



ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOKS



Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature

Edited by Rachael Hutchinson and Leith Morton

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

The *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* provides a comprehensive overview of how we study Japanese literature today. Rather than taking a purely chronological approach to the content, the chapters survey the state of the field through a number of pressing issues and themes, examining the ways in which it is possible to read modern Japanese literature and situate it in relation to critical theory.

The *Handbook* examines various modes of literary production (such as fiction, poetry, and critical essays) as distinct forms of expression that nonetheless are closely interrelated. Attention is drawn to the idea of the *bunjin* as a ‘person of letters’ and a more realistic assessment is provided of how writers have engaged with ideas – not labelled a ‘novelist’ or ‘poet’, but a ‘writer’ who may at one time or another choose to write in various forms. The book provides an overview of major authors and genres by situating them within broader themes that have defined the way writers have produced literature in modern Japan, as well as how those works have been read and understood by different readers in different time periods.

The *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* draws from an international array of established experts in the field as well as promising young researchers. It represents a wide variety of critical approaches, giving the study a broad range of perspectives. This handbook will be of interest to students and scholars of Asian Studies, Literature, Sociology, Critical Theory, and History.

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*Edited by Rachael Hutchinson
and Leith Morton*

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INTRODUCTION

Rachael Hutchinson and Leith Morton

Compiling a book on any one nation's modern literary production is a huge undertaking. There are many possible ways to approach the task. The *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how we study Japanese literature today. Rather than taking a purely chronological approach to the content, we survey the state of the field through a number of pressing issues and themes, examining the ways in which it is possible to read modern Japanese literature and situate it in relation to critical theory. Our contributors, drawn from an international array of established experts in the field as well as promising young researchers, represent a wide variety of critical approaches, giving the study a broad range of perspectives.

There are of course many books available on the topic of modern Japanese literature. Donald Keene's *Dawn to the West* of 1984 set the mold for critical surveys, covering the Meiji period (1868–1912) through to Shōwa (1926–1989) and dedicating single chapters to major authors and genres. Written over thirty years ago, however, it is now outdated, and does not include ideas of feminism, queer literature, the impact of colonialism, or fluidity between Japanese and other literatures. To provide this broader perspective, many scholars have since written and edited books on such themes, as well as works focusing more narrowly on one major author or genre.

There have also been a number of anthologies, of which the *Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature* is perhaps the most comprehensive. It presents the texts with useful critical commentary, and follows a similar format of periodization, featuring major authors and representative examples of genre works. The aim of this book is thus to provide an overview of major authors and genres by situating them within broader themes that have defined the way writers have produced literature in modern Japan, as well as how those works have been read and understood, by different readers in different time periods. Chapters on major authors thus take into account the change over time in the ways that specific works may be read, as well as investigating possible new readings of the work that may lead to new insights.

Similarly, we would argue that the recent move towards identity and representation studies, as well as history and memory studies, needs to be assessed with respect to the impact on the field and its usefulness in understanding modern Japanese literature as a whole, as well as individual case studies of specific writers. While specific sections of the book focus on the

impact of feminist and queer readings, as well as war memory and the colonial legacy, we recognize that there is still much work to be done in these areas. We view this book as a gateway to further research, as approaches to the field continue to change over time. It should also be emphasized here that the idea of literature itself has changed over time: what people read, and the mode by which they read it, is very different in 2015 to how it was in 1915. Modes of production, marketing and distribution are vastly different – consider the proliferation of ‘light novels’, online serials, and cell phone novels as well as TV tie-ins, author roundtables, tweets, e-books, and online blogs by both authors and readers. The impact of electronic fiction on the production, marketing and writing of Japanese literature cannot be overlooked in any discussion of contemporary writing. This mode of literary production has already led to numerous experiments in fiction and other genres of writing, and may well point to future directions in publishing in Japan. The intersections between ‘literature’ and technology have always afforded insight into how people read, understand and gain meaning from words, whether in a woodblock print, pulp magazine pages or touchpad screen. We believe the new modes of distribution, including the reconstruction and re-construction of meaning by reader comment in social media, are significant developments in reading practice and worthy of greater attention.

Overall, we acknowledge that there is no one overarching mode of understanding that will apply to the whole of modern Japanese literature. The twentieth century itself is extremely disjunctive by nature, and literature written in that time period cannot be treated as a unified discursive structure. Taking this as a given, we have to look at literature in a number of different ways. Even though human beings construct continuity and themes out of chaos, it remains the fact that chaos is still the reality. This situation demands a refracted vision. Each chapter of this volume presents a snapshot of one specific instance of modern Japanese literary production, taking different approaches to the subject in order to present a multifaceted picture to the reader. The resulting image is not simple – content of chapters and sections will necessarily overlap and bleed into each other. These areas of overlap, as well as the liminal spaces between chapter content, will encourage the reader’s own thoughts and interpretation, while also suggesting further avenues of research. It is our aim to stimulate thinking and discussion on approaches to this dynamic and exciting subject, offering new ways of reading without resorting to mere classification.

In terms of structure, we believe it is necessary to deconstruct the privileged position that prose fiction has held over the critical imagination with respect to modern Japanese literature. The book will focus mainly on fiction and poetry, with some consideration of the critical essay. After some discussion, we decided that other textual forms such as drama and manga will not be considered in the volume, since they include a significant visual and performative aspect. To get away from the traditional format of volumes on modern Japanese literature, the structure will not follow the tripartite ‘Part One: Fiction; Part Two: Poetry; Part Three: Critical Essay’ mode of organization, but will treat each mode of expression as part of a wider whole – the literary output of modern Japan. As such, major authors will be treated in a thematic way, so that poets, essayists and novelists who wrote about Japanese nationalism and political ideals will appear together in the ‘Literature and politics’ section, for example. In this way, we hope to achieve a more holistic vision of how artists of the time thought about specific issues.

This approach also does away with arbitrary lines drawn between modes of production, drawing attention to the idea of the *bunjin* as a ‘person of letters’ and providing a more realistic assessment of how writers have engaged with ideas – not labelled a ‘novelist’ or ‘poet’ but a ‘writer’ who may at one time or another choose to write in one form or another. Nearly all major authors in the Japanese modern period were also well known as essayists.

People like Kobayashi Hideo (1902–1983) were equally well known for both modes of literary production. Similarly, Yamada Eimi (b.1959) is very productive in the essay form, as is the poet turned novelist Tomioka Taeko (b.1935), and world-famous Murakami Haruki (b.1949). In many ways the aspect of literary production in Japan is like that of France, where writers like Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) can operate successfully in both realms. Hiroshi Nara's essay on the philosopher Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941) shows that he was equally a poet, writing in two modes of literary production at once. The fact that Kuki remains well known as a philosopher but not as a poet raises many interesting questions about the value of writing and its 'literary' quality.

Thinking about the significance of the Nobel Prize for literature, it is significant that Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) and Ōe Kenzaburō (b.1935) both operated in multiple modes of literary production, including poetry, 'palm-of-the-hand' short fiction, the novel, the essay, and journalistic reportage. Murakami Haruki is equally adept at novelistic fiction, critical essays and translation. The fact that Kawabata and Ōe won the Nobel Prize for literature, and Murakami is widely seen as having 'missed out' on this prize in 2013, may speak to the fact that the two earlier writers were seen as somehow more 'literary' or of greater stature in their home country. Murakami Haruki lives overseas for much of the time, mostly in the US, and many of his works carry cultural references from all over the world. Opera, jazz, TV and film, rock music and genre fiction all have a place in Murakami's work, evoking an ever-changing cultural environment that encompasses Japan as well as the rest of the globe. While Murakami's novels may be set in Japan, and many of his protagonists are lonely or isolated human beings, his works carry an unmistakable stamp of global interconnectedness. This makes his work highly relatable for readers all over the world, and his work is perhaps the most translated of any contemporary author. Indeed, his works are often translated twice – *Norwegian Wood (Noruwei no mori)* by Alfred Birnbaum (1989) and Jay Rubin (2000); *Hear the Wind Sing (Kaze no uta o kike)* and *Pinball, 1973 (1973-nen no pinbōru)* by Alfred Birnbaum (1987, 1985) and then Ted Goossen (2015). Murakami is perhaps the most popular Japanese writer alive, and many scholarly books and articles address his oeuvre. We have not included a full chapter on Murakami here, but interested readers will find much on Murakami in the bibliography.

Similarly, readers interested in genre writing will not find a full chapter dedicated to the idea of genre, but it is clear from the discussions in various chapters that genres of writing in modern Japanese literature overlap and cross boundaries. This is not to say that genres as a category of literary criticism or history have disappeared completely. Japanese critics still use categories like historical fiction, mystery, science fiction and romance, and there are individual libraries of works belonging to those categories published in Japan from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. Some of the works discussed in individual chapters fall into these genres, but because of their literary significance, and their relationship to literary history, they are not compared or contrasted to other works that fall into the same category. Rather than reading specific works of literature as prominent examples of a certain genre of fiction, the contributors to this volume have examined works in terms of their fundamental themes, as commentaries on Japanese society, or in relation to discursive practices of patriarchy or the literary establishment.

