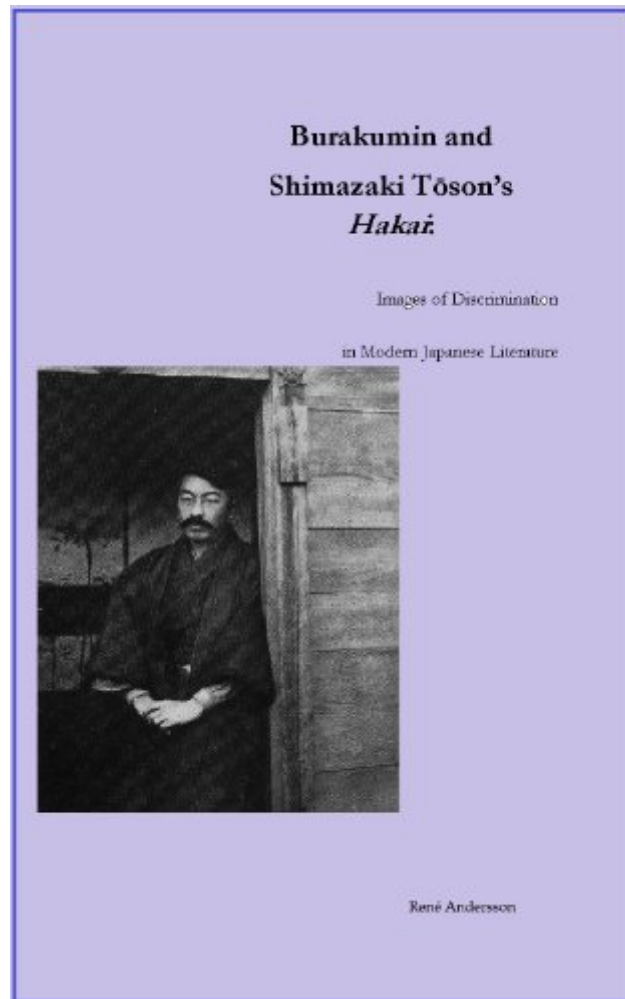


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Burakumin And Shimazaki Tōson's Hakai



Synopsis

Published in 1906, *Hakai* or *The Broken Commandment* in English, by Shimazaki Tōson, is generally considered the first novel in the genre of *shizenshugi*, a Japanese variation of French Naturalism. Traditionally, the novel has been viewed as an example of *kokuhaku shōsetsu*, or 'confessional novel' in that the protagonist confesses his origin as a member of *Eta* – an autochthonous and despised minority in Japan, in current days called *Burakumin*. To understand the complex issue of discrimination in Japan at the early stage of its modernization period, a renewed analysis of the factors influencing the establishment of structural discrimination towards the group presently known as *Burakumin* is presented. Political factors during the last stages of the Tokugawa period (1600 – 1868) are of particular interest since these had a profound influence on the novel. The overriding hypothesis is that Tōson had socio-political motives when he wrote *Hakai*; to demonstrate this, the life of Ōe Isokichi is introduced. Ōe's life functions as a role model for the novel and in particular for the actions and character of the protagonist. To understand the novel's position within Japanese literature, works published prior to *Hakai* that concerned themselves with *Burakumin* and their status in Japan are also analyzed. *Suiheisha* – an early organization struggling for *Burakumin*'s rights to be treated as equals – criticized the novel as a blatant example of discrimination. This critique is scrutinized and an alternative reading to the *Suiheisha* interpretation is introduced and explained.

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