**Rakugo and Henry Black (Paris lecture)**

Rakugo is the art of storytelling. It is the art of storytelling using one person to depict many. The storyteller squats on a cushion called a *zabuton* and narrates the voices and actions of the persons in the story. He uses few props. Only a cloth called a *tenugui*, and a fan. The *tenugui* can become a wallet, a head cloth, a handerkerchief. The fan can become a pipe, a sword, chopsticks, or an oar on a boat.

The classic stories in the repertoire evolved from Buddhist parables and such things as the collections of stories called *Nihon ryoiki* and *reiiki*. These stories contained themes now found in *rakugo*, such as the disguised fox and the human skull which returns to life. Other influences are the sermons of the Buddhist monks and the sixteenth century narrators who told military stories to the military leaders known as daimyo.

Once such forms, which had been used by Buddhist preachers, were taken over by lay people, they started to evolve as a totally secular form of narrative entertainment. What is clear is that the advent of persons who regularly performed narrations for an audience indicates the emergence of a popular art form for the masses.

Rakugo stories have a structure which involves a preface, the main body and the punchline know as *ochi*. This *ochi* should provide a catharsis or release to the listeners. It should also make you laugh, even if you’ve had a bit of a cry during the main part of the story. A number of devices are also employed along the way to achieve this. Chief among them are pauses or moments of silence known as *ma*. These pauses are inserted at key points during a narration for special effect.

To become a professional storyteller, known as a *rakugoka*, one must experience about 12 years of training before becoming a *shin’uchi* in a special ceremony.

The classic repertoire includes: stories about people in the old licensed prostitution quarters, travel stories in which the central character goes on a journey (sometimes to heaven or hell) and encounters strange animals or amusing situations; stories about inept thieves; and stories about stupid samurai or Buddhist priests.

Characters include *tonosama* (lord), *danna* (master of the household), *wakadanna* (young master), *taikomochi* (male entertainer), *oiran* (courtesan).

Much of rakugo’s repertoire takes the mickey out of authority figures and displays a fairly earthy humor. The story titles demonstrate this. “The Lazy Bath Attendant”, “The Taming of the Spook”, “Fooling the Superstitious at the Teahouse”, “The Illiterate Dog”, “The Long Underwear”, to give just a few.

The *rakugo* theatres are known as *yose*. In Tokyo now, there are only about three large ones left.

The golden era for *rakugo* was during the Meiji period. This is the period usually associated with the opening of Japan to Western influence. It is synonymous with the reign of the Emperor Meiji which spanned the years between 1868 and 1912. There are a number of good reasons for the popularity of rakugo in these years. Chief among them is the fact that it was a cheap form of entertainment which was accessible to the average person. And once we enter the Meiji Period, we are no longer in the age of the samurai. In 1868, the samurai effectively abolished themselves as a class. From 1868, Japan is on the road to modernity. There was a rapid rise in the level of literacy, we see the establishment of a parliament and a constitution modeled on those of Western Europe, the struggle for votes for women, the entry of women into the urban workforce, and industrialization.

This period is a time when a new civilian government sought to selectively emulate the constitutional monarchies of Western Europe. Japanese politicians and intellectuals looked to countries like Britain, France, Germany and the United States for their inspiration. The government promoted a slogan at the time: “civilization and enlightenment”.

Of course everybody had a different interpretation of what it meant to be civilized and enlightened.Fashionable people adopted all sorts of Western fashions, including dress, hair styles, and even the eating of eating beef. A government program of reform covered the promotion of a new constitution, the construction of Western style brick buildings in central Tokyo and the reshaping of the centre of Tokyo on a design inspired by Baron Haussman’s redesign of the centre of Paris under Napoleon.

With all this Westernisation and modernization going on, could something as quintessentially Japanese as rakugo, survive and prosper? Well as the height of its popularity in the Meiji Period, particularly during the 1880s and 1890s, rakugo enjoyed unprecedented status as an entertainment form. At theatres known as *yose*, ordinary people could experience storytellers, acrobats and musicians. The price of entry was much cheaper than for kabuki. In 1905, the Scotsman Francis McCullagh who was visiting Japan, was so impressed by the prevalence of this form of entertainment that he recorded in his diary that rakugo storytellers were ‘very numerous and popular.’ He also wrote that the *yose* were as numerous in Japanese towns and cities as pubs were in Ireland.

