“Modern Japanese Literature on Its Own Terms”

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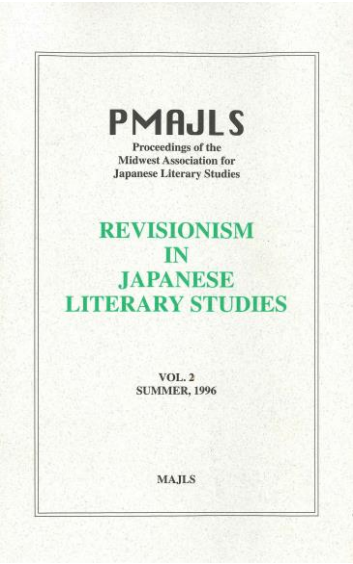

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MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE ON ITS OWN TERMS

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Since this is a conference *about* rather than *for* the advancement of theory, I am obliged to be schematic about the details of what I am here calling the terms of modern Japanese literature. Masao Miyoshi has already placed these words -- *modern, Japanese*, and *literature* -- within parentheses.[1] These are terms with a history; and an examination of their appropriateness when applied to a body of writing that is in many ways dissimilar to, for example, modern American literature has set off a lively debate which I, for one, have followed with interest. Although I am not in total agreement with Professor Miyoshi, I share the concern that the founding principles of *Nihon kindai bungaku* are somehow foreign to it. Reading its texts and examining the secondary literature, I have often wondered if the premises are mistaken, or if they have been mistakenly understood. They do seem to establish expectations in the reader that are not *native*, to use Miyoshi's provocative word.

Following Miyoshi's lead, Edward Fowler has suggested that the word *novel* is in dissonance with the term *shōsetsu*.[2] I do not need to tell this audience that *shōsetsu* itself is not originally a Japanese word. As it appears in the *Analects, hsiao-shuo*, literally

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[1] Masao Miyoshi, "Against the Native: The Japanese Novel and the 'Postmodern' West," in *Postmodernism in Japan*, eds. Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 143-168.

[2] Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

"small talk" is given value only insofar as it instructs the gentleman about the common man's situation. It is the "talk on the streets," so to speak, a discourse not properly literary at all, at least not to a Confucian regard for speech versus writing. Reflecting this Chinese disregard for fiction, Edo-period scholars of the high, such as the neo-Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), dabbled with the low as an amusement. In a similar way, Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758-1829), engineer of the Kansei Reforms which came down harshly on many a *gesakusha*, was a scribbler himself.[3]

In nineteenth-century Europe, the rise of the novel gave status to writers of fiction that could only have been unbelievable to their Japanese contemporaries. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1880), for instance, was a prime minister of Great Britain. Victor Hugo (1802-1885) was revered by the French as symbol of freedom and a champion of democracy. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), a man of wealth and education, wrote about adultery, a fact he later regretted yet one for which he gained acclaim and prestige. The journey from the picaresque novel to something more serious, what Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) called "matters of life and death," tells us that in both Europe and in Japan there was a tension between the low and the high. But for reasons that I will suggest below, the rhetorical tradition in Europe seemed to have worked this problem out more quickly than was the case in Japan. We have only to examine Takizawa Bakin's (1767-1848) *Nansō Satomi Hakkenden* (Tales of the Canine Eight, 1814-1842), to understand the cognitive dissonance caused by the paradoxical concept of "serious fiction." In the spirit of *kanzen chōaku*, praising virtue and denouncing evil, the elevation of fiction began in the

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[3] Haruko Iwasaki, "Portrait of a Daimyo: Comical Fiction by Matsudaira Sadanobu," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38:1 (Spring 1983), 1-48.

latter half of the Edo period (1600-1868). But it was not until the Meiji period (1868-1912) that the authority of the author was finally established, and then only after the example of Europeans and Americans.

Now, here is the problem. If it is true that modern Japanese literature received inspiration from and responded to western narrative conventions, how can it be inappropriate to suggest that the novel and the *shōsetsu* share an essence? Even a writer as seemingly retrograde as Izumi Kyōka (1873-1939), who proudly declared "How glad I am to owe nothing to Tolstoy!", was inescapably caught up in the larger cultural trends of the day. The novels he published were bound and printed in the western style. Like most modern novels, his *shōsetsu* were largely devoid of illustration. Though he started writing in classical Japanese, he switched to a more colloquial idiom in 1897, with a story called "Kechō" (A Bird of Many Colors) and continued within the *genbun itchi* vein until he died in 1939. Even Kyōka -- declared by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965), Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972), and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), to be Japan's most Japanese writer -- studied English and knew it well enough to teach it to others. As a young boy, he became infatuated with a missionary from Tennessee. He was fond of western cigarettes and wine made from grapes. He enjoyed western movies. And, most puzzling of all, was his penchant, as described by his close friend Teraki Teihō, to use western words as the germ for many of his stories.

