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(with Cyril Birch, ed.)

*Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*

*Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology*





*Modern*

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**JAPANESE LITERATURE**

*an anthology*

*compiled and edited by*

*Donald Keene*



**GROVE PRESS  
NEW YORK**

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**TO TED AND FANNY DE BARY**

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## **NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES AND PRONUNCIATION**

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*Japanese names are given in this book in the Japanese order: that is, the surname precedes the personal name. Thus, in the name Natsume Sōseki, Natsume is the family name, Sōseki the personal name.*

*The pronunciation of Japanese in transcription is very simple. The consonants are pronounced as English (with g always hard), the vowels as in Italian. There are no silent letters. Thus, the name Mi is pronounced “mee-nay.” In general, long vowels have been indicated by macrons, but in some stories they have been omitted, as likely to seem pedanticisms.*



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# PREFACE

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It may come as a surprise to some readers that this volume, devoted to the Japanese literature of the last eighty or so years, should be as long as my *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, which covers more than a thousand years. The disproportion is largely to be explained in terms of the amount of literature which has poured from the printing presses in recent times. All the literature which survives from, say, the thirteenth century can hardly compare in bulk with what any single year now produces. But it is not only by mere numbers that modern Japanese literature earns the right to be heard; its quality is remarkably high, and compares with that written anywhere in the world.

The choice of material for inclusion has been difficult to make. It is a commonplace of literary history that many works highly esteemed in their own day are subsequently doomed to oblivion. It also happens, though less frequently, that a book which passed almost unnoticed in its own time is later seen to be a treasure of the literature. These are the dangers which beset the compiler of anthologies of modern works, and I cannot hope to have escaped them altogether. I shall be very glad if no glaring injustices have been made. I have included very little solely for "historical" reasons. The novels of the 1890's have suffered in particular as a result of this policy. Although they are still highly regarded by some Japanese critics, they seem unbearably mawkish today, as I think most people will agree who have read the existing translations of such works as Ozaki's *Golden Demon*.<sup>1</sup>

It is the custom of Japanese critics to divide the modern period into the reigns of the three Emperors: Meiji (1868-1912), Taishō (1912-1926), and Shōwa (since 1926). These distinctions have some meaning, as our use of "the twenties" or "the thirties" conjures up an era, but it has not been necessary to observe the lines of these demarcations in a book intended for Western readers.

Few of the translations given here have ever before appeared in print. Most were made especially for this volume, and I wish to express my thanks to all the translators. I am particularly indebted to Edward Seidensticker for his willingness on repeated occasions to drop whatever else he was doing and turn out for this book a remarkably fine translation. Carolyn Kizer has kindly looked over my translations of modern poetry and offered many valuable pointers. Other help, at a time when I needed it badly, I have acknowledged, however inadequately, in the dedication.

I am grateful to Kawabata Yasunari, President of the Japanese P.E.N. Club, for his kind intercession in obtaining permission to use works by living authors. Acknowledgments are also due to: International Publishers Co. for *The Cannery Boat*; the *Japan Quarterly* for *The Mole*; Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., publishers of *Some Prefer Nettles*, for permission to use other works by Tanizaki; W. H. Norman and the Hokuseido Press for *Hell Screen*; Glenn Hughes for *The Madman on the Roof* (from *Three Modern Japanese Plays*); New Directions for "Villon's Wife"; and Rinehart & Co., Inc. for *Earth and Soldiers* (from *Wheat and Soldiers*).

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# INTRODUCTION

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The transformation of Japan within the space of about forty years from an obscure oriental monarchy to one of the great powers is accounted a miracle of the modern age. With the most rapid efforts Japan shook off the encumbering weight of a past of isolation and ignorance, and astonished the world by victory in a war with Russia and the winning of an equal alliance with England. Military successes and the development of industrial enterprises—and also the growth of scientific learning—made Japan the leader of eastern Asia.

