

JAPANESE LIFE IN THE EDO PERIOD AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE

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Before entering my discussion, I should say a word about the term “Edo Period” itself. In Japanese the most often used term for the period from 1600 to 1868 is *kinsei*, meaning “recent times”. This term designates only this one particular period, and does not include any other “recent times”, making it difficult to use the term in translation. The period of 268 years is known also as the Tokugawa period, from the family name of the shoguns who were the effective rulers of Japan during these years. In Western studies of Japan one now encounters the term “early modern” for the same period, I myself prefer to use “pre-modern”. Finally, in literary studies one most often finds “Edo Period”. The significance of this term is that the center of literary production, long in Kyoto, the old capital, or (more recently) in Osaka, shifted to Edo, the modern Tokyo. However, it is hard to date the shift. Matsuo Basho, the greatest of the haiku poets, moved to Edo in 1672, and one might take this year as the beginning of “Edo literature”; but it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that Edo became the center of other forms of literature, such as fiction and drama. In short, there is really no satisfactory term that can be used both in Japanese and in foreign languages for this important period.

The Edo period – or whatever one chooses to call it – begins in historical terms with the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. As the result of the victory in this battle, the Tokugawa family emerged as the strongest military power in Japan. Soon afterwards, it established its seat of power in Edo, known as *bakufu*, or “tent government”, emphasizing its military aspects. It retained control over the country until its armies were defeated by those of the emperor in 1868.

I shall not describe the military or political aspects of the regime, but I must say a little about the situation that prevailed prior to the establishment of the Tokugawa bakufu

because it contrasted so markedly with what would be typical of Japan for two and a half centuries. The chief figure in the Japan of the 1580s and 1590s was Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), a self-made man with pretensions to aristocratic culture. During this period Japan was open to foreigners and to outside influence. Ever since 1543 when three Portuguese arrived at the island of Tanegashima, there had been an increasing foreign presence in Japan. At first there were, in addition to the Portuguese, Spaniards, Englishmen, Dutch and a scattering of other Europeans, but in 1636, the country would be closed to all except a handful of Dutch traders kept more or less imprisoned on an island in Nagasaki Bay.

The screens of the 1580s and 1590s often depict foreigners, both priests and soldiers, in their distinctive clothes, walking through the streets of Kyoto. In 1587 when Hideyoshi organized a mammoth tea party at the Kitano Shrine, he specified that foreigners should feel free to attend. He himself enjoyed wearing Western clothes when relaxing in his castle in Osaka, and his favorite dish was beef stew. The Japanese, as Buddhists, had not eaten meat, but under foreign influence it was introduced and accepted, at least by a small part of the population. Bread, still known today in Japan by the Portuguese word *pan*, was not only introduced, but in a few years a Spanish priest would declare that the best bread baked anywhere in the world *pan* was made in Edo. Wine was also introduced and found favor among intellectuals, some of whom claimed that (unlike saké) one could drink large quantities of it without getting drunk. Not all of the novelties originated in Europe. The Portuguese also introduced tobacco and maize from the New World, and within a short period of time other vegetables (such as sweet potatoes) that were first cultivated in Mexico or elsewhere in North America became familiar to the Japanese, as we know from depictions in screen paintings.

The invasions of Korea staged by command of Hideyoshi were deplorable acts of aggression, but they enhanced Japanese culture. Korean artisans were brutally removed to Japan where they made pottery and silk textiles that were more refined than those previously made locally. A printing press was presented to the Emperor Goyozei in 1593, and from this time on printed books, as opposed to manuscripts, became the normal means of disseminating works of literature.

During the twenty years at the end of the sixteenth century the Japanese theatre greatly developed. Both Kabuki and Bunraku originated at this time; these would be the main forms of theatre during the Edo period.

Even in the world of scholarship there were great changes in the direction of creating a popular culture. In 1599 Fujiwara Seika punctuated the Confucian classics to make them easier for Japanese to read. This unsensational event, followed by many similar steps, would make it possible for many more Japanese than before to read works written in Chinese on which the official philosophy of the Tokugawa regime was based. Again, in 1603 public lectures on Confucianism and on the classic work of Japanese literature, *Tsurezuregusa* were offered by Hayashi Razan (who would be the Confucian adviser of the shogun) and Matsunaga Teitoku, the chief haiku poet of the day. Public lectures broke through the tradition of secret transmission of learning that had been the bane of Japanese education until this time, and still survives to this day in the traditional arts. No longer would appreciation of the Confucian texts or the classics of Japanese literature be

restricted to persons of the proper lineage: it became possible for anyone with the inclination and the necessary money to acquire culture.