In the *yose*, the entertainment was mainly focused on storytellers. The storytellers, known as *rakugoka* were the real celebrities.

By the Meiji period, rakugo was generally acknowledged, by the government and its practitioners, as having an educative effect on the populace. Even apprentices from the country who worked in Tokyo, would be taken to the *yose* to learn the ways of the world. So the storytellers performed an important social function beyond entertainment. Although most accounts of *rakugo* characterize it as an art of the common people, the prevalence of *yose*, accounts of attendance by intellectuals like Fukuzawa Yukichi, and acknowledgement by writers such as Natsume Sōseki that *rakugo* influenced their work, attest to its wide-spread popularity during these years.

During this time, some far-sighted and innovative storytellers adapted tales from the West in keeping with the fashion for borrowing from the West. The leader of this trend was San’yutei Encho. His stories were mainly borrowed from authors like Guy de Maupassant. Encho adapted the de Maupassant story *Un Parracide* as (oyagoroshi). Victorien Sardou’s *La Tosca*, and Charles Reade’s novel *Hard Cash*.

But there was one more Japanese rakugoka who exceeded Encho with adaptations of stories from Western sources. Let me introduce to you one of the most popular reformist Japanese storytellers of all time. His professional name was Kairakutei Burakku. He was born as Henry Black in Adelaide a town in the then British colony of South Australia in 1858. As it was a British colony at that time, this made him a British citizen at the time of his birth.

Although Henry was born in Australia, by 1865, the Black family had moved to Yokohama near Tokyo. His father John Black had become editor of the English-language newspaper the *Japan Herald.* By 1886, Henry had begun a career as a storyteller, by giving his first serialized story on stage and having it published in book form. During his career, Henry Black produced many original stories, performed kabuki roles, and helped produce the first disc-shaped records made in Japan. He performed hypnotism and at one stage had his own band of Western style musicians. He also became a Japanese citizen. He was a highly talented Australian-born Japanese of British ancestry.

How could someone with his obvious foreign ancestry have been in theatres in Japan in the 1880s? The answer is that he lived in Japan during a time of tremendous change when people were open to much that was new.

Between May and November 1879, at the request of several pro-democracy societies, John and Henry Black addressed a number of public meetings in and around Tokyo on topics related to governance and the law. Henry Black was twenty years old at the time. Their first engagement was a speech meeting of the Kun’yūsha at Yūrakuchō on June 1 at which they spoke on a theory of people’s rights (*minkenron).* Subsequent topics included the pros and cons of a prison system, Napoleon, abolition of the Yoshiwara prostitution quarters, the demerits of opening up Japan, criminal procedures, cholera prevention, juries, governance (*seitai ron*), trial by evidence (*shōko saiban no setsu*), and the relationship between the people and government (*jinmin to seifu no kankei*). These topics were themes which Henry Black later included in his narrated stories.

Interest in Napoleon, for example, stemmed from Japanese curiosity over European experiments in styles of governance and legal codes, as well as the Japanese government’s eagerness to superimpose Parisian style grand boulevards on central Tokyo. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte had become president of France in 1851, and the country’s emperor, Napoleon III, the following year.

Black’s ability to speak in Japanese attracted the interest of professional rakugoka who invited him to speak in *yose*. One of these was Shōrin Hakuen, a prominent exponent of the didactic *kōdan* style of storytelling, who coached him in the art. One of Henry Black’s earliest stage appearances was in December 1878 at the Tomitake Theatre in Yokohama’s theatre street of Bashamichi. On that occasion, he spoke about Joan of Arc, and the exiled pretender to the Scottish throne, Charles Edward Stuart.

