

The Difference between Modern Literature and Literature of Modernity in the Early Meiji Period: Kubota Hikosaku's *Torioi Omatsu kaijō shinwa*

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By the middle of 1889, Futabatei Shimei 二葉亭四迷 (1864–1909) had finished *Ukigumo* 浮雲, a novel that has often been called the first modern work of Japanese literature. Futabatei is generally granted this recognition because he wrote “a perceptive, realistic novel and made considerable progress toward perfecting a new colloquial narrative style. ... His novel established the value of psychological realism and the merit of a simple but carefully constructed plot” (Ryan 1967: Introduction). As such, it is considered the first successful expression of what was a growing desire to modernize Japanese literature vis-à-vis the Western literary tradition, a desire that was perhaps most clearly stated by Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙 (1859–1935). In his *Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髓 (1885–86), Shōyō “plead [ed] for the development of a conscious theory of what the novel should contain and how it should be written” (Ryan 1967 : 71), and although he made clear that he had no wish to deny the value of Japanese literary achievements, it must be acknowledged that the qualities he was seeking – many of which Futabatei is credited with incorporating – were those associated with the Western novel of this time.

Inasmuch as modernization, from at least fifteen years prior to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, was a process almost exclusively conceived of as occurring in some relationship to

the West (or more generally, the foreign), we are safe in thinking of Shōyō's concept of a reformed literature as part of a larger conception of modernity.¹ Further, because Futabatei's novel is in many ways the result of a conscious attempt to refigure literary expression in certain ways (a focus on the individual, a privileging of the popular and vernacular, etc.) that were already being defined elsewhere (in political and social theory, for example), and because this was seen as a means of bringing the field of literature to a state of Western-inspired modernity similar to that being pursued in other fields, we can see the novel as being completely conditioned by the larger discourse of modernization. On this basis, too, we have no trouble in calling it a modern work. But was it the first one?

Certain scholars have taken up some of the terms under which *Ukigumo* is judged to be modern – terms that are specific to the literary field – and applied them to much

1) Any discussion of modernization in Japan invites difficulties. Here my goal is to define works, acts or ideas that are characterized by an engagement with the contemporary Japanese concept of modernity as being of the modern period. Sheldon Garon states, “[h]istorians tend to approach modernization as a long-term process, but they have written little about what modernization and modernity meant to the Japanese people themselves. Although Japanese differed over definitions of “modernity,” the quest to make Japan “modern” captivated a diverse set of actors from middle-class professionals and village elites to higher civil servants” (Garon 1994: 347). One definition of modernity might have been both the technological and cultural status of certain foreign powers, implying that native technology and culture were inferior. Another definition might have been a combination of foreign technology and native culture, implying the superiority of the latter. A response to the issue of modernity that completely denied the need to “modernize” (or “Westernize”) in any respect is another possible definition. All of these, despite their differences, are conditioned by the discourse of modernity, and are thus part of the modern period. For me, the modern period in Japan begins within individuals when there is the awareness of the concept of “modernity,” and a engagement is made with the agonistic questions “better than,” “worse than,” or “equal to.” As a result, I am in general opposed to the idea of a transitional period.

earlier works in the Japanese tradition. As an example, realism has been ascribed to Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693), as in this comment by Robert Danly:

By the standards of Flaubert or Zola, Saikaku would seem a very strange realist indeed. Like the Europeans two hundred years later, Saikaku attempted to reproduce normal, everyday life as lived by the ordinary person, thereby portraying universal truth. And like them, his technique was the exact observation of human behavior set against the physical background of contemporary life. ... What he did not share with the Europeans was the same rigorous code of objectivity. And yet even in the breach, Saikaku remains a realist. He was not one to eschew exaggeration or a fancy style, but in the overdrawn and decorative he still managed to capture aspects of human nature that ring true (Danly 1981: 129).

Another feature of Futabatei's work, the attribution of psychological depth to characters, is often located in *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, a trend acknowledged here by Donald Keene: "Murasaki Shikibu devoted her greatest attention to the elements in human life that have changed the least over the centuries. Because the emotions of her characters are so easily intelligible, we sometimes obtain a startling impression of modernity, and it is easy to overlook even the aspects of life in Heian Japan that differ most conspicuously from our own" (Keene 1993: 507).

Whatever the merits of these kinds of observations, and irrespective of the concerns which may motivate them, they cannot lead to a conception of the works they apply to as modern, in the sense that *Ukigumo* is modern. It is not *Ukigumo*'s realism or its psychological depth that, of themselves, mark the novel's modernity, but rather the fact that it possessed these things at a moment when they had been identified with a specific conception of modernity.

