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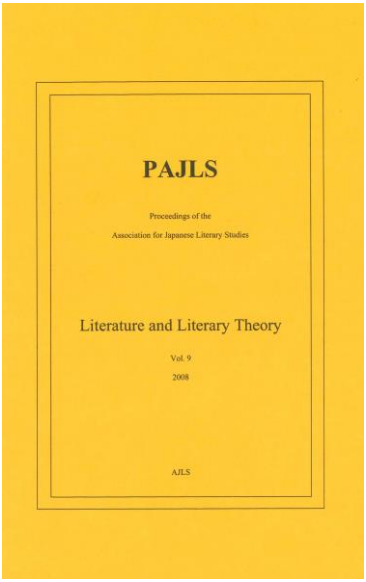

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The Vicissitudes of Drama as a Literary Genre in Meiji-Taishō Debates

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During a couple of decades around the Taishō era (1912-26), drama enjoyed something of a heyday in Japanese literature. Almost every writer of the day at least dabbled in this form, and many—including Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Yamamoto Yūzō, Kikuchi Kan, Kume Masao, Arishima Takeo, Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Nogami Yaeko and Ueda (Enchi) Fumiko, to name just a few—established themselves as playwrights before or while still settling into fiction. Some, like Yoshii Isamu and Kinoshita Mokutarō, were poets who caught the drama bug. Many more, men and women like Suzuki Senzaburō, Okada Yachiyo, Hasegawa Shigure, Kubota Mantarō, Kishida Kunio and Akita Ujaku, devoted themselves almost exclusively to writing for the stage. One of the first scholars to write a major study of modern drama in Japan, Ōyama Isao, lists some eighty professional playwrights active in Japan from ca. 1900-1940; the volume of work that they produced is immense.[1] Some of the earliest modern Japanese literature to be translated into European languages was of drama by Shōyō, Tanizaki, Yamamoto, Mushanokōji, Kikuchi, Kishida and others. Kōri Torahiko even wrote drama in English, and at least one of his plays, *The Death of Yoritomo*, was performed on the London stage.

Many of these writers, particularly those who were almost exclusively playwrights, are practically forgotten today and the ones we remember are often remembered for other things. In fact, drama is a subject that has been given remarkably short shrift in Japanese literary studies over the past century or so. Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel, 1885-6), for example, has amassed a significant body of criticism in English, to say nothing of Japanese, but this work was really a footnote to a life devoted to theatre and drama, which few since Shōyō's death in 1935 have bothered to study in any great detail.[2] What is also forgotten in much discussion of the rise of naturalism in Japan is that it was the plays of Ibsen and Hauptmann and not the fiction of Zola or Maupassant that kick-started this movement in the first decade of the twentieth century. To understand the rise and fall of drama as a literary genre in early twentieth-century Japan, however, we must go back a couple of decades further, to the debates over theatre reform in the 1880s.

Japan has one of the greatest theatre traditions in the world, and drama has played no small part in this. The country has produced unique forms like noh, the puppet theatre and kabuki; the latter two, in particular, played a crucial role in the rise of early modern Japanese culture. It would be no exaggeration to say that, well into the late nineteenth century, kabuki remained the dominant form of cultural expression for the Japanese. By the 1880s, however, prominent critics like Suematsu Kenchō (1855-1920), Toyama Masakazu (1848-1900) and other members of the Engeki kairyōkai (Society for Theatre Reform, 1886) took kabuki to task for its coarseness and failure to promote the Meiji project of "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*). Much of the debate surrounding this movement revolved around efforts to recognize the artistic value of the dramatic text and to reform kabuki playscripts (*kyakuhon*) in accordance with

[1] See Ōyama Isao, *Kindai Nihon gikyokushi*, 4 vols. (Yamagata: Kindai Nihon gikyokushi kankōkai, 1968).
[2] A recent exception is Tsuno Kaitarō, *Kokkei na kyojin: Tsubouchi Shōyō no yume* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2002).