When considering the historical realities of the development of *bungaku* (literature), whether in England or India or Japan, it might make sense to think of the novel as one of many cultural influences that traveled with and was an accomplice to projects of colonialism and nationalism. Miyoshi makes this

point as well: that the novel is essentially a colonialist text, as Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) *Heart of Darkness* makes very clear. In my study of the poet Ishikawa Takuboku, I present a similar argument, that the pornographic impulse in his *Diary in Roman Script* is indebted to his reading of western pornography, and that his idea of sexual conquest can only be understood in terms of the larger context of nations acquiring and exploiting lesser territories.[4] In this regard, that scholars such as Nakamura Mitsuo and Donald Keene should present the story of *Nihon kindai bungaku* as a dawning to the west seems only appropriate. Their thesis -- that modern Japanese literature developed in response to the external influence of America and Europe -- has become a *teisetsu* or orthodoxy. The distance between a work of *gesaku* such as Santō Kyōden's (1761-1816) *Meotokō* (ca 1784) and a *kindai shōsetsu* such as Shiga Naoya's (1883-1971) *An'ya kōro* (A Dark Night's Passage, 1922-37) would support this argument. Kyōden's is a densely illustrated, brief and elliptical piece. Shiga's is a massive work of sustained development.

The gap between these two works seems great. But what would be the measure that would allow us to answer why one is modern and the other is not? Speaking in defense of the orthodoxy, I must say that the modernization model does an excellent job of pointing out the difficulties of moving from one paradigm to another. Highly sensitive to the ways in which narrative conventions (and therefore modern consciousness) changed over time, this schema has located important areas of recalcitrance. Indeed, pointing out the ways in which modern Japanese literature

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[4] "In the Scopic Regime of Discovery: Ishikawa Takuboku's *Diary in Roman Script* and the Gendered Premise of Self Identity," *positions: East Asian Cultures Critique*, 2.3 (1994), 542-569.

itself is still *not quite modern* has been the accomplishment of much of the most insightful criticism that has been written since the War. Let me point out just a few important critical moments. Edward Seidensticker's "Strangely Shaped Novels: A Scattering of Examples,"[5] and Edwin McClellan's "The Impressionistic Tendency in Some Modern Japanese Writers, "[6] have contributed much to the debate by pointing out the lingering impressionistic and lyrical tendencies of modern Japanese fiction. Also helpful is Howard Hibbett's "Introspective Techniques in Modern Japanese Fiction," which locates a tendency to avoid psychological analysis in works and dramatic situations in which the reader might expect trenchant comment.[7] With less delicacy, Maruyama Masao's "From Carnal Literature to Carnal Politics" also contributes by berating the entire modern project for its lack of fictional strength. He draws a causal link between the inability of Japanese novelists to imagine life differently and oppressive political life. Though Maruyama himself admits to a limited knowledge of modern Japanese fiction, his idea that Japanese writers could not write like westerners is a provocative one, especially in light of how a painter like Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) could, in fact, paint like a westerner (see Figure One).[8]

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5 In *Studies in Japanese Culture*, ed. Joseph Roggendorf (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1963), TK.

6 *Chicago Review*, 17:4 (1965), 48-91.

7 In *Search for Identity*, ed. A.R. Davis (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 1-14.

8 In *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris, trans. Barbara Ruch, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 245-267.

Figure One:

Kuroda Seiki, "Woman with a Mandolin, 1891." Painted in Paris, while studying under Raphael Collin. Why is a painting more "tranlatable" than a novel? Setting aside the issue of interpretation, why is it easier to be graphically understood (i.e. semiotically copied) than linguistically understood?