The mythologisation of Charles Stuart and Joan of Arc as nationalist heroes was not necessarily lost on Japanese audiences. The Japanese quest for a national identity was already integral to the search for modernity. The stories also served as warnings about the threat of colonization by the British, whose military prowess had largely English philosophical underpinnings. The choice of Joan of Arc, and Charles Edward Stuart as topics suggests that Henry Black was already sensitive to the idea of nationalism as among the attributes of the nineteenth-century European nation-state to which many Japanese aspired.

Here we see how Henry was acquiring many of the attributes which he would utilize throughout his career in storytelling – fluency and confidence in the Japanese language before audiences, knowledge of domestic and international affairs and of Western and Japanese cultures, and a talent for gathering story material which would appeal to Japanese audiences. There was also the unique distinction of being a narrator with European ancestry.

Henry Black was 27 years old when in 1886 he ceased full time English teaching and gave his first theatre presentation of the serialized story *Kusaba no Tsuyu* (Dew by the Graveside). This was an adaptation of British author Mary Braddon’s *Flower and Weed*. By then, Tokyo had 230 *yose*, making *rakugo* one of the most prevalent and accessible forms of entertainment available.

Henry officially affiliated with the San’yū guild in September 1890 at the age of 31. In March 1891, he took the professional name of Kairakutei Burakku on achieving *shin’uchi* (principal performer) status with the guild. Henry claimed San’yūha members wanted him to join their guild because ‘a Western *rakugoka* is unusual’ (*seiyōjin no rakugoka wa mezurashii).* High-ranked guild members saw in the foreign-born Black the potential for innovation in the *rakugo* repertoire*.*

Newspaper reports show that foreign birth quickly made Henry an object of curiosity. On his assuming the professional name of Kairakutei Burakku, the 24 March 1891 issue of *Yamato shinbun* described him as ‘the Englishman Black, promoted as the *rakugoka* with the different colored hair.’

Extremely popular *rakugoka*, including Black, performed at more than one *yose* during the day. Rickshaw pullers were in attendance outside the *yose* to take them to the next venue as quickly as possible.

While most *rakugoka* performed while seated with their legs folded under them upon a *zabuton*, illustrations of Black from this period indicate that he also gave his narrations seated on a chair behind a small table upon which were a glass cup and a water decanter.

Black was to become the pre-eminent *rakugoka* adaptor of foreign material, claiming by 1901 to have ‘translated no fewer than 14 English novels into Japanese’. Black’s ability to translate from English to Japanese enabled him to use the then popular European detective and mystery genre. Because this genre uses chapters which end with some suspenseful development, it suited Black’s method of telling stories in episodes over several days. Mary Braddon was just one of a number of British, French and American Victorian-era sensation novelists whose works were translated and popularized in Japan in the decade prior to Black’s achieving *shin’uchi* status. In Japan, as Amanda C. Seaman notes, the genre’s ‘combination of storytelling and social awareness’ also enabled its exponents to cleverly use its ‘narrative and conceptual resources’ to ‘depict and critique contemporary Japanese society’.

Black’s sources of original material appear to have been mainly English and French. I have already given the example of his debut story which was from the English author Mary Braddon. His other Braddon story was his 1891 *Eikoku Rondon gekijo no miyage* (Story from a London Theatre), which was adapted from Braddon’s 1877 short story *Her Last Appearance*

I would not be surprised to find that more of Black’s works, particularly those set in Paris, owe their inspiration and perhaps their origin, to works which Braddon plagiarized or adapted from French sources.

Braddon was frequently accused of plagiarising the work of others, including the work of popular French and British authors of the day. Braddon was fond of the works of Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert and Honoré Balzac. The evidence suggests that even if she did not directly plagiarise works, she was heavily under their influence.