newly imported western ideals of dramatic form. Besides noting the high social status accorded to theatre in nineteenth century Europe and America, the importance accorded there to drama as a literary genre exercised some of the best minds of the Meiji era. Nishi Amane (1826-1894), Mori Ōgai's mentor, was instrumental in introducing Aristotle's *Poetics* and Western drama theory to the Japanese. His *Hyakugaku renkan* (Encyclopedia, 1870-72) identified a variety of poetic forms, including epic, lyric, ballad and drama. Drama was further distinguished into comedic and tragic forms, which were more refined than those seen in Japanese theatre, which was "a medium for the lewd and base," Nishi asserted.[3] Numerous other Meiji intellectuals, from liberal politician Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901) and critic Ishibashi Ningetsu (1865-1926), to novelist Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909) and Dostoyevsky translator Uchida Roan (1868-1929), served as conduits of Aristotelian drama theory, via nineteenth century aestheticians like Hegel, Lessing and Belinsky. Many recognized that, while Japan had a rich and venerable theatrical culture and even a number of illustrious playwrights, nonetheless, the dramatic text had counted for little or nothing of literary value. In large part, this move reflected a power struggle between the traditional kabuki, where actors were king, and the rising Meiji intelligentsia, who felt increasingly that external control of the theatre was needed to elevate it into a more respectable art form.

Hisamatsu Sadahiro, in his *Doitsu gikyoku tai'i* (An Outline of German Drama, 1887), wrote that "drama harmoniously combines the two forms of epos and lyric into one genre." Indeed, Hisamatsu concludes, "drama is the most artistic of all the arts."[4] But a cardinal feature of Meiji culture was its quest for artistic and generic purity, and many critics would find fault with traditional Japanese plays for their "impure," hybrid form. Mori Ōgai, one of the towering figures of Meiji Japanese culture, would reflect the desire for a more "pure" drama. In his criticism of the Society for Theatre Reform's program, Ōgai argued for a clear distinction between what he called "straight drama" (*seigeki*) and "opera" (*gakugeki*), with the latter "falling somewhere between a *jidaimono* in kabuki and a *jōruri* puppet play." He complained of "distracting 'operatic elements' in our national practice," advocating a "simpler and more truly artistic theatre" that did not try to "distract the audience with specious shows of 'real' stage effects."[5]

> A play should be given life through its text: it should present poetic nuances in dialogue form (*jinjō no gengo ōtō no aida ni shisō no myōmi wo gentei subeki*), with the actor bringing the script to life.[6]

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[3] Tsugami Tadashi, Sugai Yukio, Kagawa Yoshinari, eds., *Gikyokuron: Engekiron kōza*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Chōbunsha, 1977), 138. For a discussion of the impact of Aristotle on Meiji letters, see also Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: an intercultural essay on theories of literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 22-23, and William Lee, "Chikamatsu and Dramatic Literature in the Meiji Period," in Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds., *Inventing the Classics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 192.

[4] *'Dorama' wa bijutsu-chū no mottomo bijutsu naru mono nari*; quoted in Tsugami, et al., *Gikyokuron*, 141.

[5] Mori Ōgai, "Surprised by the Prejudice of Theatre Reformers" (Engeki no ronja no henken ni odoroku), Keiko MacDonald trans., in J. Thomas Rimer, ed., *Not a Song Like Any Other: An Anthology of Writings by Mori Ōgai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 145-49. Mori Ōgai, "Engeki kairyō ronja no henken ni odoroku," in Nomura Takashi and Fujiki Hiroyuki, eds., *Engekiron, Kindai bungaku hyōron taikei*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1985), 46-49. Ōgai's essay originally appeared in *Shigarami zōshi* (October 1889).

[6] Mori, "Surprised by the Prejudice of Theatre Reformers," 148.

The most trenchant critic of traditional dramaturgy was none other than Tsubouchi Shōyō, whose formidable energies turned away from fiction to drama after the mid-1880s. In what is a seminal text of Meiji drama criticism, "Wagakuni no shigeki" (Our Nation's Historical Drama, 1893-94), Shōyō would write that traditional Japanese drama (particularly Chikamatsu's and Mokuami's *jidaimono*) could be characterized as "dream-fantasy plays" (*mugen-geki*):

> In what respect do they resemble dreams and fantasies? It is in their ridiculous scripts, the farfetched events they portray, their unnatural characters, their desultory relationships, their absurd plots, their plethora of *metamorphoses* and *inconsistencies*, their lack of *unity of interest*, their shocking incidents, their exaggerated acts—in all these respects they are fantasies that exist only in dreams. (Italicized words here and below are given in Chinese characters but provided with English glosses).[7]