Japan at the end of the sixteenth century was more cosmopolitan than it would be again until the present day. However, the Tokugawa regime decided to expel all foreigners and to prevent Japanese from going abroad. This system was known as *sakoku*, literally “chained country”, a term not invented, however, until the nineteenth century. Apparently the shogun’s government was disturbed by the success of Catholic missionaries and feared that Japanese who became converts to Christianity might divide their loyalty between their political allegiance to the shogun and their religious allegiance to the West. The example of the Philippines, colonized by the Spaniards on the heels of missionary activity, served as a warning this might happen in Japan as well. Relations with China and Korea were not severed, but they were also brought under strict control. The maintenance of order became a mania with the shoguns, who wanted their regime to last forever, and they believed that the greatest danger to order came from outside Japan. However, the government wished to be kept informed about developments abroad, and for this reason it tolerated the Dutch trading station on the island of Deshima. The Dutch were able to make considerable profits, mainly by smuggling, but they were required to provide annual reports on conditions in other countries. A trickle of information about Europe entered Japan in this way through the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century a small number of Japanese, believing that Western learning could help their country, began the study of Dutch, mainly in order to read medical and other scientific works.

Most people in Japan were undoubtedly grateful to the Tokugawa shoguns for establishing peace after almost two centuries of warfare. One can find echoes of this gratitude in unexpected places, such as the poetry and prose of Bashô. In 1689, when he made a walking tour through the north of the country, he visited Nikkô, the site of the tombs of the shoguns. His expressions of reverence in the prose account seem absolutely sincere, and the poetry, if less direct, conveys the same feeling:

<i>ara tôto</i>	<i>How awe-inspiring!</i>
<i>aoba wakaba ni</i>	<i>On the green leaves, the young leaves</i>
<i>hi no hikari</i>	<i>The light of the sun.</i>

Here, the light of the sun is the radiance emanating from the presence of the Tokugawa shoguns. It also refers to Nikkô, a place-name meaning “sun-light”; but it would be strange to say that the light was “awe-inspiring” unless it meant the special light shed by the shoguns.

We probably would not have enjoyed living under the rule of the shoguns in a society where individuals enjoyed little freedom, but the blessings of peace (which lasted throughout the period) were of the highest importance to those who knew from personal experience or the reminiscences of their parents what the wars had been like. The advent of a lasting peace seems also to have been responsible for the shift in attention from the world to come, the concern of Japanese of the medieval period, to the present world. Of course, the Japanese continued to be Buddhists, but religion was no longer the principal

factor in their lives. Confucianism, with its emphasis on life as a member of a this-worldly society, supplanted Buddhism as a guide to daily behavior. The prosperity that came with peace also induced people to expend treasure for this-worldly goods, rather than making offerings to the Buddha.

In the medieval period it had been common to look back to a golden age when life was superior to that in the present, but this attitude was increasingly displaced by interest in this world. The term *ukiyo*, which in the medieval period had meant “the sad world”, now came to mean by a homonym “the floating world” – the ever-changing aspects of contemporary life. There was a new insistence of being up-to-date in fashions, in the style of wearing one’s hair and so on. Perhaps the ultimate symbol of the new culture was the wave, as depicted on screens in the museums in New York and Boston – ever-changing, always exciting. Change, which had generally been deplored, now came to be desired.

Fiction, which for centuries had been set in a vaguely indicated past (whether the court life of the Heian period or martial scenes from the Kamakura period), was now written about the present. *Uraminosuke*, a story written about 1612, is stated to be the account of events that took place in Kyôto in the summer of 1604. A somewhat later work, *Ukiyo Monogatari* by Asai Ryô-i, written about 1660, is important not only because of its insistence on the new meaning of *ukiyo* – the delightful uncertainty of life in a joyous age when people live for the moment – but because the author was the first professional writer in Japanese history. Only now, with the increase of literacy and the development of relatively inexpensive methods of printing, could anyone make a living as a writer by appealing to the general public. The fact that we know the name of the author is also significant. We do not know the name of even one writer of fiction for about four centuries, between approximately 1200 and 1600. This reflects no doubt the humble status of the art of fiction during those centuries; but now that it was possible to make a living as a writer, it was essential that readers know who had written the books. Indeed, sales of books by the most famous novelist of the Edo period, Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693), were so intimately connected with his reputation that his name appeared in the titles of several of his books, as in *Saikaku Shôkoku Hanashi (Saikaku’s Tales of the Provinces)* of 1685.

Saikaku’s novels closely reflected life in the Japan of his day, especially life as led by the merchant class. This class, though despised by the samurai because it did not produce anything useful (unlike the farmers and the artisans), nevertheless steadily acquired wealth and with the wealth the ability to indulge in luxuries that were beyond the reach of all but a few of the samurai class.

Saikaku’s first novel, *Kôshoku Ichidai Otoko (The Life of an Amorous Man)* was published in 1682. Saikaku had already established himself as a leading poet of haikai, excelling especially in rapid impromptu composition. In 1684, at the Sumiyoshi Shrine in Ôsaka, he composed the incredible total of 23,500 verses in a single day and night, too fast for the scribes to do more than tally. The prose style of his novels was closely related to the elliptic manner of his poetry, depending on the alertness of the readers to catch the meanings. The hero of *Kôshoku Ichidai Otoko* is called Yonosuke, which probably was short for Ukiyonosuke, the man of the floating world par excellence. He is

interested only in lovemaking, not in the artistic manner of a Heian aristocrat but as an unremitting agent of the craving for fleshly pleasure. The book is so devoted to this one theme that it would be unreadable were it not for the flashing style and for the *joie de vivre* communicated. At the end of the work Yonosuke at the age of sixty sets sail for the Island of Women (*nyogo no shima*) aboard a ship called the *Yoshiiro Maru* (S. S. Lust), loaded with aphrodisiacs.

