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Review: Modernism and Modernity

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MODERNISM AND MODERNITY

DAWN TO THE WEST: JAPANESE LITERATURE IN THE MODERN ERA, Volume I: FICTION; Volume II: POETRY, DRAMA, CRITICISM, by Donald Keene. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987 (paperback reissue). Pp. xiv + 1327; xiv + 685. \$29.95; \$19.95.

THE PLEASURES OF JAPANESE LITERATURE, by Donald Keene. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Pp. xii + 133. \$19.

Robert M. Torrance

For a reader trained, like myself, in the literature of Europe and America, the recent reissue of Donald Keene's comprehensive and authoritative history of modern Japanese literature, *Dawn to the West*, provides not only a vast supply of information on a subject of commanding interest to any comparatist, but occasion for reflection on the different forms that modernity has taken in the continuing encounter of Japan with the West in the era designated as "modern." The shopworn antithesis between a modernity derived from the West and a tradition native to Japan has long ago, as Keene's discussion makes abundantly clear, lost whatever questionable validity it may once have had. For the terms themselves are problematic, and the relation between them perpetually changing: so much so, indeed, that what strikes a Western reader as most compellingly modern in these writers will not infrequently be what appears, at the same time, most distinctively Japanese.

Keene's mammoth work, which is only part of a projected "multi-volume history of the whole of Japanese literature," is the fruit of decades of research by one of the leading Western scholars of Japan; in its mastery of a staggering number of primary texts and of critical sources both Japanese and Western it will clearly long remain definitive in its field. Keene devotes the first, and far the longer, of his two volumes to fiction, the second to poetry, drama, and criticism. Within each of these four principal categories he presents a historical survey of the subject,

with lengthy chapters on each major movement or individual writer, typically including capsule biographies of important writers and brief summaries or descriptions of major works. Beginning with "The Coming of the Enlightenment," Volume I devotes chapters both to individual writers, from Tsubouchi Shôyô and Futabatei Shimei to Mishima Yukio (in general, Keene does not discuss living authors) and to genres and movements such as the Meiji Political Novel, Naturalism, the "I Novel," War Literature, and the Revival of Writing by Women. Volume II consists of four parts: Poetry in Traditional Forms; Poetry in New Forms; The Modern Drama; and Modern Criticism.

By its very nature this imposing history will remain, for most readers, an encyclopedic reference work rather than a book to be read through in its own right; its great value lies in the thoroughness and reliability of its information and in the soundness of its observations rather than in critical originality or theoretical insight. Yet although the book is not thematically organized, its very title, *Dawn to the West*, presages the central theme to which it inevitably and repeatedly returns. Volume I, in particular, is not merely a survey of Japan's major modern novelists and their principal writings but an account of changing Japanese responses to the challenge posed by the inescapable encounter with the West through which the problematic concept of modernity arose and developed. It is in this light that I wish to consider a few of the many developments Keene traces.

The encounter was especially conspicuous, as George Sansom has described it and as Keene reminds us, in the early Meiji, when top-hatted and frock-coated Japanese gentlemen undertook, with the help of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, to transform their country by zealous imitation of all things Western into a modern power, and to the astonished consternation of everyone else, succeeded. The Western models which Japanese writers first chose to emulate in their endeavor to transform the frivolous *gesaku* literature of the late Tokugawa in accord with the ideology of a new and sterner day will inevitably strike Western readers today as both infelicitous and (in terms of that time) not especially modern. Almost the first contemporary European novel translated into Japanese, in 1879, was Bulwer-Lytton's "badly faded and sometimes comically inept" *Ernest Maltravers*, under the title "A Springtime Tale of Blossoms and Willows," and others by the same master followed in rapid succession. Yet even such models as these, in sometimes shaky translations, powerfully fueled the determined reaction of early Meiji writers against the literary values of the previous age. We are far indeed from *gesaku* when one political novel features a geisha named "Rights" whose lover is

“Popular Government in Japan” and another is entitled “Inspiring Instances of Statesmanship.”

What these writers were rejecting in their own recent tradition was familiar and clear; what they were attempting to substitute for it, in the name of the West and modernity, was much more uncertain, as these halting first endeavors suggest, in literature than in science or industry. Tsubouchi Shôyô, by virtue of his impassioned call (as Keene puts it) for “a new and distinctively modern Japanese literature” in his manifesto of 1885, “The Essence of the Novel” (“Shôsetsu Shinzui”), has been often “acclaimed as the founder of modern Japanese literature” (I, 96-97). He deeply influenced one of the first and finest Meiji novelists, Futabatei Shimei, whose *Ukigumo* (*The Drifting Cloud*) was published between 1886 and 1889,¹ and his advocacy of the realistic (or “artistic”) novel which would present, in Keene’s paraphrase, “a true picture of life as it is actually lived” (I, 104), established a new criterion for what would become the central tradition of modern Japanese fiction. But when his own favorite novels were Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and Bulwer’s *Rienzi*, the latter of which he translated, one may infer that the essence of the Western novel, at least, and of the modernity it elusively promised, remained imperfectly apprehended: a doubt reinforced by his own flawed attempts to realize his theories in practice.

Even amid the derivative zeal of early Meiji, and amid the monumental efforts of its writers to fabricate a contemporary literary language in the place of classical Japanese, not all poets or novelists, of course, had entirely jettisoned their native traditions (threadbare though these had become by the late Tokugawa) in favor of half digested Western models. Not only Japanese settings and themes, but Japanese (even Chinese) genres and styles continued to find a place amid the welter of European imports. Much of this literature was derivative without pretending to innovation, derivative to the point of being formulaic; thus Keene remarks in an earlier essay that not one of the many predictably jingoistic works denouncing Chinese cowardice and trumpeting Japanese valor in poetry and prose during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 was in the new and still experimental colloquial style, and the greater part of the war poetry was written—irony of ironies!—in classical Chinese.² But serious poets, too, wrote not only in the new style (*shintaiishi*) imported from the West but in variations of the traditional haiku and tanka, as well as in time-honored Chinese forms.

At least for readers who lack Japanese, the perpetuation into the modern age of poems in the traditional seventeen or thirty-one syllables soon runs the risk of appearing to be an exercise in nostalgic archaism, a somewhat mannered repudiation of modernity itself. In the West, haiku

brought a new focus on the evocative image, but in Japan Bashô and others had long before done it far better. In sharp contrast to the novel, the haiku poetry that followed the Restoration "had become stagnant and even meaningless," Keene remarks (II, 90); and nearly a century later a Japanese critic concluded that the only readers of haiku were the writers themselves (II, 177). Because the stringent traditional genres were so unmistakably Japanese, however (even when poems written in them addressed contemporary themes), the sharp dichotomy between them and the experimental Western forms illustrates with unusual clarity the continuing tension between native tradition and imported modernity that the Restoration and its aftermath had exacerbated if not created, but by no means resolved.

Indeed, though Keene devotes nearly four hundred pages of his second volume to poetry, and suggests the possibility "that future historians of Japanese literature will remember the twentieth century for its poetry as much as for any other variety of literature" (II, 193), it is hard, on the basis of his or other translations, to dismiss entirely his earlier judgment that even in the far more varied "new style" most modern Japanese poetry, appealing though individual poems frequently are, "seems curiously lacking in substance," and above all in intellectual interest, by the standards of contemporary Europe and America.³ Shintaishi poets of early Meiji "revealed an unexpected conservatism with respect to poetic diction and meter," and on the whole, Keene observes, "Modern poetry was less adventurous than fiction in its language even after it had left behind the archaisms of the traditional poetry" (II, 193). Liberating though the reintroduction of longer poetic forms undoubtedly was after a millennium in which few poems in Japanese had exceeded thirty-one syllables, no Japanese poet would appear, from Keene's account, to have had an importance remotely comparable to that of Pound or Eliot, Apollinaire or Valéry, Rilke or Brecht, in initiating and defining the modern.

