

J. THOMAS RIMER

Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions

An Introduction



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J. THOMAS RIMER

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for Mark

Preface

 WHAT follows here has a double purpose. I hope first of all to indicate certain structural principles important in the tradition of Japanese narrative fiction. Secondly, I have enjoyed writing in some detail about works that I genuinely admire, works I would like to call to the attention of readers who may not have read them. For both reasons I have included copious quotations from the translations of the original texts, perhaps more than some readers may require or desire. Still, I would insist that a close reading of texts of this quality is the first requisite step toward any proper analysis of their larger purposes, and I hope that my readers will share my enthusiasm for the particular examples I have chosen.

There are, of course, some omissions. Ihara Saikaku, the Tokugawa novelist, has been written about so often, and so well, that there seemed little point in repeating the same information. Among modern writers I have set aside Akutagawa Ryūnosuke for much the same reason. Shimazaki Tōson, on the other hand, cannot be dealt with in such a study as this because as yet, regrettably, no major work of his is available in translation other than *Hakai* (The Broken Commandment), an admirable but somewhat atypical youthful work. I have also omitted Mishima Yukio, first, because he has been so much discussed elsewhere (although his texts have not been given careful scrutiny on any systematic basis), secondly, because I do not happen to share the enthusiasm of many others for his work.

My greatest regret of all is that I have not had the profit and pleasure of consulting Professor Edward Seidensticker's new and complete translation of Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*, which, at the time of writing, was not yet available. My analysis has been based rather on Arthur Waley's earlier translation; but that translation too has become a classic in its own right and, as such, surely deserves detailed treatment.

My thanks for help in preparing this study go to many. In

particular I would like to thank Professor Masao Miyoshi for a number of trenchant comments that were most useful to me in revising the manuscript. Professors Earl Miner and Makoto Ueda also made helpful suggestions, and both Miss R. Miriam Brokaw and Mrs. Arthur M. Sherwood of Princeton University Press have provided me with the utmost support with the production of the book. Professor Eugene Soviak's questions stimulated me to take up many of the matters dealt with in this study, and I have to thank Mr. Robert Tuggle of New York for one key sentence and the very important concept that lies behind it. My wife Laurence, through her own studies in French literature, did a great deal to help me in refining my own conceptions, as she read through and commented in detail on the manuscript chapter by chapter. I wish also to acknowledge the generous financial support provided me by Washington University for the preparation of the manuscript, in several stages. Professor Donald Holzman, of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, was also most helpful to me at several crucial junctures in the preparation of the manuscript.

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Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions

I

Introduction

I

 SINCE the Second World War, an increasing number of translations have made available to the Western world an ever broader range of Japanese fiction, ranging from the early poem tales to the newest existentialist fashions of Abe Kōbō. These translations find readers, and some have achieved lasting reputations. Still, the comments often made in the press or in reviews suggest a certain dissatisfaction felt by readers. The forms in which these narratives are cast—short story, novella, novel, reminiscence—seem familiar yet somehow malformed with respect to our expectations. We are attracted, yet disconcerted by what we find.

Or so the argument goes. Actually, such a statement of the problem suggests a proper answer. A certain amount of critical attention has been focused on the question of what Japanese fiction is *not*. More effort is needed to determine what the general principles of the traditions of that fiction might be. There are several obvious ways to pursue such a topic. One might, for example, examine the larger role of fiction in Japanese culture and society. Japanese fiction had an aristocratic beginning in the Heian court. In particular, the tonality given to narrative prose by Lady Murasaki and her *The Tale of Genji* created an aesthetic that can readily be traced all the way down to the postwar novels of Dazai, Kawabata, and Tanizaki. Another method might be to examine the readers of Japanese literature. Court attitudes and aristocratic self-images certainly conditioned the artistic milieu from which *The Tale of Genji* came; in the early twentieth century, writers of the stature of Natsume Sōseki wrote their most sustained efforts for serial publication in newspapers. All such questions might be regarded as a way to study Japanese literature through its sociology. The information available through such analysis is immensely revealing and helps to give a sense of the limits of creativity in each successive social setting.

