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## A sense of (dis)continuity: Searching for novelistic expression in Meiji fiction

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### Abstract

The article focuses on new developments in Meiji literature in response to the tension existing between the spoken and the written narrative styles. It points to the tradition of *gesaku bungku* popular fiction, the influence of foreign novels and the practice of translating literary texts into Japanese as important factors shaping novelistic language and narrative strategies. The analysis includes the texts of San'yūtei Enchō's *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* (*The Strange Tale of Peony Lantern*, 1884-1885), Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo* (*Floating Clouds*, 1887-1889), Mori Ōgai's *Maihime* (*Dancing Girl*, 1890) and Higuchi Ichiyō's *Takekurabe* (*Growing up/Child's Play*, 1895-1896).

**Keywords:** Meiji fiction, San'yūtei Enchō, Futabatei Shimei, Higuchi Ichiyō, Mori Ōgai, presentational mode, dialogue, narration

### 1. Introduction

The new foreign modes and fashions which bombarded Meiji Japan in the mid-nineteenth century were eagerly contrasted with the old domestic traditions. The novelty of manners and expressions was heartily welcomed by some and severely criticised by others, while the majority of the Japanese had to struggle to adjust to the rapid changes of the new era. Although the supporters of the transformation process were far more visible in print (Kornicki, 1982: 1), and their most earnest views on “the enlightened civilisation” or *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 were available in newspapers, opponents tried to ridicule them, frequently by means of satire, presenting them as parrot-like imitators of foreign ideas (Yamamoto, 1983: 86).

The process of modernization, which overlapped intense westernization taking place in Meiji Japan, was also concurrent with changes in the area of

Japanese literature; the voices calling for reforms were as strong among social thinkers as they were among writers. Influenced by Tsubouchi Yūzō 坪内雄蔵 (pseudonym: Shōyō 逍遙)'s *Shōsetsu Shinzui* 小説神髓 (*Essence of the Novel*, 1885–1886), Japanese *shōsetsu* 小説 (the term which embraces all fictional narratives, such as novels, short-stories and novellas), the long-lasting crisis of respectability was overcome after initial criticism and soon became one of the most debated and explored genres in Meiji literature.

The intricacies of Meiji period novels viewed in the context of Japanese modernisation have already been explored by a number of scholars, including Donald Keene (1961), Masao Miyoshi (1974), J. Thomas Rimer (1978), Peter F. Kornicki (1982), James A. Fujii (1993), Dennis Washburn (1995) and John Pierre Mertz (2003). As might be suggested by Shōyō's *Shōsetsu Shinzui*, in which the “sketching or copying” (*mōsha* 模写) of reality was encouraged (Miller, 2009: 103), the questions of verisimilitude and imitation were often addressed by the writers of *shōsetsu*; they were accompanied by numerous appeals to reform Japanese written language, as well as develop realistic methods of expression that would “not simply reflect but embody objective fact” (Washburn, 1995: 79).

The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the changes occurring in the language and methods of Japanese *shōsetsu* from the viewpoint of the dynamics between the written and spoken styles. The influence of foreign fiction and the practice of translating literary texts into Japanese will be considered as important factors in the search of novelistic expression. Then, Hasegawa Tatsunosuke 長谷川辰之助 (Futabatei Shimei 二葉亭四迷)'s *Ukigumo* (*Floating Clouds* 浮雲, 1887–1889), Mori Rintarō 森田太郎 (Ōgai 鷗外)'s *Maihime* 舞姫 (*Dancing Girl*, 1890) and Higuchi Natsu 樋口なつ (Ichiyō 一葉)'s *Takekurabe* たくくらべ (*Growing up/Child's Play*, 1895–96), all written soon after the publication of *Shōsetsu Shinzui*, will be analysed as spaces of negotiation between the oral and the written, the traditional and the novel, and the ambiguous and the direct. The ultimate question will be whether it is possible to trace a “sense of discontinuity” or a “sense of dislocation” in those works, resulting from frantic attempts to grasp meaning and respond to the demands of modernity (Washburn, 1995: 78).

## 2. Defining the *shōsetsu*

Literally translatable as “short account” (Rimer, 1978: 62), *shōsetsu* was first used in opposition to poetry and associated with common gossip (Sonnenberg,

2015: 27). Before the Meiji era, it was on the margins of what was considered proper “content of ‘literature’”, which consisted of poetry and nonfiction prose, the former being “a vehicle of expression” and the latter used “as the moral guideline for the literati class” (Fowler, 1988: 22). The term *shōsetsu* – now commonly used to indicate all kinds of fictional narratives, regardless of their length – gained popularity with the publication of Tsubouchi Shōyō’s acclaimed work, which reviewed the narrative methods used in traditional Japanese fiction within a slightly modernised (and still rather vague) framework of realistic representation. Before the term itself started to circulate among critics, writers and readers, elements of “fiction,” now associated with the *shōsetsu*, could be found in a number of traditional genres popular before the Meiji period. Rimer indicates that “the tale, the diary, the *monogatari*, the essay all seem to possess in varying amounts certain characteristics of Western fiction” (1978: 62), and the boundary between truth and fiction in these genres was rather indeterminate.