Saikaku created in Yonosuke an emblematic figure who was immediately accepted as representing the new society. He is an exemplar of the man who exploits his own potentialities, and above all the man of the ukiyo, the world of delightful uncertainty, of pleasure and of expertise. Among his later works of fiction the best are those in an erotic vein which convey his celebration of the life of the “floating world” of the Ôsaka townsmen. He also wrote more serious works describing how merchants have made or lost fortunes, and others describing less convincingly the samurai, a class for whom he seems to have had exaggerated respect.

Saikaku's novels reflect his observations, but it was the theatre above all that served as a mirror of contemporary Japanese society. Reading the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725) one finds, not necessarily in the most important parts, references to how people did business, practiced religion, believed or did not believe in superstitions, associated with other people at different levels of society. Scholars have traced thirteen levels of politeness used by the female characters in Chikamatsu's plays, an indication not simply of politeness but of acute awareness of the many strata making up the society. The prevailing impression one obtains from Chikamatsu's plays about contemporary life, known as *sewamono* or domestic tragedies, as contrasted with *jidaimono* or period pieces, is of a society where everyone knew what everyone else was doing, and fear of what other people might think was an obsession. In this culture shame, rather than sin, was dreaded.

The prevailing thought behind these plays, as behind much of Tokugawa culture, was Confucianism. Only the learned actually read the neo-Confucian texts that had been adopted by the bakufu as a kind of state religion, but everyone was indoctrinated with Confucian thought, whether on the level of being good to one's parents (known as *oya kôkô* or filial piety), or in the recognition that society has claims on the individual which must be acknowledged.

Chikamatsu was so much under the influence of Confucian ideology that Japanese critics have often discussed his plays in terms of *giri* and *ninjô*, the two aspects of popular Confucian thought most commonly found in literature of the time. *Giri* was the sense of obligation towards people who have favored one with kindness either from the heart or only formally. It was also one's obligation to society as a whole. *Giri* preserves order in society, and nothing was more important to the Tokugawa rulers than order; their mania for order seems to have stemmed from recollections of the disorder that had earlier afflicted Japan, and every sign of disorder, whether an unruly crowd in a theatre or a merchant who flaunted his wealth, was firmly suppressed as examples of a lack of *giri* towards society.

Ninjô, or human feelings, was a recognition of the existence of sometimes irrational elements in human behavior originating in the emotions. *Ninjô* was the cause of the

tragic endings of Chikamatsu's plays. It was considered quite normal and appropriate for a married man to amuse himself with prostitutes in the licensed quarters from time to time. His wife, if we can believe the plays, was likely to be an inarticulate creature who mutely observed her husband's behavior, never complaining even if the cost of his pleasures deprived her and their children of necessities. There was only one thing the husband might not do: he must not fall in love with a prostitute. If he had the misfortune to fall in love, and was not content merely with enjoying physical pleasure, this access of *ninjô* could destroy his family and ruin him not only as a husband and father but as the successor to his family. The heroes of many of Chikamatsu's domestic tragedies are good men who make the unforgivable mistake of falling in love with a prostitute, an offense for which the man, and usually his beloved too, must pay for with their lives.

Even at the risk of such disasters, the Confucian-inspired rulers recognized the necessity for outlets for men's passions. They believed that a wellrun society was the supreme good, but were aware that there is an unruly, irrational streak in men which always threatens to explode if not given an outlet. The government therefore, though officially deploring the existence of "bad places" (*akusho*), tacitly allowed licensed quarters and theatres to be built. The connections between the two were close. From time to time, when samurai fell to quarreling over favorite actresses, or some other disorder occurred, the government would close the theatres. Eventually women were barred from the stage and grown men took their places in female roles, but the licensed quarters remained in business.

The licensed quarters became the center of the popular literature. It was there that merchants especially went and enjoyed, thanks to their money, the privileges that were formerly restricted to the upper classes. The prostitutes were known by *Genji-na*, or Genji names, meaning names derived from *The Tale of Genji*, and merchants could buy the favors of Murasaki or Rokujô or Tamakazura, depending on his fancy. The houses of prostitution were beautifully decorated – as one can tell from such surviving examples as the Sumiya in Kyôto – and the courtesans were attired in magnificent robes. A special etiquette of the licensed quarter developed which made a visit not merely an opportunity to satisfy physical craving but provided the only social life that most men knew.

A code of behavior for the courtesans developed, which was described in great detail in *Shikidô Ôkagami* (*The Great Mirror of the Art of Love*, 1678) written by Fujimoto Kizan (1626-1704). It took the author over twenty years to complete his masterpiece. Quotations from the Chinese and Japanese classics sprinkle the pages, giving a dignified and even erudite tone to his account. Kizan devoted minute attention to every aspect of a courtesan's appearance and behavior. Each article of clothing she wore, each gesture she made, had to be in keeping with the traditions of the licensed quarter as they had evolved. Here is a sample:

Laughter. It is most delightful when, something amusing having happened, a courtesan smiles, showing her dimples... But for her to open her mouth and bare her teeth or to laugh in a loud voice is to deprive her instantly of all elegance and make her seem crude. When something is so extremely funny that she must laugh, she should either cover her mouth with her sleeve or else avert her head behind the customer's shoulder.

