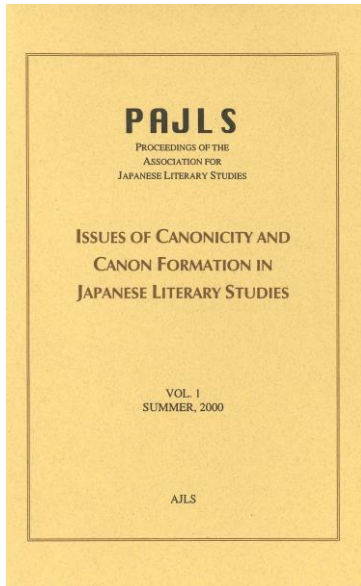


“In Search of Insignificance? Modern Literary Anthologies, Premodern Genres, and the Failed Canonization of Uchida Hyakken”

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IN SEARCH OF INSIGNIFICANCE?
MODERN LITERARY ANTHOLOGIES, PREMODERN GENRES,
AND THE FAILED CANONIZATION OF UCHIDA HYAKKEN

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In an influential critical essay from 1948, the modernist writer and literary critic Itō Sei lamented that Uchida Hyakken (1889-1971) was then regarded as “outside the lineage of modern Japanese literature.”¹ Speaking from the personal experience of someone working on Hyakken, Itō’s assessment continues to ring true today, in a world where Uchida Hyakken remains somewhat of an unknown. Whenever I speak or write about Hyakken I find myself introducing him as Uchida Hyakken, the short story writer, Uchida Hyakken, the Sōseki disciple, Uchida Hyakken, the Taishō literary figure—attempting to contextualize him for the audience. My reluctance to let Hyakken’s name stand on its own is symptomatic of his minor status in the canon, or what I term his “failed canonization.”

I have a working theory that perhaps one reason Uchida Hyakken remains a minor figure is because he wrote in genres which were retrospectively defined as non-canonical. In other words, he did not write *shōsetsu* or novels. Rather, he penned *zuihitsu* (miscellany), *nikki* (diaries), *kikōbun* (travel writings), genres which, although they are commonly associated with premodern or pre-1868 literature, were a central part of Taishō experiments in first-person narration. These are also highbrow prose genres which have since been removed or disassociated from the modern canon.² The question here arises: What exactly is the modern canon?

¹ Itō Sei, “‘Shōten’ kaisetsu,” *Uchida Hyakken: Yume to warai*, vol. 22 of *Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō shinshū*, ed. Sakai Hideyuki (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1986), 11. Itō’s exact words are: “Futsū Hyakken wa Nihon no gendai bungaku no keifu igai no tokoro ni iru sakka da to iwarete iru.”

² We often think of poetry or low-brow prose as genres left out of the canon, but this is not the case.

One way to define or, more specifically, to locate the canon is by referencing the various anthologies of modern literature or *Kindai/Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū*. The relationship between prestigious literary anthologies and the canon remains undefined, and one cannot unequivocally say that inclusion in an anthology means that a work or writer has arrived at canonical status, but certainly these multi-volume sets, by virtue of their existence and availability, guide who gets read and who does not.³

On a surface level, the physical layout of an anthology identifies the important figures in literary history. A visual scan indicates that certain authors occupy their own volume, or multiple volumes, while others are grouped in threes, fives, eights, or even twelves. More often than not, those in the single-author volumes are major figures, such as Sōseki, Akutagawa, Tanizaki, or Shiga, authors who need no introduction. Writers like Hyakken, however, are what I call “bookend volumes” and are forced to share space with other lesser-knowns.⁴ But even among the minor writers, Hyakken fares better than some, such as Wakayama Bokusui, who shares a volume with eleven others, or Edogawa Rampo, who is not represented at all.⁵

Does placement in a shared volume indicate lesser status? If we were to read only those single-name volumes, what picture of the canon would we derive? Charles Altieri, in his well-known essay “An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon,” implies that skipping the minor writers would not overly impact our view of literature, “because they neither provided significant types exemplifying wisdom or craft nor influenced those whom we think did.”⁶ I find Altieri’s remark misleading, because he assumes the existence of a neutral and invariable arbiter of major and minor status. However, the addition and deletion of writers from the various anthologies indicates that the canonization process changes over time and creates new criteria.

