is the heart of the middle ages” (p. 216), but I would take heed and study in much more detail and with as much theoretical sophistication as possible the notion that much Japanese literature had, in the periods under consideration, a placatory purpose. Indeed, one might often replace the term “ritual” in Plutschow’s discussions by the term “placatory function” and come up with better insights into the psychological conditions of production of certain cultural performances and their political and social effects. Aware that this is a central issue, the author stirs the pot and offers a large number of textual morsels that are absolutely fascinating in this respect. The entire repertoire of Nō dramas must be, once more, submitted to lucid analysis, particularly concerning their structuration of what the author calls, perhaps misleadingly, the “Shinto-Buddhist synthesis.” I am less and less convinced that Buddhism and Shinto ever achieved a synthesis and, more than ever before, conscious and mindful of the conflicts that animated the drive or will to synthesis and of the very conflicts of interpretation that sustained the production of texts and poems in the medieval period. There were, also, between monks and priests, conflicts over who would perform what kind of rituals, in what setting, and for what purpose. The author is unwilling to broach that topic, for he wants to deal with texts and not with their authors, but he is right in insisting that ritual was central to some aspects of culture, and central to the placatory character of literature, poetry, and some works of art.

Despite my criticisms concerning methodology, this book has a lot to offer to aspiring students of Japanese literature, and I recommend it within that context alone. The author has a vast command of literature and poetry, and a sensibility many might

envy; he has also done a lot of groundwork and has surveyed many Japanese secondary sources, though one wishes he were less obedient to their implied ideological thrust than Hikotonushi-no-mikoto was to the tangle En-no-gyōja submitted him to. What we should organize is a really interdisciplinary and international conference on a topic that Plutschow has rightly recognized as central to any attempt at understanding the medieval period. As a historian of Japanese religions with a deep interest in literature and the arts, I would love to participate.

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YONEMURA, ANN. *Yokohama: Prints from Nineteenth-Century Japan*. Washington, D. C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990. 198 pages. Bibliography, chronology of world events, list of artists. Cloth US\$45.00; ISBN 0-87474-993-X. Paper US\$26.95; ISBN 0-87474-999-9.

Yokohama prints, the subject of this catalogue, are a genre of *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 (Japanese woodblock prints) that flourished from 1859 to the 1870s. They were produced to satisfy Japanese curiosity about foreigners and foreign cultures at a time when some foreigners arrived at Yokohama, an international port newly opened after over two hundred years of national seclusion. This mass-produced popular art, covering the time from the very end of the Edo period to the early Meiji period, has been reevaluated recently (see MEECH-PEKARIK 1986). This catalogue, full of color illustrations, accompanied the traveling exhibition that was held at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C., and two other museums in the United States in 1990-91. The prints are from the collection of William and Florence Leonhart of Washington, D.C.

Ann Yonemura, author of the catalogue and Assistant Curator of Japanese Art at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, thematically arranges the prints and tries to explain suitable historical settings and contexts. Backed by historical information, the author's approach successfully explains how the prints demonstrate the vast range of Japanese interests in foreigners and their cultures. For example, the chapter "Leisure and Entertainment in and around Yokohama" includes such leisure activities in the foreign community as Sunday promenades, private parties in the merchants' residences, boisterous parties in pleasure quarters, exotic animals, visiting circuses, and military exercises (129).

The author's thematical approach, however, does not clearly show how and why Japanese interests changed along with the drastic political and economic change of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. While she covers the entire production period, she fails to show the transformations in Japanese interest in foreigners and their cultures in the sequence of thematical chapters. Since I have a great interest in this historical perspective, I found this lack of treatment disappointing. Many scholars (see YOKOTA 1989, 67-68) prefer to divide Yokohama prints into two periods of production according to changes of subject matter. The subjects in the first period (the early 1860s) concentrate on the foreigners themselves. Then, in the second period, the subjects change to rapid Westernization of Yokohama, and sometimes Tokyo. Moreover, the prints in the Meiji period, depicting Western inventions such as steam locomotives and balloons, can be strictly interpreted as *kaika-e* 開化絵 (enlightenment pictures)