

Urban Space in Tokyo Narratives

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This paper attempts to read the female protagonist in Tamura Toshiko's 田村俊子 short story "Eiga" 栄華 (*Glory*, 1916) as a metaphor for the dark space of Edo in the context of the Meiji *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 (civilization and enlightenment), a national effort towards power and glory that comes with technological and career advancement on a collective and personal level. Tamura's "Eiga" focuses on the desperate wandering one evening in the life of Komatsu, a woman who has once lived extravagantly and is now clinging to the illusion of passion from a lover who has jilted her. She embodies the space of Edo (a dark, sinister, segregated space, the space of *asobi* 遊び—play) in contrast to the bright, sanitized, and "normal" landscape of Meiji enlightenment. Komatsu is the agent who wanders through the landscape to remind one of the looming darkness which the glory of Meiji seeks to purge, but by necessity exists ever so tenaciously on the margin in order to problematize the full legitimacy of Meiji enlightenment.

Many Meiji and early Taisho novels depict a segregated, irrational and sinister space (*akubasho* 悪場所) encapsulated in the bright, orderly, and rational landscape of modernity—Soseki's *Rondon tō* 倫敦塔 (*London Tower*, 1905), Ōgai's "Kompira" 金比羅 (1909), and Kyōka's *Kōya Hijiri* 高野聖 (*The Holy Man of Mount Kōya*, 1900) immediately come to mind—and "Eiga" can be placed in that context, yet unlike those other stories Tamura does not allow light and rationality to reclaim the closure of the spreading gloom in her story. Moreover, while Soseki, Ōgai, and Kyōka set their stories in imaginary or far-off places, away from the urban center where the drive for enlightenment is most evident, Tamura sets her story in Tokyo and traces the movement of her character from the dark alleys and bridges of the Edo space of *asobi*—Shitaya, Tsukiji—to the well-lit, brick-laid Ginza, a showcase of Meiji enlightenment. Tamura's "Eiga" serves less as a protest and resistance to Meiji enlightenment than as an

elegy of the past glory of an amorous woman and the vanishing aura of the places she passes through. The topos of an amorous woman wandering through a landscape of dramatic decline and prosperity is of course not a new one, dating back to Saikaku's *Life of an Amorous Woman* (*Kōshoku ichidai onna* 好色一代女, 1686), and there are good reasons to believe that Tamura is drawing from Saikaku's legacy by suggesting that Komatsu might have wandered into Tokyo from Osaka (we are told at one point that Komatsu has a brother in Osaka). What Tamura does is to give this universal topos of the wandering amorous woman specific references in time and space, so that her wandering becomes a comment on a certain urban space in a certain time in history, specifically the dark, back alleys in Tokyo during Meiji enlightenment.

For those who are not familiar with the story, let me give a brief summary of the plot. Komatsu was married into the affluent Toda family but is already widowed at the beginning of the story. Provided with a handsome amount of money, she lives with her young daughter Mieko and an old servant, leaving her son with the Toda family. Continuing with her extravagant lifestyle of playing around (*asobiaruku* 遊び歩く) as when her husband was alive, which includes frequenting the theater and teahouses and having amorous relationships with kabuki actors, she quickly squanders her wealth, and at the beginning of the story is reduced to borrowing money from Nonose, a man who used to work for the Todas. Her old servant is completely disillusioned and leaves her. Desperate, she drags little Mieko around in her best outfit in an attempt to see Koisaburō, a kabuki actor who was once her lover but is no longer interested in maintaining a relationship with a patroness who is broke. After leaving Mieko in the temporary care of Nonose's wife Kaneko, Komatsu spends the last part of the journey alone in a rickshaw, going from one old place to another, haunted by flickering images of a past glory and tormented by illusions of a hopeless passion.