³ It is possible to think of these *zenshū* as somewhat analogous to the *Norton Anthology* series.

⁴ Hyakken usually shares space with Morita Sōhei, Naka Kansuke, Suzuki Miekichi, and Terada Torahiko.

⁵ For Wakayama Bokusui see volume 28 of Chikuma’s *Gendai Nihon bungaku taikai*, 1968-1973.

⁶ Charles Altieri, “An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon,” *Canons*, ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 52.

Another problem with the *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū* is that they erase genre differences by subsuming everything under the heading of “bungaku,” a heading which is simultaneously too broad and too narrow, because it not only erases differences across genres, but it deletes those genres deemed inappropriate or unworthy. In this regard, it is instructive to look at other genre-specific anthologies for clues on literary classification. Uchida Hyakken appears in a variety of anthologies, including:

Nihon dōwa meisaku senshū, Shinchōsha (1940s)

Gendai Nihon zuihitsushū, Chikuma (1950s)

Gendai kikō bungaku zenshū, Shūdōsha (1959)

Gendai haiku taikai, Kadokawa (1972)

Gendai Nihon no yūmoa bungaku, Rippu (1980)

Shōwa no entateimento 50 hen, Bungei shunjū (1989)

Zen Nihon binbō monogatari, Fukutake (1991)

Sekai SF zenshū, Hayakawa (1971)

It is noteworthy that all of these anthology titles suggest genres or modes separate from, even inferior to, “pure literature” (*junbungaku*). Hyakken is a difficult writer to categorize, since he wrote in a variety of styles ranging from children’s stories to war diaries, *zuihitsu*, poetry, travelogues, and fictional short stories. However, the most commonly cited and anthologized of Hyakken’s many short story collections is his maiden work *Meido* (Realm of the Dead) (1922). Despite the fact that stories from this collection appear more than any other, it is far from representative of his style. Its predominance in anthologies and critical studies also belies its poor reception in the Taishō period, a testament to the fact that anthologies of modern literature do not necessarily reflect an author’s literary style or reception history. At this juncture, I would like to look briefly at Hyakken’s early publication history.

Hyakken debuted in January 1921 with a selection of six stories in the literary journal *Shinshōsetsu*.⁷ Later that month Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

⁷ The stories “Realm of the Dead,” “Santō Kyōden” (Santō Kyōden), “Hanabi” (Fireworks), “Kudan” (Kudan), “Dote” (The Embankment), and “Hyō” (The Leopard) appeared under the title “Realm of the Dead.” For information on Hyakken’s publishing history see Morita Sakan, *The Hyakkien-nōto: Oboegaki Hyakkien nōto: Shoshi Uchida Hyakken chō* (Tokyo: Tsugaru shobō, 1975).

praised Hyakken for his innovation: had Hyakken been “in the dustbin of the *bundan* breathing the same air as the rest of us, he would never have been able to write these [dream] stories.”⁸ Akutagawa’s kind words, however, did little to temper the poor critical reception from other quarters.

Hyakken added twelve stories to the original six and produced his first collection, the aforementioned *Meido* in 1922. It was not only a critical failure, but a personal embarrassment—in an effort to give the collection a new, fresh feel, the publisher deleted the page numbers. This novelty trick, however, backfired when they botched the printing job by misaligning the pages in the final copies, leaving consumer and critic alike equally baffled. Hyakken’s hopes for a reprint were dashed when the press proofs for *Meido* were destroyed in the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Normally, a book could be reset, but Hyakken lacked the financial and literary clout necessary to secure a reprint.⁹