In pointing out difference is the beginning of knowledge, one virtue of the post-structuralist critique has been its insistence that knowledge is not innocent. The hermeneutical mood of these four essays is essentially one of disappointment. We can situate each by noting how their expectations are not being met by the Japanese text. First, the flow of narrated events is slowed and even interrupted by lyrical moments of imagery. Second, rather than delving deeply into the interior of a characters' mind, the modern Japanese text is satisfied to intimate emotional states in a superficial way. And finally, rather than exploiting the imaginative possibilities of fiction, the Japanese novelist tends to fall back on what Maruyama calls a "carnal" state, a physicality that hinders the development of historical consciousness. We need only pursue the context of these three areas of expectation to realize that without an external, western point of reference they would probably not have been made. In other words, the terms of modern Japanese literature assumed here are meant to problematize the field, a function they fulfill with insight precisely because of the reasons that cause Miyoshi to place *modern Japanese literature* within quotation marks. Being essentially non-native, standards such as these make the tacit assumption that Japanese modernity owes its nature to the west, and that western narrative practice provides a standard to which the field aspires.

But maybe not. Another less accusative way to understand this highlighting of difference is to say that the English reader already has these expectations and that the Japanologist is simply pointing out a cultural difference in a (sympathetic) attempt to help the western reader of Japanese fiction understand why, for instance, Sōseki's novels read differently than Jane Austen's (1775-1817). The point in considering either of these possibilities, of course, is to raise the issue of how we understand modernity.

There are many possibilities. Certainly, one way of understanding the difference exposed by this cross-cultural reading is to consider how the Japanese text might in some way be standard and how western fiction might be the exception. This is, again, Miyoshi's point. From a world literature perspective, the narrative of past-tense/third-person is unusual, and the narrative of a hear-say/first-person is common.

Given the ease with which one can take sides in the ascribing of a normative or superlative state, the entry of politics into the construction of a world frame for modernity is perhaps unavoidable. Against the nativist grain, "unusual" in this schema might just as easily be equated with "better" or "more advanced" or, we might as well say it, "modern." Orientalism hinges on this very issue. Yet whether we are for or against conflating the modern with the west is a preoccupation that, I believe, misses the point. And this is where I must depart from Miyoshi's critique. The truth of the matter is that a more precise understanding of modernity continues to escape us because we have been unwilling to develop a theoretical model that takes advantage of that cross-cultural perspective which our present historical situation has given us. In other words, given the variety of modern experience that is observable throughout the world, and given the possibility of a state of post-modernity, is it not possible to go deep enough in our understanding of literary expression to find terms that allow us to relativize *each example* of modern discourse and thereby come closer to what might be the nature of modernity?

An opening for this project was provided by Jacques Derrida, whose preoccupation with language led him to a rigorous

critique of the western rhetorical tradition.[9] By now, Derrida's conclusions are well-known, but their ramifications for cross-cultural studies are just beginning to be understood. By suggesting the logocentric nature of the western tradition, Derrida has illuminated the power of the phoneme, that aural and invisible aspect of language which, in its (seeming) immateriality, provides a ground (or maybe we should call it a hiding place) for being and the source of knowledge. Whether we are arguing for God, Truth, or Reason as the measure of all things, the possibility that the closest we might get to such things is an invisible voice rather than a visible body explains a predilection for the abstract, the hidden, the discursive, the systematic, and so forth. As explained by Rousseau, who is a major target of Derrida's critique, we can understand the alphabet to be superior to other more overtly material scripts, such as Egyptian hieroglyphs or Chinese characters, because of its symbolic (rather than iconic or indexical) life as a system of signs. (We would need to forget, of course, that the letter "a" was once a picture of an ox's head, that "z" was a figure of a weapon, and so on.) The simplicity of the abc's allows one to progress rapidly from a state of memorizing to a state of critical thinking; thus, the advanced nature of western thought.

Less a focus of attention in Derrida's critique of presence is the nature of the grapheme, or the material aspect of language. This is perhaps because the figure is, in the tradition of Hegel, Nietzche, Heidegger and Saussure, too obviously a sign to be a reified as a candidate for original signification. The characterization of the text (or the written word) as a transcript

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9 *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

of speech follows the western predilection for invisibility. But it is not clear to me that the reification of the visible should be any less of a problem for western metaphysics, nor that Nietzche's "will to power" (or the mind's incessant capacity to establish metaphor) can be separated from the physical realities of a body, a stick, a stone, and so on. Equally problematic as an ascribed source of being is the visible presence of the sign, whether the dot of an "*I*' or a star in the sky. History has demonstrated that the voice of Yahweh, God of All, has had to contend not only with the idols placed in green places but with the green places themselves. Despite attempts to curb our fascination with what there is to see, our search for the invisible creators of creation and the laws and forms that supposedly give shape and meaning to our interactions with the world must depend on the paradox that truth must, if it is to make a difference, be imagined. Here I cannot give such fundamental matters the attention they deserve, but I would like to suggest at least that the iconophobic impulse, i.e., the desire to control and even disqualify the ways in which space generates meaning, is both illuminated and shared by Derrida. Indeed, distrust of the image is the very essence of logocentrism, which is in turn very close to the center of what we have been calling modernity.