Japanese drama, in short, exhibits a dreamlike view of life, where fantasy is not distinguished from reality and it is impossible to reason why events happen or characters act the way they do. Life may seem like a dream, Shōyō continued, but we need to make sense of it, and so too with drama. Only fools and madmen would take pleasure in the purely irrational. Shakespeare's plays, he goes on, are "tragedies of *character*" (*seikaku no higeki*), whereas Japanese history plays are typically "dramas of *intrigue*" (*kyakushoku-geki*) or of *fate* (*shukumei-geki*). In such plays,

> Events have no causal relationship and characters have no *individuality*. In Shakespeare's masterpieces, at the same time that there is interest (*umami*) in each and every act, there is an overlying idea (*honshi*) running through the entire work which gives rise to a kind of microcosm, but the ingenuity of our drama, while rich in interest particular to each act, completely lacks any overlying idea.[8]

The pleasure afforded by traditional Japanese theatre, Shōyō acknowledged, lay in its "remarkable variety, not only of *appearance*, but also of *tone*," its ability within the course of an entire play or program to run the gamut of human emotions, with "sudden swings from the severe to the salacious, from the refined and elegant to the ludicrous, now virtuous, now violent, now awesome, now weird, never just one thing or another."[9]

This paratactic instinct, a taste for variety over cohesion, was underscored in late Edo culture by two dramaturgical trends in kabuki. One was *naimaze*, the technique of "twisting together" separate narrative strands, often discrete plot lines with quite independent casts of characters that would be familiar to audiences from other plays.[10] The other trend militating

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[7] Tsubouchi Shōyō, "Wagakuni no shigeki," in Nomura Takashi and Fujiki Hiroyuki, eds., *Engekiron, Kindai bungaku hyōron taikei*, vol.9 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1985), 49. Shōyō's essay was serialized in *Waseda bungaku*, October 1893-March 1894, with related criticism subsequently published in *Waseda bungaku, Taiyō*, and other journals. For a discussion of Shōyō's essay, see Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, vol. 2 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 410-11.

[8] Tsubouchi, "Wagakuni no shigeki," 51.

[9] Tsubouchi, "Wagakuni no shigeki," 51.

[10] This is a device not strange to Hollywood. It is lampooned in "Luxury Lounge," an episode of *The Sopranos*, in which Christopher Moltisanti attempts to pedal an idea for a screenplay on Ben Kingsley, describing it as "*The Ring* meets *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*." "Luxury Lounge," Episode 72, Season 6 of *The*

against structural, stylistic or thematic unity was called *midori*: breaking up multi-act history plays, dramas which we have seen were already loosely structured, then shuffling them together in a kind of "best of" program with isolated acts from *sewamono* and dance plays. For Edo more than for Kamigata (Osaka and Kyoto) audiences, performances of favorite actors trumped plot. The *midori* program is still typically the way a kabuki production is put together. Presenting multi-act dramas in their entirety (*tōshi-kyōgen*) is still rather exceptional, often reserved for such plays as *Chūshingura* and it is a relatively recent phenomenon of somewhat antiquarian instincts.[11]

Shōyō recommended three measures for a more fundamental reform of Japanese drama: 1) Make a clear distinction between dramatic and narrative modes; 2) Strive for greater structural consistency: a "unity of *interest*" that is equivalent to the theme or action of the drama; and 3) Make character the mainspring and rationale for all actions and events of the drama.[12] In short, Shōyō attempted to create a discrete literary genre for drama predicated on a more individuated portrayal of human character, where the self is constructed out of conflict with other emerging selves.[13] Moreover, he advocates a strong, cohesive and rational structure in which a logical, cause-and-effect sequence of events is constructed out of the actions of individual characters. This creates an aesthetic of unity and purity, in contrast to the hybrid, episodic and discursive beauty of kabuki and *jōruri*. At the same time, in contrast to kabuki's aesthetics of surfaces, Shōyō pointed toward a dramaturgy of interiors that attempted to anatomize the human soul.