Such critical procedures make it possible to use these works of literature as documents in cultural, intellectual, and philosophical history. Much modern Japanese literary criticism is of this variety, and some excellent Western scholarship has been written from a similar point of view. Among recent studies in English, one might mention *The World of the Shining Prince* (New York, 1964) by Ivan Morris, which attempts to recreate the social and spiritual milieu of Lady Murasaki and her generation. Another first-rate treatment of problems in Japanese literary history is Masao Miyoshi's *Accomplices of Silence* (Berkeley, 1974), a study of modern fiction in terms of its social and linguistic contexts.

The forms of Japanese fiction possess a literary history of their own, one that has given rise to a series of changing styles. Further, as contemporary Western criticism has been at pains to point out, style itself not only determines the content but is often synonymous with it. An analysis of style and content, and of the nature of the relationship between them, would seem to constitute the basis for an understanding of the purposes of Japanese fiction, or of any other. The task of providing any such analysis is a formidable one, and what follows is merely a modest attempt to suggest certain necessary directions of inquiry. My conviction, in sum, is that the great works of Japanese literature succeed brilliantly on their own terms. It is up to us to find out what those terms are.

II

In determining the necessary means to discuss the framework that sustains this literary structure, we may put forth two larger problems. Both have a bearing on every work examined here. The first is the problem of originality. Certainly originality remains the often unspoken yet ultimate criterion for the success of much contemporary Western art, music, and literature. A work is judged by the extent it can break away from what has come before. Some of the satisfactions found among Western readers of Japanese fiction in translation are due to the very fact that different traditions make a given work seem original in terms of Western sen-

sibilities. Read in their proper context, however, the Japanese works are bound to make a different impression. Japan, like other cultures that bear the burdens of a long and complex history, seems to favor a more classically oriented literary tradition. Originality is highly valuable, but within certain limitations imposed by a developed and inherited taste. Certainly originality has never been the ultimate criterion in Japanese tradition. Western perceptions as to the nature of Japanese originality are sometimes muddled because of the reputation that Japan has earned during the earlier years of the century as a country of imitators. By such a definition, works of literature are sometimes dismissed as mere imitations of available models—*The Tale of Genji* is copied from Chinese works, Tanizaki from Edgar Allan Poe, and Dazai perhaps from Dostoevsky.

In terms of literary craftsmanship, however, such influences (and their extent is always less than might be supposed) are rather a sign of Japan's longstanding cosmopolitan attitude toward other civilizations. China, Japan's most powerful neighbor and culturally her greatest source of influence until the late nineteenth century, took little interest in literary and artistic traditions other than her own, but the Japanese, who never saw themselves as the center of world culture, always maintained a lively interest in the variety of experiences available to them. This fundamental attitude was as visible in the early Japanese chronicles as it was in the latter half of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese missionaries came to Japan, and as it has been since the 1850s, when Japan began to open her doors to the West.

Moreover, such a lively interest in other cultures—or more specifically for the present purposes, in other literary styles and systems of aesthetic and philosophic ideas—must certainly come as no surprise to those who know anything of the history of the European intellectual traditions. No one finds unnatural the enormous impact of Goethe and Shakespeare on all of European culture; Sartre seems no less an important figure for having been stimulated by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. In the European tradition, cosmopolitanism is assumed to be a positive virtue. Japanese literary culture be-

haves no differently, but the distances are greater and the traditions further apart. The borrowings therefore often seem more apparent and the eclecticism more striking, even when the results are altogether successful. Exchanges bring riches: what we admire in our own literary tradition we can scarcely condemn in another.

In addition, we must realize the added difficulties imposed on our understanding by such a literary tradition. Quite simply, one must know more. In particular, Japanese modern writers who draw on three pasts at once (European, Japanese, and Chinese) make any simple judgments on their work difficult to render; indeed, the untutored Western reader may not even be aware of the challenges set, the rules of the game. In particular, structural elements that often seem completely missing often turn out to be operating most effectively, but in terms defined by canons of taste and tradition wholly unfamiliar to us. Until some understanding of that tradition can be achieved, individual works of Japanese literature, for the Western reader, must be made to stand, frail and perilously alone, in a fashion never anticipated by their original authors or readers.