From France, the story I like the most is Henry’s 1891 *Shachū no Dokubari* (The Poison Pin in the Coach). This was adapted from the Fortuné de Boisgobet story *Le crime de l’omnibus.* In the original, de Boisgobey has two heroes, the artist Paul Freneuse and his companion Binos. They uncover the reason for the mysterious death of a beautiful young woman on an omnibus traveling between Jardin des Plantes à la Place Pigalle, to Montmartre. In Black’s story, Okatsu is killed in a coach travelling across Paris at night. In spite of his high social status, the story ends with the businessman Mr. Yamada being jailed as an accomplice in the murder of his niece Okatsu and conspiracy to kill her sister Onobu. The issue of appropriate disposal of private property inherited by the female protagonist Onobu was at the heart of *Shachū no Dokubari*. This reflects the importance of the issue of women’s rights in the debate over law reform.

Black’s choice of European detective fiction gave him the opportunity to demonstrate legal practice in Britain or France. Reflecting the new legal code framed with Gustave Boissonade’s help at around the same time as this narration, Black showed how French citizens were all equal before the same set of laws. Boissonade was a [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France) [legal scholar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_scholar). He drafted much of [Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan)'s [civil code](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_code) in the Meiji period. The message Black’s audiences received from *Shachū no dokubari* was one of change in the power relationship between men and women. In *The Poisoned Pin in the Coach*, the audience learns of French law as it applied to kinship structure and property relations, particularly in relation to the rights of inheritance pertaining to women.

Also in this story, Henry appears to have commemorated his then live-in male lover Takamatsu Motokochi through his use of the name Kanō Motokichi for the de Boisgobey version’s central character Paul Freneuse. Henry and Motokichi lived at the same address in Tsukiji in the same year as he produced *The Poisoned Pin in the Coach*.

In keeping with sensation fiction’s propensity to supply blueprints for negotiating modern life Henry Black’s narrations contain numerous accounts of the benefits of science and modern technology to the solving of crimes. In *Shachū no dokubari* when the art student Itō visits the morgue with Okatsu’s landlady to identify her body, Black uses the opportunity to instruct his audience on the relationship between modern forensic science and criminal law. Black also explains that cadavers are used by medical scientists if left unclaimed.

In *Iwade Ginkō chishio no tegata* [The blood-stained hand print at the Iwade Bank], Black shows how swiftly the police can track Matashichi from London to the Liverpool docks 100 *ri* (equivalent to 393 kilometers or 244 miles) away, using the telegraph and telephone to convey information about him throughout the country.

*Iwade Ginkō chishio no tegata* is a good example of Black’s use of science to solve a crime. In the story, the victim’s nephew Iwade Takejirō solves the crime by matching a blood-stained hand mark on a piece of paper from the crime scene to the hand of the bank’s janitor. Black’s elaborate aside on the use of fingerprints as acceptable proof of identity in China and Japan in the absence of carved seals may have been inspired by his knowledge of the investigative work of Dr. Henry Faulds, a British missionary doctor who worked at Tsukiji Hospital in the 1880s. Black was also living in Tsukiji (with Motokichi) by 1885. In a paper titled ‘On the Skin-furrows of the Hand’, published in the British scientific journal *Nature* in 1880, Faulds said he was inspired to embark on his investigations after learning that Japanese potters frequently left their fingerprints on clay pots as a way of identifying their provenance. Black’s use of fingerprinting as a device in detective fiction appears to have been a world first.

The contentious issue of abolition of Tokyo’s brothel quarter Yoshiwara, raised by Black in one of his 1879 talks, had been the subject of newspaper editorials at the time. Black incorporated the debate into his 1891 narration *Eikoku Rondon gekijō miyage.* In discussing the dissolute behaviour of the story’s villain, Black noted the harm caused to families and society by men who squandered their money at the Yoshiwara.

The theme of law reform and descriptions of French or English legal practice occur often in Black’s stories. One good example is Black’s adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*. He called his adaptation of this story Minashigo (The Orphan). In *Minashigo*, Black mirrors Dickens’s interest in criminology displayed in *Oliver Twist*, where Nancy attends the court to try to find out what has happened to Oliver. In Black’s version, Nancy’s Japanese equivalent Omine’s incognito visit to the court gives Black an opportunity to inform his audience that in Britain the public is permitted to attend police committal hearings.

