

Lecture: Matsumoto Seicho in the Context of Literary History

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To begin, I would like to present my perspective on literary history. When a new work emerges, it inevitably carries influences from the preceding era, thus contributing to a continuous, structured narrative. The interconnections and relationships among various works collectively shape literary history.

Now, let's consider an example. There is a writer named Un'no Juza, who is about ten years older than Matsumoto Seicho. He published various works, including science fiction detective novels in a magazine titled *Shinseinen*. One of these works is titled *Shindoma*, and the story features a wealthy man with a beautiful wife, leading a comfortable life. However, the man is suffering from tuberculosis, a deadly illness at the time. He undergoes a surgical procedure performed by a renowned doctor, involving the use of medication to create a barrier around his lungs, like a wall, to prevent tuberculosis bacteria from entering. As he regains his health, he becomes involved in a romantic relationship with the young wife of the doctor, and she eventually becomes pregnant and insists on having a child. Unable to cope with the situation, the wealthy man constructs a hidden, sealed laboratory in his garden and generates vibrations that resonate within it. The pregnant woman hears the vibrations, which are intended to terminate her pregnancy. After the deed is done, the woman leaves, and the man believes he is free from the affair. Ironically, the vibrations that led to the demise of the unborn child also damage the protective wall around the man's lungs, and he, too, faces impending mortality.

In *Shindoma*, Un'no Juza introduces an innovative concept using sound waves. When we read it, we sense an unsettling connection, perhaps to the vibrations associated with the second and third murders in Matsumoto Seicho's *Suna no Utsuwa*. It is an era of ultrasonic, so in the story, one of the main characters is a young, energetic expert in electronic music. He uses ultrasonic surgical instruments to induce heart failure in a young actor with a weak heart, resulting in his demise. Furthermore, he uses sound waves for an abortion procedure on the mistress of one of his friends, inadvertently leading to her death as well. In other words, the ideas in Un'no Juza's

Shindoma had been circulating and were later revitalized as ultrasonic murders when they intersected with Matsumoto Seicho's talent, creating a unique and narrow current in literary history.

Now, let's delve into another example. In 1957, Matsumoto Seicho wrote a work titled *Hossa*. The protagonist is a gambling addict deeply entangled in debt, so he neglects to provide living expenses for his sick wife and instead indulges in extramarital affairs, showing that he is a careless and irresponsible man. One day, unpleasant events start unfolding from the moment he wakes up. At work, he makes a major mistake and is severely reprimanded by his boss. Failing to secure a loan, he also faces rejection and coldness from his lover, leaving him physically and mentally shattered.

The novel concludes as follows: Late at night, the protagonist boards the train, grabs the handrail, and gazes ahead. There, he notices a man who seems on the brink of falling asleep, swaying to the side as if about to tip over but returning to an upright position. The man repeats this motion, resembling the rhythm of his own monotonous daily routine, replaying every day. The man does not relinquish his seat. As the protagonist looks at his repeating movement, he finds himself strangely captivated by this repetitive motion. Suddenly, he is overcome by a violent, impulsive emotion and lunges at the person, clutching the man's throat. It might be the irrational anger of everyday life, or perhaps even a murderous intent. At that moment, the novel concludes, leaving the interpretation to the reader.

This is a highly skilled piece of work. When I read Matsumoto Seicho's *Hossa*, it reminds me of work from a previous era, *Kamisori*. It is one of the early works by Shiga Naoya, a prominent writer of the Taisho era. The protagonist is a young barber with a quick temper and extreme nervousness but is a masterful craftsman. He catches a cold during a busy season, causing him to lie down with a high fever that makes his hands tremble. Despite his quick temper, he becomes increasingly irritated by everything his young apprentices do, and his frustration builds up. At last, he gets up and starts sharpening razors, but the razors end up being returned by one of his clients, tearing his pride to shreds.

At that moment, a man enters and requests a beard shave. He has a coarse appearance and appears to be heading to a brothel. The barber, who is very fastidious, holds a strong aversion to men like him. Despite everyone's efforts to dissuade him, he reluctantly begins to shave, his hands trembling. That was when he unexpectedly injures the customer while trimming his

beard. As he watches the small clots of blood rise, he is suddenly overcome by wild emotions and cuts the man's throat with a razor. The novel ends with a gruesome scene of blood spatter.

This work also depicts irrational anger and murderous intent in everyday life. Shiga Naoya's piece, *Kamisori*, from the Taisho era, has continued to resonate through the ages, and its influence has emerged in Matsumoto Seicho's work titled *Hossa*. The similarity between these two novelists is viewed as a continuation in literary history.