Saikaku's work may well have been considered modern in its day, we cannot say, but the concept of modernity of that time cannot have been analogous to the one that prevailed in 1889. If we are to look for examples of Japanese literature which engage with the same moment of modernity as *Ukigumo*, which can thus be modern in some comparable way, we must look for works that are defined by the issues characteristic of that moment: How was Japan to proceed into the post-Shōgunal era? How was Japan to judge herself and be judged – politically, culturally, socially, economically – in relation to a newly insistent dichotomy, that of Japan and not-Japan? What changes needed be made, and what changes needed to be avoided? This is not to suggest that Japan's dilemma was simply how to be more like the West (although the importance to Japan's concept of modernization of having a variety of foreign examples would be difficult to overstate): the central question, to which there were many violently opposed answers, was "What does a modern *Japan* look like?"

In the search for possible examples of modern Japanese literature prior to Futabatei's novel, some have focused on long, serialized works called *tsuzukimono* 続き物 that were featured in popularist *koshimbun* 小新聞 of the early Meiji period.² These were primarily accounts of sensational events, usually crimes, and fictionalized to a lesser or greater degree. Issues related to the production of these works – the development of the press and its effect on popular consciousness, the evolution of a reportage manner of storytelling, contemporary conceptions of the proper relationship between truth and fiction – provide opportunities for considering their relationship to the larger question of Japan's modernization. However, no one would suggest that their *literary* qualities bear much in common with those of

2) My introduction to this line of inquiry was a talk given by John Treat at the University of Washington in the spring of 1998.

modern Japanese literature: typically they are understood as a continuation of the Edo period *gesaku* 戯作 tradition.³

To refer back to the earlier description of *Ukigumo*, this is to say that they are not marked by psychological depth or a concern with interiority, and are written in a language that is inherited – complete with tropes, patterns, and intertextual elements – from Japanese pre-modern literature, which here primarily refers to that of the Edo period. There is a certain realism of description, as might be expected in stories supposed to be based on actual events, but perhaps this is seen as being more in the tradition of Saikaku, and of the many kabuki and *bunraku* 文楽 plays that also dramatized sensational contemporary events.⁴ If these are the criterion that are to be used to judge modernity, then it should be said at the outset of this study that the work to be considered in detail below, *Torioi Omatsu kaijō shinwa* 鳥追阿松海上新話 (1878), which is the first of the *tsuzukimono*, does not meet them.

However, it is not at all clear that these are the criterion that must be applied. Tsubouchi Shōyō, when he wrote *Shōsetu shinzui*, was already aware of the larger issues of modernity and modernization facing Japan. Which is to say, there was already a clear discourse of modernity before he attempted to define how his own field, literature, should best respond to modernity. His contribution was to postulate aesthetic and structural changes, themselves in keeping with

3) This estimation is made by Kamei Hideo (Kamei 1978), Noguchi Takehiko (Noguchi 1976), and Honda Yasuo (Honda 1998), among others. While Kamei and Noguchi do address the modernity of these works, they focus on reflections of social phenomenon that can be located within them, rather than literary qualities: in both cases, the fact that the literary place of these works is within the *gesaku* tradition is taken as a given. Honda's work is a historical description of the development of stories serialized in newspapers, which he too sees as beginning with *gesaku*.

4) On this tendency in kabuki and *bunraku*, see Brandon 1975 (pp. 4–5) and Brazell 1998 (p. 17).

his definition of proper modernization, which should be made to what he saw as the most modern literary form, the novel, in order to bring the field of Japanese literature into the modern age. Futabatei and many other writers generally shared, or came to share, these views, which then come to seem characteristic of many works written in the modern period. Yet there were works being written in the modern period (or perhaps ‘period of modernization’) prior to 1885 or 1886, and whereas these cannot be expected to reflect formal choices that would later be identified as literary expressions of modernity, they may yet be completely conditioned by an engagement with the same conceptions of the modern that led Tsubouchi to write his famous essay. Although these conceptions would not yet have been applied specifically to literature, they would nonetheless have defined modernity at this time.

This is not to suggest that all works written in the period between Japan’s first conceptualization of modernity and *Shōsetsu shinzui* are therefore also modern, albeit in ways different from *Ukigumo*. It is not enough merely to locate in a work elements from the environment or society that have come to be associated with Japan’s particular process of modernization, for this is only observation, and does not constitute engagement.⁵ Engagement becomes evident only when some kind of response to the questions raised by modernity is apparent; when there is some grappling with issues such as what a modern Japan, or a modern Japanese citizen, is like or should be like.

5) This is perhaps only true of prose forms, which had often incorporated descriptions of the new, the foreign, and the strange, without this producing any kind of anxiety about the current state of society vis-à-vis some other, fundamentally different state. This seems true of later kabuki and *bunraku* as well. However, the mention of such elements within Japanese poetic forms at this time – and perhaps the *Nō* – would likely be so disruptive of traditional strictures as to constitute engagement of itself.