Again,

A courtesan should be able to write poetry. She should at least be familiar with the old language so that she can recite poems describing the changing of the seasons. It is a mistake to assume that only crude, ignorant men buy prostitutes. If a woman can converse adequately with a cultivated customer, why should he ever look elsewhere?

A most interesting section of *The Great Mirror* deals with the pledges of love (*shinjû*) offered by courtesans to prove they really love particular customers. The supreme pledge treated by Kizan was the cutting off of a finger. He commented:

The other four varieties of pledges – tearing off fingernails, writing oaths, cutting off locks of hair, and tattooing the customer's name – can be carried out, as part of a calculated scheme, even if the woman is insincere. But unless she really loves a man, it is hard to go through with cutting off a finger... Nails grow back in days, a head of hair in months, oaths can be hidden away, and tattooing can be erased when a woman no longer sees a man. But giving up a finger makes a woman a cripple for life, and she can never restore things to what they were. The act should therefore be performed only after grave deliberation.

Fujimoto Kizan did not treat the ultimate form of *shinjû*, the willingness of a courtesan to die with her lover, but this is the subject of a number of Chikamatsu's best plays, notably *Sonezaki Shinjû* (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, 1703) and *Shinjû Ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*, 1721). The devotion of a prostitute to one man, even though she was compelled to sell her body to many others, is a theme running through these plays. In the end, she proves her love in the most unanswerable manner by dying with the one man she loves. The term *shinjû*, which originally meant any demonstration of what was in the heart of a courtesan, came to mean only one thing, double suicides, a courtesan and her customer dying together. Chikamatsu undoubtedly beautified these women; not all of them could have been so devoted, so ready to sacrifice themselves.

The licensed quarters undoubtedly had a sordid aspect. Women were sold to the brothels by their families and had to remain there until their contracts expired. They were like serfs, forbidden to leave the licensed quarter; and although they might wear splendid clothes, they were often obliged to lie with men whom they found physically repulsive. It is true that the *tayû*, or grand courtesans, had the privilege of refusing men they did not like, and even after accepting a large fee might do nothing more for a man than condescend to offer him a cup of saké; but extremely few women attained this rank, and her glory did not last long in the licensed quarter. For men, the licensed quarters provided an area of freedom in an otherwise constricted society. The government, which allowed no political freedom, perhaps allowed this sexual freedom as a way of defusing possible tensions. The merchant, who might have to toady to samurai during the day, could associate with the women of the quarter on an equal footing. Tahei, a character in Chikamatsu's play *The Love Suicides at Amijima*, says, "A customer's a customer, whether he's a samurai or a businessman. The only difference is that one wears swords and the other doesn't"

The ideal home of the Tokugawa period, as prescribed by the Confucian philosophers, must have been an extremely boring place. One gets the impression from reading the texts of the plays that the wife rarely said a word to her husband. The husband of the deferential wife would approve of her behavior, but he could scarcely have found life at home exciting, and he paid little attention to his wife or his children. Marriage as an institution was necessary in Confucian terms in order to prolong the family line and to ensure in this way that there would be descendants who offered their respects to deceased ancestors. A husband's chief duty to his parents was to provide heirs. The wife had many duties but few pleasures. Naturally, there was no licensed quarter where she could go to dissipate her frustration. It was said that a woman had no home of her own through three generations: as a child, she served in her father's home; when she married, she went to her husband's home; and if she survived him, she lived in her son's home. Perhaps her greatest pleasure was to become a mother-in-law and have a daughter-in-law to torment, in the manner made familiar by many works of Japanese literature of this period.

Of course, women's lives could not have been quite so dreary as they seem in the novels and the plays. Obviously, their relations with their children were not confined to serving them. They loved their children and shared responsibility with their husbands for raising them properly. In the following passage from *Yari no Gonza* (*Gonza the Lancer*, 1717), the play by Chikamatsu, Osai, the mother, scolds her little son who is playing at being a samurai by brandishing a lance:

For shame. You're a big boy, and you still don't understand even the simplest things! Of course, you're a samurai, but look at your father. He enjoys his lordship's favor, and his stipend has been increased, not because he's handy with weapons – there's nothing so remarkable about that in a samurai – but because he performs the tea ceremony so well. That's why his services are in demand and why he's treated with such consideration. Now, while you're still young, you should learn how to hold the tea ladle and how to fold the napkins. I'll get a terrible reputation if people start saying that you children are being brought up badly while your father's away in Edo. I'll be disgraced. Yes, I can see why they say a boy should be trained by a man. Go to your grandfather's and study *The Great Learning*.

The Great Learning was one of the Four Books of Confucian philosophy that every educated person, especially of the samurai class, was expected to study. Osai is correct in saying that advancement as a samurai at this time, when there was no warfare, was less likely to depend on martial prowess than on a proficiency in an appropriate art, such as the tea ceremony.

