Imaging the World: 
The Literature and Aesthetics of Mori Ogai, the Shirakaba School, 
and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 

Anri Yasuda 

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ABSTRACT

“Imagining the World: The Literature and Aesthetics of Mori Ogai, the Shirakaba School, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke”

Anri Yasuda

This dissertation examines the role of aesthetics in Japanese literary discourse, with attention to the emergence of new cross-cultural perspectives, from the late 1880s through the 1920s. Modernity in Japan was marked by the rapid and often jarring juxtapositions of new techniques and ideas from Western sources against older Japanese traditions, and my project considers how literary authors envisioned and interpreted this cultural eclecticism. In particular, I focus on their reactions to Western paintings and sculptures. The visual arts seemed to offer viewers a direct access to ‘universal’ aesthetic values though their non-linguistic nature, and thus appealed to those seeking to attain cosmopolitan perspectives. Through analyzing Japanese writers’ literary responses to foreign artworks, and their ideas on vision as an avenue of information, I investigate the changing nature of representation and signification in this new age, and the role of literary language within it.

I take as the main subjects of my dissertation Mori Ogai (1862-1922), the members of the Shirakaba School such as Mushanokōji Saneatsu (1885-1976) and Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) during the period of their eponymous publication Shirakaba (1910-1923), and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927). Each of these authors has been both praised and denigrated for the high-minded idealism and aestheticism of his works, in no small part because of a marked tendency to employ foreign literary and artistic references. I argue that despite assessments that their works had been composed at an intellectual remove from the social and material contexts in which they lived, the ideal of aesthetics they had upheld as a fixed and transcendental principle that allowed for their appreciation of imported images and ideas of beauty, in fact catalyzed their critical assessments of their own discursive
positions within Japanese society. These writers explored the links and the disjunctions between their artistic ideals—which spanned across cultural and national boundaries—and their more immediate awareness of themselves as citizens of modern Japan. They discovered that for them, any attempt at cosmopolitanism had to take place within the contexts of their Japanese realities, and any thoughts about it had to be voiced through the medium of Japanese literary language. Even visual images could not ultimately elide the viewer’s conceptual frameworks, and were interpreted in light of them. What resulted was thus a distinctly hybrid outlook in which their conceptions of Japan, the world, their individual identities, and their creative and critical productions, were indelibly linked with each other.

Literary attempts to express this evolving terrain of modern Japanese perspectives played a role in the genbun-itchi movement that sought to officially standardize the multiple written and colloquial forms of the Japanese language, from the late nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century. Different modes of writing were championed during the course of this linguistic flux, and I analyze how the philosophies and outlooks expressed in the works of Ogai, the Shirakaba School writers, and Akutagawa, were intricately rooted in the linguistic registers they chose to employ.

Through these approaches, my dissertation traces these literary writers’ self-images and worldviews as formed within the shifting and multiple values and ideas that characterized modernity in Japan.
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Introduction: ‘Literariness’ and ‘Images’ in Modern Japanese Literature

In his critique of the Japanese intelligentsia’s apparent inefficacy against the country’s descent into fascism in the 1930s, the Marxist theorist Tosaka Jun (1900-1945) identifies the root of the problem in a tendency in Japanese thought that he calls “literary principlism”, or more simply, “literary-ism” (文学主義).¹ By this, he means a hermeneutic philosophy (解釈の哲学), that addresses “only the organization of the meanings of things (意味の秩序), rather than the actual (現実的な) organization of things.”² Tosaka explains that such an epistemology precluded the conceptual grasp of material and historical realities, and instead allowed for the free coexistence and development of conflicting values and ideas insofar as they were of an immaterial, ‘literary’ order. According to Tosaka, public discourse came to be dominated by this unconstrained ‘literary’ mode of thinking, and superseded critical engagement with material and social circumstances.

He describes this cultural climate of literary principlism as based on the “direct commuting of literary expressions and images—which are not real, but fantastic—to the status of philosophical, rational concepts. This [was] most convenient for bringing about a structure of logic that would link images with other images, instead of a structure of logic rooted in the order of reality”.³ For Tosaka, the realm of the literary therefore pointed to an extra-rational, ghostly unreality, in which thought circulated as images unmoored from their real world referents.

¹ Tosaka Jun, “Gendai Nihon no shisō jō no shomondai” (1935), Nihon ideorogii ron (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005), 22. Henceforth, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
² Ibid., 21-22. Emphasis indicated in original text.
³ 「現実に就いてのファンタスティックな表象である処の文学的な表象乃至イメージをそのまま哲学的論理的概念にまで仕立てたものが之である。こうすれば現実の秩序に基づく現実的な範疇組織（=理論）の代わりに、イメージとイメージをつなぐに於ける解釈用の範疇組織（=理論）を結果するのに、何よりもつこうがいいからである。」Ibid., 23.
The postwar philosopher Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) takes Tosaka’s diagnosis of the Japanese disposition towards ‘literary principlism’ as the point of departure for his analysis of how from the Meiji period onwards, the paradigms of “‘politics and literature’ had been in competition against each other in their quest for progress.”

He notes that because it became of top national priority for Japan to define and secure itself against the Western powers, ‘politics’ henceforth primarily came to mean the nation’s “international position and power, in other words, a politics ‘aimed outwards’,” rather than the power dynamics within people’s immediate, local experiences. Awareness of the actual conditions of Japanese life was confined to the depoliticized, “inner world of the literary.”

Maruyama’s assertions are in line with contemporary scholar Atsuko Ueda’s account that the foundation of modern Japanese literature as an ontologically independent discourse “demarcated around ‘emotions, customs, and manners’,” had been accomplished in the Meiji period “through the concealment of the political.” She explains that a new autonomous realm that thematized romantic and domestic relationships, instead of political ones, was claimed and promoted by members of the literati “who were being defeated in the struggle for power in the educational arena and hence losing the path towards the center of the government.”

It might be said then, that the modern Japanese literary realm was not actively established as a critical space for its agents’ contemplation of a new age they would help to shape, but rather, that it came to be defined as the shadowy underside of the historical trajectory of the rapidly consolidating Meiji government. Politics—both in the sense of

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5 Ibid., 73.

6 Ibid., 76.


8 Ibid., 89.
Japan’s awareness of itself as a latecomer to the international geo-political dynamics unfolding between competing imperial powers, and in the more localized sense of establishing a democratic subjectivity for its citizens within its national boundaries—were doubly excluded from this literary space.

Like Tosaka before him, Maruyama states that before its downfall due to government crackdowns and internal discord, the advent of Marxism in Japan had presented a major crisis to Japanese thought because it called for people’s awareness of themselves as political, historical agents in the all-encompassing, trans-national structure of a capitalist economy. This comprehensive ideology threatened the notion of literature, and art in general, as an apolitical, conceptually independent space. Maruyama also observes that even before the Meiji period, “concepts that arrived [in Japan] according to a definite temporal sequence nonetheless lost their constitutive historicity because [ideas] tend to exist atemporally within the Japanese psyche through spatial rearrangement” (Emphasis mine).9 He discusses the “haphazard” (雑然)10 coexistence of fragments of Buddhist, Confucian, shamanistic, and Western influences in Japanese culture throughout time as the result of a fundamentally unstructured attitude of inclusiveness.

In these critiques, it might be said that the purported tradition of radical syncretism in Japanese thought, as well as its modern manifestations in ‘literary principlism’, are envisaged in terms of an all-encompassing, timeless expanse that stands as the antithesis of constructive logic and material history. Within this unique mode of conception, all ideas can be said to appear simultaneously alongside one another without overlap, and held without contradiction; they might be regarded as pure ‘images’, to use Toksaka’s term, reflecting but ultimately removed from real world circumstances. Politics, ideology, and any other discourse with direct bearing on people’s living conditions would therefore be

9 Maruyama Masao, “Kindai Nihon no shisô to bungaku”, 11.
10 Ibid., 8.
In my study of Japanese fiction from the end of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, I question the nature of ‘literary’ thought as assumed in this trope of “literaryism”. I ask how, or if, literary writers’ understandings of various imported and traditional values and concepts throughout Japan’s period of rapid modernization, had indeed been in terms of superficial, ‘imagistic’ thought that ultimately proved to lack a critical, consequential engagement with the external world. Toward this end, I analyze the unique cognitive boundaries of modern Japanese ‘literary’ thought, and the ontologically ambiguous nature of the ‘images’ that purportedly constituted it, through analyzing a selection of literary texts from this period. I trace how writers conceptually navigated between multiple modes of ‘images’—mental, visual, linguistic, and otherwise—in constructing their literary imaginations, and how in turn, these resultant literary perspectives stood in relation to the wider, unfolding spheres of their social and material realities.

Specifically, I investigate the links between writers’ abilities to interpret or envision something mentally, and to respond to it and evoke it linguistically in their literary outputs, and I consider how these mental processes were shaped by and reflective of their awareness of their social and material conditions as well as their aesthetic considerations. I hope to show that literary visions were formed at the interstices of ocular vision, linguistically and culturally shaped subjectivities, aesthetic judgments, and other variable modes of knowledge that cumulatively order how individuals see and know their worlds. Amongst the issues I examine are how the visual perception and subsequent interpretations of an object are dependent on the discursive position of the viewer, how literary language can articulate and process such relativity, and how writers’ self-reflexive conceptions of literature too bear the imprint of this awareness. My argument is thus that rather than conceptually insulate its writers and readers from confronting and evaluating their actual surrounding realities, the different sorts of perspectives explored in the broad expanse of literary thought in fact
catalyzed writers to develop and express a flexible and critical view of their rapidly evolving eras and societies.

I take as the object of my study Mori Ogai (1862-1922), the members of the Shirakaba school during the period of their eponymous publication (1910-1923), and Akutagawa Ryûnosuke (1892-1927). Each of these writers has been both particularly praised and denigrated for the erudite and aesthetic character of his works, or in other words, for the ‘literary’ and deracinated nature of his writings. As will be shown, this was in no small part because of the liberal employment of foreign textual and artistic references in their works. In the late Meiji and Taisho periods, influences and resources from abroad entered and spread throughout Japan in unprecedented amounts and speeds, as the nation became increasingly entrenched in international relations, and mass media developed. Questions of cultural identity and of hybridity arose at all segments of Japanese society, and literary writers too sought to evaluate the social and material changes unfolding around them. I argue that despite assessments that their works had depended too much on concerns that were arcane and unfamiliar to most of their readers, Ogai, the Shirakaba writers, and Akutagawa had each believed that works of literature and art could be appreciated across linguistic and cultural differences, and that this attitude of aesthetic cosmopolitanism in fact formed the basis of their critical examinations of issues that were more immediately related to their Japanese realities.

The writings of these authors reveal their efforts to calibrate their broad foundation of imported cultural knowledge—fostered through a study of literary and artistic works culled from various national, linguistic, and stylistic origins, as well as multiple historical periods—with their awareness of the specific cultural and socio-historical situations in which they lived and worked. It is the tensions between their desire to gain a trans-cultural worldview if at least through the arts, and their desire to affirm their own local discursive positions, that I trace throughout my dissertation. My intention is not to reinforce a
dichotomous opposition of imported modern values versus native traditions, but to consider how writers fashioned their own mixed perspectives from numerous possible influences and sources. I thus take as the object of my investigation an understanding of modern Japanese literary subjectivity as created in dialectical relation to the various competing factors constituting the nation’s changing realities. Theodor Adorno famously states in *Aesthetic Theory* that art is “social primarily because it stands opposed to society. Now this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous. By congealing into an entity unto itself—rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be ‘socially useful’—art criticizes society just by being there.”¹¹ I propose that literature, and the ideas expressed in its conceptual space, occupied such a privileged yet engaged position vis a vis the evolving social discourses in modern Japan.

The intellectual appetites of the late Meiji and Taisho period writers crossed not only cultural and linguistic boundaries, but different forms of media, and I pay particular attention to the roles that visuality played in shaping their critical views. A number of contemporary studies in visual culture examines how due to developments in the social and technological media of optical perception, visual information came to play a greater epistemological role for subjects of modern society from the nineteenth century onwards. Writing about the context of modernity in Western cultures, Jonathan Crary states that the expansion of the networks of visual signs through various new channels “enabled the new objects of vision (whether commodities, photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity, sundered from any relation to the observer’s position within a cognitively unified field.”¹² Images, now reproducible and exchangeable, became commodified in their own economy, to be consumed according to their own reality.


detached from real-world referents. Japanese culture’s modernization too has been marked by the burgeoning visual stimuli in new urban environments, and the unprecedented modes and amounts of ocular data which circulated through a rapidly expanding media industry.

I invoke this notion of modern visuality to suggest that the Japanese writers’ range of nuanced literary responses to visual images reflect their awareness of the complex and shifting nature of representation and signification at large in modernity, and of the unique capacity of literature to express and challenge these dynamics. The juxtapositions of imported concepts and artifacts against older traditions which characterized Japan’s cultural landscape in this era of increased international contact necessitated subjects’ reception and synthesis of information not just across linguistic and cultural differences, but also across numerous forms of media. It was not only through printed texts, but through an array of new objects and technologies, that Japanese individuals encountered knowledge to incorporate into their constantly evolving worldviews.

The conceptual strategies by which information was thusly ‘translated’ and processed across multiple sources and platforms might be described in terms of a general cognitive hybridity that is markedly modern. Authors’ literary descriptions of and reactions to visual stimuli can be seen as exemplifying this hybrid and fluid nature of modern perspectives. Whether in Ogai’s rather scientific efforts to delineate the visual perception of beauty in stories such as “Hanako” (1910), Mushanokôji Saneatsu’s numerous claims to personal identification with the French Post Impressionists through visual contemplation of their paintings as typified in his “Rules of Painting” debate against Kinoshita Mokutarô (1911), or Akutagawa Ryûnosuke’s resort to the terminology of painting to pontificate about literature especially in his Literary, All Too Literary (1927) essay series, the integration of visuality into the wider contexts of their critical and creative imaginations is evident.

Although photography, and film in later periods, were imported visual technologies that came to dominate the popular media landscape of Japan in the early twentieth century as
it did elsewhere, in my investigation of the links between Japanese literary language and visual information, I focus on literary writings about paintings and sculptures, particularly from abroad. Writers’ meditations on the visual fine arts from distant origins required not only the effort to linguistically describe the visual qualities of the objects being examined, but also, to experience and interpret in the foreign works the artistic values ascribed to them. Unlike with photographs in which the images’ direct connections with the real objects and scenes they depict are often unavoidable, or with film in which the fuller associative contexts of narrative and sound are integrated with its images, the evaluation of paintings and sculptures illuminates a register of thinking and feeling that is more aesthetic, and less bound to the viewer’s knowledge and concerns about actual referents and circumstances external to the work itself. I use here the term ‘aesthetic’ in a broad sense, to mean any theory of beauty or taste as having inherent and self-evident value, and ‘artworks’ to mean any objects created to express and explore these values.

The Japanese writers’ fluent discussions of the aesthetic value of foreign paintings and sculptures, and their ability to draw these insights into the greater sphere of their own literary discussions, draw upon what seems to have been the basic premise that they were able to appreciate and interpret the beauty of the artworks, regardless of an unfamiliarity with the socio-cultural discourses within in which they been created. This optimism seems to arise from the assumptions that aesthetic value was unvarying across time and space, and that the fine arts that express this through the immediacy of their non-linguistic and visual media, were universally significant to viewers regardless of their own linguistic or cultural positions. However, a closer look at these writings reveal that any optimism about the universal transparency of visual artworks was in fact inflected by the authors’ worldviews as shaped by their local Japanese environments, and in my dissertation, I study how authors’ literary outputs expressed the tensions between their desire for an aesthetic cosmopolitanism and for engagement with specific conditions in their actual worlds. Their attempts to
employ and mold the Japanese literary language to explore notions of ‘universal’ beauty and vision exposed their struggles to speak outside of their discursive positions and their referents, and raise questions about the translatability of such notions across time and space.

My dissertation delineates how writers expressed their attraction and skepticism toward the seemingly universal plane of visual perception and aesthetic value, as well as their critical awareness of their specific local realities, through the medium of Japanese literary language. The writers each played a pivotal role in the evolution of modern Japanese literary thought and expressions, and I argue that an interest in vision and aesthetics was of central importance to the construction of their self-images and worldviews. The selection of their works that I analyze focuses on the relationships that obtain between perception and knowledge, and it indicates how underlying modes of interpretation and perspective mediated their receptions of new information. Thus, it might be said that these writing echo the larger dynamics involved in the authors’ establishment of their identities and viewpoints within the flux of ideas and values circulating throughout Japan’s developing modernity.

Mori Ogai (1868-1922), the first of the authors I analyze, was a medical doctor in the Army and functioned as a high-level bureaucrat while developing his literary career. He first rose to fame within the Japanese literary world in his debate against Tsubouchi Shôyô (1859-1935) throughout a series of exchanges which came to be known as the Submerged Ideals Debate (没理想論争) between 1891 to 1892. As Atsuko Ueda shows in her aforementioned study, Shôyô’s seminal essay series Shôsetsu shinzui (1885-1886) promoted nonpolitical themes and the psychological realism of characters as the appropriate subject of novels, and it retroactively came to be ideologically instituted as the foundational text of modern Japanese literature in the years following its appearance. Ogai, who had argued for the centrality of aesthetic idealism instead of a strict adherence to realism in literature,
gained a reputation for his romantic inclinations that largely stands intact to this day\textsuperscript{13}.

In the decades that followed, Ogai would translate and lecture on the works of Eduard von Hartmann (1843-1906) and other Western aesthetic philosophers, and promote the development of the modern visual arts through his critical writings as well as various involvements with institutions such as the Tokyo Art School and the Imperial Museum, all while producing his own creative fictions and moving through the ranks of bureaucracy to eventually reach the position of Surgeon General of the Army. I hope to show in my study that as he navigated between the worlds of art and statecraft, Ogai’s literature went on to explore, test, and refine the timeless and ongoing relationships between artistic perspectives and reality as a lived sphere rooted in local conditions. I argue that the many allusions he makes to foreign philosophies and artistic references enhanced his ability to make apt pronouncements on the critical issues of his day.

The Shirakaba group, the second subject of my study, published their eponymous magazine between 1910 and 1923 under the optimistic ideals of a cosmopolitan ‘human’ spirit that could transcend cultural and linguistic differences. They promoted the notion of the ‘self’ (自分) as the irreducible and rightful agent of modernity. Dissatisfied with the state of Japanese culture which seemed to them to lack artists who were unhesitant in expressing the strong and confident subjectivity they sought, they turned their gazes abroad for inspiration. Within Japan, they admired Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916), who like Ogai was renowned for his facility with a range of Japanese and foreign ideas, and wrote with unique understanding and feeling about Japan’s evolving values and the uncertainties they engendered. But, ultimately, the Shirakaba group found Sôseki too, to be too cautious and hesitant for their tastes.

\textsuperscript{13} His involvement with the Subaru magazine (founded in 1909), which explicitly criticized the rise of Japanese Naturalism in favor of more romantic and aesthetic literature, has been especially commented on by critics like Itô Sei (Nihon bundanshi, Vol. 14, Han shizenshugi no hito tachi (Tokyo: Kôdansha bungei bunko, 1978)), and Takada Mizuho (Han shizenshugi bungaku (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1963)).
They instead set their sights on modern Western art, and believed they found communion with the intense subjectivity of certain strands of its works, which they tried to express through their own literary outputs. The *Shirakaba* magazine played a major role in introducing Western art to a wide Japanese public, and its members became known as cultural elitists who called themselves “children of the world”.

In my analysis of their readings of the Western visual arts, I investigate how they forged their sense of connection with foreign artists and their works through a process of projection and selective identification. I argue that their professed universalism was carefully contoured to heir literary and conceptual positions within Japan. I also suggest that the unapologetically direct and subjective writing styles they championed continue to be reflected in the popular Japanese literature of today.

The last writer I examine, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927), gained immense popularity for his elegant prose style, and his intellectual capacity to draw freely from a wide range of ideas and historical references from Japanese and foreign literatures and artworks. His work was praised as the culmination of the Taishō period (1911-1925) zeitgeist of cosmopolitan liberalism, rooted in a critical rationality that was able to move gracefully between ideas and styles from all contexts. But as debates over the political and aesthetic boundaries of Japanese literature escalated to new levels of urgency with the increasing prominence of Marxist criticisms and the rise of mass culture, the literary establishment came under attack for their purported insularity from these developments. When Akutagawa committed suicide in July 1927, blaming a “vague anxiety”, his death was thus widely perceived as emblematic of the defeat of modern Japanese literature’s epistemological hermeticism that kept its practitioners from the conceptual grasping, and hence active shaping, of the actual conditions of life through material agency and political

engagement. In my reading of his works though, I trace Akutagawa’s continuous questioning of his role as a literary writer and artist, and I argue that he had been well aware of the tensions between aesthetic ideals and lived realities. The challenges he faced in this process are evident in the multilayered nature of his works that evince ideas and insights still largely pertaining to contemporary conditions in Japan.

While Ogai, the Shirakaba writers, and Akutagawa each celebrated aspects of the conceptually unlimited scope of their aesthetic ideals, my contention is that they also challenged their conceptual remove from local realities. Their interest in visual images as transcending the specific referents that they picture, and in beauty as a transitive and independent value by which they could evaluate artworks in diverse media from any origin however distant, helped to construct their eclectic and critical worldviews, and their literary expressions. Insofar as collective and institutional notions of modernity, aesthetics, and modern literature were still coalescing in their lifetimes, their ideas and writings that questioned these too, should be considered a vital part of their understanding, rather than as resistances to any given unity.

It is my hope that this study on modern Japanese writers’ contemplation of the purported universality of aesthetics and their manifestations through artworks, and their transposition of these ideas with their Japanese linguistic and cultural conditions, can contribute, if obliquely, to ongoing discourses about the relationships between vision, knowledge, and culture. The notion that visual perception can remain unmediated by the variable conditions of the viewer has been widely discredited by theorists such as Martin Jay

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15 Lippit, Seiji, “Disintegrating Mechanisms of Subjectivity; Akutagawa Ryunosuke’s Last Writings”, Topographies of Japanese Modernism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 39-43. Lippit argues against the conventional literary historical reading of Akutagawa’s works as belonging to an untroubled Taisho mentality that was yet to concern itself about the status of literary practice which would be central to the modernist writers of the Showa period; he “examines the connection, often ignored or obscured, between Akutagawa’s writings and modernist literature in Japan.” (40)
and W.J.T Mitchell. Also, as critics such as Norman Bryson and Pierre Bordieu have argued, any appreciation of art involves a particular interpretation that goes beyond perception alone. The modern Japanese authors’ unique receptions of Western art and their ideals thus can be said to proffer further concrete support for these premises, in that their ways of seeing and knowing were cumulatively formed within multiple and competing discourses. They forged their worldviews and imaginations from the assorted objects of their sensory perceptions, their high aesthetic ideals, and the eclectic assortment of their multi-cultural learnings. Their literary productions are the result of these rich interactions, and are hence deeply connected to the hybrid conditions of knowledge in their era.

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Mori Ogai and Aesthetics I: A World of Beauty in Ogai’s German Trilogy

Dreams and Aesthetics

The interesting thing about dreams is that normally forgotten things resurface unexpectedly in variously changed forms, are expanded upon, turn like images from a magic lantern, and like scenes from a play time and space flow freely, so that one witnesses the passage of several decades in a few moments [...]. [Emphasis by Ogai.] (“Yume”, (Dreams), OZ 29: 285)

Mori Ogai (1862-1922) wrote this passage in 1889 as part of a brief meditation on the psychology of dreams soon upon his return to Japan following the four years he spent in Germany (1885-1889) in preparation for a career as an Army doctor. Though he takes as his source the work of Julius Nelson, an American psychologist, and he writes this for a medical journal, Ogai’s thoughts can also be read as reflective of his own complex relationship with the memories of his experiences abroad, circulating freely and actively amongst both the hierarchical elites and bohemian artists of German society. The liberties he had enjoyed as a visitor were very different from the social and bureaucratic responsibilities that awaited him in his homeland. Remembrances of his years as a foreign student surface in not only the “German trilogy” stories—Maihime (The Dancing Girl, 1890), Utakata no ki (A Record of Froth on the Water, 1890), and Fumizukai (The Courier, 1891)—that he published soon after returning to Japan, but also as echoes in his later creative and critical works underpinned by the ideals he had discovered in Europe. For

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2 “The Dancing Girl” and “The Courier” are the most conventional translations for these stories’ titles, and appear in J. Thomas Rimer, ed., Youth and Other Stories (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994). In this anthology, Utakata no ki is translated by Richard Bowring as “A Sad Tale”, but I use instead the more literal, yet evocative, translation of “A Record of Froth on the Water”, which J. Thomas Rimer used in J. Thomas Rimer, Mori Ogai (New York: Twain Publishers, 1975).

3 For example, Vita Sexualis (1909), “Daihakken” (1909), “Fushinchû” (1910), and “Kanoyôn” (1912) explicitly feature characters who had spent time abroad in Europe and whose thoughts are shaped by their
Ogai, it must have been like awakening from a dream to find himself back in the reality of Japan, where he would live out the rest of his days as an increasingly busy and prominent figure in the fields of not only scientific research and statecraft, but also of literature and cultural criticism.

He writes about his transition back into Japanese life almost twenty years later in “Môsô” (Illusions, 1911), a novella told from the point of view of a retired medical professor reflecting on his youth from the quiet solitude of his seaside home. The fictional narrator describes how he had come of age by mulling over the disconnect he had sensed between his readings of Western novels that focused on issues such as the fear of death and the horror of losing one’s individuality, and his memories of how as a child he had been told by his elders not to fear death because he was a member of a proud Japanese samurai household. During the time he spends abroad in Germany as a young scientific researcher, he thus becomes an avid reader of philosophical texts in search of a resolution to his dilemma over these contradictory values systems, and though he does not discover any firm answers through his reading, meditating on these metaphysical themes brings him solace. In fact, he feels himself to be so greatly changed by his intellectual development that on the eve of his departure from Europe upon the conclusion of his studies, Japan now seems a vague memory, “a beautiful, nostalgic land of dreams.” (OZ 8: 206) Half remembered and otherworldly, the specter of Japan seems to represent the promise of a long deferred sense of fruition.

Yet this was not to be. The old professor recalls that: “as regards the natural sciences, it [was] not just the end discoveries that I had hoped to bring back. I also intend[ed] to hold the seeds for future developments. However, in the homeland I return[ed] to, there was no atmosphere for fostering these seeds. Or at least ‘not yet’.[…] I was overcome by a dull sense of dread.” (OZ 8: 207) The young doctor returned home

comparative perspectives. His critical writings—whether on literature, art, politics, or science—almost always evince his cross-cultural scope.
hoping to establish there the spirit of experimentation and liberalism that had enlivened scientific research in Germany, but soon discovers that the intellectual climate of his country was still averse to the idea of “Forschung” (empirical experimentation). (OZ 8: 209)

Though disappointed, he instead seeks refuge in the resigned philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer and aesthetic treatises of Eduard von Hartmann as he continues to uphold the duties of his official position and eventually earn himself the comfortable retirement from which he now muses on his past.

It might thus be said that once Japan had proven that it was not the open land of possibilities he had dreamed of, the topos of his dreamscape shifted from a geographical or cultural designation to a conceptually elusive space of unfettered idealism that existed parallel to the logistical spaces of his immediate, real life in Japan. This realm of an endless openness to new ideas from various cultures, languages, and times could be accessed only through a specially attenuated, provisional perspective that might be termed ‘literary’.

Especially after he retires, the old professor devotes his days to reading his imported philosophy and literature books, retreating from the people and events of the outside Japanese world. Philosophical contemplation becomes his lifelong interest. Yet, Ogai writes perhaps a bit ruefully of his alter-ego that: “he learned that any system of metaphysics is equal to a stanza of lyric poetry.” (OZ 8: 217) This seems to express his resigned acceptance that new concepts, whether of metaphysical impact or poetic charm, could enter and be appreciated in Japanese discourse only under the general designation of ‘literature’, signifying an ontological remove from actual, living reality.

Ogai echoes many of the sentiments he explored in “Môsô” in a short, autobiographical essay entitled “Nakajikiri” (Partitions, 1917) written six years later when he himself felt that “old age [was] finally encroaching as a physical reality.” (OZ 26: 543) As he looks back at the various fields he had participated in throughout his busy life from a detached “retrospective standpoint”, he states that: “as for philosophy, since I was a doctor
and was confounded that philosophy had no position for unifying the natural sciences, I took provisional refuge in Hartmann’s *Philosophy of the Unconscious.*” (OZ 26: 543)  Like the narrator of *Mōsō* for whom his forays into philosophy remained separate from his public career and livelihood, the “provisional” nature of the “refuge” that Ogai found seems to indicate his understanding that although the concrete realities of the natural sciences—including the passage of time leading towards his old age—could be neither neatly compartmentalized nor escaped, by acceding to a ‘literary’ mode of thought, he could find metaphysical order and meaning in the works of philosophers and writers.

Ogai first discovered Hartmann’s ideas during his time in Germany through anthologies of European philosophy which included synopses of Hartmann’s debut work *Philosophy of the Unconscious.*  However, his later interest in Hartmann’s thought focuses primarily on his aesthetic theories.  Ogai would go on to publish translations of the beginning sections of Hartmann’s *Aesthetik. Zweiter systemascher Theil: Philosophie des Schoenen* (Aesthetics -Volume Two: The Philosophy of Beauty, 1887) as a collection of entries entitled *Shinbiron* (Theory on Aesthetic Critique) in his coterie magazine *Shigaramizōshi* in 1892; a summary of Johannes Volkelt’s *Aesthetische Zeitfragen* (Timely Problems on Beauty, 1895) entitled *Shinbi shinsetsu* (New Aesthetic Theory) presented over two years from 1898 in his new coterie magazine *Mezamashi gusa*, established after his return from the Sino-Japanese War, then later as its own volume in 1899; a continuation of the translation of Hartmann’s *Aesthetiks* entitled *Shinbi oryō* in two volumes in 1899; as well as numerous other aesthetic writings that illuminate the metaphysical systems of beauty he discovered through Hartmann’s works.