Black’s enthusiastic advocacy of law reform based on English and French legal codes contrasts with his mentor Sanyutei Encho’s use of De Maupassant’s *Un* *Parricide* and in1895. This story, which was called *Meijin Chōji* (Master Cabinet maker Choji) in Japanese begins from a point at which the cabinet maker is at the peak of success and fame. Both Encho and de Maupassant portray his encounter with an apparently married couple who befriend him and become his benefactors. When the cabinet maker Chōji suspects that the couple are his parents who abandoned him as a baby, he begs them to admit that they are his parents. But when the couple deny they are his parents, Chōji kills them in a fit of righteous rage. De Maupassant’s version ends abruptly at that point by asking readers to make their own judgement. But Enchō devotes considerable time to describing the trial and the judge’s decision. Enchō set his story in the Edo period before the Meiji period. Unlike Black’s contemporary settings, Enchō’s choice of a pre-Meiji period setting makes his story an exercise in nostalgia. It caters to proponents of the case for incorporating Japanese morality in the framing of new codes of law. The inequitable but symbiotic relationship between *Choji* and the samurai judge allows them to play out their roles *vis a vis* the other as if it is the natural order. The scene where Choji appears before the judge is radically different from that narrated by Black in *Minashigo*. Whereas Black stresses the right of access by citizens to the court and equality of all before the law, Enchō describes in minute detail the dialogue between the protagonists so as to emphasise the difference in status between the lowly defendant Chōji and the benevolent, but condescending samurai judge. The illustrations accompanying each story also highlight the differences. In *Minashigo*, the urchin Seikichi and the judge sit facing each other. Seikichi even has his hands placed on the bar and his eyes are level with the judge’s eyes. In illustrations of the story *Meijin Chōji*, the defendant kneels with eyes averted and heads down while the judge sits, well above them, on a raised floor with comfortable *tatami* matting.

Henry’s other published works that year included *Dawn at the River* (*Nagare no Akatsuki*) which appeared in *Yamato Shinbun* from January to March. This was a tragic romance dealing with the French aristocrat, Baron Sawanabe, who flees France for London during the French Revolution. It contains elements reminiscent of Dickens’s French teacher Charles Darnay in *A Tale of Two Cities* and relies on the device of identical twin brothers, one good and the other dissolute.

As well as *The Poisoned Pin in the Coach* and *Dawn at the River*, the publisher Sanyusha also released Henry’s *The Rose Girl* (*Bara musume*) in 1891. This was a detective story set in Paris. It involves a plot to assassinate the French crown prince. The anarchist Ohana plans to disguise herself as a flower girl to lure the prince and kill him with poison gas. When the Chief of Police in Paris, Kawamichi Shō, learns that the German political offender and scientist, Nishinō Takeshi has entered the country with the intention of assassinating the crown prince, he puts Detective Ōmura on the case.

Above all, by applying the storyteller’s ability to interweave humor and suspense, Henry’s tales were blueprints for survival for mass audiences and readers at a time of rapid reform and social change.

Henry’s tales also reached audiences via print in newspapers and books. These books were known as stenographic books or *sokkibon* in Japanese. Stenography arrived in Japan in 1884. It radically altered the course of book and newspaper publishing in Japan. R*akugo* was closely involved in this development. Stenography was initially used for recording debates in the newly constituted Diet or parliament. But newspaper and book publishers quickly applied the skill to the narrations of popular *rakugoka* to mass produce *sokkibon* (stenographic books) versions of the narrations, Their low cost, thanks to the use of cheap paper, combined with the prevalence of lending libraries, meant that they reached a wide audience.

The first of these stenographic books was San’yūtei Enchō’s ghost story *Botan* *dōrō* (The Peony Lantern). The book version was so successful that five more *sokkibon* of Enchō’s stories were published the following year.