Many striking parallels may be drawn between the history and the literature of Japan during this period. In 1868, when the youthful Emperor Meiji assumed control of the government after six centuries of rule by military men, Japanese literature had dropped to one of its lowest levels. The popular authors of the time specialized in books of formless, almost meaningless gossip. The country which had been turned in on itself during almost 250 years of isolation, seemed to have exhausted its own resources. The gaiety had left the gay quarters, the center of much of the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and the rouged animation of anecdotes about the courtesans of the day was ugly and meretricious. And yet, within the same forty years that elapsed between the Meiji Restoration and the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese literature moved from idle quips directed at the oddities of the West to Symbolist poetry, from the thousandth-told tale of the gay young blade and the harlots to the complexities of the psychological novel.

The military and commercial successes of Japan have been attributed by Western critics to the Japanese genius for imitation, and this very skill has been often considered a discredit, as if it were somehow more admirable to imitate badly. The literature and art of modern Japan have been open to similar attack by those who deplore any deviations from what they consider to be the “pure Japanese.” Such critics would condemn the writers and artists of today to expressing their anxieties about a world in disorder through the medium of exquisite poems on the cherry blossoms or monochrome sketches of pines and waterfalls. But, as the Japanese have discovered, the cleavage is impossible: the industrial plant, democracy, economics, Symbolist poetry, and abstract painting all go together, and are today an inseparable part of the lives of cultivated people in Japan as everywhere in the world.

The acceptance of what we think of as Western traditions did not take place in Japan without a struggle. For a time (as in China) an attempt was made to maintain the principle of “Western techniques and Eastern spirit.” This meant that Japan should welcome Western machinery and other material benefits while retaining unaltered the customs and philosophy of the East. It might seem that it was a feasible dichotomy, that there was no reason why, say, a machine operator could not lead his life in accordance with Confucian principles. The fact was, however, that the industrialization of Japan tended to make the ideals of the family system impossible to fulfill. Even had the West offered nothing but technical knowledge, Japan would probably have had to abandon or modify seriously her traditional ways.

During the twenty or so years that followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the Japanese were frantically occupied in learning about—imitating, if one will—the West. They built for themselves railway and telegraph systems, printed newspapers and photographs. Ordinary citizens became interested in political problems for the first time, and there was a movement to enable them to take a more active part in the government. A modern political and industrial state was taking shape, characteristically Japanese in many features of its composition, but modeled on similar institutions in the West. In literature the changes came more slowly. This is not surprising: it took a much greater knowledge of the West to write a good psychological novel than it did to run a railway. We find traces

of the West scattered everywhere, of course. Even the conservative writers mentioned in their works the rickshaws, banks, newspapers, and other novelties of the time. The celebrated dramatist Kawatake Mokuami wrote a play about an English balloonist who dazzled the Japanese by descending from the sky over Tokyo, and a leading Kabuki actor was required to pronounce a speech written in English for the play. In a puppet drama of 1891 there is a love scene between a geisha and a foreigner, which is filled with scraps of English: “*Wasureyō mono ka* last year *no* spring, I *no* fine day *Sumida no hana yori* Paris London. ...” In the domain of translation from Western works, the Japanese moved from *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles (a book which sold hundreds of thousands of copies) to the political novels of Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, and eventually to Zola.

It is easy to see why the Japanese eagerly devoted themselves to study of the working of the steam engine or the pump, or even to the practical information contained in *Self-Help*, but it is interesting that they turned so quickly to Western literature. The first complete translation of a Western novel was that of Bulwer-Lytton’s *Ernest Maltravers* in 1878. This innocuous story belies the vaguely pornographic overtones of its Japanese title, “A Spring Tale of Flowers and Willows.” The title may have been initially necessary to sell the book, but what made it so great a success with the Japanese was the revelation that the men of the West had a tender side to their sternly practical lives. The emphasis on the material superiority of the West had been so insistent that the more spiritual aspects of Western life, even when revealed in so etiolated a fashion as we might expect from the pen of Bulwer-Lytton, came as a great surprise to most Japanese. The political background of the novel also offered Japanese writers fresh ideas as to what they might put into their own works.

One should not overlook the role of Christian missionaries in arousing among Japanese an interest in the literature of the West. The Christian religion had been prohibited in Japan during the early seventeenth century, and rigorous measures had been adopted to prevent its recrudescence. In 1873, under foreign pressure, the ban was lifted, and the influence of Christianity rapidly spread to all parts of the country. Some men were led, as Christian concern with their fellows began to occupy them, to a kind of socialism. Others felt a new sense of individuality and the desire to express it. The hymns which the Christian converts sang were of importance both in the introduction of Western music and in the beginnings of the new poetry. The Bible was the first Western book known to many Japanese, and its words convinced them that there was more to the West than mere “techniques.”