The second preliminary problem that might be raised concerns the ever-changing relationship between the past and the present for each individual author. For the Japanese, the past performs an endlessly complicated function. In the first place, the past never served them as a monolithic tradition, a cultural carpet rolling down through the ages, to provide a kind of homogeneous blanket covering the warts and idiosyncratic bumps of each succeeding age. The changes that have come to Japan in modern times are well known and enormous, but the changes Buddhism brought to early Japanese culture, or those brought about as a result of the social restructuring of the country during the medieval period, were in some ways just as profound. The question, in literary terms, of what to do with the past was just as important then as it is now. Further, the literary past was usually perceived not as a burden but as a precious thread of continuity and sophistication in a world that all too often seemed full of upheaval and continuous, ominous change. The Japanese literary tradition, and the psy-

chological and stylistic attitudes it fostered, retained a kind of dialectical energy that has provided vitality for almost a thousand years.

Of course every civilization retains its literary past in some fashion, even if only as a stereotype ripe for destruction and ridicule. Writers who feel empty and bereft are usually those who have no sufficient tradition behind them, as Hawthorne once insisted. In Japan, the literary past always plays some active function, even if an unconscious one, in the composition of fiction. An attempt to define the functioning of that past provides one major theme of this study.

With these remarks as a preface, a Western reader, faced with the range of Japanese fiction now available to him in English, might well go on to pose a number of additional questions. The first area of concern involves the relationship of fiction to reality. Long accustomed to holding up as a criterion the "willing suspension of disbelief" in making judgments on the efficacy of a work of fiction, the Western reader here faces a new set of conventions that define that relationship. Not only is the relationship between fiction and reality of a somewhat different nature in the Japanese tradition; the ultimate sense of reality itself, as perceived by the various writers discussed in the present study, can in no way be defined in the same terms as our own. The Japanese sense of the continuity of personality in time, the relationship of the individual to others, and of the individual to nature, stands at a considerable distance from our Western experience. Many Japanese writers have been found disappointing by Western critics who find the narratives shapeless, without climax. The Japanese response might well be (although I must confess I have never seen it so succinctly formulated) that reality is indeed shapeless and that Japanese literary conventions are thus closer to ultimate truth than are our own. In any case, the Japanese literary mechanisms for apprehending reality permit the creation of works that, read carefully, possess the ability to shake us loose from our usual preconceptions.

A related question concerns the relation of language to narrative. Perhaps the fact that the Western novel is bound up in conveying our own perceptions of "reality" has imposed the

standards of prose on the linguistic structures of our fiction; and, indeed, writers who move toward a use of heightened prose or poetry (Hesse, Rilke, on occasion Gide) in an attempt to produce "poetic" novels have done so, to some extent, at their peril, for such hybrid genres have not always received the modern reader's full sanction. The Japanese novel, on the other hand, draws on poetry as much as on prose for its literary mechanisms and for its language, and our expectations must be altered accordingly.

Still another issue involves the nature of causality in the Japanese tradition. Our notion of cause and effect goes back, no doubt, to Aristotle; by the nineteenth century, causality, in its artistic aspects, was such a central conception in fiction that Henry James could declare "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the determination of character?" Gide may have struck a glancing blow at this central concept with his *acte gratuite*, but the close reciprocal relationship between character and action is still of crucial importance in Western fiction. One's first response on reading Japanese fiction is that this relationship, whatever its ultimate nature, is certainly more loosely perceived in the literary mechanisms involved. Determining the qualities and limitations of the nature of this causality will help considerably in explaining the ranges of artistic sensibility found appropriate to narrative in the Japanese tradition.

Another area of exploration might be that of coherence, or total effect. Tightly structured Western fiction often makes its impact, and sets in motion its deepest reverberations, through the architectural structure of its various parts. Again, our contemporary sense of reality makes us more appreciative of the Japanese looser structure; we tend to prize the Poussin sketch over the formal painting, and, as Charles Rosen has pointed out, Flaubert's real art may now seem to lie in his letters rather than in his novels.¹ Nevertheless, the literary structures in Japanese fiction are assembled in strikingly different ways, and the coherence they are marshalled to suggest is of a different order than that to which Western readers are accustomed.