One good reason to avoid genre categories is that significant works of literature, in a sense, create a category of their own. It is arguable, for instance, that some novels by Murakami Haruki could be classified as thrillers or mysteries. *Dance Dance Dance (Dansu dansu dansu)*, 1988), *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (Sekai no owari*

to *hādo boirudo wandārando*, 1985) and the recent *The Colourless Tazaki Tsukuru and his Year of Pilgrimage* (*Shikisai wo motanai Tazaki Tsukuru to kare no junrei no toshi*, 2013) have at their heart a murder or mystery that must be solved, for the narrator and the reader to achieve closure and resolution. But given Murakami's prominence, and his acknowledged status as an important writer, his works tend not to be seen as genre fiction but as something more significant. This is helped by the fact that his novels can often be read in a number of different ways – *Dance Dance Dance* is a serious critique of late-stage capitalism in the closing years of the twentieth century, for example. As a result, we may say that Murakami's novels fall into a larger category of significant and important fiction. But of course no real genre of that name explicitly exists in twenty-first-century Japan since the notion of canonicity, and indeed the very idea of the canon, has come under increasing criticism by readers and commentators alike.

Some of Murakami's works could also be classified as science fiction or fantasy, most notably *Kafka on the Shore* (*Umibe no Kafuka*, 2002), which won the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel in 2006 after appearing in English translation. However, it has often been noted by Japanese critics that since the 1970s many important works of fiction utilize elements of fantasy in their construction and plot. The tendency is not to classify these works as falling into the category of 'Science Fiction and Fantasy' because a narrowly defined genre still continues to exist. Many novels incorporate elements of the genre or take advantage of its stylistic conventions, but they would not be seen as true 'SF novels' by fans of that genre. This is also the case for the other genres mentioned above. There are specialist magazines in Japan that publish mysteries or science fiction and most of these works are aimed at fans of these genres, and are seen by critics as entertainment literature. In contrast, what we think of as serious or significant literature may not entertain so much; rather it may confront the reader with writing that is offensive, obscene or difficult. By and large, the magazines and series associated with particular genres avoid publishing stories that prefer to confront rather than entertain. Of course, these remarks are an oversimplification, and when particular examples or works are examined we can discover many exceptions where works can be both confronting and entertaining and also belong to a particular genre while transcending its limits.

One of the reasons for Murakami Haruki's enormous popularity, both within Japan and abroad, is his narrative technique. The ubiquitous Murakami narrator is 'boku' (I), a first-person narrator who is usually male and is dealing with significant problems in his life, often relating to a missing girlfriend or spouse. Boku is a kind of Japanese everyman and Murakami's novels chart the development of this universal character from his first appearance in his early short stories and his award-winning early novel *Hear the Wind Sing* to the later middle-aged, married man who appears in such novels as *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (*Kokkyō no minami, taiyō no nishi*, 1992). Many novels do not fall into this pattern, including such well-known works such as *Kafka on the Shore* and *1Q84* (2010). Nevertheless the appeal of 'boku' has played a large role in capturing the vast reading audience that Murakami maintains, both in Japan and overseas, and especially in China, where Murakami is so popular that numerous studies have appeared in Chinese and Japanese exploring the reasons behind his fame. In that respect, Murakami is a very rare creature, an author who has become the authentic voice of his generation, much as Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) was the voice of his generation. Volumes have been written about the 'cool' Murakami style; his early works in particular are filled with the bricolage of high and low culture, referencing the Beatles as well as Immanuel Kant. This stylistic mixture often confused Murakami's early critics and it was not until 1989 when the commentator Karatani Kōjin wrote a very famous critique that Murakami was firmly

placed into the ranks of serious, highbrow writers and his reputation as a major author was confirmed. Another factor accounting for Murakami's astonishing popularity is his embrace of the common obsessions of his generation: the occult, parallel worlds, the traps and pitfalls of consumer capitalism, and in recent years, Japan's suppressed modern history. At the same time, it must be noted that for all his popularity, he is not what used to be known as a 'popular writer' (*taishū sakka*). Nor is he equally popular with all demographics, and feminist critics in particular have pointed out the narrow masculine viewpoint of Murakami's works. But Murakami's fiction continues to explore human relationships, seeking out the essence of what a human being is, with a specific focus on those human beings who inhabit the myriad islands of Japan. These are among the big questions of our age and directly speak to the meaning of life. Above all, it is his gift in creating stories that permit him to address these issues that have marked him out as one of the most significant writers of our time.

One large question in a study of this kind involves the relationship between literary works and criticism of those works. What is the interplay between literature and the study of literature, and why might this be significant? The *bundan* debate examined in this book illustrates how an exchange between prominent authors can influence the shaping of fiction in such a way as to provide a model for other writers to follow. Readers may not be as deeply engaged in these discussions as authors and critics but the marketing of Japanese literature over the course of the twentieth century is, in some degree, sensitive to these debates. In Japanese, the term for debates over a particular conceptual or artistic paradigm applying to literature is *ronsō*. There are many volumes in Japanese tracing the history of numerous debates that have been held during the twentieth century by writers and critics alike. This handbook does not trace the history of these debates in any great detail, other than one or two chapters that have a particular focus on them. There are far too many *ronsō* to trace, and not all of them are equally significant; in many cases the significance of these debates can be assigned to the dustbin of history. Among the most significant for twentieth-century literature is the debate mentioned in the chapter by Rebecca Mak, where Tanizaki Junichirō (1886–1965) and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) famously argued about the nature of literature as art. But there are other important *ronsō* or debates (that is, metacriticism) that have influenced the production and consumption of Japanese literature in the twentieth century. To name but a few: an important debate that played out in literary journals and newspapers and magazines from 1920s to World War II addressed the role of literature, the audience for whom it should be written, and the class from which authors should come. This debate was central to the proletarian movement, as detailed in the chapter by Mats Karlsson. A large-ranging debate was conducted among the intelligentsia in the first half of the 1930s on whether popular literature could embody the ideals of the Marxist proletarian literary movement (the answer was no). This debate also argued that literature was an instrument in class warfare and thus should be written by and for the working class. The author Arishima Takeo (1878–1923), who committed suicide in 1923, was plunged into despair at being a bourgeois and thus unable to write such literature (although he did make the attempt with some of his works).

The interwar period was also a time when both modernist and proletarian writers competed for public acclaim on the same stage. Some cultural critics like Kobayashi Hideo (1902–83) were unwilling to embrace either of these two modes of writing, especially after the proletarian movement had rejected any compromise with modernist subject matter or techniques in their literature of the vanguard. He noted in his famous essay 'Multiple Designs' (*Sama zama naru ishō*, 1929) that: 'If proletarian . . . literature does indeed manage to move people, it is because . . . the work is coloured by the writer's blood' (Kobayashi 1995: 24). And writing

on the avant-garde, Kobayashi observed: ‘The New Perceptionists decry the existence of ideas in literature as impoverishment and strive to eradicate them. But compared to their own debilitated ideas, is their writing itself really so powerful?’ (Kobayashi 1995: 33). In the end, both genres of literature came under attack from the authorities, and neither looked as if they could survive by the end of the decade. Later the debate became even more urgent as the censorship associated with the onset of the war in China in the 1930s led to a debate about the value of literature itself (echoing the debates held in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the deadliest natural disaster to befall Japan until that time). The main participants in the debate surrounding these issues were Yokomitsu Riichi (1898–1947) with his renowned critique ‘On the Pure Novel’ (*Junsui shōsetsuron*, 1935) and Kobayashi Hideo with his equally famous essay ‘Discourse on Fiction of the Self’ (*Shishōsetsu-ron*), which was published a month later. Did Japanese writers have the capacity to produce their own unique genre of fiction? Was the literature of the West inevitably debased and corrupted by colonialism and imperialism?

These questions led writers to participate in the famous 1942 conference of intellectuals held in Tokyo to discuss the meaning and purpose of the war and its relationship to Japanese culture known as the ‘Overcoming Modernity’ meeting. This conference took place over two days in July, and thirteen intellectuals took part, including the critics Kobayashi Hideo, Kamei Katsuchirō (1907–66) and Nakamura Mitsuo (1911–88), and also the novelist Hayashi Fusao (1903–75) and the poet Miyoshi Tatsuji (1900–64). Nine essays written by the participants were later published in the September and October issues of the magazine *Literary World* (*Bungakkai*). ‘Overcoming Modernity’ (*kindai no chōkoku*) meant in the context of the times, overcoming the West. So, here it is possible to trace one debate that arose out of the emergence of the proletarian literary movement into a much wider discussion over the value and role of literature during the time of an existential war threatening the very existence of the Japanese nation itself as perceived by the Japanese public at the time.

