In an aesthetically moving montage in his 1993 film Madadayo, Kurosawa Akira depicts his protagonist observing the passing of the seasons from his ramshackle hut as the Second World War comes to an end around him. The film is based on the life and writings of short story writer and essayist Uchida Hyakken (1889–1971), who despite having lost everything in the air raids that ravaged Tokyo, remained in the city for three years in a small shack next to the burnt-out ruins of his neighbor’s house. Hyakken had experienced the cultural flowering of modernization following the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, only to see the capital in ruins once again as American B-29s firebombed the city in 1945.

Hyakken’s life, like the cultural production of Japan’s pre-war era of the 1920s and 1930s, was fundamentally shaped by the experience of the modern (modan) and of war. These two historical moments of modernity and militarism have traditionally been understood as separate, with the shift happening in the early 1930s, as a decadent Western lifestyle gave way to fascism.¹ The modern celebrated the cosmopolitan, consumerism of the metropolitan dweller, while the war muted and eventually silenced artistic expression. Recently there has been a revival of interest in the cultural production of Japan’s modern era, with works of both high art and mass culture receiv-
ing overdue critical attention. With regard to the Asia-Pacific War, however, Japanese scholars continue to decry the lack of a literary response, and are quick to take writers to task for not speaking out against the government. Such paradigms have structured our understanding of modern Japanese cultural history, but they have also negated the work of writers who sought a literary path over the ideological one of nationalism. The separation of these two eras prevents us from seeing connections between the cultural and political responses to a pre-war modernity that stretched from the 1920s into the total war of the early 1940s. Uchida Hyakken is one such writer who, in always opting for the literary, successfully critiqued the discourse of both modernization and of the war. His writing provides a counter-narrative to this story of modern Japanese literature by complicating the history told within.

This book seeks to move beyond analytical structures that rendered Hyakken’s literature insignificant, in order to examine his writing as a means for establishing a critical language not couched in the strident vocabulary of prewar politics. Critics have traditionally applied a measuring stick of war responsibility, which credits only those leftists who served as ideological counterparts to the vehement rhetoric of the extreme right. But, in a writer like Hyakken, we see how an articulation of modernity took on political overtones as the modernity project became militarized in Japan’s interwar years. The fleeting experience of modernity in the 1920s provided Hyakken with a literary language for critiquing the rhetoric of immutability of the 1930s, which was used to fuel Japan’s war in Asia. Hyakken honed his critical language on cultural modernism, but since he did not adopt the openly ideological position of the left, his work does not merit recognition in the paradigm noted above. Yet, in his focus on both the extraordinary and the quotidian everyday, Hyakken countered the harsh realities of modernization and imperialism. He crafted an apt tool for critiquing Japan’s modernity project, while at the same time protecting literariness from the invasive dictates of ideology.
The analysis in this book is in no way meant to devalue the important role played by leftist writers who were imprisoned, tortured, and killed during the war years, nor to exculpate those who collaborated with the imperial project. Rather, it is a vehicle to appreciate the various literary reactions to the modernization of the 1920s, while at the same time, open up a literary space of protest, an alternate intellectual response to the era of militarism. In the process, we can come to recognize the literary contributions of a writer such as Uchida Hyakken, and the difficulty of the path negotiated by authors who sought to continue writing in the dangerous climate of the prewar. As an active writer in this era, Hyakken had to find a vehicle for expression to attend to the cultural and political changes around him. As David Harvey notes about such changes, the artist could “contest them, embrace them, try to dominate them, or simply swim within them, but the artist could never ignore them.” The options open to Hyakken were the unreservedly political language of the proletarian movement, the realism of Naturalism, the solipsistic narratives of the I-novel, and the experimental poetics of modernist movements such as the Surrealists. Hyakken, however, found an alternative idiom for creating a critique of modernity in its cultural and military forms, namely the language of the everyday. Like German theorists Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, Hyakken was able to “fabricate an ‘alternative’ aesthetic for attending to the experience of modern everyday life.” Like his modernist counterparts, he accomplished this by awakening an “acute consciousness of language.” Hyakken began experimenting with critical language as he responded to the new material realities and the crisis of representation that rendered prewar everyday life fleeting and ephemeral. Within his mundane, everyday linguistic settings, he makes the familiar unfamiliar, and returns to a time when modernity still retained an aura and the possibility for transformation and critique.

This book takes up Hyakken’s fiction and essays written during Japan’s prewar years, namely the imperial eras Taishō
(1912–26) and the first fifteen years of Shōwa (1926–89). I take a cultural studies approach in order to insert Hyakken’s writing into the prewar context and to describe the intersection of his literature with the material and discursive surroundings of the time: a consumer-oriented print culture; the popular entertainment of film; the capitalist and cultural force of an emergent middle class; a planned, yet sprawling metropolis; and the war machine of an expanding Japanese empire. In doing so, I am consciously breaking with a line of criticism that emphasizes the autobiographical aspects of Hyakken’s writing, an approach that has long been prevalent in Japanese literary studies. These critics laid the groundwork for future analyses by illuminating important connections between the author’s personal life and his literature, but an unfortunate side effect has been the circumscription of Hyakken to an individual, private realm detached from the era in which he wrote. Due to the biographical focus of this approach, Hyakken appears disengaged from the changes of modernity and occupying an apolitical position during the prewar; however, given the encompassing nature of the rising tide of militarism, such a position ceased to exist. As the government cracked down on the dangerous ideologies of modernism and liberalism, the personal became political.

In the following chapters, I seek to open up Hyakken’s work, and to find an alternate means for figuring prewar cultural history, especially with regards to the literary community’s critique of the war. Chapter 1 of the present study highlights his acute sensitivity to the forces of modernization that erased the unique voice of the author and permanently disabled our ability to communicate experience. Chapter 2 examines Hyakken’s turn to the zuihitsu, and the quotidian, ephemeral nature of this essay-like prose form. Through this genre, Hyakken questions the viability of the highly individual experience in an age when literature became subject to market forces. In Hyakken’s critique of the unique authorial voice, we can see a means for moving toward a critique of the war and the challenges encountered by writers no longer able to
speak an auratic text. Amidst the suppression of thought and speech in the 1930s, many authors sought and were granted cover from censorship in the chatty, unstructured *zuihitsu*.

Over the course of the 1930s, Hyakken moved from the literary to the national, as he used the discourse of the fleeting to critique the immutable rhetoric of the war machine. Set against the backdrop of rising militarism, Hyakken comments on modernity as an ideological movement supporting Japan’s military incursions on the continent. Chapter 3 discusses the ways in which his short stories—one about an old actuality film from the Russo-Japanese War era and another about the Yūshūkan war museum at the Yasukuni Shrine—reveal the shifting nature of this discourse. In Chapter 4, Hyakken turns to the constantly changing landscape of the city, *the* physical manifestation of modernity itself. Hyakken finds history buried in the city’s recesses, where time is discontinuous and echoes of the past intrude uninvited. Hyakken purposely returns to metropolitan sites of rupture to critique the myth of the eternal and the homogeneous national.

**Uchida Hyakken and Modern Japanese Literature**

Since Uchida Hyakken is little known in the English-speaking West—the first translations of his work were published in 2006—I include here a biographical sketch, which also serves to locate Hyakken within modern literary history. The sections that follow this biography examine Hyakken’s relationship to modernity and the conceptualization of the everyday in prewar Japan.