The novels, when they first appeared, were not highly valued, and neither were other fictional narratives — presented under various names, depending on the prevailing theme or manner of distribution — which nonetheless flourished before the Meiji era. They were frequently read aloud in families and among friends, a practice which Maeda refers to as “communal reading” (2004: 229). Due to its great popularity, fiction often became a target of criticism. In Tokugawa and the early Meiji era, it was considered harmful as a vehicle of immoral behaviour and idle fancy. In 1876, Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832-1891), a translator of the works by Samuel Smiles and John Stuart Mill into Japanese, openly attacked all popular fictional narratives of the time, most of which were still heavily influenced by the tradition of *ninjōbon* 人情本 (sentimental novels) and *kokkeibon* 滑稽本 (comic novels), and strongly advised “students not to touch them, the wealthy not to buy them, heads of families not to sanction their purchase, publishers not to publish them, circulating libraries not to stock them and artists not to provide illustrations for them” (Rimer, 1978: 12).

The situation began to change gradually after the publication of *Shōsetsu Shinzui*, which postulated the reform of fiction. Soon the novel occupied a dominant position in the literature of the Meiji period (Washburn, 1995: 94).

Shōyō reviewed the prevailing tendencies of the publishing market in most critical terms:

The time indeed seems propitious for the production of novels. Everywhere historical romances and tales are being published, one more unusual than the next. It has reached such a point that even newspapers and magazines are printing reworkings of the hackneyed old novels, and thanks to this trend, the number of novels being produced is now beyond all reckoning. There is a simply staggering production of books, all of them extremely bad (Tsubouchi & Keene, 1960: 55).<sup>1</sup>

Shōyō noticed that low-brow fiction of debatable quality was immensely popular but hardly recommendable and he proposed a new approach to writing novels, influenced to some extent by the European literary tradition but even more strongly rooted in the great fiction of the Tokugawa period. Shōyō's program was far from being either precise or revolutionary but by emphasising the significance of verisimilitude in the description of human passions and social conditions, while discouraging previous didacticism, it defended the importance of fiction; furthermore, it adjusted the existing vocabulary (*ninjō* 人情 – “human passions”, *setai* 世帯 – “social conditions”) and developed a new one, later applied and altered in the debates on modern novel.

*Shōsetsu Shinzui*'s emphasis on the mimetic aspect of fiction is not accompanied by any clear or detailed definition. In fact, Tsubouchi uses a number of expressions with reference to mimesis: “shin o utsusu” (to reproduce reality), “mamono (...) o mogi suru” (to imitate things as they are) (Tsubouchi, 2011: 42), “shin ni semaru” (to approach truth) (p. 65), “mosha suru” (to imitate) (p. 140), or “shashin” (representation) (p. 43), and he insists on the great value of the “artistic novel” which – as the Japanese signs “mosha shōsetsu” (mimetic novel) (p. 65) also suggest – is defined by its mimetic qualities.

The juxtaposition between didacticism and mimesis in fiction is also explored by Tsubouchi Shōyō's close acquaintance, Futabatei Shimei, in *Shōsetsu Sōron* (Theory of the Novel, 1886), where it is stated that “mimesis is the true essence of the novel” but further explained that the aim of the novel is to “draw out the essential Idea” which is manifested in reality (Levy, 2006: 36; cf. Futabatei, 1989: 25).

Although Shōyō may not have been the most zealous reformer of fiction in Japan, his work became emblematic for the changes that later occurred in *shōsetsu*. To him, the noticeable gap between the Japanese rich tradition of fiction writing and the modern novel – which became one of the important themes of *Shōsetsu Shinzui* – did not seem insurmountable, but to other writers

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tsubouchi, 2011: 7-8.

and critics the influx of foreign fashions became a stimulus for more vigorous changes with regard to “the establishment,” or the traditional canon, the language and the modes of expression (Washburn, 1995: 78).

### 3. Translating foreign fiction

Although Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *Shōsetsu Shinzui* was written in response to the challenges of foreign literature, its argumentation was nonetheless rooted mostly in the Japanese tradition, referring only to a limited number of foreign authors, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Moreover, it may be argued that his own theory of the novel exerted less influence on Tsubouchi than the practice of translating foreign literature, to which he decided to devote most of his life and endeavours, working on the masterpieces of Zola and Thackeray, and – above all – Shakespeare. In 1895, Tsubouchi stated that it was “much more difficult to make a foreign text Japanese than to turn one’s own impressions into text” (Miller, 2001: 111). He left numerous reflections on his attempts to translate Shakespeare into Japanese, choosing free style and complaining that “the text grows too long and turns into paraphrase,” and he postulated the simplicity of expression in translating English proverbs or aphorisms (Morton, 2009: 24). Morton even notices, having compared Tsubouchi’s versions of *Julius Caesar* from 1913 and 1933, that the author of *Shōsetsu Shinzui* “clearly sought to construct a more colloquial version of Shakespeare” (2009: 33).

In fact, the practice of translation influenced the plot and character construction, as well as the language of the Meiji novel in a manner not to be neglected. First, literal translations of foreign novels, “gangly English or French names and the exotic trappings of foreign settings,” also affected the phonetic transcription (Miller, 2001: 3). Many works were treated only as inspirations – the practice is referred to as *hon’an* 翻案 (adaptation) – and any others were translated more faithfully, which usually posed challenges to Japanese grammatical structures. Before focusing on translating Shakespeare, Tsubouchi also tried his hand at adaptations, as illustrated by his *Futagokoro* ふたごころ (*Two Hearts*, 1897) and his use of Walter Scott’s and Bulwer-Lytton’s texts. His intent in these adaptations is identified as that “of improving contemporary literature through demonstrating a higher standard” (Miller, 2001: 115), which strikingly resembles the intention behind writing *Shōsetsu Shinzui*.