*Sokkibon* sold well, and although not considered high literature, they were the envy of many novelists and publishers. Few *sokkibon* have survived intact owing to the poor quality of paper used in them, and the lack of regard in which they were held at the time. But the low cost meant that they reached a wide audience. The appeal of *sokkibon* lay in the use by the storytellers of vernacular Japanese. In effect, *sokkibon* served as ‘reading primers for the minimally literate masses, thereby aiding state efforts at mass literacy.’ These developments represented a diversification of the channels by which the ideas of narrators such as Henry Black and Enchō reached a mass audience.

That is one reason why *The Peony Lantern* has been cited by Anne Sakai here in France as ‘the point of departure for modern Japanese literature.’

At around the same time as the development of the *sokkibon*, entrepreneurial newspaper proprietors also began to show an interest in serialising the stories of *rakugoka*. The *Yamato shinbun* pioneered the practice beginning with its founding edition on 7 October 1886 with episodes of Enchō’s *Matsu no misao bijin no ikiume* [A Beauty Buried Alive].

IN the 1880s, newspapers became yet another way for *rakugoka* to reach a mass audience. Many of the serialized stories were adaptive translations (*hon’an mono*) based on English and French sources with translator-adaptors giving Japanese names to characters and places. IN some of Black’s stories, for example, characters traverse bridges in Paris which are named after familiar bridges in Tokyo. The characters arrive at home in London or Paris where they read the Yomiuri shinbun newspaper, drink beer and discuss what type of rice cakes they will have for New Year. This created hybrid settings, enabling readers to identify more readily with the characters.

Henry benefited from this diversification of the channels by which the ideas of narrators such as Black and Enchō reached a mass audience. He already had an affinity with newspaper proprietors. He had developed this while working with his newspaper editor father and in his association with the pro-democracy movement. Many members of this movement later became newspaper editors. So, for example, between 1887 and 1896, *Yamato shinbun* printed at least four of Henry’s tales ­– *Eikoku yodan nagare no akatsuki* (Dawn at the River), *Setsunaru tsumi* (Pitiful Sin), *Tsurugi no hawatari* (Sword Blade), and *Natsu no mushi* (Summer Insects).

This is also the period when the Frenchman Jules Adam saw him. Adam was a first secretary of the French legation. He described *rakugoka* as ‘a class of very remarkable and really curious artists,’ noting that *yose* filled ‘a large place in the existence of the Japanese’ In 1899, Adam wrote a book in French about rakugo and mentioned Henry. He had a particular fascination with Henry. Here is what he wrote (and here I translate back into French from the English translation of Adam’s book):

*I had been haunted for a long time by a secret longing to become acquainted with this phenomenon, dilettante or outcast – I knew not what to call him – for whom I cherished a strange admiration mingled with sympathy and curiosity. I wished to question him, to study him, to turn over page after page of his life, as one might be a book or a document.*

Adam was in the hot spring town of Ikaho north of Tokyo one day when he stayed in an inn where Black had stayed the day before. The servant at the inn could not tell Adam where Black had gone, so he was disappointed. But some months later in Kobe, Adam noticed that Black was performing at a theatre in the city.

*I entered and had the good fortune to hear him for the first time. I was astounded. The room shook with thunders of applause, when he left the platform. I hastily left the room anxious to introduce myself and congratulate my friend with all my heart, but he had already gone. Leaping into a* jinrikisha*, I drove to his hotel, having fortunately procured his address. Alas! The bird had flown. He had gone by the midnight train to fulfill an engagement in an important town in the South.”*

Henry was busy in this peiod, but in the early years of the 1880s, he was unable to travel freely in the countryside. There were government restrictions on foreigners travelling outside the major cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Kobe. His solution was to marry and become adopted into a Japanese family. Records show that in April 1893, at the age of 33, Henry Black underwent a marriage of convenience to a Japanese woman called Ishii Aka. He was also adopted into the Ishii family, acquiring the surname of Ishii. Officially, he became Ishii Burakku. This was a step which gave him access to Japanese citizenship. He could now travel freely around Japan. Reporting the marriage, the 24 May 1893 edition of the *Chūō shimbun* stated that his new wife Ishii Aka was the 18-year old daughter of Ishii Mine, a candy shop operator. But Black was gay and the marriage was merely an opportunity for him to gain Japanese citizenship so he could move freely around Japan at the time. In reality, Henry continued living with his male partner Motokichi.