It goes without saying, however, that unless the Japanese had felt a need to create a new literature no amount of foreign influence would have mattered. There was no reason why the books of chatter about the denizens of the licensed quarters could not have continued to dominate the literary scene. What the foreign examples did was to afford the Japanese the means of expressing their new ideas and their consciousness of being men of the enlightened Meiji era. This was not by any means the first time that Japanese had felt dissatisfied with the prevailingly low level of the literature of the first half of the nineteenth century. The poet Ōkuma Kotomichi (1798-1868) had declared himself proud to be a man of his times, and scorned to write, as most poets did, in the old-fashioned diction of a thousand years before. But despite his protests, Ōkuma’s poems are written in the traditional *waka* form, and delightful though they are, do not strike us as being in any sense revolutionary. A poem in thirty-one syllables can be exquisite, it can be moving, but it obviously can never be a full exposition of a poet’s thoughts or attempt to deal with subjects in which the intellect as well as the heart is involved. Some Japanese had tried to escape from the limitations of the *waka* by writing Chinese poems and prose—the only foreign literature known in Japan before the opening of the country—but, with some brilliant exceptions, their compositions were less explorations of the possibilities of the medium than cold and sterile repetitions of alien imagery.

When the poets of the 1880's felt a need to express their emotions in terms more suitable to their age than the traditional forms permitted, they had access to a new idiom. The first collection of English and American poems in translation was published in 1882. The choice of poems was not inspired, but with Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade," Gray's "Elegy," some Longfellow, and even a few morsels of Shakespeare to build on, the Japanese were soon expressing in very varied terms their reactions to life in the brave new world of the Meiji era. That their early attempts were no masterpieces need surprise no one. Everything had to be learned afresh, for the old traditions were more of a hindrance than a help. Interestingly enough, it was not until much later that Japanese poets discovered that the complexities of modern life—or, at any rate, some of them—could be treated in the *waka* and *haiku* as well.

*The Essence of the Novel* (1885) by Tsubouchi Shōyō is one of the first important critical works of the time. Tsubouchi was a student of English literature, and what he read of the aesthetic principles of which it is founded convinced him that great changes must take place in the writing of Japanese fiction. The preface to the book threw a challenge in the faces of Japanese authors and readers alike: the sorry state of Japanese literature was no less the fault of readers who buy the sensational, pornographic fiction than of the men who wrote the books. Tsubouchi's challenge was, as a matter of fact, more impressive than either the full statement of his views or the original works he later wrote. His critical opinions were for the most part those of foreign writers, and applied by him to Japanese works. For example, Tsubouchi rejected the didactic novel, represented in Japan by such writers as Bakin, in favor of the artistic novel, the beauty of which is its own excuse for being. Quotations from Sir Walter Scott, Thackeray, and a variety of other nineteenth-century giants buttressed his arguments. Sometimes he was caught in a dilemma, as when he had to deal with artistic novels of amorous content. Tsubouchi wrote, "The Frenchman Dumas wrote some extremely cruel works, and some romantic tales of illicit unions, but he never stooped to lascivious description of the mysteries of the bedchamber, such as are common in Japanese vulgar works. There is no objection to his novel being read aloud before the entire family."

Shortly after his *Essence of the Novel*, Tsubouchi published the *Character of Modern Students*, a work intended to embody his artistic theories. It is not much of a book, and hardly distinguishes itself from the popular fiction which Tsubouchi so roundly condemned. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this novel is that the heroes are students (modeled on Tsubouchi's friends) who speak a jargon heavily larded with English, and thus identify themselves as being "enlightened."