In fiction, too, Japanese writers of the Meiji era and beyond had not of course wholly lost sight of a tradition that included Lady Murasaki and Saikaku, both of whom Tsubouchi praised in the preface to his essay. But here the exciting new possibility, to which the discovery of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Maupassant, and Zola, soon began to contribute where Bulwer-Lytton left off, of exploring psychological and social dimensions of contemporary reality in more or less contemporary language—the tradition, broadly speaking, of Western realism—long continued to dominate the attention of all but a few important writers. Natsume Sôseki, who wrote appreciations of Whitman, Wordsworth, and Burns in his early years, turned to haiku and to Chinese traditional

forms when writing his own poetry. By far his most influential and lasting achievements, however, were in the novel, and as a novelist he remained in most essential respects, varied and original though his writings are, a realist in the manner advocated by Tsubouchi and inaugurated by Futabatei—but a realist who immeasurably enriched the dimensions of that term. By attuning his subtly crafted fictions to the sensibilities most expressive of his own place and time—as in *Kokoro* (1914), at the end of which the disillusioned Sensei writes the epitaph to an age when he resolves, like General Nogi, to follow the Emperor to the grave, “overcome with the feeling that I and the others, who had been brought up in that era, were now left behind to live as anachronisms”⁴—Sôseki made the new realism as fully Japanese as Western, bequeathing it to his successors as a central part of their own native heritage. In this fusion of traditions lay the modernity that writers throughout the Meiji had so energetically but unevenly striven to attain.

The few major writers who sought, in these years, to apply the newly learned techniques to the treatment of themes from the Japanese past broke down still further the already obsolescent dichotomy of Eastern tradition and Western modernity. Mori Ôgai, who had studied medicine in Germany, approved of “imitating the West without reservation” (I, 364), but did so in a way distinctive to himself and his nation. Profoundly influenced by the samurai ethic of an earlier age, Ôgai succeeded in his late writings, Keene remarks, “in capturing something quintessentially Japanese in his evocations of the past” (I, 375), both historical novels and the biographical accounts known as *shiden*; by using Western innovations to revitalize an older native tradition he transcended merely derivative imitation and established a precedent that would deeply influence successive generations of Japanese writers.

Among these, Akutagawa Ryûnosuke is one of the few in the Taishô period (he died in 1927, five years after Ôgai) who has been widely read and admired beyond Japan. His vividly evocative, swiftly paced, hauntingly imaginative stories of the Japanese past, some of them inspired directly or indirectly by the *Konjaku monogatari* and other classical Japanese tales, defy programmatic categorization and raise questions disturbingly pertinent to his own time and ours: the interconnection of love, destruction, and art in “Hell Screen,” for example, or the troubling indeterminacy of truth in “In a Grove,” on which Kurosawa Akira later based his film *Rashômon*. Here there can be no question of imitating Western models; Akutagawa was Pirandello’s co-equal, not his pupil, in exploring the ambiguities of modernity.

But apart from these and a few other major exceptions, Japanese literature from the late Meiji to the early Shôwa falls for the most part,

as Keene describes it, into more or less distinct schools, several of which roughly correspond, with considerable lag time, to European movements. The Romantics of the early Meiji (including the young Ōgai) were succeeded by practitioners of Naturalism, Proletarian literature, modernist New Sensationalism, and that peculiarly Japanese variation of autobiographical or confessional fiction known as the "I novel" (*watakushi shōsetsu*). To summarize Keene's extended chronicle of these and other movements and their leading exponents would serve little purpose if any; as in all literary history, much that once seemed important seems so no longer. Whatever else may vanish or remain, however, it is evident at least that Japanese writers of these relatively peaceful but far from stagnant decades no longer conceived of Western literature as an instrument to be adapted *en bloc* to Japanese uses. Rather, Japanese writers were now searching among multiple alternatives for forms and styles through which to express the particular modernity of their own complex society, with full awareness that this society could never again be isolated from the rapidly changing world to which it now incontestably belonged.

A few writers of the time, like Nagai Kafū and Shiga Naoya, achieved a highly individualized stylistic and even poetic mastery that set their personal variations of Naturalistic fiction and the "I novel," as Keene describes them, apart from routine exemplifications of these frequently dreary genres. But on the whole, from all these movements little of great interest to the non-Japanese reader appears to survive. The Naturalists no more found their Zola or Dreiser than the Romantics had found their Wordsworth or Keats, and the legacy of Naturalism to the "I novelists" and party-line Proletarian writers (and to those who wrote scarcely less predictable confessions of their *tenkō*, or political recantations) soon becomes a depressing, indeed a boring, story. "The techniques of the writers of the proletarian school," the critic Nakamura Mitsuo charged, "are mechanical imitations of the techniques of their predecessors, the 'I novelists'" (I, 882), many of whom drew heavily on the Naturalists. It is difficult to avoid the impression, from Keene's account, that this literature of programs and schools, for all its outward multiplicity, is scarcely less derivative in what it achieves—and far less fresh and exhilarating in what it attempts—than the more naïve appropriations of the early Meiji had been. So external and "mechanical" a modernity, attained (in contrast to that of Sōseki or Akutagawa) at the price of such seeming drabness, was a prize of dubious value.

Roughly half of the 120 years between the Meiji Restoration and the present had already passed when the long and eventful Shōwa period began in 1926. In retrospect, even the best reputed writers before that

time seldom traveled well, much less exerted great influence, outside Japan. Those translated into English—mainly in the decades after World War II—include Futabatei, Sôseki, Ôgai, Kafû, Akutagawa, and Shiga (whose output, like Kafû's, continued long into the Shôwa period),⁵ but of these estimable writers only Akutagawa, and possibly Sôseki, have been much read, if at all, beyond a tiny circle of English-speaking readers. During the very decades when Arthur Waley, followed by a host of other fine translators (Keene prominent among them), were revealing the wealth of *The Tale of Genji* and the *Man'yôshû*, Zeami and Chikamatsu, Saikaku and Bashô to Western readers, the Japanese writers of our own century remained almost entirely unknown or ignored. Keene's pioneering anthology *Modern Japanese Literature* (1956) did yeoman service in introducing them to the West, but its less than uniformly enthralling selections (three quarters of them from works published before 1920) may have also contributed to making much of this literature seem second-rate, and far from strikingly modern, in a European perspective; I remember how disappointing I found this volume, as a student, after the excitement of first discovering Keene's *Anthology of Japanese Literature* from the earliest era to the mid-nineteenth century, published one year before.

Most Japanese readers, Keene remarks, consider Sôseki and Ôgai their finest modern writers, but Keene himself confesses that Sôseki's uncompleted last novel, *Meian* (*Light and Darkness*), "bores me from beginning to end" (I, 346), and that all but one of Ôgai's shiden "are closed books to most readers" (I, 382). For most of us outside Japan who have responded to the attraction of a literature still far too widely neglected it is the triad of Tanizaki Jun'ichirô, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio who are most likely to have drawn and held our interest. Kawabata gained international renown with the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1968, and Mishima with his attempted coup d'état and ritual suicide in 1970; nor was Tanizaki, the oldest of the three (his works were published throughout the half century between 1910 and 1962), a stranger to notoriety in either youth or old age. But it is by the depth and complexity, the vividness and diversity, of their writings that these three very different masters, in each of whom the tension between traditions and modernities in modern Japan finds striking and subtle expression, maintain their claim to the attention of Japanese and Western readers alike.

For all their differences, each of these three has seemed modern to Western readers—"modern" in terms not only of Japanese literary history but of continuing interest and appeal beyond Japan—as none of their predecessors, excepting Akutagawa, had done. Yet none of the three would be readily classified, in Western terms, as a modernist; and this

fact is of cardinal interest. In no major European or American literature since the late nineteenth century would the self-conscious experiments of writers identified (by however flexible a criterion) as modernists or the avant-garde not have a prominent place: imagine the twentieth-century British and American novel, for example, without Joyce, Woolf, or Faulkner. Modernism is no one thing, to be sure, but in fiction one of its principal hallmarks has been the multiplication or complication of narrative perspectives such as we find, in very different ways, in *Ulysses*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. Despite the paradigmatic, if exceptionally straightforward, example of Akutagawa's "In a Grove," where in less than fifteen pages seven narrators tell partial versions of the "same" story in mutually incompatible ways, experimental modernism has played a far more modest, even rather marginal, role in most Japanese fiction of this century; contemporary though their themes and settings may be, all but a few leading novels are characteristically told in ways familiar to the nineteenth century and before, either by a more or less omniscient third-person narrator or by a participant in the first person. In regard to narrative technique, they generally appear "traditional" by comparison not only with Western modernist novels but with *Moby-Dick*, *Tristram Shandy*, or indeed *Don Quixote*.