¹ See Rosen's article "Romantic Documents," in *The New York Review of Books*, May 15, 1975, p. 15.

All of these concerns might be summed up as cautionary in nature—a desire to remove false expectations for Western readers. Yet one can hope for more than that: only by approaching these works of Japanese fiction with the proper expectations can their humor, lyricism, and philosophical profundity be perceived. An analysis of their literary structures may be a most helpful way to create the proper expectations.

III

If the role of creating proper expectations is one normally assigned to literary criticism, then one might next discuss the accomplishments of Japanese traditions of criticism. As in Europe, criticism has played a part in the Japanese literary tradition since its beginnings, and a study that could provide even a modest outline of the history of Japanese literary criticism would make a book far longer than this one. No such attempt is provided here, but a few remarks on the concerns of Japanese criticism might be useful at this point.

If we look briefly at what might be termed traditional literary criticism in Japan—that is, from the earliest periods through the incursions of the West in the 1850s and after—we find that one prominent fact stands out. The highest genre of literature was poetry, and most critical attention was focused on this form. What Japanese criticism on fiction existed (and there was a certain amount at all times, especially concerning *The Tale of Genji*) tended to define and make use of critical terms borrowed from the poetic vocabulary. One genre was defined in terms of another.

A closer look at the tradition suggest that two basic types of criticism maintained an ascendancy. One was didactic and moral, often with a heavy religious cast, Confucian, Buddhist, or Shintō. Like much of what the good Christian bishops have told us down through the centuries about Western literature, most of these homilies can now be put aside. A second type of criticism dealt more closely with the problems of art and might be termed a kind of technical criticism. A modern reader will find this older criticism quite practical in nature and often surprisingly contemporary in feeling. In the Heian

period (794-1185), which saw the creation of *Genji*, *Tales of Ise*, and several great anthologies of 31-syllable *waka* poetry, the critics were the poets. The whole aristocratic class wrote poetry. Literary criticism was written by practicing poets for practicing poets. Questions as to the worth of literature, or debates over the relative worth of literature in relation to history or philosophy, were seldom pursued, since the aristocratic class shared the same assumptions about the fundamental importance of poetry. Criticism stressed such questions as the choice of proper means to suggest allusive effect, or the creation of techniques permitting the inclusion of a poetic reference without giving a newer poem too great a literary burden.

The patterns and expectations of literary criticism were laid down in such a fashion for an aristocratic audience. Later, even when that society began to change, the earlier canons of taste and the limitations set on the functions of literary criticism continued to prevail. Adaptations, however, were made for each successive audience. Indeed, the simplest way to grasp the general nature of the changes and developments in Japanese literary criticism is to observe for whom the criticism was being composed. In the Heian period, the poet-critics mostly wrote for each other, but in the long period from 1185, after the disastrous civil wars that virtually destroyed the political power of the court, down to 1600, when the country was reunified under the Tokugawa Shogunate, several new factors became important. A new warrior class arose. Fighting men who had spent their lives far from Kyoto, the capital, they took the political power from the court and felt they needed to adopt the high culture of their predecessors as well. Now the court poets had others to whom to teach literature besides themselves, and the new military rulers proved to be, on the whole, avid students and generous patrons. Social status, of course, remained all important. Even such a fine poet as Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216) could complain that his work was not properly appreciated because of his inferior social status.

Criticism, because of a new audience, also developed certain new concerns that were of vital importance in the growth

of the Japanese aesthetic sensibility. During most of the Heian period, contemporary values were the most important—put baldly, what was newest was best. After destruction and civil war, however, the past seemed, as it receded, to have been far better than a troubled and uncertain present. The virtues of the literary past began to replace those of the present in the hierarchy of values. Indeed the actual social values of the past often seemed in danger of slipping away altogether, and thus evoking the earlier Japanese aristocratic culture became, according to medieval Japanese criticism, one of the important duties of the literary tradition. Criticism urged writers to understand the past and use it as a means to choose appropriate precedents for new literary departures. The Western image of the medieval Christian monk preserving what he could of European culture while brutal wars raged outside his monastery is one that is not markedly different from the Japanese example. Nevertheless, although literary criticism was written by a somewhat larger group than in the Heian period (indeed the “socially inferior” Kamo no Chōmei wrote the most satisfactory medieval thesis on poetics) and for a somewhat larger audience, the nature of the criticism remained predominantly practical. The critical dialogue remained basically one between teacher and student, although the nature of both was now slightly altered. Still, the underlying assumptions concerning the purposes of that relationship were not questioned.