I have tried, in searching for new terms for modern Japanese literature, to locate and analyze shifts in the configuration of sign systems, as measured by the give-and-take between phonemic and graphemic poles, between phonocentrism, or the rhetoric of the spoken word, and what I have called the pictocentric, or the rhetoric of the visible figure.[10] My working assumption is

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[10] "Pictocentrism," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 40 (1992), pp. 23-39.

that words and pictures signify differently, and that changes in semiotic preferences indicates meaningful moments in the development of human consciousness. With this, rather than the western/non-western dyad as my analytical device (or the literacy/orality binarism which is flawed because of its phonocentric bias), I have come to a number of tentative conclusions regarding the nature of the modern as experienced in Japan. Given that modernization is indicated by a shift toward phonemic (i.e., anti-figural) expression and toward the problematizing of the imagination (or what is usually called self identity) upon which this change depends, it is probably safe to say that Japan's modern period begins not in the Meiji period but centuries earlier, at least by 1650 and the birth of *ukiyozōshi.* Though accelerated by contact with the west, the Japanese experience of the modern is not intrinsically western any more than the western post-modern is intrinsically eastern. What needs to be said about the vexing problem of east versus west is that at any given point in history the balance between phoneme and grapheme is in flux, and that, due to geographical, historical, and ideological reasons, trends can be located in the dominance of one or the other. In sum, we tend to equate the modern with the west because western culture spread at a time when logocentric trends dominated there.

Of course, the spread of western culture is not simply a matter of external influence. More helpful in thinking about modern development are the conditions of reception that allowed logocentrism to be increasingly influential. Just as the industrialization of Japan in the Meiji period was aided by the formation of incipient capitalism prior to the Meiji Restoration, so too was the rise of the *kindai shōsetsu* helped by Edo-period trends toward more sustained, plot-driven narrative. As I have

argued elsewhere, Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) criticized Takizawa Bakin in the attempt to reform Japanese letters, but Bakin's criticism of Takebe Ayatari's (1791-1774) reception of the *Shui-hu chuan* is very similar to Shōyo's critique. Using the semiotic measure of modernity that I am proposing, it becomes possible to say that both Bakin and Shōyo were moving in the same direction, and that the Shui-hu chuan, a Chinese novel, was an important impetus toward the modern in Japan. Its influence on the development of the *yomihon* and, therefore, the evolution of *gōkan* from *kibyōshi* (to a more sustained text from a more fragmented, visually oriented one) is there for anyone to observe.[11]

For the art historian, the consequences of this shift from pictocentrism to logocentrism should be obvious, especially since writing and painting until the Meiji period are so closely connected. Indeed, without considering in a comparative way the semiotic features of both word and picture, it becomes impossible to come up with an interpretive schema that accounts for the hybridized iconography of the Edo period. Let me conclude my remarks today by giving just one example of how these new terms of modernity might apply.

I return to Kyōden. At the recent conference on Sexuality and Edo Culture, Nobuhiro Shinji, a fellow panelist, brought a number of things to my attention. In a paper entitled "*Sharebon sakka no omote to ura: Santō Kyōden no baai*," Nobuhiro spoke of the ways in which Kyōden constructed an image of himself through his work. Within the context of that amazing conference, the images that he had prepared proved to be particularly helpful

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[11] "Pictocentrism: the Chinese Roots of Japanese Modernity," *Proceedings of the Conference on Sexuality and Edo Culture, 1750-1850* (forthcoming).

in answering a simple-minded though not unimportant question which presented itself again and again. Those of you who have seen Edo-period erotica have no doubt noticed how amazingly large the genitals are on the figures depicted -- both men and women. Over the years, I have heard a number of explanations -- "such images are not meant to be realistic;" "such images are expressive of a *psychological* realism;" or "such images are *fetishistic*" -- which have never seemed very clear or satisfying.