Naturally, not all adaptations were intended as a way of enhancing the status of Japanese fiction. San'yūtei Enchō 三遊亭圓朝, for example, who is mentioned later in this paper, used adaptations of various foreign stories in order to enrich his *rakugo* 落語 performances and attract the audience. One of Enchō's famous adaptations, *Seiyō Ninjōbanashi Eikoku Kōshi Jōji Sumisu no Den* 西洋人情話英国孝子ジョージスミス之伝 (A Western Romance: The Tale of George Smith, Dutiful English Son) appeared in 1885 as a stenographic novel (*sokkibon* 速記本) (Miller, 2001: 85).

More faithful translations (*hon'yaku* 翻案) exerted even greater influence on Meiji fiction. Futabatei Shimei, the famous author of *Ukigumo* 浮雲, remains well-known in Japan due to his beautiful translations of Russian literature, especially of Turgenev's *Aibiki* あひゞき (*The Rendezvous* from *A Sportsman's Notebook*), first published in 1888. Ryan quotes the response of Kanbara Ariake 蒲原有明, a poet and a novelist, to the beauty of Futabatei's vernacular language:

Futabatei's gembun itchi style with its masterly use of colloquial language – that unique style – sounded so fresh its echoes seemed to go on endlessly whispering in my ears. A nameless joy filled me. (...) When I read the passages describing the forest, I could visualize the scene before my eyes. The changeable sky of late autumn, the light of the sun piercing through the forest, the rain lightly falling – it was as if I were looking at a scene in the country through which I had walked just the day before (...) My reaction to the story filled my whole being; it was like music. Reading *Aibiki* was a completely new experience in my life (Futabatei & Ryan, 1965: 118).

In his spirited reaction to Futabatei's translation, Kanbara associates the use of vernacular language with the effect of immediacy that the described landscape has on him. The revolutionary quality of the language used in *Aibiki* may also be attributed to Futabatei's choice of text: the plot of *The Rendezvous* is not very complex and all its beauty resides in descriptive passages, which could not have been omitted, as was frequently the case with adaptations (Levy, 2006: 43). The practice of *hon'yaku* resulted in unprecedented freedom from the previous stylistic and rhetorical devices of Japanese fiction. Levy brilliantly names the effect: "Futabatei's attempt to translate the original text as an indivisible unit of linguistic form and narrative content necessitated the creation of a new target language" (2006, 37). The influence of foreign literature and the practice of translation deepened the reflection of the Japanese authors with regard to the plot and character construction, as well as the language of the novel.

#### 4. Reflecting on the language

The postulates to reform the role and redefine the significance of the works of fiction in Japan were accompanied by proposals to create a new written language, which may be traced back as early as the last years of the Tokugawa era. In 1866, Maejima Hisoka 前島密, with a view of a widespread compulsory education, went as far as to suggest that the shogunate abolish Chinese characters and use a simpler method of transcription in textbooks, instead (Twine, 1978: 337). Maejima's proposal, though it may seem absurd today (and undoubtedly was to many of his contemporaries), it brought to light the problem of the written Japanese which was incomprehensible to many people, not only due to the great number of complex Chinese characters it used, but also because of the great distance in terms of vocabulary and grammar which divided it from the spoken language (*kōgotai* 口語体).

Twine distinguishes among four major styles used in writing at the beginning of the Meiji era: *kanbun* 漢文 – annotated classical Chinese, which was the “medium of official business, criticism and exposition, history and other serious literature,” *sorōbun* 候文 – epistolary style, “used in both private and official correspondence and in public notices, reports, archives, laws and ordinance,” classical Japanese *wabun* 和文, and *wakankōkōbun* 和漢混交文 – a mixture of classical Japanese and Chinese (1978: 334-336). In the time of rapid social changes, such complexity in written styles started to be viewed as an obstacle in social progress and provoked calls for an “intelligible tool for the acquisition of knowledge and exchange of information” (Tomasi, 1999: 333). In this respect, what is commonly referred to as the movement of *genbun itchi* 言文一致 (unification of the spoken and written styles), may be regarded as an attempt to negotiate a written language capable of transmitting information in as comprehensible (as well as convenient) a manner as possible, which was especially supported by social reformers and educators. It was also an attempt to establish vernacular written language in fiction.

The changes in written Japanese which occurred in the Meiji era were not all consequences of the pragmatic approach to language as a tool for exchanging information. In fact, in the field of literature we should rather speak about numerous ingenious quests for a new language needed to express new ideas, depict new reality and describe new desires. Futabatei Shimei, Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki and many other Meiji writers all searched for their own ways.

The necessity of a new language had been subtly suggested before, in *Shōsetsu Shinzui*, in the passage devoted to colloquial language. Shōyō notices that *zokubuntai* 俗文体, or colloquial style, results in bringing the “plain language as it is,” with its clarity of meaning and vitality (Tsubouchi, 2011: 103). However, he enumerates the problems resulting from the use of *zokubuntai* in Japanese novels:

Despite the numerous advantages of the colloquial style, we cannot profit from it, since there is no unity in Japanese (*genbun ichizu*) and the language used in writing differs conspicuously from the spoken language. As a consequence, if the colloquial language is recorded as it is in writing it either sounds inarticulate or overly coarse. The most refined plot becomes rustic and is often disparaged as boorish. Moreover, contrary to the situation in the West, our language alters immensely in places not so far apart and the differences between particular dialects are such as between French and English (Tsubouchi, 2011: 103-104).