In the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when the country was united and at peace, the range of literary consumers was extended still more. Domestic tranquillity brought increased commerce, and the rising class of town merchants possessed the money, the leisure, and the desire for status that led them to follow literary pursuits. This new group of students required proper instruction, like the warriors who preceded them, and courtly literary values were again adapted and transformed accordingly.

The continuing preoccupation with an ever-receding past also caused an intellectual movement of considerable importance that in turn was to provide a link with the later development of the modern Japanese sensibility. The influence of Chinese ideas on Japan (like European ideas on America) was

always profound, although far less than on the civilizations of Vietnam or Korea. The study of Chinese literature and philosophy was particularly popular in the Tokugawa period, since these writings, because of their more synthetic nature, seemed to supply a cohesive view of philosophy and literature that Japanese commentaries could not provide. Japanese writers and historians admired these Chinese examples and tried to emulate them by turning back to examine their own earliest traditions, just as the Chinese had done. In the process, however, the Japanese found that many widely accepted Chinese philosophical and historical canons of thought and interpretations actually did considerable injustice to the early Japanese sensibility. This school of research, often called "National Studies," produced important results in political and social philosophy. In the field of literary studies, the scholars began to identify the early Japanese sensibility as a virtue to be defined neither in the didactic forms suggested by other Japanese critics in earlier periods nor by any significant reference to Chinese literary premises. The greatest of these critics, Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), was perhaps the first to lift Japanese literary criticism from the level of the brilliant particular observation to the level of general aesthetic (but not didactic) consideration. He was a major figure, and much of his work can still be consulted with profit. In many ways, Motoori was the prototype of the modern literary intellectual now so familiar in contemporary Japan and elsewhere.

Motoori's observations were made within the context of traditional Japanese culture; with the coming of Western ideas about literature toward the end of the nineteenth century, an enormous upheaval brought to the fore questions concerning the role of literature and of the critic as well. Some of these issues seem unresolved in Japan even today. The dislocations of the times produced a new role for the Japanese writer. In the Meiji period (1868-1912), novelists, aware of the vast changes in their society, were forced to look intellectually at the problems they faced: economically, socially, and spiritually. The literary traditions of the past seemed to offer little in the way of help. The modern critic Nakamura Mitsuo has described the position of these writers very clearly.

For them, the novel was not merely an artistic representation of human life. Rather, it was a means of searching for a new, true way of living. At the same time, it was a record of this search. This was the hazardous quest for the sake of which the writers of the Meiji and Taisho periods risked tragedy in their real lives. They had high, probably exaggerated expectations of the novel, and they dared to believe in them and to *live* them.

For them, art was a path of mental and spiritual training, and the search for truth meant living without pretense. This ethical passion made these people, eking out their meager lives in obscure corners of society, the conscience of their society. By speaking out their own minds honestly, they succeeded in grasping the very nature of the civilization in which they lived in ways which were possible to none other of their contemporaries.²

Some novelists wrote for others who, like them, felt the ambiguities and difficulties of a dislocated existence. For these readers the writers often seemed heroes in a struggle to search out some kind of truth about the meaning of life. Novelists now became cultural heroes, and literary criticism began to include the collection of materials appropriate to such hero worship. A general educated public, an intelligentsia, for whom such criticism could be written, began to develop in the Meiji period, and this public still seeks to identify its heroes today. The arrival of a general reader on the Japanese literary scene has produced a critical vocabulary and a set of concerns considerably different from those found appropriate in earlier periods.