Hyakken has long enjoyed a cult following in Japan for his eclectic writing, both during his career and after his death in 1971. He is best known for the mysterious, dark fiction of his early short story collections and for his entertaining, lighthearted *zuihitsu*, but his writing is difficult to summarize under any one theme. The richness of his work is found in the wide variety of styles, genres, and venues encompassed over the course of his fifty-year career. This includes fiction, *zuihitsu*, war diaries, poetry, travelogues, and children’s stories. Stylisti-
cally speaking, he established a simple, modern idiom in his debut book *Realm of the Dead* (*Meido*, 1922) upon which he would continue to draw throughout his career. His work has been described as embodying a “Japaneseness,” and certainly the reedy riverbanks of his first book call to mind the landscapes of his native Okayama, as well as the eerie settings of the kabuki theater; however, the short sentences and overemphasis on the first person pronoun indicate the influence of Western literature. Hyakken’s play with language and fragmentary narrative echoes the trends of modernism, but his work does not begin to enter the highly experimental realm of the, at times, tortuous prose of some of his contemporaries. Hyakken exhibits characteristics of the avant-garde who sought to establish entirely new literary modes, while at the same time he is reactionary in his desire to return to a purity of language untainted by mass culture. It would be a mischaracterization to claim a central position in the literary canon for Hyakken, but an equal mistake to dismiss his writing as insignificant. From his position on the margins of elite literature, Hyakken eschewed unified narrative and used his fragmentary, brief, simple style as a means to critique the modern world around him and to express sentiments contrary to the mainstream rhetoric of the time.

Uchida Hyakken (see Figure 1) was born on May 29, 1889 in Okayama City to Uchida Hisayoshi and Mine, the proprietors of a family sake business. Named after his maternal grandfather, Eizō, he did not begin using the pen name Hyakken until his high school years (1908). Hyakken’s childhood memories of growing up in Okayama provide a backdrop for many of his early stories, and he took his pseudonym from the name of a local, seasonal river, along the banks of which he passed time as a youth. It was in Okayama that he also met his future wife Kiyoko, the younger sister of his high school friend Horino Yutaka. His memories of Okayama, however, are not all pleasant. His father died suddenly of beriberi heart disease when Hyakken was sixteen, and the family business folded. Yutaka also passed away at the age of twenty.
In addition to forming an Ur-landscape for Hyakken, Okayama was also the site of his budding interest in literature. While still a middle and high school student, Hyakken contributed prose and poetry to the youth journal *Chūgaku sekai* and its spin-off *Bunshō sekai*, as well as to newspapers and local publications, under a variety of pen names. He began reading Natsume Sōseki the same year his father died, starting...
with *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai wa neko de aru*, 1905-07) in 1905 and *Drifting in Space* (*Yōkyoshū*) in 1906. On the suggestion of his teacher, Hyakken sent his story “The Tale of an Old Cat” (“Rōbyō monogatari,” 1908) to this great modern writer in 1909, and much to his delight received a favorable reply.

This epistolary exchange would be followed up with a face-to-face interview when Hyakken moved to the capital in 1910 to study German literature at Tokyo Imperial University. Hyakken was a product of the modern schooling system instituted in the Meiji era (1868–1912), the Tokyo-centered model that brought graduates of the prestigious provincial higher schools into the capital for further education at the elite national universities. Like many of the aspiring writers of his generation, Hyakken would remain in Tokyo to seek his literary fortunes. He began attending the Thursday gatherings (Mokuyōkai) at Sōseki’s house where he met other disciples, many of whom went on to become well-known figures in Japanese literature, and he formed important literary friendships with writers Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Morita Sōhei.14

Sōseki passed away in 1916, but he continued to exert influence over Hyakken’s personal and professional life. Both Sōseki’s dark and mysterious “Ten Nights of Dreams” (“Yumejūja,” 1908) and *Drifting in Space*, as well as his humorous *The Young Master* (*Botchan*, 1906) and *I Am a Cat*, are considered models upon which Hyakken based such works as *Realm of the Dead* and *I Am a Cat: The Fake Version* (*Gansaku wagahai wa neko de aru*, 1950).15 Sōseki also posthumously provided Hyakken with employment as an editor and compiler of his collected works.16 After graduating in 1914, Hyakken needed a steady source of income to support his wife Kiyoko, whom he married in 1912, their two children, and his own mother and grandmother who had moved up from Okayama in 1915.17 Hyakken took on three jobs teaching German. His first was in 1916 at the prestigious Military Academy (Rikugun Shikan Gakkō), which produced elite officers for the Imperial Army.18 In 1918, Akutagawa recommended Hyakken for a job at the Yokosuka Naval Engineers Academy (Kaigun Kikan Gakkō),
where Akutagawa himself was teaching English. Their relationship teaching together is portrayed in Hyakken’s poignant and amusing story “The Bowler Hat” (“Yamataka bōshi”). Hyakken’s last academic post was at Hōsei University in 1920, the year his grandmother passed away.

Among Sōseki’s disciples, Hyakken was a literary late bloomer. His debut work Realm of the Dead did not appear until twelve years after he moved to the capital, when he was already age 33. The collection comprises eighteen stories, some as short as two pages, centering on an unnamed male protagonist. This character travels through eerie, disconnected landscapes inhabited by seemingly familiar faces from an inaccessible past. Try as he might, the protagonist is usually unable to retrieve his memories, but this does not keep him from following these guides to sideshows, abandoned riverbanks, mysterious towns, seashores, and temples. He stands by as the other characters fall prey to smallpox, get eaten by leopards, steal his wife, and undergo physical transformations. He himself is chased by a large turkey, reborn as a mythical beast, strangled by former lovers, and tricked by a fox. In the course of these encounters, he kills innocent children, meets an unborn brother, and nearly reunites with a dead father.

Postwar critics would later identify Realm of the Dead as the essence of Hyakken’s literature; however, fortune was not originally on Hyakken’s side. The work was published in February of 1922, but the foundry or pre-press proofs for Realm of the Dead burned in the fires of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. This disaster destroyed Tokyo and neighboring Yokohama, killing and injuring close to 250,000 people, and dealt a tremendous set-back to the publishing industry. Hyakken’s book had gone through an initial small-run printing of 500 volumes and had appeared on bookstore shelves. But with the destruction of the proofs, a reprint would not be possible until 1934, despite the efforts of well-known writers such as Akutagawa and Satō Haruo. In an oft-repeated sentiment, Uchida Michio laments that Hyakken missed his opportunity to have an impact on the Taishō literary scene because the
book was not reprinted earlier, and hence failed to circulate among important writers and critics.\textsuperscript{23}

Lack of exposure due to the limited copies of the initial print run was only part of Hyakken’s problem. The work had in fact been available to the reading public in more than one format; sixteen of the eighteen stories appeared in 
\textit{Shin-shōsetsu}, an established literary magazine in 1921, and Akutagawa and Morita Sōhei had published articles on Hyakken’s stories in the January issue, urging the literary community to read his work. According to Akutagawa, the real problem lay elsewhere. The stories had been read by some, but were not well received. Akutagawa indicates that, based on the reviews he has seen, the critics did not know what to make of Hyakken’s fiction. Akutagawa finds Hyakken’s stories interesting because Hyakken is not held prisoner to the trends of the literary establishment. However, this freedom may have been an important factor in the work’s demise. Akutagawa explains that the literary elite could not appreciate Hyakken’s originality because they were unable to think outside of superficial stylistics.\textsuperscript{24} Akutagawa was most likely referring to the fact that upon reading \textit{Realm of the Dead}, Hyakken’s contemporaries would have found neither a familiar realist narrative nor a thinly veiled biographical framework, dominant literary trends that had begun in the early years of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{25} Two questions then arise: what was Hyakken writing and how should he be situated within the literary context of early Taishō?