Shōyō proves aware of the inevitable difficulties stemming from adopting colloquial style in writing. The spoken language differed so greatly from what the readers had been accustomed to in writing that once it was recorded, it momentarily lost its natural clarity and vitality, and, instead, sounded coarse. As a consequence, Shōyō allows colloquial language only in the novels of modern life (*tōsei no monogatari* 当世の物語), but even there he insists that it should be used wisely and with care, and sometimes it may be profitable to invent, as some of the writers in the Tokugawa period did, dramatised dialogues instead of recording the real-life conversations (Tsubouchi, 2011: 104).

Yamada Bimyō 山田美妙 in the “Preface” to his *Fūkin Shirabe no Hitofushi* 風琴調一節 (*A Note on the Organ*, 1887) also notices that the colloquial language in books is considered vulgar by some. He does not, however, support Shōyō’s view that it should be restricted to conversations. Here is what Bimyō says on the subject:

Any new and unfamiliar style provokes people preoccupied only with the surface of things and invite their negative comments like “vulgar” and “inelegant.” In the face of these charges, no one dares to try the colloquial style exclusively. Especially as regards the novel of manners, the dialogue is barely “vernacular” enough, and yet the narrative portions retain the “elegant style” characterized by the *-nari*, *-keri*, and *-beshi* suffixes. This inconsistency between dialogue and narrative within the same novel is really unsightly. We must remove it no matter how difficult the task may be (Miyoshi, 1974: 4).



Contrary to Shōyō, who allowed the colloquial language in dialogues but encouraged the “elegant style” in descriptive passages, Bimyō regarded the inconsistency within one work of fiction as “unsightly,” and insisted that only one style should be used. He also defended the gracefulness of the spoken style, emphasising that “in the hands of a skilled writer, colloquialism can offer an indescribable gracefulness with a discipline all its own, which is in no sense inferior to the elegant written style” (Miyoshi, 1974: 5).

The choice of a new written language for writing fiction was difficult not only because of the great discrepancy between written and spoken Japanese, but also due to the diversity of spoken dialects existing at the time. As a consequence, the decision of what should become the prevailing model or the standard for Japanese speech may be seen as an ideological one. Fujii, among others, is well aware of the complication, when he says: “The very formula that defines *genbun itchi* as a written representation of spoken language (as if there were such a monolithic entity) reveals an ideology at work” (Fujii, 1993: 96). A similar complication must have been at work also in the case of *kōdan* 講談 stories or *rakugo* performances, popular in the Meiji era, in which the performer had to choose the language both for himself as a narrator and for the characters he impersonated.

## 5. Recording an oral narrative

The discrepancy between the spoken and the written word was partly (and temporarily) reconciled by the appearance of *sokkibon*, or stenographic books. The method of shorthand writing was introduced to the Japanese public by Takusari Kōki 田鎖綱紀 and soon became popular, as it enabled a rapid transcription of lectures, sermons and *rakugo* performances. The article on stenographic methods published in “Jiji Shinpō” 時事新報 in 1882 was enthusiastic. “Phonography makes possible the direct transcription of even the longest and most complex discourses,” it said, and gave “assemblies, street-corner disquisitions, and parodies of Buddhist scriptures (*ahodarakyō* 阿呆陀羅經)” as examples (Miller, 1994: 473).

The rapid transcription was famously used to record the oral narratives of San'yūtei Enchō, the acclaimed *kōdanshi* 講談師, professional storyteller, also referred to as *rakugoka* 落語家, whose brilliant performances attracted the attention of a large public (Twine, 1978: 343). The *rakugo* performances usually

involved playful dialogues, all executed by one performer, which required lines that would be memorable and distinguishable at the same time. The stories put in writing retained much of the natural vigour and intensity of the spoken language, which must have appealed to the readers.

The stenographic method was used by Sakai Shōzō 酒井昇造 and Wakabayashi Kanzō 若林珮蔵, who recorded the comic spoken narratives of San'yūtei Enchō in what is sometimes referred to as a *sokkibon kōdan shōsetsu* 速記本講談小説 (narrated story in a form of a stenographic book). The effect of such cooperation, inspired by the editors of Tōkyō Haishi Shuppansha 東京稗史出版社, was the publication of *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* 怪談牡丹灯籠 (*The Strange Tale of Peony Lantern*) as a series of fascicles in 1884, and then as a separate book in 1885, which captured the vivid character of spoken narration in print. Naturally, the tension between the oral and the written traditions did not disappear altogether, which is also indicated by the fact that the stenographic transcription was corrected before the publication.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, *sokkibon* gave a sense of immediacy to the written texts and provided a model for colloquial-style writing for some writers.