Other debates are also long lasting, and their effects may be felt even today. The criticism in the immediate postwar period by such critics as Kyoto University scholar and translator Kuwabara Takeo (1904–88) of traditional genres of poetry like the tanka and haiku because of their associations with debased propagandist verse so damaged the prestige of these genres of writing that many serious poets abandoned these forms for free verse. The condemnation of writing produced during the war years (which in Japan encompassed the fifteen years from 1931 to 1945) led to an almost complete boycott of literature produced at that time, in terms of reproducing and discussing it, save for the most famous authors who chose not to produce pro-war works. Discussion and reprinting of these works has only become possible over the past two decades coinciding with the birth of the twenty-first century, as noted by Leith Morton (2013).

Turning to the contents of the handbook, we have followed a thematic structure with three or four chapters in each section. The first section, ‘Literature, space and time’ addresses very broad ideas – how have concepts of time and space featured in Japanese writing? Much has been written in recent years on the idea of the city, the hometown (*furusato*), and the countryside, but why are these themes considered to be so important? Why do they feature so heavily in Japanese writing of the modern period? Is it something that also features heavily in premodern writing, and if so, how have the ideas changed? Stephen Dodd first addresses these questions with respect to theoretical writing from the West and Japan, setting the scene for a case study of *The River Sumida* (*Sumidagawa*, 1909) by Nagai Kafū (1879–1959). Jon Holt then compares the function of time in modern tanka and haiku to the time operating

between frames in manga, with a focus on Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912) and Tawara Machi (b.1962). Alisa Freedman focuses closely on the spaces of Tokyo in her analysis of Kawabata Yasunari's 1930 novella, *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (*Asakusa no kurenai-dan*), which is complemented by Amanda Seaman's study of literature set in interior spaces, occupied by single women in Tokyo.

Section II of the book, 'Gender and sexuality', applies two main approaches to the study of modern Japanese literature – queer theory and feminist theory, which have truly changed the ways in which we read literary works. Since the 1970s, we may say that feminist readings, queer readings, masculinity studies, and so forth have proliferated, but here we ask, how do these approaches help us understand modern Japanese literature? What does the study of representation and identity have to offer us now? Keith Vincent answers this question with a nuanced re-reading of Natsume Sōseki's novel *Kokoro*, one of the very few works in this volume whose title is not given an English translation. Like James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this one-word title now stands for a whole way of comprehending modern history and sensibilities, from the Japanese perspective, re-printed and re-appropriated again and again since its publication in 1916. Vincent analyses a recent stage play adaptation of the novel, opening up new ways of understanding the relationships in the work, as well as our own relationship with reading literature in general. Barbara Hartley next gives a feminist analysis of women's writing from the Meiji period to the present, as well as a feminist re-reading of what we might think of as the male classics – works by Kawabata, Tanizaki and others that use the woman's body as a site of labour, scopophilic pleasure, or reproduction. Hartley introduces the reader to contemporary women writers whose works challenge and problematize the canon of modern literature in Japan. Rachael Hutchinson offers a feminist re-reading of some works by Nagai Kafū, which feature strong women with realistic subjectivity, women who persevere in the face of objectification, racism, classism, sexism and violence. In the context of the Meiji period, Kafū's feminist perspective offers a stark contrast to other male-centred writers of the time, as well as some writers of our own time who could be accused of misogyny and discursive oppression of the female Other.

The prominence of the body as a theme or motif in postwar writings may be seen as a direct result of the relaxation of prewar and wartime censorship. Writers were emboldened to go where none had dared to go before: the frank representation of sexuality and sexual topics. This was a boon for authors writing popular fiction like Tamura Taijirō (1911–83), author of *The Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no mon*, 1947), which was an enormous success, selling 700,000 copies in a single volume of stories (originally the novel was published in a magazine), and soon adapted to the silver screen, with numerous remakes and a live theatre version running for three years. But such authors of more serious fiction as Tanizaki Junichirō also explored sexual themes more openly than ever before, especially in Tanizaki's case with his 1956 novel *Kagi* (The Key) which was made into a movie several times both in Japan and abroad. Postwar women authors also used the female body as a powerful metaphor expressing not merely hitherto repressed female sexuality but also to grapple with social issues that could be represented in somatic form. Novelist Tsushima Yūko's (b. 1947) uneasy parables about the woman's role in postwar Japan often used her female protagonists' bodies as a canvas upon which their anxieties and fears were painted in subtle colours.

Section III, 'Literature and politics', begins with perhaps the most political of all Japanese literary genres, proletarian literature. Mats Karlsson examines the Proletarian Literature Movement in terms of experiment and experience, bringing to life this body of work which is often portrayed as dry or unlitrary. The intersections between literature and politics are

complex and take many forms, as political imperatives drive literary production and writers resist, comply, negotiate and struggle to express their true thoughts on paper. Leith Morton examines literature in the time of the Fifteen Years War (1931–1945), with a particular focus on poetry, analysing how different writers coped with censorship practice and some resisted through their writing. Mark Williams examines the practice of *tenkō* or ‘conversion’, asking whether writers felt genuine political apostasy or merely expedient adaptation to new ideological winds. Kota Inoue takes us into the postwar period, analysing the Japan–US relationship as it appears in fiction, after the occupation of mainland Japan officially ended in 1952. A close reading of Murakami Ryu’s *Almost Transparent Blue* is contextualized in terms of the invisible occupier who remains unnamed and unspoken, even in the much clearer hierarchy of power operating in Okinawa, where occupation officially ended in 1972.

The next section, ‘Writing war memory’, examines the working out of war trauma and the re-definition of national identity through literature. It is well known that discourses on ‘Japaneseness’ proliferated in the postwar period, reforming definitions of identity after the ultra-nationalism of the 1930s, defeat in war, and the foreign occupation from 1945 to 1952. This section examines how ‘history’ functions in literature, particularly following times of crisis when writers look back at events and try to craft a new narrative ‘history’ for themselves, often in a counter-discourse to official government statements. David Stahl, Kyle Ikeda and Justin Aukema examine the responsibility of the writer, who provides a voice to the undocumented and unofficial experiences of war. Stahl asks the vital question ‘what is war literature?’, arguing against a narrow definition of literature written during the war years, re-reading well-known postwar works as a ‘working-through’ of traumatic events stemming from the war, in personal or national experience. Kyle Ikeda examines both non-fiction and fiction accounts of the Battle of Okinawa, while Justin Aukema analyses the oeuvre of Saotome Katsumoto (b.1932), who worked to commit the Tokyo Air Raids to public memory, writing literature and building museums so younger generations can experience the event. A critical question explored in this section is what war memory means to people who never experienced war themselves: how is ‘history’ created anew in literature, or passed on to the next generation?

Closely related to the war experience is the colonial experience, examined in Section IV, ‘National and colonial identities’. Colonial structures in writing are a good way to examine a number of different ideas in ‘modern Japanese literature’, for example the fluidity of culture across so-called ‘national’ boundaries and what it is that makes a work ‘Japanese’ – being written from within or without the geographical boundary of the Japanese empire, in Japanese script or possibly in another language. When the nation (or nation-state, *kokutai*) is a fluid, dynamic and ever-changing entity, what does that mean for its national literature (*kokubungaku*)? In future work, it would be interesting to see the extent to which minorities within Japan found commonalities with the colonial Other. Anne McKnight’s recent work on *burakumin* writer Nakagami Kenji in Korea springs to mind here, pointing to new directions for research into the processes of Othering communities and how those Othered communities differ from each other. In this section, Karen Thornber examines novels from East Asian literature which show the aftermath of empire in continued abuses of power, focused on the medical profession. Endō Shūsaku’s *Sea and Poison* (*Umi to dokuyaku*, 1958) depicts Japanese vivisection of an American soldier; Yi Ch’ōngjun’s *Your Paradise* (*Tangsiñdül ūi ch’ōnguk*, 1976) shows a Japanese official running a medical facility for Koreans afflicted with Hansen’s disease (leprosy); and Mo Yan’s novel *Frog* (*Wa*, 2009) critiques China’s one-child policy, filtered through a literary friendship with the son of a Japanese officer. The fluid boundaries of empire are also visible in the plurilingual nature of some contemporary writers, inside and outside

Japan, who choose to write in Japanese, English, German and other languages regarding the Japanese expatriate experience. Angela Yiu focuses closely on Mizumura Minae (b. 1951) and Hideo Levy (b.1950), whose works challenge all preconceived notions of ‘national literature’. Lastly, Catherine Ryu performs a close reading of the novella ‘Crimson Fruit’ by Kim Ch’ang-Saeng (b.1951), a *zainichi* Korean writer in Japan who problematizes language itself through the idea of a speaking body.