The first important novel of the new Japanese literature was *The Drifting Cloud* (1887-1889) by Futabatei Shimei. It is written almost entirely in the colloquial, which in itself was a great achievement. Undoubtedly Futabatei was influenced by Turgenev, some of whose stories he translated, but *The Drifting Cloud* is an original work and no mere imitation. The conversations capture with a marvelous exactness the speech of the day, and the character portrayals are brilliant. It is astonishing that within twenty years after the Meiji Restoration the imprint of the West had become so strong on Japanese society, and that any novelist caught up in the frantically rapid evolution of the society could have observed it with such detachment and humor. A new kind of hero made his appearance in Japanese fiction. Unlike the all-conquering soldiers and lovers we find in earlier writings, the leading character of *The Drifting Cloud* is timid before the woman he loves, loses his job, becomes the object of the laughter and contempt of everyone, and finally exasperates even the reader with his ineptitude. In one typical scene Bunzō (the hero), having been rebuffed by his sweetheart, lies on his bed, grief-stricken. But he is incapable even of keeping his thoughts on his sorrow—they wander to a consideration of the grain of the wood in the ceiling, from that subject to

the remembrance of his physics teacher, a bearded foreigner, and then to a book which had once impressed him. Suddenly he recalls with a cry his lost love. We see in Bunzō a Japanese overwhelmed by the pushings of a world composed of people who have read *Self-Help*.

Futabatei's extraordinary novel did not sweep all before it. Another, more powerful group of authors continued older traditions while paying lip service to the new. Such works as Ozaki Kōyō's *Golden Demon* (1897) combined a lushly poetic style with sentimental plots filled with the wildest improbabilities. Enormously popular in their own day, they have dated as *The Drifting Cloud* has not. One work in a more traditional vein which retains its vitality is *Growing Up* (1895) by the woman novelist Higuchi Ichiyō. This tale of children in the Yoshiwara, the licensed quarter of Tokyo, is closer in style to the seventeenth-century novel than to works of its own day, but the sharpness of its details and its descriptions still excites our admiration today.

While the novel and the short story were making striking advances, the Japanese drama and poetry continued in much the same vein as before. In the case of the drama, the exigencies of the theatre were such that no great changes were immediately possible. The most that one could expect was an occasional Western touch, whether the striking of a clock or the appearance of a character in Western dress. Within the framework of the existing dramatic arts certain steps were taken to achieve greater historical accuracy in the presentations, sometimes with ludicrous results. In the 1890's the Shimpa (or "New School") drama gained public favor with plays based on such contemporary events as the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. Shimpa, however, relied more on dramatizations of novels than on original plays, and its greatest successes were with the *Golden Demon* and similarly melodramatic works. Some Western plays (including Shakespeare) were performed by Shimpa, but it was not until the foundation of new theatre movements after the Russo-Japanese War that Western dramas received serious productions.

In poetry we find in the 1880's and 1890's numerous translations of European works, and in their wake Japanese poems on similar themes. The most successful of these poems, one step removed from the originals, was undoubtedly "The Song of the Autumn Wind" (1896) by Shimazaki Tōson. Although clearly derived from Shelley's ode, it was graceful enough to survive in its own right as a Japanese poem, and indeed marked the beginning of modern poetry in the country. It begins:

Softly the autumn wind has come,  
Rising from the western sea ...

and has some rather striking verses:

Scattering East and scattering West,  
Like priests of Brahma who taught the way,  
Tossed about by autumn winds,  
The leaves go fluttering down.

A poem by another poet of the day startles us with its opening lines: "Oh, to be in Yamato, now that October's there." Such close imitations of European models amuse us, but it should be remembered that the only examples of new poetry which could inspire the Japanese were familiar European ones. They had based their poetry movement on, say, Chinese verse, the results would seem less comic. Japanese translations were, in fact, the way that much European literature came to be known in China and elsewhere in eastern Asia.



The speed of the development of the forms and themes of poetry during the 1890's and 1900's was astonishing. In 1896 Shimazaki delighted his contemporaries with his lines after Shelley; in 1909 Kitahara Hakushū began his "Secret Song of the Heretics" with:

I believe in the heretical teachings of a degenerate age, the witchcraft of the Christian God ...  
and a few years later he wrote lines like this:

My sorrow wears the thin flannel garb of one-sided love.