The oral character of *Kaidan Botan Dōrō*, though also problematic due to the complex process of transcription and correction the text was subjected to, may nonetheless be visible both in the manner of setting the scene and in the language. Here is the opening passage of the book:

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, in the third year of the Kampō era, when Tokyo was still known as Edo, there was a celebration held in the shrine of Yushima in memory of the venerated Prince Shōtoku. On that great number of people gathered in the shrine and the squeeze was dreadful. Close by, in the area of Hongō Sanchōme, there was a shop selling armour, owned by Fujimura Shimbei. The superb articles displayed at the shop caught the eye of a samurai who was passing by. He must have been in his early twenties, his complexion was pale, his eyebrows most beautiful, his eyes were bright and determined, indicating short temper. He had his hair neatly combed, wore a splendid *haori* and a first-class *hakama*. He had leather-soled sandals on his feet and stood in the front. In the back you could see his companion in a pale blue livery coat, with a belt around his waist and a wooden sword covered with brass. The samurai stood there leaning against the post and viewing the displayed items (San'yūtei, 1977: 5).

<sup>2</sup> Some claim that regardless the later intervention into the text, Enchō's wording was kept, while others insist that the text was altered in the process of transcription and revision to the extent that it is difficult to treat it as a record of an oral performance (Nomura, 2002: 38-39).

All the verbs and adjectives in the passage are used in their colloquial forms. Moreover, they are also polite. The narrator, by choosing honorific language (*keigo* 敬語), as exemplified by his choice of verbs *mōshimashita* 申しました (the polite equivalent of “say, be called”) or *gozaimashite* 御座まして (polite equivalent of “be, exist”), indicates his humble position towards his listeners, which is simultaneously transferred onto the relationship between the narrator and the readers.

In fact, the choice between the neutral and the polite forms of Japanese was one of the core problems faced by writers of the Meiji era who were looking for a new language. In *kanbun* and classical Japanese, possibly as a consequence of stylization, the “honorific system has been somewhat neutralized over its long history” (Miyoshi, 1974: 13). Yamada Bimyō, who admits that he was inspired by San’yūtei Enchō, decided to use the honorific language in his novels (Miyoshi, 1974: 5). Futabatei Shimei, who also treated Enchō’s narratives as a model for using colloquial language in literature, chose differently but the decision was not an easy one, as he emphasizes in his essay *Yo ga genbun itchi no yurai* 余が言文一致の由来 (*How I Came to Use Genbun itchi*, 1906):

Should I use the polite form of the first person pronoun, *watakushi*, with sentences ending in *gozaimasu*, or the more familiar masculine personal pronoun *are*, as in “*Ore wa iya da*” (“I don’t like it”)? Professor Tsubouchi was of the opinion that there should be no honorific speech used. I was not entirely happy with this idea, but it was after all the view of the expert whom I had even contemplated asking to revise the manuscript for me. So I went ahead and finished the work without using honorific speech. This is the story of how I began writing in *genbun itchi* (Karatani & de Bary, 1993: 48).

Futabatei’s hesitation reflects the unstable state of language at the time. As Miyoshi indicates, “[i]n the early Meiji years, when the social role of the writer was still unfixed, the choice of the – *desu* suffix system over the – *da*, or vice versa, presented him with an agonizing problem in composition” (Miyoshi, 1974: xiv). Neutral as they may seem, however, plain forms, which are devised for the purpose of the novel, also suggest a specific relationship between the narrator and the readers. Futabatei decided to follow Shōyō’s advice not to use honorific language in his narratives and he referred to himself, not without humour, as “belonging to the ‘*da*’ school,” as opposed to Yamada Bimyō who was “of the ‘*desu*’ school” (Karatani & de Bary, 1993: 48)<sup>3</sup>. Both Futabatei and Bimyō named

<sup>3</sup> In fact, Yamada Bimyō wrote his first *genbun itchi* novel using the copula “*da*,” but he later switched to the polite “*desu*” form. The neutral “*de aru*” – as opposed to polite “*desu*” – was also used by Ozaki Kōyō in *Ninin nyobo* (Levy, 2006: 39).

San'yūtei Enchō as their model but they took two different paths in their quests for the language of the modern novel. “Da” or its slightly more polished version “de aru” was – as Levy notices – “a form from translation”, and “it was able to create a neutrality for the narrative voice in vernacular writing that was not common to the enunciations of spoken Japanese” (Levy, 2006: 39).

Although they contributed to alleviating the tension between the written and the oral traditions, the stenographic books soon disappeared. Their ephemeral popularity indicates that the vernacular language in fiction was not merely a recording of real spoken Japanese (Levy, 2006: 45). They were – as Futabatei's example proves – inspirational but could not compete with the modern novels on which they had exerted influence.

## 6. Towards representation in language

The exactness of language used in dialogues is said to have contributed to the realism of fiction written in the Tokugawa era (Keene, 1987: 112). The attempt to render the vividness of the language in conversations was already noticeable in the works of Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水 (1790-1844) and Jippensha Ikku 十返舎一九 (1765-1831), and aggravated the discrepancy which the writers of the Meiji era had to face, between the style of descriptive passage and that of dialogues. However, it does not seem that dialogues were appreciated only for their realistic value, before Meiji. The language they were written in was still abundant in literary tropes and puns, whose aim was primarily to entertain the readers. This is what Fowler refers to as the “presentational mode” of Japanese literature:

In the absence of a highly representational mode, the influence of a more self-consciously presentational mode on Japanese fiction has been enormous. The latter mode has played no small role in western literature as well – as the continuing interest in tropes, for example, demonstrates – but it has not had the sweeping impact, especially on prose, that it has had on Japanese literature (Fowler, 1988: 20-21).