Keene's chapter on "Modernism and Foreign Influences" comprises fewer than one hundred of the twelve hundred pages of his first volume, and the writers it describes have by no means had a centrality even remotely comparable to their Western counterparts. "With the exception of a few poets," Keene observes, "the early practitioners of Modernism, after years of struggle with an idiom they admired but found intractable, reverted to older literary styles; but," he adds, "almost all the important Japanese writers of the twentieth century were at some stage Modernists" (I, 630). Even those most closely identified with modernism were at best equivocal in their realization of its goals, or indeed in adherence to its tenets. Of Yokomitsu Riichi, leader of the New Sensationalist school (Shinkankaku-ha) between 1924 and 1930, Keene writes that the "uncouth short sentences" of his early novella *The Sun*, influenced by *Salammbô*, "are reminiscent less of Flaubert than of Tarzan" (I, 648), and asserts that all traces of modernism had disappeared from the "prolix and completely uninspired writing" of his later years (I, 665).⁶ Itô Sei turns from imitation of Joyce to "titillating fiction suitable for serialization in women's magazines" (I, 681). And Hori Tatsuo ends his career by professing "a dislike for Modernism" (I, 708), reverting instead to the Japanese past, and translating the French Renaissance sonnets of Louise Labé.

Tanizaki would later express his embarrassment at the "extremely superficial, indeed mindless ways" in which Western influence revealed itself in his youthful works (I, 630-31), and Kawabata, who experimented with Joycean stream of consciousness and Freudian psychoanalysis in his brief New Sensationalist phase, discovered deeper sources of inspiration in the classics of the East, especially the Buddhist scriptures. "I have received the baptism of modern Western literature and I have myself imitated it," he wrote in 1934, "but basically I am an oriental . . ." (I, 807). In sum, at least as Keene sees it, even for major writers like these, who responded to its impact, "Modernism was only a passing phase in careers devoted to more traditional literature" (I, 631).

Be that as it may—for surely the phrase "more traditional literature" is subject to question—why does the avant-garde experimentation so prominent in the development of the twentieth-century Western novel, to say nothing of poetry and the drama, play so relatively minor a role for these pre-eminently modern Japanese writers? Why should modernism be so much less central to modernity in Japanese literature than in that of the West—especially given the fact that "modern" and "Western," since the Restoration, had so often been nearly equated? To suggest that these writers turned *instead* to the rediscovery of their native Japanese heritage—finding sufficient inspiration in Buddhist sutras or the Heian novel, haiku or noh, tales of the medieval past or the way of the samurai—and thereby discarded modernism as a superficially extrinsic import from the West would clearly be false, or at best far too simple. What is striking is that all of these major writers who sought and found inspiration in the Japanese past—Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima as well as Akutagawa and Ôgai—remained no less open to influences from the West, among which modernism was one, throughout their careers; none of them, including Mishima (qua novelist), indulged in the fantasy of nativist reaction that would purify their literature from Western contagion and restore the world as it was before Perry and Meiji. To reject "the West," or any of its products, including so characteristic a product as literary modernism, *because* it was Western, because it was "not Japanese," was simply not possible; for in literature no less than commerce and industry the West was by now, as we have seen, inseparably part of "native" Japan.

The question, then, is why this particular influence was not more pronounced among novelists who, far from rejecting it, drew upon it in different degrees and in various ways but never made it central to their artistic enterprise as so many important writers did in the West. To begin with, we must keep in mind how much more radically experimental the innovations in what we broadly call "realism"—another flexible term,

to which modernism in the West is often too simply opposed—had been in the Japanese novel since the Restoration than any Western counterparts would suggest. Western students of Keene's account might well be surprised, indeed exasperated, to find that not even the best of so many talented, even brilliant, writers appear to have shown the originality, as Westerners have been wont to define it, to go decisively beyond the narrative techniques of a Galsworthy or Maugham, so to speak—the exploded techniques of an outdated realism—and boldly imitate Joyce or Faulkner. Yet the revolution these novelists accomplished in the decades after 1868, not only in successfully adapting previously unfamiliar European styles and genres to changing Japanese needs but above all in molding a new, more colloquial literary language (as their Tokugawa predecessors had already begun to do) in the place of classical Japanese, perhaps surpasses in boldness, and certainly in the durability of its influence, the most ostentatiously outrageous experiments of the European avant-garde of the time. Virtually every novel, however outwardly imitative or conventional its "realistic" techniques might appear from a Western perspective, was for many years after the Restoration an experiment and an adventure. For by their endeavor to create a serious literary treatment of contemporary reality in the demotic style, the Japanese vanguard was telescoping, in a sense, not merely the changes in taste taking place in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe, but those that had taken place since literary Latin began giving way to the European vernaculars in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Here was an experiment worthy of the name, even when it culminated, like so many Surrealist poems and stream-of-consciousness novels in the West, in works soon (and better) forgotten.

To assume, moreover, because a development toward modernism had taken place in Europe, that Japanese writers who continued to employ ostensibly realistic narrative techniques were therefore in the rearguard of a progressive movement led, of course, by the West implies a naïve teleology (implicit in the very term "avant-garde") alien to the rich diversity of modern literature and society. (Might the true vanguard, after all, turn out, in their seemingly laggard imperviousness to Western forms of modernism, to have been "post-modernists" *avant la lettre*?) There is simply no reason to posit that the boldest and most original Japanese writers would continue to follow the course—or rather one of the several courses—mapped out by their Western counterparts: strange indeed if we should view them as *less* original because there was one Western movement they somehow neglected, with any sustained conviction, to imitate!

Literary movements, like everything human, belong to place and time, even when aspiring to liberate themselves from them; and the

experience of the world on which Japanese writers have drawn in the modern age, though much more nearly akin to that of the West than in earlier eras, has of course been far from identical with the experience of European or American writers. The fragmentation of narrative perspective characteristic of Western modernism in the years before, and especially after, World War I reflects the fragmentation of a society that had lost its unifying center and was groping self-consciously, in response to exacerbated class conflicts, aggressively competing nationalisms, and the dissolution of age-old certainties and beliefs, for another. In Europe, Renato Poggioli writes, "every avant-garde movement, in one of its phases at least, aspires to realize what the dadaists called 'the demolition job,' an ideal of the *tabula rasa* which spilled over from the individual and artistic level to that of the collective life"; it is the violence and radicalism of the avant-garde, Octavio Paz observes, that distinguishes it from its Romantic precursors, even though many modernists, especially in England and America, yearned to restore the connection with their traditional past that modernism, by its dissolution of inherited forms, was demolishing.⁷

But in contrast to that of Europe, Japanese society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though certainly no stranger to disruption and conflict, retained, in the view of both native and foreign observers, a remarkable sense of shared national purpose, an almost "tribal" unity, centered on the Emperor, that largely survived the tensions of modernization, social change, and foreign wars. War in Europe—the Great War whose calls to glory led to Verdun and the Somme, to exhaustion, disillusionment, and the senseless slaughter of a generation—symbolized the destruction of the Old Order, a destruction on which the modernism of the 1920s, with its radical challenge to a discredited if still haunting past, voraciously fed. But war in Japan, to begin with, brought the exultation of victory over the outwardly far greater powers of China and Russia; not Verdun and the Somme, but Port Arthur, Mukden, and Tsushima became the stuff of proud memory and heroic legend.