When Hyakken began writing his short stories in the 1910s, he stood witness to the disintegration of the Naturalist movement with its spare literary style that eschewed fabrication and technique. Naturalism, however, did not completely disappear; it gave way to the realistic, intensely personal, quotidian narratives of the I-novel. However, as the cataclysmic changes of modernity ruptured the cultural and physical landscape of the 1920s, realist narratives became arguably ill suited to represent the shifting perspectives of space, time, and cognition. New writers began to challenge the everyday reality represented in the transparent prose of Naturalism. Modernism’s preoccupa-
tion with language brought a resurgence of interest in literary creation. Modernist writers questioned the reality of the everyday, the constants of time and space, the logical unfolding of a linear narrative, and the convergence of writing and thought.

Any attempt to locate Hyakken within modernism is complicated by the fact that the process of defining the movement in Japan is fraught with difficulties. Despite the fact that the Japanese experienced similar disruptions on the level of material culture as did Europe and America, critics limit the aesthetic response to small avant-garde movements. Writers who experimented in this vein, such as Satō Haruo, are usually not included under this rubric, and other clearly modernist movements are excluded. Take, for example, the following observation by Miryam Sas: “Surrealism in Japan is written into literary history as a movement that never was, or trivialized as a movement that hardly was, invisible to the canonical, educated eye. . . . It never coalesced.” The designation of two other groups illustrates the varying definitions of modernism circulating in prewar Japan: the Newly Arisen Artistic School (Shinkōgeijutsu-ha) modernism is often equated with the appearance of modern life, or “attention to certain distilling [modern] objects” in fiction, while the writing of the New Sensationalist School (Shinkankaku-ha) is defined less by the appearance of this modern life, than by the linguistic and narrative strategies employed to react to and represent it. Such distinctions further complicate the definition of modernism and identification of its writers.

Hyakken does not fit within any of these camps, and it would be a misrepresentation to imply that he was associated even loosely with these self-proclaimed modernist groups. However, Japanese critics have hinted at Hyakken’s modernist tendencies. Itō Sei, known for his translations of James Joyce, wondered if the European modernist movements of Symbolism, Dadaism, and Surrealism were any newer or more experimental than Hyakken. Acclaimed writer Mishima Yukio also remarked that Hyakken’s story “Kudan” brings to mind Franz Kafka’s famous Metamorphosis. As Chapter 1 examines,
Hyakken certainly joined the modernists in questioning everyday reality, time, space, and linear narrative, and he used these and other means to attempt to return aura to his text.

Hyakken did not successfully produce an auratic text, and his failure to achieve literary distinction with *Realm of the Dead* irrevocably changed the course of his career, gradually turning him away from fiction. Despite his prodigious output—some 64 works—over the course of the 1920s, in journals such as the respected *Chūō kōron* and *Shinshōsetsu*, Hyakken would not establish himself as a writer until the publication of his second book in 1933, *Hyakkien's Miscellany (Hyakkien zuihitsu).* The first of many volumes of *zuihitsu*, this collection of 34 short works ranges in topic from childhood reminiscences to musings on airplanes, yo-yos, and facial hair; memories of the protagonist’s first and last meeting with his mentor, the great novelist, Natsume Sōseki; and seemingly more fictional stories about loan sharks and a life of poverty. The reader is hard pressed to find a central theme or character to unify the collection. Some stories are written in the first person, while others are in the third. The protagonist, often a bumbling intellectual, is referred to by a variety of names including Uchida and Hyakken, as well as the (Fujita) Hyakkien of the title, but he is equally as often unnamed or assigned seemingly unrelated names. There is no consistency in length or tone. Many of the *zuihitsu* are a scant few pages of essays or fragments, while others easily number in the double digits. The mood runs the gamut from the lighthearted and comic to the poignantly serious. The varied and disparate nature of the collection is indicative of the range of the genre itself. The lack of a strict narrative definition allowed for Hyakken to experiment with the *zuihitsu* and create a new form, a “novelistic *zuihitsu*” (*shōsetsuteki zuihitsu*) that offered new narrative possibilities in the 1930s with which Hyakken could critique elite fiction.

The formless, essay style of the *zuihitsu* had long been a part of Japanese premodern literature, with origins stretching back into the thirteenth century and earlier. *Zuihitsu* again came to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s as an alternate to the
narrative restrictions of the novel, and flourished as a literary mode and a cultural commodity. However the genre never acquired the distinct status of the novel. In 1935, writer and entrepreneur Kikuchi Kan excluded it from his influential literary award for “pure literature” (junbungaku), the Akutagawa Prize, and postwar critics wrote it out of the history books. A consideration of the zuihitsu’s status outside the literary system of distinction also allows for a brief, yet important, discussion of Hyakken’s place in the literary hierarchy and the relationship between high art and mass culture.

Prewar literature is often described as the battle between the highbrow junbungaku and the lowbrow “popular” or “mass literature” (taishū bungaku). This distinction between high art and mass culture, what Andreas Huyssen has termed the “Great Divide,” is one way to think about Hyakken’s position within modern literature.35 Hyakken’s writing secured him a place in the modern canon—but not a central one, as illustrated from his placement in anthologies of modern literature, sharing volumes with other lesser-known authors.36 Yet, the notion of canonization masks issues that fall between this great divide, especially in relation to the zuihitsu. Hyakken is most comfortably placed on the side of the elite, along with writers such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and others of Sōseki’s circle. His decision to specialize in zuihitsu excluded him from the distinction of the Akutagawa Prize, but many elite authors wrote and profited from the zuihitsu. Akutagawa’s zuihitsu headlined Bungei shunjū from its inception in 1923 until his death in 1927. The zuihitsu sold better and paid higher manuscript fees than elite fiction, and it challenged seemingly impenetrable distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow literature.

Despite the appreciation of the genre in Japan—zuihitsu are still being written—the mechanisms of pure literature did not allow it to be granted recognition. The canonization process is one that defines literature as shōsetsu (fiction), and effectively marginalizes other generic forms. Chapter 2 argues that the zuihitsu was too close to market forces to be included in any definition of elite writing. Its distance from fiction (elitewrit-
ing) can be seen in both the layout and advertising strategies of prewar journals. *Zuihitsu* headlined *Bungei shunjū*, which consequently meant that they were not included in the *sōsaku* (creative writing/fiction) section, and Kikuchi Kan marketed the writing as a side course to the regular, more intellectual, fare found in other magazines.

Hyakken’s engagement with the *zuihitsu* negatively affected his chance of acquiring literary distinction, but it put him in a position to publish in both elite and mass venues, as was common for writers in an era defined by market forces. But his contact with mass culture was not limited to writing. His semi-fictional essays were adapted for the cinema in the late 1930s, when the film industry was mining literature for screenplays in an attempt to raise the level of this relatively new genre. The resulting art film (*bungei eiga*) Roppa’s *The Pale Faced Professor* (*Roppa no Hoojiro sensei*, 1939) was marketed on the star power of Furukawa Roppa, a famous actor from the popular vaudevillian theatre. This film is one such hybrid which crosses the great divide by combining the high art of literature with the mass culture of film. Although Hyakken consented to the project, this brush with mass culture left him disappointed. The film was a success, but he felt his writing had been cheapened by the transfer to this mass medium. He decided to rededicate himself to achieving a level of pure expression (*junsui bunshō*) that can only be captured through the act of reading. In a move characteristic of modernism, Hyakken’s retreat to the realm of pure language exhibits the elite’s “anxiety of contamination.” Unlike others who actively and willingly engaged with mass culture, such as Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s ventures into the film industry, Hyakken was ultimately unwilling to give up control over the word and his unique authorial voice, even though he realized it was something he had already lost.