Shiga Naoya wrote many crime novels of this nature, including *Nigotta Atama* and *Han's Hanzai*. Why did he engage in this genre from the end of the Meiji era to the Taisho era? In fact, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro also penned numerous crime novels during his early career, as did Sato Haruo. A writer named Hirotsu Kazuo authored a novel titled *Shinkeibyō Jidai*, portraying this era as an age of nervous disorders. The Taisho era was considerably more tranquil, a time of smaller societal conflicts compared to the Meiji era, which was marked by violent revolutions and wars. However, even as things settled down, the harshness of the Meiji era likely continued to linger. It is plausible that all the young artists of the Taisho era sensed this underlying ruggedness, which found expression in the form of crime novels.

The Taisho era marked a period of significant cultural expansion, giving rise to mediums like movies that captivated authors such as Tanizaki Jun'ichiro. It served as a precursor to the mass society, an era when culture became accessible to the broader population. In the realm of literature, particularly, colloquial language became firmly established. The complex classical style of Meiji literature evolved into a more straightforward vernacular style. When reading novels by authors like Akutagawa Ryunosuke and Kikuchi Kan, it becomes evident how clear and accessible they are. In the case of Akutagawa Ryunosuke, in particular, the aesthetic refinement is exceptionally high.

In this era, as literature expanded, an element of entertainment or recreation became necessary. Naturalist literature had reached its zenith at the end of the Meiji period. However, it was quiet, simple, and lacking in drama, making it less engaging. As a reaction to this, the Taisho period saw the incorporation of entertainment into literature. A key figure in promoting this popular culture was Kikuchi Kan. He established BUNGEISHUNJU, Ltd. to disseminate this kind of culture to the masses. One of the genres that gained popularity was detective novels, with Edogawa Rampo emerging as a notable

figure.

The Meiji era was characterized by ethics and logic. Then, in the Taisho period, for instance, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro emerged with a work titled *Shisei*. No novelists in the Meiji period could have crafted works like *Shisei*. It is a story of a tattoo artist who lives with a desire to tattoo the skin of young women. The moment they receive a tattoo, women become empowered. This marked the first instance of the human body becoming a prominent theme. Edogawa Rampo followed in Tanizaki's footsteps, using themes such as "disguise," "transformation," "becoming a woman," and "altering the human body" in his novels. He also emphasized the importance of the body. These are revolutionary changes that become more apparent as time progresses.

In comparison to the Taisho period, the 1950s can be considered a period that underwent similar changes. In addition to newspapers and monthly magazines, weekly magazines emerged. Radio and movies also reached their zenith during this period, followed by the introduction of television. The media for spreading culture expanded limitlessly, leading to the establishment of a full-fledged mass society. This was the era of popular culture when almost everyone could partake in shared cultural experiences. It was during this period that a colloquial style became prevalent in most areas, making reading and writing accessible to a wider audience.

Matsumoto Seicho was a prominent figure of that era, and he expanded upon what Kikuchi Kan had accomplished during the Taisho period but on a much larger scale. The connection or continuity from Kikuchi Kan to Matsumoto Seicho is evident, displaying how cultural and literary history is interconnected. With Matsumoto Seicho's emergence, the distinction between 'pure literature' and 'popular literature,' which had been clearly separated until then, began to blur, and entertainment became exceedingly sophisticated. It seemed that there were no longer any boundaries between them.

Shiba Ryotaro emerged shortly after Matsumoto Seicho. These two novelists can be viewed as both partners and complementary figures. More of Shiba's works are historical novels. The two can be seen as a single set, not as separate entities. Among Meiji writers, Matsumoto Seicho admired Mori Ogai, whereas Shiba Ryotaro was an ardent fan of Natsume Soseki. Whether describing the dark or light aspects of history, Matsumoto Seicho and Shiba Ryotaro are also complementary. Matsumoto Seicho delves into

the true problems of the Showa period's history, while Shiba Ryotaro attempts to see the brighter side of history. These two novelists complemented each other and contributed to the significant cultural developments of the 1950s and 60s.

Another common aspect shared by these two novelists was their creation of a new genre by blending history and literature, erasing the boundaries between them. Reading Matsumoto Seicho's *Showa-shi Hakkutsu* or *Nihon no Kuroi Kiri* is far more thrilling and captivating than reading a conventional novel. This is especially true of the *Ni-ni-roku Jiken* in the former, where history is seamlessly transformed into literature. Shiba Ryotaro's *Saka no Ue no Kumo* is technically a novel but departs from the conventional novel format, and *Kaido o Yuku*, which I like, does not have the typical qualities of a novel either. Shiba Ryotaro essentially created a new genre.

Hando Kazutoshi was the first to recognize the connection between Matsumoto Seicho and Shiba Ryotaro. In his book *Seicho-san to Shiba-san*, he emphasized the strong link between them, noting their overlap. He identified this connection earlier than I did. Hando's book was a brilliant work of comparative authorship and literary history theory. Hando Kazutoshi himself was an excellent scholar of Showa history, and it seems he was contemplating the themes that connected Matsumoto Seicho, Shiba Ryotaro, and himself.