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Outline

1. Introduction
   1. Tanizaki’s piece *In Praise of Shadows* describes a Japanese view of beauty not often seen in western thought.
   2. Thesis: The Japanese embrace of the darkness, shadow, and mystery indicates a difference from the western view of space, time, and beauty.
2. Differences in views of lighting and convenience.
   1. The West wants things to be bright, illuminated, and convenient.
      1. New appliances focus on making things easy
         1. Control and ease
         2. “There are those who hold that to quibble over matters of taste in the basic necessities of life is an extravagance, that as long as a house keeps out the cold and as long as food keeps off the starvation, it matters little what they look like” (7).
   2. Tanizaki asserts that he values tradition and his idea of beauty convenience.
      1. He hates electric fans in his own home.
         1. “The snarl and bulk of an electric fan remains a bit out of place in a Japanese room” (1).
      2. In designing his own home, he fights to keep the Japanese traditions alive.
      3. Puts in appliances that agree with his traditional views.
      4. Shows a preference for culture and appearance rather than control over the house.
         1. “Our forebears, making poetry of everything in their lives, transformed what by rights should be the most unsanitary room in the house into a place of unsurpassed elegance, replete with fond associations of nature” (4).
3. Differences in the idea of a beautiful space, painting, room etc.
   1. A western home has a small roof and large windows.
      1. Praise “natural lighting”
         1. “There are of course roofs on Western houses too, but there are less to keep off the sun than to keep off the wind and the dew; even from without it is apparent that they are built to create as few shadows as possible and to expose the interior to as much light as possible” (17)
      2. Things are always bright and illuminated so that they are able to be seen.
         1. “I understand that in the Gothic Cathedral of the West, the roof is thrust up and up so as to place its pinnacle as high in the heavens as possible—and that herein is thought to lie its special beauty” (17)
      3. This plays to man’s strengths, being a primarily visual being, allowing us to see as well as possible.
   2. The Japanese building is built first with a large roof to shield the building from the light.
      1. “In the temples of Japan, on the other hand, a roof of heavy tiles is first laid out, and in the deep, spacious shadows created by the eaces the rest of the structure is built” (17)
      2. Important art is placed in an alcove to keep it dark and shadowed. Its beauty is in the eye of the beholder in a sense.
         1. “So dark are these alcoves, even in bright daylight, that we can hardlydiscern the outlines of the work; all we can do is listen to the explanation of the guide, follow as best we can the all-but-invisible brush strokes, and tell ourselves how magnificent a painting it must be” (18).
      3. The most sacred rooms are farther into the center where it is darkest. (temple).
   3. This leads to an obsession with the mysteriousness of things and that beauty is subjective. Each person creates their own beautiful image of something, rather than western people who want to see the truth to an object, including its flaws.
      1. “…Western paper to us is no more than something to be used, while the texture of Chinese paper and Japanese paper gives us a certain feeling of warmth, of calm and repose” (9).
4. What this means for differences in conceptions of space.
   1. I think this leads to two different perceptions of space and man’s role in it.
   2. Westerners believe in an ownership of a place.
      1. Quote about Westerners shaping a place to meet their ideals.
         1. “I suppose I shall sound terribly defensive if I say that Westerners attempt to expose every speck of grime and eradicate it, while we orientals carefully preserve it and even idealize it” (11)
      2. Man is ruler of space and in control, possibly from judeo Christian ideas.
         1. “We Orientals tend to seek our satisfactions in whatever surroundings we happen to find ourselves, to content ourselves with the way things are…” (31).
         2. “But the ever progressive Westerner is determined always to better his lot” (31).
      3. Appliances are made to help man feel in control and at the head of the house, convenience is important to allow man be most comfortable in his domain.
   3. Japanese believe they exist in an important space, and they use their minds image to create a romantic description of the things around.
      1. Do not want to light something up to expose its flaws.
      2. Keep a painting unlit so that everyone assumes it is beautiful and creates a mental picture of its beauty.
         1. “The quality we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life…” (18)
      3. Not rulers, but existers
         1. “…we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway” (20)
5. Conceptions of time.
   1. This view of space carries into time.
   2. Westerners believe in Carpe Diem, seize the day and make the future what you wish.
      1. Modern convenience and lighting allows us to have more time for seizing. Light in the evening, and no time consumed with the things an appliance can do.
   3. The Japanese, with their perception of time and even their lack of a future tense means they do not seize and rule the time.
      1. Things come and pass and they make what they can from it.