Married women were also subject to temptations, even though the penalty was extreme. As we know from Saikaku's novel *Kôshoku Gonin Onna* (*Five Women who Loved Love*, 1685), a woman found guilty of adultery would be paraded through the streets and then executed by burning at the stake. All the same, adultery occurred, perhaps more out of desperate loneliness than because of passion. Husbands of the samurai class would go to Edo for years at a time, but their wives were left in the provinces. While in Edo, the husband was free to divert himself in the licensed quarter, but the wife was forbidden any consolation. Osai in *Gonza the Lancer* and Otane in *Horikawa Nami no Tsuzumi* (*The Drum of the Waves of Horikawa*, 1706) are samurai wives who yield to

desires of which they are not consciously aware. Otane, despite her sister's warning, gets drunk, and this causes her to forget her natural modesty and the strict code of behavior she has learned; she makes advances to a man (a teacher of the drum) and enters into adulterous relations. Osai, another samurai wife, has been separated from her husband while he is in service in Edo. Although she professes to be interested in the young man Gonza solely as a prospective son-in-law, we realize that she herself is attracted to him. What else could explain the following remarks she makes to her daughter?

Osai – It's unbecoming for a mother to praise her own child, but I should hate to give a daughter like you to any ordinary man. I've long thought quite seriously that if we choose a husband for you from among the samurai of this fief, I would like it to be Sasano Gonza. He's the best-looking man in the province, a master of the military arts, and none of my husband's other pupils of the tea ceremony can approach him. Besides, he has such a pleasant disposition that nobody can dislike him...

Okiku – But, Mother, Gonza's a grown-up. He's old enough to be my uncle. I don't want to marry him.

Osai – You're talking foolishness. Mother is thirty-seven. I was born in the Year of the Bird, just like Father, who's forty-nine, and what wonderful children we've had! Gonza was born in the Year of the Bird after mine, which makes him twenty-five, and you in the next Year of the Bird. That's twelve years apart – just the right combination. In a couple of years' time you'll be using make-up and wearing fitted clothes. You and Gonza will make a perfect pair. Isn't it strange – all four of us born in the Year of the Bird. No more silly talk now – accept him as your husband! If you refuse, Mother will take him instead! Really, if I didn't have a husband, I'd never give up Gonza to anyone else!

Her joke has sinister overtones. Although she is fully aware of the terrible penalty she would pay if she committed adultery, she talks as if, given the opportunity, she and Gonza would make an ideal couple. Later, she meets Gonza at night. She has agreed to give him secrets of the tea ceremony in return for his promise to marry her daughter. But when she is with him that night she notices that he is wearing a sash with a design of two crests joined in a lover's knot, a sign that Gonza is already affianced to another woman, though he denied this when promising to marry Okiku. In a jealous rage, she tears off the sash and throws it into the garden. When he complains that he needs the sash, she takes off her own and gives it at him. Annoyed, he throws it into the garden after his own. At this point a rival of Gonza's, who has been secretly watching all that has happened, rushes into the garden, and seizes the two sashes as proof that Osai and Gonza have committed adultery. She seems curiously exhilarated, despite her words:

Osai – Nothing can restore matters now. We are ruined, whether we live or we die... We are doomed, but at least let us give my husband the chance to regain his reputation. Let us become lovers, adulterers, and then let him kill us.

Gonza – No, we needn't stoop to adultery. It's enough for your husband's reputation if he kills us, even without justification. After we are dead, we will be cleared of this infamy, and our own reputations will be vindicated. It would degrade me to become your lover.

Osai – I understand your reluctance, of course. But if our names are later cleared, my husband will be humiliated a second time, this time for having killed a man who was actually not

his wife's lover. I know how the thought repels you, but please call me here and now your wife, and I will call you my husband.

Gonza – To call another man's wife my own is a torture a hundred times, a thousand times more painful than to have to vomit out my entrails or to swallow molten iron. My luck as a samurai has run out, or I should never have sunk to this. There's no helping it now. You are Gonza's wife.

Osai – And you are my husband.

Gonza – Ahhh – we are accursed!

Gonza is an ambitious, even unscrupulous man. In the first act he swears that he will marry the girl who gave him the sash, but he quickly forgets this promise when he learns that the condition of being allowed to examine a scroll showing secrets of the tea ceremony is that he marry the daughter of the teamaster, Ichinoshin. He is quite frank when he explains to Osai why he so badly wants to see the secret scroll of instruction: "In this age of lasting peace, it is hard for a samurai to make a name for himself unless he is proficient in one of the arts" When Osai agrees to show him the scroll if he will promise to marry her daughter, he swears this oath: "If I should violate this oath, may I never again wear armor on my back, may I be slashed to bits by Ichinoshin's sword, and may my dead body be exposed on the public highway!" This, in fact, is precisely what happens to him.

