Reading a Japanese Film

Cinema in Context

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Animation Seminal and Influential

Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988)

THE ANIMATION FILM known as *anime* in Japan has earned the respect and admiration of viewers worldwide. Two examples—both science fiction—come readily to mind. Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1988) created a sensation in the West, especially in the United States, where it edged out *Return of the Jedi* at the Oscars. Mamoru Ōishi's *Ghost in the Shell* (Kōkaku kidōtai, 1995) was a bigger popular hit in the United States than in Japan. Its debt to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) helped give it instant status with *anime* lovers in the West. The appeal of Ōishi's work has much to do with its "technically sophisticated computer animation" in service of a complex storyline mix of biblical, Shinto, and Buddhist sources.[1]

More recently, *Spirited Away* (Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi, 2001) by Hayao Miyazaki (b. 1941) went right to the top, becoming the biggest box office hit in a hundred years of Japanese cinema history. It also cut a wide swath through the awards at a number of international film festivals, among them the Berlin Film Festival's Golden Lion for 2001 and the Best Animated Film Oscar for 2002.

Many in the West think of animation as a Johnny-come-lately film genre from the 1930s. Animation got off to a somewhat earlier start in Japan, thanks to a few stray shorts imported from, ironically, France and America as early as 1909. Japanese audiences were entranced, creating a demand for some homegrown equivalent. The earliest known result dates from 1917, *A New Picture of the Mischievous Boy* (Chamebō shingachō).[2] Communications being what they were, the renowned cartoonist Bokuten Shimogawa had no idea how Western animators worked. The best he could think to do was draw, photograph, erase, and redraw image after image on a chalkboard.[3] Primitive as it was, Shimogawa's innovation led to the far more serviceable idea of drawing characters on preprinted backgrounds. By around 1929, drawing directly on celluloid became standard procedure.[4]

Noburō Ōfuji (1900–1961) was an influential figure in early animation. He is credited with developing the *Chiyogami eiga* color-paper film, so

called because its technique grew out of the traditional art of shadow pictures on rice paper. His representative works included *Whale* (Kujira, 1927) and *The Thief of Baghdad* (Bagudaddo no tōzoku, 1929). Ōfuji's updated remake of *Whale* in 1952 won a prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

With few exceptions these early animations were the brief, low-budget products of small independents. The first full-length feature was Mitsuyo Seo's *Peach Boy's Sea Eagle* (Momotarō no kaijū, 1943). The year explains its patriotic potboiler character and the reviews dutifully lauding its depiction of the attack on Pearl Harbor as launched by the hero of a popular children's book. Wartime propaganda spawned any number of such films, among them Sanae Yamamoto's *Children's March* (Kodakara kōshinkyoku, 1942) exhorting women to do right by population growth.[5] It would not be the first time in history that government subsidy failed to discredit an art form. Japanese animation quickly outgrew its wartime compromises, becoming a major box office draw by the 1960s and the amazing commercial success it is today and looks to be for the foreseeable future.

Miyazaki's achievements as an animation filmmaker/producer have been widely discussed.[6] Undoubtedly, his current success owes much to his distinctive achievement back in 1988 with *My Neighbor Totoro* (Tonari no Totoro). He wrote both the original story and the screenplay for this animation film. It was voted best picture of 1988 by *Kinema jumpō*, Japan's most prestigious film journal. That same year, *Kinema jumpō* gave sixth place to another *anime*, Isao Takahata's *The Grave of Fireflies* (Hotaru no haka). Those two awards were remarkable for two reasons. First, no *anime* had enjoyed such critical acclaim in the history of Japanese cinema. Second, the awards that year included two films devoted to the heavily charged issue of antiwar sentiment in Japan. Kazuo Kuroki's *Tomorrow* and Kaneto Shindō's *The Death of the Cherry Blossom Troupe (Sakuratai chiru)* both depicted traumatic wartime experiences. Takahata's *anime* did the same, in fact. The difference was in his choice of genre, one whose readily accessible entertainment value made the message more accessible to general audiences.

Miyazaki's film (his third feature-length film) could not have been more different. *My Neighbor Totoro* might be called an idyll. It takes a longing look back at the 1950s, when some rural and suburban communities still offered refuge from the throes of transformation run amok in the name of postwar recovery. Though the film focuses on children free to live in a fantasy world, it appealed to adult audiences as well. Obviously, nostalgia had something to do with it. But so did the fact that Miyazaki, like Takahata, used the conventions of animation to address issues deeply ingrained in the social fabric of contemporary Japan.

Oneness with nature, for example, has long been considered part of the Japanese national character. By 1988, parents had reason to be concerned that their children were losing touch with nature. Urban sprawl was partly to blame. So was an education system so demanding of achievement that children were, in effect, held hostage at home as well as at school. Family life had suffered, too. The competitive pressures of the workplace took much of the blame for dissolving family bonds. Overworked fathers had little time for family life. Mothers, forced to take charge at home, became overachievers of another, dreadful kind. Social anthropologists dubbed her the *"kyōiku mama,"* the mother obsessed with her children's education to the exclusion of almost everything else.[7] Miyazaki's film "animates" all these very real concerns.

Still, *My Neighbor Totoro* gets its power not from weighty social critique, but from its melding of two worlds: the real and the imaginary. David Bordwell has suggested an interesting way to approach a mass-entertainment film. He urges us to "look for a tension between spectacle and narrative."[8] Let us see how that approach explains Miyazaki's success in this *anime*.

Historical and Geographic Settings and the Central Problem

My Neighbor Totoro tells what happens when nine-year-old Satsuki and her four-year-old sister Mei move to the country with their college professor father. The film is frankly informative, beginning with the idyllic opening sequence. Miyazaki plays no games with withheld information. We know early on why the mother is missing. She is ill, hospitalized. We see the central problem that will move the plot: how will these little girls cope without her, brought to a strange new place? We quickly learn that they feel lost in these unfamiliar surroundings and that they miss their mother keenly, little Mei especially. Worse yet, their father, Tatsuo, has to leave them alone for hours at a time when he goes into town to teach his classes.

The children do what children have done in so many classics: they balance fact with fantasy. Grownups would feel obliged to manage that dichotomy by drawing clear distinctions between what is real and what is not. These children manage, as children do. They switch back and forth between confronting reality and escaping into the imaginary. They do this freely, naïvely. It follows that they do some mixing and mingling of the two as well. But first, like us, they have to meet the given, unknown real world. We see them enter it as the film begins. A man is pedaling a tricycle van down a country lane. The van is packed full with the two little girls and all

manner of things. They pass through lovely, unspoiled countryside. The music we hear is lively and reassuring.

A scene this lovely could be a dream. As Miyazaki explained in an interview, he is showing us a faithful depiction of the countryside as it was in the 1950s.[9] Since then, that enchanting landscape has evolved into the cityscape that gives the area its present-day name and fame as Tokorozawa, a city whose busy prosperity has done more than gobble up its share of green and pleasant countryside. Tokorozawa in Saitama Prefecture is synonymous with urban pollution.

Various images seen in passing and in intimate detail offer important clues to definitive change taking place in the childhood years of these two girls. The tadpoles that fascinate Mei in her new surroundings clearly indicate that the family has moved to the country in the spring, as does a later view of farmers wading in a paddy, sprigging rice. Toward the end of film, the calendar in the mother's hospital ward tells us exactly when the children's adventure is coming to an end: Thursday, August 21, 1958. The calendar's sunflower picture is telling, too.

Those familiar with postwar Japanese culture will pick up on a number of culturally specific details harkening back to the late 1950s. Kanta is seen making a model airplane the old-fashioned way, using strips of bamboo. Ready-made kit models did not come on the scene till late in the decade. An American director seeking the same effect might have shown a kid making a soap box derby racecar out of an orange crate.[10] Another end-of-era detail is the female ticket taker on a bus driven by a man. Still another is the scolding Kanta gets for doodling in imitation of *Magic Ninja Boy Jiraiya* (Shonen Jiraiya), an enormously popular comic book by Shigeru Sugiura (1908–2000). Sugiura comics with titles such as *Ninja Sasuke* (Sarutobi Sasuke) were entertainment mainstays in the 1950s.

Miyazaki clearly intends to focus our attention on a family bond significantly stronger in August than it was the April before. His careful attention to seasonal detail is typical of his storytelling method, which enriches a painstakingly evocative naturalistic setting with the free play of fantasy possible with *anime*.

Needless to say, the *anime* fantasy enrichment is set against a realistic backdrop throughout. Miyazaki takes full advantage of naturalistic detail, as in his careful attention to seasonal detail. He also makes sure that pictorial effects evoke a specifically Japanese response by dwelling on the surviving evidence of the country lifestyle.[11] Rice paddies, an unpaved country road, a roadside bus stop—details such as these, familiar for time out of mind,

speak for the director's childhood memories of 1950s country life. Japanese Miyazaki's age and younger understand the rustic simplicity implicit in artifacts such as the *Goemon-buro,* a kind of cast-iron tub with a wooden base.

Miyazaki also invites the viewer to share his nostalgia for a lovely human harmony engrained in rural communities now rapidly disappearing. We see everyone turning out to welcome the professor and his girls. They are offered food and any help they need to settle in. There is one notable holdout: Kanta. Yet we soon discover, like the girls, that his unfriendliness is all bluff, a mask for painful shyness.

From this point on the plot is led by these two little girls. They meet and overcome one obstacle after another with the verve and enterprise of innocents who turn out to be quite capable of managing this new life on their own terms. They move into a house they find mysterious and strange, intriguing and somehow scary. Their lively imaginations take it from there. Dust bunnies turn into tiny black spirits haunting the house. They struggle to balance fear and curiosity, little Mei especially.

Their father is a paragon of the affectionate common sense that knows how to nurture imagination by playing along. He says these dust bunny spirits are not that scary. Not if they can be scared away—with laughter. And so they laugh for all they are worth, father and daughters together, soaking in that rustic tub, the *Goemon-buro.* The water rocks and spills over as they laugh so loud. All the father-daughter bond that any child could wish for is conveyed in a few simple shots.

The next shot takes us outside the house in time to see what look like black dust bunnies floating out of the chimney and vanishing sky high. True, it could be smoke or floating soot. This *is* country life in the 1950s. Or it could be childish fantasy. The engaging, easygoing music suggests that it does not matter which. And so this simple scene takes us in. We share the children's sense of being pleasantly reassured.

This is the first (if minor) instance of tension between "spectacle" and "narrative." According to David Bordwell, a mass-entertainment movie, like a musical prototype, often contains "those moments when the story seems to halt and we are forced simply to watch and listen." Such a moment of "spectacle" or "splendor" may insist on itself at the expense of the chain of cause and effect, that mainstay of narrative.[12] As we shall see, the parade of spectacles becomes increasingly dominant in the sisters' world of imagination and fantasy. After all, as an *anime* director, Miyazaki's concern is with sustaining our indulgence in a world he has endowed with such a wealth of "convincing" effects.

Thematic Progression and Miyazaki's Creation of Furry Totoro

The dust bunny sequence introduces Miyazaki's concern with the deeper psychological issue of abandonment/substitution. Like Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* his film creates a new context that itself explains the childhood strategy of dealing with hardship and fear by imagining and entering into a world of fantasy. Any amateur psychologist could state the formula: once a given harsh reality is sublimated into (lodged in) the unconscious, the conscious mind attempts to reassure itself by acting out "wish fulfillment."

Elsewhere, Miyazaki has this to say about Mei's sensitivity: "Undaunted by strange creatures, Mei opens up her heart to them. This shows that her world is not yet contaminated by the commonsense cautions of grownup life. Yet it speaks of her loneliness as well. . . . A mother's absence is no small matter for a four-year-old."[13] This happens first to little Mei. Even though she has her sister, her father, and a kindly neighbor "granny" to serve as mother substitutes, she sometimes finds herself left to her own devices. Her first encounter with Totoro occurs on one such occasion. Satsuki is off at school. Her father is preoccupied with his books. Mei sees and follows tiny, furry creatures down a "long tunnel" entered through a hole in a huge camphor tree. The tunnel leads to a gigantic Totoro, sound asleep.

Miyazaki gives the child time to adjust to her discovery. She soon adopts a playful, mischievous attitude toward the furry giant. She scratches his face, pulls his whiskers, whispers "Totoro!" in his ear. The scene ends on a second instance of "spectacle." Totoro, sound asleep, brings the action to a halt, in effect redefining the terms of the fantasy. We see little Mei enlisted in a mood of soothing harmony. She falls asleep on the Totoro's comfy belly. A long shot takes note of details that show how fantasy has eased this child back into a natural world that is safe and secure. A butterfly flutters over the sleeping giant and child. A snail comes creeping near. A viewer alert to similarities will not miss the impish contrast between Totoro's plump, owlish face and the professor's skinny, bookish face, complete with horn-rimmed spectacles. The transition from this world of make-believe to reality is conventionally abrupt. Satsuki and her father, out looking for Mei, find her asleep under a bush.

Mei's need for a mother substitute enlivens the plot with a chain of events that link the worlds of fact and fantasy as one problem solved leads to the next. Thus Granny finds she just cannot cope, so little Mei is taken to

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school where Satsuki, her classmates, and her teacher become her "babysitters." One day, heading home, the sisters are caught in a heavy downpour. They take refuge in a wayside temple. Kanta, the country boy whose painful shyness hides behind a show of ruffian unfriendliness, happens to see them there. He cannot bring himself to rescue them outright. Instead, he hurries up, hands them his umbrella without a word, and then runs off into the pouring rain. Satsuki, in the meantime, has shown herself to be a kindly older sister anxious to mother Mei all she can. Their very names in Japanese encode the strength of such a bond. Satsuki in classical Japanese denotes the month of May, as does Mei in the vernacular.

Miyazaki's choice of a girl *(shōjo)* as a main character has been discussed by a number of critics. Susan Napier observes that such devices came to the fore in Miyazaki films of the 1980s: "In contrast to the armored *mecha* [disordered] body, the *shōjo* exhibits strength plus vulnerability in a way that is intriguingly feminine."[14] Elsewhere, she adds, "In contemporary Japanese society, girls, with their seemingly still-amorphous identities, seem to embody the potential for unfettered change and excitement is far less available to Japanese males, who are caught in the network of demanding workforce responsibilities."[15] She instances the girls in *My Neighbor Totoro* (and in *Kiki's Delivery Service* [Majo no takkyūbin, 1989]), where the narrative premise of family loss is "defamiliarized through the use of the *shōjo* characters, whose curious, assertive, but still feminine personalities add fresh notes to classic stories."[16]

This is definitely true of Satsuki. She has her mother's slight build but her behavior is that of a girl endowed with courage and strong will. We see this in the way she faces up to hardship. She suffers, but shoulders responsibility with patient endurance. We see this clearly as the sisters wait for their father at the bus stop. The bus arrives without him. Rainy darkness falls as they wait for the next. Satsuki stands bravely with sleepy little Mei on her back. The moment is ripe for rescue. We feel it coming and sure enough, for the first time ever, Satsuki sees Totoro. Suddenly there he is, standing next to her. Miyazaki uses more "padding" than "spectacle" to develop this episode. Again, he takes his time establishing intimacy. The camera lingers on the sight of gigantic Totoro standing tall in the rain. Satsuki offers him an umbrella. Shot by shot, we see Totoro react to this new toy, this real-world artifact. He does the natural fantasy thing, acquainting himself with playing. Mei wakes and shares this fantastic encounter with her sister.

This scene confirms our growing sense that Totoro does more than serve as a parent substitute. A number of clues have pointed to a more comprehensive role. The earliest grew out of Mei's first encounter with him.

Her sister's reaction is to pooh-pooh the idea that such a creature could exist. Their father settles the issue by referring it to the reverential awe the three of them feel for the gigantic camphor tree *(Cinnamomum camphora)* that looms over near their new house. As the three of them stroke its velvety bark, the father uses the indisputable fact of this giant to explain the existence of the other. He assures the children that Totoro does exist—suggesting, in effect, that to be seen Totoro must be imagined. He adds weight to this proposition by calling the tree "the king of the forest," mentioning that it is the only reason he purchased this old house.

Miyazaki offers us no end of visual cues in support of the father's message. The camera follows Mei being led by the tiny creatures to the hole and tunnel in the camphor tree. Panning in close, it takes note of a sacred rope, the *shimenawa,* encircling the bole, marking the tree as one set apart for special reverence. Later, as the father and girls approach, they pass a little *torii* gate that marks the entrance to a shrine. The shot of their admiring gaze at the tree's immensity is carefully framed. We clearly see the sacred rope. It evidently serves a deeper meaning: the father's desire to teach his daughters something about Shinto, namely, its awareness of the divine presence in nature. The scene ends with the three of them offering prayers to the ancient tree.

The Japanese audience is prepared for this reverential attitude by any number of traditional instances. The one most familiar in the West would be Mount Fuji, originally immortalized quite literally as the mountain of everlasting life. Japanese poetry offers no end of elevating views, as in this classic by the eighth-century poet Yamabe Akahito:

Along the Tago Coast	*Tago no urayu*
We come out into the open and see it—	*Uchiidete mireba*
How white it is!	*Mashironi zo*
The lofty cone of Fuji sparkling	*Fuji no takane ni*
Beneath its newly fallen snow.	*Yuki wa furikeri.*[17]

Totoro's place in nature is affirmed by the umbrella Satsuki offers him. Rain is wetting him, like them, yet she has to show him how to take shelter under this human artifact. His response is telling, too. He gives the girls a packet of seeds. Thanks to Totoro's magical powers, the girls are put in touch with a freewheeling fantasy mix of nature and divinity. They plant the seeds he gave them and then wait, as children will, impatiently. The camera hovers, offering a faithful record of their naïve anticipation and anxiety. Finally, the seeds sprout. The long wait yields a dramatic highlight

as Totoro and tiny furry creatures appear, unfolding a musical spectacle rich in effects of sympathetic magic. Seeds sprout all around in response to Totoro's touch. Mei and Satsuki join in a dance shared by creatures and growing plants alike. The effect is that of a fertility dance, an easygoing, modern version of ancient ritual celebration of the ties that bind the farmer to his land. Also unmistakable is the suggestion that these little girls have achieved true oneness with nature's immanent divinity. Lest there be any doubt about that point, the spectacle shifts from earth to sky. Totoro and the girls take off in a motion the camera shows as an effortless glide up the camphor tree to soar above its canopy.

The episode ends with a shot of the professor working late into the night. His contented smile yields to a final shot of an owl perched in the camphor tree. The connection is obvious. He feels that he has done right by his daughters. We are inclined to agree. We have seen the larger, more spectacular picture, the fantasy world the girls have shared. Even more to the point is Miyazaki's expressive intention to alert his audience to a danger: that the hustle and bustle of contemporary Japan may work to suppress one of childhood's greatest gifts, namely, the innate awareness of something inspiriting in nature.

The disappearance of the Shinto god in contemporary Japan is more poignantly suggested in *Spirited Away*. The bathhouse and the polluted river offer a simple analogy for the rift between Shinto divinity and humanity. It is also plainly suggested by the sadly forlorn, ghost-like god craving for human companionship. Add a state of nature too foul for the divine presence to manifest itself as immanent and you have the image of a river god making do by resorting to the bathhouse for frequent ritual cleansing. It follows that Chihiro's four-day journey to the other side is what it takes to restore values missing in her life, namely, a sense of family solidarity and belief in the divine presence.

The Climax and the Final Sequence

The climax of the film is built on a synthesis of style and theme. The bonding motif is strengthened with telling details. Hearing that her mother cannot come home soon, little Mei sets out to visit her with a gift that speaks for itself: an ear of fresh corn. She is soon missed. A frantic search ensues with predictably sentimental results. Shy Kanta does all he can to help, acting as a kind of wise older brother to Satsuki. But of course his bike will not save the day, not in a film with Totoro in it. Satsuki turns to him.

This section takes full advantage of narrative/spectacle tension. Narrative prevails in the ground-level search for Mei, but the minute Totoro comes to the rescue, visual splendor tells the tale. The cat skybus Satsuki rides is an obvious bow to Lewis Carroll. Miyazaki rounds the image out by showing it from every angle—a creature whose very strangeness speaks for a child's uninhibited imagination. It is not just a twelve-legged cat, but cat and mice combined. The soaring fantastical freedom of that ride makes a commonsense narrative landing when Mei is spotted down below on a lonely country path. Her rescue continues the joyride. That, too, makes sense, given the premise of the film, namely, that the world has much to gain from children free to indulge their vivid imaginations.

Girls in fantasy flight is in fact a notable element in many Miyazaki films, among them *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds* (Kaze no tani no Naushika, 1984), *Kiki's Delivery Service,* and *Spirited Away*. Susan Napier observes:

> Flying is a major symbol of empowerment for [Miyazaki's] *shōjo* characters. In flight the girls transcend the strictures of the real, be they the expectations of society or simply the limitations of the body itself. Flying also adds a carnival or festival element to the narrative. . . . Most important, however, the image of the flying girl sends a message of boundless possibility in which emotions, imagination, and sometimes even technology (for example, *Nausicaä*'s soaring glider) combine to offer a hope of a potentially attainable alternative world that transcends our own.[18]

Obvious but significant too is the image of flying free on the wind—itself symbolic of natural energy and refreshing purity. Miyazaki is in every way devoted to images whose motions are charged with meaning. In his view, details as commonplace as rice and wheat swaying in the wind speak of nature's power to nurture spirited children like Satsuki and Mei. He is a master at persuading grown-up viewers that we have much to gain from sharing a child's spontaneous and highly imaginative delight in nature as yet unspoiled. The pity is that his films also serve to remind us that the solid, stolid grown-up world has a way of cheating future generations of children of nature's freedoms and formative delights.[19]

Worlds real and imaginary converge to end the film. They are "in fact" distinct, though they touch at important points. We see this family's bond affirmed and strengthened as they, seated on a tree, watch their father beside their mother's hospital bed. The children's gift of an ear of corn communicates across all boundaries. It does not matter how it got there. Neighbor

Granny taught them earlier to see it as a gift from heaven. Here, given to their mother, it speaks for the enduring earthly abundance of loving togetherness. The engaging theme song returns to bring that message home.

My Neighbor Totoro does more than celebrate wholesome bonds and the power of nature to inspire and heal. It praises in order to warn. Miyazaki invites our admiration of gifts that come naturally to children: curiosity and openness to nature, a lively sense of adventure, the power that comes of trusting imagination. Yet these, he insists, are gifts that can be snatched away by grown-ups unwise enough (and forgetful enough) not to recognize their value. He himself has often expressed his belief in the limitless potential that children possess.[20]

In *My Neighbor Totoro* he uses the childlike freedoms of *anime* fantasy to "send that message home" to adult viewers. This film, in effect, urges parents to help their children naturally. Miyazaki also clearly worries about the future of traditional Japanese childhood. Is the nation's push for "progress" threatening to destroy it?

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Cultural Responses to Simplicity

Akira Kurosawa's *Madadayo* (1993)

AKIRA KUROSAWA'S great achievements in his fifty-year filmmaking career have already been summarized in chapter 2. *Madadayo*, made five years before his death, was this great master's thirty-first and last work. However, the film received a rather lukewarm response in both the East and the West. Critics and audiences regard it as lacking the energetic charge and tightly knit structure for which his best films, such as *Seven Samurai* and *Ran*, are famous. Nonetheless, they agree in seeing *Madadayo* as a "self-referential" statement about his own life.[1] They suggest that the film is about Kurosawa's reflections on change and death by way of a nostalgic harkening back to the good old days before the war, when students and teachers forged a lifelong bond. In fact, the first draft of Kurosawa's script was dated August 15, 1991, to commemorate the forty-sixth anniversary of Japan's surrender to the Allied forces.

A number of critics have offered insightful examinations of Kurosawa's approach to the universals addressed in this film. Donald Richie, Stephen Prince, and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto come to mind. Here I would like to add my observations on this subject and the methods Kurosawa uses to generate complex emotions in his audience.[2] This is important to do, since *Madadayo* is the kind of film that makes considerable demands on its viewer. As I will show, this film requires a keen, "intuitive" sensitivity to specific cultural cues ranging from the boldly elemental to the subtly sophisticated.

Let us begin with Kurosawa's assumption that his viewer will have some general knowledge of Hyakken Uchida (1889–1971), a writer who has been called "the paragon of stylish essayists in modern Japanese literature."[3] After graduating from the German Department of Tokyo University (then known as Tokyo Imperial University), Uchida taught at the Army OCS, Hōsei University, and the like for eighteen years before deciding to become a full-time writer. In his youth, his love of haiku put him under the spell of the Meiji master of that form and fiction, Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916). Though his earlier novellas such as *Meido* (Styx, 1921) were