Within the space of fifteen years the Japanese poets had leaped from Shelley to the French Symbolists, and it was not long before Dadaism, Surrealism, and all the other movements in French poetry had their Japanese admirers. There was a difference between these borrowings and the earlier imitations of the poetry, painting, and other arts of China. The Chinese poetry written by Japanese was generally a tissue of allusions to Chinese scenes and events, and only rarely betrayed its Japanese origins; the Dadaist or Surrealist poetry was almost always about Japan, or at least as much about Japan as anywhere. Imitation of Chinese models had bound the Japanese to rigid conventions which kept most poets from describing their own experiences. The imitation of French models, on the other hand, freed poets to explore parts of their experience and imagination which could never before have found expression in poetry. The poets did not always wear this freedom easily. Some of them spilled over into unbridled and perhaps meaningless fantasy; others became so cryptic that a poem of a single line requires pages of exegesis. What, for example, are we to make of this verse written in English, a stanza of a longer poem in the same vein?

(well, go on!)

qwiim qwick qwiim qwick  
qririm qririm qririm. ...  
qwiim qwick qwiim qwick  
qririm qririm qririm. ...

(ah rain bow!)

Granted that this stanza has a logic of its own and a compelling directness of expression, one might wish for a trifle more content.

The poets who wrote in the more conservative *waka* and *haiku* forms also began to discover the new possibilities in expression. The *waka* reached modernity about thirty years ahead of the *haiku*, which proved the least flexible medium, but even the *haiku* caught up, as the following creations witness:

*Hitohachi no kigiku*      A bowl of yellow chrysanthemums.

or:

*Hi e yamu*      I am sick with the sun.

People have attempted to divine the meanings intended by the poets, but it remains a real question whether *any* such short poetic utterances can be called *haiku*. Liberation may sometimes be too complete.

On the whole, modern Japanese drama and poetry have not been the equal of the novels, short stories, and other works of prose. There are some remarkable exceptions, but one cannot escape the feeling that the drama and poetry have yet to reach their full maturity. In the drama we find survival

of the old-fashioned plots beloved of the Kabuki audiences, and the modern theatre has been slow to catch on. Among the few modern plays which have won lasting popularity have been those by Kikuchi Kan, including *The Madman on the Roof* (1916), given in this volume. More recently, the play *Twilight Crane*<sup>1</sup> (1949) by Kinoshita Junji won acclaim for its skillful use of Japanese folklore. As yet, however, the number of playwrights is small and most audiences seem to prefer period pieces to works on contemporary subjects.

The modern movement in poetry has been a greater success, in spite of the eccentricities detailed above. There is a personal and very moving quality in some of the more straightforward poetry, and the Japanese Surrealists at times rival their French masters. One must admit, however, that much of the modern poetry seems curiously lacking in substance. There is in particular an extraordinary dearth of intellectual interest. One finds the pangs of love, the praise of nature, and the battle cry of the workers, but of the poet's concern with intellectual matters we find little trace. The gloom of *The Wasteland* pervades a considerable portion of modern Japanese poetry, but we search in vain for T. S. Eliot's preoccupation with such subjects as ritual and religion, the poetry of the past, and the ways in which time alters all things. This poverty in Japanese poetry is not difficult to understand. The modern poets are by their own choice cut off from the heritage of Japanese (and Chinese) literature. No falling cherry blossoms or reddening maple leaves are permitted to grace their verses except ironically, and the rest of the repertory of images worn smooth by centuries of poets is considered too remote and dead to be of relevance. On the other hand, knowledge of Western poetry is not very profound either among poets or readers. A Japanese poet is unlikely to think of quoting Dante; if he did, the quotation as such would have little meaning to most readers. Japanese modern poetry tends thus to be bounded by the translatable parts of foreign poetry: the decadence of Rimbaud without his overtones, the gloom of T. S. Eliot without his sense of tradition, the fantasy of Max Jacob without his religion. There is little joy or hope in this poetry except in the "affirmative" writings from the left. The sorrow over the falling of the cherry blossoms is now sorrow over the crumbling walls of a bombed-out site; instead of soaking his sleeve with tears, the poet shouts his grief to the wind.