In Kyōden's *sharebon* we encounter, once again, the exaggerated genitalia. Why are these images so important to early-modern iconography and why do they seem to disappear in the late-modern period? One thing we can say right away is that such images are visual cliche. In the original French, the term *clich*^{e} refers to the printing plate from which images were mass produced and, therefore, made commonplace.[12] The woodblocks used to print Kyōden's illustrated texts would be just such *cliche* and this image of sexual intercourse a commonplace of Edo erotica (see Figure Two). In a slightly altered sense, the space of this image, which was printed in a book and then sold to the general public, was a common place in the same sense as the European salons, which, according to Habermas, contributed importantly to the development of modern consciousness. The mass produced text is an analogue to the salons, if you will. So are the kabuki theater and brothels, and the extravagant parties of the sort that Ōta Nampo (1749-1823) was fond of throwing. They provided a common place where popular amusements

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[12] For this analytical framework of cliche, commonplace, and common place, see Svetlana Boyn, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Figure Two:

The fourth illustration from Santō Kyōden's The Fragrance of a Happy Couple (Meoto kō, [provisional title] 1786).

She says, "But I should read your love letter first. You're always so unromantic." He says, "So how are you going to come up with an answer now? Please. Please."

But who is actually talking? Why the exaggeration of the genitalia?

contributed to the formation of the modern by flaunting the conventions of class society. Eventually, these centers of Edo culture would become commonplace, dismissed by the creation of other amusements and by the creation of a new high culture of the Rokumeikan. (That geisha were hired to stand in as proxies for the wives of Meiji aristocrats suggest that the brothels at Yoshiwara and the Deer Cry Pavilion -- a dance hall for entertaining western dignitaries -- served similar modern purposes.)

Another thing we can probably say is that, as a common place *and* as a commonplace, this mass produced text and its sexual images were meant to convey something about the identity of the author (see Figure Three). Here in *Shikidō yume hanji*, Kyōden poses with his phallus, masturbating before his lover, Kikuzono, whose image -- legs spread wide -- is displayed on a hanging scroll set before him. In this context, the phallus is at once an iconic, indexical, and symbolic sign. It resembles the male erection. It stands as a synecdoche for the man. And, finally, its exaggerated size suggests that it has also been assigned a symbolic position with regard to its signified, whatever that might be. As a symbol it shares the same arbitrary relation to reality as language in general. This is why even its synechdotal connection with Kyōden is somehow rendered unfamiliar. If we say that it is *his* penis, we must also admit that it is something *more* than that. But what is this otherness? To what does this sign refer?

A clue comes from other depictions of genitalia from roughly the same period (see Figure Four). In these examples, enlarged genitals are rendered in a way that makes their referent more obvious. Through a process of metamorphosis, they become heads, standing in as replacements for organs of thought and speech. As such, they are depicted as aggressive and volitional

Figure Three:

A "self-portrait" of Santō Kyōden, masturbating before a picture of his lover, Okiku. From A Review of Sexual Dreaming (Shikidō yume hanji, ca 1781). [The Phallus, erased by censors, was restored for the purpose of this paper.] Ejaculation is a moment of speech, as the phallus comes to stand in for Kyōden himself.