Having said this much about the audience for literary criticism and the effect of that audience on the changing nature of criticism, we might sketch briefly the kind of critical postures that have been assumed. In the case of traditional criticism, composed on the whole by professionals for professionals, argument often centered around critical terms, "virtues" perhaps, that literary works ought to possess. A given work (poem, diary, novel, etc.) was judged within the framework

² Nakamura Mitsuo, *Modern Japanese Fiction* (Tokyo, 1968), pp. 7-8.

of these critical values. Definitions of these terms in English are inevitably slippery. In the first place, many of the words used were used as early as the Heian period. The meanings of many words began to change during the subsequent expansion of the traditional critical vocabulary. Secondly, definitions of the terms usually revolved on matters of taste: they must be grasped, felt, responded to, not merely elucidated. Most of these critical terms strike a Western reader as basically aristocratic in nature; they suggest virtues to be appreciated through leisure, cultivation, and self-reflection.

Some examples may make the general tonality of the traditional critical vocabulary more explicit. Most of these terms remain (perhaps by other names) as a part of Japanese literary taste even today.

Aware (or, in its fuller form, *mono no aware*) is perhaps the most important term of all, and the most difficult to define in any concise fashion. A literal translation suggests "ahness," a clumsy word in English. *Aware* was an exclamation, "ah!" perhaps; *mono no aware* might thus become the "ahness of things." Such terminology suggests the ability of the discerning writer to find great and fundamental significance in the ordinary things of life and the further ability to pass such feelings along to discerning readers. *Mono no aware* might be said to represent a deep sensitivity to things, an ability to grasp the movements, the possibilities, the limitations of life in the context of a single incident, sometimes of a trifling nature. This intuitive yet cultured response to life represented the highest aesthetic virtue, and the artistic operation of the principle is as visible in the work of Tanizaki and Kawabata as in so many earlier works, notably in *The Tale of Genji*.

A second literary virtue was that of *makoto*, or sincerity. The idea of categorizing a work of literature, perforce an artificial construction, as "sincere" may seem curious at first, but the term actually reflects a sense of the peculiar virtues of the Japanese spirit in literature. Against the subtleties and profound learning of the Chinese were posited the spontaneity and the natural response to situations and surroundings unique to the Japanese. For many writers and critics, such a spirit was best embodied in the earliest collection of Japanese

poetry, the *Manyōshū*, compiled in the eighth century, at a time when many poems could be included that showed little, if any, influence from Chinese poetics. Generation after generation of critics (Motoori Norinaga among them) praised this "Manyō spirit" as representing the best and truest strain in Japanese culture. Sincerity was often seen as a court of last appeals in a literary debate. Even in the modern period, motive can count for as much, or more, than accomplishment.

Another critical term, often associated with early medieval poetry and later important to the *nō* theater, is that of *yūgen*, sometimes defined as "mystery and depth." The concept is an elusive one, yet of central importance in the history of Japanese aesthetics. Shōtetsu, a medieval poet and critic, defined *yūgen* as "feelings that cannot be put into words, for example the effect of the moon veiled by a wisp of cloud or of scarlet mountain foliage enshrouded in autumnal haze." Such a definition might suggest the beauty of overtones, but the meaning of *yūgen* goes deeper still. Kamo no Chōmei explains it as follows:

. . . it should be evident that this is a matter impossible for people of little poetic sensibility and shallow feelings to understand. . . . How can such things be easily learned or expressed precisely in words? The individual can only comprehend them for himself. Again, when one gazes upon the autumn hills half-concealed by a curtain of mist, what one sees is veiled yet profoundly beautiful; such a shadowy scene, which permits free exercise of the imagination in picturing how lovely the whole panoply of scarlet leaves must be, is far better than to see them spread with dazzling clarity before our eyes. What is difficult about expressing one's personal feelings in so many words—in saying that the moon is bright or in praising the cherry blossoms simply by declaring that they are beautiful? What superiority do such poems have over mere ordinary prose? It is only when many meanings are compressed into a single word, when the depths of feeling are exhausted yet not expressed, when an unseen world hovers in the atmosphere of the poem, when the mean and common are used

to express the elegant, when a poetic conception of rare beauty is developed to the fullest extent in a style of surface simplicity—only then, when the conception is exalted to the highest degree and “the words are too few, will the poem . . . have the [necessary] power. . . .”³