Eleven years passed before Hyakken published another volume of stories, which he finally did in 1933 with *Hyakkien zuihitsu* (Hyakkien’s Miscellany), a collection of essays loosely based on the fictional alter ego Fujita Hyakkien. Takeuchi Michinosuke, founder of the Mikasa publishing house, described the reluctance on the part of the publishers to take on the financial risk of printing a collection of Hyakken’s *zuihitsu*. Takeuchi convinced his brother-in-law to print the text and, to save on costs, Takeuchi set the type himself.¹⁰ The reluctance of other publishers proved to be unfounded, and Takeuchi’s gamble paid off. Twenty days after publication the poet Murō Saisei praised the work in the prominent daily, the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* (November 24, 1933):

Hyakkien zuihitsu is exceptional. Unlike popular literature where you are lucky to remember one page in a hundred, Uchida

⁸ Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, “Meido,” in *Kaisō Uchida Hyakken*, ed. Hirayama Saburō (Tokyo: Tsugaru shobō, 1975), 15.

⁹ For information on the first printing of *Meido*, see Hirayama Saburō, *Hyakkien sensei zakkichō* (Tokyo: Mikasa shobō, 1969), 56, 59.

¹⁰ The success of *Hyakkien zuihitsu* secured the financial future of the then-small Mikasa publishing house. Hyakken’s book was only their second publication. Takeuchi Michinosuke, “*Hyakkien zuihitsu gaiden*,” *Kaisō Uchida Hyakken*, ed. Hirayama Saburō (Tokyo: Tsugaru shobō, 1975).

Hyakken is the kind of author whose work stays with you right up through page 99. There is much I can learn from him.¹¹

Hyakkien zuihitsu sold extremely well and was reprinted more than ten times.¹² The success of this work helped secure a reprint of Hyakken's maiden collection *Meido*, allowed him to publish his early Taishō era diaries, and launched his career as a *zuihitsu* writer.¹³

As a measure of Hyakken's success in the 1930s, we can point to the publication of a six-volume collected works entitled *Zenshū Hyakken zuihitsu* (November 1936-April 1937),¹⁴ contracts with major publishers such as Iwanami and Chūō kōron, and large-run publications with numerous reprints.¹⁵ Hyakken resigned from Hōsei University in 1934, and although his reason for quitting was unrelated to his literary success, obviously he was able to make a living without the university paycheck.¹⁶ The great upswing in Hyakken's market value between the 1920s and 1930s is evident in the following advertisement for an anthology titled *Daienkai* (The Banquet), which appeared in the front page of the August 1935 issue of *Arabesuku*, a special edition featuring ten essays on Hyakken.

One of a kind, a writer without rival in all of Japanese literature
—Who can compare to Uchida Hyakken? The comparison can
be drawn with Poe and Hoffmann, but can Hyakken be so readily
summed up? Certainly not! For isn't Hyakken more than just

¹¹ Murō Saisei, "Hyakkien zuihitsu," *Uchida Hyakken: Yume to warai*, vol. 22 of *Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō shinshū*, ed. Sakai Hideyuki (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1986), 153.

¹² Kawamura Jirō and Irokawa Takeō, "Uchida Hyakken no Fukkatsu," *Bungakukai* (March 1985):186. Also see Morita, 4.

¹³ Kawamura Jirō addresses the relationship between the *zuihitsu* and diaries. See *Uchida Hyakken ron: muimi no namida* (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1983), 54.

¹⁴ Stories from *Meido* are included in volume six.

¹⁵ See Morita for publishing information.

¹⁶ Hyakken tendered his resignation and was officially fired from Hōsei as a result of the well-publicized "Hōsei Disturbance" (Hōsei sōdō). For details and excerpts of newspaper articles regarding this scandal, see Sakai Hideyuki, *Uchida Hyakken: "Hyakki" no yuraku* (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1993), 255-63.

literature? One who eludes even the conceptual grasp of criticism
—This is Uchida Hyakken!