In a brilliant study entitled *Toshi kūkan no naka no bungaku* 都市空間のなかの文学 (*Literature in the Urban Space*, 1982), the scholar Maeda Ai analyzes the urban space of Edo versus that of Meiji Tokyo through two nineteenth-century texts, Terakado Seiken's 寺門静軒 *Edo hanjōki* 江戸繁昌記 (*A Record of the Prosperity of Edo*, 1832-36) and Hattori Bushō's

服部撫松 *Tokyō shinhanjōki* 東京新繁昌記 (*A New Record of the Prosperity of Tokyo*, 1874).¹ While there was a conscious effort in both Edo and Tokyo to segregate places of entertainment and defilement (the so-called “akubasho,” a rubric under which brothels, teahouses, theaters, prisons, and funeral houses all fall) from the so-called normal urban space, Maeda maintains, the prosperity of Edo was organized according to the principle of human gatherings (*atsumari* 集まり). Such gatherings can be divided into two broad categories: the space for *asobi* (play, entertainment) and the space for *kurashi* (daily life). The space for *asobi* is associated with a sense of forbidden and alluring darkness, while the space for *kurashi* is associated with normality and light. The prosperity of Edo lay in the recognition of the need for the co-existence of the normal and so-called anti-normal urban spaces, and the positive facilitation of communication between the spaces of *asobi* and *kurashi*. Edo, and by extension early Meiji, prosperity ensured a lively interaction between the two different kinds of urban spaces.

What Maeda observes is evident in the writings of the Meiji-born woman writer Koganei Kimiko 小金井喜美子, for instance, when she documents the close proximity of brothels, shrines, and regular households in Senju where she lived in the early Meiji years.² And an occasion on which urban dwellers from all walks of life gather and the two different urban spaces converge is the Rooster Festival (*tori no ichi* 酉の市) at the Ōtori Jinja 大鳥神社 in Shitaya every November.

It is not a mere coincidence that Tamura begins “Eiga” with a reference to the Rooster Festival, the setting of the second climatic scene in Higuchi Ichiyō’s famous *Takekurabe* たけくらべ (*Child’s Play*, 1895-96), a story about the coming of age of children in the so-called *akubasho* of entertainment. There is a strong suggestion that Komatsu and the women

¹ Maeda 2000, pp. 119-144. Terakado lived 1796-1868, Hattori 1842-1908. Maeda’s study has been translated and edited by James Fujii (Maeda 2004); in this article, however, all translations are mine.

² See “Mukōjima kawai” 向島界限 (The Vicinity of Mukōjima) and “Yakushisama no enjitsu” 薬師様の縁日 (The Festival of Yakushisama), in Koganei 1999. Also see Yiu 2002.

she associates with (e.g., Kaneko and her company of card players, which includes a former proprietress of a restaurant and a concubine) are all spiritual sisters of Midori, the girl destined to be a geisha in *Child's Play*. Komatsu in particular inherits Midori's destiny in the world of color (that is the amorous world) when childhood ended for her.

The crimson strap of silk that Midori left out in the rain for Nobuyuki in one of the most memorable scenes in *Child's Play* is to be sustained and enlarged in Tamura's text, in which rich colorful fabric and water become dominant imagery, emblems of Komatsu's past glory. Kimonos in silk crepe dyed a rich color, a red singlet for a little girl, a gold hairpin inlaid with diamonds, a locked-up chest of kimonos for Mieko, an expensive silk crepe kimono with long flowing sleeves and a matching silk coat—all these provide color and texture within an overall dim and dark atmosphere, and they symbolize Komatsu's life and past glory.

We mentioned earlier that while the urban prosperity of Edo was organized around human gatherings, thus allowing the space of *asobi* (and by extension, its inhabitants) to flourish alongside the space of *kurashi*, urban prosperity in Meiji Tokyo came to be organized more and more along the lines of railroads, gas lights, and telecommunication. One direct consequence of this new principle was the obliteration of the waterways (rivers, canals, and ditches) and dark alleys of Tokyo, places most closely associated with Komatsu and the urban space of *asobi*. Meiji enlightenment, as Maeda Ai astutely observes, turned Tokyo into a strictly terrestrial urban space (*riku no Tōkyō* 陸の東京) (Maeda, p. 137), consigning those associated with its dark waterways and the so-called *mizu shōbai* 水商売 (literally the water or drinking business) to the shadows. Many writers express a sense of loss as the urban landscape becomes increasingly arid with technological progress. These writers include Ichiyō, who captures the time and space of unstructured child's play in the confinement of the dark ditches surrounding the Daionji in *Takekurabe*, Soseki, who depicts with dreamlike distance his sisters' boat ride down to the theater in *Garasudo no naka* 硝子戸の中 (*Within the Glass Doors*, 1915), and Kafū, who transforms the mosquitoes and ditches to poetry in *Bokutō kidan* 墨東綺譚 (*A Strange Tale from East of the River*, 1936). Tamura's language depicting Komatsu's wandering becomes increasingly aquatic in nature—from the

initial “*asobiaruku*,” which is land-bound in nature, to “*samayou*” 漂浪う (literally, to drift in the waves) (TTS 2, p. 285), “*chinrin*” 沈淪 (sinking) (TTS 2, p.275), “*ōkina tsunami no naka ni sarawaretsutsu iku yō na seikatsu*” 大きな海嘯の中に浚われつつ行くような生活 (“a life awashed by a huge tidal wave”) (TTS 2, p. 280), until finally she visualizes an imaginary rival “drowning in Koisaburō” (*Koisaburō ni oborete iru* 鯉三郎に溺れている) as she herself has done (TTS 2, p. 296).³

The association with water takes her to the memorable scene in “Eiga” in which as mother and child are crossing a cold stone bridge, Komatsu asks little Mieko if she could stay by herself with Kaneko. “Staring at a red neon light blinking on and off in the distance, Mieko remained silent. Mieko’s silence discouraged Komatsu and she said no more” (287). The word for neon light here is *irumineishon* イルミネーション, a symbol of Meiji civilization and enlightenment significantly featured in Meiji trade fairs and exposition grounds.⁴ The gloom closes completely upon Komatsu’s life as her daughter, who chases the light as she follows her mother in her desperate wandering, stares in silence at the great symbol of Meiji enlightenment.

After this heartwrenching exchange, Komatsu leaves Mieko in Kaneko’s care and continues her desperate wandering alone. The last few pages of “Eiga,” a one-person *michiyuki*, are a tour de force that shows Tamura at her best. The places Komatsu passes through mark the progress of Meiji enlightenment within a very limited geographical radius, from the dark back alleys of Kobiki-chō 木挽町 in Tsukiji 築地, known for its kabuki theater, restaurants, and teahouses, to a public telephone booth in Shinbashi 新橋 and the Wakō clock tower (completed in 1894 and universally regarded as a symbol of progress) in the Ginza. The play between light and darkness, a constant theme in Meiji literature, is intensified in the final stage of wandering, as the dark interior of the rickshaw that bears Komatsu glides over bridges and alleys, illuminated by

³ Quotes from “Eiga” are taken from Tamura 1988, vol. 2. English translation is taken from “Glory” in Tanaka 1987, pp. 3-19.

⁴ Note, for instance, Chapter 11 in Sōseki’s *Gubijinsō* 虞美人草 (*The Poppy*, 1907).

the winter moonlight and shafts of street light. “The rickshaw seemed to be slowly sinking through a lightless underworld; from time to time the scene in front of her turned pitch dark from the layers of shadows that piled on top of one another” (Tanaka 1987, p.35). Light, especially glaring electric light, does not dispel the gathering darkness in Komatsu’s life. On the contrary, it only emphasizes that she has no place in the light, as in the scene when she finds no comfort in the reflection of the electric bulb on the sliding doors as she waits in vain for Koisaburō to appear in the teahouse. The splendor (“*eiga*” 栄華) that she seeks has little to do with the bright, clear light of civilization and enlightenment; rather it is closely associated with the rich, dark colors of fabric sustained throughout the text. “Once her gorgeous sleeves had covered Koisaburō—her tentative, insecure admirer—like wings” (Tanaka 1987, p.33), yet now a thick veil (“*tobari*” 帳) separates her from the brilliant world she once enjoyed. “She found her mind assailed by darkness and cold, rising up as if from the bottom of hell” (Tanaka 1987, p.33).

As darkness closes upon Komatsu’s world, she tries two drastically different means to salvage links to her past glory. One means is telecommunication, one of the outstanding products of Meiji technological advancement; the other means (or medium) is her powerful intuition of fiction and fantasy. As far as telecommunication is concerned, the establishment at Tsukiji kept Komatsu on tenterhooks as it called Koisaburō at the theater: “The line was busy and we were able to get through only a few minutes ago, you see. As I thought, Koisaburō’s been ill” (Tanaka 1987, p. 34). Stopping at a small, lighted phone booth in Shinbashi, Komatsu called Koisaburō’s home first and was told that he was not expected back that night. She called the theater teahouse and was told that Koisaburō was ill and seemed to have gone home early, leaving his last performance to the substitute.

Fiction and fantasy enter where telecommunication fails to sustain Komatsu’s world, essentially an amorous world closely associated with the dark shadow of a bygone era. Like Emma Bovary in Flaubert’s masterpiece, who conjures an alternative existence through fiction, letters, and the sheer force of her imagination and allows that existence to take over her reality, Komatsu, for whom the piercing light of Meiji leaves no place to hide,

relies on words and theatrical imagery in an attempt to sustain the dark, colorful space of *asobi*. “An image of indulgence, soaked in crimson, appeared in the weary darkness behind her closed eyes. Slowly the image became clearer, and in the center was Koisaburō, standing still and looking resplendent in red and purple” (Tanaka 1987, p. 35). “Koisaburō’s eyebrows, painted with black and red, which showed just a little at the edge where the brush swept up; his eyes with the clear outline, nicely slanted; the way he focused those gentle, alluring eyes under his long eyelashes, so lovely, so charming. . . . Komatsu went on composing the picture of her lover” (Tanaka 1987, p. 37). Koisaburō’s name, written with the character for carp (*koi* 鯉), of course embodies a *double entendre*, simultaneously suggesting love (*koi* 恋) and the image of the fish that swims freely and gleams darkly in the waterways of a city once associated closely with the canals and ditches that surround the space of *asobi*—space of glory, before the Yamanote ideology created the image of a harsh, arid, terrestrial Tokyo aspiring to rise as a city of light.

Komatsu’s creation of an alternative reality is abruptly punctured by the symbols of progress. “She opened her eyes, which seemed glued together, and was momentarily blinded by the bright lights of the outside world” (Tanaka 1987, p. 37). The bright lights outside come from the street lights, and one of the most famous symbols of enlightenment is the illumination of eighty-five gas street lights in the Ginza in 1874, which escalated to a two thousand watt street light in Ginza Nichōme in 1882 (Maeda, p. 154). The well-lit Ginza, in contrast to the surrounding gloom of the space of Edo, marks the space of enlightenment and its inevitable drive to expel darkness. At the end of her desperate wandering in a failed attempt to reach the reference of her illusory love, Komatsu gazes at the Wakō clock tower, wrapped in the gloom of her doomed pursuit. “She looked up at a clock tower stretching high into the dark sky and saw that it was ten minutes till eleven” (Tanaka 1987, p. 37). Komatsu’s feeling as she is forced to admit the defeat of the dark alluring space of Edo under the great symbol of Meiji enlightenment in the Ginza anticipates the anti-Ginza sentiment in Kafū’s *Bokutō kidan*, at the beginning of which the author’s stand-in Oe Tadasu tells us that he never goes to the “moving picture.”

Speaking of “moving pictures”—*katsudō shashin* 活動写真, *eiga* 映

画—at the end of Tamura’s text, what we are left with is the flickering image of Komatsu’s “dying glory” (*eiga* 栄華)—or was it a pun on the other *eiga* 映画?—a dazzling and rapid play between light and darkness, a quick succession of images, richly textured colors, and dialogues whose aim is not in characterization and probing interiority but in creating a design, as in the French *dessin*, which Akutagawa would champion in 1927 against plot and characterization. What Tamura has done in “Eiga” is to create a design that superimposes the space of Edo over the space of Meiji Tokyo in order to problematize their uncomfortable meeting in modern Japan, encapsulated in the life of a woman in the span of one dark winter evening.

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