The romantic poet and critic Kitamura Tōkoku (1868-1894) also stepped into the debate, with an essay called "Gekishi no zento ikaga" (What Lies Ahead for Drama?) that appeared in the December 1893 issue of his journal *Bungakukai* while Shōyō's "Our Nation's Historical Drama" was still being serialized in the pages of *Waseda bungaku*. Where Shōyō saw a lack of overall coherence to the structure of a kabuki play, Tōkoku praised what he called its "*symmetrical harmony*" (*seigōteki chōwa*; here too English glosses are given for the Chinese characters), a harmony achieved by a highly refined synthesis of movement (dance), music (*narimono*), gesture, dialogue, narration (*chobo*), and so on.[14] Japanese dramaturgy was, nonetheless, a slave to such harmony of rhythmic and choreographic form. Tōkoku praised kabuki dance, but noted that it was designed to highlight the art of the actor, and in performance one forgets all about the character the actor is playing and even the plot, becoming enthralled in, as it were, a moving painting (*katsudōteki kaiga*). Subordinating the actions of the dramatis personae to choreographed movement and instrumental accompaniment destroys any attempt at realistic identification of the actor in the role, hence action is predicated on aesthetic principles

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Sopranos (a production of HBO Original Programming, Brad Grey Television and Chase Films), written by Matthew Weiner and directed by Danny Leiner.

[11] For a discussion of how *naimaze* and the tastes of Edo audiences resisted the development of realism, see Megumi Inoue, "Why Did *Sewamono* Not Grow into Modern Realist Theatre?" in David Jortner, Keiko McDonald, and Kevin J. Wetmore Jr., eds., *Modern Japanese Theatre and Performance* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 3-15. Brandon and Leiter discuss the impact of *midori* programming on kabuki in James Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter, eds., *Kabuki Plays on Stage*, vol. 4: *Restoration and Reform*, 1872-1905 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 32-36.

[12] Tsubouchi, "Wagakuni no shigeki," 57.

[13] This idea is developed further in Tsubouchi's *Bijironkō* (1892). See Ochi Haruo, *Meiji Taishō no gekibungaku* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō), 23, 28 passim.

[14] Kitamura Tōkoku, "Gekishi no zento ikaga," in Katsumoto Sei'ichirō, ed., *Tōkoku zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1964), 335-336. Note that the term Tōkoku uses for "drama" in not *gikyoku* but *gekishi*, which means something like "dramatic poetry."

quite alien to how drama was understood in the West. (*Drama*, after all, means "action" in Greek, but in Aristotle the term refers chiefly to the plot.) The spirit of Japanese theatre, Tōkoku stresses, is to highlight theatrical events, not the actions of the stage characters. Dance, which exemplifies the aesthetic of kabuki, in short, is scenic, but it is not dramatic.[15] The knot tying movement to music must be disentangled before real reform can be seen. If the new drama is to become a "mimetic art" (*mokeiteki bijutsu*), then it will require the concerted work of playwrights independent of kabuki and its conventions working in concert with *zatsuki sakusha*, traditional kabuki scriptwriters.[16] In the coming decades, kabuki conventions would prove resistant to such "reforms" and *shinpa*, then *shingeki* would take its place as the theatrical form best suited for the expression of modernity.

In sum, modern drama, as it emerged in the West and was understood in Japan, had several common features (or at least ideals), including: coherent and rationally constructed plots; realistic, psychologically delineated and fully individuated characters, struggling for self-determination in a harsh and antagonistic society; colloquial, matter of fact dialogue; and a minimum or complete lack of musical, choreographic or spectacular effects. Györgi Lukacs has described how the new dramaturgy created by Ibsen and his contemporaries in Europe reflected the destabilization of relations, values, ways of being and means of production inaugurated during the enlightenment and brought to fruition under industrialization during the nineteenth century.

> New conflicts result from the new patterning of sensibility, and this at precisely the juncture where, in the old order of society, the relation of higher to lower rank (master to servant, husband to wife, parents to children, etc.) found stability. . . . What kind of man does this life produce, and how can he be depicted dramatically? What is his destiny, what typical events will reveal it, how can these events be given adequate expression?[17]

Modern dramaturgy was, above all, a dramaturgy of consciousness, of self-awareness. The force of awakening individual identity began to replace the role of destiny or God in determining personal agency. We have seen how, for Shōyō, character supplants destiny or "intrigue" as the engine of drama. In the new drama, self-realization became a personal goal but also a problem, however. The strong individuals of traditional drama ironically give way in the modern drama to an individualism of powerless people. The lack of a common mythology thrusts the stage hero back upon himself to question every event that happens, every act he must take. Hamlet's introspection thus stands in high relief to the instinctive action of renaissance revenge plays, or for that matter the hyperbolic emotions and energies of kabuki or *shinpa* stage characters. As the modern world rationalized human relations, however, individual identity became abstracted and relationships between people became more impersonal. Family and other social ties become insuperable constraints for the heroes and heroines of the new drama. In a world with no longer any enduring mythology, the individual herself becomes problematized. How is drama possible in a world in which true, free action becomes increasingly impossible?