There is another interesting side to Henry. He played roles in kabuki plays. Storytellers often visit the kabuki to observe the expressions and hand movements of the actors. They incorporate these into their storytelling. It is still a custom for storytellers to act in kabuki extracts as a way to promote themselves to fans. Henry Black played a number of roles. His signature role was Banjuiin Chobee, who is the samurai hero. He first performed this role at the Haruki Theatre in September 1892. It was unprecedented in the history of the Japanese stage. Henry received tuition for the role from the great actor Ichikawa Danjūrō IX. Danjūrō was one of the great theatre reformers of his era. Cooperation between Danjūrō and Henry was therefore a meeting of reformist minds.

Henry’s 1892 Banzuin Chōbei performances were not his first *kabuki* roles. He had already appeared in 1890 in the female roles of Omiwa in *Imoseyama* (Mt. Imo and Mt. Se) and Osato in *Senbon zakura* (The Thousand Cherry Trees). Both tales involve thwarted love and mistaken identity. In 1891, he had played Kumagai in *Heike Monogatari*, Roshishin in *Suikoden*, and Omura in *Ibaraki Dōji*, *Sōzaburo no Imōto Omura*.

These performances attest to an ability to learn Japanese dialogue and deliver it like a native speaker, an enthusiasm for the theatre, and a level of devotion to Japan beyond that of almost any other expatriate foreigner then living there.

Among Henry’s other achievements is his having his voice on the first disc-shaped records made in Japan. In 1903, Henry received a welcome injection of funds in the form of the American-born impresario and producer of early disc-shaped records, Fred W. Gaisberg. Gaisberg was the first person to make gramophone recordings in Europe where he worked for The Gramophone Company, owner of the *His Master’s Voice* label.

The records Geisberg made included a geisha band of ‘little women with big European band instruments’ which Gaisberg described as ‘the funniest thing imaginable,’ and the Imperial Household Band and narrations by Henry.

Henry’s contribution included a story which purports to be a recollection of an incident in which, feeling particularly hungry, he enters a restaurant and orders a large number of bowls of noodles. The waitress fails to bring his order despite serving other customers who all eat and leave. Finally Henry hails the waitress again and demands to know why he has not been given his order, whereupon the waitress responds that she had thought that since he ordered so many bowls, he wanted to wait for his friends to arrive before eating.

There is another French connection. Henry adopted a Japanese boy called Seikichi. Seikichi later married a French woman called Julie Seikichi’s wife was a French woman by the name of Julie Pequignot. She played the samisen, was an accomplished singer of *gidayū*, and used the stage name Rosa. In his final years, Henry lived in Tokyo with Seikichi and Rosa. It was an odd ménage: the Australian-born Briton-turned-Japanese, his adopted Japanese son, and that son’s French-born wife Rosa. Rosa was an extraordinary person. She was the daughter of a French couple, but had been taken to Japan by her uncle after her parents died.

Just over two weeks after the great Kanto earthquake of 1st of September 1923, on 19 September, Henry Black died in his home. The doctor who signed the death certificate gave the cause of death as ‘senile decay’. Without consulting with the household, his sister Pauline had the body buried in the Foreigners’ Cemetery in Yokohama in a grave shared with their parents. Henry Black was born a foreigner, had become a Japanese, but was finally buried by his sister as a foreigner.

If I could, I would like to put on his grave the following statement from his story *Tale from a London Theatre*:

*If you visit the white races of Europe, unlike the black people, some of them are so eerily light skinned that you might imagine they look like ghosts under a willow in the light of the moon. But their human feelings and affection are the same as the Japanese. Even if the language, the clothing, the eye color or the hair color are different, everyone has the same sentiments when it comes to human feelings.*

Henry Black was an extraordinary human being.

Tonight, when you see the performance by Stephane, please regard it as a recreation of the spirit of Henry Black, a man who loved life, loved Japan, and loved the theatre.