This may appear to be overblown copy, but the existence of the advertisement and the reference it makes to the well-known western authors Poe and Hoffman are noteworthy.¹⁷

By the 1940s, Hyakken's work was being printed in volumes of 9,000-10,000 copies, quite a change from the limited 500-edition runs of his early collections. Given this flourishing of literary activity, it is curious that Itō Sei found Hyakken to be "outside the lineage of modern Japanese literature." If anything, Hyakken seems to have made an impressive application for membership into literary history. He fulfilled many of the prerequisites for a modern author: as a youth he contributed to influential literary journals such as *Bunshō sekai*; he allied himself with Natsume Sōseki, mentor to many of the up-and-coming literary elite; as a member of Sōseki's circle he mixed with well-known contemporaries such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke; he held a prestigious university position at Hōsei; he had a special issue of a literary journal dedicated to him; he had his fiction reprinted and anthologized numerous times; and he published in influential journals such as *Bungei shunjū*, *Chūō kōron*, *Shinshōsetsu*, *Bungakukai*, and *Shinchō*.

Itō's remarks lead us to believe that Hyakken's writing up to that point was regarded as insignificant or peripheral. But upon what criteria was this judgment made? One mark of significance was inclusion in Kaizosha's influential *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū*, a sixty-three-volume series printed between 1926 and 1931. Hyakken is not in this anthology, but this is not surprising, since his fame postdates its compilation. However, shortly after Itō's remarks in 1948, Hyakken was anthologized in Chikuma's prestigious 1958 *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū* and again in 1967 in Kōdansha's somewhat revisionist *Nihon gendai bungaku zenshū*. The 1950s, in fact, represent one of the peaks in Hyakken anthologization, his works appearing in fourteen separate collections. But this pales in comparison to the 1980s-early

¹⁷ Other advertisements of note include a volumes on Nietzsche studies, Dostoyevsky and Modern Consciousness, Hegel, and an Anthology of Contemporary Soviet Literature. Mikasa, the company that printed Hyakken's anthology, had planned to print Hoffmann's collected works (6 vols.) in 1936, in which would have included one of Hyakken's translations (*Hirayama Hyakkien sensei zakkichō*, 53).

1990s “Hyakken boom,” during which time he was anthologized in fifty-eight collections.¹⁸

It is ironic that given this flourishing Hyakken remains a minor figure. He is somewhat better known in Japan, but perhaps more through films such as Suzuki Seijun’s critically-acclaimed *Tsigoneruwaizen* (Zigeunerweisen) (1980) and Kurosawa Akira’s *Maada da yo* (Not Yet!) (1993) than through his literature.¹⁹ There are no translations of Hyakken in English, and outside of a couple of footnote references, he is all but unknown in the English-speaking West.

However, certainly in terms of his publishing history, Hyakken was successful in the 1930s and 1940s. Part of the difficulty in evaluating Itō’s remarks may lie in the conception of what constitutes literature in the prewar years. Postwar literary histories both in English and Japanese have traditionally led us to believe that the Taishō-early Shōwa period was dominated by the self-centered, semi-confessional narratives of the *watakushi shōsetsu* or I-novel.²⁰ In such a scheme, there is little space for authors like Hyakken

¹⁸ A new thirty-three-volume edition of Hyakken’s collected works was printed between 1986 and 1989. Kawamura Jirō’s *Uchida Hyakken ron* received the Yomiuri literary prize in 1984. Six reprints of Hyakken’s original publications were issued in the 1980s and sixteen between 1990 and 1994. Hyakken’s fiction was also reprinted in anthologized versions, with eighteen appearing in the 1980s and sixteen between 1990 and 1994. Publication history for Hyakken is from Morita, which only covers up to 1994.

¹⁹ Suzuki’s film was based on Hyakken’s story “Sarasaate no ban” (The Sarasate Recording) (1949), and Kurosawa’s was about Hyakken’s annual birthday party called “Maada kai.”