The last two sections of the book shift focus to the production and dissemination of literature. Section VI, ‘*Bunjin* and the *bundan*’, examines the figure of the *bunjin* (‘person of letters’) acting within the literary establishment referred to as the *bundan* (literally, the ‘literary stage’). This section looks at what it means to be a writer in Japan, new readings of the *bundan*, and what makes ‘being a writer’ different or significant in the Japanese market. Hiroshi Nara first examines Kuki Shūzō as a ‘philosopher-poet’, a man writing in two very different modes of discourse. Whether his philosophy was literary, or his poetry philosophical, raises many interesting questions about what we categorize as ‘literature’. Next, Rebecca Mak examines the *bundan* through the lens of Actor-Network Theory, focusing on the fierce debate between Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, mentioned above. Mak’s analysis treats not only the writers involved but the whole *bundan* and indeed the literary works themselves as ‘actors’, showing new ways to examine literary history and the act of writerly production. Last in this section, Kendall Heitzman returns to the idea of ‘women’s literature’ and the contentious issue of prizes in the contemporary *bundan*, comparing the frequency of female and male winners of the Akutagawa Prize (for highbrow or ‘pure’ literature) and the Naoki Prize (for ‘mass’ literature). It is clear that the role of the writer continues to be public and negotiated, within the tight confines of an establishment bounded by gender and genre expectations.

Our last section, ‘Literature and technology’, analyses new ways in which literature is being written, distributed and accessed at the time of writing. Indeed, by the time of publication there will no doubt be even newer modes of literary production available. Japan is currently a very exciting place to be in terms of online literature, where cell phone novels, light novels, web serials and even Twitter novels have proliferated. Kelly Hansen first traces the rise of the Japanese cell phone (*keitai*) novel, including such popular texts as *Sky of Love* (*Koizora*, 2005) and *The Red Thread* (*Akai Ito*, 2006). Satomi Saito next examines light novels and web serials, literary works that are written and distributed online, sometimes a result of co-authorship via forum comments and feedback to the original post. Saito analyses the intertextuality of these media in relation to manga, anime and videogames, arguing that game narrative conventions are integral to works such as *Slayers* or *Sword Art Online*, which take much from printed replays of *Dungeons and Dragons* games. Finally, Jonathan Abel brings us the #twonovel, a phenomenon of 140-character literary works published via Twitter. Innovations in form recall those in the haiku and the ‘short-short’, while literary puns and references to the canon – particularly Natsume Sōseki’s *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko de aru*, 1905) – are remarkably robust. One of the main questions in this section is whether visual and/or online culture has had any effect on the narrative modes of prose fiction: has the nature of ‘*bungaku*’ changed? It seems so. However, that is not to say that contemporary online fiction is any more interactive than the poetry circles of the past, where fans would often pen their own poetry, send it to the editor of the journal, and acquire introductions to publishing outlets. What has definitely changed is the speed of the interaction, and the vast public audiences commanded by the Internet. The commodification of literature and consumer culture from the 1980s onwards has made literature part of the ‘media mix’, but literature is surviving and thriving as it mutates and takes new forms.

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SECTION I

Literature, space and time

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1

SPACE AND TIME IN MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

Stephen Dodd

Introduction

Anyone involved in the critical reading of literature knows that there are numerous ways in which to read a text. In this chapter my critical approach examines the spatial and temporal configurations that can be identified in a literary text. This approach is particularly productive in the case of modern Japanese literature because topographical representations within a text can serve as metaphorical pointers to the traumatic events that have influenced the development of Japanese culture during the modern period. In other words, an exploration of space and time in literature offers insight into the broader social and historical processes by which a sense of being both modern and Japanese has emerged.

Cathy Caruth defines stories of trauma as articulating ‘a central problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing that emerges from the actual experience of the crisis’. Such a question ‘can never be asked in a straight-forward way, but must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding’ (1996: 5). In the case of modern Japan, the trauma expressed through literature relates most clearly to the increasingly insistent presence of the West from the 1850s and the consequent dramatic ruptures affecting all spheres of Japanese society, particularly from the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868. Social upheavals also emerged from within Japan as the authority of the Tokugawa shogunate began to decline. Taken together, these changes inevitably had a profound effect on the shape of modern Japanese literary sensibility.¹

Representations of space and time from the Meiji period may be read in part as an attempt to articulate this experience of traumatic loss, and to flesh out alternative versions of belonging precisely at a time when a fixed sense of cultural identity was becoming more difficult to grasp. Therefore, it makes sense to see spatial configurations within any literary text not so much as a passive, pre-existing zone in which events simply take place, but rather as a dynamic process intertwined with the historical flow that contributed towards the creation of the Japanese experience of modernity.

We should also keep in mind the complex ways in which modern Japanese writers and critics came to articulate a sense of time and space in their literature. It would be especially wrong to imply that the arguments framed by Japanese writers were entirely dependent on the influence of Western critics. It nonetheless still makes sense to acknowledge some of the

major Western theorists who have explored similar intellectual territory. After all, the majority of Japanese writers and intellectuals since Meiji have been more than happy to engage with Western literary theories while continuing to draw inspiration from aspects of their own native tradition. Indeed, as the world has become ever more interconnected through travel and communications, intellectual communities both inside and outside Japan have increasingly relied upon a common body of critical texts in their interpretation of literary works.

The following broad overview hopefully provides greater clarity to us as contemporary readers, since we are no less heirs to accumulated layers of interpretation drawn from both Western and Japanese critical traditions that have accrued to the way we read Japanese literary texts today.

Theoretical approaches to space and time

Michel Foucault once noted that, if the nineteenth century was dominated by history, then ‘the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space’ (1986: 22). Indeed, theories of space proved to be a rich vein in the body of Western critical thought throughout the twentieth century. Some of the most obvious examples include Walter Benjamin’s portrayal during the 1930s of the French poet Charles Baudelaire as a mid-nineteenth-century *flâneur* whose bodily engagement with the crowded streets of Metropolitan Paris provided clues to an emergent modernist sensibility (see Benjamin 2006). Georg Simmel’s earlier work ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, written in 1903, was equally influential in its concern with the transformative dynamic between individuals and their urban environments that engendered an ‘intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli’, albeit from a more anthropological angle (Simmel 1971: 325).

Marxist critics have frequently concentrated on the material relations between people and place at the level of daily experience, so it is not surprising that they figure prominently in space-centred critical theories. Names associated with this approach include Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Edward Soja.² On the other hand, some critics have been keener to employ a psychological framework in their articulation of spatial configurations. For instance, Gaston Bachelard’s writing is characterized by a discursive and seductively poetic style, with inspiration from Freudian theories. His *The Poetics of Space* (1994), first published in 1958, has come to be regarded as one of the most compelling and lyrical explorations of relations between people and place from a psychoanalytical perspective.

Initially interested in the philosophy of science, Bachelard became increasingly fascinated with the imaginative dimension of the creative mind as it interacted with and was itself shaped by physical space. Drawing on psychoanalytical concerns with the unconscious and poetical ‘dream’ language, he spoke of a ‘topoanalysis’, which he described as ‘a systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’ (1994: 8). Bachelard sought to trace the dynamic relationships between the individual conscious subject and the wider material world in which the individual is sited. Specifically, his book explored intimate spatial configurations such as the house, the nest or the inside of a shell. Perhaps echoing Freud’s assertion that images or symbols within dreams may embody multiple meanings, Bachelard suggested that everyday spaces embody a multiplicity of meanings and memories, or ‘compressed time’, as he called it. His book used literary close readings in order to unpack layered realities that he identified in the texts.