Hyakken did not, however, abandon fiction, as seen in his publishing record from the 1930s. The success of *Hyakkien’s Miscellany* secured a reprint of *Realm of the Dead* with Iwanami, an established publishing house. The rate of publication for these years is impressive: *Triumphant March into Port Arthur*. 

*Introduction*
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(Ryojun nyūjōshiki, February 1934), Hyakkien’s Miscellany Continued (Zoku Hyakkien zuihitsu, May 1934), The King’s Back (Osama no senaka, May 1934), Hyakkien’s Book of Haiku (Hyakkien haiku chō, June 1934), The Stringless Koto (Mugenkin, October 1934), The Crane (Tsuru, February 1935), Hyakkien’s Diary (Hyakkien nikkii chō, April 1935), The Bumpy Road (Dekoboko michi, October 1935), Hyakkien’s Diary Continued (Zoku Hyakkien nikkii chō, February 1936), Rapture (Uchoten, July 1936), A Busy Houseboy (Isorō sōsō, June 1937), New Rain Miscellany (Zuihitsu shin’u, October 1937), The Northern Sea (Hokumei, December 1937), Bridge on the Hill (Oka no hashi, June 1938), Kien’s Chatter (Kien ōdan, February 1939), and Chrysanthemum Rain (Kiku no ame, October 1939). This list encompasses a wide variety of fiction, including eleven collections of zuihitsu, a book of poetry, two diaries, one collection of fictional short stories, one novel, and even a book of illustrated fairy tales. The various collections of zuihitsu and fictional works include upwards of 30 to 40 stories apiece.

The great upswing in Hyakken’s market value between the 1920s and 1930s is evident in the following advertisement for an anthology titled The Banquet (Daienkai), which appeared in the front page of the August 1935 issue of the journal Arabesuku, a special edition featuring ten essays on Hyakken:

One of a kind, a writer without rival in all of Japanese literature—Who can compare to Uchida Hyakken? Parallels can be drawn with [Edgar Allan] Poe and [E. T. A.] Hoffmann, but can Hyakken be so readily summed up? Certainly not! For isn’t Hyakken more than just literature? One who eludes even the conceptual grasp of criticism—This is Uchida Hyakken!

This may appear to be overblown copy, but the existence of the advertisement and the reference it makes to the Western authors speak to Hyakken’s status. Poe and Hoffman were well known to the literate prewar reader, and any favorable comparison with these great authors was a recognizable commercial and literary seal of approval. The copy language was supported by publishing statistics. By the 1940s, Hyakken’s work was being printed in runs of 9,000 to 10,000 copies, quite a change from the limited 500 edition runs of his early collections.
In terms of Hyakken’s personal life, however, the decade of the 1930s held some upsets. In 1934, Hyakken left his teaching job at Hōsei University, along with fellow Sōseki disciple Nogami Toyoichirō, as a result of the well-publicized “Hōsei Disturbance” (Hōsei sodō).40 This incident has been described as “one of the most disturbing examples of campus unrest in Japanese university history.”41 It would end both Hyakken’s academic career and his friendship with Morita Sōhei, another Sōseki acquaintance who had also entered Hōsei’s employment in 1920. Sōhei and Hyakken never spoke after this falling out, and Hyakken only broke the silence after Sōhei’s death on December 14, 1949 with The True Story of Sōhei (Jissetsu Sōheiki, 1950). Although the disturbance strained Hyakken’s personal life, it was not without its positive aspects: namely, freeing him to pursue his writing.

The same year Hyakken resigned from Hōsei, his second short story collection, Triumphant March into Port Arthur, was published. In many ways, the collection is a continuation of Realm of the Dead, as Hyakken noted in his preface:

Of the twenty-nine stories in this collection, the first seven have a story-telling quality to them, while the remaining twenty-two are short pieces similar in tone to those in my previous book Realm of the Dead. After ten long years, I finally finished Realm of the Dead. The book was ready to be published, but in that year Tokyo was struck by terrible misfortune. The great earthquake and accompanying fires completely destroyed the foundry plates, causing the book to suffer the unfortunate fate of going out of print. For the next ten years, I gnawed at my pen and ripped through paper, and somehow after piecing together this mere collection, I was lucky enough to receive the favor of a publisher. When the book was finally about to be printed, I reflected back on the path of writing and found it to be far too long and precipitous.42

Over a decade later, the influence of Hyakken’s misfortune with Realm of the Dead is apparent, as is the new direction of his zuihitsu. The preface is signed: “From the House of Hyakkien.” The similarity to the earlier collection that Hyakken refers to can be found in themes like doubling and vision that Hyakken
began to experiment with in *Realm of the Dead*. These are re-
prised in a number of stories, including “The Tiny Double” (*Waijin*), in which a miniature version of the protagonist appears. This use of doubling is most notable in “The Reflection” (*Eizō*), which describes the protagonist’s nightly en-
counters with his own reflection outside the glass door to his bedroom. The face appears repeatedly, and as it becomes bruised and discolored, so does that of the protagonist, who tries desperately to find a means of escape. Afraid of his own reflection, the protagonist avoids mirrors and glass, only to meet his doppelganger again at night. In the last scene, this “reflection” enters the room, and the protagonist, frozen in fear, is unable to speak or escape as his double leans over him as if to say something. Other stories include a lament for an old lover who dies, a colleague who commits suicide, and various others with human-animal transformations. However the content is so varied as to be difficult to capture under any one theme. Two of the most noteworthy stories reference the war, and are discussed in the next section.

Hyakken continued to write and acquire recognition for his fiction and *zuihitsu*. A six volume collected works titled *The Complete Hyakken Miscellany* (*Zenshū Hyakken zuihitsu*) was pub-
lished between November 1936 and April 1937. Although this is primarily a *zuihitsu* series, it included stories from the fict-
ional *Realm of the Dead* and *Triumphant March into Port Arthur*, testifying to the importance of these works in his oeuvre.

In 1939 Hyakken took a commission with the Japan Mail Steamer Corporation (Nippon Yūsen Kaisha) as a consultant on mail correspondence, records, declarations, and the like. He would work there for the next six and a half years, and through this job would travel to Taiwan in November 1939 on a journey that formed the basis for his *Ship Dreams* (*Fune no yume*, 1941). Although he no longer held a formal affiliation with Hōsei University, he continued to meet with students, in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of Sōseki’s Mokuyōkai. Two of his disciples, Hirayama Saburō and Nakamura Takeshi, would visit him from their jobs with the Japanese Government Rail-
ways, and his friendship and future train trips with Hirayama form the central narrative in the *Idiot Train* (*Ahō ressha*) series.