For Ogai, the realm of aesthetic appreciation and metaphysical contemplation thus seems to have become a “refuge” accessible through literary thought’s “provisional” reality, wherein he could explore tensions and ideas that lay beyond the realms of his more official career and reputation as a doctor, statesman, and critic. His appreciation of aesthetic
idealism and beauty soon went beyond the study and introduction of Hartmann’s philosophies, and became manifest in his increasing involvement with the arts. Over the course of his lifetime, Ogai would engage in theoretical debates about aesthetics\footnote{See Introduction for information about Ogai’s “submerged ideals” debate with Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935).}, write reviews and criticism of artworks, teach aesthetics and art history at the Tokyo Art School\footnote{Isozaki Yasuhiko, “Tokyo bijutsu gakkō karikyuramu to shokutaku kyōin to shite no Mori Ogai” (Meiji 24-Meiji 32), Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku bijutsu gakubu kiyô (Tokyo: Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku, 1973), v.9, 11.}, serve as a judge of the Ministry of Education Art Exhibit from its inception in 1907 to the time of its renewal as the Imperial Arts Academy Exhibit in 1919, become the first president of the Imperial Arts Academy the same year, and serve as the head of the Imperial Museum (the predecessor of the Tokyo National Museum) from 1917 until his death in 1922.

The aim of this chapter and the next is to explore how for Ogai, the literary and aesthetic spheres represented meanings and values that pushed against the bounds of the lived pragmatism and intellectual musings of “a man of letters” (文士) in Meiji and Taisho Japan, in the manner of dreams expressing complex concepts repressed in waking life. Many of his stories evince his familiarity with the Freudian notion that dreams are produced by the workings of the dreamer’s deep psychology\footnote{Hannichi (1909), Vita Sexualis (1909), Masui (1909), Konpira (1909), and other works explore the possibility of human psychological abnormalities and the structure of dream sequences, and make use of Freudian terminology in describing his characters’ various conditions.}, and it has been noted that included in Ogai’s collection of books is a first edition copy of Sigmund Freud’s On Dreams (1901)\footnote{Nakai Yoshiyuki, “Ogai’s Craft: Literary Techniques and Themes in Vita Sexualis”, in Monumenta Nipponica, v.35, no.2 (Summer, 1980), 229.}. Ogai’s readings of the plays and stories of the Austrian author and psychologist Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931), who had been a close contemporary of Freud in Vienna, too have been studied.\footnote{Iwasa Sôshirô, “Mori Ogai・Schnitzler・Yamamoto Yuzô—Furoito no kage”, Nihon kindai bungaku no...
1910s\textsuperscript{9}, Ogai’s remarks that in dreams, “\textit{normally forgotten things resurface unexpectedly in variously changed forms, are expanded upon, turn like images from a magic lantern, and like scenes from a play time and space flow freely,}” (OZ 29: 285) echo the notion of conceptual freedoms supposedly accessed in dream-states, and they specifically suggest concurrence with the belief that visual imagery plays a special role in this. It might therefore be said that for Ogai, the realm of aesthetics opened up a space for examining an epistemological primacy inaccessible via the linearly unfolding nature of conventional thought and language, similar to how dream imagery represented to Freud a dimension that examined in changed forms a subject’s hidden primal essences, as “a sort of \textit{substitute} for the thought-processes, full of meaning and emotion.”\textsuperscript{10}

My study will proceed in two parts. I begin with a chapter on the critical, destabilizing role that images of beauty plays in the German trilogy stories. In each story, the alluring appearance of enigmatic and ultimately tragic female characters brings the protagonist to secret realms of aesthetic enchantment that challenge conventional reality, and shake their belief in the transcendence of reason. In these writings, each protagonist is able to fully enter their ‘visions’ and access these experiences largely because of their status as outsiders to their respective milieus; the protagonists of the stories are young Japanese men in Germany. In the following chapter, I focus on “Hanako” (1910) and other stories that explicitly explore theories of aesthetic vision, featuring artists as pivotal characters. In these stories, it is with a mixture of incomprehension and admiration that the protagonist

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\textsuperscript{9} The first mention of Freud in Japanese psychiatry was an article about the notion of repression, published in 1912 in the magazine \textit{Shinri kenkyū} (Psychology Research), which was founded in 1910. Freud’s theories would continue to be introduced, primarily through this magazine, throughout the decade. See Yamashita Tsuneo, \textit{Nihonjin no ‘kokoro’ to shinrigaku no mondai} (The ‘Soul’ of the Japanese and the Problem of Psychology) (Tokyo: Gendai shokan, 2004), especially chapter seven.

views artists, who represent intersections between the worlds of aesthetic idealism and the rationality of quotidian existence. Finally, I analyze his later turn towards historical fiction as reflecting Ogai’s social consciousness and attempts to envision his agencies within the creative real and the external world. I particularly focus on his novella Oshio Heihachirō (1914) which was written against the political context of the Great Treason Incident (大逆事件) of 1910-1911.

**The German Trilogy**

Ogai published Maihime in January 1890 in Kokumin no tomo magazine a year and four months after returning to Japan from Germany. In the novel Toyatarô, the narrator, writes from aboard a ship sailing back to Japan about his experiences in Berlin which haunt him as he nears his homeland. He recounts his tale from his initial arrival in the bright, big European metropolis as a government sponsored Japanese law student buoyed with dreams of risshin shusse (立身出世, to rise and advance in the world), although as the months go by, he is increasingly pained by uncertainty and loneliness. His outlook changes when he meets and falls in love with Ellis, an impoverished German dancing girl. When Toyotarô loses his government stipend because his superiors discover his relationship with her, he has no choice but to move in with her. With the help of a concerned friend, Aizawa, he eventually finds employment at a newspaper office and he continues to support his paramour and her elderly mother with this salary. This poor but happy domesticity does not continue indefinitely though as Toyotarô, despite his claims to the contrary to Ellis, comes to realize that he must restore his public honor, and through Aizawa’s introduction, he undertakes an assignment as a translator for a visiting Japanese official. The official is sufficiently impressed by his talents to offer him an elite post back in Japan. Toyotarô automatically accepts, but is tormented at the thought of confronting Ellis who is now pregnant. After a nightmarish walk through the snowy nighttime streets, he arrives home and falls into a faint. When he regains consciousness a few weeks later, he learns that Ellis has gone insane with
grief at the news of his intended abandonment, and has been institutionalized. Before he departs for Japan, he and Aizawa leave Ellis’s mother with compensatory funds. Toyotarō ends his tale by confessing that: “Ah, such a good friend like Aizawa Kenkichi is rare! But a spot in the back of my mind continues to resent him to this day.” (OZ 1:447)

As is well known, within a month of Ogai’s return to Tokyo, a German girl by the name of Elise Wiegert, with whom he had been romantically involved in Berlin, arrived in Tokyo though she was soon convinced by Ogai’s alarmed family to return home. Also, Toyotarō’s initial status as an ambitious, government-funded student matches that of Ogai’s situation during his years abroad. It has thus been conventional to assume that the fictional story of Maihime was based loosely but largely on the writer’s own experiences, although more recent research suggests that the story might also have been inspired by the romance of his friend Harada Naojirō (1863-1899), a Japanese painter whom Ogai had befriended in Germany, with a café waitress.

Harada had come to study at the Art Academy in Munich in 1884, two years before Ogai reached that city on his multiregional study tour of Germany. The son of an aristocratic politician who himself had spent time in Germany as a youth and “felt that the future of Japan must be fostered not by military prowess but by education and the arts”

Harada was encouraged to pursue his artistic ideals rather than adhere to the rigid, conventional course of a bureaucratic career, as was Ogai’s case. His travel expenses were paid for with family funds, and he was not obliged to report on his progress to any institutional authorities. Harada became a student of Gabriel von Max (1840-1915), and under him, he gradually developed a distinct style that drew on academic techniques and an interest in spirituality. Ogai seems to have admired his friend’s freedom, and he writes of

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11 See, for example, Chiba Shunji, Erisu no ekubo (Tokyo: Ozawa shoten, 1994).
12 See Niizeki Kimiko, Mori Ogai to Harada Naojirō (Tokyo: Tokyo geijutsu daigaku shuppankai, 2008).
13 Ibid., 15.
14 Figures 1-1, 1-2.
Harada’s “unattached and unselfish” (恬談無欲) character (OZ 25: 132) as having been “much loved by his teachers and peers [for being] so natural” (自然児) (OZ 25: 131). However, despite his carefree appearances, Harada’s circumstances were more complex than an initial glance suggested. He had married at eighteen and already had a child by the time he left for his studies abroad as a young man of twenty-one, following the advice of the leading Western-style painter Takahashi Yuichi, who expected that the Tokyo Art School (東京美術学校), which would shortly be established in 1887, would need Japanese instructors versed in the Western arts. It seems that Harada had been reluctant to tell his new acquaintances in Germany about his familial status—Ogai thinks this is because he had been too modest to bring up his personal life\(^{15}\)—though he eventually ends up living with Marie, a waitress at a café frequented by art students. There is a single, passing mention of Marie’s pregnancy with Harada’s child in Ogai’s diary (OZ 35: 154), but no further information as to what happened later to her, or the child in question.

In her book Mori Ogai to Harada Naojirō, the scholar Niizeki Kimiko proposes that in Maihime, Ogai had aligned himself not with the main character Toytaro but with his friend Aizawa, since it seems that he had introduced Harada to Hamao Arata, a visiting Japanese official who went on to retain Harada’s services in touring the art academies of Germany.\(^{16}\) The first art school in Japan, the Technical Arts Academy (工部美術学校) had been established in 1876 with three departments—painting, sculpture, and architecture, each headed by foreigners under limited term contracts—but it was closed in 1883 under the wave of nationalist (国粹主義) policy reforms that swept Japan. Ernest Fenellosa (1853-1908), an American professor teaching at the Tokyo Imperial University, and Okakura

\(^{15}\) “If one were intentionally hiding [his married state] to play with the emotions [of a suitor], that is an ignoble person. There are many such Japanese. In the West too, there are many who hide their so-called wedding bands. Harada was certainly not one of these. He was so modest that he was embarrassed even mentioning his wife, and even to me, a close friend”: OZ, v.25, 131-132.

\(^{16}\) Niizeki Kimiko, Mori Ogai to Harada Naojiro, 36.
Tenshin (1862–1913) who served as his assistant, led the planning for a new art school that would teach more traditional Japanese styles and techniques. They initiated a study of the European art academies as a part of their research. Hamao Arata, a member of the Ministry of Education (文部省) who was already in Europe on other bureaucratic business, was amongst those contacted for this mission, and Harada came to serve as his guide for his month long tour. Yet unlike Toyotarô who in Ogai’s novel managed to parlay a similar assignment into a job placement in Japan, when the new art school was opened to students in 1889 after years of groundwork led by Tenshin and Fenellosa, it did not include a Western arts curriculum and therefore had no openings for Harada who returned to Japan in 1887 in what seems to have been anticipation of receiving a post at the academy. Despite the difference in Harada and Toyotarô’s circumstances, Niizeki argues that in Maihime, Ogai expresses his conflicted feelings about having led his friend to hope for an opportunity that did not materialize, and to have indirectly caused him to leave behind the artistic freedoms of Germany and a pregnant mistress to return to his homeland, which still lacked the cultural infrastructure for embracing his style of artistic expression.

While it is futile to stipulate direct and exclusive real life counterparts to a work of creative fiction by examining autobiographical parallels, an analysis of Toyotarô as an artist (Harada), and Aizawa as a voice of conventional reason (Ogai) can also be supported in the narrative itself. As the scholar Maeda Ai has pointed out, the early scene when Toyotarô gazes out at the Unter den Linden, the main wide boulevard of the city, is an “interject[ion of] linear perspective into the interiority of a fictional character.”¹⁷ Indeed, the scene is described as though through the eyes of a painter. Toyotarô exclaims, “What luminosity directs my eyes! What colors stir my heart!” (OZ 1: 427), then examines the attractive broad-shouldered officers and colorfully attired girls on the street. His gaze then zooms

upwards to the high buildings and the spray of water fountains against the clear sky, and farther down the vista towards the Brandenburg Gate and the statue of the goddess on top of the Victory Tower. This process of first establishing tone and a color palette, then focusing on subjects in the foreground, and lastly confirming the more distant elements, indicates that in his act of looking, Toyotarô has actively, visually constructed the scene for himself, “interiorizing” it, in Maeda’s parlance. Therefore, when Toyotarô stiffly states that, “[h]owever, in my heart was a vow not to be moved by the transience of beautiful sights under any circumstances, and I always blocked out the external stimuli that assaulted me,” (OZ 1: 427) it sounds falsely hollow. He cannot claim indifference to a scene that he has made his own.

The young man’s penchant for beauty and wonder persists despite his declared attempts to stem it. He increasingly finds that “the prospect of becoming a figure of the law was unbearable. I used to diligently answer even the most arcane queries [about the law] but from this point onwards, in the correspondences I sent to the magistrate [under whom I studied], I argued about not being bound by the specific details of laws, and declared that to abide solely by the spirit of the law was to turn a myriad of realities into useless waste.” (OZ 1: 428) To argue against the fundamental “spirit of the law” to his superiors shows how strongly he wanted to rebel against the monolithic strictures of the field he had entered. He suspects that there might be alternatives to a life spent by rigid rules set in dry text, and the defiant loneliness that he fortifies himself with, particularly against his peers who mock his strange depression, finally gives way when he sees Ellis crying alone in a shadowy sidestreet. “Surprised by my footsteps she turned to face me, and her visage was such that I cannot describe it without the words of a poet. Just one look of her pure blue eyes that were inquisitive and yet contained an element of sadness, shaded by her long, wet eyelashes, penetrated the depths of my hardened soul.” (OZ 1: 430) It is beauty—one wonders whether Toyatarô would have been as touched by a less pretty face—that enlivens
him, and offers him a dreamy refuge from the drab world of law and rules.

Ellis explains that she lacks the money with which to bury her father who had suddenly passed away, and he follows her to the dark and cramped abode she shares with her elderly mother. It is a dingy cavelike space “at the side of which the girl stood in shame” (OZ 1: 432), and he notices now that she speaks with an accent although this had failed to register when they had met in the open street. Yet Toyotarô notes that: “She was superbly beautiful. Her complexion was the color of milk, tinged with a rosy hue by the light of the lamp. Her slim, languorous limbs seemed incongruous on a poor woman.” (OZ 1: 432) Despite her unattractive background and grating speech patterns, he is still moved by her beauty and he gives her some money with which she might resolve her woes. He does this though he dispassionately observes that: “As she looked up, there was a flirtatious look in her eyes that suggested that she would not take ‘no’ for answer. I wonder if she moved her eyes like this intentionally or without knowing.” (OZ 1: 432) Hence, it does not matter to him whether or not she has an accent, or is manipulating the effect that her appearance has on him, as long as he can gaze at her. In this moment, Ogai portrays his character not just as a lonely and displaced Japanese in a foreign land, but as more assimilated and culturally sophisticated than this native but rough-hewn girl. Toyotarô is presented as having a cosmopolitan, egalitarian perspective that can appreciate beauty in whatever context he finds it, reflecting, it seems, Ogai’s own views. It is not physical lust that motivates this aesthetic gaze, and Toyotarô states that for a long time, he and Ellis’s relationship was “much purer [清白] than it looked from the outside.” (OZ 1: 434) It is purely her bewitching appearance that matters to him.

It must also be noted that his relationship with Ellis comes to a close once she becomes pregnant, and approaches the time of parturition. Confronting this visceral reality would have required taking the relationship to a level beyond that of aesthetic pleasure. Toyotarô’s friend Aizawa gives him the all too realistic advice that “[a] man of education
and talent should not lead an aimless existence out of sentimental attachment to one girl,” and that “even if your relationship with this girl is sincere and your affections grow deeper, this is a love based not on understanding of her character but on customary longing; be firm and leave her,” (OZ 1: 439) and introduces him to a temporary government post with visiting Japanese officials. Toyotarō goes on to impress his superiors and is offered a permanent job back in Japan; overwhelmed by this dramatic turn of events, he becomes ill and enters a coma just when he must decide between the reality of a family life with Ellis in Berlin, or the reality of a conventional bureaucratic career in his homeland. This signals a renunciation, even if unwilled, of responsibility at a crucial, life-changing moment. That Toyotarō does not attempt to analyze this blank period that marked the end of his dreamy time of hiatus with Ellis, even in retrospect, seems to echo the famous Freudian proposition about the Nabel of the dream:

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to the content of the dream. This is the dream’s navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.¹⁸

Jacques Derrida summarizes this critical, opaque crux of the dream as “a night, an absolute unknown that is originarily, congenitally bound or tied (but also in itself unbound because ab-solute) to the essence and to the birth of the dream[...]. What forever exceeds the analysis of a dream is indeed a knot that cannot be untied, a thread that, even if cut, like an umbilical cord, nonetheless remains forever knotted, right on the body, at the place of the

In Maihime, Toyotarô too instinctively seems to know that his coma cannot be untangled, because it is the result of this very aporia reaching down into his most primal and constitutive essences, which had spawned both his attachment to Ellis and her beauty, as well as his subsequent, passive decision to let Aizawa steer his future back onto the path of standard and socially respectable values. This dream ‘navel’ is a place of conflicting desires that cannot be faced through reason alone.

Yet Ogai, in Freudian fashion, does offer some insight into Toyotarô’s family background that helps readers better contextualize his passive choices. At various points in the story, Ogai describes his character’s upbringing by his mother after his father’s early death. Apparently, he had become an academic overachiever out of a desire to meet his mother’s hopes of his successful future, although once out of her reach in Germany, he comes to question this maternal pressure. He however, grieves the notice of her death when it arrives by post, uncannily reaching him in the same batch as a final letter from her. These notices also coincide with the loss of his official government sponsorship because of his extracurricular dalliances. Thus unmoored from the contexts of family and nation, Toyotarô moves in with Ellis; it is in this officially orphaned state that he retreats fully, if temporarily, into his aesthetic dreamstate. Analyzing the missing weeks during which this liminal condition comes to a close would entail an examination of its origins—Ogai seems to vaguely indicate that this is caught within Toyotarô’s longstanding and unresolved issues about the absence of a father figure both, and longing for the mother who had died and left him alone in the world.

Derrida also asks: “Is this limit of analysis, instead of being the origin of the dream-wish, a resistance to analysis?[…]. Or is this limit of analysis instead attached, in some irreducible and ahistorical way, to the structure of the dreamwish, which must be born, 19

like a mushroom, at the greatest density of a meshwork destined to obscurity?"\(^{20}\) He goes on to suggest that in such instances when a subject cannot face his analysis, more is required than an interpretation of the hidden meanings of dreams or psychological symptoms; resistance “can only be lifted by the intervention of an affective factor.”\(^{21}\) This would mean that analysis could only “work toward [concurir à] the lifting of such resistances”\(^{22}\), and that interpretations, however intellectually sound, must be in conjunction with the subject’s volitional desire to understand and face these. Void of such an active motivation, analysis will have no effect, and Toyotarô seems to lack this will. Yet, his conspicuous indifference at exploring the forces at play in his last days in Berlin with Ellis seems to manifest not just Toyotarô’s cowardice about confronting the origins of his reluctance to face reality as an independent adult, but also, his instincts of self preservation. Derrida suggests that in analysis:

There is, on the one hand, what could be called the archaeological or anagogical motif, which is marked in the movement of ana (recurrent return toward the principal, the most originary, the simplest, the elementary, or the detail that cannot be broken down); and, on the other hand, a motif that could be nicknamed lytic, lytological, marked in the lysis (breaking down, untying, unknotting, deliverance, solution, dissolution or absolution, and, by the same token, final completion). Thus the archeological motif of analysis is doubled by an eschatological movement, as if analysis were the bearer of extreme death and the last word, just as the archaeological motif, in view of the originary, is turned toward birth.\(^{23}\)

Through his timely coma, Toyotarô thus manages to escape the dissolution of the coherence of his subjectivity which might have followed a direct analysis of his situation’s roots, and consciously or not, he makes a clear choice to leave Ellis and return to Japan. Even if he does not fully understand or confront why or how he reached this decision, he

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\(^{20}\) Ibid., 15-16.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 19-20.
must now live with the knowledge of himself as having chosen one life path over another; he has learned of loss. Though Toyotarô ultimately seems to be coming to terms with his choice to hew to the path of *risshin shusse*, he admits that in his most secret thoughts he resents Aizawa, the unwavering friend who rescued him from his plight by his clear thought processes and rational actions. A part of him still desires the beauty and abandon that he had experienced with Ellis, but as he closes his literary confession, he is also closing up the private subjectivity attuned to an ephemeral aesthetic allure, in favor of the more worldly and constructive subjectivity he will now live by. That Ogai ends the story on this lingering, bittersweet note serves more than to express any personal sense of guilt towards Harada whom he too had tried to ‘rescue’, and might be read as a revelation of his more general urge to challenge the monolithic imperatives of socially instituted reason over the course of his literary career to come. This urge, however, is already conflicted since from this initial stage he knows that as an Army official and figure of institutional authority, he would have to refrain from questioning too directly the ontological foundations of the reason and laws that govern society. This doubling of Ogai’s perspective with that of his artist friend, whom he admired since unlike himself he was free to give himself to the pursuit of beauty, implies his bind between two systems of values—beauty and reason—presented here as incompatible.

*Utakata no ki*, published in the August 1890 issue of Ogai’s coterie magazine *Shigarami zōshi* several months after *Maihime*, is another story that explores the realm of aesthetics as an alternative to that of mainstream realities. This dichotomized perspective is presented more starkly than in *Maihime*, in which it is the narrator’s internal struggle between his simultaneous love of beauty and his desire to uphold conventional social standards that form the story’s central drama. In *Utakata no ki*, from the start a clear divide seems to exist as a matter of fact between the worlds of artistic subjectivity and
objective reason. At the end of the tale, when the two perspectives collide in tragedy, the protagonist does not exhibit signs of spiritual growth, and instead, seems only shell-shocked. While Ogai admits that the premises of the story had been inspired by his friend Harada’s lifestyle in Munich (OZ 38: 152), overall, the main character’s interiority remains largely undeveloped, and he is defined solely in terms of his dedication to the allure of his beautiful artistic muse. For these very reasons, the story manages to focus more explicitly on the themes of aesthetic allure and the artistic temperament, than the previous work does. The title, *Utakata no ki* (A Record of Froth on the Water), aptly captures the ephemeral and dreamy quality of not only its tragic heroine, but also the realm of beauty she represents in the story.²⁴

The narrative unfolds in the third person voice and focuses on Kose, a Japanese painting student, who is newly arrived at the Art Academy of Munich. His friend Exter introduces him to the other art students at the Café Minerva, where Marie, a painting model known for her beauty as well as her sass, works as a waitress. Kose tells his new peers that this is not his first time in Munich; he had come to visit the Pinacotheque Museum six years ago and during his brief stay, had encountered a beautiful child flower peddler whose pathos had moved him to give her what little money he had had with him. The girl’s visage has continued to haunt him to this day and his paintings, especially a portrait of the legendary heroine Lorelei that he has been working on recently, bear her countenance. Marie announces that she herself had been that impoverished flower girl, and she kisses Kose, much to the other students’ delight. A week later, she visits him in his studio and tells him her life story. Her father had been an esteemed painter in the court of the increasingly eccentric Bavarian King Ludwig II until the king tried to seduce his wife, also named Marie. He struck the king in order to defend his wife, and was consequently jailed. Following this,

²⁴ Ogai wrote the title of the tale as "うたかたの記". The term 泡沫 (utakata) literally means froth on water, but also can directly mean “transience”, like watery froth.
he fell ill and soon died. The heartbroken Marie I also died, leaving their daughter orphanned. She was eventually adopted by a kindly fisherman and his wife who lived by Lake Starnberg, and lived there until she returned to Munich as a young woman. After recounting this, Marie invites Kose to the lake, where King Ludwig II also happens to be undergoing treatment for a mental illness. As Kose and Marie row on the waters, Ludwig II and his psychiatrist stroll by the waterfront and spot them. The king mistakes Marie for her mother, and in his confused desire to reach her, he plunges into the lake and drowns. His doctor, who tries to stop him, too dies. Marie is startled by the commotion and falls into the water, and the distraught Kose brings her to the nearest fisherman’s hut to nurse her back to consciousness. It turns out to be the home of Marie’s former foster parents. Despite their efforts to save her, she too dies.

The mysterious drowning of Ludwig II and Doctor Gudden in 1886 had been a major historical event, and Ogai has created a fictional story in which, however implausibly, this public death is linked to a more private tragedy. Ludwig II had been deposed due to charges of insanity, and was criticized for his extravagant spending on large-scale architectural projects and the patronage of artists such as Richard Wagner. The eccentric king left behind a creative cultural legacy, but rival factions deemed him incompetent as a wielder of real political power. The charges of his clinical insanity remain contested, but in Ogai’s story, he is shown not so much as an erstwhile victim beaten down by political machinations, or even as a man conflicted between his official responsibilities and his love of the arts. Rather, he is presented in his utter dedication to Marie I/Marie II’s beauty; the incestuous overtones of this fantasy in which the daughter is interchangeable with the mother hint at the gravity of his psychological abnormality by this time. The King’s desire to reach Marie is depicted without hesitation. “Standing on the bank of the lake was the king with Doctor Gudden, his private attendee. The king stared at the girl entranced, as though watching a vision, and he suddenly screamed ‘Marie!’”. He threw aside his parasol and
waded into the water towards her.” (OZ 2: 22) Ogai does not attempt to depict the king’s thoughts and portrays only his stark actions which, driven by his desire to approach the beautiful Marie, outweighs rational judgment as represented by the faithful Doctor Gudden who tries to save him:

The sand at the water’s edge was mixed with a muddy clay, and the king’s feet sank in deeply so that he could not break free though he struggled. The old doctor too tossed aside his parasol and followed, clinging to the king, but he was old and his strength was diminished. He took two or three steps kicking the water, and grabbed the king’s neck trying to pull him back. As the old man tried to resist being tugged forth, the king’s cape and jacket slipped off and remained in his grasp. The old man flung this aside, attempting to pull the king closer, but the king turned and tackled him. The two struggled without a word, wrestling against each other.

This all took place in a single moment. (OZ 2:22)

If this battle is read as that between the will to aesthetic pleasure and the imperatives of reason, the consistent focus on how old and feeble the doctor is against the mad strength of the king indicates a not too subtle power dynamic. However, though Ludwig II and Gudden’s fates are known from the start, Ogai presents the struggle between them as a genuine contest while it lasts. First, that the doctor is mentioned at all, and by name, emphasizes his presence as a counterpoint to the king. Furthermore, the play-by-play account of his attempts to save the royal personage stretches out the scene, decelerating its rhythm as though rendering it in cinematic slow motion. The silence too heightens the dreamlike, visual nature of the sequence. Instead of engaging in a debate using ornate language, the two forces are locked in simple combat against each other. Ogai encapsulates in this “single moment” what seems to be the timeless, endless struggle between the desire for beauty and the desire for rational order.

This epic fight, and the subsequent death of Marie, unfolds not in Munich, but in the provinces by the lake. It is a rainy late afternoon on a Sunday when Marie impulsively invites Kose to these outskirts, which is hours away from the city, but despite these
inconvenient circumstances, “Kose obeys, like a child being led by his mother.” (OZ 2:17)
It is thus an instinct that precedes reason that makes the artist obey his muse, and he follows her farther and farther away from the civilized city of schools and culture, and towards the liminal, dreamlike wilderness of her origins. From Kose’s studio they take a carriage to the station, embark on an hour long train ride, take another carriage to the lake, and finally, she even asks him to row out onto the water in the rain. He follows her without voicing any concern about where or what this spontaneous trip is leading to, and she chants, “Today, today! What can be done about yesterday? Tomorrow and the day after are empty concepts, futile words!” (OZ 2:19), as though to discourage the artist from logically contextualizing his devotion to her beauty in the reality of a linear temporality. Kose’s fantasy immersion ends abruptly though, by the nightmare of witnessing in sudden succession the deaths of Ludwig II, Gudden, and Marie. Ogai does not describe Kose’s return to Munich where news of the king’s death by drowning is causing an uproar:

The sad news was proclaimed on black-framed posters throughout the city, and crowds gathered under these. People bought special editions of the newspaper which published accounts of the discovery of the king’s corpse along with theories as to the cause of his death. Policemen on call wore their full official uniform with the black Bavarian armor and rode on horses, passing by each other on patrol in the crowded streets. (OZ 2:24)

In contrast to this record of the city’s public reaction to the death of a king, there is no description of the personal grief of the artist at the death of his muse. Ogai thus emphasizes the gap between official, historical records—the detail about newspaper stories chronicling the news of Ludwig II’s death highlights the processes by which such records are disseminated—and the reality of an individual’s aesthetic experiences. That no one knows of or mentions Marie’s death although she is directly linked to Ludwig II’s demise, seems to imply that beauty is an object of private contemplation rather than a public, historical one. As far as public memory is concerned, it is as though she had never existed. Kose too, is forgotten by everyone in the midst of the nationwide mourning, and when he is
discovered by his friend Exter a few days later, he is nearly catatonic, gaunt and kneeling in front of the Lorelei painting he had executed in the image of Marie.

Like the king, he too has been felled by his devotion to an ideal beauty that finally eluded him. Ogai seems to imply in this parallel between Ludwig II and Kose that artistic temperaments can transcend nationality and class. The universal nature of the experience of beauty however, seems to entail a conceptual breaking free from conventional reasoning: Ludwig’s purported insanity, and Kose’s status as a foreigner, mark them as outsiders. Ogai accentuates the ‘transporting’ power of beauty by setting the climax of the story in the provinces rather than the capital where both the king and the artist had originally been situated. In both cases though, as evinced by Ludwig’s bizarre drowning and Kose’s final broken state, it seems that a total and exclusive dedication to aesthetics is untenable in reality. Beauty must, Ogai seems to conclude, serve as a “provisional refuge” (*OZ* 26: 543), a pleasure to be enjoyed with the awareness that it is in fact disinterested in, and ontologically independent, from actual life.

