

Jane Marie LAW, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyo Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. 321 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN 0-69102894-X.

PUPPETS OF NOSTALGIA STRIKES a contrast to prior studies of Japanese performing arts that dwell on dramaturgy or literary aesthetics divorced from the historical and cultural setting. Jane Marie Law's research on the puppet (*ningyō*) traditions of Awaji Island deserves recognition for its holistic approach to studying the use of puppetry as a religious technique. By combining archival research with interviews drawn from extensive fieldwork and adding much personal reflection, Law draws out the significance of Awaji puppetry not simply as the little cousin of the better-known bunraku puppet theater, but as an important case of the reworking of tradition and the use of theater in ritual.

The traveling puppeteers from Awaji once played an integral role in moments of celebration and ceremony throughout Japan from the early modern era to the early twentieth century. Whereas perceptions of otherness and liminality surrounded itinerant ritual puppeteers in their premodern heyday, with the near extinction of this tradition in the twentieth century, Law views nostalgia as the dominant motif structuring modern views toward Awaji puppetry. She locates the bitter-sweet recollection of puppetry for the people of Awaji within a nexus of remembrance of how the dying art of puppetry was once the focus of the island's cultural and ritual life, albeit that the status of puppeteers was low if not marginal in Japanese society as a whole.

The first half of the work discusses the use of puppets in ritual and traces the liminal status of puppeteers and puppetry in Japan historically. Law finds the origin of puppetry in "ritual drama." For Law, ritual "generate[s] meaning, cope[s] with disorder and mediate[s] difference" (p. 51). Since the same can be said of drama, teasing out the "ritual" aspects of theater is often problematic. Law provides evidence of the ritual use of puppet-like effigies in Japanese history and draws comparisons with other Japanese performing arts. Historically Awaji puppetry owes a debt to *noh* theater. With more comparative research on *noh* and other arts Law could have further clarified aspects of Awaji puppetry ritual, especially the Sanbaso dance that derives from *noh*'s Okina dance. Specifically, *noh*'s version of Sanbaso is not "humorous" as Law asserts (p. 290) but is instead construed to be a "ritual." For instance, *noh* performers today contend that they unite with a divine-power when they don the mask of Okina, just as Law relates how divine possession in Awaji puppetry is marked by the placement of a mask on the puppet (p. 177).

The second half of Law's work follows the rise of the Awaji puppetry tradition, explores puppet-rituals in Awaji, and looks at the circumstances of Awaji puppetry today. Law narrates how Awaji puppeteers broke away from Kobe's Nishinomiya Shrine by the early Edo period and created their own origin myth, the *Dōkumbo denki*, to assert their independence. Besides the dance of Sanbaso, another example of Awaji ritual puppetry that Law discusses is the dance of Ebisu. Law focuses on the dark side of the chubby Ebisu as a sometime malevolent deity of fishermen and farmers who demands regular appeasement. Law's discussion of the revival of Awaji puppetry for the tourist

industry warrants reading for anyone interested in the state of Japan's "folk arts" today, although Law could well have addressed this question in a wider and more comparative context than she did by, for example, including prior research on nostalgic feelings about "hometowns" (*furusato*) in Japan or works on memory and tourism in other countries.

Law admits her own nostalgia about her topic, which in part derives from her personal stake in saving Awaji's puppetry. Law may have done better to address her own sentiments earlier in the book instead of the last chapter, for her nostalgia sometimes shades her analysis, as when she uses synchronic vignettes to describe rituals and adopts vague references to sources as "an old man" or "an old document." Law's study reveals the rich legacy of puppetry on Awaji, but the dynamic between the "ritual puppeteers" performing Ebisu and Sanbaso puppetry as a "ritual" (as opposed to a "pure" entertainment?), and the multitude of Awaji puppet troupes of the *jōruri* variety (akin to *bunraku*) that once flourished and that also performed "rituals," are topics that need further disaggregation, which we can hope that Law will illuminate in future research. Law is also silent about the category of gender. When male-dominance of most Japanese performing arts is a historical phenomenon slowly changing in the twentieth century, one wonders, for instance, about the role of women in the revival of Awaji puppetry today and what women were doing earlier in its history.

Jane Marie Law's study is groundbreaking in its revelation of the ways in which a careful study of a theatrical form can inform understanding of religious life and the formation of memory. I hope that future studies of the performing arts will be equally as far-reaching.

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