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| Shin Kabuki |
| “New Kabuki” |
| Literally “new kabuki,” a modern outgrowth of traditional kabuki and one of the fruits of Japan’s modernist theatre movement.    The term was first coined by Kasuyama Masao and later defined by Kagayama Naozō as plays written in kabuki format but with Western ideas incorporated and with literary merit. As used today, it refers to works written since the late Meiji Period (1868-1912) by intellectuals unattached to the kabuki establishment. These works were staged with kabuki’s apparatus but without such traditional kabuki acting and staging conventions as climactic poses (mie), stylized makeup, and quick role-change (hayagawari). With these plays, kabuki came to be divided into “classical” (koten) and “new” (shin) categories.    Following the Meiji Restoration, government leaders returning from trips to the West sought potential counterpart of Western drama in Japan, as part of Japanese high culture worthy of entertaining the upper classes and foreign dignitaries. This desire of Meiji leaders coincided with the indigenous modernist efforts to reform this traditional performing art to suit the times. This led to the appearance of zangiri-mono and katsureki-mono. However, after the death in 1893 of Kawakate Mokuami, who had provided most of the scripts for such reformative efforts, there was no playwright of comparable caliber to support kabuki reform. This gap, coupled with the growing influence of Western theatre and the era’s great social changes, facilitated a transition away from the old practice—scripts were exclusively by playwrights attached to a company—and the appearance of intellectual playwrights unrelated to kabuki. |
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