I have touched only briefly on a few of the Western contributors to theoretical interpretations of space and time who have most influenced the Japanese intellectual world. However, from the late 1960s critical theory emerged as a major concern in Western academia, and that interest was also taken up in Japan. Many Japanese academics first came to know these Western critics through translation. For instance, Foucault’s writing appeared in Japanese versions from

the 1960s. A Japanese translation of *Naissance de la Clinique* (1963) appeared in 1969 (trans. Kamiya Mieko, *Rinshō igaku no tanjō*, Tokyo: Misuzu shobō); and a translation of *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) appeared only a year after publication in 1970 (trans. Nakamura Yūjirō, *Chi no kōkōgaku*, Tokyo: Kawade shobō). Japanese critical works discussing other important Western critics also emerged during the 1970s. See, for instance, Hasumi Shigehiko's book, *Fūkō, Dōrūzu, Derida*, written in 1978. Other Japanese critics encountered Western theorists more directly. For instance, Karatani Kōjin attended Yale University as a visiting professor from 1975, where he met Fredric Jameson and Paul de Man. The postmodern critic Asada Akira, whose highly influential book *Structure and Power – Beyond Semiotics (Kōzō to chikara – kigōron o koete)* was published in 1983, has also contributed to English language publications.³

The dissemination of ideas by these Western critics helped encourage a wide range of Japanese writers, especially from the fields of anthropology and sociology, to branch out in a similar fashion into the area of space-centred studies. These studies often took the form of an interest in urban space (*toshi kūkan*), particularly centred on the city of Tokyo. Unno Hiroshi's book *Modern City Tokyo (Modan toshi Tōkyō)*, 1983) uses close readings of literary representations of the physical spaces of Tokyo as a means to sketch out fundamental social and cultural changes in modern Japan. Unno explores aspects of urban space in the writings of a range of authors who were active around the 1920s; for instance, Kawabata Yasunari's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa (Asakusa kurenaidan)*, 1930) and Tokunaga Sunao's *Streets without Sun (Taiyō no nai machi)*, 1929). In his introduction, Unno emphasizes the value of linking topological features with broader cultural associations. Portraying himself sitting on a bench overlooking the River Sumida, and lost in such a reverie that he feels he has been transported back to the 1920s, Unno asserts that the river itself is intimately interwoven into the imaginative geography of 1920s Tokyo (1983: 8).

But, why should he demonstrate such an interest in this particular waterway? Unno's impulse to associate the River Sumida with 1920s culture makes better sense if we consider the circumstances of Japan during the 1980s when he was writing this book. He argues that the 1920s represent the moment when familiar aspects of contemporary Japanese urban life – a rich blending of Western and Japanese arts, literature, theatre, music, and fine arts, etc. – first took shape. In other words, Unno reads the city spaces that emerge in 1920s literature as a reflection of that rich cultural mixture (1983: 11).

This is undeniable, but the author's attraction to the River Sumida may also have something to do with his own desire to escape Japan's frantic postmodern mood during the 1980s when the 'bubble economy' was moving towards its climax, and when, just as in the 1920s, there was a particularly eclectic mixture of Western and Japanese cultures. After all, this would not be the first moment since Meiji that people have identified the River Sumida as an aesthetically pleasing site of unadulterated pleasure, and an opportunity to step away from the overwhelming complexities of modern life. A similar impulse to escape the everyday problems of Meiji and simply enjoy the river was shared by several characters in Nagai Kafū's 'The River Sumida' (*Sumidagawa*, 1909), as I discuss below.

Unno was not the only critic during the period of the bubble economy to identify the river as central to any reading of Tokyo's urban space during the Taishō period. Kawamoto Saburō opens his influential book, *Taishō Illusions (Taishō gen'ei)* with the sentence: 'In the beginning was the River Sumida' (1990: 7). Kawamoto argues that the river served as a kind of literary native place (*furusato*) in which many major writers who came of age during Taishō – people like Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965) – grounded themselves.

Kawamoto portrays the pre-Meiji city of Edo as a 'water-based capital' (*mizu no Tōkyō*) centred around the River Sumida. However, the following Meiji generation destroyed it, and replaced it with a land-based Tokyo (*riku no Tōkyō*) centred round the Yamanote area.

In their turn, Taishō writers mounted their own generational rebellion by rediscovering the river as a source of inspiration. One way to interpret their love of water is as an assertion of self-identity and a willful defiance against the Meiji state and their fathers' generation.

For Kawamoto, the Taishō period is replete with a sense of illusions (*gen'ei*), but this is not to be understood in a negative sense. It is the very ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the concept of illusions that allowed for Taishō to represent an exceptionally productive and imaginative period. Once again, the River Sumida serves as a useful analogy. He acknowledges that, compared to the more forward-looking Meiji generation, Taishō writers tried to re-appropriate a city of water that now only existed as a memory, and in that sense, this latter generation is condemned always to look backwards into the past. In other words, Taishō writers are drawn towards imaginative recreations of worlds that no longer exist; as Kawamoto put it, 'the Sumida River became the "Sumida River"' (1990: 9). However, his overall argument is that this sense of self-conscious artificiality – a sensibility that pervades much of Taishō fiction – actually served as a tool for uncovering deeper artistic insights into reality.

Another major critical writer who examined links between popular urban culture of the 1920s and literary works is Suzuki Sadami. Suzuki carried out a far-reaching survey of urban cultural life of the period from a range of different perspectives in *Expressions of the Modern City* (*Modan toshi no hyōgen*). For instance, he mentions the emergence of modern illnesses during Taishō associated with the sound of heavy industrial machinery, as well as instances of neurosis experienced by those newly arrived from the countryside who suffer from the isolation of city life (1992: 15). He also addresses the emergence of the modern girl (*modan gāru*) just after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. This phenomenon of female empowerment was related to an urban environment in which dance halls and cafés had sprung up (1992: 168–195). In addition, Suzuki argues that a modern urban environment contributed to the emergence of a new level of self-consciousness. Specifically, these new forms of self identity can be found in the stories of writers like Satō Haruo and Kajii Motojirō, who featured introverted characters suffering from various forms of depression and hyperchondria (*shinkei suijaku*). For Suzuki, these afflictions were far from negative, proving to be instrumental in the enrichment of inner worlds of fantasy fleshed out in the literature of the time (1992: 233–234).

More recently, Hashizume Shinya (2006) explores how a vast range of technological changes (such as lighting, radio, and electrification) contributed to a new cultural environment and ways of thinking that might be described as modernist. Indeed, modernism has often been identified as central to space-centred, urban configurations especially during the Taishō and early Shōwa periods. It makes sense, therefore, that Kawamoto Saburō, Unno Hiroshi and Suzuki Sadami decided to edit a comprehensive, ten-volume anthology of short modernist fiction entitled *Modern City Literature* (*Modan toshi bungaku*, 1989–1991).

Before I move on to a more detailed examination of how Japanese critics have engaged with their own modern literature, let me touch briefly on the broader Japanese cultural genealogy from which modern Japanese critics emerged. These writers gained their understanding of time and space not only from Western ideas but also from theoretical preconceptions rooted in pre-Meiji literary forms.

Pre-Meiji Japanese literary articulations of space and time

One of the most prominent features of classical Japanese poetry (*waka*, the dominant pre-Meiji literary genre) is the abundance of *utamakura*, which can be traced back to the thirteenth century. The literal meaning of this term is 'pillow-word', referring to a group of poetic words associated with earlier examples of classical verse, often overlapping with well-known place

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names (*meisho*). The effect of embedding these references into a verse was to lend a greater depth and cultural resonance than would otherwise have pertained. From the poet's perspective, skilful use of *utamakura* demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of the literary tradition. As far as readers were concerned, correct identification of a particular *utamakura* confirmed their membership of a shared cultural heritage.⁴

To give one example, the appearance of the place-name Yoshino in a verse always indicated that the season must be spring, since Yoshino was famed for its glorious cherry blossoms. In other words, the use of *utamakura* points to a distinctive interpretation of the significance of space whereby these poems attained depth and cultural value through their associations with certain place names rather than through any realistic depiction of geographical *place*. Indeed, most poets who employed *utamakura* would simply not have seen any point in visiting the actual locations. In short, the pre-Meiji literary world generally assumed that space featured primarily as part of a web of linguistic and inter-textual, rather than physical, landscapes.

This is not to imply that all verse produced before Meiji shared exactly the same set of assumptions when it came to the literary reproduction of space. Inevitably, such textual configurations of space changed with time. For example, Haruo Shirane has pointed to an important change during the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) when he notes how Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), famed for his seventeen-syllable *haikai* (or *haiku*), saw the poetic canon as 'a highly encoded body of poetic topics (*dai*) and their poetic essences, which the *haikai* poet inherited, worked against, and transformed' (1998: 185).⁵ One way in which Bashō worked both with and against traditional forms can be seen through his representations of time and space. On the one hand, he adhered to the traditional use of *utamakura*, which referenced earlier classical poetry; on the other hand, the poet satisfied the demand of his contemporary readers for innovative literary flourishes by taking the almost unheard-of step of actually visiting many of the places that he wrote about. By blending old and new elements in this way, Bashō maintained the familiar mappings of inter-textual space in accordance with past practice, at the same time constructing an innovative literary space that pointed to a link between written word and real place.

Further rupturing of the classical tradition led to another significant literary shift during the Meiji period, especially as new writers arose who were inspired by Western concepts of realism and individualism. This is not to suggest that, in the modern period, the Japanese suddenly found themselves capable of imagining spatial configurations within literature that were free of all earlier Japanese inter-textual references. No culture can suddenly turn off the tap and remove itself from the broader context of the times. At the same time, it is true to say that even this context was likewise undergoing a process of constant transformation, and it was inevitable that, with new cultural influences coming in from the West, theories of space should also change. As Japanese writers and critics began to engage with newly imported forms of landscape as well as their own native preconceptions, a new set of problems arose in relation to individual identity and the phenomenal world.