The last of the German trilogy novels too explores the liminal space of dreams and images that lie beyond the articulation of everyday reasoning. As with *Maihime*, *Fumizukai* (1890) is told by a narrator recounting his past experiences from the remove of the present moment. At a gathering in a Japanese teahouse of military men who had once studied abroad in Germany, the narrator Kobayashi tells his peers of a curious experience he had had while touring with the Saxon Army.

As a part of an extended military exercise his battalion had been stationed for a short period at the Deuben castle with a provincial aristocratic family. There were five young daughters, of whom Aida, “alone had black hair. She was not particularly beautiful except for her expressive eyes, and her brows were perpetually furrowed. She looked pale because of her black dress.” (*OZ* 2:33) She is engaged to be married to Sub-lieutenant
Merheim, Kobayashi’s roommate for the duration of the trip. One evening, at Merheim’s insistence she plays the piano for the visiting troops and family but becomes distraught when from outside the window, the sound of a flute begins to accompany her melody. Merheim tells Kobayashi that as a child, Aida had taken pity on a young shepherd boy with a hare lip on their estate and had convinced her parents to pay for his corrective surgery. Since then, the shepherd had been in love with her, playing his flute under her window although she studiously avoids him. Kobayashi has a dream that night of Aida astride a horse. The horse’s head transforms into that of a man with a hare lip. Kobayashi notes that: “But because I was dreaming, I thought it perfectly logical that the girl should ride this creature” (OZ 2:36). The phantasmagoric figure then turns into a stony eyed sphinx. A parrot perches atop its head and laughs derisively at him.

The next day, Aida leads Kobayashi on a tour of the castle’s garden that features a pyramid shaped overlook. As they admire the view, she gives him a letter to secretly deliver to her aunt when the battalion reaches Dresden, the next stop on their itinerary. Kobayashi succeeds in his role as a fumizukai (letter carrier), and a few months later, he is reunited with Aida at a ball given by the royal court. The two retreat to a deserted gallery space displaying a vast collection of Oriental porcelainware, and she tells him that she has become a lady in waiting at the court. She had dreaded the prospect of marrying Merheim and in the secret epistle that Kobayashi had carried, she had asked her aunt, a powerful member of the court, to rescue her from her predicament. She feels no pity for Merheim, whom she derides as a foolish man “cast upon the waters of the world without knowing how to swim” (OZ 2:47) but expresses concern about the shepherd who is said to have disappeared from her family estate after her departure, leaving behind only his flute. Aida then slips back into the crowd of partygoers, leaving Kobayashi to contemplate her story.

It has been suggested that Ogai wrote this story in order to express, through the words of Aida, his own feelings towards Toshiko, his first wife whom he had married at the
insistence of his family and superiors following Ellis’s short visit to Japan. Toshiko was the daughter of a high-ranking naval officer, and the marriage was meant to cement his social prestige, but he divorced her after about a year, soon after she gives birth to a son. As though to dispel the easily drawn parallels between Aida’s revulsion towards her arranged marriage and his own situation, when the story was first published in January 1891 in a volume of the *Shincho hyakushu* (One Hundred Selections of New Writings) publication, Ogai had arranged for illustrations by his artist friend Harada Naojirô to depict the Kobayashi character as bearing an unmistakable resemblance to Ogai’s visage, and the Aida figure with her face hidden. By aligning himself with Kobayashi rather than Aida, Ogai thus attempts to save Toshiko from social embarrassment by exonerating her from comparisons with the foolish Merheim. This nuanced, extra-textual use of visual imagery manages to diffuse the meanings suggested by the writer’s text and circumstances alone.

However, although Ogai’s marital circumstances indeed seems to have played some role in catalyzing his development of Aida’s story, his interest in Kobayashi’s role as the story teller/letter carrier seems to carry more significance than as mere technical support for framing Aida’s tale. It is through the Kobayashi character that Ogai explores how, unlike in *Maihime* and *Utakata no ki* in which they were portrayed as mutually exclusive, the space of aesthetics and dreams can in fact foster meanings and sympathies that carry weight even in the outside realm of rational order. Ogai begins by portraying Kobayashi and Aida as sharing little in the ‘real’ world. Firstly, Kobayashi is merely passing through Aida’s castle town as a member of a traveling entourage, and it has always been clear that he would eventually be returning to Dresden with the rest of his military troupe. Secondly, and perhaps most significantly since this is what sets him apart from even all the other

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25 See, for example, Niizeki Kimiko, *Mori Ogai to Harada Naojirô.*

26 Figure 1-3. Also, see Tanaka Minoru, “Fumizukai no kechaku—tekusuto to sakuhin no tsūro”, *Bungaku,* April 1985, 76-90; Niizeki Kimiko, *Ogai to Harada Naojirô.*
members of the entourage, Kobayashi is a foreigner. It is precisely his double outsider status that Aida finds herself drawn to, since in secret, she too is increasingly aware of herself as an outsider. Although she knows that she must marry Merheim given her position within the greater social and political framework she exists in, she dreads this prospect and seeks to circumvent her fate through other channels.

Thus, even upon their first meeting, she is all too conscious of their hidden kinship and acts awkwardly. “[T]he other daughters found a Japanese person novel [...] and everyone was mirthful, but the black-clad girl barely moved her eyelashes” (OZ 3:33). At a later time, she readily volunteers to opt out from a lively cricket game to show Kobayashi a view from the pyramid overlook in their garden. It is there, in the strangely exotic structure “that seems to have been built after the pyramids of Egypt” (OZ 3:31), “separated from the world below” (OZ 3:39) that she asks him to secretly convey her letter to her aunt in Dresden.

Egypt is far removed from the realities of both Aida and Kobayshi, and thus serves as a neutral, unthreatening place—a kind of fantasy dreamscape—where she might reveal what she could not articulate in their present German milieu. She does not know that Kobayashi has in fact, already faintly begun to suspect that she did not care for her fiancé, let alone that he had ‘seen’ her transformation into a stony sphinx, but she intuits that by virtue of his nonwestern perspectives, he would be able to join her in her otherness.

And in this liminal, secluded space of the fake but imposing pyramid, Kobayashi finds to his surprise that Aida is beautiful. “After climbing the steep stairs, the blush from her cheeks had not yet receded, and lit by the setting sun she took a seat on a stone outcropping to catch her breath; when her expressive eyes turned to me, although she was usually not much to look at, she appeared even more beautiful than she had in my strange vision from earlier” (OZ 3:39). Unlike Ellis or Marie from Ogai’s previous stories, both of whom had been arrestingly beautiful blondes, Aida is an average looking girl. It is only in the deliberately engineered space of the pyramid’s decorative exotic flavor, and in the space
of his dreams where she transforms into a mythical creature that mesmerizes him, that Kobayashi perceives a spark of her hidden allure. While there is no indication that he would have refused her request if he had not become aware of her unexpected beauty, he is nonetheless catalyzed by it, and an unspoken bond is born between them.

Kobayashi’s interest in and connection with Aida remains steadfastly aesthetic, and their contact stays restricted solely to these specially circumscribed otherworldly realms of dream and beauty. Given their circumstances—she an unhappily engaged woman whose heart seems to belong to a lowly shepherd, and he a Japanese emissary who will return to his homeland—it is all too clear that he cannot truly become a part of her story. He carries her letter to Dresden without entering into its discourse. This contrasts with the famous scenario set up in Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*, as analyzed by Jacques Lacan. In Poe’s story, the police try to recuperate from a conniving Minister a compromising letter addressed to the Queen, before the epistle reaches the King’s notice. Lacan argues that whoever is in possession of the letter as it circulates amongst the characters, attains a power relative to the others who stand to gain or lose from the revelation of its contents which are never revealed. He writes that: “when the characters get a hold of this letter, something gets a hold of them and carries them along and this something clearly has dominion over their individual idiosyncracies.”

Regardless of their individual agendas, or the actual message of the letter, the various characters are engaged in a power dynamic relative to each other because each is subject to the letter’s movement. However, in the case of *Fumizukai*, Ogai keeps Kobayashi as literally just a courier, or a letter carrier. He neither benefits nor suffers by the letter’s reaching its intended destination. The only reward for its successful delivery is the satisfaction of having honored a secret promise with Aida, the girl of his dreams. His ignorance of the letter’s contents, and the seriousness of its real-world

consequences, make his actions completely disinterested and therefore aesthetic.

In the last scene of the novel, Kobayashi and Aida reunite months later in a gallery of Oriental porcelainware, at a castle where they are respectively invited as guests for a ball. The great hall is deserted since the other guests are enjoying the bustle of the party unfolding in the main ballroom. The gallery is a place of otherworldly beauty, as far removed from the reality of German society as the faux Egyptian pyramid at the Deuben castle, where Aida had entrusted Kobayashi with her fateful letter. In this secluded space, she tells him how with his help, she had managed to appeal to her aunt and circumvent her pending marriage to Merheim, but after her confession, Aida must quickly slip back into the ball and her responsibilities as a member of a royal entourage. She cannot dally for long in the liminal realm of their bond for though she had managed to escape her fiancé thanks to Kobayashi, she now has new responsibilities. Also, she cannot be reminded that in claiming her new station in life, she had left behind the lowly shepherd boy who had loved her loyally from a distance. He has no place in her life any longer, and it is a loss that she cannot afford to face and question. Turning away from Kobayashi with her composure and pride intact, she leaves behind her private and poignant loss, and as he too take his leave, Aida remains preserved in his mind as a pure and beautiful memory.

Ogai thus explores the relationship between the spheres of beauty and reality in these first novellas set in Germany, a sphere far removed from Japan. The beautiful foreign settings assist his Japanese characters in engaging in experiences that transcend their usual range of responsibilities and rational thoughts. Ogai’s employs an elegant *gabun* style prose style that combines elements of traditional Japanese sentence endings, Chinese *kanbun* syntax and words using multiple *kanji* characters, and European words and turns of phrase in evoking from his memory these remembered sights and atmospheres.28 This stance

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28 See Yamamoto Masahide, “Kindai bunti keiseishi-jō no Mori Ogai”, *Genbun-itchi no rekishi ronkō: zoku*
against the increasing prevalence of the more colloquial styles espoused by the *genbun-itchi* movement\(^{29}\), too accentuates the appeal to aestheticism underlying these early writings. Also characteristic of these tales is a sense of narrative asymmetry, a surplus of formal loose ends. Though *Maihime* commences with a narrative frame describing the scene of Toyotarô writing his story, it ends without exiting this embedded text; *Utakata no ki* ends with Kose consumed in madness with no further information about his recovery; *Fumizukai* too begins with the scene of Kobayashi’s narration in Japan but never returns to it. These structural eccentricities and lacks of closure help imbue the stories with the condensed, displaced, and indistinct but compelling air of waking dreams. The strangeness of logic pervasive in these stories—Toyotarô’s amnesiac coma as Ellis descends into madness; a secret incestuous obsession with a mother and daughter attributed as the cause of the notorious Bavarian king’s mysterious death; and hints of a possibly scandalous romance between an aristocratic girl and a disfigured and reclusive shepherd—further heightens the sense that a different way of seeing and thinking is temporarily necessary in reading these stories. In these diegetic spaces, beauty is critical above all. It is as though images, unmoored from their referents in the real world, take on lives of their own.

Ogai abandons such a clear, if provisional, demarcation between aesthetic refuge and the materially real in his later stories, as will be examined in the following chapter. However, the struggle to establish a balance between these two competing modes of value continues to be a major theme in his writings throughout the rest of his life. This struggle simultaneously mirrors his attempts to articulate a balanced sense of modern Japanese identity and perspective in the face of the nation’s international imperial gains especially following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and rapid industrialization and urbanization

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over this entire period. The gap between aesthetic images, and living realities set in a progressive historical continuity, becomes complicated as Japanese lifestyles and self-images evolve rapidly in the face of changing conditions, and the shifting trajectory of Ogai’s ideas can be said to address this wider cultural dynamic. Ogai’s German trilogy stories about aesthetic idealism, cultural boundaries, and the desires of individuals to overcome the pangs of multiple levels of longing, serve as the grounds to understanding key issues in the sprawling breadth of his literary and philosophic oeuvre to come.
Mori Ogai and Aesthetics II: Art in Life

Aesthetic Writing and Aesthetic Seeing

Even before the publication of his German trilogy stories, Ogai stated his philosophy that the realms of beauty and reality should not overlap. In his essay “Igaku no setsu yori idetaru shôsetsu ron” (Theory on the Novel that Springs from Medical Theories) published in January 1889, a mere four months after his return to Japan from Germany, he writes:

Claude Bernard states that today’s knowledge is based on observation and experimentation. When we meet with things in our midst which cannot be changed by human powers, we observe them, and when we meet with things in our midst which we can affect, we experiment with them. In medicine when we seek to know the true workings of the human body, we supplement our observations with the methods of experimentation. […]

Heeding these words, Zola directly employed them in his novels. The characters in his works have been analyzed and dissected by Zola. But when Zola analyzes human emotions, he does not have to determine the acidity of their bile. When he dissects the morals of the age, he does not question the sharpness of his scalpel. The results of this analysis and dissection are ‘etudes’; they are novels. […] However, people do not shun this. Why? It is because the vital, living flesh of the naked prostitute Nana posing in a myriad ways in front of her mirror cannot be seen in the same light as the corpse of a criminal at an autopsy with its pallid, cold skin. […] To treat as Zola does the results of analysis and dissection as a novel is not appropriate. […] While in medicine, gaining truth is sufficient, writers should not be satisfied. […] Truth is a good ingredient [for writers]. Yet, the actual method of adapting and using this should only be through his imagination. (OZ 22:1)

Although the movement which came to be known as Japanese Naturalism would not arise for almost another fifteen years and Zola was not yet well known in Japan, in Germany where Ogai had been studying, the French Naturalist writer was causing a
sensation for his frank depiction of his less than ideal characters. In the above passage, Ogai takes offense not so much at the nudity being described by Zola, as at the unartistic, matter of fact manner of its depiction. Quoting the French scientist Claude Bernard, Ogai recommends that literary writers “adapt” reality into an “appropriate” form, and implies that art should be depicted, and viewed, via the “imagination” in a manner distinct from that of lived realities. As though to emphasize this point, his German trilogy stories focus on instances when characters encounter otherworldly beauty by crossing over into mindstates and situations that are, in varying degrees, separate from their quotidian ones. The studied beauty of his refined language in these stories also reflects this philosophy that the space of literature is to be marked off by a certain formal aloofness.

Yet Ogai was not in denial of the changing realities of modern Japanese life, or the linguistic shifts that sought to keep pace with these conditions. When he returned to Japan in September 1888, the literary world was in the midst of the genbun-itchi movement that strove to establish a mode of writing more suitable for reflecting the ideas and feelings of modern Japanese individuals, than the extant modes of writing which tended to be mired in the complex formalism of classical Japanese conjugations and Chinese-based kanbun, which were not used in ordinary speech. Illustrating Benedict Anderson’s paradigm of the formation of an “imagined community” of national consciousness as achieved in the formation and widespread commodification of a shared and accessible vernacular language, Japanese writers of the period were investigating linguistic registers in which to articulate their experiences as citizens in the nation’s new era of material progress, empirical knowledge, and the possibilities open to them in the wider world. They sought a way to voice their perspectives as individuals of a specific place and time, united in their unique, linguistically framed worldviews.

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Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909) published the first part of his three part novel *Ukigumo* (Drifting Clouds) the previous year in June of 1887 using elements of spoken Tokyo dialect, and this has come to be widely regarded in literary history as the first published example of a successful *genbun-itchi* novel. The following year, he published the short story “Aibiki” (Rendez-vous, a translation of Ivan Turgenev’s story from *The Sportsman’s Sketches*) in the vernacular style, also to great acclaim. Futabatei was influenced by his mentor Tsubouchi Shôyô (1859-1935), who after studying English literature, wrote the seminal treatise *Shôsetsu Shinzui* (1885-1886) in which he espoused the realistic portrayal of human psychology as the main goal of modern literature. Futabatei’s own study of Russian literature guided his efforts towards realism and it is said that he wrote parts of *Ukigumo* in Russian first, then translated it back into colloquial Japanese, in order to avoid using set phrases and fixed idioms.\(^2\) Yamada Bimyô (1868-1910), another leading proponent of the movement, also published the novel *Fûkin shirabe no hitofushi* (A Stanza from an Organ Melody) in July of 1887 in a largely vernacular style. He followed this with the short story “Musashino” (Plains of Musashi) in this mode later that year. Bimyô too was influenced by European writing, and he made use of punctuations such as the ellipsis, as well as rhetorical devices like personification, which were new to Japanese writing. Ogai himself began his creative writing career in 1889 with the publication of several vernacular translations of Western works by writers such as the sixteenth-century Spanish playwright Pedro Calderon de la Barca, the nineteenth-century French playwright Alphonse Daudet, and the eighteenth-century German philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The range of these selections shows Ogai’s scope of interests, and his desire to share his knowledge and thoughts with a Japanese readership that was proving eager for new literary experiences.

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By 1888-1889, approximately thirty novelists were using the genbun-itchi style to varying degrees. However, there was still debate over the direction of the Japanese language and Japanese aesthetic tastes. Writers like Ozaki Kōyō (1868-1903) and Kōda Rohan (1867-1947) advocated the refinement of the gazoku (elegant-vulgar) style that mixed ornamental, traditional Japanese structures with vernacular elements. Their wide popularity was both reflective of, compounded by, the rising tide of a nationalist backlash against the rapid importation of Western influences. To counter the growing threat of the loss of national identity in the rush towards Europeanization, literary authors produced works that imitated the style and tone of Tokugawa Period writers like Saikaku and Bakin. The ‘Ra-Kochô’ (Naked Kochô) incident in January 1890 also threw into relief the conflicted attitudes of Japanese intellectuals towards Western-inspired aesthetic innovations and more traditional values, and Ogai’s reactions to it too reveal the multilayered nature of his still nascent philosophies.

Yamada Bimyô published his historical story “Kochô” (Butterfly) in the Kokumin no tomo magazine in its January issue. It was written in a vernacular style except for the dialogue, which used an ornate and old-fashioned language to enhance the periodicity of the story set during the Gempei wars in the twelfth century. This period of war inspired the Tale of Heike, an epic tale passed down through oral retellings throughout the centuries, which over time came to be adapted into many kabuki and Noh plays. Bimyô’s story attracted attention not because of its style or content, but for the seminude illustration that accompanied it. Its artist Watanabe Seitei (1852-1918) was a renowned painter in the Japanese style, and his works had won awards at the Paris World Fair in 1878 and Amsterdam World Fair in 1883. Domestically too, he was a celebrated artist who was

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5 Figure 2-1.
commissioned to paint a ceiling mural in the imperial palace. But neither the gilded status of this artist, nor the story’s classical setting, prevented the frenzy of critical disapproval that arose in response to Seitei’s illustration of Kochô, a lady in waiting who is depicted nude after washing ashore following a sea battle in which she is thrown overboard.

The canonical setting in fact seemed to increase the shock factor of the illustration, and Ozaki Kôyô wrote in the Garakuta bunko literary magazine about his dismay and disbelief that a lady of such nobility should be depicted in such a shameful state.6 Other responses focused less on the illustration’s relation to the story, and concentrated on the sheer fact of the explicit image appearing in a national publication. Though it went unpublished at the time, Shôyô, the founding father of the move towards realism in modern Japanese literature and art, wrote that “the naked body is ugly to the human gaze” and “should not appear in print”.7 In the Nihonjin magazine, the novelist Iwaya Sazanami complained about “the rude inclusion of an inappropriate image of a naked woman” alongside the text.8 Defending his artistic decision to use the image, Bimyô wrote in the following issue of the bimonthly Kokumni no tomo that the human form is a premier object of art. He states that the ancient Greeks felt that “there is no higher beauty than the nude body, with its placement of curves”, and concludes by saying: “If you visit a museum and see a marble cupid with pure, snow-white skin, or a goddess caressing a lion cub, you will know whether the gradient of these curves are the source of immorality.”9

Ogai joined the fray with a spirited editorial entitled, “Hadaka de yukeya” (Go

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7 Ibid., 24.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 27.
Naked) in the January 12, 1890 *Yomiuri* newspaper. Written in a garrulous, low Tokugawa Period vernacular—perhaps in parodying the rising revival of traditional Japanese literature, and also to indicate that he was not merely repeating European theories—he comments: “It would be a problem if this argument, which has continued for a thousand or two thousand years in the West erupts here too… […] There is no use arguing if we think that a prostitute working at a shop in a Western suit is classy, but a lady at her bath is vulgar […] Don’t mind such experts, just go naked, Poesie!” (裸で行けや、ポエジー（！）). (OZ 38: 17) The scholar Nakayama Akihiko writes in a thought-provoking essay that by and large, Japanese reactions to Watanabe’s illustration showed an attitude of ‘hyper-realism’ that equated a nude image with the nude form itself, and argues that Ogai’s reaction too shows this tendency. While the foregoing critics do in fact object to the “Kochô” illustration because of the underlying premise that nudity is shameful, and though Ogai’s commentary references nudity in different social contexts rather than in the different modes of its depiction, his last cry for “Poesie”- and not for actual Japanese women- to go naked seems to state that his interest in the matter lies in the representation of nudity in the context of art rather than life. His call to Poesie, or poetic spirit, as a realm in which nudity can be acceptable seems to imply that if the context of ‘poetic’ art is properly established—one imagines, through “appropriate” “adaptation” by the writer or the artist, as he stated in his earlier essay “Igaku no setsu yori idetaru shôseteu ron”—it can then depict the body without being vulgar.

Seen within this context, Ogai’s choice to write his otherworldly German trilogy stories the following year in a *gabun* form that mixed traditional Japanese syntax, Chinese *kanbun* vocabulary and rhythms, and liberal amounts of German words and turns of phrase, appears as a measured reaction against precisely the sort of ‘hyper-realism’ that Nakayama explores. His awareness that artistic depiction required a different frame of mind, and

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thus a different language for its expression, seems to have arisen out of his desire to preserve artistic integrity especially as the Japanese people came to abandon a reliance on older tropes and forms, to instead embrace realism as an artistic goal. Rather than as a turn towards nationalist sentiment, Ogai’s use of Western settings and themes, as well as of classical Japanese literary conventions, shows that his concern was to establish a writing that could portray a conceptual register of art as spanning across national and linguistic boundaries.

Ogai would continue to explore the realms of his aesthetic, anti-\textit{genbun-itchi} writing in the following years. The culmination of this was \textit{Sokkyô shijin}, his translation of Hans Christian Andersen’s romantic novel \textit{Improvisatore}n about the narrator’s meandering trip through Italy. The project took Ogai nine years to complete, and was published in 1902 to widespread acclaim for the poetic beauty of his language sustained throughout the expansive tale. As Ogai, now forty years old and promoted to Surgeon General in the Japanese army, wrote in the advertisement for this opus: “The translation of \textit{Improvisatore}n is practically the full culmination of a certain style of writing, and to go another step forward would require a major change.”\footnote{Yamamoto, \textit{Genbun itchi no rekishi ronkô: zoku-hen}, 236.} By this time, almost eighty percent of all published novels in Japan were using the \textit{genbun-itchi} style,\footnote{Ibid.} and Ogai, satisfied with the fruits of his efforts at elegant \textit{gabun} writing, seems to signal a new willingness to embrace the vernacular language in his own literary pursuits.

It was also clear by this time that there could be no return to the sensibilities of an earlier age, in either language or in the life of the nation. The Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) prompted movements to counter centuries old reliance on \textit{kanbun} style linguistic forms, and notions of a unified ‘standard Japanese’ (標準語) began to be discussed as the prospect of further territorial expansion loomed large with the acquisition of Taiwan at
the war’s conclusion. The economy grew from military demand, and nationalist sentiments of Japan as an advancing modern nation increased amongst the wider populace, especially with the exponential development of the newspaper industry during the war coverage. Ogai’s Army duties became more demanding and during the war he was deployed to Korea. In contrast to other literary figures who expressed patriotic enthusiasm for the war, Ogai expresses no passion about it even in his diary. He dutifully served in his official station and filed detailed military reports, but he refrained from commenting on the killing that he had most likely witnessed. He limited his literary output to poems expressing pathos for the fallen troops. Following his return to Japan, he published a collection of his literary critiques and in its preface he wrote:

Where will future developments in aesthetics come from? To sum, I think that the actual details of the history of the arts will be accumulated and stimulate a scientific interpretation; in other words, empiricism. If the old abstract idealist aesthetics cannot embrace art stemming from nineteenth-century Naturalism, and if concrete idealist aesthetics cannot embrace art thereafter, I will gladly expand my present view of the arts in the empirical direction, and even go so far as to change my standpoint fundamentally. In this sense I look forward to future developments.

Clearly, he was ready to embrace a new artistic direction that would actively explore life in fin-de-siècle Japan.

Ogai resumed periodically using the genbun-itchi style in his critical essays in 1896, in his translations of foreign works in 1908, and he would compose his first modern vernacular fictions in 1909, two full decades after his debut as a writer. By then, Japan had also emerged victorious from the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), and was

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13 Ueda Kazutoshi (1867-1937), a Western educated linguist, undertook a series of initiatives in government-directed language planning after returning from Germany in 1894. He stressed the links between national and linguistic unity and identity, and the importance of a clear and effective language for national advancement. See, for example, Lee Yeonsuk ‘Kokugo’ to iu shisô:kindai Nihon no gengo ninshiki (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1997).


increasing its position as an international imperial power. In both the official arenas of education and statecraft, as well as in the general national zeitgeist, the simple and modern colloquial style was now considered a conventional medium for expression in the new age.

In Ogai’s later stories, though he is still concerned with the borders between literary beauty and material realities, he thus shows openness to understanding how aesthetic experiences can be calibrated within the rapidly evolving conditions of everyday life. One motif he employs for investigating this intersection is the professional artist in encounters with non-artists. The professional artist must maintain his aesthetic attenuation while also functioning in society as a coherent individual. For Ogai, artists seem to represent a living point of intersection between the elusive realms of beauty and the undeniable claims of reality. In light of his own experiences with, and experimentation in, different registers of Japanese writing, his focus on visual artists in particular seems to show his admiration of their seeming neutrality from the ideological stances and perspectives inextricable from any mode of linguistic writing. Artists are depicted in Ogai’s stories as mysterious in terms of their access to aesthetic understanding, but also as knowable in their ability to communicate and coexist with others in the quotidian world.

**Artists in the World**

Notable amongst such works is “Hanako”, published in 1910 in the July edition of the *Mita bungaku* magazine. The story features the French artist Auguste Rodin who was gaining recognition in Japan at the time. The Japanese had first learned of him through the painter Kume Keiichirô’s reports of the Paris World Fair of 1900; Shirai Uzan, a sculpting instructor at the Tokyo Art School, referenced him—if unfavorably—in a lecture in 1903; during the rest of the decade, his works have come to inspire young Japanese sculptors like

Takamura Kôtarô and Ogiwara Rokuzan, and have been highly praised by the writers associated with the Shirakaba School, as will be discussed in the following chapters. The Tokyo Art School had been originally established in 1887 with only Japanese-style art in its curriculum at the behest of its main founder Okakura Kakuzô, but the departments of Western architecture, sculpture, and painting were later added in 1896 in response to the nation’s increased exchanges with Western cultures.

Ogai was an instructor of aesthetics and art history at the institution between 1896 and 1899, and during this time he actively engaged in debates with his fellow instructors, often publishing his thoughts in the Nishikimaki zasshi, the school magazine. He maintained his connections with the members of the Tokyo art world after his appointment’s conclusion, and throughout his life he stayed abreast of new artistic trends and ideas. Tellingly, his publication of “Hanako” was very timely; the rising popularity of Rodin amongst Japanese cognoscenti would culminate later that same year, with an entire issue of the Shirakaba magazine dedicated to this artist who was boldly proclaimed “Le Connoisseur de l’âme de tout le people.”

Ogai’s story is an account of the French artist’s first meeting with Hanako, a Japanese actress who would come to serve as his model. It is told from the perspective of Kubota, a young Japanese medical researcher who serves as a translator for the two. Rodin had requested this meeting with the Japanese actress because after he “had once seen a dancing girl who had been brought to Paris by a visiting official from Cambodia and been struck by a certain beguiling charm in the sinuous movements of her long, thin limbs”, he had come to “believe that all races have a beauty and it is up to the beholder to discover it” (OZ 7:190). Ogai thus portrays Rodin as having an egalitarian appreciation of beauty as a universal quality. Rodin speaks briefly with his prospective model, who is quietly judged by Kubota the scientist as “no beauty” (OZ, v.7: 214.), following a detailed appraisal of her

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17 Shirakaba, November 1910.
physique. However, the artist decides that he wants her to pose nude for him, thus signaling an aesthetic approval of her that somehow transcends her unimpressive outer form.

The sketching session itself is not depicted, and Ogai’s narrative instead describes Kubota reading Baudelare’s essay “A Philosophy of Toys” while waiting in the artist’s library. Kubota reads that: “Children handle their toys and after a while they try to break them. They wonder if there is anything behind these things. If it is a moving toy, they come to want to see the mechanism of its motions. Children are drawn more to the Métaphysique than the Physique.” (OZ 7:196). When Kubota later recounts Baudelaire’s words to Rodin as they review the finished sketches, the artist explains his aesthetic philosophy: “With a human body too, it is not physical form for physical form’s sake that it is interesting. Rather, it is as a mirror of the soul. It is the inner flame that is transparent through and above the form that is interesting.” (OZ 7:197) This is to reassure the younger man that Rodin’s appraisal of Hanako’s beauty is rooted in a ‘metaphysical’ interest about her soul, rather than any base, physical urges instigated by her form.

Although the story thus rather scientifically lays out all the objective logistics of the artist’s coming to view Hanako’s beauty in her “inner flame”, Ogai ultimately does not illuminate an intelligible methodology by which, or causal explanation of how, this appreciation occurs. It could be said that Ogai shows that Rodin sees his subject the way he does, rather than how this seeing works; Ogai implies that the mechanisms of this aesthetic vision can not be disclosed at the level of conventional sensory perception or rational deduction because Rodin’s aesthetic gaze is attuned to its own topology, inaccessible and unintelligible to the conventional eye and mind.