²⁰ Edward Fowler states: “the *shishōsetsu* so dominated the Taishō literary world that the phrase ‘Taishō literature’ (*Taishō bungaku*) now connotes its heyday” (Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 128). Nakamura Mitsuo defines Taishō history as both the development and the eventual stagnation of the *shishōsetsu* (Nakamura Mitsuo, *Nihon no kindai shōsetsu* [Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 1954], 143). Tomi Suzuki talks about the power of the *watakushi shōsetsu* as a signifier and its relationship to the privileged status of the novel (Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996]). For a revisionist perspective on the I-novel and pure literature, see Suzuki Sadami, “Junbungaku to taishū bungaku,”

who did not write I-novels or, for that matter, orthodox novels in general; instead he focused on genres more commonly associated with pre-1868 literature, the *zuihitsu*, *nikki* and *kikōbun*.

The appearance of such premodern genres in the prewar period was not unusual; rather, these years witnessed a proliferation of personal narratives, be they in the form of *zuihitsu*, private diaries, fictional diaries, I-novels, or journalistic exposes (*bakuromono*). This was also the time during which the Japanese were reevaluating premodern literature as part of the larger project of constructing a national literary history. Odagiri Susumu, in his two-part study *Kindai Nihon no nikki*, discusses late Taishō as a time when critics such as Kaitō Matsuzō, Hisamatsu Sen'ichi, and Ikeda Kikan reevaluated and promoted Heian's women's diaries as "literature" and elevated them to a key position in the classical canon.²¹

In conjunction with the recognition of premodern diaries came a surge in diary writing by modern authors. Although diaries had been written in Meiji, Taishō *nikki* are more varied and plentiful.²² Odagiri discusses the diaries of Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Arishima Takeo, Shiga Naoya, Tokutomi Roka, Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Kawabata Yasunari.²³ Famous literary diaries from Taishō include Ishikawa Taku-boku's *Rōmaji nikki* (Romaji Diary) (1909) and Hayashi Fumiko's *Hōrōki* (Vagabond's Song) (1927). But perhaps the most influential Taishō diary is Abe Jirō's *Santarō no nikki* (Santarō's Diary) (1914), a work which, although it calls itself a diary, exploits the diary's form, content, author-subject identity, and narrative voice. Stephen Kohl tells us that "through the Taishō and prewar years of the Shōwa periods, *The Diary of Santarō* proved to be an immensely popular work read avidly by young intellectuals, providing them with a new realm for philosophical speculation."²⁴ Iwanami obviously agreed, printing thirty editions between 1914 and 1943.

Bungakukai (October 1993): 170-92.

²¹ Odagiri Susumu, *Kindai Nihon no nikki: Meiji kara Taishō e* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984), 13-15.

²² Odagiri Susumu, *Zoku Kindai Nihon no nikki* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 255.

²³ See Odagiri, *Zoku Kindai Nihon no nikki* for the diaries of other modern writers.

²⁴ Stephen Kohl, "Abe Jirō and *The Diary of Santarō*," *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals During the Interwar Years*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 9-10.

Kawamura speculates that *Santarō no nikki* influenced Hyakken in the writing of his own diary, *Hyakkien nikkichō* (Hyakkien's Diary) (1935).²⁵ As mentioned previously, strong sales of Hyakken's *zuihitsu* facilitated the publication of the diary, and perhaps the two modes of writing are not unrelated. *Zuihitsu* also enjoyed a resurgence in the immediate post-quake years of the mid-1920s and developed into a full-fledged phenomenon by the early 1930s. *Zuihitsu* columns began appearing in literary publications such as *Bungei shunjū*, and in 1923 an entire journal was dedicated to and named after the genre. One author who often graced the *zuihitsu* column in *Bungei shunjū* is Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. But why is it that his oft-quoted essay "Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na" (Literary, All Too Literary) (1927) is no longer discussed as *zuihitsu*?²⁶ Did later editors feel the need to sever this work from its seemingly premodern designation? If so, this need does not seem to have been apparent in the period under discussion.