Modern Japanese literary theories of space and time

Given this long-standing complex relationship between place, space and literary representation, it is not surprising that critical writers since Meiji should also have explored ways to articulate their experience of changing relations between people and place. One of the most sensitive critical voices during the interwar years was that of Kobayashi Hideo, whose short essay 'Literature of the Lost Home' (*Kokyō o ushinatta bungaku*) touched on the deep anxiety shared by many of his urban-based contemporaries about what they perceived as the loss of an 'authentic' native place (*furusato*).

Written in 1933, the essay embodied Kobayashi's reflections on his sense of increasingly tenuous links between people and place when he was growing up in the first decades of the twentieth century. He recalls how, even though he was born and raised in Tokyo, he never felt comfortable when people addressed him as a native child of Edo (*Edokko*). Kobayashi may have been echoing Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's famous mention of a 'vague uneasiness' (*bonyari shita fuan*) in his suicide note of 1927 when he lamented that 'I have a kind of uneasy feeling (*fuan na kanjō*) that I possess no home' (Kobayashi 1968. 3: 31). Kobayashi contrasts his own experience of rootlessness with a friend who was born outside of Tokyo and had retained a much stronger sense of native place. One day, as the two are returning to Tokyo by train from Kyoto, Kobayashi is startled to see his friend deeply moved by the sight of a mountain road outside the carriage window because it reminds him of his native place:

While I listened as he related how the sight of the mountain path brought forth a host of childhood memories that made him choke with emotion, I felt strongly that I did not understand what the 'countryside' (*inaka*) meant. Or rather, I had a deep sense that the 'first home' and the 'second home' – indeed, the very meaning of the 'native place' (*kokyō, furusato*) – were alien to me. Where there are no memories there is no native place. If a person does not possess powerful memories which are the product of an accumulation of numerous immutable impressions provided by an immutable environment, then the healthy emotion that fills out the word 'native place' will mean nothing to him.

(Kobayashi 1968. 3: 31–32)

The physical reconstruction of the city of Edo into Tokyo from early Meiji had never stopped and, particularly after the 1923 earthquake, even less of the old city remained. The result was that, unlike the friend whose recollection of childhood experiences was set off by specific visual sensations, Kobayashi's upbringing in a constantly changing metropolitan landscape denied him the ability to identify links between personal history and fixed physical details of the city.

A few years later, the poet Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886–1942) evoked a similarly traumatic mood of rootlessness and rupture in his essay 'Return to Japan' (*Nihon e no kaiki*, 1937), when he compared the experience of his compatriots to the mythical figure Urashima Tarō. In the legend, after spending three years in the sea-god's palace under the sea, Urashima finally returned home only to find that he had been away for three hundred years. The native place associated with friends and loved ones had now disappeared. Hagiwara sees similarities in the experience of Japanese people his own age, who had become so disconnected from their origins that those pre-Meiji roots had withered away, and the native place could now best be likened to an old mansion with rotten eaves and a wasted garden (*Hagiwara Sakutarō zenshū*, 10: 6).

A fascination with literary representations of time and space as a theoretical means of interpreting cultural phenomena has been no less prevalent among postwar Japan intellectuals and literary theorists. For example, Isoda Kōichi (1979) broke new ground by using the map as a frame for portraying the modern metropolis of Tokyo as a series of competing economic and cultural power structures. He noted how post-1923 earthquake maps of Tokyo marked off the Western half of the city as a residential area now designed to accommodate the aspiring middle class. In contrast, the *shitamachi* (downtown) area centred around the River Sumida, which once served as an evocative backdrop for the Edo-period literary and visual arts, was now deprived of its former cultural *câché* and allotted a more mundane role as a site for industrial development. He also observes that Tokyo railway station, completed in 1914, bore the

name Central Station (*Chūō teishajō*) on some maps. For Isoda, this name indicates that the station stood not only at the centre of Tokyo, but also at the heart of a burgeoning economic and colonial power. In literary terms, the emergence of Tokyo as a site of economic and cultural capital during Meiji had already been depicted in Tokutomi Kenjiro's novel, *Footprints in the Snow* (*Omoide no ki*, 1902), when the protagonist makes a journey from his native place in Kyushu to Tokyo as the exciting centre of modernity.

Isoda's mapping of Tokyo as modern Japan's metropolitan centre relates even more directly to developments in Japanese literature when he refers to a dispute among authors during the 1920s and 1930s concerning the literary language most appropriate to depict the experience of modern everyday life. He pointed out that writers such as Nagai Kafū (1879–1959) and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, who were raised in Tokyo and had close roots to the city's *shitamachi* and Edo traditions, were naturally keen to retain elements of the native Tokyo dialect (*Tōkyō hōgen*) in their texts. In contrast, naturalist writers who had moved to the capital from provincial regions and who brought with them their local dialects, were more willing to give up individual linguistic idiosyncrasies and forge a new standard Japanese (*hyōjungo*) that could most effectively communicate the new world they were building together in the capital. Isoda continues with cartographic imagery by portraying this struggle for linguistic hegemony among writers of differing ideological persuasions in terms of a patchwork of competing literary coteries (*bundan*) that dotted Tokyo like intellectual 'villages' (Isoda 1979: 32).

Another major Japanese intellectual involved in the cultural mapping of Tokyo during the 1980s was Jinnai Hidenobu, especially with his book *Tokyo: A Spatial Anthropology* (*Tōkyō no kūkan jinruigaku*). Although his approach was more anthropological than literary, he sometimes touched upon literary references to flesh out the complex palimpsest of history and lived experiences that he feared was getting lost in the 1980s, when the older city was being buried under exuberant high-rise structures that reflected the bubble economy. Jinnai saw great value in 'reading' the contemporary city as a kind of visual text. The simple act of walking through the city districts provided him with a very practical means to engage with the urban terrain, with all its layers of history and cultural associations.

One way in which Jinnai's exploration of Tokyo touched upon literary articulations of space and time related to his assertion that it was only with the advent of modern Japan that water spaces stopped serving as the city's major structural feature. Indeed, he goes so far as to portray the *shitamachi* area during the Edo and early Meiji periods as a major urban space built on water. It was only during the course of the Meiji period that new roads and railways systems sprang up around the geographically higher area of the Yamanote region, which emerged as the pre-eminent centre of modern commerce and banking. As the *shitamachi* lost its position as principal cultural centre, old waterways were filled in over time and Tokyo turned into what Jinnai calls a 'land metropolis' (*riku no tō*) (Jinnai 1985: 99). Kawamoto Saburō was clearly drawing from Jinnai's ideas in his own book, *Taisho Illusions*.

It is worthwhile playing up the significance of these important Japanese intellectual figures since Meiji who have evinced an interest in representations of time and space because, in the last few decades, there has been a tendency for scholars of modern Japanese literature to focus almost exclusively on the writings of Maeda Ai when writing about such representations. However, this is not to downplay the real value of Maeda's urban discourses (*toshi ron*) and theorizations of space (*kūkan ron*) in enriching our reading of modern Japanese literary texts. The fact that Maeda's best-known essays have been translated into English and published as a single book (*Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*, ed. James Fujii) indicates the extent to which Maeda's research has touched a generation of Japanese academics not only inside, but also, outside of Japan.

Maeda was part of a postwar group of intellectuals who were delighted to engage with the writings of cutting-edge Western theoreticians such as Foucault, Bachelard and LeFebvre. His interest in the material significance of maps, as well as the metaphorical mapping of landscapes that could be traced out in literary texts, merely echoed his conviction that both Edo and Meiji periods were fundamentally visual cultures. Indeed, his work extended to the study of a wide range of visual manifestations of culture: from mass culture, to panoramas and world fairs.