That the poetry is prevailingly dark, traditionless, and nonintellectual does not mean that it lacks value. Within the limits the modern poets have set for themselves there is much beautifully conceived and sometimes hauntingly moving poetry. The poems of Hagiwara Sakutarō are perhaps the best of recent years. They seem the deepest felt, and, although clearly influenced by European examples, retain a feeling for the music and potentialities of the Japanese language. Hagiwara is also known as the first poet to have successfully composed in the colloquial.

The changes in the drama and poetry which have only slowly been accomplished, or which must await the future for fruition, were realized in prose at the beginning of this century, thanks to the emergence of an extraordinary cluster of gifted writers. One specific event of importance in the achievement of maturity in the novel was the four years' residence in Germany, from 1884 to 1888, of Mori Ōgai, the first major Japanese writer to have lived in Europe. Mori produced a volume of translations of German poetry in 1889, and in the following year published *The Dancing Girl*, the account of an unhappy attachment between a German dancer and a young Japanese. With this touching story the "romantic" movement in Japanese literature is considered to have begun; it is important in any case as the earliest work of the new literature to have been written by a man who had actually lived in Europe and knew at first-hand something of its emotional and spiritual life. *The Dancing Girl* was, in Mori's words, an "*Ich roman*"—a story so closely based on personal experiences as to be a kind of dramatized diary. This type of autobiographical fiction was to occupy a disproportionately large place in modern Japanese literature.

The other titan of Meiji literature, whose name is usually linked with Mori's, was Natsume Sōseki.

Natsume began his career as a scholar of English literature, and from 1900 to 1903 studied in England. In 1905 he published his first work of fiction, *I Am a Cat*. In the following years he produced a series of novels which were enthusiastically acclaimed in his day and even now retain their popularity. His early works, such as *Botchan* (1906), are filled with light, satirical touches; but Natsume's tone darkened as he turned to subjects of increasingly philosophical content. His novels deserve a larger place in this anthology, but unfortunately their reflective tone and rather deliberate pace do not permit extracts to be made successfully from the later works.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to say that in the years since his death Natsume's popularity has never wavered, and his books are still finding new readers today.

The appearance of Natsume on the scene would in itself have represented a major event in Japanese literature, but by an unusual set of circumstances the whole of the literary world burst into an almost unprecedented period of creativity during the years 1905-1915. This was the decade when some writers, like Mori Ōgai and Shimazaki Tōson, who had previously enjoyed a measure of fame, produced their best works; when others, like Natsume Sōseki and the poet Ishikawa Takuboku, wrote all of their literary production; and when still others, like Nagai Kafū and Tanizaki Junichiro, began their long, distinguished careers. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 undoubtedly was at least indirectly responsible; the victory may well have given the Japanese the confidence to produce great literature. Be that as it may, there is an almost bewildering profusion of talent in this decade. The next three decades were not to produce more than a fraction of the number of new writers of importance who appeared between the years 1905 and 1915.

The termination of the Russo-Japanese War may be said, in political terms, to have heralded the coming of age of Japan after its period of apprenticeship to the West. Japan had arrived among the powers, and her literature now began to win itself a place in the attention of the world. That the war had in some sense crystallized the new literary movement in Japan does not mean that the writers of the time were jingoists exulting over the victory. On the contrary, even those men whose hearts had leaped at initial reports of Japanese successes were disillusioned by the time the war was over. Tayama Katai's *One Soldier* (1908) suggests the mingled feelings the war aroused in the minds of sensitive writers.

Japanese chroniclers of the literary history of the modern period divide the various authors into a large number of schools—neo-Realist, Naturalist, Sensualist, etc.—and these schools in turn are splintered into subsections, denoting influences and associations. Such categories are of little concern to Western readers and need hardly bother us here. We should, however, note the immense ferment of activity in many directions. The passion for European literature continued, but to it was added a growing interest in the old Japan. Nagai Kafū published in 1909, the year after his return from five years' stay in the United States and France, *The River Sumida*, an exquisitely fashioned elegy for the vanishing Tokyo of the past. Nagai was influenced by French examples, but in subtle ways that might easily escape notice. Japanese literature was passing from a period when European works were slavishly imitated to one when an awareness and receptivity to them was not permitted to blot out the native heritage.