Akira Mizuta Lippit’s discussions of Derrida’s notion of ‘avisuality’ might help to articulate Ogai’s suggestion. Lippit raises this idea in relation to the revelatory impact of the technologies of psychoanalysis, X-Rays, and cinema, all of which give human beings visual entry into previously unseen dimensions of reality. He explains:

Avisuality not as a form of invisibility, in the sense of an absent or negated
visibility: not as the antithesis of the visible but as a specific mode of impossible, unimaginable visuality. Presented to vision, there to be seen, the avisual image remains, in a profoundly irreducible manner, unseen. Or rather, it determines an experience of seeing, a sense of the visual without ever offering an image. Similarly, Rodin’s aestheticized view of Hanako’s “inner flame that is transparent through and above the form” could be understood as his perception of not just her visible body, but more importantly, an avisual dimension of it. Kubota’s scientific and objective gaze can be posited then, as the foil of standard visuality and its inability to probe beyond Hanako’s surface appearance.

Lippit further extends Derrida’s notions of avisuality to suggest that exposing the interior, avisual layers of the human being and configuring them as open spaces can destroy the living unity of the subject. This too might apply in the case of the aesthetic gaze as portrayed in “Hanako”. Although Hanako’s exterior body is preserved, as in the case of a patient undergoing an X-Ray of her inner organs rather than in the case of a victim of atomic radiation to use Lippit’s examples, something of her humanity can be said to be effaced throughout the process of the aesthetic exposure of her soul. Indeed, though the story is titled after Hanako as its focal object, Ogai’s story reveals little of her interiority despite its emphasis on the details of her physical presence. It is Rodin’s gaze, which sees her as beautiful in an “irreducible manner”, that is the central subject of this story.

Yet, Hanako was an actual itinerant Japanese actress active in Europe, and

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18 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 53.

19 Hanako was born Ohta Hisa in 1868 to a bourgeois family in what is now Gifu Prefecture, and learned Japanese dance and music from an early age. When the Ohtas’ finances became straitened, she was adopted into another family, and when her new family went bankrupt, she joined a troupe of traveling female actresses, becoming a geisha by the age of fifteen. She married but separated from her husband. In 1902 at age thirty-three, Hisa went to Denmark as part of a troupe of Japanese actors touring Europe. At the time, there was a craze for the exotic in the European capitals, and demand was high for Asian stage performers. Sada Yakko achieved success in America with her faux-Japanese performance (she was Japanese but her acting was not in any classic Japanese style), and Cleo De Merode was celebrated for her ‘Cambodian’ dances. When Hisa’s group performed in London, she was discovered by the dance innovator/ stage impresario Loie Fuller (born Louise Fuller, American, 1862—1928) who decided to promote her career. She renamed her Hanako and with her management, Hanako’s Kabuki-influenced acting won great acclaim. She was especially admired for her death scenes. (Fuller always wrote scenarios that had Hanako die dramatically at the end.)
Ogai’s choice to work with a real figure rather than an invented one could indicate his understanding that despite her passive and fragmented presentation in his story, she cannot, in reality, be reduced to a specter of either his or Rodin’s gazes. Ogai’s descriptions of her appearance, given at various points in the story, seem to be based faithfully on images of her published in newspapers. It is plausible that the images of her “short face with a truncated forehead and chin, her exposed neck, and ungloved hands and arms,” which showed clearly that “Hanako is no beauty”, fascinated Ogai and made him wonder how Rodin, the eminent arbiter of the beauty of forms, had come to appreciate her as a muse. (OZ 7:192) Ogai’s ambiguous relationship with his heroine is evinced by how he alters or invents determining elements about her while preserving the details of her physical form and her historical existence; in the story, she appears to be as much a product of his artistic creativity, than a historically real entity. Perhaps it was because the European press presented little of her background or gave false accounts of it that Ogai had assumed her to be significantly younger than she was at the time that she posed for Rodin, although it might have been his choice as a fiction author to render the actually thirty-eight year old woman as a seventeen year-old girl in his story. Also, intentionally or not, he obfuscates her origins and presents her as having lived near the ocean during her childhood, although the real Hanako hailed from a mountainous region. Most significantly, Ogai portrays Hanako as not only physically mediocre but also decidedly reserved and wooden, though a single,

In 1906, Fuller introduced her to Rodin at the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition, where he had come to sketch and observe the Cambodian dancers. He invited Hanako to visit him in Paris so that he could sketch her there. Rodin eventually made fifty-three separate masks of her. When she moved back to Gifu in 1920, she convinced the French government to allow her to bring back two of these pieces, “The Head of Death” and “Meditating Woman”, which are now in the Niigata City Museum. For more details, see Isao Sukenobu, *Maruseiyu no Rodan to Hanako* (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2001), and Nicola Saverese, “A Portrait of Hanako”, trans. Richard Fowler, *Asian Theater Journal*, v.5, no.1, (Spring 1988).

20 Figures 2-2, 2-3.

21 See footnote 32. Hanako was born in 1868.

22 See footnote 32. Gifu Prefecture does not border the ocean.
working Japanese woman in Paris at that period could not have survived on such timidity.

Rodin seems to be pleased at Hanako’s bland behavior, to the extent that it does not intrude on his carefully tuned viewing of her soul. It is not her inner nature itself, not the emotions and thoughts that define her unique personality, but the specter of the living energy of her reality, her “flame”, that he seems to find beautiful, and it is “as a mirror” of it that he finds her outer corporeal form beautiful as well. Throughout the narrative, Hanako speaks directly to Rodin only when answering his questions about whether she had grown up near the mountains or the sea, and whether she had rowed her own boat as a young girl. Her short responses however, “made images arise in his mind” (OZ 7:194); given the paltry amount of information that she gives, these mental pictures are more the creation of Rodin’s own imagination than anything suggested by her minimal verbal evocations. It is also significant that he entertains visual “images” of her from a projected past, instead of musings about her life and personality in that long ago time.

Furthermore, Rodin does not ask her, as he sociably asks of Kubota upon first greeting him, about her work in France, and he sticks only to questions about a vague and picturesque childhood in distant Japan as though to not disturb his projections of her as an aesthetic object. In addition, because this stilted conversation is translated by Kubota their verbal interaction is indirect, filtered through the convenient barrier of language. She does not speak unless spoken to, even to her compatriot, and never asserts anything of her unique point of view and experiences as a Japanese woman in Paris. “Having become accustomed to Europe, Hanako smiles in a friendly manner” (OZ 7:193) adhering to social convention, and further obscuring what she may actually be thinking or feeling as her outer person is penetrated by the gaze of the famous artist. Ogai thus demonstrates that the artist sees his subject in an aesthetic light that is not determined by European or Japanese realities.

Ogai addresses the difference in Rodin and Kubota’s visions of Hanako by having Kubota happen upon Baudelaire’s essay while the artist sketches the girl. Since Kubota
serves as the perspective that readers situate themselves in as they too observe Rodin’s observations of Hanako, his coming upon “A Philosophy of Toys” in the library would indicate that Ogai wishes to draw readers’ attention to ideas in it that are likely to cross their minds at this juncture of the story. Perusing the essay, it would require almost no stretch of imagination for Kubota to envision Rodin, an eminent and older Western artist, ‘toying’ with Hanako, an unknown Japanese girl of seventeen. Baudelaire writes that: “children dominate their toys; in other words that their choice is determined by dispositions and desires, vague, if you wish, and by no means formulated, but very real.” Kubota is therefore made aware of the power balance that exists between players and their toys (or in this case, viewers and their objects), and perhaps also the greater cultural dynamics between Europe and Japan. Readers can imagine perhaps a veiled note of accusation creeping into Kubota’s voice when he tells Rodin after the sketching session that he had been reading that particular essay by Baudelaire in the library.

It is at this point that the sculptor intones his aesthetic statement that: “With a human body too, it is not physical form for physical form’s sake that it is interesting. Rather, it is as a mirror of the soul.” He diffuses notions of lurid Orientalist motives coloring his interest in Hanako by raising the level of the discourse to one of metaphysics, beyond the ken of regular understanding. Kubota does not respond, but presumably wanting to see how this metaphysical “soul” has been expressed on paper, he approaches Rodin’s sketches of Hanako. The artist warns him that they are “too rough too tell what’s what”, and Kubota does not proffer any comments, even of polite praise (OZ 7:197). It is possible that the young man is impressed with the sketch and the philosophy behind it, but it is also likely that he is still thinking about Baudelaire’s essay, and wondering about the element of soul that the artist claims to see in Hanako’s form, which he himself cannot detect. Through Kubota’s inability to see how Rodin—widely conceived of as the representative of

the artistic spirit—sees, Ogai seems to suggest that aesthetic appreciation occurs according to its own principles and on its own register, within and alongside the standard frameworks of perception and reason.

The 1912 story entitled “Ka no yô ni” (As If) provides a broad inquiry into the epistemological underpinnings of modern Japanese intellectual thought, and Ogai reveals through it an attempt to locate aesthetics within a rationally ordered worldview. The main character of the story is Hidemaro, an aristocratic youth who has just returned from studying in Germany. He aspires to become a historian of Japanese history, but cannot begin writing his magnum opus because he harbors doubts about the foundational myths upon which all subsequent narratives must be based. He finds himself in an intellectual paralysis, and tries to explain his confusion to his friend Ayanokôji, a fellow aristocrat who has returned from France where he studied painting. A free-spirited artist, “Ayanokôji is a man who seems to live solely by his eyes and ears, not treating anything, even art, so seriously, but his sharp mind is forever seeking something” (OZ 10:69). Hidemaro begins to tell him that:

Even when something is called truth, as long as it has passed through human imagings of it there is an added element, according to the materialist philosophies of Lange. We unconsciously make things into poems. It becomes a lie. […] Novels, in so far as we take their facts to be true, are lies. They are accepted because we are from the start aware of them as not being true, and write them as fiction. It is within this premise that they come alive, and have value. Foundational myths of origins are created in the same way, and are accepted, but differ because they are held to be true. Your pictures too, no matter how lifelike, are not real. You paint them as fiction. In life, all things that have value are founded on a conscious lie. (OZ 10:70).

Hidemaro’s suspicions about the arbitrary state of origins that center all subsequent narratives echoes the premises of deconstructivist thought, in a time and environment which lacked the vocabulary and discursive contexts in which to address them. As such, he struggles mightily to clarify his quandaries to his friend. In order to establish himself as a historian, he seeks to write an unfiltered account of past events but is all too
aware that his own perspective, indeed any fixed objective, blocks true objectivity. He has come to realize that: “Without the ‘as if’ s, there can be no academic study, or art, or religion. All things with value in this life are centered on ‘as if’ s.” (OZ 10:74) And though Ogai does not deeply develop Hidemaro’s questioning of “foundational myths” (神話) for his history project, couched therein seems to be a critical questioning about the constructed nature of modern Japan’s narrative of national unity towards linear progress and modernization, based around the supremacy of the emperor and his divine lineage.24 A major source of Hidemaro’s consternation is the fear of defying his conservative father, a baron firmly entrenched in the power structure of Meiji society and who envisions the same secure future for his son. The thought of defying him, and the patriarchal order in general, and venturing into an unknown life wherein the safety of the familiar ‘as if’ s of ideology can no longer hold, terrifies Hidemaro. He fears being branded as “a holder of dangerous thoughts” (危険思想家) if he casts any critical doubt upon the order of things. (OZ 10:73) He has become withdrawn and reclusive to the great concern of his parents who are unable to grasp his predicament.

Hidemaro does concede though, that in the realm of art, there can be value and meaning. However, he insists that the arts have only a provisional truth, because it is a priori accepted that they are separate from real life, and “[i]t is within this premise that they come alive.” (OZ 10:70) At first, Ayanokoji flippantly maintains that while he understands that his paintings “are not real” (実物ではない), in so far as they are sold for a sum, they hold some irrefutable real world value. (OZ 10:71) He teases Hidemaro by referring to the inescapable ontological premises that he obsesses over as “monsters” (怪物) and says, “decisively” (決然と), that “I don’t think about such monsters. Or even if I do, I don’t speak of them.” (OZ 10:72) From his quick and apt replies to Hidemaro’s rather

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24 See Hasumi Shigehiko, “Shôsô rekishika no shosai de”, “Aka” no yûwaku (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 2007), 103. At the time of the story’s appearance, there was a national debate about the succession of the imperial lineage in the Namboku-chô era (Northern and Southern Dynasties Period in the 14th century).
long-winded philosophical musings, it seems that he understands intellectual skepticism towards conventional logocentrisms but that he refuses to engage in such futile exercises. Later, beginning to perceive the depth of his friend’s crisis, he advises him to: “write history as I paint my pictures, even if they are based on monsters. You shouldn’t mind them, and just go on writing straight ahead.” (ずんずん書けば好きじゃないか。) (OZ 10:73)

Ayanokōji seems to imply that he would continue painting regardless of the ‘as if’s of his society, and that being aware or not of the unverifiable nature of ideologies will not deter his course.

He dismisses Hidemaro’s conclusion that in order to maintain one’s position within the social order, one has no choice but to “respect the ‘as if’s’(OZ 10:76) while being aware of their artificiality, and to carry on under this sobering awareness. Ayanokōji disagrees with this policy, saying that: “Everyone sees something worthwhile on the other side, so they continue to obey and worship. If I give someone a nude painting and tell him not to have a wife, or not to visit any disgraceful establishments, and I tell him to think as if the painting were a live woman, he won’t listen.” (OZ 10:76) He understands that just as the desire for a woman cannot be quelled by the representation of one, anything that is “worthwhile” cannot be forcibly debunked or determined by images external to it. He is in tune with his actions in striking contrast to his hesitant friend, and instinctively grasps that lived realities are entrenched in more substantive circumstances that cannot be contained within conceptual frameworks.

Reflective perhaps of Ogai’s readings of the German Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s aesthetic treatise Laokoon on which he lectured in the early years of his career25, Hidemaro muses that it is because a painting captures only a single

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25 See Isozaki Yasuhiko, “Tokyo bijutsu gakkō karikyuramu to shokutaku kyōin to shite no Mori Ogai (Meiji 24-Meiji 32)”. See also Mori Ogai, “Geiyō kaitai gaku” (1897) [written originally as lecture notes for his class at Tokyo Art School], OZ v.33; “Lessing ga koto wo shirusu” (1891), OZ v.22; and “Toyama Masakazu shi no garon wo bakusu” (1890), OZ v.22.
static moment that it can be exempt from the ideological inconsistencies that reveal themselves over time. He posits that because writing, especially historical writing, covers a duration, it becomes mired in the relativity of all the other competing claims of truth that arise over its unfolding.\textsuperscript{26} Hidemaro seems to accept that art, particularly the static visual arts, is intrinsically exempt from reason’s drive to order and categorize living phenomena. Notable is how through the narrative dynamics between the confident Ayanokôji and the tortured Hidemaro, Ogai seems to focus more centrally on the contrast between the life philosophies of artists and non-artists than on pinpointing the different ontological statuses of artworks and intellectual works, which are articulated only in the form of theory spoken by the erstwhile historian.

Some scholars have seized on Hidemaro’s intellectual resignation in “Kano yô ni” as representing Ogai’s own compromise with and conformity to the “foundational myths” and ideologies of power that he found himself in, as a member of the governing apparatus of imperial Japan.\textsuperscript{27} Karaki Junzô suggests that via this story, Ogai signified to authority figures that he would comply with their mission to maintain order rather than encourage “dangerous thoughts” that sought to destabilize the system, and that the story proposes the philosophy of “as if” as the way for intellectually alert individuals proceed within the current status quo. The “dangerous thoughts’ referred to in the story are no doubt in reference to the rise of socialism, which was being strongly suppressed by the government at the time. Other critics have noted that in expressing this philosophy in fiction, Ogai was in fact staking a position that was itself an “as if”, and that his own thoughts were not bound by

\textsuperscript{26} This atemporal, spatial quality of paintings as the condition for bearing multiple ideas calls to mind Tosaka Jun and Maruyama Masao’s analysis of the ‘literary’ mindset that they suggest has dominated Japanese intellectual history, as discussed in the Introduction.

\textsuperscript{27} Karaki Junzô, “Hito to bungaku”, Mori Ogai shû: Karaki Junzô hen (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobô, 1965); Maria Hess de Prada-Vicente, “Mori Ogai no tetsugaku-‘Vita Sexuali’ kara ‘Kano yô ni’”, Ogai no chiteki kûkan (Tokyo: Shin’yôsha, 1997), 242-258.
In a gesture of self-reference embedded in Hidemaro’s statements, Ogai indeed pronounces: “Novels, in so far as we take their facts to be true, are lies. They are accepted because we are from the start aware of them as not being true, and write them as fiction. It is within this premise that they come alive, and have value.” (OZ 10: 70)

Based on Ogai’s presentation of Ayanokôji as an alternative to Hidemaro, perhaps it might be said that Ogai was indeed proposing another way forward. Ayankôji’s refusal to be caught within the drive to intellectualize radically differs from Hidemaro’s conspicuously conscious bracketing of the constructed nature of the ideologies of their society, in that he maintains an unswerving belief in his art, and an open and confident attitude towards life. He finds freedom in his status as an artist, or as a corollary, it is because he is free that he can create his art. He states that it is not that he does not think about questions of epistemology, but that: “I try not to think about it as much as possible. I defer any decision. I don’t need to make any decisions in order to paint.” (OZ 10: 77)

Ogai seems to present this artist figure, rather than Hidemaro the intellectual, as more in tune with his realities as both a social subject and a thoughtful, sensitive individual in the modern world. Aesthetics, he seems to say, is a dimension that exceeds and defers the “as if’s.”

The artist’s unique position is further explored in “Tenchô” (Blessings, 1915), published in the April 1915 issue of the Ars magazine, a story about a struggling art student M whose painting is denied admission into the official Ministry of Culture exhibit, for which Ogai, in his real life, served as a judge from the time of its establishment in 1907. The story was inspired by Ogai’s actual friendship with Miya Yoshihei (1893—1971), a young artist who had entered the contest in 1914 and had made Ogai’s acquaintance at the time.29


The painting in the story is said to be “executed by tiny dots of intense pigment. On one hand, it appears to be a richly colored fabric, and on the other hand, like light refracted through shattered glass. Studying it, two figures are blurrily visible. From the spread of their hemlines, they must be women.” (OZ 16:65)

Miya’s painting Tsubaki matches this description. The story is told from the viewpoint of the narrator who had served as a judge on the panel that had declined M’s painting for the prestigious show. When M asks why his work did not meet the standards for admission, the narrator states that while he is not authorized to comment on official judgments, he will explain his own feelings on the matter. Thus begins their strange interview. The narrator starts by asking his guest how he feels when he paints, to which “M made a pained expression. He slowly replied, ‘This is difficult. I don’t know how to describe it in words.’” (OZ 16:67) The narrator is satisfied with this vague answer because he knows from his own experiences that the creative process cannot be precisely articulated. He writes: “I do not paint. But I have ‘attempted’ (「試み」) to write novels and plays. I too would be at a loss if asked what my feelings were as I wrote them.” By showing that this interior progression guiding artistic production eludes precise articulation, even by writers whose medium is language, Ogai seems to revisit the unique nature of the aesthetic will.

M nonetheless attempts to describe the tortuous efforts he puts into his paintings. “It is as though my head fills up and I am filled with the urge to bring its contents out.” Listening to M, the narrator judges that, “This psychological state became the internal reason, and the limitations of time and resources the external reason, for the painting.” (OZ 16:67—68) Pinning down M’s dilemma in terms of “psychology” and “time and resources”, Ogai signals a departure from assigning artistic vision to the ontologically removed and opaque status of metaphysics, as he had earlier in “Hanako”. He seeks

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30 Figure 2-4.
instead to investigate how it is held within the structures of lived experience. Sensing the young man’s frustration, the narrator of “Tenchô” tells M: “I respect your will as an artist. I bear no ill feelings towards your picture. […] However, I just feel that it is lacking something.” He encourages M to persevere, and to seek inspiration and guidance from his professors and peers. Rather than advocate meditation or solace in literature or art, his advice focuses on what the younger man can do given his concrete, social position. It is from this point onwards that the narrator stops speaking of M in the third person, and to start addressing him in the familiar, second person ‘you’ [kimi]. By this, Ogai seems to indicate the sense of closeness that he came to feel for the painter following their initial meeting.

The latter part of the story takes place half a year later when M visits the narrator to show him his new paintings, and to tell him about the tumultuous events in his life over the recent months. Just from M’s brighter expression, it is clear that he had experienced a breakthrough. He tells the narrator that shortly after their last meeting, his father died, and that his family could no longer pay for his art school tuition, let alone support his life in Tokyo. M explains that he managed to find part-time employment as a live-in assistant at an art supply store in exchange for tuition and board. But despite his poverty, he came to find it impossible to paint while holding down his job. He told his employer Takenaka: “Life as a shop clerk from the day before disturbs the paintings of today.” (OZ 16:71) Takenaka accepted this and agreed to let him focus on his art, conceding that real artistic work cannot be performed alongside practical work. They settled on an agreement to have M sell art supplies to his classmates during school hours instead of working at the store after class, although eventually, even this proved too distracting for him. At Takenaka’s behest, M reluctantly approached an established artist W to ask his professional assessment of his future potential as an artist. M stated to the older painter: “I ask this not because I want to know for myself, but to reassure Takenaka. I have no doubt about my future success, and don’t need anyone to guarantee me.” (OZ 16:75) This moved W, and he signed on to give
M a small stipend in exchange for light chores and to support him as a mentor. M ends his account by saying that he has since found a small studio where he could at last, concentrate on his art. He unveils his new works, and the narrator finds that “Neither one depicted blurry figures like last year’s painting.” (OZ 16:78) This presents in a straightforward manner the newfound clarity in M’s vision; seen against the vague sketches that Rodin presents at the end of “Hanako”, this signifies the location of art within a more conventionally visible, practical terrain.

However, this is not to say that Ogai has abandoned his interest in the transcendental dimensions of aesthetics and metaphysics. The story ends with the narrator telling M that he is lucky to have found such supportive benefactors, and that he is a “fils de la fortune”, to which M just responds “Oh, is that so,” with “wide, astonished eyes.” (OZ 16:79) It seems that although he came to accept the harsh reality that money matters cannot be ignored even if he decides to live purely for his paintings, the consummate artist M would always retain a certain disconnect regarding practical concerns because his views as an artist are based in other values. Over the course of the tale, M shows a remarkable amount of frankness in his interactions with others, in some cases making comments that in more conventional settings might be thought of as sheer arrogance. In the first place, he shows significant fortitude in approaching a judge who had rejected his work in a contest. The narrator, anticipating a barrage of grievances from a disgruntled artist, agrees to speak with M only after noting how “innocent” (無邪気) he is, and how “there was no sign of defensiveness in his words.” (OZ 16:67)

Further, it is extraordinary that given his dire straits, he could admit to Takenaka, or even to himself, that he was dissatisfied with his parttime work at the art store and that he needed to be freer for his painting; had he been less magnanimous, Takenaka could at this point have terminated his patronage altogether. His brazen attitude towards W too could have been interpreted as a sign of disrespect. It is fortuitous that M came away from this
meeting without offending the older artist, and almost incredible that he managed to gain an understanding mentor and a stipend from this visit. Ogai seems to indicate that it is indeed thanks to these multiple “Blessings” (Tenchô) that M could continue his existence as an artist, with his aesthetic idealism intact.

Of central import then, is Ogai’s apparent ambivalence about M’s lack of awareness of the great generosity bestowed on him by others. On the one hand, the narrator rates highly M’s disarmingly unaffected attitude on both visits. On their second meeting in particular, his affection for the painter is evident in his observation of M recounting his recent travails. “You sometimes laugh lightly. Based on the story of what you’ve gone through, this laugh could have become ironique depending on your nature, but it is a laugh thoroughly without malice.” (OZ 16:69) This is reminiscent of Ogai’s estimation of Harada Naojirô, his painter friend from their days together in Germany, whom he had described as a “disinterested and unselfish” (恬淡無欲) character, “much loved by his teachers and peers [for being] so natural” (自然児). (OZ 25: 131-132) However, Ogai also seems to present M’s aversion to labor in a lightly mocking tone. Even Takenaka, the most lenient of benefactors, cannot accommodate M’s complaints about selling art supplies to his classmates at school, after he had already been excused from working in the store itself. He dismisses M’s proposition to leave a quantity of supplies at the school atelier for free use by the other students, and to only periodically tally their consumption and collect payments; this idea had originally come from W who heard about such arrangements in Europe. Takenaka explains in clear terms that he cannot be so loose with his inventory. He says, “Maybe such things can be done in the West, but there is no businessman in Japan that could do this.” (OZ 16: 77) Ogai seems to imply by this that in their artistic visions, both W and M tend to overlook the actual ground differences in culture in Japan and elsewhere. The use of French words throughout the story reinforces this disconnect.

The first chore that W assigns M as symbolic exchange for his patronage is more
suitable for the young artist’s delicate temperament. M is sent to a rose nursery to pick up W’s order of fresh roses. The narrator recounts how “the gardener handed you a basket of roses that have been brought to bloom in the greenhouse. You brought this back to Azabu and got [your stipend of] five yen from W.” (OZ 16: 78) That M ends up with such ‘rosy’ work delivering flowers to his teacher seems almost too befitting of his precious status. Ogai seems to imply that like the carefully grown roses, the painter is a rare being requiring protection and cultivation.

Ogai thus underscores in this story that it is through the support of external logistics that an artist’s aesthetic vision and his ability to keep producing beauty are preserved, and he stresses the importance of public support for the arts. It is notable that he published this story in the inaugural issue of the art magazine *Ars*; perhaps he had meant for it to serve as a reminder to readers that active patronage of the arts is critical for its existence and development. The story seems to end on a hopeful note for the arts, with M sobered by his experiences, but still undeterred from his commitment to be an artist. Despite the hardships that he now knows that this path entails, he cannot, and will not, be anything else; he is simply and irreducibly an artist. It seems Ogai had come to accept that social structures and material bonds shape human lives, and that even artists seeking to delve into the elusive and unfixed space of aesthetics in their works are subject to these realities.

Throughout these stories, Ogai views artists as presenting an alternative to the structured confines of conventional logic. “Hanako” clearly illustrates this by presenting Rodin’s discovery of his model’s beauty as inarticulable through objective terms, and his observer, Kubota, does not perceive exactly how Rodin found the beauty in Hanako, but just the fact that he did so. This suggests that the artist’s genius lies in the unique validity of his subjective vision rather than his ability to channel forth some overlooked, objective essence. In “Ka no yô nî” too, whereas Hidemaro suffers because he attempts to write a pure,
objective account of history that transcends the “monsters” that support all systems of knowledge, Ayanokôji openly accepts that while perhaps he too is caught in the social ideologies of their age, his art is the result of his own free will. He is in tune with his realities in a way that Hidemaro finds enviable and unfathomable. The character M in “Tenchô” is not an aristocrat positioned to be able to live purely for his vision alone, and in this story, Ogai shows that social and material exigencies cannot be dismissed even for holders of such special, free will. But the story has a happy ending in which the artist manages to find a place within the social order through the support of others within the system who believe in his work. Ogai thus seems to imply that the radically other nature of the artistic gaze can exist in symbiotic relationship with conventional realities, and that it is in its otherness that it holds value.

Art and Social Critique

Ogai however, did not only consider the public sphere’s duty towards the preservation of art’s distinctness. He also treated the question of how art, from its “autonomous” position, could engage with and illuminate ongoing social conditions. This can be clearly seen in his writings responding to the widely publicized Taigyaku Incident (Great Treason Incident, 大逆事件) of 1910 in which twelve social activists, including the writer Kôtoku Shûsui (1871-1911), were imprisoned for questionable charges of treason, and executed the following year.

Ogai writes in the essay “Bungei no shugi”, featured in the Tôyô magazine in April 1911, four months after the sentencing of the alleged ‘terrorists’ in the Incident, that “There are, at base, no sectarian principles (shugi) in art. Art itself is a major principle,” and after delineating the different ‘-isms’ of the day—explaining that Naturalism and Socialism were different, and that the rise of individualistic thought did not equal the rise of unchecked egotism—he declares that: “Vaguely brandishing the label of ‘individualism’ to revile art is
lamentable for the sake of the nation. A country that prevents the freedom of intellectual pursuits and artistic developments will not thrive.” (OZ 26: 424-425) At least in rhetoric, Ogai thus seems to subsume intellectual and artistic freedoms under the all-justifying goal of Japan’s development as a competitive modern nation. It seems to be this official attitude that secured his place as a member of the ultra-conservative Meiji genrō Yamagata Aritomo’s inner circle of power, the Tokiwa-kai poetry circle, which he and his longtime friend Kako Tsurudo had helped found in 1906.³¹ It would have been difficult for Ogai, at any point, to lose sight of the fact that this very set of individuals in Yamagata’s coterie occupied the positions of political authority that oversaw the Great Treason Incident, which ended in the execution of twelve Socialists including Kôtoku Shûsui, and the life imprisonment of twelve others, for an alleged plot to assassinate the emperor.

Because of the newly tightened Press Laws of 1909 which explicitly forbade the publication of any news that might potentially threaten social stability or corrupt morals, the public came to know of this Treason case officially only in November of 1910 when the trial was set for the coming January, although the arrests of the twenty-six defendants had begun in May, and their preliminary hearings were over by then. In historical retrospect, there is now wide consensus that beneath the heavy cloak of secrecy and the general aura of grand scale danger that it hinted at, as Hiraide Shû, one of the lawyers for the defense in the case had written in his trial notes and also in a 1914 story about the case entitled “Gyakuto” (‘Rebel’), only four or five of these suspects had ever intended any sort of violent rebellion, and the rest of the case had been a frameup. (The story, published in Taiyô magazine, was immediately censored when it appeared.) This government framing is also confirmed by the prison diaries of Kanno Sugako who writes, in the days before her death, that: “Besides the five conspirators—Kôtoku, Miyashita, Niimura, Furukawa, and myself—the rest were forcibly linked to this case based on some long ago casual conversations that were [as

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³¹ Nakamura, Mori Ogai to Meiji kokka, 171-173.
baseless and ephemeral] as smoke” (*Shide no michikusa*, January 21).³² Uzawa Fusaaki, the chief defense lawyer, also echoes this sentiment in his postwar memoirs of 1949.