How faithful was Chikamatsu to his time? Can we accept his plays as mirrors held up to Tokugawa society? *Gonza the Lancer*, like most of Chikamatsu's domestic tragedies, was based on real events, though he altered the names and the circumstances. The public enjoyed his historical dramas for their high-flown sentiments and heroic actions of the persons portrayed, but in the case of the domestic tragedies, the public wanted to believe that everything had actually happened; it craved truth even more than artistry. Yet the dramatist had to shape the facts in such a way that the play was in some sense a work of art; otherwise, it would be forgotten as quickly as bit of contemporary gossip. Chikamatsu was aware of the discrepancy between real life and the theatre. In a conversation with a friend he is reported to have said,

In writing plays for the puppet theatre, one attempts first to describe the facts as they really are, but in so doing one also writes things which are not literally true, in the interests of art. In recent plays many things have been said by female characters which real women would not utter. Such things fall under the heading of art: it is because they say what could not come from a real woman's lips that their true emotions are disclosed. If in such cases the author were to model his character closely on a real woman and conceal her feelings, such realism, far from being admired, would permit no pleasure in the work.

Not only the words spoken by the characters but their manner of expressing themselves was artificial, yet essentially true to the characters being portrayed. The characters in a play by Chikamatsu are very much bound up with their society, and the tragedies in which they become involved often stem from the lack of money, a problem typical of their age, though not of the Nô plays, nor of Shakespeare, nor of Racine. Chikamatsu in this respect, as well as in his choice of inconspicuous little people, rather

than larger-than-life characters for his heroes and heroines, may seem curiously modern. His plays, taken together, make up an extraordinarily vivid picture of life in Edo Japan, as led by the merchants and the lower ranks of the samurai class.

We may not be convinced by the tortuous reasoning employed by Osai in explaining why she and Gonza must become lovers. We may suspect that her insistence that they must give her husband just cause for killing them masks her real desire to become Gonza's lover. But the reasoning would have made sense to audiences of the Japan of that period, for whom the form was no less important than the reality.

The domestic tragedies all but disappeared as a genre after the death of Chikamatsu. At most, some scenes within a supposedly historical drama would anachronistically be set in the recent past, as when we discover that the hero Minamoto Yoshitsune, fleeing the wrath of his brother, has taken a job as an assistant in a sushi shop. Audiences seem to have enjoyed the shifts of mood and characterization between the battlefield of heroic wars and the humble circumstances of a sushi shop.

The disappearance of the love suicide plays can be attributed directly to governmental prohibition. Many young people, seeing couples much like themselves commit double suicides in the plays of Chikamatsu, decided to follow their example, a case of life imitating art. The government felt it necessary to intervene, in the interests of Confucian principles, but it was unfortunate for the drama of the latter part of the Edo period.

As I have mentioned, the early "Edo literature" for the most part was not composed in Edo. Chikamatsu's plays were all staged in either Kyôto or Ôsaka, and the settings of the plays were most often the same region. Saikaku was a typical townsman (*chônin*) of Ôsaka, and although he sometimes wrote about other parts of Japan, his best-known works drew their materials from the world of Ôsaka and Kyôto he knew best. Even Bashô, who is thought of as an Edo poet, spent much of his life away from that city, travelling to various parts of Japan or, during his last years, living at a retreat on the southern shores of Lake Biwa. However, towards the end of the eighteenth century a shift in literary production from the Kansai (mainly Ôsaka and Kyôto) to Edo, largely because leading novelists and dramatists decided that the best market for their talents was now in Edo.

For example, the most popular dramatist in the Kansai region, Namiki Gohei (1747-1808), the son of a doorman at an Osaka theatre, moved to Edo in 1796. From this time on, Kabuki developed essentially as a theatrical art of Edo, and made its appeal especially to people of that city. The artists of Jôruri, or the puppet theatre, did not move to Edo, and this had the result of making it a provincial entertainment, enjoyed by people in the Kansai but no longer a medium for which dramatists of importance wrote plays.

Kabuki during the late Edo period is remarkable for its extraordinary realism, not in the plots but in the delineation of the characters, most of whom are drawn from the lowest segment of society – thieves, swindlers, prostitutes, gamblers and the like, none of them romanticized in the manner of Chikamatsu. The language they use is close to the colloquial of the time, though Chikamatsu generally wrote a stylized language, and the plays are effective theatrically because of the opportunities they provide actors with occasions to really act. Such plays also give us unique glimpses of the underworld of

Edo at a time of general disillusion with the Confucian ideals preached by the samurai class. They do not, of course, tell us much about the ordinary, hard-working citizens of Edo, but perhaps there was not much dramatic interest in their lives.

In addition to plays about the riffraff of society, many dealt with quarrels within the household of a daimyô (*oiemono*); but the characters are just as dissolute as the inhabitants of the lower depths of Edo society. Surely not all of the great families were as corrupt, as unworthy of their positions, as the people in these plays. Like any other kind of mirror, the Kabuki plays of this time reflected only the part of society which the dramatists chose. The samurai virtues, largely ignored in these plays, did not in fact disappear: they were never more in evidence than in the struggles of the mid-nineteenth century leading up to the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

The fiction of the nineteenth century is similarly both revealing and unrevealing of the society it portrays. The works of Shikitei Samba (1776-1822), especially *Ukiyoburo* (*The Up-to-date Bathhouse*, 1809-1813) and *Ukiyodoko* (*The Up-to-date Barbershop*, 1813-1814), relate so brilliantly that we *know* they must be faithful to their speakers the conversations of people in a public bath and at the barber's. We obtain precious glimpses into the lives of ordinary people as they struggle to make ends meet, confess their weaknesses, hint at their hopes; but obviously, only people who interested Samba appear in these pages. Again, there is no hint of the political life of the time, the apprehensions caused by the intrusions of foreign ships into Japanese waters, the economic crises that beset the government or, for that matter, the study of European learning that had come to attract intellectuals.