The conflict between the claims of East and West is particularly apparent in the works of Tanizaki Junichirō. His early productions dealt mainly with themes which might have been suggested by the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, and are marked by strong overtones of sadism and masochism. This

period reached its height with *A Fool's Love* (1924), the story of a man who is so fascinated by a coarse, European-looking waitress that he tolerates her repeated cruelties. Even in this work, however, there is implied a condemnation of the excessive worship paid to Western things. In the next major novel, *Some Prefer Nettles* (1928),<sup>3</sup> the hero is drawn both to an Eurasian prostitute and to a Kyoto beauty. Each stands for a world, and we sense that it is Japan which will win. The later novels of Tanizaki expand this conservative aspect of his work. Many of them deal with events of Japanese history of the recent or distant past. *The Thin Snow* (1944-1947), perhaps Tanizaki's masterpiece, tells of the Japan of the years immediately before the Pacific War, but contains many suggestions of *The Tale of Genji*, a work which Tanizaki has translated into modern Japanese.

Another writer who first gained celebrity in the ten years after the Russo-Japanese War was Shiga Naoya. His works, probably more than those of any other modern author, have exercised a commanding influence over the Japanese literature of today. He did not invent the "I novel," as we have seen, but his success with this genre led many other writers to seek to salvage bits worthy of preservation from the incidents of their lives. This absorption with the petty details of their own lives may represent an attempt on the part of Japanese writers to create individuality for themselves. I am tempted to link this literary tendency with the extraordinary craze for the camera in Japan. The desire to preserve the memory of a meeting or celebration with a commemorative photograph is, after all, not so different from the intent of many "I novels." In both cases it is assumed that the faithful portrayal of an individual makes for individuality, but, as some of the lesser imitators of Shiga Naoya have demonstrated, this is not necessarily the case.

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, who also published his first works during the decade after the Russo-Japanese War, was able to create true individuality in his novels without intruding himself. In 1915 *Rashōmon* appeared, a work whose brilliant, rather unhealthy style has magnetized readers ever since. *Rashōmon*, like many others of Akutagawa's works, germinated from a story in one of the old collections. To the framework of events of an ancient tale Akutagawa added modern psychological insights and the glitter of his style. Towards the latter part of his career Akutagawa also wrote some autobiographical fiction, and it too is touched with the morbid glow of his more objective writings.

The novels of the twenties, thirties, and forties were dominated largely by men who had made a name for themselves during the previous decade. A few important new writers did emerge, notably Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari. Both men were associated with a school called the "neo-Sensationalist." This ambiguous term meant in practice that its adherents were opposed alike to the rising "proletarian" school and to the unrelieved use of realism practiced by certain writers. Yokomitsu and Kawabata proved themselves to be superlative craftsmen and masters of the art of psychological fiction.

The proletarian literature movement of the twenties occupied the attention of many young authors and has since been rediscovered and extravagantly admired. Viewed by any normal standards of literature, however, its productions were remarkably poor. The great virtue of proletarian writings was that they dealt with aspects of Japan largely ignored by more famous writers. Apart from the novel *Earth* (1910) by Nagatsuka Takashi, a ponderous if accurate portrayal of the lives of hard-pressed farmers, there had been a marked reluctance on the part of most Japanese writers to treat the farmers, fishermen, and laboring classes, who make up the bulk of the Japanese population. The proletarian writers filled this gap but, we may feel, in an excessively crude manner. Occasionally, as in Kobayashi Takiji's *Cannery Boat* (1929), there is so vivid a description of the conditions under which the proletariat lives that the work still commands our attention. But painfully detailed accounts of the

misery of the oppressed classes, interspersed with scenes of joyous workers marching hand in hand to overthrow the capitalists, do not rate very high literarily. We can only marvel today that so many earnest writers produced so little of lasting value.

The military disasters of the thirties and forties into which the Japanese people was plunged by the ruling cliques produced almost no literature of consequence. Most writers did what they could to prevent becoming embroiled in the propaganda efforts of the militarists. A few showed open sympathy with Japan's "mission," but apart from the diaries of Hino Ashihei, the China Incidents and the Pacific War did not engender much literature which can be read with pleasure today.