In addition to being a lawyer, Hiraide Shû was a writer and served as the publisher of the *Subaru* magazine, which was Ogai’s literary base from 1909 to 1913. To prepare for the trial, Hiraide took the advice of Yosano Hiroshi and in October of 1910, he sought and received close tutoring about Socialist thought from Ogai, considered an expert on Western theories and their latest developments. The various accounts left behind by the defendants as well as the other defense lawyers attest that Hiraide effectively used his new knowledge in court to explain the philosophies behind the various strains of Socialist thought, in an attempt to correct and diffuse the prevalent, hazy notions that Socialism was a violent, foreign doctrine whose purpose was to destroy the Japanese nation. It would seem logical that Ogai’s unparalleled knowledge of these new ideas were considered an asset by the conservative authorities as well, in their mission to suppress their spread. It is known from his terse diary entries that Ogai continued to meet regularly with the Tokiwa-kai throughout this period. The government censors banned books and articles suspected of carrying leftist sentiments at unprecedented rates at this time³³, and Ogai had to tread carefully despite his powerful connections.

Ogai’s stories which were written amidst, and about, these circumstances reveal a measured and critical perspective, despite his close involvement with the ongoing affairs. “Fasuchiesu” (Fasces, published in September 1910 in *Mita bungaku*), “Chinmoku no tô”, (Tower of Silence, published in November 1910 in the same magazine), and “Shokudô” (Cafeteria, published in December 1910 in the same magazine) each questions the government’s repression of intellectual and artistic freedoms. In the first story, the title

³² For more on Kanno Sugako and her turn to radical thought, see *Reflections on the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Imperial Japan*, ed. and trans. Mikiso Hane (University of California Press, 1993).

“Fasces” refers to the Roman symbol of the power of the law, consisting of birch rods and an axe bound together. The beginning section of the work features a judge whose arbitrary standards for the censoring of texts is made clear through an interview with a newspaper reporter, and whose arrogance is emphasized in the second section when he is questioned by a literary writer. Also underscored in the second conversation is the writer’s lack of tenacity in trying to convince the judge to rethink his positions. The story ends with a demon who lambasts the “spineless writer” (ねろねろ文士) for not adequately defending the rights of intellectuals and artists, and berates the judge for not respecting the inherent value of learning and art. Ogai here demonstrates criticism towards not just the brutish ignorance of bureaucrats who hold political power, but the detached and effete idealism of artists. He had illustrated in “Tenchô” that dreamy dispositions may not always be tenable when there are laws to abide by and material lacks to satisfy, but here, he points out that the perpetually uncompromising idealism and critical alertness of artists present another, perhaps even more fundamental, challenge to their social existence.

The second story, Chinmoku no tô is less humorous, taking as its subject matter the mass executions in Parsi India of those who not only write, but merely read, “dangerous books” from Europe on “Naturalism and Socialism”. Ogai writes: “From the Parsi perspective, any art today whose value is recognized, and is not absolutely trite, is considered dangerous. This is to be expected. Art recognizes values that tear down conventions.” Though Ogai frames his story in a very specific and different historical context from his own, the timing of its writing indicates that the criticisms expressed in the story were pointed towards the escalation of conservative crackdowns on the development of new directions in thought and expression as the Great Treason case made its way to trial. Ogai writes in the conclusion to the story:

The value of art is that it breaks down traditions. Works that stay within tradition are unremarkable. From the perspective of tradition, all real works of art appear dangerous.

Art enters into the depths of fleeting impulses from their surfaces. As one uses
fixed colors in paintings [to enter into fleeting impressions], or desires [to express] shifts within the echoes of the chromatic scales of music, so one uses sentences to express [passing] impressions in writing. It is to be expected that these urges are explored [in art]. *(OZ 7: 391)*

Drawing together the different arts as united in the goal of capturing the specific and ever-changing conditions of the present, Ogai seems to indicate here that art cannot just retreat into itself, and that artists and connoisseurs must commit to advancing ideas in the external world. He also adds: “Academic study (学問) too tears apart convention in moving forward. Academic study will die if it is made to comply with the moods of one period in one nation.” *(OZ 7: 392)* This dire statement reflects Ogai’s wide familiarity with a range of literatures and ideas from multiple nations, and his belief that the pursuit of knowledge in the modern age cannot be confined to any one cultural sphere. His well known erudition gives him the authority from which to intone that contributing to progress requires serious study of the ideas at stake, and commitment to their defense.

Ogai’s threat of the “death” of knowledge echoes the desperate calls of other intellectuals of the period who more directly urged the public to stand up against the government’s suppression of free thought and expression. Notable amongst these is the essay “Onken-naru jiyū shisōka” (Well-Behaved Freethinkers) by Uozumi Setsuro, published in September 1910. Setsuro writes:

Thus far, the righteous, self-proclaimed free-thinkers and writers have looked upon the suppression of socialism and anarchism as fires on the opposite shore. Some have tried to claim their positions to be entirely other to such dangerous extremism. They have not noticed, or pretended not to notice, that as free thinkers, their position in the history of civilization puts them in the same position as those [being suppressed]. If they have not noticed this, it is shameful.34 He continues: “The spread of individual rights in the West has deeply rooted reasons. There was a long history. There was an absolute spirit of reform. We have been sliding on the surface [of these ideas], swallowing them whole, prematurely quoting Ibsen and

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34 *Asahi shimbun*, September 16, 1910.
Nietzsche. It is fortunate if we do not get upset stomachs. I believe it will be fortunate if each oppressive party gets medicine, and realizes the need to chew before swallowing.”

This assessment, that the current panic over “dangerous thoughts” is due to an incomplete understanding of the different ‘–isms’ entering Japanese discourse, summarizes the frustration amongst progressive thinkers at the widespread government crackdowns. The only antidote, Setsuro stresses, is through reasoned study of the ideas at stake, and Ogai might be seen as exemplary in his efforts to share his knowledge with a wider audience.

The third of Ogai’s stories written during the Great Treason incident, in contrast to the whimsical tone of the first and the ostensibly distant context of the second, presents an unflattering glimpse into the shabby offices of an unnamed Japanese government agency, which seems to be involved in the censorship and regulation of publications. The story features a lunchtime conversation amongst bureaucrats about the recent spate of censorships and their suspicions of anarchist thought; their understanding is patchy and vague, evincing Ogai’s apparent disapproval of the censors’ lack of study. The main character Kimura, a man with a scholarly bent, tries to correct their misunderstandings despite his reluctance to place himself in a politically suspect position by speaking too much. He tells his peers: “‘Oh, I only pay a little bit of attention to the history of literature. World affairs are reflected in literature like a shadow, so I grasp things indirectly.’ Kimura’s words sounded like self-deprecation, as well as an excuse.” (OZ 7: 417) This might be revealing of Ogai’s own concerns about his unique position within the worlds of letters and of bureaucracy. His position might be most succinctly summarized in the cautious, sensible sentiment voiced by Kimura that: “I believe in the importance of the freedom of expression, so I lament the too extensive degree to which we prohibit the sale of [books deemed dangerous]. Although of course, I admit that there do exist circumstances that make it unavoidable.” (OZ 7: 418) Through these words, Ogai seems to advise the real life counterparts to the government

Ibid.
officials depicted in his fiction, to be careful not to entirely suppress new ideas, while simultaneously reassuring them of his broad support in their mission to maintain social order.

To contextualize these stories, it must be remembered that Ogai was more than a casual onlooker of the Great Treason Incident, during the unfolding of which they were written. It is known that as a mentor to the defense lawyer Hiraide Shû, Ogai had been kept abreast of the case as it developed, despite its spotty coverage in general news publications. But at this point before the final verdicts had been handed down, Ogai still seems to be appealing, if indirectly, to the authorities to revise their current policies of rigid suppressions and irrational suspicions. Through his fiction, he writes as a helpful advisor, ready to clarify widespread misconceptions about imported philosophies and arts, and to provide historical facts as to their developments, so that sound and informed decisions can be made. This was impossible in any other, more overtly political capacity given his official station within the bureaucracy; he had risen to the station of Surgeon General by this point. Though he expresses frustration at the obstinacy and obtuseness of the current censorship practices and official mindsets at large, Ogai still seems to hope that the unbiased and rational understanding of competing values, and the overarching structures of order and authority, are not mutually exclusive.

Ogai turned to the composition of Japanese historical fictions after the death of the Meiji emperor in 1912, and the subsequent suicide of General Nogi Maresuke and his wife in a show of feudal fidelity to their leader. The Japanese public was rocked by this double suicide, which occurred on the day of the imperial funeral. Some were disgusted that such a premodern act could take place in their successfully modernized nation, while others

36 Nakamura, Mori Ogai to Meiji kokka, 184-202; Rubin, Injurious to Public Morals, 145-168.

37 He rose to this station in 1902.
interpreted it as a warning against Japan’s increasing amorality and disintegration of its core values of service and loyalty. Coming on the heels of the Great Treason Incident which had indicated that “free thought”, the hallmark of modernity, was not entirely ingrained in the national spirit, many continued to debate its meaning for months to come.\(^\text{38}\)

Ogai wrote “Okitsu Yagoemon no isho” (The Last Testament of Okitsu Yagoemom) in the days afterwards and in it, he attempts to recoup the psychology of Nogi’s suicide through the depiction of Yagoemon’s death. Yagoemon had been a real historical figure in seventeenth-century Japan when there had still been a custom of expressing absolute feudal loyalty through suicide, and Ogai used historical documents in crafting his story. As Karatani Kôjin points out in the essay “Rekishi to shizen- Ogai no rekishi shôsetsu” (History and Nature- Ogai’s Historical Novels), Ogai made significant revisions to the story several months after its initial appearance, citing historical inaccuracies.\(^\text{39}\) In the original text, Yagoemon commits a private *seppuku*, “all the more shining because it is so reserved”, but in the later version, the suicide is moved to a public square where it becomes a spectacle.\(^\text{40}\) Karatani argues that in republishing this tale at a temporal distance from Nogi’s death which was widely discussed as possibly admirable, and also in removing the atmospheric dignity of Yagoemon’s stoic and solitary suicide, Ogai succeeds in presenting past events according to their own, bald trajectory. He writes that by ridding the story of its external connotations, “In this revision there is no ‘cohesion’ (締まり), and rather than gather around a central theme (主題), events are dispersed.”\(^\text{41}\) Karatani states that Ogai thus “questions the mystery of ‘actions’ that are not possible to comprehend no matter how we interpret them. What people say is easy to understand, but what they do contains an


\(^{39}\) Karatani Kôjin, “Rekishi to shizen- Ogai no rekishi shôsetsu”, in *Shinchô*, March 1974, 132-159.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 133.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 134.
indecipherable mystery.” Karatani explains that Ogai’s later essay “Rekishi sono mama to rekishi banare” (History Itself, and a Departure from History, 1915) reveals this methodology. There, Ogai states that in writing historical fictions: “I decided to research historical materials and honor the ‘nature’ I perceived in them. I lost interest in arbitrarily changing this [nature].” (OZ 26: 508-509) It might be said from this that Ogai’s interest lies not in “deciphering” the meanings of actions, but in depicting actions in their “natural” state.

Karatani posits that Ogai’s historical novels, which rely on historical sources to varying degrees, are thus attempts to write in a way that elides the prerogatives of teleological thought to order events into a linear history, and that they therefore strive to reveal human nature through the unadorned depiction of events as they occur. It is an attempt to hold history in abeyance, while retaining historicity. This would seem to also hold true for Oshio Heihachirô (1914), an account of a failed anti-Bakufu uprising in 1837 led by the title character, that many critics, both at the time and in hindsight, have noticed closely reflects the Great Treason Incident. It has been noted by postwar researchers with access to materials pertaining to the Great Treason case that in a letter to his lawyers from prison, Kôtoku Shûsui had explicitly referenced the Oshio case from the Edo period as a similar example of an act of rebellion that was undertaken out of material necessity, and also that the sentiments expressed in the prison writings of the Socialists who had been convicted in the Great Treason Case mirror the feelings of lonely futility (“kojaku no kû”) that Ogai ascribes to the cornered Oshio activists pursuant to their defeat by the Bakufu guards.43

The bulk of Ogai’s story is based on facts and episodes culled from Edo period historical sources, and is interspersed only with a few brief glimpses into the characters’ psychologies as projected in light of their documented actions. Critically, the rebellion is

42 Ibid., 137.

43 Ogata Tsutomu, Ogai no rekishi shôsetsu- shiryo to hôhô (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), 210-213.
not ascribed to any declaration of revolutionary violence by Oshio, its leader. Neither is there any mention made of the twentieth-century events seeming to mirror the course of events described here. Ogai reserved his commentaries for a separate essay that he attached to the main text as an addendum, but here too, no reference is made to more recent incidents. Instead, in this essay he describes the research that had gone into the writing of the story, and he presents, for example, the records of the droughts and taxes under which the Osaka townspeople had struggled at the time of the uprising, as well as the patchy, idiosyncratic anecdotes about Heihachirô compiled in various Edo period histories.

The information presented in this addendum shows that Ogai had privileged historical materials in his finished story, and rather than forcibly create cohesions amongst the multiple and fragmented episodes that these sources contained, he had allowed the pluralities and disconnects to also appear in his work. For instance, in the story, Ogai meticulously provides the genealogies of his main characters although this greatly slows down the main ‘plot’. The addendum includes further detailed notes on the individual names and ages of each member of the foiled rebellion, as well as the manner in which they were apprehended and prosecuted. This serves to remind readers that each character had his or her own background and life story, which exceed the linear narrative drive of the main story. They are reminded that these ‘peripheral’ figures went down in history as ‘rebels’, with their other qualities and associations, no less real, effaced from public memory.

Ogai’s revisitation of the Heihachirô uprising conveys the chaotic, unorganized, and “natural” energies of what contemporary readers know from the outset was a doomed event. This is especially emphasized when, in a moment of meditation upon how he had come to lead the movement against the harsh policies of the Bakufu, Ogai’s Heihachirô cannot help but feel that it was all inevitable: “The events up to today can be said to have unfolded naturally. It was not I who pushed forward this conspiracy, but the conspiracy that carried me”. (OZ 15: 25) This internal monologue shows that it was not any
specifically held ideal or plan, nor any particularly inspirational strand of revolutionary theory, that had instigated the abortive revolution, and that such categorizations came about only after the fact. Ogai seems to suggest that in reality, human actions unfold amidst a plethora of feelings and possibilities, and that it is in retrospect that they are neatly arranged to fit into the prevailing logics of the time.

Ogata Tsutomu thus concludes that what ultimately separates Ogai’s fictional Oshio Heihachirō from a straightforward history of this long ago figure, is the implied extra-diegetic overlap of the events it portrays, with the events pertaining to the Great Treason Incident.\(^{44}\) In showing that the actions of Oshio and his followers unfolded inexorably and irreducibly, Ogai indeed complicates understandings of the recent notorious events. In the heat of the moment, actions are not yet interpreted and judged, and are open to any reading. Ogai expounds on this in his addendum essay:

> If Heihachirō had been able to articulate, with the support of the nation or a self-governing body, a way of salvation that would maintain social order, he would have established such a social policy. Even if it had been impossible for him to strategize for the Bakufu, if there had been opportunities for him to make use of his skills in Osaka before it entered Tokugawa control and was still developing as a self-governing entity, the rebellion would not have occurred. It was because these paths were blocked that Heihachirō attempted to destroy the social order in an attempt to realize his hopes. His philosophies were those of a yet unawakened Socialist. (未だ覚醒せざる社会主義者) (OZ 15:72)

It might be said that Oshio and his followers have not “awakened” to their identification as Socialists not only because the term and concept did not exist then, but because their actions were just via accordance with their wills rather than adherence to any greater framework of ideas. Modern-day readers of Ogai’s retelling of their story might see these activists with sympathy in retrospective view of the downfall of the Bakufu order, or with scorn in light of the current Socialist scare, but Ogai seems to attempt to leave this judgment open. In turn, Kôtoku and the others captured in the so-called Great Treason Incident, as referenced in the

\(^{44}\) Ogata, _Ogai no rekishi shōsetsu- shiryō to hōhō_, 194-228.
story, too could be seen to have been acting out of their individually valid perspectives under similar circumstances. Ogata observes:

Kôtoku believed that, “Revolutions occur naturally, and are not caused by a single individual or a single political group. In the Meiji Revolution too, it was just that [its eventual leaders like] Kido, Saigô, and Okubo were luckily born then, and took up this matter, riding its energies. Emphatically, it was not they that caused it.” Also, certain phrases, such as “the need for a violent revolution” and “if only there were forty or fifty soldiers prepared to die for it”, which had been carelessly tossed around in conversations amongst themselves, appeared in the trial reports of the various members of the Great Treason Incident. [That Kôtoku’s diffident ideas about revolution, and the old and careless quotes from the captured rebels,] eventually came to take fruit as a constructed revolution, and that this started to pull many people into its gyre as it unfolded, regardless of individual wills (Kôtoku in particular had been averse to violent revolution), overlaps subtly [with the failed Oshio uprising.] 45

*Oshio Heihchirô* explores the “mystery” of human actions in Oshio’s rebellion, pointing to the multiply conflicting intentions and circumstances behind them. By extension, Ogai thus also opens up the occasion to think about the various circumstances leading up to the Great Treason Incident, apart from the conventionally fixed narrative about its “dangerous” intentions.

This conceptual act of deferring a centering interpretation recalls the remarks that Hidemaro, the young historian from Ogai’s earlier story “Kano yô ni”, had made about the problem of assessing past events through predetermined premises. He had lamented: “Even when something is called truth, as long as it has passed through human imagings of it there is an added element, according to the materialist philosophies of Lange. We unconsciously make things into poems. It becomes a lie.” (*OZ* 10:70) This urge to “make things into poems” by excising elements that don’t fit in, seems to point to precisely the issue that Ogai later seeks to address in his decision to “research historical materials and honor the ‘nature’ I perceived in them” (*OZ* 26: 508-509) via his historical literature. But Ayanokôji, Hidemaro’s artist friend, had already seemed to grasp that at least the creation of artworks

lies beyond ideological boundaries imposed a priori. Regarding Hidemaro’s question of epistemological groundings, he had said that: “I try not to think about it as much as possible. I defer any decision. I don’t need to make any decisions in order to paint.” (OZ 10: 77) It seems that by remaining thusly open, Ayanokôji is able to navigate the multiple ideas and shifting social registers of the modern age by his free will, and that his ability to express his ideals in painting derives from this. It is not by closing off art as a dimension free from the ideologies and material obligations governing his world—as M, the naïve painter in “Tenchô” originally does—but by its capacity as a space for contemplating and experimenting with the open possibilities within it, that Ayanokôji succeeds in both arenas. In “Hanako” too, Rodin, the master artist, too sees his model as simply beautiful without need for explanation, and he is confident enough to freely investigate the creative inspirations that she offers, much to the befuddlement of Kubota, the observing scientist.

Besides “Okitsu Yagoemon no isho” with its clear evocation of General Nogi’s suicide, and “Oshio Heihachirô” with its explicit connections to the Great Treason Incident, his other historical fictions too explore documented episodes of individuals acting against the prevailing logics of their societies. Indeed, Ogai seems to explore in these stories the irreducible “mystery” of human actions unfolding within the framework of the different social and material realities that situate them, much as he had been doing in his earlier writings about artists creating their works within their given contexts. More than just dispassionately attesting to the theoretical possibility of stretching conceptual viewpoints past the historicizing and narrativizing impulse of the modern telos, he seems to actively celebrate the autonomy of his characters. Individual will, he seems to say, is the timeless basis not only of art, but also of all human actions.

The struggle to balance amidst conflicting value systems and various obligations, while nurturing individual intellectual and artistic progress, has always been an underlying theme in Ogai’s oeuvre and his life. Even his debut fiction, Maihime, had prominently
focused on the dilemma of a young man who must choose between adhering to the path of service for his nation, and foregoing it for the sake of a personal love. Yet, though he continued to align himself with the hierarchies of power throughout his bureaucratic career, it is also undeniable that the evolution of his creative output, and his insights into the timeless energies of human nature, were the result of the dialectic tensions that he himself confronted in his unique position at the crossroads of these competing discourses.
The Subjective Perspective and Beyond: The Early Shirakaba

The most prominent of the legacies left by the Shirakaba school—amongst the central figures of which are Mushanokôji Saneatsu (1885-1976), Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), the Arishima brothers [Arishima Takeo (1878—1923), Arishima Ikuma (1882-1974), and Satomi Ton (1888-1983)], Kishida Ryûsei (1891-1929), Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889-1961), and Kojima Kikuo (1887-1950)—to later generations of Japanese culture include their introductions of Western art to the Japanese public, and their contributions towards the genbun-itchi linguistic movement to unite the spoken and written languages. Of the former, art historians like Takashina Shûji and Shimizu Yasuji have studied how the Shirakaba magazine (1910—1923)\(^1\) devoted a significant amount of their pages towards introducing trends in the Western visual arts to its readers.\(^2\) Of the latter, literary scholars like Yamamoto Masahide and Karatani Kôjin have observed that the Shirakaba school brought to culmination the genbun itchi linguistic campaign begun in the Meiji period.\(^3\) This chapter will examine the dynamics by which both of these contributions stemmed from the uniquely cosmopolitan nature of the Shirakaba writers’ worldviews, which spanned foreign cultures and the circulating images of their visual arts, as well as the modes of expression and values deployed in the space of their everyday lives.

As discussed in previous chapters, the genbun-itchi campaign was a nation-wide movement to rid the written Japanese language of the heavy character usage and archaic structures rooted in the Chinese-derived kanbun system. It also aimed to reduce the formalism of the gikobun system dating from the Heian period. Instead, it strove to

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\(^{1}\) Figure 3-1.


\(^{3}\) See, for example, Yamamoto Masahide, Genbun icchi no rekishi ronkô (Tokyo: Ofusha, 1971), and Karatani Kôjin et al, Kindai Nihon no hihyô: Meiji, Taisho hen (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1992).
develop a simpler, unified writing style close to modern vernacular Japanese in the Tokyo dialect. According to Yamamoto Masahide, “Amongst the Shirakaba school, Mushanokōji Saneatsu used everyday language freely and boldly, markedly freeing writing from the archaic styles, creating a prose style that ‘wrote what is meant to be expressed in one’s own words’,” and “Shiga Naoya completed a vernacular writing style that was simple, precise, and impressively powerful.”

It might be said that in addition to the formal streamlining which made written language easier to use, genbun-itchi gave the Shirakaba authors an avenue by which to confront, develop, and articulate their subjectivities in ways that were qualitatively different from what had been previously possible in older versions of Japanese.

Uno Kōji, a writer from the generation following the Shirakaba’s rise in the early 1910s, explains the newness of this style of writing:

Mushanokōji’s novels were more like the essays of an elementary or middle school student, than traditional novels. His protagonists, called ‘the self’ [自分] seemed to be the author himself: [...] In retrospect, he was the true ancestor of colloquial writing (口語文体), a revolutionary, and an innovator in the reduction of Chinese character usage and improvement of kana usage. But in the spirit of freestyle writing, instead of consciously striving to create a true colloquial writing, or thinking that he must reduce character usage and that it would be more convenient to use kana phonetically, it seemed that what he did according to his whims had naturally resulted in these effects.

Indeed, Mushanokōji writes with such a simple straightforwardness that readers receive the impression that the literary work is the direct extension of the author’s life and thoughts. The childish aspect that Uno addresses comes from both this apparent psychological naïvete, and its expression through the unadorned, colloquial style of the prose. This tendency can be observed in even Mushanokōji’s earliest novel, aptly titled Omedetaki hito (A Naïve Person, 1910).

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4 Yamamoto, Genbun icchi no rekishi ronkō, 28-29.

The story revolve around the desire of the main character to marry Tsuru, a girl he has spied from afar but does not personally know. In his imagination, the protagonist pictures her as an ideal woman. However, his repeated proposals, never directed at Tsuru herself but indirectly orchestrated through an intermediary’s approach to her guardians, are rejected and the tale concludes with her marrying another man. The drama of love and heartbreak therefore takes place almost entirely in the narrator’s mind, rather than in the objectively observable terrain of a social reality. It might be said that the protagonist’s statements are performative, in that it is through the articulation of his feelings via the act of narration that he both creates and apprehends his personal reality. So firmly entrenched is the protagonist in his own point of view, that even after he learns of Tsuru’s marriage, he continues to pine for her, believing that she too must secretly reciprocate his feelings. The complete freedom that Mushanokōji allows for his character to voice and nurture his fantasies, despite external truths that conflict with them, creates an apparently seamless continuum between the narrator’s internal reality and its linguistic expression. For him, facts and conditions external to this subjective perspective are irrelevant.

Notably though, the protagonist seems coolly aware of the objective selfishness of his obsessions, even as he remains so deeply entrenched in it. He dispassionately explains: “I, thirsting for a woman, attained in her an object [emphasis mine] of desire; thereafter, I came to like her, and fell in love with her. I came to think that becoming my wife would mean happiness for Tsuru too.”6 Throughout the story, Tsuru is presented solely in relation to the a priori grounds of the narrator’s desiring perspective, and not as a full-fledged character in her own right. Such a perspective might at first appear to reflect the socially and materially elite Shirakaba school’s sense of feudal entitlement 7—the core members


7 See, for example, Honda Shugo, ‘Shirakaba-ha no bungaku (Tokyo: Shincho bunko, 1965), especially the section entitled “Elite-ishiki” (Elitism), 76-77, which comments on the uniquely privileged worldviews of the young aristocrats. On a related note, in Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial
were the offspring of hereditary aristocracy (who were not necessarily wealthy), and industry moguls (who were), and had met as students at the elite Gakushūin Peers School. Or, it might even appear that by underscoring for readers the unilateral nature of his character’s wanton pinings, Mushanokōji calls into question socially entrenched values of chauvinism, and points out a critical awareness exceeding this fictional, personal drama. But there is no sense of parody in Omedetaki hito despite the inevitable unhappy ending. Instead, the implication seems to be that the protagonist remains steadfast in his love for Tsuru, not because he foolishly fails to realize its intense and problematic subjectivity, but because he revels in it. He is first and solely attuned to his own desires, regardless of the external contraindications that make it increasingly difficult to maintain optimism that these would be requited. The novel can therefore be read as a statement of the radical primacy of the self and its instincts. Throughout his oeuvre, Mushanokōji, most clearly of the Shirakaba writers, celebrates subjective vision even as it goes against social and cultural conventions.

This intense prioritization of personal desires and experiences forms the crux of the Shirakaba philosophy. However, the group simultaneously stressed a sense of connection with foreign artists who, through the media of their visual artworks, seemed to express trans-national, human ideals. By identifying themselves with Post Impressionism in particular, the Shirakaba members believed themselves to be participants in a globally unfolding discourse of art that took as its agent a certain concept of ‘self’ that they aspired towards. In order to comprehend such specific ideals of ‘art’, and of the ‘subjectivity’ that was believed to be expressed therein as its driving force, it is necessary to question the broader contexts of the Shirakaba writers’ values and outlooks. Specifically, how did they calibrate their supposedly timeless and transcendental artistic goals with the lived realities of Japan’s developing modernity? What role did visual images from foreign sources play in

\[\text{Japan (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), Kim Brandt also finds a note of objectifying Orientalism in the Shirakaba art historian Yanagi Muneyoshi’s devotion to Korean, and subsequently Japanese, folk art.}\]
shaping their collective perspectives? This chapter and the next will attempt to address such issues through a study of the literary and critical works from the earlier period (1910—1917) of the *Shirakaba* magazine (1910—1923), focusing particularly on the works of Mushanokôji Saneatsu.

In the following analyses, it is important to note that the perspectives and ideals that the Shirakaba members held and developed cannot be considered equal to those of the Western arts and artists that they were inspired by. Essential notions, such as of ‘self’ and ‘art’, rest on the assumption that they are universally valid as analytical categories transcending cultural and linguistic specificities, but as Lydia Liu writes, it is “folly to wield an analytical concept or category indifferently anywhere as if that which makes sense in one place must obtain elsewhere.” A foreign concept is not transferred into, but translated by the host language, wherein it gains meaning through negotiation with the other terms of that linguistic worldview. Though words like 自己 (*jiko*), 自我 (*jiga*), 自分 (*jibun*), etc. pointing to the notion of individual subjectivity were already in usage in Japanese, the Shirakaba writers seem to have actively taken on the process of, in effect, translating these terms anew for themselves and testing their contours. Perhaps it is because such terms were still open—or perhaps they still are to an extent, to this day—to taking on new connotations and meanings within the sphere of Japanese language and epistemology, that the Shirakaba members each sought in them what they wanted to claim. At the same time, the expectance that analytical concepts like ‘subjectivity’, ‘humanity’, etc. existed above cultural and linguistic conditions, seemed to validate their experiments as steps leading towards universally fixed ideals.

**Discourses on the Self**

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A common criticism against the Shirakaba group is that their uncompromising pursuit of artistic and literary idealism eclipsed an awareness of the socio-political and material conditions that surrounded them. For example a later scholar, Miyoshi Yukio, writes ironically that the Shirakaba group had lived in what appears to have been “‘good, old times”, and that “it is difficult to banish feelings akin to jealousy” regarding the blithe egotism of these literary youths from a simpler age. He then notes more soberly that: “it was not just by chance, that the young generation who gathered at the Shirakaba was lucky enough to be born into an alten guten Zeiten. It should be enough to note that Ishikawa Takuboku’s “Jidai heisoku no genjō” (The Present Reality of the Dead-end Times) was also written in Meiji 43 [1910].”