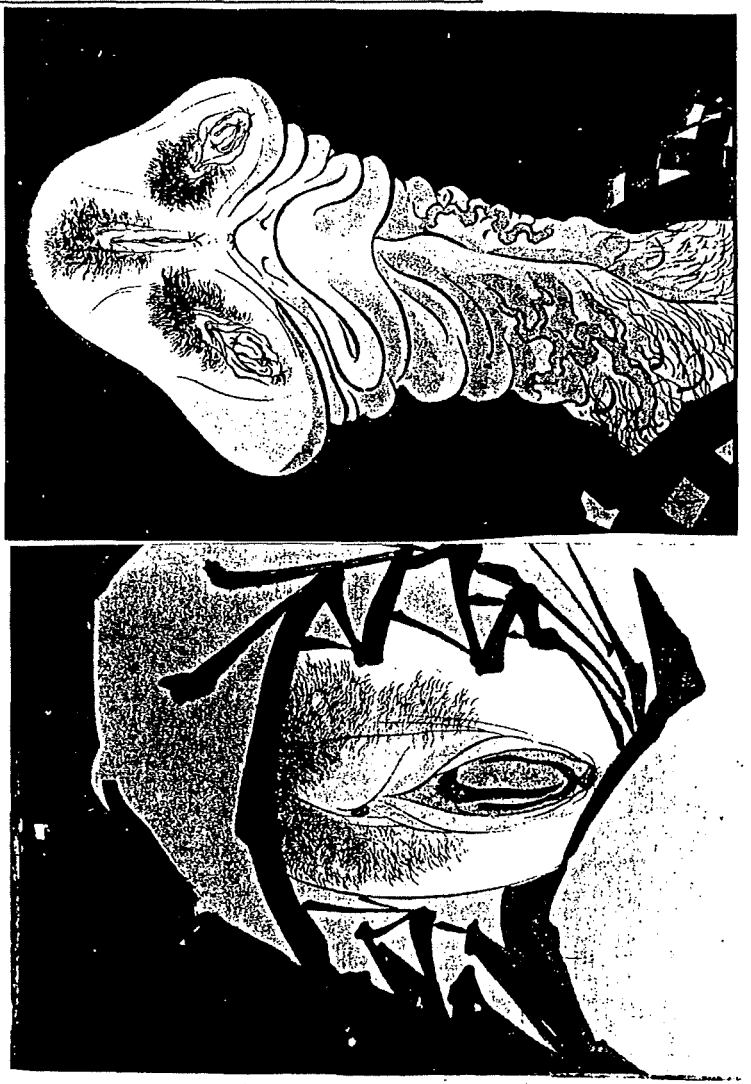

Figure Four (Two Images):

From Utagawa Kunisada's illustrations for Nocturnal Procession (Hyakki yagyō), the cannibalistic Vagina Woman (iki onna) and the Phallus-Necked Man/Woman (Rokuro tsubi). In the latter, the pum is on rokuro kubi (a monster that can lengthen and shorten its neck) and tsubi, an old term for a woman's genitals.

agents, as persons unto themselves, as it were, that pique (or perhaps we should say create) the consciousness of *real* people who, by entertaining the disembodied yet heightened nature of such willful organs, confront the possibilities of desire and the human imagination (see Figure Five).[13] They are, in other words, signs of self-consciousness that are marked by the emergence of the third person, an alterior source of narrativity and authority that inherits at least some of its genetic matter from the first person yet is important only as an imagined construction. Situated within the focal sphere of the common place, these genitalia become a sign of sexual identity that lead the modern desire to see even oneself (and certainly one's sexual partner) as an object. As pictured and exaggerated by the imagination, the giant phallus and vagina express the distance that separates one's reason from one's sexual desires, just as it conflates reason *with* those same desires. The unnatural size, in other words, establishes the possibility of separation that lies between the linguistic sign and its referent even when (or should we say especially when) the sign is meant to be solipsistic, a stand in for the self. Regarding the development of such substitution, we can go on to pose two

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13 This understanding would support Katsukawa Shunchō's thesis that *shunga* are *tsubi-e* (genital pictures), a parody of *kubi-e* (head pictures). Katsukawa's argument is that until the time of Suzuki Harunobu (ca. 1725-70), genitalia were not large. Takahashi Tōru understands the phenomenon in a different way. In Heian-period pornography, which I have not seen, the pictured genitalia are also large. According to Takahashi, Harunobu made them small. Consequently, the *shunga* represent a return to an earlier tradition. I thank Sumie Jones for directing my attention to these two conflicting theories. (But Harunobu's *shunga* also show large genitalia, as do earlier Edo-period examples. See, Richard Lane, *Images from the Floating World*, (New York: Dorset Press, 1982), 108.) These points need further exploration.