Travel also features in *Lightning at Sea* (*Oki no inazuma*, 1942) and *The Road Back* (*Modori michi*, 1944). Yet despite his propensity for excursions both abroad and within Japan, Hyakken chose not to pull up his roots at a time when many were fleeing the aerial bombardment of Tokyo; he remained in the city for the duration of the war. Hyakken’s house burned down in the B-29 air raids of May 26, 1945, the second of two strikes staged two days apart that turned the city to ashes. He moved into a three-mat hut on his neighbor’s property, and would spend the next three-odd years living there with his companion Satō Koi until a new house was built in May 1948. His memories of life in these Spartan, cramped quarters would be published after the war in the form of a *zuihitsu* collection entitled *The New Account of My Hut* (*Shinhōjōki*, 1947)—a play on Kamo no Chōmei’s thirteenth-century classic—and in two diaries, *Tokyo Burning* (*Tōkyō shōjin*, 1953), and the posthumously edited *Hyakkien’s Postwar Diary* (*Hyakkien sengo niki*, 1982).43

Acting as a counterpoint to these somber diaries, Hyakken began serializing his humorous parody *I Am a Cat: The Fake Version* in the April 1949 issue of the journal *Shōsetsu shinchō*.44 The following year he celebrated his 61st birthday with the inaugural “Maada kai,” Hyakken’s annual birthday party later made famous through Kurosawa Akira’s film *Madadayo* (1993).45 The year 1951 saw the first installment of his popular *Idiot Train* series, entitled “The Idiot Special Express” (“Tokubetsu ahō ressha”), also printed in *Shōsetsu shinchō*.46 The book *The Idiot Train* would appear in three volumes in 1952, 1953, and 1956, the first of these coinciding with celebrations for the eightieth anniversary of the Japanese National Railways, during which Hyakken was made honorary head of Tokyo Station for a day.

Other highlights from the 1950s and 1960s include his *zuihitsu* collection *Nora* (*Nora ya*, 1957) named after his beloved runaway cat. Appended to this diary style story are copies of the reward signs Hyakken posted when the cat disappeared. Hyakken’s affection for animals featured in a number of works, notably
the cats in *Nora* and *Kuru, Is That You?* (*Kuru ya omae ka*, 1963), and the birds in the *Hyakkien’s Miscellany* essays. As testimony to Hyakken’s postwar fame, his 1933 *Hyakkien’s Miscellany* was reprinted in *Shōsetsu shinchō* in monthly installments from January 1959 through September 1970. Hyakken continued writing zuihitsu, producing individual pieces and collections up until his death in 1971. He wrote a total of 32 volumes of zuihitsu, including his last book, *Gates Close at Dusk* (*Nichibotsu heimon*, 1971), which was published on April 15, five days before he died at the age of 81.

In recognition of Hyakken’s contribution to literature, the Japan Art Academy (Nihon Geijutsuin) nominated him for membership in 1967. Hyakken, however, declined via a short memo basically stating that he did not feel like joining. His curmudgeonly declaration was featured on television and in the press, where his words were shortened to the now famous quotation, “iya dakara, iya da!” or roughly translated, “I said no and I meant it!”

Hyakken published roughly a volume a year over his fifty-year career, and at times he was even more prolific. He fulfilled many of the prerequisites for a modern author: as a youth he contributed to influential literary journals such as *Bunshō sekai*; he allied himself with one of the giants of modern literature, Natsume Sōseki; as a member of Sōseki’s circle he mixed with well-known contemporaries such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke; he held a prestigious university position; he had a special issue of a literary journal dedicated to him; he had his fiction reprinted and anthologized numerous times; and finally, he was recognized toward the end of his life for his literary achievements by the Art Academy.

**Prewar Modernity: Hyakken Responds**

Baudelaire famously characterized the experience of modernity as one of “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable.” Baudelaire’s observations have been echoed in the works of modern writers and thinkers, as well as in scholarship on the
experience of modernity in the West. In the case of Japan, the temporal compression of the modernization process does not allow for ready comparison with movements in pre- and interwar Europe. Consider, for example, the accelerated evolutionary schema in which modern Japanese literature originates in the late 1890s and is followed by the appearance of modernism a mere two decades after modern literature itself took root. However, Japan did indeed experience the transient and fleeting, most markedly in the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s. This sense of contingency manifested itself in material change on a scale not seen in the first era of modernity, the Meiji period: industrialization, mechanization, urbanization, demographic shifts, urban restructuring, commercialization of the cultural market, emergence of the middle class and the masses, bourgeois consumerism, and rapid growth in systems of communication and transportation. Unlike in the Meiji era, this societal modernization, the phenomenon of “modern life” (modan raifu), which in many senses meant a modern, Western life, reached beyond the elite and filtered into the daily activities of the average urban dweller. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 provided a physical equivalent to the philosophical break with history, and allowed for new perceptions of reality. These material and representational shifts wrought changes in the cultural responses of artists in this era. Writers reacted to the tremendous fragmentation, chaos, and fleeting sense of the present, a part and parcel of the rupture with history. It was against this ever-shifting basis of everyday modern life, this crisis of representation and language, that artists formed their aesthetic.

For a writer such as Uchida Hyakken, modernization meant first and foremost a change in the very nature of writing itself. Indeed, the first two chapters of this book are primarily concerned with literary issues. Any discussion of prewar literature must address the modern printing system and its impact on literature and culture at large. But there is an earlier, and perhaps more significant, event that defined literature for Hyakken: the replacement of woodblock printing with movable type as
Introduction

the new standard around 1890. Kōno Kensuke describes the appeal of the printed word and the fetishistic attachment that young boys had for early printing sets. However, the novelty of the printed word soon disappeared as the sheer volume of printed works increased. Reading patterns also changed from detailed and discriminate to shallow and indiscriminate. Movable-type texts were no longer such objects of fascination, nor could they recreate the particularistic relationship between reader and text found in block-printed works. Hyakken was one such boy with an attachment to early printing sets, and this nostalgia would inform his concept of the auratic text.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Hyakken longed to reproduce the unique manuscript qualities of the block-printed word. He attempted to return to the aura of such early texts through the use of unusual formatting and other literary devices in his first book, *Realm of the Dead*. However, he was not able to make such a return, and his textual experiments were not understood or appreciated by the arbiters of literature. This is not surprising given the qualitative changes in the “capital-intensive publishing industry of the twentieth century”; namely, an increase in the volume of printed texts, a shift to indiscriminate reading patterns, and a commodification of literature. As Miriam Silverberg notes, this was “most definitely the dawn of the era of mechanical reproduction.” With the rapid development and expansion of the industry after the Great Kantō Earthquake, writing became a cultural commodity and writers had to respond to the market forces of print capitalism. This scale of commodification increased dramatically with the *enpon* or one-yen book, starting with Kaizōsha’s 1926 subscription series, *Complete Works of Contemporary Japanese Literature* (*Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū*). This and other series, based on the idea of the Harvard Classics, made literature available to the non-specialist, who could not afford to purchase the collected works of individual authors. This new commodity—a multivolume, affordable, subscription series—revolutionized and modernized the print industry, bringing it into the age of mass production and full-fledged advertising. It also allowed writers to
Writing had become a lucrative venture, but the production of auratic texts became difficult in this new system. The artist had to produce a unique work for purchase by a bourgeois reader whom he often held in contempt. Hyakken reacted negatively to the commodification of literature in which aura was lost in the mass production of textual material, now reduced to an ephemeral consumer product.