Takuboku’s landmark essay had been written in the wake of the Taigyaku (“High Treason”) incident of that same year, in which a group of anarchists were executed for a mostly dubious plot to assassinate the emperor, and an alleged conspiracy to stage a nationwide revolt against the Meiji government. In the essay, Takuboku laments the political apathy of young intellectuals, for whom “problems concerning the state only enter our minds when they have bearing on our personal welfares. After it passes, we go back to being strangers.” 1910 was also the year of the Japanese annexation of Korea, another fact to which almost no mention is given in the pages of the Shirakaba magazine. The era was in fact, full of unrest and social change, but the magazine’s focus turned resolutely away from these turbulent developments. Miyoshi describes the Shirakaba group’s aristocratic lineage and wealthy circumstances, and suggests that it was because of their unique social and material status that they were able to ignore the darker turmoil of their age, and turn inwards to focus on their private ideals. Even the poorest of them “did not have to worry

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10 Ibid.

about the next meal,” in Mushanokôji’s blunt words. Mushanokôji himself was not wealthy, although as a descendant of Heian era aristocrats, he had social privileges that offset his relative lack of means.

Critics contemporary to the group too had raised similar objections against their intentionally narrow perspectives. But one of the earliest and clearest of these criticisms comes from Arishima Takeo, who was a founding member of the coterie through his familial connections and personal friendships, despite what would ultimately prove to be his unshakeable doubts about the egotism espoused by the group’s other members. In the April 1911 issue of the magazine, which marked the one year anniversary of its publication, Arishima published a critique of Mushanokôji’s aforementioned first novel Omedetaki hito, which had just been released two months ago. Arishima writes in an open letter form, and addresses his younger friend Mushanokôji with candor and familiarity. “I cannot help but feel a very acute sensitivity in reading your work. I think that your capacity for feeling as regards your own experiences is so sharply developed as to be almost painful. Reading your work, I often feel hesitant, as though you were taking my hand and plunging it deep into your chest to the red and sticky depths of the heart, urging me to touch.” Through the graphic imagery of this analogy, Arishima complements Mushanokôji’s success in creating a fictional protagonist who bares his faults and feelings with so much raw directness that the reader almost hesitates at such a degree of exposure.

But pointing to this same unrestrained and unfiltered use of language that marked

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13 The group was mocked widely upon its publication as the “Bakarashi” (silly, inane), a pun pointing to their endeavor’s apparent lack of seriousness: see Shiga Naoya, “Hosokawa shoten ban ‘Abashiri made’ atogaki”, Shiga Naoya zenshû, v.7, (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1999), 377. Even after it was more established, debates were often waged against the group’s philosophy of idealism, including those by the Japanese Naturalists Ikuta Chôkô (1915-1916) and Shimamura Hôgetsu (1917), the nationalist Mitsui Kôsuke (1917), and the socialists Sakai Toshihiko (1916) and Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1921). See Usui Yoshimi, Kindai bungaku ronsô (jô) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1975).

Mushanokôji’s prose, Arishima also warns: “As your philosophy develops more, the technical skills of your writing too will have to keep up.” He further adds: “I understand that right now, you are busily trying to develop your creativity, and cannot be distracted from this personal goal. But surely, you will not be satisfied staying within this circumscribed space. […] I await the time when you will take in the wider world into your fortress.” Arishima therefore covers in this letter the central issues that would recur throughout the course of Mushanokôji’s literary career, namely, the place of objective technique versus subjective expression in art, and the prioritization of personal concerns over wider worldviews.

Mushanokôji published his reply to this critique in the same issue of Shirakaba. He admits that his selfish focus on himself is the source of his artistic inspirations, but instead of apologizing for this limited scope, he defends his choices. He writes: “I cannot bear the pain of worrying about other people’s destinies. It is painful to continue my current life unless I act oblivious to the plight of others.”

He contrasts this new defensive egotism against his earlier, youthful devotion to Tolstoy’s humanitarian compassion for the dispossessed, and its attendant tenets of self-denial and austerity. Mushanokôji explains that eventually, he will want to expand his horizons and “worry about the destiny of others, but I cannot do this now. This causes me unbearable suffering.”

Behind this melodramatic statement is a clear-sighted understanding of his present selfish vision. Rather than aspire towards a selfless and noble altruism that seeks to fix the injustices of the wider world, he knowingly chooses to explore the controllable sphere of his own immediate vision. He retains the possibility though, that in some undetermined future, he might emerge to share his enlightenment with others.

An earlier free-form essay from June 1910, entitled “Jibun to tanin” (Myself and


16 Ibid., 106.
Others) shows further evidence of Mushanokôji’s struggles to justify and situate this studiously selfish perspective. He declares: “I am glad that I am indifferent (reien 冷淡) to others. I am glad that others are indifferent to me. Since I cannot do anything about the fate of another person through loving him, or worrying about him, it is a blessing that I can become indifferent about others.”\(^{17}\)

He however, is not satisfied by cutting himself off from human contact altogether. In a rather convoluted fashion he writes: “I do not like to be disliked by others. I would rather have no relations than be disliked by people. Yet I do not want to obsessively focus on myself.”\(^{18}\)

Given his concerns about being disliked, it seems that Mushanokôji is not truly ‘indifferent’ to others, and is still contemplating how to take others’ perspectives into consideration. Perhaps since he cannot verbalize his ideal state of existence, where he is neither involved with the welfare of others nor resented for his lack of involvement, he describes this visually. “In pictorial terms, I would like to be the central figure along with my lover, with my friends as the supporting figures, and those with shared interests as background figures.”\(^{19}\)

Also, though the strident tone is retained throughout the essay, Mushanokôji concludes by appealing to ‘nature’ as endorsing his tendencies. “I have unconsciously been following the commands of nature in following this path. From now on, I will do so more consciously.”\(^{20}\)

He seems to imply that rather than adhering to an artificial path of self-denial, a more fundamental natural law dictates that he follow his own desires. Mushanokôji, rather than upholding egotism for its own sake, attempts to justify it by situating it in a transcendental logic.

Members in the group besides Mushanokôji too were aware that becoming the

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\(^{17}\) Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Jibun to tanin”, Shirakaba, June 1910, 9.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 10.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 11.
‘central figure’ in one’s worldview would banish others to the periphery, and they too pondered the implications of this. For example, Shiga Naoya’s story “Abashiri made” (To Abashiri), published in April 1910 in the first issue of Shirakaba, underscores the limits of subjective perspective. The protagonist of the story is a young man on a leisurely train trip to visit a friend. As the train departs from Ueno station in Tokyo, an attractive but frazzled woman with an infant and a small boy sit down across the aisle from him. The boy is cranky and insists on sitting by the window, and his mother appears frustrated and tired by his demands. The young man offers the seat next to him by the window to the petulant boy, and he and the mother begin talking. He learns that the boy has ear and nose problems in addition to chronic headaches, and casually remarks that the boy’s bad temper must be a result of these difficulties. The mother replies: “The doctor said that these conditions are because his father would drink so much alcohol. I’m not sure if this explains the nose and ear problems, but I think his headaches do come from that.”

The mother’s matter-of-fact candor about her seemingly pathetic circumstances increases when the young man asks her where they are going and she replies: “We are going to Hokkaido. It is supposedly a place called Abashiri, very far and very inconvenient.” They fall silent, and the young man observes her and the boy. He starts to imagine what the child’s father must look like, and finds himself thinking of a former, rather unsavory schoolmate named Magaki, who was arrogant and had drinking problems. He speculates that the father of the family in front of him must be a man like Magaki.

He remembers that in his simplicity, Magaki could be rather jovial in some respects but thinks: “Such attitudes are often not indicative of one’s true nature. Even jovial men could become difficult when faced with failure. They could become mean. They could pick on their weak wives in their messy houses, in an attempt to rid themselves

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22 Ibid., 21.
of their sadness.” The image is an unhappy one, showing doubts about the gap between appearances and reality. In his mind, the young man contrasts this against how radiant he imagines the young mother before him must have looked in her girlhood, prior to her marriage. As the train hurtles northward, the infant starts to cry, and the little boy continues to pester his mother. When the protagonist prepares to disembark at Utsunomiya, a few hours away from Tokyo, the mother asks him to mail some postcards for her from the station. They part without exchanging names. The young man is tempted to read the postcards before he deposits them in the mailbox at Utsunomiya station but he refrains, and goes about his own way.

Though he glimpses several tellingly grim clues into the circumstances of the young mother’s life, Shiga’s main character does not involve himself in her drama beyond offering her a few passing courtesies. He imagines that the journey ahead of her will be difficult, but he does not veer from his own path to understand her problems and address them with her. She is beguiling to him, but not enough so to derail his own plans. Admittedly, the mother does not tell him explicitly that she is unhappy with her life, and it is possible that perhaps, despite her challenges, she is glad to be heading towards Hokkaido with her two children. The father figure too might be a much better man than the long-ago schoolmate that the protagonist rather arbitrarily imagines him to resemble, regardless of his drinking habits. The young man’s restraint from reading the mother’s postcard messages shows his acceptance of the perspectival limits he has imposed upon himself; he might be curious about the seemingly tragic woman, but since he can not and will not take responsibility for her actual situations, he decides it only fair to respect the boundaries of her intimate thoughts. Readers are left to imagine the rest of the young fatherless family’s long train journey to the northernmost reaches of Japan, and the narrator’s subsequent leisurely visit with his friend, as two completely separate stories. Like Mushanokôji’s conjuring of a static painting in which he is the main subject surrounded by a select group of kindred
figures in carefully orchestrated sequence, Shiga’s story captures its central characters in a fleeting exchange in which they remain carefully situated in their apartness.

The story relies on visual descriptions of the young mother as seen through the protagonist’s eyes to convey his general impressions of her, rather than entering his inner monologue to reveal his feelings towards her. Because he does not ask her for any more details about herself than she manages to offer over the course of their light conversation, he has nothing other than her appearances to judge her by. This account of a brief episode of contact between strangers stresses how each individual has his or her own back-story and circumstances that are not visible on the surface. The mother’s unusual frankness with the protagonist could be plausibly explained by her fatigue, or her tacit understanding that anything she says to a stranger in the liminal space of a train compartment will not affect either of their respective lives. But perhaps, she is in want of someone to share her story with, and is inviting him in to her life if temporarily.

Yet, it is his refusal to involve himself, even as his sympathy is mildly stirred, that allows him to proceed unencumbered. While he lets himself imagine the young mother’s hardships, his thoughts maintain a detached, impersonal air so that he stops short of identifying with her. The story seems to emphasize how, even as individuals coexist in shared spaces, each person is in control of only his or her own life, and can only perceive each other through his or her fixed perspective. It shows that objective appearances, and subjective interpretations of these, are more often than not disjoined from each other. The undeniable note of poignancy with which Shiga ends the tale indicates his awareness of the compassion and the stories that are lost in such a curtailing of one’s worldview. This a theme that will be developed further in Shiga’s later oeuvre, as he goes on to explore how the ultimately separate agencies of each individual can find balance with that of others, and within the world at large.
Kusaka Shin’s (1887—1938) short story “Kare to kagami” (Him and the Mirror), published in the May 1910 edition of the magazine also points to an individual’s ability to create his perspectives as it suits him, even at the expense of social normalcy. It could be said that this tale hints strongly at the power of self-delusion, and that it questions the central Shirakaba tenet of self-affirmation, even as it ultimately celebrates it. At the start of the story, the main character is described as horrifically ugly. “On his abnormally large head, yellow pus rose wetly from purple infections. The sunken flesh of one cheek was pulled in a rictus, and the broad stem of his nose bent harshly to the left. Beneath eyebrows as sparse as a fever patient’s sat small brown eyes placed far apart. These were wet and dull from tears. His thick black mane was split from right to left, and held in place with hair cream.”

He is a scholar who immerses himself in philosophical contemplation, and during breaks from reading, he would stare at his visage in the mirror. Though initially his ugliness makes him cry, over time, he comes to believe that his face is not as horrible as he had originally thought. With his confidence buoyed, he ventures out into the street, where he studies the faces of the passersby. However, when he overhears a rickshaw man say, “How about that face!”, he hurries home and shuts himself in. Days later, a second trip outside is ended by two women laughing at him. “He told himself, ‘It seems my face becomes corrupted when I go outside the house.’ He declared that he would never go outside again, and he went back to reading and philosophizing. He would look at the mirror when he got bored, and it seemed to him that each day, his face became more beautiful.”

Whether the tale represents a triumph of personal vision over what seems to be

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23 This was the pen-name of Ogimachi Saneyoshi, who along with his brother Ogimachi Kinkazu (1881-1960), were amongst the original Shirakaba founders. They were the aristocratic descendants of Heian court royalty.

24 Kusaka Shin, “Kare to kagami”, Shirakaba, May 1910, 58.

25 Ibid., 59.
objective horror, or the crippling effects of self-delusion, Kusaka’s tale indicates that perspective is relative. In addition to the escapist fantasies that the main character indulges in by cordoning himself off from the critical gaze of others, it is also unclear whether the protagonist is in fact severely deformed to begin with, or if he is overly self-conscious and merely imagines that others are criticizing him; it is entirely conceivable that the rickshaw man and the women react the way they do because they are unnerved to notice the main character, a perfectly normal looking man, staring so intently at their faces. In either case, the tale implies that appearances, richly depicted in Kusaka’s rendering of his erstwhile protagonist’s face (at least as perceived by himself), are not fixed in qualitative meaning and that ultimately, it is up to each individual to determine, through his or her own values and perspective, what constitutes ‘normalness’ and beauty.

Mushanokōji gives fuller expression to the difficulties of renouncing socially meaningful ideals for a commitment to self-affirmation in the play *Momoiro no heya* (The Rose-Colored Chamber), published in February 1911. It oftentimes reads more like a stylized parable than a work of dramatic fiction because its characters orate their philosophical ideas clearly, instead of alluding to them through their actions or through couched and contextualized analogies. The main characters are ‘the Rose-Colored Woman’, and her husband, ‘the Young Man’, whom she tries to shield from the endless demands of the ‘Gray Masses’ that he feels compelled to commiserate with and somehow help. The play opens when the young man returns to his warm and rosy home from a visit to the ‘outside world’. He exclaims: “The coldness out there is unbearable. People are curled up with no coal to burn. They are shrunken. They have gray faces and suspicion in their eyes.”

The woman tries to convince him to stay within the happy confines of his comfortable home but the man hesitates. “It feels rather lonely to be the only one in

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possession of a rosy heart when everyone else in the world has a gray one. I feel guilty."

To make him understand that he need not deny his ideals or privileged circumstances, the woman tells him a story about one artist’s noble, solitary struggles, as follows.

Young Man: Was this in Japan? Or in a foreign country?

Rose-Colored Woman: That’s irrelevant. Anyhow, in the artist’s vicinity, there was no one who appreciated art. But because he didn’t have to worry about earning a living, he painted what he wanted to paint, in the manner that pleased him. Everyone said he was ornery, or lazy, or selfish. They said he was not productive. But he continued to paint confidently, although no one would admire his work when he was done. Everyone who saw his work complained. Not one person sympathized with him or understood him.

Young Man: Oh.

Rose-Colored Woman: He was so lonely he couldn’t stand it. He lived alone. The people in his village were deeply annoyed by him.

Young Man: Yes, I’m sure he annoyed them.

Rose-Colored Woman: Yes, they have to work hard for a living while he wakes, sleeps, eats, and paints at whim. And he always seems to lounge around. How oblivious he is to the struggles of others! How arrogant. Everyone thought that he was lazing about in his wealth. However, the artist was not as spineless as you.

Young Man: (in a mock-angry tone) Don’t be stupid.

Rose-Colored Woman: He would say, ‘I have work to do that you do not comprehend. To you I might seem a useless, annoying figure. To other people though, I am a fountain of strength, their defender. They are joyous and thankful that I exist.’

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27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 104-105.
The Young Man is heartened by the Rose-Colored Woman’s belief that an artist’s mission cannot be deterred by criticisms from the uncomprehending masses. That the woman deems as irrelevant his question of whether the artist in her story lived in Japan or not points to a universalist perspective. Throughout the course of the story, the Young Man’s sense of social obligation to the ‘cold’ and dreariness of socially effective, material productivity is gradually overcome by his acceptance of a more personal, artistic calling as represented by the Rose-Colored Woman. But just as he reaches this resolution, the ‘Gray People’ enter his happy home, and try to lure him out. Though he wavers, at the end of the play he chases them out and declares: “Fine! Even if everyone becomes my enemy, I am going to protect my autonomous self (自我)! I praise love and beauty. I will dye to a rosy color the hearts of those who identify with me!”.

Though the play seems therefore to represent the victory of egotism and idealism over collective responsibilities, it must be noted that the artist in the Rose-Colored Woman’s parable and the protagonist himself both claim strength from the hope that others will come to identify with their lonely struggles. They hope that amongst the indifferent and scornful masses, there will be a few that become “joyous and thankful” because of their works. The Young Man is not merely content to enjoy his rose-colored domesticity, and aspires to eventually dye the world in this happy hue. Through this analogy which describes the hearts of those after the Young Man enlightens them and the story’s heroine as ‘rose-colored’, and the unenlightened masses and the outside world as ‘grey’, Mushanokôji displays a reliance on the power of visuality to indicate in a single, obvious stroke the sum of his main character’s interpretations of them, even as the tale itself shows the inner heartaches and waverings of resolve that underlie such stark determinations. The play implies that an artist’s relationship with the worlds he creates for others to see is fraught with ambiguity.

Mushanokôji pursues the link between the creation of art shared with others, and

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29 Ibid., 127.
the intensely individual enterprise of subjective expression, in an essay published the following month in March 1911. He writes: “I love beauty, I love strength, I love life, I love art, I love philosophy. But this is because I love myself. It is because I want to make myself bigger, to let myself live more, to make it worthwhile to have been born.” However, unlike the Young Man in the *Rose Colored Room*, his main goal, just yet, is not to dye the world in his own ideal colors. He explains:

> It is for myself that I take up my pen. For any other reason, my pen does not flow. More than for anyone, my work is directly for myself. This is my main characteristic, and also my flaw. It is because of this flaw that I am often misunderstood by people, and that I offend them. However, if my work has any value, it is because of this flaw. Anyone who understands this is the person I seek, a person who will understand my work better than anyone. There are few other writers who write so explicitly for themselves.

The tension between writing solely for oneself, and desiring an understanding readership, is offered a tacit resolution in the belief that individual ideals can take on a communal validity, at least for a discerning and sympathetic audience. Though strictly speaking, appreciation from others would be considered a future by-product of the initially private enterprise of self-expression, it is a dimension of art that gives respite from what would otherwise be a perpetually solitary exercise. The presentation of one’s personal and unique creations, and subsequent affirmation from a critically receptive audience, can be thought of as inseparable aspects of the artistic enterprise pictured here.

As their literary careers began, the Shirakaba writers searched for art that displayed both uncompromising independence and wider, shared relevance. The current state of the arts in Japan seemed lacking, and led them to set their sights elsewhere in their quest for role models and inspiration. Looking back on the early days of the *Shirakaba*, Shiga Naoya writes that: “we were full of energy and feared no one. Natsume Sôseki was


31 Ibid., 80.
about the only person we respected, and we didn’t even look at Ogai\textsuperscript{32}, Tôson\textsuperscript{33}, or Shûsei\textsuperscript{34}. We made no mentor figures, and showed our manuscripts to no one outside our group.”\textsuperscript{35}

Mushanokôji’s comments on the literary scene from that time also reflect a sense of dissatisfaction:

> It might be because today’s Japanese lack energy, but there are few artists, and almost no writers or Western-style painters, who seem to be pushing progress. Even Doppo\textsuperscript{36} is not satisfying. Nor is Tôson. I admire that they are acting according to their subjective will, but they have not progressed enough. [...] One must be unapologetic in developing individuality (個性). The masses with no connection to their own individual natures should give way to those who have such a link, and one must keep going forward.\textsuperscript{37}

Even Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916), whose clear-sighted grasp of Japan’s modern condition earned him wide renown as a progressive thinker and cultural authority, did not meet their ideals although he came closest. Mushanokôji writes a review of Sôseki’s novel \textit{Sorekara} in the inaugural edition of \textit{Shirakaba}, beginning with an homage to the author:

> “Natsume Sôseki is in a true sense like a teacher to me, and the person I respect as the greatest figure in today’s literary establishment. I think too, that \textit{Sorekara} is the deepest and greatest of his works.”\textsuperscript{38} He states admiration for Sôseki’s beauty of language and broadness of intellect, and goes on to praises his skill in depicting the protagonist’s suffering between societal demands and personal desires. Though Mushanokôji admits to liking the

\textsuperscript{32} Mori Ogai (1862-1922), like Sôseki, regarded as cultural authority in his own right without belonging to a literary school.

\textsuperscript{33} Shimazaki Tôson (1872-1943), regarded as a representative Japanese Naturalist writer.

\textsuperscript{34} Tokuda Shûsei (1872-1943), regarded as another representative Japanese Naturalist writer.


\textsuperscript{36} Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908), regarded as a precursor to Japanese Naturalism.

\textsuperscript{37} Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Kosei ni tsuite no zakkan”, \textit{Shirakaba}, October 1912, 50- 51.

\textsuperscript{38} Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “\textit{Sorekara} ni tsuite”, \textit{Shirakaba}, April 1910, 1.
open ending of the novel since it pulls in the reader further into the story, he concludes by stating that he “hope[s] to see whether Mr. Sôseki would continue to feel pessimistic towards society, or discover a balance between society and the nature of humanity. And at that time, I believe rather than try to make nature fit society, he will try to make society fit nature. It will be then that he truly becomes a teacher for the people of the nation.” While respecting Sôseki’s understanding of the competing paradigms present in modern life, Mushanokôji seems frustrated by the older writer’s hesitance to let “human nature” prevail against the conventions of “society” in his writings.

The Shirakaba group soon seized upon the visual arts of Post Impressionism, and a selection of European art from the turn of the century and earlier, as evincing the subjective perspectives that they felt was missing in Japan. These foreign artworks appealed to them both because their expressive and unconventional imagery seemed to reflect the very ideals that they were seeking, and because their distant origins seemed to enhance their aura of authority. The Shirakaba members became avid collectors of imported art books, and their agency of identification and longing informed their consumption of the mass-mediated visual images that travelled across national and cultural borders to reach them. In turn, through the publication of the Shirakaba magazine in which they featured photographic reprints of foreign artworks alongside essays explaining the ideals they believed were embodied therein, these writers transmitted their artistic cosmopolitanism to an eager Japanese readership, reinforcing a collective imagination that sought to go beyond traditionally Japanese references.

In the words of the theorist Arjun Appadurai, writing about cultural exchanges in the age of modernity: “the mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass-mediated events and migratory audiences defines the core of the link between globalization and the

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39 Ibid., 3.
40 Ibid., 15.
modern. [...] The work of the imagination, viewed in this context, is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern.”

The Shirakaba imaginaire, which was at once inspired by images and notions from foreign sources, but unfolded within the incontestable parameters of their Japanese locality, evinces both the empowerment and rifts implicit in the increasingly global modern dynamic.

‘Post Impressionism’ and Universalism

Visual images, in that they are visible regardless of the mediation of background knowledge or formal literacy, is experienced at a cognitive level that might seem to transcend the filters of cultural and linguistic conventions. Images can therefore seem to first be ‘read’ at a radically subjective level, before external and contextual knowledge tempers their interpretations, and connects them to the wider web of an individual’s thoughts. It has been suggested that the Shirakaba writers’ interest in Western art stemmed from this sense of immediate comprehension afforded by visual images, compounded with an awareness of their linguistic limitations. Their general lack of foreign language skills prevented their serious study of Western literatures, despite the young writers’ desire to gain knowledge about the world outside of the status quo of Japanese life. It follows that for the Shirakaba members, the immediacy and intuitive nature of visual experiences was preferable to the belabored acts of reading in other languages. The scholar Hondo Shûgo observes: “The Shirakaba writers spoke at length and without hesitation about Van Gogh, Rodin, and Rembrandt. And this was widely accepted. If it had been literature, and not art, it can be assumed that things would have gone differently.”

41 Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Mushanokôji himself would largely concur with this assessment. He writes as follows of himself and his peers in their school days:

[We] began to gradually like paintings. That is to say, [we] looked at photographic reproductions of these in art magazines and books from the West. These triggered [our] imaginations and made [us] think many things, and brought much joy. Looking at images was easier than reading books, and freer. It saved us from having to enslave one’s thoughts to the work. It freed one’s imagination, thoughts, and souls. Also, no matter how distracted [we] felt, there was time enough to look at images. It was also not unpleasant to be titillated by gently erotic sensations from them.43

This frank admission shows that the experience of viewing imported art images was not a way for the Shirakaba members to learn about Western culture through diligently studying them, but a way for them to actively form their own free associations and ideas as inspired by them.

At the exclusive Gakushûin Peers school, the Shirakaba members had been indifferent students for the most part.44 For example, it was because Shiga Naoya was held back twice that he came to be in the same class as Mushanokôji, two years his junior. Mushanokôji fondly recalls of his schooldays: “Once we got to know each other better, Shiga too would say that he was glad he had failed his classes. He was not stupid, but was apparently lazy. The topic of failing reminds me too of Arishima Ikuma. He and Shiga had been in the same class, but he flunked out earlier [.]”45

These privileged young men seemed to instinctively adhere to an outlook of easy exceptionalism, whereby they believed they could navigate their modern age without relying on the disciplinary mediation of classroom instructions and social conventions.


44 This is with the exception of Yanagi Muneyoshi, Kojima Kikuo, and Arishima Takeo who had been excellent students. Yanagi and Kojima would both go on to become noted art historians. Arishima pursued a literary career.

Mushanokôji once declared: “We are psychologically and spiritually children of humanity (人類の子). We are children of the world to an extent that cannot be felt by people older than us. This is because there are great men in foreign countries, and they provide support and harmony for our spirits.”

No amount of learning could replace their visceral sense of connection with the ‘great men’ of the world. The Shirakaba group’s instinctive appreciation of the visual arts from overseas was affirmed by their innately fluid and cosmopolitan worldviews.

Every issue of the Shirakaba magazine featured photographic reproductions of artworks, often accompanied by essays about the lives of the artists, especially in the earlier years of the publication. Though from the mid-Taisho period onwards specialty art magazines started to establish themselves as scholastic authorities in the field, the Shirakaba consistently continued to include prints of artworks beyond its especially didactic, initial phase. In addition to an array of Western art by artists such as the British early Art Nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley, the Spanish Romantic painter Francisco Goya, and the Italian Renaissance master Leonardo da Vinci, non-Western art such as Egyptian sculptures, classical Greek terracottas, Japanese Buddhist art, and Korean porcelains

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49 Shirakaba, September 1910.

50 Ibid., July 1914.

51 Ibid., November 1914.

52 Ibid., February 1923.

53 Ibid., April 1916, November 1922.

54 Ibid., July 1919, July 1922.
were featured over the course of the magazine’s run, but the majority of images published were of Post Impressionist works. Works by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), Paul Cezanne (1839-1906), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), and Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), appeared repeatedly throughout the years so that loyal readers would have developed a visual familiarity with a range of their works.\(^{56}\)

It was not just the uneven eclecticism of its selections that distinguished Shirakaba from standard art magazines. For, rather than study an artwork’s formal characteristics or its theoretical implications, or trace an artist’s biography so as to cull out understandings of recurrent motifs and specific modes of depiction, or even discern signs of the creator’s unique personality and themes through a cumulative analysis of these, the Shirakaba members tended to write about artworks in terms of how it seemed to reflect and embody the artist’s intensity of personality. They venerated Western artists as their role models in what they perceived to be the universal endeavor of subjective expression, and their essays on the various artists display fervent admiration for their heroes’ exploration of their personal visions. For example, one stanza of a poem by Mushanokôji praises Vincent Van Gogh:

Oh van Gogh,  
with your spirit as though burning  
every time I think of you  
I gain strength.\(^{57}\)

Mushanokôji here situates himself on the same spiritual plane as Van Gogh, so that it is not just impersonal aesthetic joy, but also a direct and personal sense of inspiration, that he derives from the fiercely iconic Dutch painter.

Though Yanagi Muneyoshi and Kojima Kikuo later became professional art

\(^{55}\) Ibid., February 1920, September 1922.

\(^{56}\) Figures 3-2 to 3-7.

\(^{57}\) Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Seichô”, Shirakaba, July 1911, 40.
historians, and they counted amongst their members painters like Arishima Ikuma and Kishida Ryûsei, most of the Shirakaba coterie lacked formal knowledge or training in the discourse of visual art and aesthetics. Their commentaries on artworks were often prefaced with statements like, “We are, after all, amateurs (素人), so we expect you to read the following knowing this,” and they published purely personal asides like, “This edition’s print of ‘Père Tanguy’ [by Van Gogh] is very popular amongst our members. All of us love this uncle [ojisan] in the painting.” Some critics have positively viewed their unreserved approach to, and sense of intimacy with, Western art images, in that this provided them with a truer comprehension of works’ spirit than would have been possible through a more academic route. Honda Shûgo, for one, writes: “If Rodin and Van Gogh’s works were lying about in their vicinity, even if they did not read a single book about these, they would have surely have come to feel that they somehow understood these. In fact, it might have been better than knowledge just based on texts.” However, he acknowledges the group’s eclecticism of interests and their nonchronological understanding of Western art history and refers to it as a “leaping” (跨ぎ). Noting these seemingly random tendencies, other historians such as Takashina Shûji have been critical:

For the people of the Shirakaba, the issue was not Cezanne or ‘Post Impressionism’, and approximately all ‘things Western’ were of interest. For them, Rodin, Klinger, Cezanne, Vogeler, Van Gogh, and Beardsley were all stars shining on the Western horizon, and they could not comprehend criticisms

59 Figure 3-8.
60 “Henshû-shitsu ni te”, in Shirakaba, January 1912, 158.
62 Ibid., 35.
63 Max Klinger (1857-1920), a German Symbolist artist.
64 Heinrich Vogeler (1872-1942), a German Art Nouveau artist.
and statements about which amongst them were rising or which were going to fade away. It may therefore have been inevitable that although they introduced the ‘Post Impressionists’ with such passion, they could not understand their historical import.\textsuperscript{65}

Walter Benjamin’s comments on the nature of mechanically reproduced images and their circulation help to illuminate the dynamics of the Shirakaba writers’ interaction with these foreign artworks:

\textit{[T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced objects from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.}\textsuperscript{66}

Indeed, in approaching the images in terms of their personal preferences rather than according to the art-historical contexts of their creation, the Shirakaba members do seem to conceptually “detach” the images from their European tradition. Also, they seem to “reactivate the object reproduced” by appealing to the source of the images—the artist—as that which gives meaning to their works; this perception means looking through or past not only the copies of his artwork, but also, that original artwork itself. In this sense, it might be said that the “unique existence” of an original painting becomes subsumed under the idealized, spiritual personage of the artist. Within this gaze, both original artworks and their copies are valued and loved because they serve as conduits to the artist and his aesthetic spirit.