It has only been since the end of the war in 1945 that important new writers have begun to appear again in numbers. It is still too soon to be able to predict with confidence which of their works will last, but the writings of Dazai Osamu capture so perfectly the postwar scene that it is hard to imagine that they will be forgotten. The present volume concludes with an extract from a novel by Mishima Yukio, a remarkably gifted young writer whose varied production augurs well for the future of Japanese literature. As European traditions are finally absorbed, not only by the novels but by the drama and poetry as well, we can expect that the amazing renaissance of literature in Japan during the past half-century or so will continue to be one of the wonders of the modern literary world.

## JAPANESE LITERATURE

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# THE BEEFEATER

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[from *Aguranabe*, 1871] by Kanagaki Robun (1829-1894)

*It would be hard to defend on purely literary grounds the writings of the years immediately following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, but in the books of anecdotes and curiosities which were the bestsellers of the day, we find many fascinating glimpses into the life of the Japan which was just emerging. The beefeater described in this selection was a typical man of his age. For many centuries the Japanese had been forbidden by Buddhist law to eat beef. With the coming of the foreigners, however, a demand for beef was created, and by the early years of the Meiji period restaurants which sold beef had sprung up in the cities. Details of the costume and the manners of the beefeater reveal to us the comic aspects of the "enlightenment" which was taking place. The intent of this piece would seem largely to have been to parody the advocacy of the superiority of Western civilization by such men as the great educator Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901).*

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*A man about thirty-five, rather swarthy it is true, but of clear complexion, thanks apparently to the daily use of soap, which purges all impurities. His hair, not having been cut for some hundred days, is long and flowing, and looks as if it is in the process of being let out altogether, in the foreign style. Naturally enough, he uses that scent called Eau de Cologne to give a sheen to his hair. He wears a padded silken kimono beneath which a calico undergarment is visible. By his side is his Western-style umbrella, covered in gingham. From time to time he removes from his sleeve with a painfully contrived gesture a cheap watch, and consults the time. As a matter of fact this is merely so much display to impress others, and the chain is only gold-plate. He turns to his neighbor, who is also eating beef, and speaks:*

Excuse me, but beef is certainly a most delicious thing, isn't it? Once you get accustomed to its taste, you can never go back to deer or wild boar again. I wonder why we in Japan haven't eaten such a clean thing before? For over 1620—or is it 1630—years people in the West have been eating huge quantities of beef. Before then, I understand, beef and mutton were considered the king's exclusive property, and none ever entered the mouth of a commoner, unless he happened to be something on the order of a daimyo's chief retainer. We really should be grateful that even people like ourselves can now eat beef, thanks to the fact that Japan is steadily becoming a truly civilized country. Of course, there are some unenlightened boors who cling to their barbaric superstitions and say that eating meat defiles you so much that you can't pray any more before Buddha and the gods. Such nonsense shows they simply don't understand natural philosophy. Savages like that should be made to read Fukuzawa's article on eating beef. In the West they're free of superstitions. There it's the custom to do everything scientifically, and that's why they've invented amazing things like the steamship and the steam engine. Did you know that they engrave the plates for printing newspapers with telegraphic needles? And that they bring down wind from the sky with balloons? Aren't they wonderful inventions! Of course, there are good reasons behind these inventions. If you look at a map of the world you'll see some countries marked "tropical," which means that's where the sun shines closest. The people in those countries are all burnt black by the sun. The king of that part of the world tried a

kinds of schemes before he hit on what is called a balloon. That's a big round bag they fill with air high up in the sky. They bring the bag down and open it, causing the cooling air inside the bag to spread out all over the country. That's a great invention. On the other hand, in Russia, which is a cold country where the snow falls even in summer and the ice is so thick that people can't move, they invented the steam engine. You've got to admire them for it. I understand that they modeled the steam engine after the flaming chariot of hell, but anyway, what they do is to load a crowd of people on a wagon and light a fire in a pipe underneath. They keep feeding the fire inside the pipe with coal, so that the people riding on top can travel a great distance completely oblivious to the cold. Those people in the West can think up inventions like that, one after the other. ... You say you must be going? Well, good-bye. Waitress! Another small bottle of sake. And some pickled onions to go with it!

**TRANSLATED BY DONALD KEENE**



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