Lafcadio Hearn at the time, and Keene in a retrospective essay, have testified to the fervent celebration in popular poetry, drama, and art of heroic Japanese exploits in the Sino-Japanese war; and in a "Letter from Japan" of August 1904, the month before his death, Hearn describes, with a sense of "the unspeakable pity of things," the ubiquitous portrayal of Japanese victories over the Russians (sometimes before they had taken place) in lithographs, flower designs, and miniature gardens, and on hairpins, towels, and even baby clothes graphically displaying triumphant Japanese battles on sea and land.⁸ We are in a world not of

gas-filled trenches but of Trafalgar or Waterloo, or of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (one of the first Western poems translated in the early Meiji): a world where national pride in martial exploits could appear, despite the dissent of a spirited few, to unite all classes of society in a shared—and an ominously militant—purpose. Divisions there obviously were, but not yet the radical schism that set the Western avant-garde of the twentieth century, like the Romantics and their disillusioned successors in the century before, stridently at odds with the philistine tastes of a hostile or indifferent society. Small wonder, in circumstances so different, that literary modernism on the Western model failed to strike deep root in Japan.

Yet no one would be tempted to categorize the major novelists of modern Japan, because they generally chose in the end to ignore or reject the outward trappings of Western modernism, as formally conservative writers antipathetic (as Western realists of the time were frequently seen to be) to the modernist enterprise: the impression they make upon us is very much the contrary. It is true that Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima largely eschew the fragmentation of narrative perspective found in Joyce, Woolf, or Faulkner, but this of course is only one hallmark (though a central one) of modernist fiction; in other respects these Japanese writers show remarkable affinities with a modernism characterized more by its restless need for innovation and self-transformation than by any fixed or definable attribute.

The experimentalism inaugurated, however falteringly, in the early Meiji attains audacious fulfillment throughout Tanizaki's long career in novels and stories ranging from satirical portrayals of the mania for things Western to historical re-creations of a violent feudal Japan, nostalgic evocations of pre-War life in Osaka, and the flagrant parading of sexual obsessions that culminates in the *Diary of a Mad Old Man* (*Fûten rôjin nikki*, 1961-62) written when he was seventy-five. A comparable variety finds expression in Mishima's novels, each of which comes as a striking and unexpected departure in style and theme from the last. Even if none of these books can be easily pigeonholed—despite occasional use of experimental techniques such as the interplay of diaries in Tanizaki's *The Key* (*Kagi*, 1956) or the interior monologues interspersed in Mishima's *Thirst for Love* (*Ai no kawaki*, 1950)—as a modernist work on the Western pattern, the quintessential modernist penchant for bold and unpredictable new directions runs through them all.

But the affinities between these Japanese novels and the techniques of Western modernism go beyond mere innovativeness and diversity—attributes, after all (as Mikhail Bakhtin in particular has reminded us) of the novel in every age, nor indeed of the novel alone. The external

structure of the Western novel has frequently paralleled and reflected the structure of drama in a tradition going back through Fielding and the Greek and Italian romances, with their predictable if utterly implausible denouements, to the plots of Greek tragedy, whose causally connected beginning, middle, and end Aristotle so firmly commended in the *Poetics*. The “displacement” (in Northrop Frye’s sense) of that classical pattern in the direction of everyday verisimilitude is a central aspect of nineteenth-century realist fiction, even though an increase in plausibility did not always attend it. (In fact, with a few exceptions like Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and several of Jane Austen’s superbly crafted comedies of manners, the “well-made” dramatic plot remained for the most part a somewhat extrinsic framework for the Western novel, a contrivance that often stood apart, like the amorous intrigues in *Don Quixote*, from everything most essential to it.) One reason why such different books as Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* now seem modern before their time is their outright abandonment of any such dramatically developed linear plot, even as an external convenience.

No departure from the “realist” tradition is more characteristic of the Western modernist novel—in Proust or Mann no less than in the more radically experimental Joyce, Woolf, or Faulkner—than its rejection of this residual “well-made” structure, in which carefully laid complications were supposed to issue with relentless logic in a climactic denouement. Not plot but mood; not external action but inward reaction; not logical interconnection of events but the discontinuity of lived experience; not linear sequence but subjective time, the time of memory and dream: not classical drama but music, with its interweaving of parallel themes and motifs, provides the structure for modernist fiction in the West, and this structure is profoundly in tune with that of many Japanese novels, outwardly “realist” though their narrative techniques may remain. For here the Japanese novelist, without ever denying his debt to the West, was securely on native grounds. The spare designs of Japanese woodcuts (as Whistler and the post-Impressionists had already discovered), the suggestiveness of noh drama and the haiku (as Yeats and Pound were discovering), and the interweaving of memory and dream in the Heian novel, with its “Proustian” association of images, were all far closer in spirit to European modernism than many works in the classical or realist traditions of the West.

Tanizaki, in an exchange with Akutagawa, expressed a personal preference for tightly knit plots not uniformly evident, at least by classical Western standards, in his own stories.⁹ Yet it can hardly be accidental that he composed his masterpiece, *The Makioka Sisters*

(*Sasameyuki*, 1943-48), in the years between two of his three translations of *The Tale of Genji*, whose plot is ostensibly far looser in structure.¹⁰ Keene's judgement of Tanizaki's major book is surprisingly tepid and reserved. In his early book *Japanese Literature* (1955), he called it a masterpiece "of a kind" that "never quite comes off" for a Western reader, though it "approaches greatness." *The Thin Snow*, he wrote (translating literally the title of the then untranslated novel), "is as exact a recreation of life as exists in fiction," one which, by its "photographic" naturalism, "deliberately sacrificed all dramatic possibilities." "Here, then, is a true *roman fleuve*, a slow and turbid river of a book, which moves inevitably and meaninglessly to its close," leaving us with the feeling "that there may be an emotional blank behind the Japanese" (!)¹¹ In an essay of 1967 on Tanizaki, in which he laid heavy stress on the "masochistic worship of women," foot-fetishism, and coprophilia found in the writer whom he pronounced "the finest modern Japanese novelist," Keene said of *The Makioka Sisters* (in which such obsessions are far less evident than in other stories) virtually nothing except that it is "by far his longest novel and perhaps his best," though atypical.¹² And in *Dawn to the West* he still considers it, thirty years after his first ambivalent comments, "rather old-fashioned in its narrative method" and suggests that in this stodgy way Tanizaki "created a solid sense of reality that would be difficult to achieve with any more adventurous literary techniques" (I, 775).

Yet surely the Western reader for whom Tanizaki's deeply moving book so conspicuously fails to "come off" is one predisposed to find in it a workmanlike but pedestrian reflection of a somewhat threadbare Western realism. Reading it now, in Seidensticker's translation alongside the same translator's *Tale of Genji*, one is struck instead by the skill with which Tanizaki has combined a poetic realism in the proto-modernist tradition of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (another "slow and turbid river of a book" moving toward a seemingly meaningless close) with the leisurely and evocative suggestiveness of the greatest of all Japanese novels, which (still more than feet or excreta) was Tanizaki's main preoccupation, and no doubt solace, during these tumultuous years. His masterpiece is a tale of frustrated love and unfulfilled yearning not among the high nobility of the Heian court long ago but among the upper middle class of suburban Osaka in the years before the Pacific War, which looms menacingly closer and closer as this outwardly ordinary story of family troubles slowly approaches its unresolved end. Like *The Magic Mountain* of Thomas Mann, whose characters cannot foresee the cataclysm that overhangs their dying world, *The Makioka Sisters* too is a tale of times now past: times to which one sister, the fragile spinster

Yukiko, who "could never really be at home in the modern world" (p. 419),¹³ sadly clings, while her younger sister, the dissolute "modern beauty" Taeko, impatiently scorns the constrictions of outmoded tradition, and their married older sister Sachiko finds herself "astonished at how the world had changed" and wonders "if such happy times would ever come again" (p. 460).