Both Shunsui and Ikku were regarded by Shōyō as representatives of realism in Tokugawa fiction, which – as Rimer notices – proves his broad understanding of the term: although the works of those writers were “devoid of any sociological or naturalistic realism,” they nonetheless were characterised by the “descriptive detail and the linguistic realism of the dialogue” (1978: 34).

For a time, the use of direct speech in dialogues eliminated the problem of how to situate the narrator towards the readers. The dialogues naturally focus on dynamics between the speaking characters, rather than on the relationship between the narrator and the audience. In *Kaidan Botan Dōrō* the politeness of descriptive passages disappears in dialogues, in which characters address each other in a variety of manners, depending on their relationship. It is as if the narrator left the stage or became invisible to let the characters speak freely. Here is the conversation between the samurai and the owner of the shop with armour from the first chapter:

Samurai: “Sir, how much is that?”

Owner: “Oh, yes. Thank you, sir, for inquiring. I will not ask for too much, sir. As I just mentioned, were there a signature of a master, it would be of great value. There is no signature, so it is ten golden coins.

Samurai: “Ten golden coins! It is a little too expensive. Won’t you lower the price to seven and a half?”

Owner: What shall I do? Then I will lose on that. It cost me a great deal (San’yūtei, 1977: 6).

The direct narration reflects the relationship between the owner, who uses honorific language, and the customer, whose expressions are rather neutral. The customer attaches a honorific prefix (*go* 御) to the address but the verbs he uses are in the plain form. The moment, however, the narrator reappears on stage or becomes visible again, he comes back with his customary politeness addressed at the audience: “As they fervently bargained over the price, a passing drunkard caught the servant of the samurai. ‘What the hell are you doing?’ he shouted” (San’yūtei, 1977: 6). The narrator in the descriptive passages continues to use the humble language, regardless the character of the events he is narrating. In this manner, he inscribes the direct speech, which in fact is a dramatised dialogue, into his own monologue.

The situation is different in Futabatei Shimei’s *Ukigumo*, in which the narrator adopts a less involved tone, possibly trying to distance himself from the reader. As Karatani notices, “Futabatei sought to abstract conversational speech for purposes of writing” (1993: 49). The opening passage introduces him as a rather detached observer of the narrated events:

It is three o’clock on the afternoon of a late October day. A swirling mass of men stream out of the Kanda gate, marching first in ant-like formation, then scuttling busily off in every direction. Each and every one of the fine gentlemen is primarily interested in getting enough to

eat. Look carefully and you will see what an enormous variety of individual types are represented in the huge crowd. Start by examining the hair bristling on their faces: mustaches, side whiskers, Vandykes, and even extravagant imperial beards, Bismarck beards reminiscent of a Pekinese, bantam beards, badger's beards, meager beards that are barely visible, thick and thin they sprout in every conceivable way (Futabatei & Ryan, 1965: 197).<sup>4</sup>

The verbs used in the passage are not honorific but plain, proving Futabatei to truly belong to the “de aru” school of writing. However, most of the sentences are nominal, which may resemble the narrative style of Tokugawa fiction. In this respect Karatani is right to say that “Futabatei was unable to completely resist the pull of the *ninjobon* and *kokkeibon* styles,” identified with Japanese traditional fiction (1993: 51). It is also possible to argue, as Masao Miyoshi does in reference to Futabatei's translation of Turgenev, that the author of *Ukigumo* was uncomfortable with outdoor scenes and looked for “the security of stereotyped convention” (Miyoshi, 1974: 29). Be that as it may, the brisk nominalisation seems to imitate the hectic atmosphere of the place described. Moreover, the attempt to depict the scenes in *Ukigumo* in a realistic manner is also associated with frequent onomatopoeic expressions, especially in Part One and Part Two (Maeda, 2004: 240-241).

It is worth noticing here that the opening passage of the novel, quoted above, differs significantly from portions of direct narration and other descriptive passages in the novel. The opening of the second chapter may help to illustrate the change:

The man we have been calling “The tall young man” was named Utsumi Bunzō and he was from Shizuoka Prefecture. His father had served in the old feudal government receiving a stipend under it. But then the feudal lord had fallen and the Imperial government was restored. The Meiji era began; there were none who did not yield to the change. Bunzō's father returned to his home in a small village in Shizuoka and simply vegetated for a while. He lived from day to day doing nothing until he had exhausted his resources. At last his savings had all but disappeared, and he became seriously concerned (Futabatei & Ryan, 1965: 203).<sup>5</sup>

The style of the passage may be still called obsolete – the sentence is long and evolving in all directions, and the syntactic relationship between the subject and the predicate is sometimes vague – but it is different from the opening passage,

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Futabatei, 1989: 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Futabatei, 1989: 14.

and as the novel develops, the style further evolves. While the first chapter opens with a view of a crowd of people described from a distant perspective by means of nominal phrases – an often named characteristic of Tokugawa-period fiction written for entertainment or *gesaku bungaku* 戯作文学 – which corresponds with the metonymical character of the description, the following chapters focus on individual characters and consist of long verbal sentences. Miyoshi, who refers to the style as “archaic,” sees its paradoxical resemblance to James Joyce’s interior monologue (Miyoshi, 1974: 27). The style further changes when the narrator proceeds to Utsumi Bunzō’s thoughts – its interruptions correspond with the protagonist’s hesitation and internal struggle (Maeda, 2004: 143).

