

MONUMENTA NIPPONICA

VOLUME 72 NUMBER 1

2017

Shifting Perspectives on the Shogunate's Last Years:
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A Parody in the Ruins:
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BOOK REVIEWS

Drahtseilakte: Der junge Kenzaburō Ōe. By Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnerreit and Christoph Held. Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 2015. 293 pages. Softcover €32.00.

ASA-BETTINA WUTHENOW
Universität Heidelberg

This German-language volume on the early works of the Nobel Prize-winning author Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935), coauthored by Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnerreit and Christoph Held, is a rare pearl among the latest publications on Japanese literature. The book provides a vast quantity of precious and little-known information about Ōe and the works he wrote in the years after World War II, up to the early 1960s. Its title, which translates roughly as *Tightrope Walking: The Young Kenzaburō Ōe*, reflects Ōe's literary experiments of those years. Ōe himself has referred to those efforts as a sort of "tightrope walking," where, as related in the book, he felt in constant danger of falling and breaking his neck (p. 11). The publication is divided into two numbered parts, followed by the landmark reprinting and translation of Ōe's 1961 story *Seiji shōnen shisu* (A Political Boy Is Now Dead).

Part 1, written by Held, deals with three early narratives by Ōe published in 1958—*Shiiku* (The Catch), *Miru mae ni tobe!* (Jump Before Looking!), and *Memushiri ko uchi* (Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids). These works all focus on the problem of lost identity seen after World War II, a period of intellectual and moral crisis in which the Japanese mind, mired in ambivalence and insecurity, yearned in vain for ethical and