For by the time Tanizaki completed this book (whose publication the government censors suspended as contrary to the War effort), Osaka and the way of life it once embodied would lie in ruins: in this "novel of war and peace," Tanizaki observed, to his personal credit and to the immense benefit of his understated but none the less passionately engaged remembrance, "I was not able to withdraw completely from the enveloping storm" (p. 531). Only on its surface is the novel old-fashioned in manner (as Mann's has also been called), for in no other way could it tellingly evoke that vanished place and time. Far from being a merely photographic slice of life, the novel is surely one of the richest fulfillments in modern Japanese literature of that blend of Western realism with native sensibilities toward which writers in Japan had been striving since Ernest Maltravers became *A Springtime Tale of Blossoms and Willows*. Its "blanks" betoken not emotional gaps in the Japanese or incursions of meaningless emptiness but—in accord with Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader response no less than with Japanese classic tradition¹⁴—suggestive possibilities of still undetermined meanings to be supplied by each character and each reader. In the face of so richly evocative a "realism" as this, Western modernism had nothing further to teach.

Tanizaki's masterpiece thus confounds the increasingly stale antitheses of Eastern and Western, traditional and modern, which had preoccupied him in earlier works like *Naomi*, or "A Fool in Love" (*Chijin no ai*, 1924-25), and *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tade kuu mushi*, 1928), in which marital discord reflects the unresolved conflict of cultures. In this light, the paradox that Kawabata, often considered the most purely "Japanese" in temper and style of modern novelists—the Nobel Committee so honored him a century after the Meiji Restoration—was at the same time the major writer most closely associated in his youth with the experimental modernism of the New Sensationalists, is perhaps not surprising: throughout his writings he reveals the profound similarity of these seeming opposites.

That he is a modern novelist in the broadly realist tradition introduced from the West and pioneered in the Meiji era—the tradition of depicting contemporary social and psychological realities in contemporary language—is never in doubt; his stories, unlike those of Ôgai and Akutagawa, or indeed of Tanizaki, are always set in modern Japan and

firmly rooted in the culture of his own place and time. This culture, especially after the War, is a rapidly changing one where "a scent of ugly decay and want of principle" hangs in the air, as the narrator observes in *The Sound of the Mountain* (*Yama no oto*, 1954, p. 255).¹⁵ The aftermath of war frequently reverberates in this and other late novels much as its relentless approach had shadowed the outwardly stable world of Tanizaki's *Makioka Sisters*: "maybe another war is on its way," Shingo's dissolute son Shuichi, who remembers the whistling bullets long afterwards, tells his troubled father. "And maybe the other one is still haunting people like me" (p. 266). With so keen an awareness of the corruption and latent violence of the world he portrayed, Kawabata often writes with elegiac regret for a threatened or vanishing way of life—nowhere more poignantly than in his meticulously detailed but strangely moving account in *The Master of Go* (*Meijin*, 1954), based on his coverage of the event as a newspaper reporter, of the old Go master Shūsai's loss of his final match in 1938 to a younger competitor. Here the punctilious realism of what would later be called in the West a "non-fiction novel" conveys, again, no mere slice of life but the author's sadness, looking back on that earlier time, that "From the way of Go the beauty of Japan and the Orient had fled" (p. 52).¹⁶

But if Kawabata is a realist in bringing before us, as he persistently does, a present-day world in which this tenuous beauty of a receding past is always at risk, he reveals his affinity with classical Japanese literature in continuing to evoke that haunting presence. He drew inspiration from Buddhist scriptures and considered himself "basically an oriental," as we have observed; indeed, in this same autobiographical account of 1934, as quoted by Keene (I, 807), Kawabata declared his long-standing but never realized hope to write, as his swan song, a "vision of the classics of the East." Keene, Seidensticker, and other Western and Japanese critics have frequently remarked on stylistic or structural similarities of Kawabata's novels to noh drama or other classical Japanese forms. Seidensticker observes that Kawabata's manner in the elusively beautiful *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1935-47) resembles that of the haiku in "its terseness and austerity, so that his novel must rather be like a series of brief flashes in the void,"¹⁷ and Keene remarks that this novel is "close to the spirit of the Heian writings" (I, 819). In his subtly oblique and suggestive depictions of the beauty and sadness of fragile and always tentative human relations the "realist" Kawabata is thus in a long and illustrious Japanese classical tradition whose principal wellspring, for him as for Tanizaki, remained, of course, *The Tale of Genji*.

But *Snow Country*, Keene goes on (I, 819), is at the same time "unmistakably modern in its manner, especially the free associations that skip

from one perception to the next"; indeed, this dreamlike association of never fully understood or connected images is among the principal ways in which the very qualities of Kawabata's style that make him appear typically "Japanese" no less strongly recall the Western modernism that he had passed through and beyond. Human relations and their meanings are never quite clear, never sharply, much less finally, defined, either to Kawabata's characters or to his readers, in large part because no one moment, no one thought or impression, can ever—in life or even in the strategy of *Go*, which resembles and encapsulates life—be isolated from any other. Not the logic of abstract rationality, but that of dream and memory interfused with the fleeting immediacy of perception and feeling, is central to Kawabata, as to Proust or Mann, Joyce or Woolf—or to Murasaki, Bashō, or Zeami. It follows that the structure of his novels will be very different from the carefully plotted structure of the traditional Western novel (insofar as this structure itself was not also a fiction).

Keene seems to me quite mistaken, then, in his contentions that Kawabata, "for all his many virtues as a writer, . . . had little sense of structure," and that this structure was of a "linear" kind (I, 796-97). It is rather the continual interweaving of dreams, memories, and impressions from the past and present, along with anticipations and fears of the future, into the consciousness of the central character, however commonplace and "uninteresting" that character may appear in himself, that gives these novels their open-ended, intrinsically inconclusive structure and their intensely resonant suggestion of finally indeterminate meanings.¹⁸ The disconnectedness of events and relations in *Snow Country* or *Thousand Cranes* (*Sembazuru*, 1952) reflects, as no well-made plot could possibly do, the incompleteness of a character (and through him of his world) in whom love and understanding grope uncertainly for a desperately needed object and fail to hold what is in their grasp. And although Keene lightly dismisses Kawabata's last novel, *Beauty and Sadness* (*Utsukushisa to kanashimi to*, 1963), as "a disappointing novel, only a few cuts above middlebrow fiction" (I, 836), the inexorability with which an unabsolved past returns, in this troubling book—as in the classic *noh* plays, *Sotoba Komachi* or *The Damask Drum*—to take revenge on a present that can never escape it demonstrates, at the very least, the author's purposeful mastery of dramatic structure.

The repeated hints of an indefinable "other world" that run throughout Kawabata's writings once again suggest the conjunction of Japanese tradition—especially its Buddhist afterworlds from which ghosts return, in the *noh*, to this present world of encompassing illusion—and of Western modernism. The involuntary memories of Proust's

Recherche, the epiphanies of Joyce's *Portrait*, the tantalizing traces of a more abundant past in *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, continue and extend the Symbolist quest for some dimension of experience (such as Christianity or popular Buddhism once promised) that would transcend the bleakness and sterility of the present—if only some apprehensible reality corresponded to it. The human figures which Shimamura sees reflected in the train window at the beginning of *Snow Country* are unrelated to the evening landscape that moves by outside the window, "yet the figures, transparent and intangible, and the background, dim in the gathering darkness, melted together into a sort of symbolic world not of this world," a world of "inexpressible beauty" (p. 15) that he can glimpse, but not enter: a transient, not a habitable, world. The narrator of *The Master of Go* sees in the figure of the Master walking absently, "like a relic left behind by Meiji," away from the game "the still sadness of another world" (p. 63) which is never merely the past, but the possibility of overcoming apartness that the past sometimes symbolizes for us. In *Thousand Cranes*, Kikuji is disquieted by his sense of "another world, in which there was no distinction between his father and himself" (p. 64);¹⁹ and in *The Sound of the Mountain*, the aging Shingo is haunted by traces of a world of greater fullness and depth than his own that intermittently suggests itself to him in disturbing dreams, in the lingering memory of his love for his wife's long dead sister, in his attraction to his faithless son's wife, in the noh mask that symbolizes eternal youth, and above all in the foreboding sound of the mountain that he alone hears in the night.