If this is true, then the reverse corollary would seem also to be true: it is not enough to declare a work to be “un-modern” or “pre-modern” only because one cannot locate in it certain formal elements that have been identified as characteristically modern. In his discussion of early-Meiji popular interest in the phenomenon of the *dokufu* 毒婦 (“poison women” who commit acts of cold-blooded treachery) and the concomitant interest in newspaper articles and *tsuzukimono* about one notorious *dokufu*, Takahashi Oden 高橋お伝 (1850?-1879), Kamei Hideo focuses on a consciousness of criminality apparent in such stories that he sees as leftover from the pre-modern period. He identifies three periods that characterize what was a gradual transformation of literary descriptions of “wrongdoing” (*aku* 悪): in the first, a bad act is something one performs directly and tangibly, such as murder or robbery, and it has tangible results. This is characteristic of *gesaku*. The second period is one in which the *desire* to perform such acts is yet present, a desire which often arises in response to post-Meiji power relationships, and which finds expression especially in the *seiji shōsetsu* 政治小説, or political novels, of the time. Lastly, in the period of modern literature, even this desire to perform actual criminal acts has disappeared, to be replaced by mere “grudges,” and feelings of resentment towards others that never threatens to “come to a boil” (Kamei 1978: 88). As a result, Kamei finds the description of, and interest in, those direct acts of actual wrongdoing which are at the heart of the Takahashi Oden story to be indicative of a continuation of the *gesaku* tradition, specifically that of *kanzen chōaku* 勧善懲悪 tales (stories designed to “promote good and chastise wrongdoing”).

Here Kamei has fixed upon one feature he finds characteristic of modern Japanese literature (the absence in stories of any desire to commit actual criminal acts), which he locates in such novels as Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *Tōsei shosei*

katagi 当世書生氣質 (1885–86), *Ukigumo*, and Mori Ōgai's 森鷗外 (1862–1922) *Maihime* 舞姫 (1890), and determines that *tsuzukimono* concerning Takahashi Oden are not modern because they do not share it. In truth, inasmuch as all *tsuzukimono* that one can think of have this focus on direct acts of wrongdoing, they would all deserve this judgment. Yet even were Kamei's sense of the development of the Japanese consciousness of criminality to be correct, and it very well may be, this consciousness cannot be the only touchstone for an awareness of and engagement with the larger issue of modernization at this time.⁶

A conception of the modern came to different people at different times in Japan, and when it did come, it produced anxieties of different kinds. Primarily these anxieties arose from the recognition that society had entered a period of flux, and that for well or ill change was occurring. Many had a positive, 'liberal' response to this fact, sure that the changes were necessary, even inevitable, for the Japan of their understanding. Others had a sense of foreboding, a reactionary impulse that arose from the fear that much of value would be lost, and damage done to society, as others tried to modernize Japan unnaturally. Most likely responded differently to various issues, holding a mix of liberal, conservative, and reactionary views; this is a stance often found characteristic of Japan and the Japanese during this period. To some, modernity meant industrialization and technological advancement; to others its greatest possibility was an unprecedented reorganization of society, and a new

6) Noguchi Takehiko does something similar in his identification of certain changing ideas concerning gender identities, gender relations, and sexuality, looking at *dokufu* as they appear in kabuki, *gesaku*, and *tsuzukimono*. Again, the last of these are found to be something other than modern, and are rather "Meiji *gesaku*," whose authors have squandered a chance at modernity by forcing their materials to conform with pre-modern ideas of the *kanzen chōaku* work (Noguchi 1976: 94).

view of humanity itself. If some of the details of the following statement by Joseph Kitagawa can be argued, it yet describes this phenomenon of 'differing modernities' amply:

If Western influence could have been confined to technological and academic spheres alone, as the Meiji regime had hoped, it would not have caused so much anxiety for the government leaders. If that had been possible, Japan could have developed both a highly centralized hierarchical polity and an efficient, "modern" technological civilization. Instead, Western influence resulted in the emergence of a new intelligentsia that demanded liberty, equality, and human dignity. What the Westernized intelligentsia envisaged was not the kind of technological civilization that was merely to serve the political ends defined by a few men who surrounded the throne, but the kind of civilization that "advances the well-being and dignity of man, since man acquires these benefits through knowledge and virtue," to quote Fukuzawa Yukichi, the spokesman of the modernist movement. It is to be noted that the "virtue" advocated by Fukuzawa was not the traditional Confucian virtue, based on that hierarchical relationship in which one is expected to know one's place and to fulfill his obligations with diligence, humility, and obedience. Convinced that all men and women were created equal and furnished with the same dignity without distinction, Fukuzawa and others like him instilled the spirit of "modernity" in the minds of youths who were impatient with the traditional values (Kitagawa 1966: 253-54).