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[15] Kitamura, "Gekishi no zento ikaga," 337.
[16] Kitamura, "Gekishi no zento ikaga," 338-39, 340-41.
[17] Györgi Lukacs, "The Sociology of Modern Drama" (1914), Leo Baxandall trans., in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1968), 439-440.

> Every suffering is really an action directed within, and every action which is directed against destiny assumes the form of suffering. . . . The heroes of the new drama—in comparison to the old—are more passive than active; they are acted upon more than they act for themselves; they defend rather than attack; their heroism is mostly a heroism of anguish, of despair, not one of bold aggressiveness. Since so much of the inner man has fallen prey to destiny, the last battle is to be enacted within.[18]

"Survival as an individual, the integrity of individuality, becomes the vital centre of drama. Indeed, the bare fact of Being begins to turn tragic," Lukacs adds.[19] The passivity of the modern hero presented a substantial problem for a modern dramaturgy, however. In shifting focus from outward, aggressive action to inward, passive suffering, the appropriate medium of artistic expression became less dramatic and more epic or lyrical. The new drama thus took on more the qualities of the modern novel, with its focus on the inner thought processes of its protagonists.

Thus, as drama began to emulate the experience of reading fiction, there was an anti-theatrical trend to the production of modern drama in Japan. Theatergoing increasingly resembled and even enacted the literary experience. At Tsubouchi Shōyō's appropriately named Bungei kyōkai (Literary Theatre) productions, spectators would often bring the texts of plays and follow along.[20] A remark by Osanai Kaoru about Gerhart Hauptmann's *Lonely Lives* (Einsamme Menschen)—a work to which the protagonist of Tayama Katai's "The Quilt" (Futon, 1906) turns obsessively for inspiration—pretty much sums up the new anti-theatrical dramaturgy. Osanai said of this signature work of German naturalism that it was "a play that is not a play, in the sense that there are no occasions for acting."[21] At the same time, theatre was pressed into the service of conveying a "message" that was ultimately more intellectual, even ideological, than sensual. Indeed, the theatre became, to an extent to which it had never been before in Japan, a forum for the illustration of social problems and the exploration of ideas and possible solutions. Modern dialogue drama, like fiction, became a medium for the personal expression, above all, of its author. Accordingly, the status of the playwright rose over that of the actor, who increasingly was called upon to deliver faithfully the words as they had been written (and frequently printed) down. By the same token, however, much of the fun of theatre going was lost, and increasingly the experience of seeing a play was like being taught sometimes harsh and frequently boring lessons in modern life. A number of the dramatists themselves were not entirely happy with this turn of events. Tanizaki, for one, professed that he preferred an "art rich in sensual pleasures over that with deep intellectual content." Hence, he favored kabuki over Ibsen, whose impact on modern Japanese audiences had been profound but was "liable to give them bad dreams." The experience of going to the modern theatre—being forced to sit still quietly and listen without the accompanying pleasures of food, tobacco, or alcohol, and no music or dance, just a lot of talking—was too much like school. And so, Tanizaki claimed, "if I want to see a play these days, I still run to kabuki, even though I'm not entirely satisfied with it. In any case, there I can

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[18] Lukacs, "The Sociology of Modern Drama," 429.
[19] Lukacs, "The Sociology of Modern Drama," 433.
[20] Kitami Harukazu, cited in Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender, and Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 160.
[21] Cited in Gioia Ottaviani, "Difference and Reflexivity: Osanai Kaoru and the *shingeki* movement," *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1994), 220.

see richer colors, more beautiful physical action than I can on the modern or *shinpa* stages."[22] In its quest for a more rational, intellectual and literate experience, modern Japanese theatre thus lost its traditional connection with the body.