If Hyakken was lamenting these effects in the early 1920s, any hope of returning to a previous system was dashed by the end of the decade. Middlebrow readers were purchasing books as accoutrements to their new modern lives, and the myth of authorial control had finally been shattered in the face of undeniable market forces. Hyakken was not successful in restoring aura to his text, but he did recreate the disorienting experience of modernity in *Realm of the Dead*. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hyakken’s protagonist is caught in the eternal repetition of the present, and without recourse to historical narrative, cannot make sense of his experience. Without access to the past, neither can he accumulate that experience in order to translate it into meaning; hence the act of remembering is traumatic. This nostalgia for a lost past intrudes onto the present, creating doubles and fluxes in time, further blurring the line between reality and illusion, original and copy. The character’s search for the unity of narrative leads him to folklore, but the certainty of tradition remains beyond his grasp. Living in a distracted mode of perception, he is unable to see and interpret his own actions. Like his characters, Hyakken’s anxiety as a modern writer is palpable in *Realm of the Dead*. Just as his protagonist is overwhelmed and silenced, Hyakken at this stage of his career was unable to see the possibility for a critical articulation of modernity that could lead to a transformation of the world around him. The darkness of this vision resonates with the tone of his stories.

In a shift away from the bleakness of *Realm of the Dead*, Hyakken began writing *zuihitsu*. This new genre provided him with a light-hearted literary mode unfettered by the narrative
restrictions of the novel, but more importantly, with a new idea of literature itself. In his zuihitsu, Hyakken plays with the concept of an auratic text by mocking the very seriousness of the I-novel authors who clung to their unique identity in an age of endless copies. On one level, Hyakken’s zuihitsu can be seen as his reconciliation with the new role of literature, one that celebrated the materiality of modern life, much like the modernism of the Newly Arisen Artistic School.

It would not be an overstatement to argue that Hyakken’s success with the zuihitsu was predicated upon print culture and its role in the creation of a “modern life” for the emergent, middle-class, middlebrow reader. Print culture became one means of selling a modern cultured lifestyle characterized by Western middle-class glamour and efficiency. The zuihitsu was in many ways defined by this material side of modernism, or as it was termed in Japan, seikatsu. Modern life was sold in department stores and films, in everyday products such as fountain pens and cosmetics, and in the print culture of advertisements, journals, and books. Kikuchi Kan, editor and creator of Bungei shunjū, intentionally marketed the light, easy-to-read zuihitsu to on-the-go readers seeking to live this modern lifestyle. Zuihitsu was the quintessentially modern form of print culture, providing a sense of both shock and intimacy for the reader. These chatty unstructured texts fit perfectly the life of the modern urban dweller, who could consume his magazine on the train while commuting into work or while relaxing at home with the family in their new culture house (bunka jūtaku).

In these zuihitsu, Hyakken questions our ability as modern subjects to speak from an individual, auratic position not tied to a fleeting present. If such a position was difficult in the 1920s, as authorial voice was lost to the machine of capitalism, it would become impossible over the course of the 1930s, as modern consumer subjects became imperial subjects and authorial voice was silenced by the dictates of propaganda. Despite these forces and his initial disheartenment by the failure of Realm of the Dead, Hyakken discovered the potential of writing and truly developed his critical language in his writings on the
war. Chapters 3 and 4 examine his turn from the literary to the national as the once ephemeral nature of discourse became immutable.

Government censorship in the prewar attempted to re-establish control over the discursive to serve the militarizing state. The war itself can be seen as another crisis of representation and language. The rhetoric of the war that dominated life in 1930s Japan is often seen as a rejection of the decadent, Western-inspired, materialist modernism captured in the catch phrase “erotic grotesque nonsense.” However, we need not see the war machine as a rejection of modernity; in fact, the discourse of war represents the second half of Baudelaire’s equation, namely the eternal and immutable. From intellectual movements to the culture industry to political rulers, there was a visible attempt to create historical continuity to mask the rupture with the past rendered by modernity. The Return to Japan (Nihon Kaiki) movement advocated a return to a timeless past of ethnic Japanese values, a fatherland of ancient memory. The government sought to erase the era of 1920s modernity, as they recycled discourse of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) to rally support for the Manchurian Incident (1931) and Japan’s subsequent incursions into Asia. The relativism of modernism—a reaction to the tremendous fragmentation of space, place, time, and language—became dangerous, both politically and intellectually, to the myth of nationalism and its immutable “Japanese” character.

The force that had the greatest impact on daily life in the 1930s was undoubtedly the war. Although the era is often labeled the “prewar” or alternately “interwar,” these are misleading since Japan’s Fifteen Years War (Jūgonen sensō), which climaxed in World War II, began in 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria. The concept of nationhood reached beyond Japan’s geographical borders to create an empire in a physical and imaginative sense. Empire became ever-present in everyday life in the 1930s, as Japan cast its imperialist net wider and wider over China and its other Asian neighbors. The average Japanese citizen’s contact with the war was not limited to draftees
and returning soldiers. War permeated popular culture in the form of theme products: food, toys, books, films, theater productions, music, exhibits, and lecture series. War became both a tool of government propaganda and a lucrative cultural product. Literature was not immune; anything referencing wars and militarism, past or present, was either censored or read against this new context of 1930s empire.

Hyakken’s second book, *Triumphant March into Port Arthur*, was one such item read against the imperial context. The title of this collection is a slogan from the Russo-Japanese War that had been rehabilitated by the Japanese state to justify its takeover of Manchuria in 1931. Revamped, heroic images of this old battle, and of a valiant General Nogi Maresuke, became new tools of government propaganda and media sensationalism. The Ōshūkan war museum at Yasukuni Shrine, the central shrine for commemorating Japanese war dead, was being rebuilt, and in a nod to the new rhetoric of pan-Asianism, the new building was constructed in a traditional Japanese gable-roof style. This was an erasure of the Western symbolism found in the architecture of the Meiji era structure built to commemorate those who died in the Restoration. The museum received new attention as soldiers lost in service to the Emperor’s new war on the Asian continent were returned home over the course of the 1930s. Government propaganda was successful in suturing the ruptures of modernity so as to create an unbroken historical memory stretching beyond earlier battles in Asia back to an essential Japanese identity.

Hyakken shared his private grief over the war in a zuihitsu titled “The Nose” (“Hana,” 1938), that he wrote for the *Tokyō Asahi shinbun*. In the essay he recalls hearing of his former student’s death: “When I heard the report of second lieutenant Ōhashi Chōichirō’s death in battle, I remembered the evening twilight at the Yasukuni Shrine some fifteen or sixteen years ago. Chō had come back to Yasukuni, now a spirit of the fatherland. I imagine him wandering out to the sumo ring toward the back of the shrine, searching for fragments of his childhood dreams” (4: 83).
Hyakken refers to the time when he walked home through the shrine with two students (Chō and another boy) who played in the sumo ring while he watched. It was dusk and the ring faintly glowed amidst the approaching darkness. Hyakken watched the boys until they were told to leave by the military police. In remembering his former student, Hyakken calls him a *gokoku no oni* (the spirit of a person who died defending the fatherland), a patriotic term bereft of the ambiguity in his other stories. Critics have argued that Hyakken never engages the ideological side of his student’s death or of the shrine, and reminisces only on a personal level.62