Such an explanation practically serves as a poem in itself; but whatever the ultimate meaning of *yūgen* may be (a meaning which in any case is heavily dependent on the taste and cultivation of the reader), the term suggests a transcendental beauty, a beauty behind the surface that exists on another plane of reality to which the work of art may help to lead the reader. Such ideas are not entirely foreign to our own culture. One need think only of Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality”:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The difference, however, is that for Wordsworth the transcendental experience produces thoughts; for Chōmei an emotional and intuitive response is required, no matter how transformed by necessary cultivation and self-reflection. One poem often cited as possessing *yūgen* is the following *waka* by Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241):

miwataseba	In this wide landscape
hana mo momiji mo	I see no cherry blossoms
nakaikeri	And no crimson leaves—
ura no tomaya no	Evening in autumn over
aki no yūgure	A straw-thatched hut by the bay.
	(tr. Donald Keene)

Teika here excludes all the usual symbols of the beauties of nature and the seasons, pushing his poetic vision above and behind the open grey scene that provides the surface images. The criteria for the proper evocation of *yūgen* are subtle. The effects of *yūgen* can be profound, even in the kind of seemingly simple poem cited above.

³ Quoted in Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford, 1961), p. 269.

A fourth term often employed in traditional literary criticism is *sabi*. The word is related to the Japanese word for "rust," which immediately says a good deal about the literary virtues it suggests. One modern rendering of the term that captures something of the feeling meant to be conveyed is "tranquility in the context of loneliness." Like *yūgen*, the word was first associated with poetry and later was given a wider application. The term was particularly important with reference to the *haiku* of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) and his followers. The art of *haiku* writing, which reached its first great heights with Bashō, was a more popular art than the poetry practiced by the earlier courtiers; and for some critics, *sabi* is a more homely version of the aristocratic *yūgen*. Bashō himself identified the virtues of *sabi* in a poem by his disciple Kyorai:

hanamori ya	Under the cherry blossoms
shiroki kashira o	The guardians of the trees
tsukiawase	Lay their white heads together.
	(Nippon gakujutsu shinkōkai trans.)

Bashō liked Kyorai's juxtaposition of the pale fresh blossoms with the white hair of the old gentlemen who, sent out to keep the tree safe from those who might pluck its branches, sit gossiping underneath its boughs. Bashō himself defined *sabi* as the feelings one might experience in seeing an old warrior, weary and battle-scarred, dressed for an elaborate occasion in fresh bright robes. *Sabi*, like the other terms mentioned above, demands a proper artistic response to the thrust of the writer's own cultivated intuition.

All of the examples (and there are many more, some equally significant, that might be provided) obviously serve best as touchstones of taste. Ultimately, in Japanese terms, they provide the basis for a critical stance, but the gap between such a recognition of this realized feeling and our familiar concepts of literary prose structure—and we can certainly sense principles of structure in the works of Japanese fiction we read—poses certain difficulties for the Western reader. Passages of prose, for example, can be said to express *mono no*

aware or *yūgen*; yet even after such an acknowledgment is made, the question remains as to how such an effect was accomplished. The Western reader seeks, in effect, a poetics of prose.

With the coming of Western influences at the time of the Meiji period and after, one might assume that the critical stance of Japanese literary critics would come closer to that employed in the West. In broad outline, certain *rapprochements* were created, but many of the similarities, in fact, seem to exist only on the surface. The first systematic Western critical methodology was introduced in a celebrated book *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel), written in 1885 when its author, Tsubouchi Shōyō, was a mere twenty-six years old. Shōyō went on to become the most distinguished translator of Shakespeare into Japanese. His attack on Tokugawa didactic fiction and his insistence on the central importance of the psychological realism he found in his reading of Western, particularly British, fiction, had a profound effect on young Japanese readers and writers. His book literally launched the modern literary movement. The break with the literary past was enormous. The poet and actor Shimamura Hōgetsu wrote with the firmest of convictions in 1908 that in the past Japanese literature had chosen beauty as the highest ideal; now, with the advent of naturalism, the ideal was truth.⁴