Perhaps the other world, after all, is the world of death ("I do not like that other world," Bloom reflects in *Ulysses*); in any event, it remains throughout Kawabata an unrealized, yet indispensable, possibility that fitfully illumines, or overshadows, this life. In the absence of that fulfillment, our present world is a fragmentary one in which we remain incomplete and apart. It is fitting, then, that Kawabata's late novellas, *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* (*Nemureru bijo*, 1960-61) and *One Arm* (*Kataude*, 1963-64), in which this sense of irremediable apartness is most intensely conveyed through the portrayal of men who find communion only with naked women drugged to sleep or with phantasmagorically dismembered limbs ("I can let you have one of my arms for the night," said the girl . . .),²⁰ are also those in which the continuing modernist affinities of this most classically Japanese of modern "realists"—affinities above all with Kafka, poet of the fantastically commonplace, the nightmarishly real—are most strikingly and unmistakably evident.

In Kawabata, then, modernism, except in its most superficial sense, was by no means merely a "passing phase" through which he progressed on his way back to a "more traditional" literature. On the contrary, he discovered in Japanese tradition stylistic and thematic resources that permitted him to enrich the somewhat shopworn realism bequeathed by the Meiji in ways that paralleled, but had no need to imitate, the modernists of the West: he "returned" to tradition in the only way a major writer can, by transforming and going beyond it. In Mishima, who came of age during the War, the paradox was of a different but not, perhaps, of a wholly dissimilar kind. This fanatical nationalist, who vigorously pursued the martial arts and formed a Shield Society of modern-day "samurai" to protect the Emperor, gained international notoriety in 1970 when he committed ritual *seppuku*, after haranguing the cadets of the Japanese Self-Defense forces from a balcony in a theatrical and consciously futile attempt at a coup d'état: yet his tightly structured and intensely dramatic novels seem—at least before the final tetralogy—far more purely and familiarly Western in style and inspiration than any that we have examined in either Tanizaki or Kawabata.

In most of these books there is indeed very little, apart from their vivid settings in post-War Japan, to mark them as belonging to a specifically Japanese or East Asian tradition—and very little, too, that reflects the more radically experimental techniques of Western modernism. Far from choosing to compose in a "Western" as opposed to a "native" vein, however, as a writer before Sôseki might still have done, Mishima wrote urgently of himself and his world in a realist tradition that by now, eighty years and more after the Restoration, belonged as unquestionably to Japan as it did in Europe or the Americas. But in Japan, where it was younger, this pliant tradition remained experimental well after the once audacious avant-garde techniques of the *entre-deux-guerres* were in danger of becoming stale mannerisms, if not predictable tics, in the West: while more doctrinaire modernisms were fading into the past, an evolving realism proved to be enduringly modern. By his virtuosity in boldly adapting this tradition to his own troubled times, Mishima demonstrated its unexhausted wealth and accelerated its transformation.

His first great success, the autobiographical *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen no kokuhaku*, 1949), published when he was 24, expressed, with a raw candor and poetic intensity wholly foreign to the Japanese "I-novel" of an earlier generation, the young man's awakening, amid the chaos and destruction of a country at war, to his own homosexuality: his gradual and painful discovery that the mask of "normality" which he attempts to make his own could never fit. Violence, psychological and

physical, open or barely suppressed, runs throughout this compelling novel, and diverse though the books that followed were, as Mishima explored the resources of his astonishingly versatile art, many are given characteristic shape—it is this that makes them appear so dramatically “Western” in structure in contrast to such seemingly directionless books as *The Makioka Sisters* or *The Sound of the Mountain*—by an act of outwardly senseless violence toward which everything builds: murder in *Thirst for Love* or *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (*Gogo no eikô*, 1963), arson in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*, 1956). In the last-named of these, which Keene rightly considers one of Mishima’s masterpieces, a young Zen apprentice handicapped by a debilitating stutter comes to the conviction, in the years after the War, that “to live and to destroy were one and the same thing” (p. 112),²¹ and finally sets fire to the Golden Temple of Kyoto, whose ideal beauty had been the dream and hope of his youth.

Mishima based his account on an actual event of 1950, and masterfully re-created the pathology of the acolyte’s mounting obsession; but the intensity of this book as of others surely derives in significant part from the extent to which the protagonist’s obsessions coincided with Mishima’s own. The timid and weakly young man of *Confessions of a Mask*, who aroused himself to sexual climax by pictures of St. Sebastian penetrated by arrows and by daydreams of sado-masochistic torments, and who gladly evaded war service when misdiagnosed as tubercular, became the fanatic devotee of body-building and the martial arts who strove, no less insanely than his young priest Mizoguchi, to inspire his degenerate countrymen with the heroic, self-sacrificing ethic of the samurai and kamikaze pilots of the distant and recent past.

“It remained for me some day,” he wrote in his rambling confessional manifesto *Sun and Steel* (*Taiyô to tetsu*, 1968), “to achieve something, to destroy something”:²² for him as for Mizoguchi the two were inseparably fused. To this extent Mishima, in turning from art to action, appears to have been imitating, even parodying, his own artistic creature, whom he nonetheless aspired, in one essential, to go beyond. For Mizoguchi’s last words after burning the temple are “I wanted to live” (p. 262), and in this he is not unlike the young Mishima, who idealized heroic death and opted for life. But “the Way of the Samurai,” Mishima affirmed in the book translated into English under that title (*Hagakure nyûmon*, 1967), quoting from Yamamoto Jôchô’s eighteenth-century handbook, the *Hagakure*, “is death” (pp. 8, 44-46):²³ his own story would end not like the Zen priest Mizoguchi’s but like that of Lieutenant Takeyama, who in “Patriotism” (“Yûkoku,” 1961) commits seppuku, as if in rehearsal of Mishima’s own suicide nine years later, rather than obey an order to

attack his rebellious fellow-officers.²⁴ In his final act mask and face would at last be one, with the esthetic consistency given only, in life, to the hero or madman.

Why, then, do the novels of this Japanese nationalist who fervently extolled and resolutely sought to follow what he believed was the ancient samurai tradition take a form that appears so distinctively modern and Western? Mishima turned, to be sure, in his final tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility* (*Hôjô no umi*, 1965-70), to themes of Buddhist reincarnation; and perhaps in the style of these novels too, as Marguerite Yourcenar observes, "The perspectives found in European art make way for those other, plunging ones which appear in Chinese painting, or for the flattened designs of Japanese prints . . ." ²⁵ But if so, this somewhat labored final work is the exception: in sharp contrast to his admiring mentor Kawabata, Mishima found his main artistic models, until nearly the end of his quarter-century career as a novelist, almost entirely in the West.

For the typically dramatic, indeed "Aristotelian" structure of the novel, which Kawabata, in his affinity with both the Japanese classics and avant-garde Western modernism, discarded even when writing in the outwardly realist tradition derived from the West, was a structure perfectly suited to Mishima's need for a literary form that would give intense expression to psychologically motivated acts culminating, as Mizoguchi's in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* pre-eminently do, in a violent denouement inexorably resulting from all that has come before. The classic tradition to which Mishima was most strongly drawn, and by which he enriched the realist novel, was thus not the Japanese but the Western—above all the tradition of Greek and Racinian tragedy. His youthful experience of all-encompassing death and destruction in the terrible final year of the War endowed him with a conscious sense of tragedy further heightened by his intoxication with the beauty of Greece, which he visited, and his study of the ancient Greek language. Mizoguchi finds a "tragic beauty" in his vision of the Golden Temple bombed to ashes (p. 42), and even in *The Way of the Samurai* Mishima remarks on the affinity of the *Hagakure* to "the philosophy of the Greeks, particularly the Spartans" (p. 52), and to Stoic and Epicurean thought (pp. 79-81). The willed acceptance of death by the samurai or the kamikaze pilot found adequate literary expression not in haiku or noh but only in tragedy, and the peculiar modernity of Mishima's novels, which rightly strike us as Western (though not therefore as less Japanese), stems above all from his unique fusion of contemporary realism with the structure and tension of ancient tragedy.²⁶

The very fact, however, that the violent act in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* and other novels, to say nothing of Mishima's artfully crafted theatrical life, coincides with the climactic denouement—in contrast to such Western classics as *Oedipus the King* or *Crime and Punishment*, in which the murder takes place before the play or early in the novel—rules out the possibility of any true resolution of the tensions it brings to a head. There is recognition of a kind at the end of Mishima's novel, but no opportunity for reversal; unlike that of Oedipus (who will reappear at Colonus) or Raskolnikov, Mizoguchi's act forever defines, and in that sense condemns, him. Yet Mishima the artist was by no means as single-minded as he strove to make himself in preparation for the pristine purity of death; several of his finest novels give expression, on the contrary, not to the tragic impasse central to this willfully destructive creator's life but to the still more difficult and rarer quality of a classic balance between tensions momentarily held in precarious resolution.