Hyakken was, however, well aware of the rising militarism and the concurrent discourse of the eternal; he taught at the prestigious Military Academy, and his job at Hōsei University located him just behind Yasukuni Shrine. Hyakken was also one of the few writers who refused to join the Japanese Literature Patriotic Association (Nihon Bungaku Hōkokukai) founded in May 1942. This was the most successful of the government’s organizations to mobilize writers for the imperial cause, as noted in the group’s charter: the goal was to “establish our world view as writers of the Empire.”63 Although, as Jay Rubin notes, one had to be a member in order to write and publish during these years, Hyakken was able to put out three books between 1942 and 1945: *Lightning at Sea*, *The Road Back*, and a book of poetry titled *Hyakkien’s Haiku* (*Hyakkien haiku*, 1943). This may have been due to Hyakken’s use of the *zuihitsu*, a form that was not seen to possess the critical potential of literature. The suppression of thought and speech in wartime Japan led many authors to seek out the *zuihitsu*, and critics such as Tosaka Jun and Miki Kiyoshi debated the value of the form in the 1930s.64

Hyakken addresses the issue of national and personal memory in his short stories, where he critiques the rhetoric of war as a discourse of shifting symbols and an erasure of the history of modernization. Chapter 3 of the present study examines two stories that reference the war. The first takes up the issue of memory through an actuality film from the Russo-Japanese
Introduction

War. The real General Nogi is replaced by his blurry, celluloid, commodified image in this film that lacks a cohesive, heroic narrative. The second story describes a nightmarish visit to the Yūshūkan, now rendered a fleeting specter haunted by dead soldiers with eerie yellow skin. Unlike Hyakken’s earlier works in which characters were unable to access the past, this story shows the reader how that past has been recreated and recast to meet new and different needs. He demonstrates that those memories are malleable, subjective, and ambiguous—a message that would have been dangerous in wartime Japan, where the government had little tolerance for indeterminacy. Hyakken’s use of the fragmentary and ephemeral may have allowed him to evade the censors, but looking beyond the lack of openly political language, his antiwar message is clear.

In 1938, as the war raged and Japan expanded its empire in Asia, Hyakken published a collection of vignettes on the city titled “Tokyo Diary” (“Tōkyō nikki”). What may seem like an unusual topic given the national context turned out to be another opportunity for Hyakken to counter the increasingly vehement rhetoric of the war. In focusing on the city, Hyakken returns to the site of prewar modernity. Tokyo underwent fundamental changes that shaped it into a prototype of the present day metropolis, integrating monuments, buildings, and plazas into the city design. The cities were modernizing so rapidly that they were quickly leaving behind the traditional ways of the countryside. Taishō was the age of the city and the era of urban planning that wrought the largest changes on the local landscape, specifically on Tokyo, the cultural, literary, and political capital. New concepts entered the local language as urban planning (tōshi keikaku) transformed everyday urban spaces. The 1920s were also the era of the “city story” (tōshi shōsetsu), in which well-known landmarks, neighborhoods, and prominent features of Tokyo’s new urban reality commonly appeared, as the city became an oft-used setting. This urban literature, however, was lost to the canon as writers turned away from the city in the 1930s and denounced their earlier fiction, some even deleting these stories from their col-
lected works. As military concerns took over, the national focus shifted from the local to the war overseas, and the city largely disappeared as an idea in Japan.

Hyakken’s “Tokyo Diary” must be placed within the context of rising militarism and nationalism. As argued in Chapter 4, Hyakken’s return to the city is working against the backdrop of the conservative discourse of the Return to Japan movement that denied the national identity found in the modern city and promoted a return to an immutable, often rural, Japanese past. Hyakken refutes the ideology of this movement as his protagonist visits important sites of modernity, capitalism, and imperialism concentrated in the high city: Tokyo Station, the Marunouchi Building, the Imperial Palace. He conducts a literary archeology to uncover alternate histories and strata of memory buried within the urban. Like his conservative counterparts in the Return to Japan movement, Hyakken is also engaging in the production of memory. However, for Hyakken, this memory is temporary and multivalent; it does not offer the unambiguous rhetoric of a return to a Japanese past somehow untainted by Western modernity. Hyakken demonstrates time and again that such an immutability does not exist. Rather, Hyakken’s memory leads us back to the city, the locus of Western modernity and an important center for the modernization reforms that brought the nation into the new century. He leads us back to the very site that the Return to Japan intellectuals assailed as a site of loss of traditional identity.

As the war intensified, the government became more and more successful at bringing public discourse under its control, and literature and literary journalism were grinding to a halt. The government succeeded in shutting down the major liberal magazines Chūō kōron and Kaizō, and although literature in all forms continued to be written, literary concerns were forced to serve the militarist agenda. After Japan’s defeat, writers struggled to come to terms with their complicity with the war. Hyakken escaped these debates, due to a number of factors. Unlike well-known writers such as Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Nagai Kafū, who opted for silence or a “literature of nos-
talgia,” Hyakken did publish during the war. His decision to write zuihitsu may have spared him censorship, given the lightweight, non-intellectual (apolitical) reputation of the genre. However, his work from the 1930s does carry a clear critique of the state—a critique through a return to a past that neither endorsed the national rhetoric nor posed an immediately recognizable threat to it.

Critical Possibilities in the Modern Everyday

Hyakken’s language of protest is couched within a mundane, everyday reality that references the past through outmoded images such as old newsreels, magic lanterns, and monuments from the early days of modern urban planning. He takes the reader back to a time when these objects had an aura, a sense of novelty and awe. In doing so, Hyakken returns a magic to his texts and creates an environment in which the familiar becomes unfamiliar, therefore allowing for the possibility of transformation or critique. This possibility of finding the extraordinary with the ordinary happens within the context of the everyday.

The uncontrollable disruption of the present by the spectral past, seen in Hyakken’s texts, takes the forms of memories, ghosts, and doubles. Lost history returns in a disturbingly fragmented, uninvited form. This characteristic of Hyakken’s fiction, concentrated in Realm of the Dead, has been read as the evocation of a dreamlike state emanating from the author’s diaries. The failed reunion of the protagonist with his father in the story “Realm of the Dead” is indicative of Hyakken’s losing his own father, or metaphorically, his mentor Sōseki. This rubric of dreams weds an autobiographical reading of Hyakken’s work with aspects of the fantastic.

The focus on the dreamlike quality of Hyakken’s work began as early as 1921 when Akutagawa Ryūnosuke extolled the virtues of Hyakken’s writing through a favorable comparison with their mentor: “Unlike Natsume Sōseki’s ‘Ten Nights of Dreams,’ these stories don’t merely pretend to be dreams, but are written exactly as if they were dreamt.” Postwar
critics continued this line of analysis, describing Hyakken’s fiction as a “dream novel” (mugen shōsetsu) and a “series of dreams” (yume no keiretsu) from which the protagonist can never awaken.72 Certainly the nonlinear narratives, sudden scene changes, and appearance of unexplainable phenomena, such as the return of the dead or of the unborn, doppelgangers, and mythical beasts, could fit a dream pattern. The literary inheritance of texts such as Sōseki’s “Ten Nights of Dreams” inclined critics to interpret the events in Hyakken’s short stories as emanating from the realm of nocturnal visions.73

But to confine the analysis to the dreamlike is to disconnect Hyakken’s work from the realities of the prewar era, and to prevent the emergence of a critique of modernity and the state. Rather than discuss Hyakken’s stories in terms of real and unreal, fantasy and dreams, we can utilize the idea of the everyday, specifically focusing on the dialectical nature of the term, which signifies both the quotidian existence of daily life regulated by capitalist modernity, and “the everyday as Other—as that which is outside, that which is omitted or escapes from the regimentation of the modern world.”74 This paradigm illuminates the significance of Hyakken’s temporal disruptions, his focus on the present, and the irretrievability of the past. It also accounts for his use of doubles, repetition, and fragmentation. We can see the unusual in Hyakken’s texts emerging from a mundane linguistic world.