One point here needs to be contested: the above makes it appear as though the "Meiji regime," which here must consist of the "government" in a general sense and "a few men who surrounded the throne" in a more limited one, was united and consistent in taking a poor view of changes beyond the

sphere of production. However, in the first fifteen years following the Restoration especially, this was not the case. In the first place, Meiji policies were influenced by many individual people to whom modernization meant different things. In the second, the “throne” itself, or the ideas attributed to it, had provided (or echoed) an early impetus for more liberal change. The five items of the Charter Oath (*Gokajō no seimon* 五箇条の誓文) of 1868, precursor to the first Constitution of the same year, read as follows:

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule (Tsunoda 1958: 137).

It is this positive attitude towards change, unencumbered by any deep-seated misgivings, which can be seen in Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1834–1901) and many other figures of the early and middle parts of the Meiji period.

However, the conservative outlook that Kitagawa attributed above to the “Meiji regime” was certainly prevalent as well during this same time, not only among those charged with governing, but at all levels of society. As changes believed by many to be dangerously liberal began to be made, this conservatism necessarily became a reactionary force, the expression of a desire to erase the changes and restore a prior order. The Great Principles of Education (*Kyōgaku taishi* 教学大旨), issued as an imperial rescript (*chokugo* 勅語) in 1879, is

an early example, and makes a nice contrast with the Charter Oath of 1868:

The essence of education, our traditional national aim, and a watchword for all men, is to make clear the ways of benevolence, justice, loyalty, and filial piety, and to master knowledge and skill and through these to pursue the Way of Man. In recent days, people have been going to extremes. They take unto themselves a foreign civilization whose only values are fact-gathering and technique, thus violating the rules of good manners and bringing harm to our customary ways. Although we set out to take in the best features of the West and bring in new things in order to achieve the high aims of the Meiji restoration – abandonment of the undesirable practices of the past and learning from the outside world – this procedure had a serious defect: It reduced benevolence, justice, loyalty, and filial piety to a secondary position. The danger of indiscriminate emulation of Western ways is that in the end our people will forget the great principles governing the relations between ruler and subject, and father and son. Our aim, based on our ancestral teachings, is solely the clarification of benevolence, justice, loyalty, and filial piety (Livingston 1973: 152).

This is a specific case of a reactionary desire to impose anew the traditional Confucian social order, which was seen as threatened by new philosophies of human relationships. As such it is an intellectual engagement with modernity, yet all the same is of a kind with many of the violent agrarian revolts of the early Meiji period:

[M]any of these revolts appear to be merely demonstrations of resentment against the many aspects of modernization. Tumult and rioting only too often greeted decrees announcing the reform of the calendar,

the abolition of the queue, the legalization of Christianity, the emancipation of the *eta* (outcasts), vaccination, the establishment of government schools, conscription, the land survey, numbering of houses, and the like. Peasants frequently were excited by wild rumors that the numbering of houses was a preliminary measure to the abduction of their wives and daughters; that the phrase “blood taxes” in the conscription decree of 1873 was to be taken literally, so that in joining the army their blood would be drawn and shipped abroad to make dye for scarlet blankets; that the telephone and telegraph lines would be used to transmit the blood; that the children herded into the new schools would also have their blood extracted” (Norman 1940: 72).

Although their concept of modernity, and their sense of its implications, is of a different order than that of Motoda Nagazane 元田 永 孚 (also Eifu; 1818–1891), the Confucian advisor to Emperor Meiji who drafted the Great Principles of Education rescript of 1879, the “peasants” described above are similarly conservative, similarly reactionary. During this period of flux, for every Fukuzawa Yukichi that wrote a statement like “Heaven never created a man above another nor a man below another” (which he did in 1872), there was someone to decry such statements for contradicting “the traditional political philosophy which assumed that human society was a natural hierarchy in which all men were by nature unequal” (Kiyooka 1966 : xii–xiii). Both responses, however, are equally ‘modern,’ in that they represent a full engagement with the processes of change that characterize Japanese modernization, and with the contemporary discourse of modernity.

Precisely during this unsettled, early part of the Meiji period, the first of the *tsuzukimono* was published. *Torioi Omatsu no den* 鳥追ひお松の伝, written by Kubota Hikosaku 久

保田彦作 (1846–1898) and “supervised” (*etsu* 閱) by its publisher, Kanagaki Robun 仮名垣魯文 (1829–1894), appeared in fourteen installments between December 1877 and January 1878 in the *Kanayomi shimbun* 仮名読新聞. Due either to a changing legal sense of what should appear in a newspaper or to flagging public interest, publication was halted before the story’s completion.⁷ However, it was then introduced in book form between February and March of 1878, under the title *Torioi Omatsu kaijō shinwa*, which proved very popular. Assuming that the two versions of the story are largely identical (losses among the original newspapers make this impossible to judge conclusively), the fourteenth serial installment would have taken readers about two-thirds through the complete work.