The poetry of the same time only occasionally touches on larger concerns than the daily activities of the poet. Some patriots at the end of the Edo period, it is true, wrote poems in Chinese expressing their indignation over the failure of the government to expel the foreigners and similar topics; but most poets, like those of a thousand years earlier, wrote about the scent of the first plum blossoms or their joy on discovering of an early autumnal morning that the leaves on the trees were beginning to turn color. These themes had eternal validity, and were not any more false to the poets of the nineteenth century than they had been of the poets of the *Kokinshû* writing in the ninth century, though it would take an exceptionally keen nose to detect the scent of plum blossoms in Tokyo today.

Poems on such eternal themes are unsatisfying if we are trying to discover something about the age that produced them. We want to know more about the poet, what it was like to live in 1840 or 1850 or whenever he was writing. Some poets of the time felt this too. Ôkuma Kotomichi (1798-1868) wrote, "The masters of the past are my teachers, but they are not myself. I am a man of the Tempô era, not a man of old. If I were indiscriminately to imitate the men of old, I might forget my plebeian name... It would be an act of pure imitation, like a performance of Kabuki. "When we turn from this pronouncement to Kotomichi's poems, however, we are likely to be disappointed. It is not because they are insincere or lack literary skill, but because they are so exclusively concerned with himself and his appreciations of nature that they tell us very little about him as a man of the Tempô era (1830-1843). I will give a few of his best tanka to suggest what I mean:

Lamenting the World

wa ga mi koso nani to mo omowane me kodomo no ushi chô nabe ni uki kono yo kana	As far as I'm concerned, It doesn't bother me a bit, But when my wife and kids Complain how hard things are, It really seems a hard life.
---	---

Sweeping the Grounds of a Poverty-Stricken House

mazushikute toshi furu kado wa waza mo nashi haraishi niwa wo mata haraitsutsu	In this house where I have lived In poverty all these years There is nothing to do; I sweep again the garden, The garden I have already swept.
--	--

Thinking of the Future Life

shina takaki koto mo negawazu mata kano yo wa mata wa ga mi ni zo narite kinamashi	I have no desire For loftiness of rank; In the world to come I hope I can come back again Exactly as I am now.
--	--

The tanka was too short to be suitable for the exposition of the poet's views on life or his description of the tensions within the society. The poetic diction, which insisted that only words of pure Japanese origins could be used in a tanka, militated against the poet's describing things or institutions of the Edo period that were known only by names derived from China or elsewhere. Only a few tanka poets managed to convey in their poetry something more than momentary reactions to the sights of nature or to emotional experiences. Tachibana Akemi (1812-1868), for example, wrote a series of tanka called "Solitary Pleasures", each of which opens with the line *tanoshimi wa*, or "it is a pleasure" Here are a few:

tanoshimi wa mare ni uo nite kora mina ga umashi umashi to iite kuu toki	It is a pleasure When, a most infrequent treat, We've fish for dinner, And my children cry with joy, "Yum! yum!" and gobble it down.
--	--

tanoshimi wa ebisu yorokobu yo no naka ni mikuni wasurenu hito wo miru toki	It is a pleasure When, in these days of delight In all things foreign, I come across a man who Does not forget our empire.
---	--

The first of these two poems, though it contains only words of pure Japanese origins, violates all the rules of poetic diction by including such humble expressions as *umashi umashi*, the sound of lips smacking, like the English “yum yum”. In place of the elegance of manner and language that had long been characteristic of the tanka, the poet insists on the possibility of writing tanka about ordinary, even poverty-stricken people, something that would have been unimaginable to tanka poets of the early Edo period, let alone those of antiquity.

The second tanka introduces an intellectual, or at any rate, a patriotic conception, though this, too, was highly unusual in poetic composition at this time. Akemi, writing at the end of the Edo period, when intellectuals were divided between those favoring opening the country to the west and those whose battle cry was “drive out the barbarians!”, clearly cast his lot with the xenophobic patriots. Apart from the particular issue of whether or not to open the country, one senses that poets like Tachibana Akemi were impatient with the limitations of the tanka, but did not know how to overcome them. This would take influence from the outside, when the translations of European poetry opened the eyes of Japanese poets to new methods of expression.

The works of the outstanding haiku poet of the late Edo period, Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827), show a similar tendency to treat the humble and the ordinary, rather than the profound, as found in the haiku of Bashô. A few of his haiku will suggest his typical manner:

yasegaeru	Skinny frog,
makeru na Issa	Don't get discouraged:
kore ni ari	Issa is here.

This haiku was written in 1816 when Issa watched a fight between two frogs. It shows his sympathy with the underdog, and this has brought the haiku popularity, but it skirts the borders of sentimentality. Issa even showed sympathy for insects and animals that are normally disliked:

yare utsu na	Hey! don't swat him!
hae wa te wo suri	The fly rubs his hands, then his feet
ashi wo suru	Begging for mercy.