The Sound of Waves (*Shiosai*, 1954), inspired in large part by his visit to Greece, is one of Mishima's most popular books, a love story set in a Japanese fishing village and modeled on the ancient romance of Daphnis and Chloe. A simple story, yet one in which the rugged island, its people, and the surrounding sea, and the dawning emotions of the two young lovers, are all evoked with a delicate lyricism that places this brief novel, as Yourcenar says, "beyond any academic criticism."²⁷ If the would-be nihilist and samurai who wrote *The Sound of Waves* intended it, as he later claimed in apparent discomfort at its widespread appeal, as a "joke on the public,"²⁸ or a mere stylistic exercise, what he achieved by writing with such visionary intensity against the bent of his twisted temper and increasingly obsessional convictions was something far different, that can only be born of a genuine tension between conflicting opposites: a classic.

Still more impressive, though equally slighted by those who find the true Mishima only in his more troubled works, is *After the Banquet* (*Utage no ato*, 1960), a book—occasioned, again, by an actual event—in which we find neither the cult of youth and masculinity nor the obsession with violence and death that we have come to expect in Mishima's novels. The warm-hearted and good-natured, if shrewd and hard-headed Kazu, middle-aged proprietess of a restaurant, who marries an honorable but aloof politician of radical convictions and unbending aristocratic habits, and dreams of overcoming her peasant origins and her questionable past in the respectable security of burial in his family tomb, is perhaps the most fully rounded and deeply sympathetic character in Mishima's fiction: an astonishing mirror opposite of everything his

nascent ideology seemed intent on promoting. Once her spontaneity and intelligence, her tireless efforts and unstinting generosity have failed to win her husband Noguchi's election against a well-funded and unscrupulous opposition, this woman turns with "an intensity bordering on ferocity" (p. 232) to the seemingly impossible task of regaining the restaurant she has mortgaged to finance his campaign, even though, in so doing, she must betray a husband who finds "no room for divergence in human conduct, whether in politics or love" (p. 257).²⁹

When she recovers her restaurant and returns to the garden she had loved, it is no longer with the complacent feeling that everything in her life is well understood and uncomplicated, but with "an uncanny joy she had never known" (p. 268), a joy in the strangeness of the once familiar; now that she has abandoned a counterfeit happiness and acted on her deepest impulses, "everything has found its place, the birds have returned to their nests" (p. 271). Here recognition attends (and presupposes) reversal in a deeply realized resolution inaccessible to the possessed protagonists of Mishima's more typical novels. By so convincingly portraying this hard-won and precarious balance of deep and continuing tensions, this return that is also (like that of Odysseus) a rediscovery, and by placing his story not in an island fishing village but in the heart of contemporary Tokyo, Mishima has employed the techniques of realism inherited from generations of Westernizing predecessors to accomplish that rarest of feats, in Japan as in the West, a classic that is unequivocally modern. Perhaps, like the Tolstoy of Isaiah Berlin's well-known essay,³⁰ Mishima too was a fox attempting to be a hedgehog, a man of multiple sympathies and insights striving for the singleness that only death could bring, a Kazu longing more and more fiercely—but without chance of reversal—for some heroic counterpart to the tomb of Noguchi; and perhaps his greatness as an artist, in everything he wrote, but especially in such apparent diversions as *The Sound of Waves* and *After the Banquet*, lay finally in his inability or unwillingness to attain that goal, to which he would sacrifice his life, in his novels.

The modernity which the translators and imitators of the early Meiji associated above all, in the novel, with the Western realist tradition, and ardently, even naïvely, aspired to attain for themselves, has not surprisingly proved in the hands of subsequent masters to be no single thing. Most of those who continued to write in programmatically realist, naturalist, and confessional modes have undergone the fate of all who belatedly mimic the modern as if it could be unchanging, and who are remembered, if remembered at all, mainly in meticulous chronicles like *Dawn to the West*. For the modern, after all, is whatever speaks to the interests and needs of readers at that particular time called the present,

so that the classic work, which can always be read anew, remains perpetually modern long after works up-to-date for the moment have vanished into an unrecoverable past. Those like Akutagawa, who learned unabashedly from the West but wrote of the heroic or legendary Japanese past, can be read today with an interest and pleasure rarely claimed for the naturalist and proletarian continuators of a one-dimensional realism. The true modernists of Japan, as we have seen, are not those who tagged along after the Western avant-garde but those, like Tanizaki in *The Makioka Sisters* and Kawabata throughout his major writings, who learned from *The Tale of Genji* or the noh as well as from the West, and infused the new realist novel with the spirit of the Japanese classics, which was no less that of their own time. And in Mishima's novels the frazzled dichotomies of East and West, tradition and modernity, break down altogether: this most "reactionary" and "nationalistic" of writers is at the same time the most thoroughly "modern" and "Western."

For what is modern—by which we can only mean, in the end, what is lasting—in this leading realist of post-War Japan is not only his intense portrayal of the violent psychological and social disruptions of his day: the novels that accomplish mainly this, like *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*, to say nothing of *Forbidden Colors*, run the risk (whatever their wider intentions) of becoming period pieces. What is no less modern, because it derives no less from his lived experience of contemporary reality, is his moving depiction of a barely possible resolution to these conflicts (possible in his art if not in his life), achieved in large measure by infusing his impassioned realism with the tragic restraint of the Western classics, which he thereby made his own, and Japan's. The tradition to which Mishima gives classic expression in the best of his novels is thus neither Eastern nor Western: it is the incessantly changing tradition of modernity itself through which the static and long outdated dichotomies of East and West, old and new, are left behind and transcended.

* * *

For all but the most specialized or dedicated readers the encyclopedic *Dawn to the West* will remain, by its very nature, a book more consulted than read. *The Pleasures of Japanese Literature*, in contrast, testifies to Keene's admirable gift for skillful synopsis and graceful popularization. Based on lectures given at the New York Public Library, UCLA, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1986 and 1987, this eloquently compendious book (handsomely printed, with four color plates, by Columbia University Press) can serve both as a useful introduction to

Japanese literature for readers with no prior knowledge of the subject and as a stimulus for others to rediscover familiar pleasures. In the course of his five chapters—on Japanese Aesthetics, Japanese Poetry, The Uses of Japanese Poetry, Japanese Fiction, and Japanese Theater—Keene succinctly summarizes the history of major literary genres and comments perceptively on various classics of poetry and prose, touching only peripherally on the modern era. Whether his theme is nostalgia for the past, the beauties of the seasons, the sadness of love, or the falling of cherry blossoms, he imbues it with the freshness of old memory and new insight.

His most interesting chapter is perhaps the first, in which he attempts to define some of the principal characteristics of Japanese taste in terms of Kenkō's fourteenth-century collection *Tsurezuregusa*, which Keene translated as *Essays in Idleness* over twenty years ago. The four characteristics on which he focuses are *suggestion*; *irregularity*; *simplicity*; and *perishability*. He makes no pretense that these characteristics, though typical of Japanese (as opposed to both Chinese and Western) taste, are peculiar to it; his observations are not dogmatic, but restrained and judicious. Yet a Western reader, while assenting in broad outline to his remarks, may nevertheless find his contrasts too sharply drawn—find the affinities between our opposed traditions greater than his distinctions appear to allow.