It is a *dokufumono* 毒婦物, or “poison woman tale,” and recounts the career of wrongdoing and crime of Omatsu, a woman from the *hinin* 非人 (“non-person”) outcast class. Its language is that of kabuki and *gesaku*, as are its manner of storytelling and its characterizations. In these respects it is certainly a “*fin de siècle*-type” work, as Noguchi Takehiko judges it, something that he thinks is only to be expected of Kubota and Kanagaki, two of “the last *gesaku* writers” (Noguchi 1976: 57). However, it must be said that taken as a product of this particular moment in the Japanese literary tradition, there is really nothing else that it could have been: because in 1878 a specifically literary approach to modernity had yet to be clearly postulated and incorporated, there can

7) The editorial notes to the edition used, written by Maeda Ai, give the former reason for the premature stoppage (Okitsu 1989: 428), whereas Honda Yasuo cites a note that appeared at the end of the fourteenth installment to come to the latter conclusion. In this note, a “reporter” (*kisha* 記者) says that he has received letters such as one that reads as follows: “*Omatsu no den* has gone on a lot longer than anyone expected, and since readers are more than a little bored with it, why don’t you end it?” As a result, this person determines to do just that, “and to have the complete story published as a “*gesaku*-type *yomihon*” (Honda 1998: 76–77).

be no escaping the fact that the onset of what we recognize as Japanese *literature's* modern period must postdate *Torioi Omatsu*. All the same, because a *fin de siècle* sensibility is one characterized by a complex, anxious awareness that one world is ending, with another unknown one to take its place, it remains that an acceptance of Noguchi's adjudication of the work (and its author[s]) would not preclude the possibility that the story might also evince an engagement with the Japanese discourse of the modern that has been discussed thus far.

In fact, elements within the story make clear that Noguchi must be incorrect when he states that *gesaku* writers like Kubota and Kanagaki, by virtue of having come of age in a period not permeated by the atmosphere of the Restoration, finally had the sense that "such things as changes in the government [we]re matters which occur[red] a great distance away" (Noguchi 1976 : 57). For unless we are to attribute the writing of *Torioi Omatsu* entirely to 'social energies' rather than authors, Kubota and Kanagaki are responsible for a work which is engaged with just such things. In spite of a format, style, and language that is inevitably "pre-modern" (in terms of a sense of modernity limited to literary format, style, and language), *Torioi Omatsu* is almost wholly engaged with the social and political issues that were at the center of the larger early-Meiji Japanese conception of modernity.

Like perhaps that held by most people of this same period, the primary attitude evinced in the work towards many elements of modernization is one of reactionary conservatism: social situations that had arisen as a result of early approaches towards modernization are presented as being a negative outcome, with the implication that the approaches that fostered them should be disavowed. In particular, the narrative in *Torioi Omatsu* is entirely driven by the idea that

changes in the social order (especially the loosening of class demarcations) had produced a dangerously fluid society. This clear engagement with the early-Meiji discourse of modernity requires that the work be considered, if not a work of 'modern Japanese literature' in the manner of *Ukigumo*, then certainly as literature of the Japanese experience of modernity.

One of the hallmarks of the so-called *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 (civilization and enlightenment) period in Japan, which coincides with the country's early experiences with the concept of modernization, was the burgeoning conflict between a new, egalitarian understanding of the rights of individuals and the traditional belief that every man had his natural place in the social order, some high and some low. The language of the Charter Oath of 1868 reflects the former tendency, as does Fukuzawa Yukichi's statement (cited above) that "Heaven never created a man above another nor a man below another." The reiteration of Confucian social hierarchies found in the Imperial Rescript of 1879 is an expression of the latter, and came at a time when liberal ideas of equality were seen by many as having already altered society to a dangerous degree.

Implicit in the idea of all men being equal is the belief that one is not destined by the circumstances of one's birth to remain at a certain social position, or limited to certain 'natural' patterns of behavior. This is related to an anecdote told by Fukuzawa: on a trip out of Tokyo, he came across a farmer on horseback. This man, recognizing Fukuzawa as being of the samurai class, immediately dismounted, which he would have been required to do when meeting such a person on the road prior to 1871, before laws abolishing such 'feudal' distinctions between social classes were promulgated. Fukuzawa relates: "I forced him to get back on the horse and drove him off. This made me reflect what fearful weight the old customs had with the people. Here was this poor farmer

still living in fear of all persons, never realizing that the new law of the land had liberated him" (Kiyooka 1966 : 244). Although he refers to members of the agrarian class as "rubber dolls," who had come to find it entirely natural that they should bend and bow to their erstwhile betters, Fukuzawa did not believe that this kind of ingrained response reflected any innate tendency : "Still the times do change. At present the onetime "rubber dolls" have developed into fine enterprising citizens. Many of them have learned sciences and are practising modern business and industry" (Kiyooka 1966 : 246). For many others at this time, however, it was not at all clear that people could or should deviate from the established patterns of social behavior that had been determined for each class of society. It was rather feared that such disruptions of the natural order would inevitably lead to chaos : a lack of "benevolence, justice, loyalty, and filial piety," as the 1879 Imperial Rescript put it.