And in the case of the Shirakaba members it was, for the most part, through copies that they came to an appreciation of Western art. There were also amongst their number a few who had studied abroad and had visited the museums of Europe in person, such as Arishima Ikuma and the painter Umehara Ryûzaburô whom he befriended in Paris and who

\textsuperscript{65} Takashina Shuji, “\textit{Shirakaba to kindai bijutsu}” (Shirakaba and Modern Art), \textit{Nihon kindai no bi-ishiki}, (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1986), 334.

too became a contributor to the magazine. However, the other Shirakaba members’ knowledge of Western art history was based almost entirely on the photographic reproductions in the imported books that they purchased with their plentiful personal funds. Shiga Naoya describes in an autobiographical novella that:

When I ran out of money, I inquired of a used bookseller I knew in Kanda which titles they would purchase for the highest prices. I would then buy these [on credit] at Maruzen or Nakanishiya, and deliver these by carriage to the used bookstore for cash. Maruzen and Nakanishiya would come to my familial home to collect their credit, so they would give me an unlimited supply of books.

Such unlimited access to art books—not to mention museums abroad—was a privilege not available to the most Japanese people of the time.

Thus, that images and knowledge of the Western arts were still not widely available to the general public in Japan may have added to the general air of significance that the Shirakaba members perceived in the images in their art books, and the eager reception of their reprints by the Shirakaba readers. Walter Benjamin observes that: “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.” It might be said though, that for the Shirakaba members and their fans, the copies of artworks themselves too were precious, and carried special significance. The writers’ personal involvement in editing each edition and selecting the images to be printed in them seems to have further enhanced their sense of, if not propriety, than familiarity with the prints as a treasured commodity; frank comments in the “Henshū-shitsu ni te” (Inside the Editorial Room) column of many editions regularly tell of the concerns and logistics that went into choosing the specific images featured in its pages. The affection that the Shirakaba group


70 For example, “This issue, we took a chance and used a three-color ink process. We worry about how it will turn out. If it turns out well, in the future, we will occasionally use three-color processing. But this is expensive, so it will only be once in a while. Let’s hope it goes well”: “Henshū-shitsu ni te”, in Shirakaba,
felt towards artistic images seemed to therefore have some basis outside the spectral authority of the artists they were believed to manifest, although they did not articulate much about this more material aspect of their enthusiasm for the arts.

The Shirakaba members’ relationship to Western art was thus uniquely mediated by conditions of access, and their central concerns with the artist as the originary source of his works. They consistently and methodically favored art that stressed individual creators’ worldviews and a celebrated their unique personalities, over the various other strains of Western art. They sought from foreign images inspiration and validation for the cultivation of their own artistic egos, and the Post Impressionists’ artistic emphasis on depicting their inner visions rather than their impressions of the external world, especially suited their tastes. This is palpable in an open letter by Mushanokōji that recounts his emotional experience of looking at a series of prints with his friend Yanagi Muneysohi:

Yesterday, seeing the paintings of Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Matisse, Y and I became very excited. I thought it false unless I went this far. I felt I am wandering haphazardly. Once you understand their paintings even a bit, other people’s works appear lukewarm. It is a wonder how we can bear this state of things. It is not manly. […] It is frustrating and lonely for me to be carefree much longer. I want to write something that lays bare my soul. I want to discover a soul that matches mine perfectly and will dance together with it.

When I see recent paintings, I feel the painters’ souls touching mine. I then feel a deep strength and joy. The value of such art is not measurable by traditional standards. Nor can it be measured by new ones. These arts give no room for criticism by others. I feel that recent art tries to touch the souls of others without leaving room for criticism.71

Here, Mushanokōji is not idolizing from afar the random ‘stars shining on the Western horizon’, as the critic Takashina had suggested, but is instead enlivened by the

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71 Mushanokōji Saneatsu, “Tegami yottsru”, in Shirakaba, December 1911, 50.
keenly felt hope that he too might someday measure up to these particular artists in terms of spiritual elevation. He senses a special spiritual communion with the Post Impressionist artists’ expressive works, and believes that this sort of visceral understanding surpasses critical, academic analysis of pictorial qualities that can be isolated and quantified. But significantly, he does not explain what elements of their paintings—neither the use of color, space, line, or modes of abstraction—caused this tide of strong feelings in their favor.

The Shirakaba group’s emphasis on getting to the hearts of artists through viewing their works sometimes led the Shirakaba to gain actual contact with the artists themselves. Amongst the highlights of the magazine’s earliest days was when they received a postcard from Paul Klinger (1857-1920), a German Symbolist artist whose work had been featured since the inaugural issue. Kojima Kikuo wrote an introductory essay about the artist in the December 1910 issue, accompanied by a photograph of the artist in his studio, and he sent Klinger a copy of the magazine along with a letter expressing admiration of his work. Kojima, who unlike the other Shirakaba members had been a serious student and eventually became an art historian by trade, was fluent in German and his message had been composed in German. In April Kojima received a postcard of thanks from Klinger, and the joyous celebration that this caused amongst the Shirakaba coterie is described in the May 1911 issue. But this pales in comparison to their exchanges with Rodin, an artist they admired so much that they had devoted an entire issue (November 1910) to the great sculptor.

For several months, the group had been planning the special edition to be released in honor of the sculptor’s November 14 birthday, and Arishima Ikuma, who was chosen to represent them for his French skills, wrote to Rodin to inform him of their intentions. At the start of September, Rodin replied with a postcard of thanks, along with a signed

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72 Figure 3-9.

73 Figure 3-10.
photograph. This image was featured in the *Shirakaba* Rodin issue which appeared as planned in November 1910. Mushanokōji’s essay, “Rodan to jinsei” (Rodin and Life), captures the tone of respect and affection they held for the French artist. He writes:

Rodin is the person who sings his own song with the strongest, most deep-seated power in modernity. For this, he made many enemies. He also made allies. Finally, he defeated those who made noise about him. Those who made noise about him now sing their songs in his tune. Those who don’t have been silenced. The crown of victory fell to him.

He lives in this world as one of its most victorious individuals. [...] In a word, I worship (崇拝) Rodin because I want to let my self (自我) live as well as possible. I don’t think there is anyone who has let, and continues to let, his own self live as well as Rodin.

Mushanokōji seems to overlay his own experiences as a part of the Shirakaba group, which was mocked at first by the literary establishment, on his admiration of the esteemed French master who rose above his critics. Yanagi Muneyoshi goes so far as to call him a “religious figure.” He raves: “As a religious figure, Rodin has finally appeared before us as an authority figure. How we long for and admire such an authority figure, such a personage.” In addition to such essays of adulation, the issue also featured Rodin’s biography, a bibliography of French books about him, and eighteen prints of his works, more than any number of images to ever appear in a single issue before or hence. Though most of their writings are extremely subjective, and they seem to project unto Rodin a variety of idealized personality attributes, the issue presents an impressive and informative

74 Figure 3-11.

75 Figure 3-12.

76 Mushanokōji Saneatsu, “Rodan to jinsei”, *Shirakaba*, November 1910, 72-73.


78 Ibid.
commemoration about the artist’s work.

An unsigned editorial in the February 1912 issue, written by Mushanokôji, describes how the Shirakaba group had sent this special November issue of their magazine to Rodin upon its appearance, along with a promise to send him some *ukiyo-e* if he would acknowledge their tribute. Though time passed and they did not hear back from him, they decided to send him the Japanese prints in any case, since they thought: “it being Rodin, we felt guilty about letting matters rest. It will be good enough if Rodin sees our gift even if he sends not even a postcard. We have to send him the prints because maybe he is eagerly awaiting them.”79 In August, they sent him thirty *ukiyo-e* that they deemed to be of high enough quality to present to their hero. The editorial describes that a month and a half later, in September 1911, a letter of thanks arrived from Rodin promising to send them three bronzes. “We were overjoyed but somehow couldn’t believe that real Rodin sculptures would arrive, and were in a state of suspended disbelief.”80 When the sculptures finally arrived, their excitement was immense. A detailed account follows:

Yanagi called us at five. ‘It went well, banzai! Where should I bring them?’ I said, ‘Shiga, Sugano, and Hirasawa are here so come over. Yanagi agreed. We waited in excitement for half an hour and Yanagi arrived. We were mad with happiness, saying, ‘This is great,’ ‘They’re finally here,’ ‘Banzai’. We open the wrapping, the boxes having been discarded because they wouldn’t fit on the train. We called everyone but most people were unfortunately out. At dinner, we went to eat, holding the bronzes. This is because it would be horrible if they were stolen, or there were an earthquake. And because we wanted to see them. We show my mother, who was extremely happy. 81

These happy events took place in January—there was a delay because of customs regulations after the shipment arrived in December. This account, and photos of the three

79 “Rodan no chôkoku no kita koto nit suite”, Shirakaba, February, 1912, 149.

80 Ibid. 150.

81 Ibid.
Rodin bronzes were printed in the February 1912 issue. Another editorial comment reads: “We basked in our joy, saying how it was worth it that we had worked to have the Shirakaba make an impact on the world.” Though there is little description or appraisal of the actual works themselves, the visceral, personal joy of the group at achieving contact with their hero is very clear.

Yanagi Muneyoshi’s essay “Kakumei no gaka” (Revolutionary Painters, January 1912) also sheds further light on the individualistic nature of the Shirakaba group’s admiration of the Post Impressionist painters. Yanagi writes that Lewis C. Hind’s 1911 book *The Post-Impressionists* influenced his present essay and much of his, and the other Shirakaba members’, ideas on art. Indeed, many of the terms and phrases used by the Mushanokōji, Yanagi, and the other Shirakaba writers to describe their philosophies about art and the primacy of selfhood appear in Hind’s book. Since Hind’s arguments are so constitutive to Yanagi’s essay, a brief overview of Hind’s main ideas will be informative at this point.

Hind states his main thesis early in his book, that: “Expressionism is a better term than Post Impressionism, that avenue of Freedom, opening out, inviting the pilgrim who is casting off the burdens of mere representation, and of tradition, when it has become sapless.” The term ‘expressionism’ is not limited to nineteenth century French art, and is open enough to imply any inclination towards artistic assertion of the individual perspective. Hind accurately interprets the new European trends in painting within this

82 Figure 3-13.

83 “Rodan chôkoku nyûkyô ki”, Ibid., 151.

84 It seems that this is the book that Mushanokôji describes perusing with Yanagi in “Tegami yottsu”, in Shirakaba, December 1911, 50.

85 Lewis C. Hind, *The Post Impressionists* (London: Methuen& Co., 1911), 3. Mushanokôji enthuses in “Kakumei no gaka” that, “This is a new book, with vivid images and the articles are written in an engaging manner. This book so excited us that for about a week, two or three members would gather every night around the book”: Shirakaba, January 1912, 30.
recognizable paradigm, and draws on anecdotes of and quotes from individual painters and collectors to support this basic narrative. He explains how French artists like Edouard Manet and Claude Monet broke away from “convention and the chilly formalism of official art”\textsuperscript{86} so that by 1880, they had established a hitherto unseen variety of expressionism in their works which came to be known as Impressionism, thereby paving the way for later modern art in Europe. Post Impressionists “broke through Impressionism”\textsuperscript{87}, and “desired to express the sensation an object presented to them, never the imitation of it.”\textsuperscript{88} He argues that Post Impressionism shifted the emphasis from the objectivity of the intellect perceiving the object, to the subjectivity of the affect responding to it. Hind states that beginning with Paul Cezanne, Post Impressionist artists, in particular Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Henri Matisse, dispensed with formalistic conventions and vied instead for a more unmediated, pure approach to pictorial expression. He explains that his insights were first inspired by his repeated visits to the art exhibit entitled Manet & Post-Impressionism held at the Grafton Gallery in London the previous year in 1910, under the curatorial direction of the critic Roger Fry who first coined the term ‘Post Impressionism’.

Yanagi in turn, defines Post Impressionism for his Japanese readers as follows:

When old grounds are shaken and a new fountain surges’, people sense a new life and also fear the poison it may contain. This is the destiny of revolutionary events. Historical progress is a repetition of the new powers tearing apart the old. The art of the Post Impressionists, whose history had hitherto been excluded from the annals of art history, too is a revolutionary movement creating history to come. […] Art has now changed directions, and the meaning of life has been made anew. If we ask what Post Impressionism is, the answer is clear. –If you see within yourself the only realm that should be, and hope to express the overflowing entirety of its existence with seriousness, you are already living in accordance

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. 9.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid. 10.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. 11.
with the spirit of the Post Impressionists. When all phenomena become alive to you, and you perceive yourself in all phenomena, when your entire personhood flows as one with the rhythm of nature’s entire existence, what remains is your eternally affirmed life force. It is this affirmation and fulfillment of life that is the force that gives birth to Post Impressionism. When your individuality becomes great, your art must have both a transcendental value and meaning.\footnote{Ibid., 3.}

Though he situates Post Impressionism in the trajectory of Western art history, Yanagi more significantly locates within it the “meaning of life”, an ideal that is as applicable to Japanese life as to European life. The Post Impressionistic mission is presented as an inclusive philosophy to live by rather than just admire in the rarified precinct of foreign art.

With these basic premises laid out, Yanagi then goes on to call the nineteenth century a special time and pivotal time. “The nineteenth century is a great century. This is because it is a century of great progress. Upon all fronts of culture, the battle flag raised against the Classicists changed the path of progress, and had the power to change the course of life. Humankind first tasted the joy of free development by returning to the self. The affirmation of individuality and the freedom to breathe were the most significant products of this age.”\footnote{Ibid., 7.} The use of the term ‘humankind’ here shows clearly that Yanagi sees the epochal awakening to individuality as globally shared. In Japan, the nineteenth century was a time of drastic changes brought about by the beginnings of Japan’s modern interactions with the Western world through the formation of the Meiji nation state. The sense of paradigm shift and rupture gripping fin-de-siècle Europe thus simultaneously found resonance with Japanese readers.

Yanagi then sets forth Hind’s outline of the progress of expressive art from Manet onwards, summarizing that: “Whereas the Impressionist painters directly depicted the impressions they received from nature, they did not know to stop at this passivity, and
ultimately had to progress to actively projecting themselves upon nature.”91 Cézanne is then called “a personage as pure and certain as his still-lives. Faced with this unwavering personage, all things seem flimsy and weak. Like an immobile mountain range, he grew and expanded his territory within the silence, guarding his position in the awareness that in this world only he and nature exist, and lived a life of peace and strength.”92 Yanagi writes of Van Gogh that “his personage was a fiercely active one, in contrast to the great receptivity of Cézanne.”93 “Everything he painted was active life itself. The clouds he painted dance, the trees he painted burn. When he painted these things, he was always at the heart of this burning nature. He always lived and breathed with his paintings. He never knew how to paint through technique.”94 Yanagi next describes Gauguin’s art as “quiet and kind”95, and his art as depicting “a pure, primitive nature filtered through [his] gentleness”96. Each artist’s temperament is characterized carefully and affectionately, as though Yanagi were speaking of close friends rather than of distant foreign masters perceived only via their works.

Descriptions of the visual elements of the painting are almost entirely absent from Yanagi’s writing. This seems to be because he intended to keep the focus on the imagined specter of each artist, as evoked through Hind’s characterizations. Reprints of these masters’ paintings are interspersed throughout the magazine though, for readers to appraise and experience for themselves.

Perhaps significantly, Yanagi’s introduction of Matisse97 as the successor of the

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91 Ibid, 9.
92 Ibid., 13-14.
93 Ibid., 14.
94 Ibid., 17.
95 Ibid., 19.
96 Ibid., 22.
97 Figure 3-14.
previous three painters is a bit more restrained than his treatment of the other artists. He writes:

We who know the desires that have raised Cezanne and Van Gogh into this world should perceive that Matisse’s paintings, which were not even dreamed of thus far in art history, respond to a fundamental desire in the human heart and are a serious expression of life. Art and life are as one. It is not just a matter of depicting phenomena, but when [his art becomes about] the power itself of life force, and the object as itself, it is not an eternal affirmation but an eternal denial.  

The nature of the “eternal denial” that Matisse supposedly symbolized is not further defined by Yanagi, although his passionate language points to the artist as a bearer of mystical and dire significance. Hind classified Matisse as at the outer edge of the Post Impressionist movement, and stated “he troubles me, this strange Matisse”99, “There are many stalwarts in the forefront of this movement, but Matisse’s place is unique,”100 that “Death, I fancy, will still find me trying to explain Matisse,”101 suggesting the radically new directions of abstraction that Matisse seemed to him to herald. Yanagi simply describes Matisse as “the last of the expressionists”, and that with his arrival, “life and art have reached their limit, and must turn to a new direction.”102

To summarize, the Shirakaba members were galvanized by the Western arts because it seemed to answer their search for an art that expressed individual will while evincing communally valid meanings. As this chapter has shown, it was not, academically speaking, only the works and artists of Post Impressionism that appealed to them. However, Yanagi’s essay on the movement captures their enthusiasm towards all art and their creators

98 Ibid., 23.
99 Hind, The Post Impressionists, 47.
100 Ibid., 50.
101 Ibid., 52
102 Ibid.
that fit their criteria, and they seem to have gravitated to the concept of ‘Post Impressionism’ as a philosophical stance that represented their ideals. They used the term loosely and metonymically, and felt that the fierce subjectivity displayed in ‘Post Impressionist’ art pointed to the essential and unassailable authority of the artists that created them. Such artistic presence was believed to stand beyond the local and material conditions in which the images of his works were viewed, and the Shirakaba members tried to commune with the spirits of these great masters through images of their artworks, believing that a supra-linguistic bond of artistic spirit obtained between them. Emboldened, they were inspired to pursue their own ‘selves’ in their own artistic endeavors.

This was, needless to say, a very particular interpretation of Post Impressionism, created and sustained within the matrix of their specific aesthetic premises, and the mediated, material circumstances in which they viewed artworks. The group did not feel obliged to follow the Western art historical trajectory past this particular perspective, because new developments would have exceeded the framework of their ideals and worldviews.

The magazine did not feature articles on or publish images of, for example, the rise of Picasso and Cubism, Duchamp and Dadaism, or any of the other major subsequent strands of European art more contemporary to them in the 1910s. Though they claimed to feel kinship with the “great men in foreign countries”\(^{103}\), and had the means to access more recent conceptual and artistic developments in Europe, the Shirakaba members refrained from adapting their own ideas just for the sake of keeping up. They remained loyal to what they collectively envisioned as the ‘Post Impressionistic’ perspective, discovering in it a timeless and universalist cosmology that gave trans-discursive priority to each artist’s unique and subjective vision, because it seemed to validate for them their own nascent artistic ideals.

\(^{103}\) Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Jinrui kara kuru eiyôbun”, *Shirakaba*, September, 1911, 161.
Children of the World in Japan: Shirakaba Idealism and Local Realities

The Shirakaba member’s early artistic beliefs were challenged and clarified through a protracted debate with the critic Kinoshita Mokutarô (1885-1945) between late 1911 into 1912. The empowering optimism, as well as the logical aporias, of the Shirakaba school’s ideas were revealed throughout this exchange which spanned the social webs of friendship and the shared artistic interests linking the Japanese literary and visual art worlds. Mushanokôji Saneatsu would, through this debate, secure his place as the group’s spokesperson, and the ideas he articulates within it would influence his future directions. At the root of the contention was Mokutarô’s comments regarding an art exhibit by the Shirakaba associated painter Yamawaki Shintoku (1886-1952), held between April and May 1911 at the Rôkandô1 gallery in Kanda, which had been established in 1910 by the poet and painter Takamura Kôtarô (1883-1956). What began as one critic’s routine review of a painting show eventually led to impassioned declarations of the meaning of art and subjectivity, and of the state of Japanese modernity, from both sides of the works in question. A close overview of the proceedings shows how beneath the discourse on universality, an awareness of being Japanese was also being examined. This meant that the “children of the world”2, as Mushanokôji had called himself and his artistic peers, could not avoid acknowledging, and answering to, their more immediate realities.

“Rules of Painting”: The Debate with Kinoshita Mokutarô

Yamawaki Shintoku, the painter at the heart of the debate, had risen to fame prior

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1 The gallery was named after the ‘grotta azzurra’ which figures prominently in Hans Christian Andersen’s romantic novel Improvisatoren (1853). Mori Ogai translated this work from German as 『即興詩人』 between 1892 and 1901, and published it in its entirety in 1902 to great acclaim. He evocatively translates ‘grotta azzurra’ as 琉璃洞, or ‘jade cave’.

to this in 1909 for his painting “Teishaba no asa” (Morning at the Station) which won entry into the third Bunten (文展) exhibit sponsored by the Ministry of Education. He was still a student at the Tokyo Art School at the time, and came to be hailed as a rising new talent by prominent art critics. For example, the critic Sakai Saisui wrote in a review of the exhibit in the November 1909 Bijutsu shinpô (Art News) magazine:

[Yamawaki’s] painting was created with a surprising amount of research and fine attention, and there is probably no other work that is as modern in terms of technical skill, conceptual basis, or observation. It is one of the best paintings here. One foreign artist said it should be viewed as equal in rank to Manet’s works. In our opinion, the top half of the painting is practically perfect. The way that the sun shines upon the frost of the winter morning is particularly well depicted. Meticulous research has also gone into the color palette. If he does not halt his efforts, he will probably become a rare artist in the future.

The ‘foreign artist’ referred to here points to Bernard Leach (1887–1979), a British artist who had befriended Takamura Kôtarô when they were both studying art in London in 1907. Influenced by Takamura, Leach, who was born in Hong Kong, moved to Tokyo in 1909 and formed friendships with Yanagi Muneyoshi and Shiga Naoya, thereby becoming associated with the Shirakaba group. Regarding the Bunten exhibit, Leach comments in an interview with the critic Ishii Hakutei in the December 1909 issue of the art magazine Hôsun:

I haven’t seen an exhibit of Western style paintings by Japanese artists before, so I can’t tell at all whether it was [comparatively] a good show or not. However, it was better than I expected. I thought the best work was ‘Morning at the Station’ by someone called Yamawaki. The light is depicted very well. I think it would not be shameful to see it hung near the works of the French Impressionist Monet. Monet of course paints better works, but at the same time, he creates worse ones too.

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3 Figure 4-1.
4 Sakai Saisui, “Yûbo naru shin-shin yôgaka”, in Bijutsu shinpô, November 1908, 15.
5 Bernard Leach interviewed in Ishii Hakutei, Hôsun, December 1909.
At the start of his stay in Tokyo, Leach seems to still manifest a bit of hesitation about art in Japan. He would go on though, to become interested in Japanese aesthetics especially through the study of ceramics, and upon his return to England in 1920, he would establish a pottery studio specializing in a mix of Eastern and Western techniques.

The previous quotation by Sakai seems to have been a misquotation, for Leach compares here Yamawaki’s use of light not to Manet’s, but to Monet’s. Though “Teishaba no asa” no longer survives, having been burned during World War II, there remains a monochromatic facsimile of it. Perhaps conscious of Impressionistic influences, the painting contains nebulous and atmospheric elements, and appears suffused by a thick morning mist. The steam from the engine of a train that sits stationed in the lower left quadrant of the painting also contributes to this haze. The painting depicts the bustle of morning activity at the Ueno train yard as viewed from a high vantage point, and telegraph wires stretch across this field of vision as though suggesting the ongoing buzz of unfolding world events. The horizontal lines of these wires, and what seem to be train tracks extending across the mid-ground of the painting, intersect with the stark vertical lines of a telegraph pole and the posts of a fence that cuts across the lower portion of the painting at the foreground, creating an overall dynamic and geometric impression. The upper sector of the painting closer to the horizon, praised by Sakai in his review, is filled with dark buildings and small figures moving about the busy train yard. The work is detailed and dense with brush strokes. In the monochromatic image, it is difficult to determine how skillfully Yamawaki depicts light, although the praises of his critics suggest the tonal richness of the original.

“Teishaba no asa” also found favor with Nagai Kafû (1879-1959) who was rising to fame within the Japanese literary establishment for publishing *Amerika monogatari* (Tales of America) in 1908 and *Furansu monogatari* (Tales of France) in 1909, following his five years abroad in the United States and France. Kafû had returned to Japan not only with
memories of the bohemian lifestyles he writes about in these novels, but also with fond remembrances of the artworks he had seen overseas. Like Leach, he too compares Yamawaki’s painting to Monet’s works. He writes that the work “especially drew my attention. This is because it reminded me of Claude Monet’s paintings of Gare St. Lazare at the Luxembourg Museum. I do not know whether the artist was aware of this, but in ‘Teishaba no asa’, I could indeed hear music from between the colors. It is a good painting with passion.”

The Impressionist painter Monet had lived near the St. Lazare train station between 1876 and 1877, and during that time had produced 12 paintings of the site. Monet’s heavy grays depicting the trellis of the train terminal and the surrounding buildings, and the dreamy billows of colorfully tinted smog, might provide possible clues as to what Yamawaki’s rendering of Ueno station may have looked like—or perhaps, had aspired to look like—in its original form.

The Rôkandô gallery proprietor Takamura Kôtarô critiqued “Teishaba no asa” in his essay “AB HOC ET AB HAC”—meaning ‘at random’ in Latin”—which was published in Subaru magazine in February 1910. Takamura had studied painting and sculpture in

6 Nagai Kafû, “Issekiwa (Monbu-shô tenrankai no seiyôga oyobi chôkoku ni tsuite”, in Subaru, November 1909, 159.

7 Arguing against the high praises lavished on the painting, Ishii Hakutei, the critic from Hôsun, had written: “It is the artist Yamawaki’s good luck that such a boring work as ‘Teishaba no asa’ has been so carefully appraised. [...] I do not respect paintings that are ‘light based’. From a realist point of view, I respect above all local color. From this perspective, this painting is nil”: Hôsun, February 1910. Takamura Kôtarô retorts in his now seminal essay “Midori-iro no taiyô” against the notion of ‘local color’, taken to mean the use of a color palette evocative of a particular landscape and its sensibilities rather than an artist’s perception of it. He writes, “I desire an absolute freedom (freiheit) in the artworld. Thus, I try to admit a limitless respect for an artist’s PERSOENLICHKEIT (人格 [individuality]). I want to think of the artist as a unique human being in all senses of the word. I want to SCHÄTZEN (評価 [critique]) a work based on the artist’s PERSOENLICHKEIT.” He continues, “Even if someone paints “a green sun” I will not complain. I might see it as green too sometime. I will not judge the entire value of a painting just based on the presence of ‘a green sun’. [...] I will raise or lower my esteem of a work based on the amount of DAS LEBEN (生命 [life]). I want to give absolute say to the PERSOENLICHKEIT of the artist who paints a green sun. However, it seems standard amongst today’s people to perceive of Japanese nature in tones of muted ink.” This exchange sets the grounds for the debate between Yamawaki, Kinoshita and Mushanokôji, which will be examined more in depth below.
New York, Paris, and London for three years before returning to Tokyo in 1909, and his comments reveal his measured, mixed reactions to the widely praised painting. He tries to delve beyond the surface appearance of the work, and peer behind the visual media to articulate the artist’s philosophies embodied therein. He writes:

The work is clumsy. When Leach said this painting is comparable to a Monet, it is purely from a British perspective. Monet did not have such a conventional way of seeing. There are as many differences between this painting and a Monet, as between a saltwater fish and a freshwater one. Monet steps into nature. This painting, on the other hand, maintains a distance from it and seeks to depict it according to a more conventional gaze. I like this painting not because I think of it as Impressionist or modernist. I became enchanted by how the painting bit into nature like a bulldog, with such intense effort as though it would never let go, and how it managed to convey certain impressions that the artist saw in nature.  

Though Takamura did not yet know Yamawaki or his oeuvre at this point, and he is not convinced of Yamawaki’s technical skills and maturity as a painter, he expresses admiration for the artist’s apparent struggle to relate to and express his impressions. The issue for him is not whether Yamawaki is sufficiently Impressionist or not, because “seen today, Monet’s paintings strike us as beautiful but not modern. (Though Monet’s more recent works show some newer tendencies.) Those who think of typical Impressionists as modern are quite naïve. Modern people are moving closer to nature. (現代人は自然にもっと肉薄している。)” For all its formalism and adherence to detail, which Takamura decries as too “pragmatic”, he seems to perceive in Yamawaki’s painting a measured hesitation foreshadowing a more radical sense of entry into nature.

Takamura’s description of the colors that Yamawaki had used in the painting are

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9 Ibid., 42.

10 Ibid., 41.
also of an ambiguous tone. “The grays are really the color of ash in a charcoal brazier. Whether for the yellows or the blues, he uses colors we have come to know in real life,” and that “from the point of view of colors, I feel my spirits sink.”¹¹ It seems that for Takamura, who would go on to write his manifesto on artistic freedom entitled Midori-iro no taiyô (The Green Sun, 1912), Yamawaki’s use of conventional colors, despite their unusual intensity as accentuated by the overall realism of the work’s composition, seemed constrained and uninspired. However, he adds in a more positive tone: “It is clear that this painting makes an exaggerated use of light and dark. […] It seems that in relentlessly trying to reflect the large and strong waves of natural light, the painting’s Ton [tones] had Entasser (sic) [built up] without the artist’s conscious intentions. This is why there is no sarcastic feeling in this work. (厭味が伴って来ていない。)”¹² Again, he praises Yamawaki’s sincere artistic reactions toward nature, prioritizing this to the resultant painting itself. Takamura’s poetic readings of Yamawaki’s painting reveal an artistic attitude that crosses the borders between the visual field of painting and the articulation of language, in search of an overarching aesthetic ideal.