In this haiku Issa ingeniously interpreted the familiar movements of a fly as begging for mercy. The haiku has no seasonal word or *kireji*, and it is in the colloquial language, making it uncertain whether it is proper to call the poem a haiku. But Issa has admirers among contemporary haiku poets who rate him even higher than Bashô. The haiku of Issa's that I like best does not fulfill any requirement of the haiku except being written in 5, 7, and 5 syllables, but it is unforgettable. After the death of one of his children, a little girl named Sato, he composed this haiku:

tsuyu no yo wa	The world of dew
tsuyu no yo nagara	Is a world of dew, and yet,
sarinagara	And yet...

One can imagine that friends attempted to console him by saying that the world we live in is as ephemeral as the dew, and that the only real world is the world of Buddha to which we travel after death. Issa agrees, and yet he cannot forget the child he has lost. In this and many others of the haiku of Issa the lives of the very ordinary people are evoked with a few words that linger in the mind.

For poets of the late Edo period who felt that their thoughts could not be compressed into the 31 syllables of a tanka or the 17 syllables of a haiku, there was another possibility open, composing poetry in classical Chinese, as poets in Europe until the nineteenth century composed poetry in Latin. The composition of poetry in Chinese was obviously far more difficult for a Japanese than poetry in his own language. Not only had he to master the difficult grammar, which is totally unlike Japanese, but he had to obey the rules of Chinese poetry including rhyme, though hardly any Japanese knew the sounds of Chinese, and the prescribed patterns of tones, though Japanese is not a tonal language. This meant that Japanese who felt impelled to compose in Chinese had to verify in a special dictionary the sound and tone of each character they used in a poem. One would imagine that this would have prevented Japanese from composing many poems in Chinese, but the late Edo period was in fact a time when such poetry flourished. One short *kanshi* (as Japanese poems in Chinese were called) by one of the best kanshi poets, Yanagawa Seigan (1789-1858), should suggest how unlike the content of a kanshi was to that of a tanka or a haiku. It is an attack on the shogun:

You, whose ancestors in the mighty days
Roared at the skies and swept across the earth,
Stand now helpless to drive off wrangling foreigners –
How empty your title “Queller of Barbarians!”

This poem was naturally not delivered to the shogun himself. Yanagawa Seigan was not so foolhardy as to challenge the severe censorship, let alone the bakufu itself. But it is noteworthy that such rebellious sentiments were expressed in literary terms. The kanshi was the chosen medium of the samurai class, whose education was largely in the Chinese classics, especially the Four Books of Confucianism. The patriotic kanshi poets of the end of the Edo period provided a marked contrast to the Confucian poets of the seventeenth century who related in kanshi such subjects as their pleasure in the quiet beauty of a spring day. The times had changed, and even conservative poets who carefully observed the rules of their particular medium inevitably showed in what they wrote about (and what they did not write about) how much the world had changed.

The end of the Edo period was one of the worst periods in the history of Japanese literature. The novels of the early nineteenth century which are still read today, such as those by Shikitei Samba (whom I have mentioned), or Jippensha Ikku (1765-1831) whose *Tôkaidô Dôchû Hizakurige* (*Travels on Foot on the Tokaido*) is still funny after all these years, retain the attention of readers today because there is still a part of the daily life of Japanese which has not changed greatly since their time. But for most educated Japanese of the end of the Edo period, the great climax of Japanese fiction was the works of Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848). W. G. Aston, whose history of Japanese literature published

in 1899 was until recently the only such history available in English, expressed the high opinion of Bakin that he probably derived from his Japanese intellectual friends. Today, the novels of Bakin are still admired, but seldom read. Their emphasis on Confucian morality, especially the justification of literature as a means of *kanzen chôaku* (encouragement of virtue and chastisement of vice), makes them unwelcome to readers who do not share this Confucian ideal of literature. But it is possible to read the novels of Bakin as a kind of mirror of the samurai class at the end of the Edo period, when the world they believed in seemed to be crumbling around them, and they desperately turned to the past for reassurance and renewed faith in their ideals.

The Edo period – by whatever name it was known – was extremely unpopular when I was first living in Japan in the early 1950s. It was associated with feudalism (*hōken shugi*), and feudalistic was the worst epithet people knew. Children accused their parents of feudalism, and every custom from the past that did not please a person was generally labelled as feudalistic. The only reason admitted for reading the literature of this period was to trace the muffled cries of protest and anguish of authors that can be heard despite the polished surfaces of their works. Attempts were made to prove that every writer of note belonged to the peasant or merchant class, and thus was oppressed by the system. Perhaps the worst feature of the period in the eyes of these writers was the closure of the country: *sakoku* was called the tragedy of Japan.

The situation has completely changed today. Many writers now claim that *sakoku* was an extremely enlightened policy, quoting the praise for the system by Europeans who visited in Japan as members of the Dutch trading station in Nagasaki. There are even scholars who write articles advocating a “new *sakoku*” It is not necessary to take sides in this dispute. The literature of the period itself, whether read for its intrinsic beauty or as the background of an extraordinarily important period of Japanese history, deserves greater attention throughout the world.