Against this backdrop, in 1877 the choice of a member of the *hinin*, or outcast class, as the protagonist of a story constituted in itself an engagement with this particular issue of modernization. In 1871, a series of new laws had decreed that the position of the *hinin* in society was not fundamentally different from that of any other citizen, and their births, deaths, and other vital statistics began to be officially registered in the same manner as people from other social groups.⁸ The fact that revolts in the countryside occurred in response to "the emancipation of the *eta*" (as noted in the passage from Norman 1940, cited above) shows that this decision was not universally met with approval. Rather, among many there was a sense of foreboding, and the belief that only disaster could come from thus disrupting society's natural order. This foreboding seems clearly to have

8) Okitsu 1989, p. 131, note 15.

arisen out of assumptions that a group of people whose determined, natural role was to conduct affairs found in various ways to be anathema to decent society would, with the passage of these new laws, continue to do exactly that, high ideals or no, with the only difference being that they would henceforth conduct their unsavory affairs on the stage of decent society.

Torioi Omatsu is nothing if not a story of a *hinin* woman who, along with her *hinin* mother and a *hinin* accomplice, goes forth from the small neighborhood of Tokyo that traditionally had been thought to delimit the space of legitimate *hinin* activity, and conducts various unsavory affairs. Although the story itself is set at the very beginning of the Meiji period, which means that by the time of the 1871 emancipation laws Omatsu is already well along in her career as a *dokufu*, we are justified in identifying the characterizations of *hinin* found throughout the story with the larger issue of changing class relationships in a modernizing Japan for three reasons: first, this issue was very much current in 1877–79, the time of composition; second, the liberal concepts regarding the equality of men which produced such emancipation decrees had been abroad in educated circles well before 1871; third, language found in several parts of the text itself seems deeply conditioned by the larger discourse on social organization.⁹

9) As one example of this final point, at one point in the tale Omatsu declares: "Even though I was born a proper person, complete with the same five senses [as anyone], I'm despised as an *eta*, a beggar," an expression that Maeda Ai sees as a direct reference to the language of the emancipation decree of 1871 (Okitsu 1989: 130–31). Another example is the use of the expression "all men are brothers" (*shikai keitei* 四海兄弟), a phrase from the Analects which was employed in the first years of Meiji to express a sense of friendliness for foreign countries, following the logic that in the eyes of Heaven, all men are equally human, irrespective of race or nationality (Okitsu 1989: 163). On that same page, Maeda in a note identifies language which was popular shorthand for the ideals of human equality

Torioi Omatsu's engagement with that larger discourse is clearly a conservative one: the portrayal of the protagonist and other *hinin* characters depicts the negative results of their interaction with wider society. When the story opens, it is explained that Omatsu and her mother, Ochiyo, have traditionally made only a humble living at a traditional outcast pursuit. But with so many newcomers in Tokyo – a product of the urbanization that was another result of modernization – interest in their New Year's songs for driving away pests (*torioi no uta* 鳥追いの歌) has flagged.¹⁰ However, while plying this trade around a nearby barracks for Restoration forces, a young samurai officer, either too far away from his own home to know better or an early believer in emancipation, becomes infatuated with the pretty Omatsu. Mother and daughter then conspire to use this infatuation to gradually fleece the officer, named Hamada Shōji, out of all his possessions. Completely taken, the young man neglects his duty, and is punished by his commander (Okitsu 1989: 128–29). This first 'interclass affair' of the work is on the one hand a complete disaster for the respectable Hamada, and on the other an indication of what might be expected to result if *hinin* are permitted to act outside their natural sphere.

Next Omatsu, perhaps warming to possibilities beyond her traditional calling, secures the interest of a reliable young merchant, Chūzō. He is the clerk of a shop dealing in

Fukuzawa Yukichi expressed in his 1872–76 work *Gakumon no susume* 学問のすすめ (Okitsu 1989: 163, note 21).

- 10) Honda Yasuo thinks it is not coincidental to the story that the Tokyo authorities had in 1876 banned the practice of *torioi*, along with other common practices which they saw as being of no benefit. He believes there is an elegiac quality to the work, a lament for the culture of the Edo period: "This, the last *torioi* in Japan, spins into insanity as a "poison woman," then dies along with the last vestiges of the Edo period" (Honda 1998: 85). I would rather suggest that the work laments the trend towards modernization that eliminates traditional roles in general, and the disruption this causes.

embroidered clothing, a shop appropriately enough named the “Mastuya.” One evening, when he happens to be carrying a large sum of his master’s money, he is coaxed into visiting Omatsu’s residence in the *hinin* quarter. The reader is told that this is hardly something he would ordinarily do: “This was the first time Chūzō had ever stayed in a *hinin* shack, and when he thought of the shame he would suffer were it ever to get out, he suddenly could not sleep” (Okitsu 1989: 130).