When Maeda turned his attention specifically to literary readings, he amalgamated a concern with material aspects of modern life and spatial configurations in order to give shape to deeper currents of cultural change. For example, he identified Miyazaki Koshoshi's short story, 'Returning Home' (*Kisei*, 1890) as the first example of what he termed 'native place literature' (*urusato bungaku*) by linking the text's internal geographical structure to the broader social conditions of mid-Meiji. This literary sub-genre typically described a young man based in Tokyo who returns briefly to his native place. Such a story provided an opportunity to contrast the sense of metropolitan rootlessness to the positive delights of the native place where the skies appear bluer and the locals more trustworthy and upright. In short, Maeda identified this nostalgic vein of writing as a critique of modernity and as a search for a compensatory balm to heal some of the traumatic cultural and social upheavals of the Meiji period (1990: 220).⁶

Another Japanese critic whose work has strongly influenced the way we read modern Japanese literature from a spatial perspective, both inside and outside of Japan, is Karatani Kōjin. The extent of Karatani's influence on his own generation of scholars can be judged from the fact that he shares the rare honour with Maeda of having seen some of his most distinguished texts translated into English. One such book is *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (*Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*, 1980), which was particularly important in the way he used the concept of landscape to argue that a fundamentally new way of seeing the world emerged in Japan during the late 1890s in conjunction with the literary trend of realism. Karatani traced this new epistemological view through the writings of Kunikida Doppo (1871–1908). For example, in 'The Musashi Plain' (*Musashino*, 1898), the narrator visits the area of Sakai in the Western part of Tokyo in early summer with a friend. When they enter a teashop for refreshments, an old lady ridicules them because they have come at the wrong season: like Yoshino, Sakai was a 'famous place' (*meisho*) renowned for its cherry blossoms, so they should have come in spring. However, Karatani points out that Doppo is laying claim to a new understanding of time and space here in the way he boldly stands against convention. The narrator has come to appreciate Sakai not for its traditional seasonal links, but as a locality to be savoured, from his own modern individualistic perspective, precisely for what it has to offer in the off-season, during the summer.

The best-known section of Karatani's book that addresses the emergence of a new epistemological understanding of time and space during Meiji relates to what he calls Doppo's modern 'discovery of landscape' in the story, 'Unforgettable People' (*Wasureenu hitobito*, 1898). One scene describes the narrator on a boat passing a small island in the Inland Sea, when he catches sight of a man on the beach. The man appears to be picking things up and putting them into his basket. The boat very quickly moves on and the beach scene disappears from view, but the scene remains unforgettably etched into the narrator's mind. Karatani argues that this is the precise moment when a modern literary perspective is inserted into the landscape, both literal and metaphorical. An irreversible transformation of perception has taken place whereby earlier conceptions of the relationships between people and place centred upon inter-textual famous names are swept away. Instead, 'ordinary people' located in recognizably real landscapes have come into being (1993: 23).

Close reading: Nagai Kafū's 'The River Sumida'

I have set out some of the most distinguished contributions to theoretical interpretations of space and time that have influenced the field of modern Japanese literature. This final section provides an example of how such theories can be applied to a specific close reading of a Japanese literary text. Nagai Kafū's 'The River Sumida' is a text that benefits from a spatial analysis not only because it exemplifies various ways in which space-centred configurations can articulate a range of feelings and emotional responses related to the age, but also because it demonstrates the impact of cultural trauma as a fundamental aspect of the Japanese modern condition.⁷

The story centres around the fortunes of seventeen-year-old Chōkichi, who is instinctively inclined towards the pre-Meiji arts of music and acting; his mother O-toyo who, despite being a teacher of *Tokiwazu* traditional music, wants her son to study hard in order to succeed as a modern bureaucrat; his uncle Ragetsu, a haiku poet whose disreputable youthful exploits got him expelled from the family home; and O-ito, Chōkichi's fifteen-year-old love interest who is about to enter a geisha house as the story begins. 'The River Sumida' was one of the stories written by Kafū in the first couple of years following his return to Japan after a five-year journey around the United States and Europe. Most events of the story, which take place around the *shitamachi* area close to the river, are portrayed in a way that strongly hints at the traumatic effects of Westernization on the Japanese psychological as well as physical landscape. In fact, Kafū had nothing against the West *per se*: many of his experiences abroad were entirely positive. However, upon his return to Japan he lamented what he felt was the way his country was turning into a pale imitation of the West at the same time as it was losing its own (as he saw it) authentic identity. Chōkichi may be interpreted as a symbol of resistance against the forces of modernity.⁸

The significance of space in 'The River Sumida' can be read in numerous ways. Most obviously, the title highlights the central role of the river as it runs, quite literally, from one end of the story to the other. But, whereas Steve Rabson's interpretation focuses on the environment of the river as a character, my own reading is more directly concerned with how the main character Chōkichi *engages* with the environment. The river serves both as a metaphor for the vicissitudes in Chōkichi's life and as a balm for his emotional crises. The textual structure bears comparison with Bachelard's concept of topoanalysis, in the sense that the young man's psychological nuances are spelt out through the manner of his engagement with the surrounding environment. For example, the mixture of expectancy and unease that pervades Chōkichi as he awaits O-ito's arrival on Imado Bridge is given shape through his contemplation of a darkly brooding, and yet intriguingly beautiful river (188). Likewise, towards the story's end when he realizes that his aspiration to become an actor is unlikely to be fulfilled, Chōkichi displays a determination to fall sick and possibly even die by deliberately wandering through summer floodwaters that have overflowed from the river, with the result that he catches typhoid (216). From beginning to end, the river's insistent presence suggests that, notwithstanding Jinnai's likening of the rise of modern Tokyo to the emergence of a land metropolis, Kafū was determined to cling stubbornly to a landscape still under the sway of older water-based structures.

This is not to imply that the modern features of Tokyo can be entirely eradicated from the text. It may be true that for much of the story the reader's gaze is directed along protective, shadowy backstreets that throw up titillating and timeless images such as a woman showering in moonlight, glimpsed by Ragetsu through a gap in the bamboo fence as he makes his way towards the river ferry. Nevertheless, the modern world occasionally has the power to break through such nostalgic remnants of an earlier cityscape. As Ragetsu walks in the direction of his sister's house, he encounters 'newly built rows of cheap houses waiting for renters' that have risen up over reclaimed paddy fields (182). Later, when he tries to persuade his nephew to

complete his school studies for his mother's sake, they walk together along the Oshiage Canal, where pollution from the mechanical age has already left its mark: 'Industrial soot floated down from somewhere, and from somewhere came the noise of industrial machinery' (212).

When it comes to those landscapes that appeal to Kafū so powerfully that his text lingers over them with evident lyrical delight, they frequently convey a sense of decay or putrefaction. This is due in part to the inevitable influence of *fin de siècle* Decadent poets on a newly returned Japanese author with a keen enthusiasm to pay homage to all things French. For this reason, when Chōkichi absconds from school to wander around the area of Asakusa, he becomes aware of 'worm-eaten' leaves and sinister-looking men dressed in dirty kimonos (193). And when Ragetsu does finally get to his sister's, the home is described as dilapidated, its paper doors patched over with faded pictures of beautiful women, while mice can be heard scurrying in the roof above and there is the hum of insects all around (183). The overall effect of such a description is not to create an unpleasant atmosphere; on the contrary, it suggests a comfortably well-worn environment in which the varied lives of humans, rodents and insects rub along together as part of an organic whole. At the same time, it is undeniable that the tone of decay also implies that any literary attempt to portray an idyllic landscape entirely removed from the everyday difficulties of real life is ultimately a flawed venture, and is indeed increasingly doomed as the features of modern Japan became ever more clearly woven into the urban fabric.

Space also features significantly in its effect on the narrative's temporal flow. For instance, when Chōkichi is waiting for O-ito on Imado Bridge, this is simply the first of several points in the story where narrative movement – the question of what happens next – is suspended and the reader is invited to pause, and to contemplate aspects of the river from an overwhelmingly lyrical and visual perspective. As Chōkichi watches from the bridge, narrative progression gives way to painterly flourishes in the shape of 'thin lines of lightning' in the gathering darkness that illuminate the upper reaches of the river. Moreover, a viscous sensuality makes itself visible through reference to 'the wet stakes in the water, the bits of seaweed coming under the bridge on the flood tide' (188). There are, it is true, some signs of the bridge as a site of daily human activity when a couple of strolling singers pause to admire the moon before they move on towards the Yoshiwara – Tokyo's famed red-light district. However, a photograph of the same bridge taken by Kusabame Kinbei near the beginning of Meiji throws into question the extent to which even these figures should be interpreted as ordinary people in everyday space. The bridge is of the familiar traditional, wooden type that frequently appeared in earlier *ukiyo*e prints.⁹ In short, even apparently realistic strolling musicians could just as well be interpreted as figures drawn directly from the repertoire of traditional *shitamachi* characters.

Kafū takes great effort to blur boundaries between real and imaginary spaces, and this is nowhere more evident than in his depiction of Chōkichi's visits to the Miyatoza kabuki theatre. If Bachelard is right to suggest that spatial configurations like nests and shells lend shape to the intimate world of human desires, then the Miyatoza can be understood as a site that houses a similar body of hopes and aspirations. In fact, Bachelard directly addressed the symbolic significance of the theatre in a way that sheds useful light on the psychological impulses that drew Kafū to mark out a theatrical territory within his own story. Bachelard speaks of a 'theatre of the past' that is constituted by memory:

the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past, wants time to 'suspend' its flight.