## 7. Modern use of old forms in Meiji novels

The example of Futabatei’s *Ukigumo*, in which long sentences with a flowing perspective were used to describe the floating existence of the protagonist, suggests that the traditional narrative methods could be used to express novel ideas in Meiji fiction. The traditional literary language – *gabuntai* 雅文体 – was also treated as an important area of quest for new expression, among others, by Mori Ōgai and Higuchi Ichiyō. Ōgai used it effectively in *Maihime* 舞姫, which explores the problems of defining oneself in the context of modernity. Ōgai’s contemporaries referred to the style as *wakanyō setchūtai* 和漢洋折衷体 – “mixed style of Japanese, Chinese and Western” due to the frequent use of foreign German names in the story (Miyoshi, 1974: 38).

*Maihime* draws from the tradition of diary writing while attempting to express the inner self in a manner resembling *Ich Roman* (Bowring, 1979: 55). The opening passage explores the beauty and suggestiveness of classical Japanese:

They have finished loading the coal, and the tables here in the second-class saloon stand in silence. Even the bright glare from the electric lights seems wasted, for tonight the group of card players who usually gather here of an evening are staying in a hotel and I am left alone on board (Mori & Bowring, 1975: 151).<sup>6</sup>

The verb forms are in classical (*bungo* 文語) forms but the sentences are short and clearly divided, which situates the passage in sharp contrast with the opening of *Ukigumo*. As a consequence, the works are often juxtaposed with one

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mori, 1965: 3.

another and Karatani's statement that *Maihime* is more "realistic" (and hence more modern) than *Ukigumo* is widely known and commonly quoted. According to Karatani, *Maihime* has "the conceptual and grammatical structure of a work written in a European language and translated into Japanese," which leads him to a conclusion that "it is Ōgai's work which represents an advance, and it is his work, rather than Futabatei's, that brings the issue of *genbun itchi* to light" (1993: 50-51). Obviously, *genbun itchi* is understood here in a broader sense, not merely as a use of spoken Japanese but as a response to the challenges posed by foreign fiction.

Undoubtedly, Mori Ōgai's acquaintance with German literature, as well as his experience as a translator, enabled him to endow *Maihime* with the grammatical structure of a work of foreign literature translated into Japanese, despite the use of *bungo*. Ōgai's dialogues are as elegant in form as the descriptive passages:

'Why are you crying?' I asked. 'Perhaps because I am a stranger here I may be able to help you all the more.' I was astounded by my audacity. Startled, she stared into my sallow face, but she must have seen my sincerity from my expression. 'You look a kind sort of person,' she sobbed. 'Not cruel like him or my mother!' Her tears had stopped for a moment, but now they overflowed again and ran down her lovely cheeks (Mori & Bowring, 1975: 155).<sup>7</sup>

The phrase Ōta Toyotarō addressed at Elise is polite and far from colloquial and his language in dialogues resembles that in narrative passages, which supports the claim that "*gabuntai* made no distinction between the voice of the narrator and that of the characters described" (Nagashima, 2012: 86). The language of Elise, a German dancer, and Ōta, a Japanese foreign student, is not individualised, but rather becomes a subject of elegant stylisation. The dialogue is written down in Japanese *gabuntai* but the setting suggests that both characters are using German and there is no difference in their language ability: Ōta's proficiency in German is identical with that of a native speaker (Takada, 2000: 14).

The clear structure of sentences and passages in *Maihime*, indeed easily translatable into English, is accompanied by a consistent use of one narrative voice belonging to Ōta Toyotarō, the narrator and protagonist of the story. In this early work, Ōgai seems to prove "both his understanding of and control over one of the most fundamental tools of fiction writing as it was then

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mori, 1965: 6.



being practiced in Europe and the U.S.: a consistent narrative voice” (Snyder, 1994: 356). The beginning makes it clear that Ōta is on his way to Japan while recollecting the moments spent in Germany. He recalls what occurred to him during his sojourn outside of his country:

Returning to Japan, I feel a very different person from when I set out. Not only do I still feel dissatisfied with my studies, but I have also learned how sad this transient life can be. I am now aware of the fallibility of human emotions, but in particular I realize what a fickle heart I have myself. To whom could I possibly show a record of fleeting impressions that might well be right one day and wrong the next? Perhaps this is why my diary was never written. No, there is another reason (Mori & Bowring, 1975: 151).<sup>8</sup>

The story has a circular character: the protagonist in the end finds himself in the very same place he was when he started his adventure and narrative. It is possible to say that Ōta’s stay in Germany was “a glorious moment of suspense to be treasured in memory perhaps, but finally irrelevant to his necessary being” (Miyoshi, 1974: 43). However, the opening passage does suggest the possibility of change in the narrator’s perspective and of his inner self. Although throughout the story Ōta refers to himself by means of *yo* 余, a first-person pronoun traditionally used by men, when he speaks of himself going back to Japan, he uses another pronoun (*ware* 吾), which highlights his two statements: “Returning to Japan, I feel a very different person from when I set out,” and “I realise what a fickle heart I have myself.” In this manner, the classical Japanese in *Maihime* may have been used to reveal or emphasise the anxieties of the protagonist.