He is right to be wary, as Omatsu, her mother, and another *hinin*, Ōsaka Kichi, have set a trap for him. Kichi bursts in, pretending to be an angry husband, and threatens to kill Chūzō. The clerk is persuaded to give over half of his master’s money in order to assuage his attacker, an act which makes it unthinkable for him to return to his shop. Later we find Chūzō despairing of his future, and resolving to die to acquit himself of his error. However, Omatsu – who has meanwhile had to flee Tokyo because of her actions – comes across him in this state, and convinces him that it would be better to try and find a way to replace his master’s funds (Okitsu 1989: 138–39). She sets off with him, her hopes on getting the other half of the money he carries. While in the first example disaster resulted from *hinin* leaving their traditional space, in this episode it arises when a respectable merchant enters into that space. This is no less the result of looser boundaries between classes, which make such interactions a reasonable possibility, if not yet a particularly welcomed one. Like Hamada, Chūzō’s ‘interclass affair’ is disastrous for him, and as with Hamada, Omatsu and the other *hinin* perform deeds that are uniformly unacceptable to wider society.

As the story progresses, Omatsu is at one point exposed as a *dokufu* by a mysterious soldier, who lists all of her crimes from beneath a rush hat that conceals his face. Omatsu is carted off by other soldiers, supposedly to prison, only to

instead be set down and have her bonds cut: the mysterious soldier is none other than Hamada, who has stolen Omatsu away ahead of the real authorities. He confesses that he still loves her, and after making many statements that reflect his full agreement with the more liberal concepts of egalitarianism expressed during the early Meiji period,¹¹ takes her to his home and installs her as what is in essence his second wife (Okitsu 1989: 160–66).

This is already an unprecedented position for a *hinin* to achieve, and represents a great loosening of class strictures.¹² However, Omatsu's nature is to perform unsavory deeds, and she cannot simply pursue this new opportunity that a liberalizing society has allowed her. She instead plots with her old accomplice Kichi (who has by chance come to serve as a stable-hand at the house) to usurp the position of Hamada's principal wife, and thus gain access to the household purse. She is successful in this, but her rival kills herself as a result. This leads to suspicions on Hamada's part, and upon discovering the truth of his misjudgment, he kills himself as well, forcing Omatsu and Kichi to flee once again and robbing them of long-term comfort (Okitsu 1989 : 167–

11) The egalitarian sentiments described in note 9 above are (with the exception of Omatsu's statement) expressed by Hamada. Another comment of his is as follows: "Though it may have been Hamada Shōji's mistake that the one he fell in love with was not of samurai decent, this is the kind of thing they mean when they say " [Love] is beyond the boundaries of normal ways of thinking," and it's nothing to despise" (Okitsu 1989: 164). Here Hamada is referring to himself in the third person.

12) A fact mentioned directly in the story through reference to new emancipation edicts which decreed both that "*eta* and *hinin*" were to be seen as "new citizens" of the nation, and that intermarriage between social classes was to be permitted. These are described as recent changes whose effects were already being felt, to the degree that interclass marriage was "already nothing that anyone troubled themselves over" (Okitsu 1989: 168). There is an anachronism here, as these laws were not passed until the fourth year of Meiji (1871), whereas the internal dating of the story has them in effect a year earlier.

175). The liberal changes in class structure, despite the good intentions which motivated them, have proved disastrous: Hamada is ruined for believing in such ideals as equality among men, while Omatsu and Kichi continue to prove that it is simply not in their nature to become members of respectable society. The conservative message reflected here is one that posits social chaos as the likely, if not inevitable, result of this aspect of the modernization of Japan.

Importantly, in *Torioi Omatsu* the problem is not simply that social changes have allowed a particularly inveterate wrong-doer, Omatsu, to interact with people outside the *hinin* class; the central point is rather that as a *hinin* such behavior is innate to her, and cannot be changed. This is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the final episodes of the story. Omatsu, who finally seems to be on the brink of achieving some kind of escape from her habitual wrongdoing, spends two full years as an apparently devout nun at a Buddhist hermitage. Penitent, chaste and humble, she convinces all around her that she has changed her ways. If she had truly been able to do so, this would contradict the idea that men are by nature limited to certain patterns of behavior. However, one day she conceives a desire to return to Tokyo to see whether her mother is alive or dead. She has no money for this trip, and though one supposes she could just as well have asked for help, instead, “in a trice her *dokufu* nature, which spurred in her a tendency for wrongdoing, asserted itself, and she had no thought of wrong or right” (Okitsu 1989: 180). She tries to steal some money, is discovered, and in spite of her attempts to talk her way out of trouble, is thrown out of the hermitage by the abbot, who declares, “a *dokufu* like you cannot be saved” (Okitsu 1989: 181).