Despite close to a generation of interest in the form (roughly from the 1880s to the 1920s), it would seem that drama missed its moment as a genre that defined the modern. The Meiji era was a crossroads of experimentation, where the public, theatrical and performative culture of Edo was eventually exchanged for a literary culture of private reading and appreciation of written texts. In his introduction to a seminal essay by Maeda Ai on the transformation of reading practices in the Meiji era, James Fujii notes that the second decade of Meiji (roughly the 1880s) opened "the nation to modernity as a moment of failed community where solitary reading and privatization echo the silencing of not just reading, but of the sociality that found brief expression in the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement" of Nakae Chōmin.[23] Maeda describes how the spread of publications in moveable type and the rise in literacy levels revolutionized the practice of writing and its reception in the Meiji era. "Interest in the literary arts had been nurtured by oral literary traditions," including kabuki, that emphasized the performative, rhythmic and material qualities of language over its semantic or mimetic value.[24] The 1880s and early '90s were thus a turning point in the shift from an oral and public, to a literate and private culture in Japan as it underwent modernization. Shōyō remarked in 1891 that "the ancients 'read' the works of others with their ears, while people today enjoy the benefit of reading with their eyes," adding that the new practice of private reading "must follow the principle of excavating the deep significance of the text."[25] Literary and artistic practices increasingly emphasized language's function as a medium for representation, where the aim of artistic expression is not so much to portray appealing patterns or colorful surfaces but rather lay bare the interiors of the human soul. This was a process of introversion that Karatani Kōjin has called the "discovery of interiority," a concept which he claims was ultimately a linguistic construct. It is thus no coincidence that literary efforts moved away from highly figurative lyric or prose, classical diction and musical or rhythmic effects, toward prosaic locutions and plain speech—in short, toward the creation of a modern vernacular literature: *genbun'itchi*, literally the "unification of the vernacular and literary."[26] Accordingly, there was a shift away from the voice of the actor, reciter or storyteller to the authorial "voice" of the text itself. Increasingly, then, the purpose of a literary work, whether fiction, poetry or drama, would be to articulate what Shōyō called the author's "true intent" (*hon'i*) or subjectivity.

Whether language reform "discovered" modern subjectivity or the quest for interiority demanded a new idiom of expression is beside the point. Rather, what I would stress here is that this overall trend was essentially *anti-theatrical*. An anti-theatrical quality evident in the contours of modern drama itself permeated the culture of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Japan, just as it has Europe's. As language was severed from the voice, both literary and theatrical expression became alienated from physicality. Despite kabuki's dominance over

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[22] Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, "Gekijō no setsubi ni taisuru kibō" (My Hopes in Regard to the Theatre, 1913) in Tanizaki Jun'chirō, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, vol. 22 (Tokyo: Chūō kōron, 1982), 10-11.

[23] James Fujii, "Introduction: Refiguring the Modern: Maeda Ai and the City" in Maeda Ai, *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*, translation edited by James Fujii (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 223.

[24] Maeda, *Text and the City*, 227, 228.

[25] Tsubouchi Shōyō, "Dokusho o okosan to suru shui"(A Prospectus for the Encouragement of Reading), quoted in Maeda, *Text and the City*, 234.

[26] For a detailed discussion of *genbun itchi*, see Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, translation edited by Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 39-40; 45-75.

popular culture, aesthetic standards began to shift radically during the Meiji era. Rhetorically speaking, modernity found expression in Japanese literature through the devices of confession and dialogue: the former gave rise to personal fiction (*watakushi-shōsetsu*), the latter to the language of modern *shingeki* drama. The eventual victory of monologic expression over the dialogic imagination is an important reason for the literary precedence of fiction over drama in early twentieth-century Japan. As a consequence, *shōsetsu* (fiction) began to replace *shibai* (the play) as the paradigm of cultural expression. And by the same token, there was a narrowing of subject matter and attenuation of plot, with an, often claustrophobic focus on modern subjectivity, creating by the 1920s the "plotless fiction" that novelist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke would praise as the sign of "pure literature." Modern Japanese cultural expression thus moved from a polyphonic or dialogic mode of narrative to something closer to internal monologue; at its most extreme, plot is abandoned for a lyrical exploration of consciousness in the "I-novel."