The concept of the everyday allows for connections to be made across Hyakken’s literary styles that have traditionally been regarded as disconnected and unrelated. Hyakken’s fiction and zuihitsu exemplify the double nature of the everyday; they are representations of the everyday as quotidian, and at the same time are unregimented, heterogeneous narrative developments outside of standard literary modes. It also creates a bridge between Hyakken’s writing and prewar culture; both literary and public discourse in the 1920s and 1930s characterized the everyday or “everydayness” (nichijōsei) as a shifting notion, a doubleness created through the experience of living in multiple modernities, multiple realities. For prewar Japanese,
the everyday represented both halves of Baudelaire’s equation: a constantly shifting lived reality and an idealized immutable that only existed in the past or in some unforeseen future. Hyakken represents this duality in the textual fabric of his work. The following chapters examine these transformative possibilities of the everyday in Hyakken via the local Japanese context of the prewar and the lens of Western theory.

The prewar period was characterized by an “overwhelming, almost overdetermined, interest in and enthusiasm for everydayness.” The use of the term “everyday,” however, was paradoxical. It represented the site of modernity, as well as a means of apprehending and critiquing modernity and culture itself. It was the key term in prewar debates over the content of daily life and the need to identify cultural purpose and meaning. The concern for it was shared by modernist avant-garde and modern consumer alike. The meaning of the everyday was tightly bound to the notion of culture, and remained an open site of contestation. The term was used by a range of critical and commercial voices without any agreement on its meaning. It was within this very ambiguity that the discourse was formed.

From the viewpoint of material culture, everyday modern life was marketed to the public through Hollywood films and print culture, in the department stores and on the city streets. Citizens negotiated the modernity of daily life at their jobs, at home, and in their leisure activities. Ethnographers Kon Wajirō and Gonda Yasunosuke envisioned culture as a series of creative everyday practices. They located potential in the everyday consumer culture rather than in an unchanging national character. These men sought to reunite the everyday with the reality of daily life. Along with Kon and Gonda, other critics examined the “primacy of the performative present.” Tosaka Jun saw the potential for critical thinking in the zuihitsu as thought itself became “quotidianized.” Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke studied the relationship between new technology and the experience of everyday life, looking at the ways in which science mediated mass culture.
In contrast, philosophers Watsuji Tetsurō, Kuki Shūzō, folklorist Yanagita Kunio, and the Japan Romantic School (Nihon Roman-ha) did not see the everyday as an ever-changing present, the now of immediate experience, the lived moment. Rather, they desired to place the everyday outside of “contemporary phenomenal life” or to reject the experience of modernity all together. For these conservative thinkers, the everyday was a past of tradition that could be stabilizing or binding, but that had fixed conceptions of community and culture used to check the consumptive production of the present.

As this modern life clashed with traditional practices and values, thinkers began to question its authenticity as “Japanese culture.” Amidst the militarist climate of the 1930s, culture took on the dangerous connotations of liberalism, and the state sought to control its harmful influence. Various attempts were made to rein in culture and control its excesses. Debates raged in the 1920s and 1930s over the meaning of culture and its use as both a philosophical concept and a consumer marketing device to sell everything from houses and lifestyles to fountain pens. Everydayness was the key term in prewar culture debates. It is not an overstatement to say that in Japan, daily life became the site of ideological contestation attempting to define cultural purpose.

The discourse of modernity upon which Hyakken comments converges around this notion of the everyday. In Hyakken’s debut text, Realm of the Dead, he struggles with the shifting nature of reality and with the notion of doubleness. The stories are set in the pastoral, but Hyakken’s protagonist is subject to the “ever-fluctuating stimulus field of constant immediacy” characteristic of the metropolis. In his work, Hyakken reproduces the patterns of modern urban life: the quick, chaotic, and fragmentary experiences that lead to a nervous restlessness. Like the city dweller, Hyakken’s protagonist develops a distracted mode of attention to survive in this new environment. The modern everyday forces a constant reaction to the new, but also an adjustment to the relentless repetition of capitalist modernity: the routine of the factories, of a regimented, seg-
mented time. The doubleness created through this experience has been discussed in terms of a “cultural code switching” between the old and new, the Japanese and Western. But as a writer, Hyakken reacts to the doubles produced via the simulated realities of modernity. The modern, capitalist system exchanged the unique experience for a plurality of copies found in film, photography, print culture, and the mass media.

This endless, shifting process remained hidden by a capitalist progress which presented itself as a homogeneous experience. In order to reveal the unevenness and discontinuity of the capitalist urban everyday, Hyakken returns to a time when the changes of modernity and our means of interacting with the world—visual, textual, oral—were still new. In Realm of the Dead Hyakken uncovers the psychological state of the urban dweller not yet indifferent to the shocks of modern spaces, media, technologies, and interactions. Hyakken’s return is to a time of aura. The old actuality film in “Triumphant March into Port Arthur” recalls the alienating and emotion-filled reactions of Japanese viewers seeing celluloid images of their dead countrymen on foreign soil for the first time. The wandering in “Tokyo Diary” evokes the disorientation produced by new urban spaces, and grants Hyakken’s protagonist access to lost histories and mysterious happenings hidden in the fabric of the modern city. Hyakken’s attempt to return aura to the text relies on his ability to infuse a magic into his language. It is within this linguistic realm of aura that Hyakken finds the extraordinary necessary for transforming the everyday.

The everyday provided a means of escaping, undermining, and subverting the simultaneously disorienting and homogenizing forces of modernity. “Japanese thinkers envisaged an everyday world filled with alienation brought on by routine yet still filled with possibility, the different in the same: the place of transformation.” The everyday is a site of resistance to the alienation and oppression of modernity, and a place to find the extraordinary within the ordinary. Hyakken focuses on the spaces of everyday life (nichijō kūkan): the modern city—museums, buildings, plazas—and the urban experience; the
cinema and the new subjectivities and spaces it created; and the media spaces of journalism and literature. Within these spaces he introduces alternate temporalities by focusing on the outmoded, which has the power to disrupt the homogenizing effects of capitalist modernity, as it did for contemporary European Modernists. He employs techniques common to Western theorists of the everyday who critiqued capitalist commodity culture, such as the defamiliarization of Surrealism and the wandering or dérive of the Situationists. This methodological similarity allows Hyakken, like his Western counterparts, to reveal the discontinuity of capitalist modernity.

Writing Realm of the Dead at the beginning of his career, Hyakken could not see the everyday as a site of resistance. He did not share the optimism of Walter Benjamin, who envisioned the distracted mode of modernity as a means for critical articulation. Moving into the zuihitsu, Hyakken honed his critical voice, but it was not until his stories referencing the war that Hyakken truly found the potential for transformation. Unlike Western theorists Simmel, Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre, and Michel de Certeau, who saw transformation at the level of everyday practice, for Hyakken, possibility lay in the language of writing. His return to aura happened at a point when the nation’s intellectuals were searching for a timeless past of cultural tradition. By focusing on discontinuity, Hyakken was able to turn his language of cultural modernism into a critique of the war rhetoric, which had erased earlier moments and voices that existed outside the narrative of an ahistorical, homogeneous national. Amidst the rapidly militarizing world around him, Hyakken found his own means of protest within the language of the literary.