(Bachelard 1958: 8)

Mention of a yearning for stability bears close comparison with the literary search for a timeless native place (*furusato*) identified by Maeda Ai in Meiji fiction; it reflects a similarly profound desire to locate a predictable and protective ‘home’ safely outside of history as a means to guard against the traumatic and unforeseeable fissures of modern life. This is why Chōkichi finds such relief in escaping the harsh sunlight of early spring, and plunging into an enclosed theatrical world where (in Seidensticker’s fine rendition) ‘the warm, sour (*kusai*) smell of the theatre crowds pressed down from the yet darker regions above’ (203). These crowds are populated not by ambitious Meiji individuals, but by refugees from a world beyond their control, uprooted ghosts whose only choice is to seek comfort in numbers.

The author uses this theatrical space to articulate a freedom of sorts by throwing into further question the distinctions between reality and artificiality, and the relative merits of both. From his vantage point in the Gods, Chōkichi observes a scene in which a courtesan gazes upon the moon, the outline of which is reproduced on stage by ‘strings pulling away clouds to reveal a light, a large round hole in the black screen’. However, the clumsy amateurishness of this effect in no way detracts from its profound impact upon the young man. Quite the contrary, it allows him to re-evaluate earlier experiences in the ‘real’ world beyond the theatre’s confines. Recalling how he too had looked up towards a bright moon from the Imado Bridge, the entirely artificial theatrical scene now before him appears to take on a more realistic aura, to the extent that ‘the stage was no longer a stage’. It is perhaps only natural then that, after leaving the theatre and stopping for a moment on the very same bridge, he should brace himself against the bitter cold and mark the space by allowing a fragment of a traditional *jōruri* (puppet theatre) ballad to issue from his throat (204–205).

In fact, Chōkichi’s first experience of the Miyatoza as a balm to ‘ease the pain’ proves so effective that he returns the following day. During this second visit, the theatre’s physical layout is highlighted in a way that further undermines any simple distinction between a fanciful theatrical space and the harsh reality of the wider world. As before, the young man is captivated by the stage performances, but this time he has become conscious of ‘the lively balconies to the left and right of the theatre’ (206). Paul Waley has painted a vivid portrait of the ‘chat and banter’ that took place among the audience at a kabuki theatre, suggesting that these social interactions were almost as significant a part of the whole experience as the performance on stage (1984: 180). The theatres tended to be so dark that the actors’ faces had to be lit by candles. Some wealthy spectators had boxes, but most people sat on mats ‘in small compartments divided by narrow gangplanks’ along which waiters delivered tea and refreshment to customers (*ibid.*). Such a layout worked against any clear distinction between stage and auditorium. Indeed, the audience might be understood to have occupied a liminal position; they were not only paying customers from the outside world but also performers in their own right, both watching and being watched by other groups of viewers within the theatre itself. No wonder that Chōkichi should have been drawn to the potential delights of an acting career, which offered the opportunity to play out a predictable and defined role in a world where the endings were already known.¹⁰

But it is also possible to interpret the spatial interaction between theatrical and external worlds from another angle. After kabuki theatres were banished to the Asakusa district in 1841, the area quickly became a haven for all sorts of performing arts, so kabuki theatres jostled for space with puppet theatres. The Miyatoza, which continued right up until World War Two, stood out as ‘a stronghold of the untainted kabuki of Edo, a theater for kabuki connoisseurs’ (Waley 1984: 178). Kafū, who should definitely be counted as an aficionado, would have been very aware that the district in which the theatre was located formed the backdrop to some of kabuki’s most popular productions. This linkage between the worlds both inside and outside the theatre building only increases a sense that the theatrical space

should be understood less as a site of retreat from reality, and more as an active springboard of engagement, a kind of willful artistic bleeding into the surrounding environment. In this sense, the characters in ‘The River Sumida’ occupy an intriguing middle ground between aesthetic representation and lived experience.

Examining Kafū’s story from the perspective of space and time is only one possible critical approach. Even in terms of spatial configurations, I have certainly not exhausted all possibilities. But let me conclude by pointing to a broader picture of how space and time relate to this specific story written in the first decade of the twentieth century. Bachelard’s exploration of intimate places seems to have been driven by a desire to uncover a pleasurable sense of where one belongs. However, in the Japanese context the very concept of home is particularly problematic. As far as literary production is concerned, the loss of a fixed sense of belonging became a powerful inspiration for modern Japanese writers to try and make sense of their own time and place through language. In Kafū’s literature, there are certainly legitimate grounds for finding fault in the way he too easily differentiates the old and the new, and tries to set up an overly simplistic contrast between a supposedly authentic Japanese past and a shallow and insubstantial modernity. However, from a more sympathetic perspective, ‘The River Sumida’ may be read as a serious attempt to give shape to the traumatic events that informed his age.

Notes

- 1 Donald Keene (1984: 55–75) describes the strong impact on Japan of Western literary texts during late Tokugawa and early Meiji. John Mertz (2003: 101–6) discusses the importance of translations of English literature from the late 1870s in shaping the Japanese understanding of modernity.
- 2 Lefebvre (1974) explores space as a socially constructed environment rather than a natural pre-existing phenomenon. David Harvey (1989: 164) argues that, under a capitalist regime, money acts as a mediator of commodity exchange to give shape and meaning to our very understanding of space and time in the urban environment. Edward Soja (1989) critiques orthodox Marxist ideas by calling for a re-evaluation of the balance between space and time, and for the development of a spatial hermeneutic.
- 3 See, for instance, his article ‘A Left Within the Place of Nothingness’, in *New Left Review* 5 (September–October 2000).
- 4 On Japanese *meisho* and *utamakura*, see Kamens (1997).
- 5 Shirane (1998) provides details of Bashō’s travels through Japan.
- 6 My book (Dodd 2004) discusses in detail the traumatic cultural and social upheavals of the Meiji period. On Miyazaki Koshoshi’s ‘Returning Home’, see p. 18 and p. 26.
- 7 Page references correspond to Edward Seidensticker’s translation of the story in *Kafū the Scribbler* (1965). Other close readings of ‘Sumidagawa’ include Steve Rabson’s article (1982).
- 8 For a detailed analysis of Kafū’s view of the West, see Hutchinson (2011). Washburn (2007) deals extensively with the question of authenticity in modern Japanese culture. Ikuho Amano (2013: 79–102) explores Kafū’s difficulties in returning to Japan from the West as a ‘decadent returnee’. Kafū’s returnee stories are also examined by Hutchinson (2011: 133–172).
- 9 For Kusabame Kinbei’s late Edo-early Meiji photo of the bridge, as described by Kafū, see http://oldphoto.lb.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/en/target.php?id=124_. Accessed 10 April 2015.
- 10 In fact, as a young man and to the horror of his father, Kafū was very keen to find employment in the theatre, and he even had a part-time job for a while handling the clappers in the Kabuki-za.

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2

LITERATURE SHORT ON TIME

Modern moments in haiku and tanka

Jon Holt

Introduction

One characteristic of modern Japanese literature that distinguishes it from earlier, traditional forms is the prominence of a freer sense of time in early twentieth-century writings, especially in poetry of the modern (1868–1945) and contemporary (1945–present) periods. Premodern poetry embraced a variety of themes (love, friendship, mourning, and so on), but the conventions of representation dictated a seasonal framework for the expression of these themes. Haruo Shirane writes that poets of the classical age (784–1185) ‘developed and established an extremely complex and highly codified view of the four seasons that would become the model of elegance and the primary literary representation of nature for the next thousand years’ (2012: 203). The traditional requirement in haiku and tanka that a poet situate the poem in time was not restricting but quite the contrary: it was liberating, because the demands of the form helped the poet shape the poem’s scope.

However, by the early twentieth century, many Japanese poets clearly rejected the idea of human beings being tied to the clock or calendar. For example, in 1910, Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912), a modern poet who often made idle and wasted time his theme, wrote this tanka: ‘Without a thought in my head / one day, all day / I will let my heart linger on the echoes of the steam train’ (1910a: 55).¹ In literature of the modern and contemporary periods, the emphasis on individual identity and personal agency required fictional characters to transcend the bonds of time. Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933), perhaps Japan’s most cosmically attuned poet and a writer of a greater, Buddhist sense of time, created avant-garde poetry that located human beings outside of time and, by extension, worldly concerns (Holt 2014). Japanese naturalists and I-novelists, who reigned supreme in the earlier decades of the twentieth century, may have meticulously documented their mundane daily affairs, but one senses that by the 1920s, for writers like Miyazawa and the New Perceptionist School (Shinkankaku-ha), time was no longer a constant, no longer bound by even human perception. These rejections of human-centric time were also flights from the dismal reality of Japan’s early war buildup. Flash-forward to the contemporary period and we see the legacy of a rejection of a nationally shared time in favour of a time that is far more focused on personal and often idle moments, such as in Tawara Machi’s *Salad Anniversary* (Sarada kinenbi, 1987):