An awareness of and appreciation for the premodern can be found in the remarks of the modernist poet Hagiwara Sakutarō, who described Hyakken's *zuihitsu* as "gems on a par with the classical *Hōjōki* and *Makura no sōshi*, both in terms of their poetic beauty and consummate literary form."²⁷ Hyakken himself consciously looked back to his premodern predecessors when naming his 1947 *zuihitsu* collection, about his wartime experience living in an abandoned shed in Tokyo, titled *Shinhōjōki* (The New Account of My Hut). This is not to say that Hyakken was writing in the classical language or speaking in the voice of a Kamo no Chōmei or Yoshida Kenkō.

²⁵ Kawamura, 68. Hyakken's diary covers the years 1917-1922.

²⁶ This essay constitutes one half of the well-known literary debate between Tanizaki and Akutagawa. "Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na" appeared in the April, May, June, and August 1927 issues of the journal *Kaizō*. However, the sections now referred to as "Zoku Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na" were published in *Bungei shunjū's zuihitsu* column in April and July of 1927. Given the similarities in form and topic, it is possible to consider the *Kaizo* entries as *zuihitsu* as well. It is also worth noting that Tanizaki's contribution, "Jōzetsu roku," is referred to as a serialized *zuihitsu*.

²⁷ Hagiwara Sakutarō, "Suisenbun," *Kaisō Uchida Hyakken*, ed. Hirayama Saburō (Tokyo: Tsugaru shobō, 1975), 445-46. The essay originally appeared in *Zenshū Hyakken zuihitsu*.

Hyakken's *zuihitsu* are modern and demonstrate a very conscious use, perhaps exploitation, of the twentieth-century personal narrative most commonly represented by the I-novel. In a work such as *Hyakkien zuihitsu*, Hyakken problematized the author-subject identification process. He encourages us to use his real life as a subtext for understanding his *zuihitsu*, to identify him with his protagonist Fujita Hyakkien, and to accept *zuihitsu* as nonfictional. However, at the same time, he works to undermine these assumptions, as seen in the opening line of his 1929 "Tonbodama" (Dragonfly Sphere): "The word I here refers to the I of the story, not to the author himself."²⁸

It may not be possible to pinpoint the forces that render an author major or minor. But, one way to approach this issue is to explore the relationship between genre and canonization. We can begin by sketching out the differences between the premodern and modern forms of genres such as the *nikki* and *zuihitsu*.²⁹ It is not safe to assume they are the same. But there is also a need to go beyond these narrow genre and historical distinctions in order to see how so-called premodern genres interacted with the discursive system of the modern era. The early twentieth century was a time during which the Japanese were reevaluating their literary past as they began writing their own literary histories. Perhaps their evaluations of premodern literature comment more on modern literary conceptions than on intrinsic qualities of ancient texts. And perhaps it was these modern texts that facilitated the recognition of premodern works.³⁰

Taishō was an era of great literary experimentation in form, genre, and modes of expression. Many of the same issues we bring to the table when discussing the I-novel are relevant for the *zuihitsu* and the *nikki*. By including the premodern in our view of the modern, by overcoming the limitations

²⁸ Uchida Hyakken, "Tonbodama," *Uchida Hyakken zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1971), 288.

²⁹ See Irmela Hijjya-Kirschnereit's comments regarding the relationship between *zuihitsu*, *nikki*, and *watakushi shōsetsu* (Irmela Hijjya-Kirschnereit, *Rituals of Self-Revelation: Shishōsetsu as Literary Genre and Socio-Cultural Phenomenon* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996], 297-300).

³⁰ Hisamatsu Sen'ichi commented on the connection between the reemergence of the classical diary and the self-centered discourse of daily life in the now canonically modern literature of naturalism (Odagiri, *Kindai Nihon no nikki*, 14).

of the equation "modern Japanese literature = *shōsetsu* = all of modern prose," we get a much more comprehensive picture of the different discursive forms and expressive modes of the time.