## 8. The outskirts of modernity

The brilliant use of traditional forms in order to express a modern message was also characteristic of Higuchi Ichiyō’s works. In her *Diaries*, she insisted that the goal of her literary endeavours is to create impeccable beauty (1976: 316) and she looked for the manifestation of this ideal in classical literature. Contrary to the writers previously mentioned, she made no attempts at translating foreign literature, which may have resulted in her even greater indebtedness to the classical Japanese. Nonetheless, she could write in *kōgotai*, as is illustrated by her late short-story *Kono Ko* この子 (My Child, 1896), as well as by the brilliant dialogues in her other works. At the same time, she was a diligent observer of

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mori, 1965: 3.

surrounding reality, which is vividly illustrated by *Takekurabe* たけくらべ, her most often-quoted work of fiction, focusing on the lives of children in the outskirts of the famous quarters of Yoshiwara.

The opening passage of *Takekurabe* is abundant in traditional literary tropes:

It's a long way round to the front of the quarter, where the trailing branches of the willow tree bid farewell to the night time revellers and the bawdyhouse lights flicker in the moat, dark as the dye that blackens the smiles of the Yoshiwara beauties. From the third floor rooms of the lofty houses the all but palpable music and laughter spill down into the side street. Who knows how these great establishments prosper? The rickshaws pull up night and day. They call this part of town beyond the quarter "in front of Daion Temple." The name may sound a little saintly, but those who live in the area will tell you it's a lively place (Higuchi & Danly, 1981: 254).<sup>9</sup>

The forms belong to classical Japanese, as do the stylistic devices: *kakekotoba* 掛詞 or puns, such as the one using the adjective "long" (*nagakeredo* 長けれど), which may refer either to the road or to the branches of the willow, and *engo* 縁語 or words/images related by meaning. Still, the place is depicted most vividly, and the metaphor of enclosure, explored in the passage, may be read as something rather modern (Nakanishi, 2002: 63).

The language of dialogues in *Takekurabe* differs conspicuously, which makes it resemble Futabatei's *Ukigumo*, both texts showing a significant discrepancy between direct narration and descriptive passages. The difference may be illustrated by a conversation included early in the narrative, in chapter 3, depicting the children's preparations for the festival in Senzoku Shrine:

"We'll do something together," said Midori. "Don't worry about money. I've got plenty. Just say what you want."

The friends, quicker than adults to see their opportunity, knew that they were not likely again to have a ruling lady so generous.

"How about a show? We'll use a store where everybody can see us."

"You call that an idea?" The boy already wore his headband in the rakish festival manner. "We'll get a *mikoshi*. A real one. The heavier the better. *Yatchoi, yatchoi*" (Higuchi & Seidensticker, 1960: 76).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Higuchi, 1974: 402.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Higuchi, 1974: 409.

The style of the conversation is colloquial, clearly different from the opening passage, descriptive in character (Hara, 2003: 204-219). The grammatical structure of the sentences reflects the enthusiasm and great expectations the children harbour before the festival. The attitude of the boys willing to show their strength while carrying a portable shrine *mikoshi* is highlighted by the onomatopoeic expression: *Yatchoi, yatchoi*. Still, particular voices are not individualized. Even Midori, the main protagonist, who is introduced in the same chapter as a person from Kiinokuni province with a specific dialect, speaks as all other children brought up in the outskirts of Yoshiwara district in Tokyo.

The language of *Takekurabe*, which employs the poetic tropes of classical Japanese in descriptive passages, as well as colloquial forms in dialogues, is used to depict the ambiguous character of the quarter adjacent to the influential Yoshiwara. As a consequence, *Takekurabe* may be read as a study of social influence and the gradual discovery of one's looming fate, which is reflected both in the theme of the story and the dynamics of the language.

## 9. Conclusion

The tension between the oral and the written styles in Japanese literature of the 1880s and the 1890s, which was highlighted by the influx of European and American novels and discourses, were ingeniously explored by Meiji writers. Stenographic books of San'yūtei Enchō suggested one possible approach to the problem. They turned out to be inspirational to Futabatei Shimei, who attempted to use colloquial speech in dialogues and subsequently alter the language used in descriptive passages. This attempt was to help bridge the gap between dialogues and descriptions, typical of Tokugawa literature. The reflection on Futabatei's influence on the novelistic expression in Meiji literature is, however, incomplete without the context of his translations. Contrary to Futabatei, Mori Ōgai, also a translator of foreign literature, presented a different approach to the challenging gap between the oral and the written. In *Maihime* he used classical language, but changed the structure of sentences and paragraphs in order to focus entirely on the speaking persona. Higuchi Ichiyō, on the other hand, explored classical Japanese, and experimented with stylized colloquialisms in order to suggest the immediacy of the depicted places.

The quests for a new language in fiction, illustrated by the works of Japanese nineteenth-century fiction analysed in this paper, were triggered by a

“sense of dislocation,” or an acute awareness that the new times called for new means of expression. Futabatei, Ōgai and Ichiyō did not begin their search by imitating foreign patterns but instead explored what they had already known and highly valued within the Japanese tradition. This encouraged the process of reevaluation of the old narrative techniques, many of which were discovered to be highly fruitful for expressing new ideas. With the exception of Ichiyō, all the writers had substantial experience in translating foreign works of literature, which also resulted in their experimenting with vernacular language. The tension existing between the oral and written styles in nineteenth-century Japan corresponds in their works to the dynamics between the presentational and representational modes in literature. The writers attempted to explore new paths in writing, and their quests have significantly contributed to the development of the modern novel in Japan.

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