Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) was a leading novelist, playwright and theorist of the Taishō and Shōwa eras. Although best known as a novelist, Tanizaki’s plays also reflected his literary concerns with eroticism, aestheticism, and decadence.

Tanizaki Jun’ichirō was born in Tokyo to a middle class family. Tanizaki mentions having had a privileged childhood; his parents often took him to the theatre and exposed the author to the traditional Japanese arts. However, numerous business reversals resulted in a decline of the family’s fortune; Tanizaki had to abandon his studies at the University of Tokyo in 1911 for a lack of money.

Tanizaki began writing while still a student at the University of Tokyo, publishing his first play in a literary magazine in 1909. He continued to write short stories, plays and novels throughout the 1910s and early 1920s. In 1923 Tanizaki’s house in Yokohama was destroyed by the great Kantō earthquake; he subsequently moved to the Osaka area. His work changed at this time as well as he became less interested in issues of modernity and the West and more involved with Japanese aesthetics and tradition. Tanizaki continued to write until 1943, when the serialization of his novel Sasemeyuki(*The Makioka Sisters*, 1943-1948) was stopped by the militarist government. After the war, Tanizaki continued to write and became acknowledged as one of Japan’s foremost novelists, winning a numerous awards and being recognized by the government with the Order of Culture in 1949. Although he wrote several novels and an autobiography after the war, he was far less productive than before. He died of a heart attack in 1965 at the age of 79.

As a playwright, Tanizaki primarily wrote between 1915 and 1925, at a time when he was struggling to write novels. He is seen a member of the *geijitsu ha* (“artistic branch”) of shingeki. His work primarily explores issues of beauty, eroticism, and obsession. His first major plays both dealt with historicized subjects. In Hōjōji Monogatari (*The Story of Hosshō Temple*, 1915) and Okuni to Gohei (*Okuni and Gohei*, 1921) Tanizaki’s historical characters find meaning in beauty and devotion rather than in legendary exploits. Tanizaki continued to write plays which explored the relationship between beauty and obsession and mocked conventional moral standards. These works included *Mandorin wo hiko otoko* (The Man with the Mandoline, 1925) and his best known play, *Aisureba koso* (Because I Love Him, 1921). In this latter work Tanizaki explores the love triangle between the heroine, Sumiko, the decadent Yamada, and the noble Miyoshi. The play ends with the obsessed Sumiko rejecting Miyoshi and joining Yamada in his decadence.

Tanizaki returned to writing novels in the mid-1920s and stopped writing for the theatre. His work continued to influence theatre artists, especially with the essay *In’ei Raisan* (In Praise of Shadows, 1933). This essay compares Japanese aesthetics and the idea of change, especially change from the West. In the essay Tanizaki praises the Asian values of subtlety and shadow as compared to the harsh light of modernity. In this sense, he echoes Western aestheticists such as Walter Pater who stressed the importance of beauty in the modern age. *In Praise of Shadows* was also influential to other “artistic” shingeki writers such as Mishima Yukio.

DAVID JORTNER