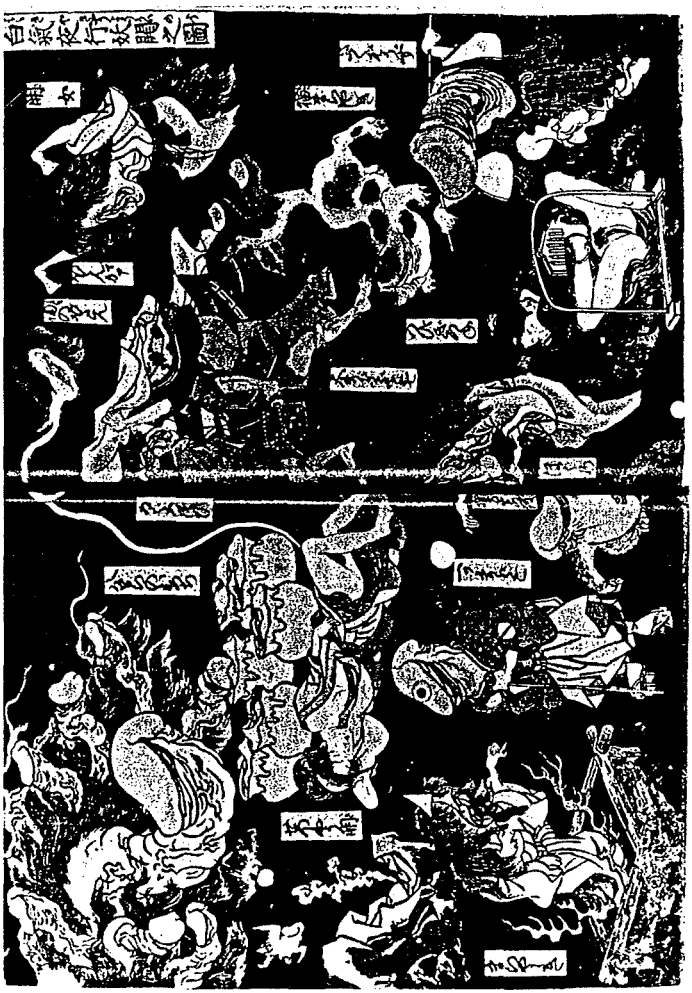

Figure Five:

"A Medley of Monsters" from Utagawa Kunisada's Nocturnal Procession. Here the genitals are clearly heads of various sorts-- the vagina as dominant as the phallus. Both have become organs of speech. Could this explain the problem of size? If exaggeration makes the sign more symbolic, of what is enlarged genital symbolic?

hypotheses. The first is that the modern imagination produces a position of (third-person) narrative *from* the first person who simultaneously is both seer and seen. (The authorial third-person is a fantasy, in other words, an imagined self that both disturbs and excites by expanding the real space and power of the first person.) And the second is that this new language, which results from visual exaggeration, grants individuality as an invisible commonplace. Individuality is presented as a right. It is a romantic and post-romantic notion.

Returning again to Kyōden, we can see how his image and the phallic image are nearly of equal stature (see Figure Six). Though not overtly indicated by the text, the lines of dialogue in this scene from *Meotokō* supposedly spoken by the two "people" present, could conceivably be coming from their genitals which are, after all, the center of attention. This would mean that in this scene, as in the one of Kyōden's masturbation, there are (as centers of emotion) more than two people represented. The state of the phallus as a third person who desire for speech is rendered by ejaculation in one image and by dialogue in the other. She says, "It's because you're so cute that I do such embarrassing things." He says, "Why should I say anything? Break up with your fianc[e] and marry me." Elsewhere, in other *gesaku* texts and in other *shunga* images, this same moment of articulation is represented by their monstrous life as *bakemono* who kiss and eat and, we would conjecture, even speak a word or two, even beyond the onomatopoeic "*zuburi, picha picha.*"

Placed within a larger context of semiotic trends, the monstrous phallus and vagina express a crucial moment in the shift from pictocentric to logocentric culture. As signs in and of

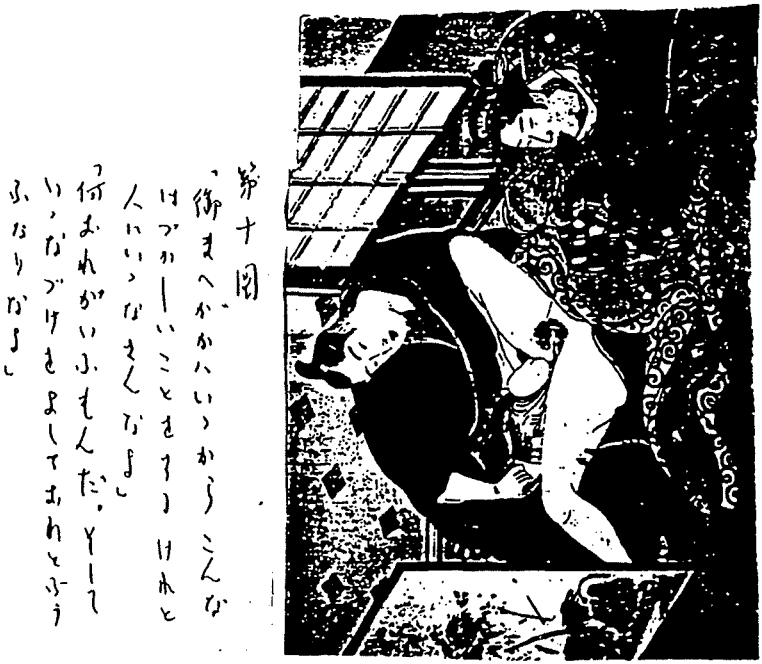

Figure Six:

The eighth illustration from Kyōden's The Fragrance of a Happy Couple

She says, "If you weren't so cute, this wouldn't be happening. Not a word to anyone." He says, "So who's talking? Get rid of your fiance and marry me."

As in Figure Two, the bodies are decentered, unnaturally positioned, with the effect that the genitals become as important as the heads of the two lovers (who seem to look on from a distance). How do we understand this equivalence? Can we even imagine that it is the genitals who are talking? This graphemic swelling (i.e. the enlargement of the genitalia), probably indicates a usurpation of phonemic power by the visual sign. Is this the visual status of the pre-Freudian discourse? Kyōden and Kunisada have captured the pictocentric moment that gives rise to the logocentric discourse of psychological analysis. Does the creation of psychology and construction of interiority begin with A Review of Sexual Dreaming (Shikidō yume hanji)?

this transition, they display a stage of graphemic swelling that precedes phonemic utterance. The grapheme's seeking the phoneme suggests that the modern transition is a series of negotiations in which word and picture seek for advantage relative to each other by appropriating the other's abilities.[14] One of the most difficult questions to answer regarding the modern decline of pictocentrism is why visual expression flourishes in the 18th century when, as Richard Lane has argued, modern trends can be identified as far back as 16th-century *kanazōshi*.[15] In this case, we can see at least one reason why the highly visual discourse of monstrosity precedes the highly discursive discourse of psychology. It seems that the need to articulate sexual desire as a defining principle of human identity eventually leads to the modern shackling of the imagination precisely because the emerging phoneme, which first requires graphemic exaggeration, is the analytical end of the distortion. The anti-figural impulse of *genbun itchi*, then, could be seen as both a development from and a reaction to the highly figurative *ezōshi* text. Similarly, the coarse and even misogynistic edge of much Meiji-period fiction might be ascribed to a sub-conscious resentment of the deflating of the gorgeous genitalia that have at last achieved a post-orgasmic, much-reduced state of realism. The transparent language that was to be the new idiom of modern Japanese literature required the rejection of the word-as-picture, yet the actual reluctance of the Japanese novelists to assume the role of third-person narrator,

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[14] This is a point already demonstrated in "Picturing the State: a Semiotic Analysis of the Meiji Slogan," *Proceedings of the Harvard Conference on Meiji Japan*, (forthcoming).

[15] "The Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel: Kanazōshi, 1600-1682," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20, 644-701.

to abandon imagistic lyricism, and to engage in the psychological discourse that this new invisibility made possible has much to do with a continued longing for the immediacy of visual signs and for its celebration of the not-yet-fully-articulated desire. Aided by further technological development, this thirst for visuality has now reemerged as a defining force of post-modern culture with its renewed sense of cliche and its desire to find meaning in a life after articulation.

Issues such as these need to be worked out more carefully than I have been able to do here in such a limited amount of space. One difficulty of so briefly suggesting new terms for the study of modern Japanese literature is that they must create the dialogue that critiques and understands them. Regardless of the problems, however, the attempt to fashion a new discourse is well worth the effort. As a writer of fiction myself, I believe that the best critical response to creativity is creative. For me, the production of theory, which is little more than the locating of values in relationship to each other, arises honestly and responsibly from a morally engaged reading of literary texts and (as such) is a creative form of discursive activity. As scholars and teachers of Japanese literature, we are fortunate to have been given the complicated task of reading across cultures. Yet the discomfort we feel when applying familiar critical standards to an unfamiliar body of work also affords us an opportunity to move beyond what has already been done to do (and therefore learn) something new. Forced to go deeper and deeper in our analysis of human expression, we might someday reach a point where the term "cultural relativity" is not hiss and a byword but a truism that reformulates the issues of beauty and virtue in ways that make them abundantly available to everyone.