Despite the change in the literary climate, however, much modern Japanese literary criticism remains closer in spirit, whatever its current fashionable verbal trappings, to the older criticism than to the systematic criticism of the West. Modern Japanese literary criticism can be roughly divided into three categories. None performs precisely the functions a Western reader might expect. The first of these might be described as academic criticism. Time has wrought enormous changes in the Japanese language, and works written even as late as the early years of this century require considerable quantities of notes and explanations. For the older texts, variants must be compared, definitions of archaic terms clarified, manuscripts sought out. A whole academic industry has sprung up to pre-

⁴ See Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, *The Vocabulary of Japanese Literary Aesthetics*, (Tokyo, 1963), p. 69.

serve and protect the national literary heritage. The expenditure of energy on the details of these varieties of critical problems has not produced as powerful a parallel concern with the larger significance of the works so carefully being explicated. This particular critical world is a miniature one. Small questions are answered brilliantly. Large ones are seldom posed.

Some of this larger function has been taken over by a second category of critics, those who have adopted a Marxist stance. Many of them, but by no means all, are associated with universities. For those educated in the period from roughly 1920 to the 1960s, Marxism seems to provide the same psychic satisfactions Confucianism did for their ancestors: a love of orthodoxy, a rigid abstract framework within which any particular reality may be fitted, and a sense of possessing the truth. On the whole, Marxism brought to the consciousness of literary critics a sense of the social forces that lie behind individual acts and helped them understand the changing possibilities for interpreting literature in a rapidly industrializing society. But there have been no Marxist critics of Japanese literature, in academic circles at least, with the sort of temperament that might have led them to look beyond the structures of the intellectual system they adopted. As yet, Japan has produced no Lukács, no Adorno.

A third type of contemporary criticism is that produced by the best of those men who might be called, for want of a better term, literary journalists. Many such writers make criticism their vocation and have achieved the kind of status among discerning readers that a man like Edmund Wilson gained in this country during his lifetime. The criticism written by these men is intensely personal and powerfully stimulating. Etō Jun, himself a highly accomplished critic, describes the paradigm as follows:

I think that a literary theory, if it is to be called a theory at all, can be discovered only *a posteriori* through the critic's ethical as well as aesthetical experiences as he reads a particular work. Once discovered, however, this "theory" does not necessarily work again in the same effective manner in its application to another work. This is, I think, the fate of any literary theory, for a theory cannot be alive un-

less it is rooted in the critic's own experience of an actual work. By its own nature, this kind of experience can hardly be repetitive.⁵

The emphasis again remains on a personal, highly intuitive response to literature by one who has cultivated himself by study and reflection. The greatest of the modern Japanese literary critics, Kobayashi Hideo (born 1902), has composed a number of essays that are as poised and as moving as any texts in modern Japanese literature; yet as these works reveal the meeting of his sensibility with the work under examination, the result seems as much a map of Kobayashi's own spiritual landscape as of the work under discussion.

In sum, in modern Japanese literary criticism there exists a natural and tacit understanding that much can be assumed. For those of us who do not share that tradition, our task is to grasp as precisely as possible what those assumptions are.

IV

In attempting to provide an explication of certain important literary structures and themes in the Japanese tradition, I have (as the subsequent text will make clear) employed concepts taken from a variety of traditional and modern Japanese writers and critics, in order to make the discussions that follow as meaningful as possible. In particular, I have adopted the method used by such critics as Kobayashi: that of choosing for analysis individual texts that I much admire. The works I have chosen date from all periods in Japanese literary history. Using each work as a point of departure, I have attempted to show, by citing various other texts, both literary and critical, how the Japanese tradition, as it developed, produced a close interplay of thematic and narrative structures, an interplay that in turn came to represent the central element in a highly coherent literary aesthetic, with its carefully wrought sanctions of thought and expression. Further, I would suggest as well, such modes seem in some ways closer

⁵ Etō Jun, "Modern Japanese Literary Criticism," *Japan Quarterly*, xii, April, June 1965, p. 177.