Lest the reader get the impression that only Omatsu's status as a *dokufu*, rather than as a *hinin*, is irredeemable, the story's final paragraphs are replete with descriptions of

Omatsu that identify bestial qualities in her nature ; such descriptions were at the core of popular language used to refer to the outcast class. Thus, Omatsu lives out her days crazed “like a mangy dog, living in the Realm of Beasts even while yet alive in this world, despised as unclean by all people” (Okitsu 1989 : 181), and the narrator informs us that “there is nothing so pitiful as a beautiful woman with the soul of a beast” (Okitsu 1989 : 182). The term translated above as “Realm of Beasts” is *chikushōdō* 畜生道, and while this specifically refers to one of the six hells of Buddhist cosmology, the term *chikushō*, literally “beast of burden,” was perhaps the most common pejorative epitaph for *hinin*. Despite many opportunities to make her way in larger society, opportunities available to her as a result of the liberal concepts of class emancipation that were one trend in the early modernization of Japan, Omatsu proves unable to rise above what is shown to be her innate social position without causing significant damage to wider society. Her characterization reflects a line of reasoning within the discourse of modernization that understood liberal ideals of social equality to be inapplicable to Japan, and which recommended a course of progress into the new age that preserved traditional social hierarchies, respecting the natural tendencies of the people that populated them.

But the unnatural advancement of a social class beyond its natural limits is not the only effect of liberal trends within the modernization process addressed: throughout *Torioi Omatsu* there are occurrences when the traditional, Confucian social relationships are shown to have more generally collapsed. As noted earlier, this is precisely the phenomenon that Motoda Nagazane witnessed when accompanying Emperor Meiji on a tour of regional schools, motivating the 1879 Imperial Rescript that he authored. To refer to episodes from the story that have already been presented above, there

is the example of Hamada Shōji – whose name (*shōji* 正司) literally means something like “Right Service” – who is derelict in his duties not only to his commander, but by extension to his clan, the fledgling Meiji state, and finally the emperor himself. This dereliction is shown in the story to have been brought about by his love for Omatsu, a love made possible by Hamada’s belief in liberal concepts of egalitarianism. Chūzō – whose name translates as “Treasury of Loyalty” (*chūzō* 忠蔵) – fails in the most vital duty of the merchant class: that of apprentice to master. Again, this is a result of his trip into the *hinin* stratum of society, where he would not have been likely to stray were it not for the loosening of class strictures. Hamada’s infatuation with Omatsu also leads him to disrupt the proper relationship between husband and wife: taken in by Omatsu’s plot, he has his principal wife thrown into a storehouse, where she dies (Okitsu 1989 : 172–74). This is another aspect of social disharmony that the text addresses, and by doing so, reflects a conservative trend in the Japanese attitude towards modernization.

In addition to the above, there are several other elements of Japan’s modernization process that are implicitly addressed. To choose just one example, there is the new freedom of movement that the lifting of pre-Meiji travel restrictions extended to all classes, which seems to have been an ancillary effect of a more general loosening of class distinctions. This contributes in *Torioi Omatsu* to the protagonist’s ability to flee from authority unhindered. She thus has a much easier time than an earlier Omatsu, the heroine of an 1865 kabuki *dokufumono* titled *Momochidori okitsu shiranami* 百千鳥沖津白波 (popularly known as *Kijin no Omatsu* 鬼神のお松, or “Omatsu the Demon God”): she must live in the mountains as an outlaw to gain freedom of movement (Yamamoto 1970 : 282–310). As in the case of the other effects of liberal

modernization policies, this one is shown as having a negative impact.

Far from being a text written by someone who felt that affairs of state “occur a great distance away,” *Torioi Omatsu* is almost wholly engaged with the social and political issues at the center of the larger Japanese conception of modernity. More than a mere observation of contemporary social trends, the consistently conservative – and finally reactionary – attitude taken towards liberal changes that had been made or were being made to social hierarchies and class relationships constitutes an active participation in the debate over modernization. The central question of this debate – what a properly modernized Japan should be like – is one that conditions almost every episode of the tale. If it features literary qualities that are not consistent with those that would later be considered representative of the literary field’s response to modernization, and if this means that it cannot be comfortably considered a work of ‘modern Japanese literature,’ *Torioi Omatsu* must nonetheless be understood as a work of Japan’s ‘literature of modernity,’ a category that, in terms of social history at least, is in many ways more important and more useful.

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