For surely Western poets, too, have granted importance to beginnings and ends, and suggestively evoked the sadness of lost love, from Sappho's Atthis ("I was in love with you, Atthis, once long ago . . .") to Wordsworth's Lucy ("A violet by a mossy stone, Half hidden from the eye . . ."). The studied irregularity of Japanese gardens, which Keene too easily contrasts with the geometrical symmetry of Versailles, might be better compared with the cultivated wildness of eighteenth-century "English gardens"; as for Japanese prosody, the astonishing thousand-year dominance of the utterly regular waka or tanka left no leeway, before the discovery of the West, for anything approaching the irregularity of "Pindaric odes" or *vers libre*. Simplicity is itself a cultural construct, but the recurrent pastoralisms of the western tradition, culminating in Rousseau and the Romantic movement, bear witness to its perennial appeal in other cultures than that of Japan. Nor have Western writers since the Greeks (not all of whom wrote tragedies!) invariably "bewailed" the perishability of things human. It was a Roman poet, Horace, who—though aspiring to build a monument more durable than bronze—bade his readers "not to hope for immortal things" but to seize the day in the brevity of its passing beauty; it was an American poet, Wallace Stevens, who declared Death the mother of beauty and questioned "The

need for some imperishable bliss," celebrating, in its place, "the heavenly fellowship Of men that perish and of summer morn . . ." For all the differences in their literary traditions, then, writers in Japan and the West, through centuries before (and the century after) their modern encounter began, have drawn on a deep commonality of human experience and aesthetic values that makes the distinctions Keene persuasively draws between them a matter, after all (as indeed it should be), of nuance.

NOTES

1. Parenthetical page references, unless otherwise indicated, are to *Dawn to the West*. Concerning Tsubouchi's important essay—the preface to which is translated by Keene in his anthology *Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), pp. 55-58—cf. Chapter 2 of Marleigh Grayer Ryan's introductory commentary to her translation of *Japan's First Modern Novel: Ukigumo* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 37-95.
2. Keene, "The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and Japanese Culture," in *Appreciations of Japanese Culture* [formerly *Landscapes and Portraits*] (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971; rpt. 1981), p. 290.
3. Keene, ed., *Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology*, p. 22.
4. Natsume Sôseki, *Kokoro*, trans. Edwin McClellan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), p. 245. Sensei's despair on learning of the Emperor's and General Nogi's deaths in Tokyo parallels the sadness of the Narrator's dying father in the countryside (pp. 91, 108-09). On the impact of these two deaths see Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 213-27.
5. Apart from the frequently translated Akutagawa, only Futabatei among these writers is mentioned in Keene's selective bibliographies as having been translated into English before the War, and even Futabatei's principal novel, *Ukigumo*, was first published in English translation in 1967 (see Note 1, above). The comprehensive bibliography *Modern Japanese Literature in Translation*, compiled by the International House of Japan (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1979), catalogues early English translations of Sôseki's *Botchan* and of scattered shorter works by each of these authors, who were also sporadically translated into French, German, Russian, and other Western languages.
6. On Yokomitsu himself, and the situation of Japanese modernism in general, see Dennis Keene, *Yokomitsu Riichi: Modernist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

7. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 96; Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire*, trans. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 115, 123.
8. Lafcadio Hearn, "A Letter from Japan," in *Writings from Japan*, ed. Francis King (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 151-63. On the Sino-Japanese war, see Hearn, "After the War," in *Kokoro* (1896; rpt. Rutland, VT, and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), pp. 87-108, and Keene, "The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and Japanese Culture," in *Appreciations of Japanese Culture*, pp. 259-99.
9. See the discussion in Makoto Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 71-74. Ueda believes that "By and large Tanizaki seems to have followed his own theoretical precepts about plot construction," but notes that the plot of *The Makioka Sisters*, in Tanizaki's phrase, "has a grandeur like that of a far-extending mountain range"—a distinctly un-Aristotelian conception of what is tight-knit!
10. Noguchi Takehiko, in his excellent article "Time in the World of *Sasameyuki*," in *Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 3 (1977), 1-36 (a translation by Teruko Craig of Chapter 6 of his book *Tanizaki Jun'ichirô ron* [Chûô Kôronsha, 1973]), quotes Tanizaki as writing, in 1948: "Although as an author I didn't purposely go about imitating *Genji*, I suppose one can say that in various ways I was influenced" (p. 11). Noguchi carefully analyzes several ways in which *Sasameyuki*, especially in its treatment of time, parallels *Genji*, above all in the so-called Tamakazura chapters.
11. Keene, *Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), pp. 107-09.
12. Keene, "Tanizaki Junichiro," in *Appreciations of Japanese Culture*, pp. 172, 185, 183.
13. Parenthetical page references are to Tanizaki, *The Makioka Sisters*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1957; rpt. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966).
14. In Keene's own *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), see, e.g., the emphasis on the importance of "no action" in "Seami on the Art of the Nô" (pp. 258-59) and of suggestive emotional restraint in a stylized art "which lies in the slender margin between the real and the unreal" in "Chikamatsu on the Art of the Puppet Stage" (pp. 386-90). Both of these very different dramatists, like the writers of haiku, and like the Symbolists and

- modernists of the West and the theorists of hermeneutics and reader response, require the spectator or reader to devise or interpret a meaning not given by the words of the text alone.
15. Parenthetical page references are to Kawabata, *The Sound of the Mountain*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1970; rpt. New York: Perigee, 1981).
 16. Parenthetical page references are to Kawabata, *The Master of Go*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1972; rpt. New York: Perigee, 1981).
 17. Introduction to Kawabata, *Snow Country*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1956; rpt. New York: Berkeley Medallion, 1964). Parenthetical page references are to this edition.
 18. See the excellent discussion in Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, pp. 203-14. For Kawabata, Ueda remarks (p. 208), Western stream of consciousness "reflected the loss of a coherent world-view in the modern age," whereas the kindred associational technique of both classical and modern Japanese literature "was a result of not forcing a man-made pattern upon life."
 19. Parenthetical page references are to Kawabata, *Thousand Cranes*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Knopf, 1958; rpt. New York: Berkeley Medallion, 1965).
 20. Kawabata, "One Arm," in *House of the Sleeping Beauties and Other Stories*, trans. Edward Seidensticker (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1969; rpt. 1980), p. 103.
 21. Parenthetical page references are to Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, trans. Ivan Morris (New York: Knopf, 1959; rpt. New York: Perigee, n.d.).
 22. Mishima, *Sun and Steel*, trans. John Bester (Tokyo and Palo Alto: Kodansha International, 1970), p. 26. In the play *Madame de Sade* (*Sado kôshaku fujin*, 1965), trans. Donald Keene (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 103, the Marquise de Sade says of her husband "His fascination with destruction ended in creation."
 23. Parenthetical page references are to Mishima, *The Way of the Samurai*, trans. Kathryn Sparling (New York: Basic Books, 1977; rpt. New York: Perigee, 1983). The quotation on p. 8 is from an earlier essay of 1955.
 24. The story, translated by Geoffrey W. Sargent, is printed in Mishima, *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories* (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 93-118. Mishima subsequently made a film of this story in which he himself acted the young officer's part. Seldom has Oscar Wilde's dictum that life imitates art been so literally realized as in Mishima's death.

25. Marguerite Yourcenar, *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*, trans. Alberto Manguel in collaboration with the author (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), pp. 53-54.
26. See Ueda's comments on Mishima's tragic novels in *Modern Japanese Writers*, pp. 246-47.
27. Yourcenar, *Mishima*, p. 39.
28. Quoted in John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1974), p. 121.
29. Parenthetical page references are to Mishima, *After the Banquet*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: Knopf, 1963; rpt. New York: Perigee, 1980).
30. Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (London, and New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, and Simon and Schuster, 1953); rpt. in Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (New York: Viking, 1978), pp. 22-81. The title comes from a fragment of the Greek poet Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing."