Fall 2008

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Literature as Life-Form

Media and Modernism in the Literary Theory of Ōkuma Nobuyuki

WILLIAM O. GARDNER

A heightened awareness of the mediated qualities of print literature shaped prewar Japanese modernism, as did creative attention to the connection between print and such rival media as film and radio. While many writers, artists, and critics of the 1920s and 1930s explored the print medium’s new possibilities and its relationship to rival media, the literary theory of economist, tanka poet, and critic Ōkuma Nobuyuki (1893–1977) offers a particularly striking articulation of these concerns. In Bungei no Nihonteki keitai (The Japanese Morphology of Literary Art, 1937), the last of three books of literary theory, Ōkuma stressed the necessity of inserting the reader or media consumer into critical discourse and examined what he called sonzai keishiki, the “formal existence” or media gestalt of print literature, film, and radio; he also emphasized the new theoretical perspectives to be gained by comparative studies of various media. Through his keen attention to the aspects of mediation and reception in literature, Ōkuma left a body of criticism that still offers stimulating perspectives on twentieth-century culture, raising issues regarding the nature of literature and media that assume a fresh relevance amid today’s changing media landscape.

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1 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 18. All translations in this article are the author’s.

2 In this article I will render sonzai keishiki, more literally translated as “form of existence,” as “media gestalt.” “Gestalt” is suggested by Ōkuma’s related use of the term keitai 形態, a standard translation for morphology or Gestalt. While a few critics and scholars of the 1930s, such as Nakai Masakazu 中井正一, referred to communications media by the Sino-Japanese compound baitai 媒体 (media), this term and its katakana equivalent media メディア were not widely used in Japan at this time and are seldom found in Ōkuma’s writings.

Monumenta Nipponica 63/2: 325–357
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Moving between printed literature, film, and radio, Okuma stressed the need for a reevaluation of literature that responds to its evolving media context. “The character (honshitsu 本質) of things,” he wrote,

is determined by what other things they are compared with; the character of something old itself will change with the appearance of something new. I would like to emphasize that an “absolute essential character” of things (zettai no honshitsu 絶対の本質) does not exist. The character of literature changes according to what it is juxtaposed with or compared against.3

By using the term sonzai keishiki, or “formal existence,” Okuma sought not only to define the intrinsic formal qualities of works in a given medium within this intermedial context, but to address the entire set of conditions of production and reception through which the medium comes to life as “social production.” With his focus on the social aspects of production and reception, he rejected the notion of literature as a landscape of immortal monuments or masterpieces. Instead, he insisted that literature is “something that dies” and directed his attention towards the ephemeral form of the newspaper-serialized novel (shinbun shōsetsu 新聞小説).

In its attention to the rise of mass media and their profound effects on conceptions and practices of art and literature, Okuma’s critical theory calls to mind the contemporaneous writings of such Frankfurt School theorists as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. On the other hand, in its focus on the temporality and contextually specific manifestations of the literary work and on the physically and mentally embodied process of reading, Okuma’s criticism parallels the pioneering phenomenological literary theory of Roman Ingarden, which also took shape in the 1930s. However, although Okuma and his peers among Japanese literary critics of the 1920s and 1930s were steeped in many of the same philosophical sources as the Frankfurt and (to a lesser extent) the phenomenological schools, there does not appear to be much direct influence between them. Therefore, while I will occasionally note significant parallels with European or American literary theory of the time or later, I will concentrate primarily on outlining Okuma’s criticism itself and on explicating its relation to Japanese literary and critical trends of the same period.

The aim of this article, then, is to introduce Okuma’s literary theory and to offer some preliminary observations regarding his position within the context of prewar Japanese critical and creative discourse. Following a brief synopsis of Okuma’s career as economist, poet, and critic, I will provide an overview of the literary situation to which he responded in his critical writing, including the expansion of the print industry, the increasing attention to rival media within the literary world, and the appearance of modernist and proletarian literary schools.

In the second section, I will consider Okuma as an exponent of “reader-centered theory” (dokusharon 読者論), as his criticism was first appraised by the postwar

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3 Okuma 1937a, p. 129.
literary scholar Maeda Ai 前田愛. Ōkuma’s focus on the literary work’s relationship to the daily life of the reader led to his distinctive vision of newspaper-serialized fiction as central to modern Japanese literary production, which I will discuss in the third section. I will then take a look at the final major issue Ōkuma’s criticism raises, that of orality (and its antithesis, visuality/silent reading), and show how this issue connects his general literary and media theory with his own tanka criticism and practice. Through this examination of various aspects of Ōkuma’s career as a literary critic, I will suggest that the intermedial approach that led to his progressive vision of literature as a “life-form” interdependent with the everyday lives of readers also led to a focus on issues of visuality and orality with more conservative overtones.

**Economic Theorist, Poet, Critic**

Ōkuma Nobuyuki sustained his remarkably eclectic range of activities as a writer, critic, and academic for over five decades. After graduating from Tōkyō Kōtō Shōgyō Gakkō 東京高等商業学校 (present-day Hitotsubashi Daigaku 一橋大学), Ōkuma taught economics at several public higher schools and universities in the prewar years, beginning with his appointment in 1921 to Otaru Higher Commercial School (Otaru Kōtō Shōgyō Gakkō 小樽高等商業学校), where his students included future novelists Kobayashi Takiji 小林多喜二 and Ito Sei 伊藤整.4 His scholarly career also included a period of study in London and Berlin as a Monbushō scholar from 1929 to 1931.5 Ōkuma’s early publications in economics and social science included *Shakai shisōka to shite no Rasukin to Morisu* 社会思想家としてのラスキンとモリス (Ruskin and Morris as Social Thinkers, 1927), *Marukusu no Robinson monogatari* マルクスのロビンソン物語 (Marx’s Robinson Crusoe, 1929), and *Haibun riron* 配分理論 (Distribution Theory, 1930), works in which Ōkuma staked his position as an economist through a highly individual negotiation of Neoclassical and Marxist economic models.

Of particular pertinence to Ōkuma’s literary theory is his focus in these economic studies on the distribution or allotment of time as a fundamental variable in human society and economy. In addition to the importance of understanding the circulation of commodities and the distribution of labor in modern society as pursued in Neoclassical and Marxist economic theory, he stressed the need to comprehend time as a physical restriction on human activity. Human beings must divide a limited amount of time between labor and rest (including sleep and leisure activities); they are restricted by the twenty-four hours of the day and their own physiologies. Hence leisure activities, including the consumption of literature, must be considered within a competitive economy of time consumption as well

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4 On the relationship between these three writers, see Kamei 2003.
5 As a Monbushō scholar (Monbushō zaigai kenkyūin 文部省在外研究員), Ōkuma audited courses at the London School of Economics and conducted private study with the Marxist economist and social theorist Karl Korsch in Berlin. His tour abroad also included visits to Switzerland and the United States. Ōkuma 1993, pp. 373–74.
as commodity consumption.\textsuperscript{6} Okuma applied this line of analysis directly to literature in his first two works of literary theory, 	extit{Bungaku to keizaigaku} 文学と経済学 (Literature and Economics, 1929) and 	extit{Bungaku no tame no keizaigaku} 文学のための経済学 (Economics for Literature, 1933).

At the same time he was establishing himself as an academic and economic theorist, Okuma was also active as a tanka poet and critic. During his student days, he was deeply impressed by the formally innovative and socially progressive tanka of Ishikawa Takuboku 石川啄木 and Toki Zenmaro 土岐善麿, and he contributed to Zenmaro’s journal 	extit{Seikatsu to geijutsu} 生活と芸術 as early as the year 1913. After a period of relatively scarce poetic output in the early 1920s, Okuma reemerged as a core coterie member of the tanka journal 	extit{Marumera} まるめら, founded in 1927 by a group of poets from his native town of Yonezawa; he remained active as a poet and critic for roughly the next ten years, after which he ceased tanka composition.\textsuperscript{7} Okuma was an early supporter of the Proletarian Tanka movement that took shape around 1927, and many of his tanka express leftist sentiments on such themes as May Day, Korean laborers, and the restraints on expression in Japan.\textsuperscript{8} The following is an example from a series of poems from 1928 describing Korean laborers breaking rocks in front of Tokyo Station:

\begin{quote}

the labor of Koreans who appear on the streets—is it merely a phantasm to the citizens of Tokyo?\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Despite composing many socially conscious tanka such as this, he parted ways with the organized Proletarian Tanka movement after he was criticized for lack of political commitment and, as I will discuss in the final section of this essay, concentrated on developing a new type of lengthy, free-form waka.\textsuperscript{10}

Okuma’s activities as a public intellectual during the wartime and postwar periods were broad in scope and controversial. During the war years he realigned his professional interest in economic distribution and social welfare within a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[8] The informal Proletarian Tanka movement that gathered steam around 1927 was formally organized as the Proletarian Tanka League (Musansha Tanka Renmei 無産者短歌連盟) in 1928. For more examples of Okuma’s left-wing poetry, see the series of poems “Gogatsu tsuitachi” 戦火五月, “Mienu mono made” 角のものまで, and “Tôkyô shimin ni ataru” 東京市民にあたる, as well as “Nihon no kuni” 日本の国, “Suzume” すずめ, and “Yûreisen” 幽霊船, in Sasaki 1975, pp. 224, 225, 227. Nakano 1978 gives an overview of Okuma’s career as a tanka poet, focusing on the role of the 	extit{Marumera} journal.
\item[9] 街頭に / あらわれた鮮人の / 労働を / まぼろしほどに / 市民はおもふか, Okuma 1937b, p. 7.
\item[10] Waka is a term in use since the Heian period to distinguish verse using the native language of Japan from verse written in Chinese. While the umbrella term waka also includes forms such as the 	extit{sedôka} 旋頭歌 and the 	extit{chôkka} 長歌, the most common form of waka is the tanka, having thirty-one syllables in the 5-7-5-7-7 pattern, and the two terms are sometimes used synonymously. In the modern period, it has become customary to refer to tanka composed prior to the Meiji Restoration as waka and those composed after as tanka. From around 1931, however, Okuma urged tanka poets to expand their vision to encompass all of the waka tradition, not only tanka, and began himself to compose in the longer 	extit{chôkka} form.
\end{footnotes}
nationalist framework, advocating the totalistic and rationalized mobilization of resources under the aegis of the nation-state in such works as *Kokka kagaku e no michi* (The Road to a Science of the Nation-State, 1941). In the postwar period, Okuma wrote such works as *Kokka aku: Sensō sekinin wa dare no mono ka* (Evils of the Nation-State: Who is Responsible for the War? 1957), in which he criticized his own role in support of wartime nationalist mobilization. While continuing his academic career as an economist, he also published commentary on a wide variety of topics, including Japanese intellectual history, the family system, and postwar democracy.11

**Modernism and Marxism**

Although Okuma’s activities as a writer on economic, social, and ideological issues stretched well into the wartime and postwar periods, his work as a literary critic was concentrated in the decade from 1927 through 1937. This output included numerous works of tanka criticism and polemics (not collected in a single volume until the year of Okuma’s death), as well as three works of literary criticism and theory focusing primarily on prose fiction: *Bungaku to keizaigaku* (Literature and Economics, 1929), *Bungaku no tame no keizaigaku* (Economics for Literature, 1933), and *Bungei no Nihonteki keitai* (1937). Okuma’s innovative literary criticism and theory emerged out of a rich context of debate fostered by the rapid growth and reorganization of the Japanese publishing industry and the appearance of proletarian and modernist literary camps. Before taking a closer look at Okuma’s literary theory, we need first to consider briefly this broader context.

The most prominent signs of the dawning in the 1920s of a new age for the print industry included the rapid expansion of newspaper subscription; the rise of new mass-circulation magazines such as *Kingu* (King), which made a dramatic debut in 1925 with a print run of 750,000 copies for its first issue; and the appearance of *enpon* (literary anthologies available by subscription for one yen per volume, beginning with Kaizosha’s widely advertised and commercially successful *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshu* (Complete Collection of Modern Japanese Literature) in 1926.12 The growth of popular magazines provided new commercial opportunities for writers and encouraged new approaches in such popular genres as detective fiction, domestic melodrama,

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11 On Okuma’s shifting views of the nation-state, see Matsumoto 1994. From December 1942, Okuma served on the board of directors (rijii 理事) of the Greater Japan Speech and Reporting National Assembly (Dai Nippon Genronpō Kokkai 大日本言論報国会), a wartime support organization formed under the direction of the cabinet’s Information Bureau. Under the Allied Occupation, he was briefly purged from holding public office (including academic positions in public universities) because of his association with the assembly. For timelines of Okuma’s life and career, see Okuma 1977–1978, vol. 2, pp. 387–99; Okuma 1993, pp. 372–78.

12 For an outline of the growth of the print industry in the 1920s, see Arase 1967 and Fujitake 1967; circulation figure for *Kingu* magazine is from Fujitake 1967, p. 775. For further analysis of changes in the print industry, literary genres, and readership during this period, see Maeda 1973, pp. 151–216.
and period fiction, while the success of the *enpon* series also enriched the pockets of numerous established authors associated with *jun bungaku* 純文学—“pure literature” as opposed to genre-based popular fiction.

Together with the expanding commercial scope of the print industry, writers and critics of the 1920s and 1930s took a keen interest in print literature’s changing position relative to rival artistic and communications media, especially film, radio, and mechanically produced and reproduced music. This rapidly developing comparative context fostered a new critical awareness of the historicity of literature as an art form mediated by written or printed characters. Indeed, despite the flourishing environment of the print industry, such new historical and intermedial consciousness sometimes translated into nearly messianic formulations about the potential demise of literature as a medium defined by writing.\(^\text{13}\)

Just as rapid growth and multifarious changes in the print industry buffeted the literary world, a new contingent of modernist and avant-garde writers and artists challenged their literary elders and explored the artistic possibilities of the print medium itself. The Mavo (マヴォ) artists’ group, avant-garde poets such as Kanbara Tai 神原泰 and Hagiwara Kyōjirō 萩原恭次郎, and later the prose author Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 and his fellow writers in the Shinkankakuha 新感覚派 (New Perception School) literary faction experimented with typographical techniques in much the same way as did international avant-garde movements such as Italian and Russian Futurism, Dada, Constructivism, and Bauhaus.\(^\text{14}\)

Although some writers and groups clearly positioned themselves as avant-garde, during the formative period of the mid-1920s, Japanese literary modernists as a whole were by no means a discrete camp of writers easily distinguishable from practitioners of “pure literature,” leftist “proletarian literature” (*puroretaria bungaku* プロレタリア文学), or more commercially oriented “popular literature” or “mass literature” (*taishū bungaku* 大衆文学). Rather, writers with modernist or avant-garde proclivities and affiliations struggled to define their place in a literary world that was increasingly fractured by debates over the nature and possibilities of a mass audience and a more aggressively commercial publishing industry. Modernist and avant-garde writers of the 1920s frequently found common ground with Marxist critics and advocates of “proletarian literature” in a shared suspicion of the literary assumptions and social practices of the *bundan* 文壇 (literary establishment), which were being reformulated during this decade into an ideology of “pure literature” centered on the “personal novel” (*shishōsetsu* 私小説), even as the publishing industry and many of its *bundan* gatekeepers were becoming more visibly commercial. There was also a strong mutual influence between modernist art and literature, on the one hand, and popular literature and urban popular culture, on the other. Given the rapidly changing material culture and social practices that constituted urban and suburban daily

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\(^{13}\) For Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke’s 平林初之輔 remarks on the impending end of written language, see Hirabayashi 1928a and 1928b; partial translation of 1928a in Gardner 2006, p. 107. See also Hasegawa 1933 for a relatively sanguine view of the coming demise of written culture.

life, popular culture was increasingly defined as “modern” (*modan* モダン). Both *modan* and *seikatsu* 生活 ("daily life") became prominent, closely paired terms in discourses that addressed the transformations in the lifestyles and aesthetic values of urban youth.\(^{15}\)

Despite the common anti-establishment front between leftists and modernists of the early and mid-1920s, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, writers came under pressure to take more doctrinaire positions, either clearly committing to the Marxist camp, which featured a new emphasis on political orthodoxy under the influence of theoretician Fukumoto Kazuo 福本和夫, or clearly positioning themselves outside of Marxism.\(^{16}\) To further complicate the situation, reflecting the mid-1930s phenomenon of ideological reorientation known as *tenkō* 転向, many writers who committed to Marxism soon repositioned themselves in response to the Japanese government’s crackdown on leftist activism. The difficulty of modernist writers in negotiating the terrain of “pure literature,” “mass literature,” and the social demands of “proletarian literature,” together with the related debate over the merits of the so-called *shishōsetsu* (personal novel) and *honkaku shōsetsu* 本格小説 (full-fledged novel), is abundantly evident, for example, in the knotted rhetoric of Yokomitsu Riichi’s critical essay from 1935 “Junsui shōsetsu ron” 純粹小説論 (Theory of the Pure Novel), which called for a new form of “pure novel” enhanced by the techniques and scope of popular fiction.\(^{17}\)

**Reader-Centered Literary Theory**

Political debates over the nature and future of literature, as well as the fresh attention paid to printed language in a comparative media context, also led to an increasing critical interest in questions of literary readership and reception. Surveying the prevailing interpretive models for literature at the beginning of his *Bungei no Nihonteki keitai*, Ōkuma describes them as dominated by author-centered views. Against these he argues the case for reader-centered theory, in the process aligning himself with Marxists and modernists in opposition to advocates for “pure literature” and the “personal novel.” He stresses that critics as well as authors of literature must understand that art is not an autonomous expression on the part of the creator, but a negotiation between the demands of the producer and the consumer:

> Just as a product of industrial labor cannot exist without first anticipating consumption and consumers, art is also already a form of social production, and it must respond to the many demands that arise from the life of a society. This is

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\(^{15}\) See Silverberg 2006 for an analysis of this urban popular culture with particular reference to the terms *modan* and *seikatsu*.

\(^{16}\) Symptoms of this schismatic tendency include the purge of anarchist members from the leftist literary journal *Bungei sensen* 文芸戦線 in 1926 and the break-up of the Shinkankakuha, which culminated in 1927 in the discontinuation of their journal *Bungei jidai* 文芸時代. Similar tensions manifested themselves in the 1930 secession of coterie members of the journal *Shi to shiron* 詩と詩論 (founded 1928) to form the journal *Shi to genjitsu* 詩と現実.

\(^{17}\) Yokomitsu 1935, pp. 91–102.
the contract that exists from the time that an artwork is born, and the idea of “pure art” with an independent motivation can only arise from an extreme individualism that is both elitist and escapist. 18

Okuma ascribes what he sees as the domination of author-centered views of literature to the common-sense orthodoxy (jōshiki 常識) created by the interaction of modern individualism with certain elements of the Japanese literary tradition. These had manifested themselves in particular in the Japanese shishōsetsu or shinkyo shōsetsu 心境小説 (novel of mental state)—literary modes that, as depicted by Ōkuma, stress the relationship between the literary work and the author’s life or internal world. 19 He also associates the predominant expressive, author-centered viewpoint with the concepts and socioliterary practices of so-called “pure literature” and the contemporary bundan. In contrast to the common-sense orthodoxy of literature as individual self-expression, Okuma pointedly employs Marxist terminology to stress that the moment a manuscript is sold, it ceases to be simply the individual product of the author; instead, transforming from “written material” (kakimono 書き物) to “reading material” (yomimono 読み物), it becomes “social production.” 20

Although Okuma stresses the originality of his argument vis-à-vis “orthodox” or author-centered approaches, in fact the issue of readership had already come under increasing scrutiny in the first decade of Shōwa—an inquiry spearheaded by Marxist critics such as Aono Suekichi 青野季吉 and Ōya Sōichi 大塚迫一. 21 In the essay “Josei no bungakuteki yokyu” 女性の文学的要求 (The Literary Demands of Women, 1925), for example, Aono argues that the increase in women readers is the most significant factor in the broader expansion of readership in contemporary Japan and points out that the development of women’s magazines (fujin zasshi 婦人雑誌) as a powerful new forum for fiction has supported this growth. Aono identifies this expanded female readership as based primarily among housewives of the petit bourgeois class, as well as the new class of working women such as educators, clerical workers, and typists, who arose from the petit bourgeois class and shared many of its values. According to Aono, these readers created a demand for popular fiction that allowed them to indulge in the imag-

18 Okuma 1937a, pp. 7–8.
19 Okuma’s rather one-dimensional view of the shishōsetsu should be seen as a rhetorical construct rather than a careful analysis of this literary phenomenon. One could argue, to the contrary, that the reader assumes an important position in the shishōsetsu’s confessional mode, and that the vital relationship between confessional author and reader creates the type of closely knit writing/reading community that Okuma himself valorizes, albeit on the limited scale of the bundan and its aficionados. On the contemporary debate over the shishōsetsu, see Suzuki 1996.
21 In his celebrated study of the modern reader, Maeda Ai includes a chapter on the history of reader-centered literary criticism in which he discusses critics Katagami Noburu 片上伸, Aono Suekichi, and Ōya Sōichi, in addition to Okuma, as pioneers in the analysis of the modern Japanese readership. The examples from Katagami and Ōya discussed in this section owe much to Maeda’s study. See Maeda 1973, pp. 217–23. See also Maeda 2004, pp. 163–222, for a translation of a related chapter from this study, “The Development of Popular Fiction in the Late Taishō Era: Increasing Readership of Women’s Magazines.”
inative exploration of social freedoms denied them in their actual lives, which were still defined by the restrictions of the family system and oppressive social and gender norms. Although Aono acknowledges that such popular fiction often showed sentimentality (kanjōteki yōso 感情的要素) regarding social freedom, especially in the sphere of relations with men, he also stresses its potential to “express criticism and a destructive impulse vis-à-vis everyday reality.”

While Aono’s essay offered a pioneering sociological analysis of contemporary readership, Ōya Sōichi, another prominent left-aligned critic, focused his attention neither on the writer nor the reader, nor on the literary work, but instead on the mediating power of the print industry and the bundan, the social organization of established writers. In his influential early essay “Bundan girudo no kaitaiki” (The Age of Dismantlement of the Literary Guild, 1926), Ōya likens the bundan during the formative late Meiji and early Taishō periods to a medieval crafts guild, in which master writers served as mentors for literary apprentices and gatekeepers to the literary profession. The contemporary era, however, he notes, shows a breakdown in this social organization, as aspiring young writers and literary veterans now compete on nearly equal footing in a purely capitalist environment dominated by the expanding organizational and marketing power of the publishing industry.

Ōkuma himself identified Ōya’s pioneering critical role as follows: “Before [considering] the theoretical question of literature as a commodity, its market, or its commercial value, there was a need [to examine] the bundan from the perspective of economic history as the zone of literary production and to criticize its feudalistic organization. It was Ōya Sōichi who responded to this need.” Ōya’s keen grasp of contemporary trends and writerly verve unquestionably propelled his work to widespread attention within the contemporary literary world. Nevertheless, his was only one prominent voice among many in the early Shōwa discursive field who were attempting to move beyond author- and text-based criticism and to analyze the social, structural, media-specific, and intermedial aspects of literature.

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22 Aono 1925, pp. 311–34; quotation from p. 320. This essay is summarized and discussed in Maeda 1973, pp. 220–21.
24 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 183.
25 As important contributors to this discourse, in addition to Aono and Ōya, we could add figures such as Katagami Noburu, Katsumoto Seiichirō 勝本清一郎, Sugiyama Heisuke 杉山平助, Nii Itaru 新居田, Hasegawa Nyozekan 長谷川晃, and especially the gifted and prolific Marxist critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke. In a metacritical essay within Bungei no Nihonteki keitai, Ōkuma himself cites Ōya Sōichi, Sugiyama Heisuke, and Katsumoto Seiichirō as three critics who through their exploration of “literature as a social phenomenon” laid the groundwork for his own literary studies. Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 181–85. Ōkuma had a close personal relationship with Katsumoto Seiichirō, and Bungei no Nihonteki keitai shares a number of specific themes, including a focus on serialized forms and the problematics of “national language,” with Katsumoto’s 1936 work Nihon bungaku no sekai-teki ichi 日本文学の世界的位置.
Film as Durational Event and the Media Consumer

While Ōkuma’s attention to the reader/consumer may not have been as unprecedented as his anti-“orthodoxy” rhetoric suggests, his Bungei no Nihonteki keitai does offer a fresh perspective on reader-centered theory, beginning with its emphasis on the physiology of the consumer during the time-span of the consumption of the artwork. In the volume’s provocative introductory essay, entitled “Ren’ai, eiga, shinbun shōsetsu” (Love, Film, and Newspaper Novels), Ōkuma posits love-making, cinema viewing, and reading as three activities that are temporally bounded by the individual’s physical and mental limits—in other words, they are dependent upon the participant’s or viewer/reader’s limited ability to sustain a concentrated activity. These limits are distinct from the formal beginning and end to an artwork considered independently of the consumer. Thus, while a text as created by the author (kakimono) has a formal beginning, middle, and ending, the ability to sustain the act of reading is limited by the reader’s physiological condition as well as the demands of other work and leisure activities, and each reader will create his or her own temporality for the work as “reading material” (yomimono). The contemporary novel as materialized in book form in fact anticipates this interrupted or distracted consumption through such features as chapter breaks and redundancies in the narrative, and this anticipation of an interrupted reading is one of the distinctive features of the novel as mediated by the book. Yet, the temporality of a work of serialized fiction in a newspaper or magazine as experienced by the reader will be quite different from the same work consumed in book form, even though the two forms of text may commonly be recorded in literary history as interchangeable.

This distinctive take on the process of the consumption of literature follows directly upon Ōkuma’s line of argumentation in his 1933 study Bungaku no tame no keizaigaku, in which he analyzed the consumption of literature within a temporal economy of leisure, arguing that the reading of literature must be understood as one of several possible leisure activities chosen to fill the modern individual’s limited time outside of productive labor. In Bungei no Nihonteki keitai, Ōkuma expanded on these introductory observations on the temporality and physiology of the reading experience within the context of his analysis of serialized newspaper fiction, but before doing so, he first framed his study of literature in a comparative context, investigating the perspective to be gained on literature-reading as a “media gestalt” or “form of existence” (sonzai keishiki) through comparison with film-viewing.

In Ōkuma’s view, the new medium of cinema was especially valuable as an object of study because the mass scale and rationalized processes of film production, as well as the distinctive conditions of its consumption, cast a more general light on the nature of art. As he puts it, film has expanded the scale of artistic

26 Author’s summary and interpolation based on Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 1–22.
27 Ōkuma 1933; see especially part 1, pp. 1–25; part 2, pp. 1–74.
creation from “the width of an individual human skull to the width of a factory,” displacing those “internal elements of the creative process that the creator of novel or poem would conduct unconsciously” onto “a mathematical calculation conforming to laws of rational engineering.” Ökuma accordingly stresses the importance of studying not only the film industry and its products themselves, but also the growing body of film theory, declaring “there is nothing else that casts such a new light on the general question of ‘what is art?’ as film theory.” Specifically, he finds in cinema and film theory a social value deriving from attention to the media consumer, which he argues is missing in the literary world:

That [cinema] is a new, independent art form that is adapted to the era of industrial capitalism and, therefore, cannot be understood without a concrete grasp of its complex mechanisms of production and its advanced technology: this has been thoroughly explicated by previous film theorists. What I think has been left unsaid, however, is the extent to which its existence comprises a form with a high degree of sociality (kōdo no shakaiteki keishiki), surpassing that of other art forms in every respect. This characteristic was already diagnosed from the earliest period of the cinema’s historical development, particularly in America. If we say that film is becoming something like the daily food of the masses, then those involved in film production must know every aspect of the mental and physical condition of the audience sitting in the movie theater. . . . To create a film without knowing the general characteristics of audiences sitting in the darkness of the movie theater, in particular the physical and mental conditions of their daily life, would be like preparing food without thinking about the condition of the stomachs of children and the sick. I cannot say that today’s film producers are paying sufficient consideration to this point, but compared with other previously existing arts, the position of the film audience—in other words, the position of the consumer—is included within the fundamental concerns of artistic production. It is of utmost importance to realize that this condition, which seems at first glimpse to deny the artistic quality of cinema, is in fact the condition that can most fulfill cinema’s artistic qualities.

As he acknowledges in this paragraph, Ökuma’s remarks on film build upon a broad foundation of film criticism and theory, both domestic and international, which by 1937 had become established as an important field of intellectual inquiry in Japan. In particular, his comparison of film audiences to “children and the sick” who are being served mass-produced food would seem to reflect an early, persistent strain of cinema discourse that regarded audiences as immature, impressionable, or even pathological. Nevertheless, it is precisely this attention to the audience—rather than the author or work—in discussions of cinema

28 Ökuma 1937a, p. 134. This emphasis on the rationalist, industrial, and Fordist aspects of the film industry as a point of comparison to literature ties Ökuma’s work to that of Hirabayashi (1928a) and Oya (1928).
29 Ökuma 1937a, p. 135.
30 Ökuma 1937a, pp. 6–7.
31 On the discourse regarding cinema audiences in the United States, see Hansen 1991, especially pp. 60–89; on Japanese cinema discourse, see Gerow 1996.
that Okuma sees as a healthy corrective to the obsessive attention to the author in Japanese literary discourse, dominated by the shishōsetsu model of writing and reading, wherein the connection between the literary work and the author’s personal life is the focus of interpretation. Okuma’s emphasis on the physical condition of the audience during the projection of a film as an event unfolding in time prepares the way, moreover, for his analysis of the consumption of literature as an embodied, durational, and social event.

**Serality, Sociality, and the Life of the Novel**

The increased scrutiny of media during the first decade of Shōwa included a fresh critical assessment of the role of newspaper serialization in the development of modern Japanese literature. Hasegawa Nyozekan 長谷川如是閑, himself a former newspaper journalist, helped to initiate this new critical appraisal with an essay on shinbun bungaku 新聞文学 (newspaper literature) for the Iwanami kōza: Nihon bungaku 岩波講座: 日本文学 (Iwanami Lectures: Japanese Literature) publication series of 1932. While acknowledging the important literary role of newspapers in Western countries such as England and France, Hasegawa noted several distinctive features of “newspaper literature” in Japan, including the frequent serialization of long novels of several hundred installments, as well as the tendency for newspapers to include writers on their staff as resident novelists, reporters, and literary editors. During the Meiji period, which was formative for both modern journalism and modern literature, newspaper staff writers included such major literary figures as Futabatei Shimei =*-rll9~, Natsume Sōseki 正則漱石, Ozaki Kōyō 尾崎紅葉, Masamune Hakuchō 正宗白鳥, and Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規. Given that a great number of the most influential works of modern Japanese literature were originally written in serialized form, Hasegawa asserts that the “basic standard for publication of Japanese modern literature has been in newspapers and magazines, rather than in the book format as in the case of Europe and America.”

Hasegawa’s essay inaugurated a period of intensive critical discussion of the newspaper-serialized novel by such critics as Aono Suekichi, Katsumoto Seichirō 勝本清一郎, and Sugiyama Heisuke 杉山平助, as well as Okuma. Building on

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32 The influential works of modern Japanese fiction first serialized in newspapers are too numerous to catalogue here, but examples include Kōyō’s Konjiki yasha 金色夜叉 (1897), Kikuchi Yūhō’s 菊池幽芳 Ono ga tsumi 己が罪 (1899), Shimazaki Tōson’s 島崎藤村 Haru 春 (1908) and le 家 (1910), all of Sōseki’s major novels from Gubijinso 広美人生 (1907) onwards, Tokuda Shūsei’s 徳田秋声 Arakure あらくれ (1915), and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 武者俊之助’s Chūjin no ai 嫌人之愛 (1924). In the 1920s and 1930s, newspaper serialization also became an important format for the development of taishō bungaku (popular literature) and the historical novel, as exemplified by such works as Kikuchi Kan’s 菊池宽 Shinju fusin 真珠夫人 (1920) and Yoshikawa Eiji’s 吉川英治 Miyamoto Musashi 宮本武蔵 (1935–1939). For postwar studies of shinbun shōsetsu, see Takagi 1974–1981; special issues on shinbun shōsetsu in Bungaku in June 1954 and January 2003; and in Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kanshō 42:15 (December 1977).

33 Hasegawa 1932, p. 5.

34 See Aono 1935, pp. 142–52; Katsumoto 1936; and Sugiyama 1935; as well as the special feature on shinbun shōsetsu in the same November 1935 issue of Shincho 新潮 in which Sugiyama’s
Hasegawa’s assertion of the centrality of serialization for the development of Japanese fiction, Katsumoto Seichirō, for example, attempted to identify the characteristic formal aspects of modern Japanese literature, tying these specifically to the newspaper or magazine serialized format. In his 1936 study *Nihon bungaku no sekaiteki ichi* (The Position of Japanese Literature in the World), Katsumoto singled out an essay-like (*zuihitsuteki* 隨筆的) quality and a loose, perambulatory structure as typical formal attributes of modern Japanese prose. Comparing these qualities to the premodern form of the picture scroll (*emakimono* 絵巻物) on the one hand, he also linked these characteristics’ formal development and expression to the limitations and underlying potential of the serialized format. Undoubtedly, the emphasis on national or cultural specificity in the title of Ōkuma’s book *Bungei no Nihonteki keitai* refers in part to this contemporary discourse that sought to link the development and distinctive qualities of modern Japanese fiction to the form of newspaper serialization. In contrast to Hasegawa and Katsumoto, however, Ōkuma does not take a comparative national or cultural approach to literary study, and despite his choice of title, he is not particularly concerned with identifying the uniquely “Japanese” aspects of serialized fiction or with tying them to a premodern literary tradition.

As with the film medium, Ōkuma instead locates the special significance of newspaper fiction in its “high level of sociality” (*shakaisei* 社会性), which, he writes, “is not to be found in the numbers of its readers, but in the conditions of its reception—in other words, in its very ‘form of existence’ (*sonzai keishiki*).”35 According to Ōkuma, one of the distinctive temporal features of newspaper fiction in Japan is that it tends to be written so as to be published in the same season as its setting, with its plot unfolding in parallel with the temporal progression of the serialization’s publication. The inclusion of references to current national incidents and trends in the novel, which is being written as well as consumed in fresh daily installments, amplifies this sense of parallel temporality. From the reader’s perspective, furthermore, the temporality of reading a newspaper novel is not only the time it takes to read each individual installment, but also the time spent in “everyday life” between installments, leading to “the illusion that the content of the work is unfolding in parallel to the reader’s own life.”36 Together these features produce in the reader what Ōkuma terms a heightened “sense of reality” (*jitsuzaikan* 実在感), which is reinforced by the reception context of newspaper fiction, consumed by the reader on the same page as news articles; thus, he asserts, the reader’s frame of mind is one of “concern for social realities.”37

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35 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 30.
In his valorization of newspaper fiction’s “high level of sociality,” Ōkuma inverts the standard hierarchy of literary publication, where serialized work is considered less definitive and prestigious than work published in book form. Instead, he approaches serialized work as living literature and refers to single-volume novels or multivolume collected works as mere “forms of storage.” This regard for the sociality of the serialized form leads Ōkuma to a position of radical contextualism, whereby he argues that each work is only fully alive when it is first released, in the historical moment shared between an author and audience. “A novel” he puts it succinctly, “is a living creature that is breathing only during the short historical period in which it is released.” He expands on this view in the following passages:

Creative activity is the writer’s social action, and, just as with the actions of all other historical personages, it is tied together with all historical elements in its historical moment and is thereafter absorbed into the future. It is often thought that literature itself has a long life span, since it is preserved in a durable and objective physical form as printed material, as a book. However, this is but an illusion.

The life span of a novel is short. Many people find this hard to believe, but the time that a single novel exists as a living entity (seimei) is between half a year and a year, or perhaps two or three years. Beyond that, we must consider it a rarity for the life of a novel to surpass five or six years. Beyond even that, what continues to exist after publication is only what has been preserved. Especially something such as zenshū (collected works) is only a form of preservation—it is not that the work continues to live as a social entity. As readers of a certain work when it was first published, people cannot forget their experience of having lived together with the work at the moment it held onto its life-force in the midst of its own time. Still, if they pass on the same book to young people of the next generation, they cannot expect the younger generation to be moved or excited in the same way. A novel is a life-form that breathes for a short while during the historical moment when it is published, and then, like a fish that stops breathing when pulled out of water, its life comes to an end.

Thus Ōkuma arrives at his striking view of literature as “something that dies,” and firmly designates even so canonical a figure as Natsume Sōseki, whom he praises as an exemplary newspaper novelist, as “a writer of the past.”

**Natsume Sōseki as a Newspaper Novelist**

Ōkuma’s view of Sōseki, who as resident novelist and literary editor of the *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞 played a pioneering role as mediator between the realms of literature and journalism, helps to bring into focus the implications of Ōkuma’s

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38 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 54.
39 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 54.
40 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 55.
41 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 54.
42 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 18, 55.
theory of newspaper serialization. As specific examples of the parallels between newspaper serialization and readers’ daily lives, Ōkuma enumerates the periods of serialization of the various novels Sōseki wrote for the Asahi, beginning with Gubijinso (Poppy), which ran from June to October 1907. Ōkuma identifies Sanshūrō 三四郎 (September through December 1908) as the first of Sōseki’s novels where the seasons depicted in the novel correspond exactly to those during which the novel was serialized, and he points out that the title of Sōseki’s sixth novel for the Asahi, Higan sugi made (Until after the Equinox; January through April 1912) is also a declaration of the projected time-span for the novel’s serialization.43

In the case of Mon 門 (The Gate; serialized between March and June 1910), Ōkuma notes that the length of time covered in the novel corresponds roughly to that of the novel’s serialization, although there is a lag between the seasons depicted in the novel and those of the period of serialization. Based on the depiction of seasons and the inclusion of the historical incident of Korean nationalist An Jung-geun’s assassination in Harbin of former Prime Minister and Resident-General of Korea Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文, Ōkuma places the action from around November 1910 through February 1911, roughly five months prior to the period of serialization.44 Not only does the assassination identify the time-frame for the novel, Sōseki uses it, Ōkuma observes, to establish the psychological world of its main characters. A dinner conversation about the assassination between Sōsuke 宗助 and his younger brother Koroku 小六 enables Sōseki to express the commonplace nature of the placid, commoner-style daily life of the novel’s protagonists. On the other hand, association with the location where the fateful incident took place leads the married couple who are the novel’s protagonists to recall a certain person who has drifted over to Manchuria. In this way, Sōseki depicts the characters’ psychological processes and crucially foreshadows the development of the novel as a whole.45

A survey of Sōseki’s newspaper publications thus furnishes Ōkuma with some immediate examples of the potential of the newspaper-serialized novel to intermesh with the daily lives of its readers through its parallel temporality and incorporation of public events that reinforce the reader’s “concern for social realities.” To be sure, he does not attribute Sōseki’s stature as a writer simply to his canny employment of the temporality of the newspaper medium. To try to unlock the secrets of Sōseki’s “lowness” (hikusa 低さ), “broadness” (hirosa 広さ), or popular appeal (tsūzokusei 通俗性) as a newspaper novelist, and how these qualities relate to his “loftiness” (takasa 高さ) as a literary giant, Ōkuma considers various

43 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 64–65. Ōkuma incorrectly cites the year of Gubijinso’s serialization as Meiji 44 (1911) rather than Meiji 40 (1907), but the subsequent sequence of dates that he gives indicates that this is a typographical error rather than a misunderstanding of the novel’s publication history.
44 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 41–42, 50.
45 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 41–42.
other aspects of Sōseki’s authorial style as well. As one of the keys to Sōseki’s popular success, Ōkuma cites the vividness of his characters. Rather than discussing Sōseki’s works as “literature,” Ōkuma claims, ordinary readers would chat about his characters as if they were real people and would not have been surprised to come across Sōsuke and O-Yone 御米 from Mon quietly growing old together in some out-of-the-way corner of Tokyo.

Sōseki achieves this effect, at least in part, Ōkuma suggests, through the nature of the prose narration offsetting the characters’ dialogue. Compared to that of contemporary Naturalist authors such as Shimazaki Tōson and Tayama Katai 田山花袋, Sōseki’s narrative style shows little inclination towards lyricism or lyric rhapsody (eitan 詠嘆). Instead, it is “intellectual” or “rationalist” (richiteki 理知的) and filled with “antiliterary elements” and an “antiliterary verbosity.” Yet, it is precisely this “antiliterary” ground that allows the figure of the characters’ dialogue to emerge so vividly, “just as our eyes are captured by butterbur flowers blossoming in a stone wall.”

Contemporary novelists could learn much from Sōseki’s literary techniques, Ōkuma proposes. Nevertheless, he holds fast to the position that the author’s world was most vividly experienced by readers of Sōseki’s own generation:

Sōseki is already a writer of the past. The publication of his collected works has been a great success, but I wonder how many readers there really are in Japan today who are calmly rereading him. Instead, it is young boys and girls who encounter fragments of his works in their school textbooks. Sōseki is most alive in the memories of Japanese who lived at the time he was active as a writer... and who relished each and every one of his works as they first appeared. This generation will look back on that time and feel that the numerous characters in Sōseki’s works existed within their daily lives. They will remember his characters affectionately, just as they do real people. They will not only be able to recollect the names of a certain number of characters, but by citing these names in conversation, they can enjoy themselves [with others of their generation] in a shared world of memories. Sōseki’s collected works, with their beautiful cinnabar and dark blue covers, are lined up against the walls of homes everywhere, but Sōseki is only alive in the memories of his readers. Since those readers will all grow old and die, the memory of Sōseki will only remain for another thirty or forty years. After that, the age will surely come when he attracts attention from only a handful of literary enthusiasts and specialized literary scholars.

From our perspective at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we might question the accuracy of Ōkuma’s prognostications, since Sōseki has remained one of the few writers of the Meiji and Taishō periods who is still read widely by readers of all generations in Japan, and who is recognized around the world as a figure of great literary importance. On a more fundamental level, based on the conception of literature as a humanistic domain that can connect readers and writers from faraway times and places, we might also question Ōkuma’s basic

46 See Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 58–59, for preliminary discussion of Sōseki’s “lowness” and “loftiness.”
47 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 61–62.
48 Ōkuma 1937a, pp. 55–56.
premise that a work is alive only during the moment of its appearance. In fact, Ōkuma himself anticipates such objections from his readers:

Unless we add [a proviso] such as the following, we will not be able to contain our readers’ dissatisfaction. If we have linguistic ability and understanding, there is no work of literature of past or present, East or West, that we should not be able to appreciate. Moreover, we may be influenced the most by a work from a different language or a different age. Indeed, what we might call the immortality of literature is a conception based on this fact. Those things are all true. Still, we must keep a firm grasp on the general truth that a work of literature is not only born in an inseparably close relationship to its historical moment, but is also read in an inseparably close relationship to its historical moment.

While acknowledging his readers’ potential objections, Ōkuma thus insists on the importance of the shared social and historical world of the author and readers and maintains his focus on the unique capacity of newspaper-serialized fiction to capitalize on this shared temporality.

To the extent that Ōkuma’s literary theory engages with the temporality as well as the physiology or physically embodied realization of the reading experience, we could say that his approach is basically phenomenological and that it indeed bears comparison with the phenomenological analyses of reading by such European critics as Roman Ingarden and Georges Poulet. From this perspective, we might compare Ōkuma’s analysis of the work’s sonzai keishiki (formal existence) with Ingarden’s analysis of the “concretizations” of the literary work in each specific act of reading, as described in his seminal The Literary Work of Art from 1931. Intriguingly, just as Ōkuma’s analysis of sonzai keishiki leads to an organic conception of the literary work as a living being that breathes and dies with the historical moment of its realization, so, too, Ingarden speaks of the “life” of a literary work, which “lives while it is expressed in a manifold of concretizations” and “undergoes changes as a result of ever new concretizations.”

Starting from this insight, Ingarden and subsequent theorists of the reader-response school of criticism proceeded to inquire into the mechanism for the reader’s generation of the text’s meaning, as well as the individual variability of each reader’s “concretization” of the literary work. For Ōkuma, by contrast, the content of the individual “reading” is not a principle area of concern. Although he does not pursue the question of the changing content of individual readings, Ōkuma nevertheless provides a sharper focus than Ingarden on the issue of medi-ality, or the literary work’s specific material and temporal qualities as realized in various media formations.

49 Ingarden 1973, pp. 346–47. I have omitted the italicization that was employed for emphasis in the original passage.

50 In its “abstraction” from demographic specifics and its focus on bodily experience, Ōkuma’s conception of the reader has much in common with that found in Yokomitsu Rikichi’s literary theory of the late 1920s, as described by Kitada Akihiro: “For Yokomitsu and the Shinkankakuhka, the ‘reader’ is nothing other than a bodily existence that reacts to the physical entity of print (文字 moji) media, and [the work’s] ‘content’ is the bodily sensation that wells up in this reader.” Kitada 2002, p. 175.
Orality, Radio, and Silent Reading

Just as he uses the example of cinema to highlight the issue of reception in literature, Ôkuma also investigates the yet newer medium of radio, both to explore its own artistic potential and to reveal through comparison previously obscured elements of modern literature as mediated by the print industry. Radio broadcasting in Japan began in 1925 with independent stations established in Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka, which were consolidated into the Nippon Hôsô Kyôkai (the precursor to present-day NHK) the following year. From its inception, radio in Japan was hailed as not only a conduit for news and music, but also an important new medium for literary expression. Broadly defined “literary” applications of the new medium could be divided into three categories: radio plays, literary readings, and traditional narrative arts. From the start, there were diverse experiments in broadcasting radio plays (rajio geki / rajio dorama ラジオ劇 / ラジオドラマ), beginning in July 1925 with a performance of Tsubouchi Shôyo’s Kiri hitoha 墨一葉 by a cast of prominent kabuki actors to mark the first day of continuous broadcasting by the Tôkyô Hôsô Kyoku 東京放送局 (JOAK) station. Subsequently, playwright and director Osanai Kaoru 小山内薰, leader of the progressive Tsukiji Shôgekijô 築地小劇場 (Tsukiji Little Theater), was particularly active in exploring the new medium, directing a performance of Richard Hughes’s radio play “Danger” (translated as “Tankô no naka” 炭坑の中で) in August 1925, and helping to found the Rajio Dorama Kenkyûkai ラジオドラマ研究会 (Radio Drama Study Group) that same month.51 On the other hand, a vogue for the broadcast of readings of modern prose narratives (monogatari/shôsetsu) began with film star Natsukawa Shizue’s reading of popular novelist Yoshiya Nobuko’s Tsuriganeso 鈴籠草 in November 1932. In the years that followed, Natsukawa and fellow screen actress Okada Yoshiko 岡田嘉子 continued to promote the development of monogatari and shôsetsu for radio.52 Meanwhile, former benshi 弁士 (silent film narrators) such as Tokugawa Musei 徳川夢声 and Ótsuji Shirô 大辻司郎, displaced from cinema by the advent of “talkies,” became active in the radio medium, applying the newly invented narrative/improvisational genre of mandan 漫談 (literally, random talk) to radio with such programs as “Nansensu mondô” ナンセンス問答 from 1931.53 Long-established narrative arts such as naniwabushi 浪花節, kodan 講談, and rakugo 落語 also achieved a new popularity in the radio medium.54

52 The first such radio literary reading was Okada’s reading of “Tsubakihime monogatari” 桜姫物語 in November 1926. Poetry readings were also featured, beginning with Tomita Saika’s 畠田碎花 recitation of eight modern poems in April 1927. Nippon Hôsô Kyôkai 1965, p. 209. For more on radio poetry readings, see Tsuboi 1997, pp. 233–48.
53 Mandan, a semi-improvised monologue or dialogue combining narrative elements with social commentary and satire, applied the verbal skills of the benshi in noncinematic performance settings such as yose 席席 halls. It was developed in the mid-1920s by benshi such as Ótsuji and Musei.
Amid this fresh wave of broadcast “literary” activity, critics such as Ōkuma, Hasegawa Nyozekan, and Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke sought to explore the new medium’s cultural implications and possibilities. Laboring to decouple the concept of literature from exclusively written language, Ōkuma and other critics of the 1920s and 1930s saw in radio the potential for a revival of oral literature. Ōkuma in particular used the topic of “radio literature” to explore the fundamental qualities of oral versus written literary expression. According to Ōkuma, oral language retains the “sensual” (kanseiteki na 感性的な) element of words, while written language is “language as a code that reaches us only through the eyes, language that is extremely antisensual (非感性的 hi-kanseiteki).”

Expanding on this point, he criticizes “modern literature” as having “robbed even poetry of the natural sensuality that words possess: just as a color can be bleached from a fabric, it has removed the oral element from the fabric of words and created a realm of ‘words perceived by the eyes’ or rather ‘words deprived of their sound.’”

Advocating radio’s potential to become a distinctive new literary medium, he argues that “radio literature must retrieve the sensual element that has been lost to modern literature, calling it back to its original natural condition, and thus creating a literary realm entirely opposed to modern literature.”

In a passage that reveals his growing tendency in the late 1930s to address literary issues within a problematics of “national language” (kokugo 国語), Ōkuma stresses the potential of radio to correct what he identifies as a desensitization among the populace to the oral qualities of literature, abetted by the particular characteristics of modern Japanese and its mixture of phonetic syllables (kana) and logographic Chinese characters (kanji):

The excessive use (ran’yō 滅用) of Chinese characters and Chinese-derived words in Japan’s national language has invited a disinterest in and lack of perception of the sound-based elements of words in the national populace. Prose written in a mixture of Chinese characters and kana has created everywhere the phenomenon of Chinese characters whose meaning will be the same no matter how they are read aloud, and it appears that so long as there is no misunderstanding in the meaning, the way of reading aloud can be left up to the reader. This gives rise in turn to the condition whereby the written characters that should represent words actually dominate the reader’s consciousness, and the living words as sound seem, on the contrary, to be something fleeting and trivial. This strange psychological condition has spread throughout citizens of every age and social class. . . . [Thus] the question of the establishment of radio literature . . . is not only a global issue, but also a domestic issue, insofar as it pertains to the question of national language in this country.

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55 For examples of other critics who discussed the literary potential of radio, see Hirabayashi 1928a; Hasegawa 1933.
56 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 98.
57 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 105.
58 Ōkuma 1937a, p. 99.
Although Ōkuma frames this criticism of contemporary print literature with reference to the new medium of radio, his critique could be situated in an extensive lineage of nationalist, phonocentric discourses, beginning with eighteenth-century Kokugaku scholars such as Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 who identified and privileged native phonetic speech over written culture imported from China. Meiji-era reformists introduced a new layer of phonocentrism through the *genbun itchi* 言文一致 (unification of speech and writing) movement, which sought to create a new style of written Japanese, based in part on the colloquial speech of the new capital of Tokyo, that would constitute a common national language, effacing former class and regional distinctions.\(^\text{60}\) Despite Ōkuma’s seemingly progressive emphasis on “sociality” and novel focus on new media, this alignment with Kokugaku phonocentrism and *genbun itchi* discourses within a pragmatics of “national language” would appear to give his criticism a surprisingly conservative cast. The question of Ōkuma’s attitude towards “national language” and its political implications is indeed a complex one, which I will address further in the context of his tanka criticism.

Ōkuma’s criticism of written Japanese’s “excessive use” of Chinese-derived words might seem to be a variation on Tokugawa-era Kokugaku or Meiji-era *genbun itchi* rhetoric, but his analysis of the specific character of the written language in the modern novel opens a new critical vista on the relationship between print and the expression of interiority in modern literature. In a chapter entitled “Narrative Arts and Literature,” Ōkuma inquires into what enables modern literature to produce a strong sense of “illusion” (sakkaku 錯覚) in its reader. He argues that modern prose literature’s unique “illusion” derives not from its fictionality, which it shares with film and drama, but rather its mode of reception. “The fact that one form of modern art, the novel (shōsetsu), leads us into a deep ‘illusion’ is due to its form of reception in silent reading, and this form of reception is conditioned by modern literature’s formal existence (sonzai keishiki), print technology.”\(^\text{61}\) Anticipating such theorists of media and narrative as Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong,\(^\text{62}\) Ōkuma draws a connection between the reader’s experience of silent reading as mediated by print technology and the development of interiority as a narrative technique:

\(^\text{60}\) Twine describes the “nationalism” of the *genbun itchi* movement as following two phases: the first an attempt to create a national speech community as part of the broader early Meiji effort of “modernization” and expansion of participation in civic life, and the second phase a more self-conscious effort to create a “national language” as part of the surge of ethnic nationalism following the first Sino-Japanese War (Twine 1991, pp. 163–78). While proponents of *genbun itchi* advocated a variety of positions, in general the movement could be described as a pragmatic effort to establish a standard style of written language with a close relationship to the dialect spoken in the capital, rather than a purist effort to purge all sinoic elements or construct a written language based strictly on colloquial speech. Many of the arguments in favor of *genbun itchi* nevertheless could be said to privilege orality and stigmatize sino-derived elements of written Japanese. On phonocentrism in eighteenth-century Kokugaku studies, see Harootunian 1988, pp. 40–65; and Sakai 1991, pp. 271–79. On *genbun itchi*, nationalism, and phonocentrism, see also Karatani 1993, pp. 45–75; and Karatani 1995.

\(^\text{61}\) Ōkuma 1937a, p. 117.

\(^\text{62}\) For representative texts in the post-1960 resurgence of media and narrative studies, see McLuhan 1962; Scholes and Kellogg 1966; and Ong 1982.
Literature that is comprised through the single medium of “words perceived by
the eyes” (me ni utsuru kotoba 眼に映る言葉), even if it takes the ostensible form
of narration or storytelling (setsuwa 說話), cannot remain for long in the realm
of storytelling. The essence of modern literature has been carved out naturally
in the realm of description (byōsha 描写); description in modern literature—in
particular, psychological description—has an intimate, inseparable relationship
with the development of movable-type printing, and we can say that it would not
have developed unless its readers had fulfilled the fundamental condition of the
ability to read silently at high speeds. The words that are literature’s only means
or medium are materials that have already been bleached of their true oral attrib­
utes, becoming materials of a different, highly objective nature. . . . The moment
that the reader of a modern novel is immersed into his deepest “illusion” is the
moment that he has forgotten the existence of the narrator, the moment that he
has forgotten the existence of words as words. It is the moment when the medium
of words becomes a material with the flammability of gunpowder. . . . [The
reader’s] eyes follow the lines of printed characters as a flame passes down the
wire of an explosive charge. . . . This event all takes place within the interiority
of the reader, as a so-called interior experience, and it all depends on a certain
internal ability he possesses. Thus, at the moment when this pure interior expe­
rience unfolds, the face of the author and the voice of the narrator will neces­sarily disappear. Herein lies the secret of the quality of silent reading that
constitutes the formal existence of modern literature.63

Ōkuma’s consideration of the potential of radio literature gives him an occa-
sion to hail the oral qualities of language that the medium of radio could revive
and to criticize the loss of these elements in contemporary written culture. Yet
ironically the same train of thought also leads him to the above insights on the
distinctive qualities of the reading experience and the relationship between inte­
riority, print culture, and the development of the modern novel—a passage that
is surely one of the highlights of Ōkuma’s critical oeuvre. As the tension between
these two positions suggests, the question of orality and written forms of
Japanese was a difficult and persistent one for Ōkuma and his peers. Indeed, such
questions of “national language” became an increasing focus of attention in the
second decade of the Shōwa period, against the backdrop of Japan’s expanding
empire and the sense of national crisis that only intensified as Japan entered full­
scale war with China in 1937. When we consider that radio, including “radio
literature,” became a prominent medium of propaganda during the wartime
period, the dimensions of the questions of radio, orality, and “national language”
become clearer.64 In Ōkuma’s case, however, we must also recall that before

64 See Tsuboi 1997 for a detailed look at the issue of orality and radio in wartime Japan with spe­
cial regard to the recitation of patriotic and pro-war poetry on radio broadcasts. As Yoshimi Shun’ya
吉見俊哉 points out, several critics such as Murobushi Köshin 室伏高信 and Hasegawa Nyozeikan
warned about the totalitarian potential of radio as a medium disseminated from a single source to
a large mass of listeners, and articles such as Kiyozawa Kiyoshi’s 清沢清 “Hōsō no u yokukka” 放
送の右翼化 (Chūō kōron 中央公論, September 1935) criticized the increasing state control and pro-
pagandistic use of radio in the mid-1930s (Yoshimi 1995, pp. 211–17). For additional studies of
radio and state propaganda during wartime Japan, see Kishi et al. 2006; Tsuganesawa 1998.
committing the above words on radio to paper, he had already been deeply involved in debates on the nature of oral and written language through his activities as a tanka poet and critic. To better understand his stance on orality, it is necessary to turn to his tanka criticism, which developed in parallel to his more general writing on literature and related media.

**Okuma’s Tanka Criticism and the Question of Orality**

Although Okuma published dozens of critical and polemical articles on tanka throughout his lifetime, the peak of his production of tanka criticism, as well as tanka, coincided with his involvement with the *Marumera* journal in the decade between 1927 and 1937. He wrote in the preface to *Bungei no Nihonteki keitai* that he was also preparing to publish a volume of tanka criticism under the title *Shōwa no waka mondai* 昭和の和歌問題 (The Issue of Waka in the Shōwa Era), but his tanka criticism remained uncollected until the year of his death, when the first of a two-volume compilation of tanka criticism bearing this title was finally published. Okuma’s evolving views on tanka and waka form a complex body of work that demands to be considered together with a reappraisal of his creative output as a poet. While such a comprehensive study is beyond the scope of this article, I will try to summarize some of the main points of his tanka criticism insofar as they shed light on his broader critical stance, especially as regards the question of orality.

Okuma’s first mature work of tanka criticism was an article from 1927 on the two modern tanka poets whose influence was crucial to his own poetic development, Ishikawa Takuboku and Toki Zenmaro, entitled “Kindai bungaku no ichi keitai to shite no tanka: Toki Zenmaro ron no zenshō” (Tanka as One Form of Modern Literature: Prelude to a Study of Toki Zenmaro). In this piece, Okuma begins by adumbrating the social function of literature in introducing new ideas, observations, and sensibilities to the public consciousness. As the article’s title suggests, he argues that, despite the tanka form’s marginal position within modern literature, it is indeed capable of expressing modern consciousness and, in the hands of poets of exceptional talent, is worthy of consideration as true literature. He holds up the example of Takuboku, whose “greatness as a tanka poet is not only that he expressed his modern life-consciousness (kindai no seikatsu ishiki) through tanka, but also in the fact that he was able to express this [consciousness] at a higher level [in tanka] than he could through any of the other literary forms of his time and thereby gave a new value to the tanka form itself.” Okuma further acclaims Takuboku’s capacity to imply “his entire life situation (zen seikatsu) in the background of each of his tanka. In other words, in each of his singular, one-time expressions of his feelings, he was able to symbolize his entire individual, familial, and social existence.” Following his discussion of

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66 Okuma 1977, p. 29.
Takuboku, Okuma names Toki Zenmaro as the contemporary tanka poet most capable of assuming Takuboku’s mantle as a poet of modern life. The task in representing modern life (kindai seikatsu 近代生活) in the late 1920s, Okuma suggests, is not to express stillness or eternity in the midst of movement, as tanka aesthetics had traditionally emphasized, but to express movement itself and thus capture a new aesthetic of modern dynamism in the age of industry.67

Placing a high value on innovation and employing terms such as kindai seikatsu no rizumu 近代生活のリズム (the rhythm of modern life), this essay is a paradigmatic statement of modernist aesthetics in tanka. While asserting that Takuboku’s breakthrough in tanka was due in part to his outsider status, however, Okuma also suggests that the next important innovator will likely come from within the tanka tradition, generated through—and ultimately breaking free of—the “traditionalism and inflexible organization of its master-disciple relationships.”68 Throughout his critical career, Okuma remained ambivalent towards the master-disciple organization of tanka practice in the modern kadan 歌壇 (the term referring to the social “world” of tanka poets, used in parallel to the bundan or the prose literary world). Despite his hostility towards the reigning Araragi アララギ school of tanka and his trenchant criticism of the prose bundan in such works as Bungei no Nihonteki keitai, Okuma was often surprisingly supportive of the kadan as a social institution, frequently admonishing tanka poets who would forswear the kadan and approach tanka simply as another form of poetry.69 In the postwar period, Okuma would suggest that tanka could be conceived in two equally valid ways: first, in the hands of truly outstanding poets, as a form of “literature” (bungaku), as he originally proposed in his essay of 1927; and secondly, as a type of “craft” (shugei 手芸 / kurafuto クラフト), “performance” (gigei 技芸), or “artistic way” (geidō 芸道), akin to flower arranging, calligraphy, or the tea ceremony, with a school-based (ryūha 練流) social formation distinct from that of “literature.”70

Just as Okuma held an ambiguous view of the kadan, his views on language and form in tanka—issues that dominated his tanka criticism—were complex and changing. To summarize his core position during his years as a Marumera coterie member, however, we could say that he developed an increasing aversion to the use of Chinese-derived or other “foreign” expressions in tanka and attempted to construct a synthesis of contemporary colloquial spoken language with Yamato kotoba 大和言葉, the native literary vocabulary and rhythms found in the waka tradition going back to the Man’yōshū 万葉集.71 As a polemicist,

67 Okuma 1977, p. 36. Toki Zenmaro was a journalist and tanka poet who in 1913 founded the important tanka journal Seikatsu to geijutsu, which nurtured left-wing expression and experimentation in tanka. For an English-language introduction of Zenmaro and his tanka, see Ueda 1996, pp. 97–108.

68 Okuma 1977, pp. 31–32.

69 Okuma 1977, p. 360; Okuma 1937a, pp. 206–207.

70 Okuma 1977, pp. 312–13, 381.

71 Nevertheless, as the chōka quoted below illustrates, he never attempted to purge his own poetry entirely of foreign-derived expressions.
Okuma urged his fellow tanka poets to extend their vision beyond modern tanka and to develop a poetic practice drawing on the entire waka tradition, including longer, nearly extinct forms such as the chōka 長歌. He himself experimented throughout his career with rhythmic variations outside the strict 5-7-5-7-7 tanka syllabic pattern and became increasingly attracted to longer forms. 72

Although this description might seem to paint him as a traditionalist or even an archaist, Okuma’s poetic stance reflected a modernist sensibility and developed in response to contemporary concerns—he never depicted his evolving aesthetic as a “return to Japan,” and he was harshly critical of those poets whom he saw as merely imitating archaic poetic styles, such as that of the Man’yōshū (a collection increasingly in vogue during the nationalistic 1930s). Nor did Okuma ever frame his interest in Yamato kotoba in terms of kotodama 言霊, the uniquely invigorating “spirit of words” that some nationalist ideologues believed ancient Japanese to possess.

An attraction to plainspoken, colloquial language was a hallmark of left-leaning tanka poets from the 1910s onward, and in such treatises as “Musanha kōgoka undō e no ichibetsu” 修身漢語歌歌運動への一撃 (A Look at the Proletarian Colloquial Tanka Movement; 1927), Okuma, too, expressed support for the political value of tying the language of tanka to the everyday language of the working class. 73 He, nevertheless, was also critical of previous attempts at writing kōgo tanka, or colloquial tanka, which he considered overly prosaic and lack-

72 As an example of Okuma’s attempts to create a modern version of chōka, we could cite his 1933 poem “Yureisen” 霧靄舟 (Ghost Ship), which combines vocabulary and rhetorical devices, such as pillow words, clearly evoking the Man’yōshū with the modern subject matter of the pioneering voyage across the Northern Sea Route by the Soviet icebreaker Sibiryakov in 1932. Okuma’s poem and my translation follow:

Ghost Ship
Breaking, cutting through the fast-frozen Arctic ice sheet / A single exploration vessel arrived on our shores / Propeller lost, hull filthy, towed by a fishing boat / It sleeps in a corner of the noontime Yokohama port / Nineteen hundred and thirty two International Polar Year. / The Russians, high-striving, fearless, quick to seize their chance / Cut through the hard and fast to the far reaches of the phantom sea lane / Tonnage one thousand three hundred eighty Engine horsepower two thousand / A sea-tested icebreaker, fashioned in Glasgow—the Admiral Sibiryakov. / Its crew, men and women of science from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. / At the end of November sea roads it sleeps in the noontime sun of a Japanese dock / Struck by the great resolution of this country with thoughts difficult to utter / Tears streaking my cheeks I bring my hands together / In respect for the ship’s battered, forlorn form. (Okuma 1937b)

ing in rhythmic sensitivity, and as the Proletarian Tanka movement progressed, he continued to criticize his fellow leftist poets on these grounds.

The year after writing “Musenha kōgoka undō e no ichibetsu,” Ōkuma expanded on his criticism of the prose-like quality of contemporary tanka by articulating the opposite poetic value of *taieisei* 対詣性 (interlocution or “recitability”). The earliest Japanese poetry had taken the form, he claimed, of a vocalized call or address (*yobikake* 呼びかけ) from one person to another, and the special value of poetry can be realized only when it is recited aloud in a social context. Contemporary tanka—both in the colloquial style and otherwise—had lost its original character as vocal communication, and in the process had slipped into a “diary-like” solipsism. We could view Ōkuma’s eventual pursuit of a synthetic colloquial-traditional style, then, as an attempt to infuse the contemporary, socially grounded style of colloquial tanka with the rhythmic, communicative, and “recitable” qualities of ancient waka.

As Ōkuma’s views evolved, he increasingly framed the issue of language in tanka not strictly as a question of poetics, but as one part of a broader imperative to reform the Japanese language as a whole. “The reform of the Japanese language,” he wrote in 1932, “is a grave problem that now confronts the Japanese people. . . . Needless to say, the reform of Japanese should aim for the simplification of characters and terminology. . . . This task should not be contrived in a mechanical fashion by linguists. Rather it should develop creatively from the artistic consciousness of writers of literature.” He specified that the reform of Japanese “should develop along with the Proletarian literary movement and should remain firmly fixed to that movement.” Ōkuma shared this agenda for the simplification of Japanese with many leftist intellectuals, although there was a diversity of opinion as to just how to achieve linguistic reform, and few of Ōkuma’s fellows on the left shared his enthusiasm for reviving archaic *Yamato kotoba*, even within the confines of poetic expression.

Despite their ambiguities, Ōkuma’s tanka and tanka criticism clarify his stance as a literary critic in several ways. First of all, his embrace of Takuboku and Zenmaro, as well as his extensive experimentation with poetic meter, underscore his orientation towards formal and thematic innovation and his basic grounding in modernist aesthetics. The thematic content of Ōkuma’s tanka, as well as his critical support for the nascent Proletarian Tanka movement, demonstrate his leftist sympathies, although he distanced himself from Marxism in its most strident and doctrinaire forms. Most importantly, Ōkuma’s longstanding engagement with issues of orality and “national language” in tanka helps explain the stance towards written and oral literature taken in *Bungei no Nihonteki keitai*,


75 Ōkuma 1932, p. 15.

76 For a consideration of leftist proposals for language reform in the 1930s, see Yasuda 1998, pp. 590–628.
allowing us to see it from a more nuanced perspective. In that work, Ōkuma’s critique of the Chinese-derived component of the modern writing style and his embrace of the potential of “radio literature” to revive an oral literature seem to hearken back to the Kokugaku rejection of Chinese culture and the nationalism of the genbun itchi movement and thus to introduce a hint of jingoism that resonates with the increasingly conservative political tone of the 1930s. Consideration of the origins of Ōkuma’s interest in orality, emerging from within a leftist movement that campaigned for the simplification and colloquialization of written language in order to reflect and serve the culture of the proletariat, reveals another dimension to his engagement with these issues. Adding another layer to these complexities, Ōkuma’s attraction to the native poetic language of Yamato kotoba, especially the language of the Man’yōshū, as expressed in his poetry and tanka criticism, is at once highly idiosyncratic and oddly in tune with the conservative cultural turn of times.77 Ōkuma’s criticism thus furnishes us with an example of a multidimensioned body of work spanning the “progressive” 1920s and “ultranationalist” 1930s that cannot be reduced to a simple narrative of tenkō, or political conversion.

Through this survey of Ōkuma’s writing on literature, I have tried to illuminate three central nodes of his theoretical concerns: reader-centered theory, sociality, and orality. To evaluate his position within literary history and the value of his theoretical ideas, we should take note of the distinct contours as well as the limitations of each of these critical nodes. First, in contrast to such efforts as Aono Suekichi’s pioneering essay on the expansion of female readership, Ōkuma does not focus on the demographic specifics of the reader or readership—gender, age, educational level, or social class. Rather, he is interested in the “formal existence” (sonzai keishiki) or “media gestalt” of the reader’s temporally specific encounter with the literary work in a given media formation—a book, radio performance, or newspaper serialization. Just as the “reader” remains a semiabstracted component of a specific media formation in Ōkuma’s analysis, his conception of “sociality” is also largely schematic—a point that those seeking a more concrete social and political analysis may find frustrating. Through his employment of the term “sociality,” we can see that Ōkuma sought first of all to promote a literature that would reach beyond the mental realm of the individual, which he saw as the limitation of contemporary literature supported by the bundan, as typified in shishōsetsu or shinkyō shōsetsu. His analysis of newspaper fiction shows that he valued literature not only as a form of speech that would connect the author and readers, but as a cultural force generating a connection or conversation among readers themselves. Literature produces a sense of sociality or community between author and readers in a shared historical moment. This type of sociality is closely related to the

77 For an analysis of the conservative shift in the literary world of the 1930s, see Doak 1994.
value of orality that Ōkuma sought in tanka as a form of interlocution or address (taiisei/yobikake). Ōkuma appears to hope, moreover, that this sociality of literature will maintain a close relation to the political and social events and issues of the day and help to sustain public attention to social issues.

Nevertheless, Ōkuma leaves unspecified just what the relationship between literature, society, and politics is, and how literature’s “sociality” bears on such pressing contemporary issues as nationalism, imperialism, and class conflict. Despite his focus on aspects of mediation in literature and related arts, he likewise elides discussion of the political elements of mediation such as censorship of film and print literature, or, for example, the comparative power dynamics of amateur, privately owned, and nationalized radio. It is this political vagueness that separates Ōkuma from contemporary Marxist critics such as Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke and Aono Sueki— or even an outspoken liberal journalist such as Hasegawa Nyozeke—and leaves him open to charges of having “a lack of consciousness of crisis” (Maeda Ai) and being “excessively naïve regarding the political power of media” (Tsuboi Hideto 坪井秀人).78

What, then, is the legacy of Ōkuma’s literary criticism and theory? During his most active decade as a literary critic, although he had some influence in the tanka community, his broader forays into literary and media criticism had only a limited impact. The critical articles that were reworked and collected in Bungei no Nihonteki keitai and other volumes were originally published in such prominent journals as Chūō kōron 中央公論, Shisō 思想, and the Asahi and Miyako 新聞 newspapers, and Ōkuma’s writing on newspaper serialization in particular seems to have helped stimulate and sustain a broader critical interest in this topic in the mid-1930s.79 Nevertheless, judging from the relatively scarce mention of Ōkuma in writings of the time or in subsequent literary histories, it appears that his criticism did not exert the influence over fellow writers and intellectuals that professional critics such as Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke and Ōya Sōichi had, or author/critics such as Yokomitsu Riichi or Itō Sei. Ōkuma’s position as an academic economist, outside the community of professional writers and critics, likely prevented his work from being taken too seriously in the heated field of literary and cultural criticism. As a body of literary theory, furthermore, Ōkuma’s work bears the marks of having been produced piecemeal as a series of occasional articles rather than being developed in a sustained or systematic manner.

Despite the general neglect of Ōkuma’s criticism, in the postwar period it has occasionally attracted the attention of such prominent literary scholar/theorists as Maeda Ai, Tsurumi Shunsuke 鶴見俊輔, and Kamei Hideo 龟井秀雄, as well as younger scholars such as Tsuboi Hideto. Tsurumi, one of the most important commentators on intellectual history and popular culture in the postwar period,
summarizes Ōkuma’s contribution with an emphasis on his media criticism. “His series of topical commentaries that explicated the various domains of mass culture,” Tsurumi writes, “not only with respect to their internal principles, but also with respect to the economic and social conditions that constrain them from the outside, are the forerunners to today’s media criticism (masukomi jihyō マスコミ時評) and, moreover, have a more solid theoretical framework than the media criticism of today.”

Within the field of literary and cultural history, Ōkuma’s work deserves to be read as part of a lively body of Japanese literary criticism and theory that brought sharp critical attention to the social and medial dimensions of literature. In its focus on literature’s media-specific and intermedial aspects, this body of criticism produced by such figures as Hirabayashi, Ōya, Hasegawa, and Ōkuma displays a striking synchronicity with the most innovative literary criticism worldwide, especially the Frankfurt School criticism exemplified by Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. Despite their shared common grounding in Marxist theory as well as Bergsonian philosophy, however, the Frankfurt School does not seem to have had much direct influence on the Japanese Marxist critics of the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, although Ōkuma’s work shares some striking commonalities with the contemporaneous literary theory of Roman Ingarden, there is no evidence of a direct connection between the two writers.

While limited in the ways described above, Ōkuma’s criticism offers several intriguing avenues for further exploration. Researchers on the modern novel can take inspiration from his enthusiastic appraisal of the importance of serialization to the development of modern Japanese fiction and his provocative theoretical postulates on the distinctive qualities of newspaper serialized work and its reception. The high hopes that Ōkuma and other critics of the 1930s held for the development of “radio literature” likewise suggest a largely unwritten chapter in media history, one that would explore the early applications, experiments, and unrealized dreams for literary and dramatic expression in radio—as well as the political dimensions of this “literary” medium.

Beyond the specific issues addressed in such works as Bungei no Nihonteki keitai, Ōkuma’s overall method of considering not only the formal properties of individual media, but their surrounding social formation, reception, and dynamic interrelation, continues to be relevant to today’s burgeoning scholarly field of media and intermediation studies. Finally, regardless of its potential application to future scholarship, those who delve into Ōkuma’s work will discover a vivid critical landscape that offers, in its presentation of literature as “something that dies,” a compelling vision of what Baudelaire termed the “circumstantial element” of beauty, which, the poet wrote, “we might like to call, successively or at one and the same time, contemporaneity, fashion, morality, passion.”

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80 Tsurumi 1978, p. 10.
81 For a discussion of the “synchronicity” of Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke and Walter Benjamin, see Sugamoto 2007.
82 Baudelaire 1972, p. 392.
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