Yamawaki too sought spiritual kinship with those outside his specialty field of painting, and his friendship with the Shirakaba members flourished from around this time period of artistic experimentation and rising fame. Shiga Naoya in particular collected his paintings and became an especially close friend. Yamawaki, Shiga, and the other Shirakaba members strove together to deepen their affinities with the Western artworks that they admired from afar. For example, according to Shiga’s diary from March of 1910, a group of Shirakaba members and Yamawaki visited the home of the late art dealer Hayashi Tadashi (1853-1906), who had been based in Paris for much of his career selling ukiyo-e and buying the works of the French Impressionists.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 40.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Kagioka Masanori, Yamawaki Shintoku: Nihon no Monet to yobareta otoko (Kôchi-shi: Kôchi shinbun-sha,
At Hayashi’s home, the young visitors were able to see the original works of such Impressionists as Monet, Camille Pissarro, Armand Guillaumin, and Edgar Degas, amongst others. Yamawaki later wrote a letter to Shiga thanking him, and gives an impression of his first direct encounter with the works of the European artists:

I state here to you just that the reasons I dislike Guillaumin’s works are, first that the colors are dirty, second that his brush strokes give a bad impression (嫌な感じ), and third that the [artistic] effects are not clearly realized. Also, Monet’s image of the flower garden lacked the luminosity that is necessary in his work, and the colors too were dirty.\textsuperscript{14}

This comment evinces that for Yamawaki, in addition to the visual elements of color and light, the ineffable impressions and aura of a painting were amongst his primary artistic concerns, and that even as a fledgling Japanese painter developing his own artistic voice, he maintained a steady critical gaze toward the works of the esteemed Western masters. He had already, it seems, the beginnings of an uncompromisingly subjective vision.

Yamawaki’s solo show held at Takamura’s Rôkandô gallery from the end of April into May 1911 featured eighteen oil paintings, and ten water colors and sketches, showcasing his artistic progress over the seven years since his arrival in Tokyo as an art student from Kôchi. It was this show that led to the Shirakaba debate against the writer and critic Kinoshita Mokutarô. In the June 1911 Chûô kôron magazine, Mokutarô praised Yamawaki for the high emotions and idealism evident in his works, but lamented his seemingly haphazard painterly techniques. He wishes that the artist had been able to harness his affective energies and present these through “the well comprehended rules of painting (よく理解された絵画の約束)”, rather than be stifled by the lack of technical

\textsuperscript{14} Quoted in ibid., 97.
skills through which to give these full expression.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps ironically for a painter so attuned to the spiritual expressivity of his works, Mokutarô compares the raw energies of Yamawaki’s works to the predicament of “an angry mute”, who can not adequately articulate his vibrant inner turmoil. Mokutarô explains his assessments as follows.

This is because I believe that the pictorial arts are not like the arcs drawn by blood pressure monitors. For example, though a painter’s feelings might be dramatically moved by the sparkling of the water’s surface under a bridge in the sunlight, and the intensity of the impressions created by the roofs and the bridge, if he at that instance takes colors upon his brush without any principles, and instead expresses the excitement of his heart [only] through muscular movement, the resulting painting would have been created through sphygmography and not through artistic technique (技). Painting is something more than this. I would like a quiet understanding to be fostered, in addition to emotional movement (感激).\textsuperscript{16}

Mokutarô, like his mentor Mori Ogai, was a medical doctor, and practiced dermatology in addition to his literary and critical activities. His opinions here imply that like Ogai—for whom the exploration of the relationship between an artistic creation’s aesthetic uniqueness and the material conditions surrounding it was a major philosophical concern—he strongly believed that aesthetic values are rooted in unique principles that transcend quotidian experiences, even as they are contextualized by more worldly “understanding”s. This implies the importance of technique, and the establishment of standards within Japanese artistic discourse before individual experimentations could take full and meaningful flight. Mokutarô continues, in direct contradiction to the trajectory of Yamawaki’s artistic evolutions: “For me, the older paintings, such as “Shinbashi”, are more interesting.”\textsuperscript{17}

“Shinbashi” no longer survives, but according to a review of the show by Arishima


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 368-369.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 369.
Ikuma, a Shirakaba member and painter, “Shinbashi” was amongst the works that reflected Yamawaki’s early and academic style, which was “anti-individual” and sought to “copy nature” rather than express his own conceptions of it. The aforementioned “Teishaba no asa”, upon which Yamawaki had attained his initial renown, would seem to fit into this classification. Arishima argues that it had been by overcoming this initial derivative phase that Yamawaki reached his current art of “life and light (生命と輝き)”, which represented a “individualistic progress”. Moktarô’s call for “well comprehended rules of painting”, and a “quiet understanding” seems to indicate his mistrust of Yamawaki’s more recent works in this new mode reflecting a will to subjective expression, instead of a full, measured mastery of the art-historically developed methods of formal expression in painting. In effect, it is this blatantly uncontextualized, “individualistic” nature of Yamawaki’s later works that Mokutarô finds unacceptably haphazard.

Amongst the works on display that Arishima explicitly identified in his article as belonging to this later “light and life” mode were “Ochanomizu”, “Hashi”, and “Irihi”. Of these, it is believed that “Irihi” is the only one that survives intact. It is thought to be the 1910 painting now known as “Yûhi” in the collection of the Kôchi City Central Municipal Institute. Hues of red, orange, and yellow dominate the work, which is relatively small at 23 by 33 cm. Three figures in the lower left quadrant of the painting walk toward the right, as what seems to be a tram car or a train approaches them from the middle distance in the upper right quadrant of the image. A telegraph pole and its shadow bisect the visual field vertically, and a row of buildings or hedges stretch across its midground. Yamawaki

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18 Arishima Ikuma, “Yamawaki Shintoku no kinsaku”, in Shirakaba, June 1911, 70. The specific painting referred to here as “Shinbashi” seems no longer extant. For more details about Yamawaki’s surviving works, see Kagioka Masanori, Yamawaki Shintoku: Nihon no Monet to yobareta otoko (Kôchi-shi: Kôchi shimbunsha, 2002).

19 Ibid 71.

20 Kagioka, Yamawaki Shintoku, 141.

21 Figure 4-2.
employs thick, smudged, van Gogh-esque brush strokes that allow the viewer to just barely decipher the objects they depict. The painting is awash in brilliant colors and its elements are blurred, as though the world were ablaze and melting in the intense warm light of the setting sun. The work seems to focus on Yamawaki’s feelings evoked by the scene, rather than his attempt at depicting its components in detail; the painting implies a break from the more analytical sensibilities of works like “Teishaba no asa” and “Shinbashi”, which adhered to Yamawaki’s visual receptions of the external scenery.

In the September issue of Shirakaba, Yamawaki retorted to Mokutarō’s criticisms. He begins his essay by affirming Arishima’s reading of his oeuvre, and recounts how his initial pursuit of realistic depictions (写実) had eventually led him to “destroy the forms of objects” in his pursuit of their essences, and to “enter the realm of the shapeless image”. 22 He discovered that “the paintings of the Post Impressionists were not merely primitive”, and that “depictions of the objective truths of nature had reached their limit with the early Impressionists. It is only natural that later artists should fall into their interiorities (内面的に崩れて行くのは自然である).” 23 These comments show the clear influence of Yanagi Muneyoshi’s writings on Post Impressionism in the Shirakaba magazine, as examined in the previous chapter.

The latter part of Yanagi’s essay then turns to Mokutarō’s comments, and Yamawaki argues: “the meaning of all pictorial elements shift, according to the pursuit of the truth” of objects whose appearances shift over time, and thus, that his own focus is more on his individual inner visions than on the visual results of their expression. 24 He goes on to state that “painting is about the entire personality, and more than skill,” and that it should

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 110.
express the immediacy of “human sentience”. 25 Yamawaki writes, impassioned: “Emotions run through reason, the will becomes heated and becomes truth, it becomes the beating of the heart, works in the touch, appears in movement, colors become light.” 26 In this way, a painting is the integrated sum of these organic sensations of the artist facing his subject. He indicates that the visually observable end products of this personal artistic meditation are secondary concerns for him. The debate has now shifted in register so that it is no longer just about painterly techniques, but about aesthetic philosophies.

Mokuatrô responds to Yamawaki in the November Shirakaba. He begins by coolly pointing out that the difference between his and Yamawaki’s theories stems from the fundamental opposition of their epistemological premises, namely that his ideas are rooted in objectivism while Yamawaki’s are based in subjectivism. He then writes: “You argue that there is reason and unity between an artist’s personality and a painting which is its expression. This is neither inconsistent, nor impossible. However, I do not think of personality and the artwork as supreme and cut off from other concerns. Rather, I view these as manifestations of modern culture.” 27 It is from this more holistic perspective that he goes on to examine artworks as existing and functioning within society, affecting individual viewers as the “external source” of their emotional responses to them.

Mokutarô then argues that in order to move not just the hearts of a few specific individuals, but to appeal to a more general and multiple spectatorship, an artwork must follow some basic principles of artistry. He stipulates though, that this does not mean he simply wants art to be about the “lowest common denominator” accessible to the “ignorant and unsound masses”. 28 He wants, rather, that the relationship between art and emotional

25 Ibid., 111.
26 Ibid., 112.
28 Ibid.
reaction throughout time be more fully studied and understood, so that the artistic methods
by which “on the one hand, an artist might fully express his inner life, and on the other, the
greatest number of spectators might understand (and sympathize) with him,” might be
found. Understanding the dialectic between subjective and objective visions is his main
concern.

Mokutarô ends his critique by stating that: “[I]n order to objectively view Japanese
culture and gain balance, I would like a Verständnis (understanding) of Manet, a mediator of
traditions, rather than of van Gogh and Cezanne, who are called the most modern of modern
men”. Eduard Manet (1832 – 1883) is a pivotal figure in Western art’s shift towards
Impressionism and its prioritization of light and color over traditional academism’s attention
to form and details, so this amounts to a pointed critique at Yamawaki’s dismissal of the
Impressionists in favor of his identification with the historically and conceptually later
Post-Impressionists’ such as Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cezanne. Like Honda Shûgo and
the other later historians who would classify the Shirakaba writers’ eclecticism of cultural
references as a haphazard “leaping”, Mokutarô seems to imply here that Yamawaki’s “Post
Impressionistic” turn towards subjectivity is suspect because his understandings of the
precedent stage of Impressionism, as the exhaustion of an ‘objective’ gaze perceiving the
external qualities of things, is insufficiently developed.

Notably, Mokutarô’s critiques address the whole of “Japanese culture” rather than
Yamawaki as a single artist. Mokutarô’s interest thus seems to be in diagnosing the
confused state of Japan’s modernity, in which multiple ideas and value systems from
different time periods and cultural contexts coexisted without full comprehension of what
each entailed. Yamawaki seems to have incited such a strong response from Mokutarô
because he and his artworks seemed to embody this incomplete and confused hybridity.

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 53.
It is not surprising that at this point Mushanokôji Saneatsu, quickly becoming the Shirakaba group’s most vocal spokesperson, steps in to the fray because its themes of artistic subjectivity, cultural context, and aesthetic meaning were central to his own literary project of self-expression. Having apparently read Mokutarô’s essay before it was put to print, Mushanokôji included his objections to it in the editorial column of the same November 1911 Shirakaba issue. He writes in his characteristically emphatic prose that true art can only come from the self: “I do not want artists to be concerned about the public. […] Unlike Mokutarô, I cannot deny individuality.”

Mushanokôji’s focus is therefore solely on the subjective perspective of the artist, for whom the social effects of his work is a welcome but secondary concern. Like Yamawaki, he expounds upon the almost mystical fusion of the artist qua his work. The contemptuous tone he takes is tinged with personal irritation, as though he had felt his personal philosophies to be under attack, while Mokutarô writes with the more removed and measured voice of a critic. Even after the conclusion of this debate, Mushanokôji would reiterate the artistic indifference to public demands and needs that he had come to defend in his exchanges with Mokutarô. He comments for example in the October 1912 issue: “Someone complained that there is not a single Shirakaba novel that writes about the material hardships of life. I just want to say to these people, if you want to read such articles they should be available next door or across the street, so go ask. It is wrong to go to a florist for bread, and blaming him when he does not have it.” For Mushanokôji, the debate with Mokutarô seems to have had the effect of clarifying what was entailed in upholding his own arguments in actuality. The hesitance that was seen in The Rose Colored Chamber February 1911 has now given way to a more strident articulation of his artistic stance against social conditions.

31 Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Rokugô zakkan”, Shirakaba, November 1911, 142.

32 Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Kosei ni tsuite no zakkan”, in Shirakaba, October 1912, 52.
In the following issue of *Shirakaba* (December 1911), Yamawaki agrees that he and Mokutarō are indeed arguing at different registers. He begins his response to Mokutarō by commenting about the “rules of painting” that Mokutarō had asked that he adhere to. “If your so-called rules […] arise from the relationship between art and things like nation and culture, it can be said that your ideas depart from issues of pure art (純芸術).” According to Yamawaki, because art is the individual enterprise of each artist, the wider public sphere in which it is created should not be taken into consideration. He declares:

> It is only art that allows not even a bit of space between immediate sensation and expression, and can have life and strength. This is the art that we crave. There is no need to communicate our hearts to others beyond this. Art is not some trick for addressing such concerns. To repeat. Art is *expression* (エキスプレーション). To try to make the largest number of people understand one’s expressions (表情) is the work of an actor, or a prostitute. Art is not such an intentional thing. It is more sporadic, more necessary, and more purposeless. There is no leisure for thinking about whether it is understood by others, or is not, or if it offends others, or pleases them. It is in thinking about such matters that actors develop theatrical mannerisms, prostitutes their argot, and painting its principles and formalism.

Yamawaki’s differentiation between the imported term エキスプレーション and the Japanese term 表情 hint at a distinction between a higher and more organic mode of artistic existence located within universal and timeless prerogatives, and specific and artificial techniques as a means of localized craft. He prioritizes the first as the raison d’etre of “pure art”, while dismissing the latter as pandering to the fickle tastes of a mostly unenlightened Japanese public. He seems to endorse a linear view of art history which leads up to an artistic modernity moderated by the values that inform modern Western art, even as it denies the historical circumstances of his lived environs.

In contrast, Mokutarō writes from a perspective grounded in the temporal and

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33 Yamawaki Shintoku, “Kinoshita Mokutarō kun ni”, *Shirakaba*, December 1911, 91.

34 Ibid., 94.
cultural present of Japan, and he goes on to contend that even the notion of ‘self’, prized as purely timeless and self-evident by the Shirakaba members, is in fact, produced within current cultural discourses which have now come to prioritize the notion of the individual. In the same December 1911 issue, Mokutarô writes in response to Mushanokôji’s editorial comments from the previous month:

Even Yamawaki’s pictorial style did not suddenly come to him from nowhere. To me it looks as though as a member of the public, his temperament and tendencies took in influences from the other members of the public, and digested these to make it his own. I think therefore that this force might work upon others. I think thus that there must be some common communicative element at work. It is this that I refer to as a “rule”. The phrase “rules of art” includes elements commonly shared by humans such as sense stimuli and mental cognition of ideas, and in further cases, a cultural zeitgeist. Since I try to take a more detached viewpoint, I tend to overlook the value of an individual’s subjectivity. This is because it is my main concern to perceive any thing occurring in the human realm in terms of its causes and effects.35

Though it is clear by this point that Mokutarô and Mushanokôji / Yamawaki approach the issue from such disparate premises that productive intellectual engagement and debate are not possible, both parties continue to present their views under the guise of responding to each other. In the January 1912 Shirakaba, Mokutarô continues to argue that the notion of a ‘self’ arises relative to other ideas within a shared contemporary zeitgeist. In a letter to Mushanokôji, he stresses that: “this sort of ‘self’ includes traditions and continuities.”36 Ruefully, Mokutarô notes that what had begun as his critique of Yamawaki’s paintings has now devolved into an unfruitful and emotional argument between himself and Mushanokôji. In a letter to Yamawaki, whom he perceives as the less hot-headed of the duo, he exhorts: “from now on, let us stop fighting and exchanging harsh


Alongside Mokutarô’s conciliatory messages, Mushanokōji presents an essay about why Post Impressionism particularly appeals to him and his Shirakaba peers, in an apparent attempt to meet Mokutarô’s earlier charge about the need for the Shirakaba group, and modern Japanese people in general, to more fully grasp the fuller context of Western art history and cultural discourses before wholeheartedly laying claim to their latest developments and manifestations. In what appears to be a partial concession to Mokutarô’s logic about facing the circumstances in Japan, but still maintaining a tone of spiritual mystique, Mushanokōji admits that the Post Impressionists and their will to subjective expression “did not suddenly appear. People like Goya, Daumier, Corot, Courbet, Manet, and Monet [first] appeared, attempting to touch upon ‘that which, if absent, must be lamented’.”

Apparently drawing from Lewis Hind’s book, he writes that Cezanne managed to situate the artist’s own subjective responses within the act of perception and depiction by actively “approaching nature”. Mushanokōji explains that this led the way for subsequent Post Impressionist artists to “listen for the voice of nature within both the self and nature”.

By emphasizing how he understands the Post Impressionists to be in dialogue with the timeless and universal realm of nature, Mushanokōji attempts to justify his interest in the European painters as not contingent upon any prerequisites of historical and social knowledge; the Post Impressionists’ mission is presented as self-evident at a cosmological level. He does not want to embrace the socio-historical conditions in the West any more than he wants to engage in Japanese ones. Yet, Mushanokōji’s overview of Western art history leading up to Post Impressionism, however abbreviated, nonetheless shows his

37 Ibid., 155.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
recognition of the broader cultural and art-historical discourses that came to produce it.

Mushanokōji supplements this short essay with extensive writings in the February 1912 issue of the magazine. He publishes in this issue a total of four pieces, including two essays entitled “Tanin no uchi no jibun ni” (To Myself Amongst Others) and “‘Jiko no tame’ oyobi sono ta nit suite” (‘For Myself’, and Other Issues), and two letters addressed to Mokutarō. He states in “‘Jiko no tame’ oyobi sono ta ni tsuite”: “had I not suffered through Tolstoy’s philosophies, or if I had not been Japanese (and had not been influenced by the teachings of Buddhism and bushidō), and if the members of my social class had not been as fearful of the world, I would not have come to stress the notion of ‘the self’ as strongly as I do now”\(^{41}\). This seems to further imply that despite his contention that ‘the self’ is a self-evident and organic notion, he admits that his social circumstances and exposure to others’ ideas played a role in his realizations. It is only because he had considered the full implications of confronting the views of others that Mushanokōji has come to turn his back on these, and only because he had realized how exceptionally fortunate his material circumstances were compared to others, that he came to commit fully to honing his own already uncommon perspectives.

Yet, he still maintains that ‘the self’ is, for him, an all-encompassing, a priori concept that includes such disparate concerns such as “desires as an individual, desires as a social being, desire as a human being (in order to differentiate from individual desires, I often call this the desires of humankind, or humankind’s pulse), desires as an animal, desires as an earth dweller, desire as a physical being, etc.”\(^{42}\). At first glance, this wide-ranging list seems to dilute the specificity of the ‘self’ that he calls for. But he goes on to explain in no uncertain terms:

If I am overcome by my ‘social instincts’, I may die for society, but I do no want

\(^{41}\) Mushanokōji Saneatsu, “‘Jiko no tame’ oyobi sono ta nit suite”, in *Shirakaba*, February 1912, 97.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 99.
to be pressured by society to kill myself when my social instincts are not stirred. When I am stirred by these ‘social instincts’, I ask the ‘instincts as an individual’, ‘instincts as a member of humankind’, ‘instincts as an animal’, and ‘instincts as a material being’ which are also within me whether it would be bad to obey this urge. [...] If these instincts do not approve, I will not be moved by my ‘social instincts’.43

Mushanokôji subsequently criticizes what he sees as the dissipated state of the contemporary Japanese spiritual condition. “The Japanese have become too compromising. I feel that you [Mokutarô] too have this tendency. [...] I have lost more than half my interest in debating further with you.”44 His contention seems to be that the Japanese need not refuse themselves an entry into the universalist discourse in facing that their socio-historical roots differ from that of the Western nations, and deny their ‘human’ instincts because of this. Mushanokôji and Mokutarô do not engage in discourse beyond this Shirakaba issue, and both men continue to assert their original perspectives in their subsequent works.

Mokutarô’s essay “Kôshû to ware to (san-tabi Musha ni atau)” (The Public and Myself, Third Reply to Musha) featured in this final exchange underscores a frustration over their ideological differences. Apparently influenced by Mushanokôji’s unflaggingly antagonistic tone over the course of their debate, he begins the essay by snidely commenting that, “You [Mushanokôji] seem to like thinking in simplistic terms,”45 before re-articulating his main arguments, amongst the main tenets of which are, “Human beings have an external as well as an internal life,” “There is a world beyond the subjective one […] that is of the relativity between an individual and the public,” and “The target of our inner lives should be the harmonization of these two directions (beyond a purely superficial compromise).”46

43 Ibid., 99-100.
44 Ibid. 101.
45 Kinoshita Mokutarô, “Kôshû to ware to (san-tabi Musha ni atau)”, in Shirakaba, February 1912, 80.
46 Ibid., 80-81.
Mokutarô’s skepticism about the notion of a ‘self’ disengaged from socio-historical contexts, and subsequently, the notion of an art as arising out of such individualistic perspectives, directly challenged the central tenets of Mushanokôji and the Shirakaba writers’ worldviews, causing them to reiterate and clarify their positions in defense. Though no clear winner emerged, both sides were made to reexamine the meaning of terms like ‘art’ and ‘self’ which were quickly becoming naturalized in Japanese parlance, and consider their positions within social realities. This had the effect of affirming Mushanokôji’s inward looking and self-affirming tendencies, but it also caused him to confront his own stance vis-à-vis the public. Although the debate had originally revolved around what Mokutarô had criticized as the stylistic irregularities of Yamawaki’s paintings, its main focus quickly shifted from the formal aspects of artworks to the philosophies and intentions underlying their creations.

While both parties seemed to agree that expressionistic imagery, in their nonlinguistic and seemingly self-evident openness, seemed to grant viewers access into the specific worldviews of each artist, Mushanokôji and Mokutarô differed on how such access came about. Mushanokôji, in his beliefs that he and his peers were “children of humanity”, accordingly perceived self expression through art to be a universally shared and meaningful endeavor needing no further contextualization. His identification with Post-Impressionism was based more on a general constellation of beliefs about expressionism and individuals’ artistic agencies, than on the art-historical significance of this artistic movement, or the specific formal qualities of the works created therein. On the other hand, Mokutarô, as a cultural critic, was more interested in tracing the historical development of artistic and cultural sensibilities, and parsing out the shared terms of aesthetic and philosophical discourses fostered therein. For Mokutarô, the Shirakaba group’s fondness of ‘Post Impressionism’ was suspect because the members did not seem to fully understand the conceptual and socio-cultural grounds on which the movement was based. Due to their fundamental disconnect, Mushanokôji could not engage with Mokutarô’s line of thought.
which questioned altogether the supposedly a priori nature of ‘universal’ norms and ‘cosmopolitan’ understandings within the unique context of Japan’s modernization.

Kinoshita Mokutarô was not alone in voicing a critical diagnosis of the logical leaps and contradictions entailed in Japan’s remarkably rapid modernization via Western cultural and technological imports. Besides his mentor Mori Ogai, discussed in earlier chapters, Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916) was amongst the leading cultural authorities of the age who was particularly vocal about the Japanese people’s need to maintain awareness of their nation’s present situations in light of its continuity from the historical past. Sôseki wrote widely of Japan’s need to understand the shifts in its epistemological grounds as necessitated by dramatically changing material and ideological circumstances. For example, he comments on the imported nature of the changes occurring in all aspects of Japanese life in a lecture entitled “Gendai Nihon no kaika” (The Opening of Japanese Modernity), published in November 1911. He states:

There is a certain sense of pathos for a nation that has to receive outside influences for the sake of progress in this way. We must hold dissatisfaction and concern about this state of affairs. Those who act with confidence, as though this progress were organic and native to us, are not right. This is quite pretentious, and not right. It is false and shallow. Isn’t it arrogant for a child who has never smoked anything before, to act as though he were a connoisseur when smoking a cigar? 

Taken in the context of the Shirakaba-Mokutarô debate unfolding at the time of this article’s publication, the Shirakaba members might be likened to the cigar connoisseurs feigning knowledge of, and discriminating taste in, matters that they had not earned a personal familiarity with through sufficient experience. Though the Shirakaba members were avowed fans of Sôseki—Mushanokôji had even stated that “Natsume Sôseki is in a true sense like a teacher to me, and the person I respect as the greatest figure in today’s literary

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establishment”—they differed significantly from the older writer with their instinctive ease within the cross-culturally unfolding phenomena of modernity, and their unhesitant expectations that Japanese literature and art should be as entitled and as able to reflect its conditions as any other form of modern art. In contrast, Sōseki’s oeuvre was devoted to exploring and questioning Japan’s process of settling into its new status as a modernizing nation-state, and illuminating the epistemological shifts and spiritual aporias that this entailed.

In his seminal study *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Karatani Kōjin analyzes Sōseki’s unique perspective as both an observer and participant in this transformation of Japanese perspectives. He points out how in his youth as a government-sponsored scholar of English literature, Sōseki had eventually come to realize “the historicity of the very term ‘literature’. History, like literature, was established and came to prominence in the nineteenth century; to view the past in a historical framework meant to take the existence of universals as self-evident.” Furthermore, Sōseki realized that in order for these universal terms to take root as naturally given concepts, their origins had to be concealed. Karatani argues that as a member of the Japanese generation that came of age in the 1880s during the suppression of political and public freedoms in the wake of the People’s Rights Movement, Sōseki had witnessed the emergence in Japanese discourse of various systems of ideas such as “the self”, “literature”, “psychology”, “interiority”, and “expression” which later came to be considered self-evident to a modern worldview. Karatani explains that throughout, Sōseki retained a sense of connection with the worldviews that had preceded this shift, so that he could not take for granted Japanese understandings of these new, but by definition timeless, terms. He was forever aware of

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48 Mushanokōji Saneatsu, “‘Sorekara’ ni tsuite”, *Shirakaba*, April 1911, 1.

the historicity, and thus the constructed nature, of these fundamental modern sensibilities, even as newer generations internalized them.

Indeed, in “Gendai Nihon no kaika”, Sōseki voices his suspicion of recent Japanese who display what seem to be too much facility with imported ideals:

Leaving aside those who show off knowledge of foreign theories which they have only just barely learned for themselves, let us presume in this case that one has actually mastered a foreign idea and moved on to the next idea based on his own thorough studies, with no consideration for following trends or acting the part of the eccentric. Let us presume that in the space of forty or fifty years we have gone through a natural, self-generated cultural evolution and have reached now the latest stage in progress, which took the Western cultures a century to reach. If this were so, even if we exempt [ourselves of] the challenges faced in the earlier stages of this progress, we should be proud of this amazing absorption of knowledge, which had taken a hundred years for the Westerners, who are stronger than us both physically and mentally. However, at the same time, severe neuroses and dazed wandering would seem to become a common phenomenon amongst us. It would be more natural than not to fall into neuroses.50

Sōseki seems to imply by this that the Japanese are spared from neuroses because their absorption of conflicting foreign values is incomplete, or that modern Japanese culture is in fact succumbing to neuroses, or at least amnesia, because of its too rapid absorption of too many mutually exclusive values that naturally arise dialectically.

Were the Shirakaba merely children pretending to be cigar connoisseurs, to use Sōseki’s analogy, or truly children of the world, in Mushanokōji’s words? The Shirakaba group’s apparent faith in the tenets of modern subjectivity and the ability to express this through various artistic media, including Japanese language, seems to indicate that they had internalized these modern systems as natural, even as they were made gradually aware that this necessitated the suppression of the historicity of these ideas, much to the chagrin of critics like Kinoshita Mokutarô. Perhaps it was through the direct and non-verbal channel of visual images that the sincere and unstudied gaze of the Shirakaba members managed to

50 Natsume, “Gendai Nihon no kaika”, 35.
grasp the constellation of cultural concepts girding the expressivity of Western paintings—particular by the Post-Impressionists—with more immediacy and depth than would have been possible through a more cautious and bookish approach to foreign texts and philosophies.

The primacy of the subjective perspective, and the prioritization of vibrant and fantastic inner ideals over the sobriety of external realities, described not only the Western-style paintings the Shirakaba writers favored, but also their own literary and philosophical positions. Still, it is not possible to say whether this artistic affinity somehow made their resultant sense of global cosmopolitanism any more real than a worldliness attained through more conventionally accepted means, such as extensive travels abroad or the mastery of foreign languages and literatures—as many theorists have argued, any sense of an individual’s identification with a community wider than the sphere of people with whom actual interaction is possible, is necessarily “imaginary”, no matter how heartfelt.51

In the following section of this chapter, I investigate how Mushanokōji Saneatsu, the spokesperson of the Shirakaba group, attempted to further address the bounds of the conceptual idealism that he came to stake in the preliminary years of his literary career. Amidst the tumult of changes in the ideological climate, especially the rise of socialist thought and class consciousness throughout the mid to late Taisho period, Mushanokōji established the Atarashiki Mura (New Village) farming commune 1918 with the intention to create his own version of a utopia that stood apart from both the ideologies of state and a revolution against it. The efficient and rapid pace at which he gathered supporters and resources for the project, and the drastic change of lifestyle that its undertaking entailed for him, attest to his unwavering commitment to this cause. Though events would not unfold entirely in accordance with his rosy plans, the village would become a central focus of

Mushanokôji’s life and work, and become a concrete and lasting legacy of his singular vision.

**Mushanokôji and the ‘Atarashiki Mura’ Project**

Withstanding critical skepticism of the strong idealism of their magazine in its initial years, the Shirakaba group rose steadily in public influence. Their professed faith in universally humanistic values and their casually sophisticated cosmopolitanism dovetailed with Japan’s rising optimism about the nation’s having joined the ranks of a world-class modern nation, especially following the conclusion of World War I and the advancement of Japan’s imperial expansions abroad. During these heady years, progressive intellectuals were turning their attention to notions of “jîndô shugi” (humanism) and democracy while grappling with the social and material inequalities that were surfacing in the wake of the nation’s rapid economic and urban developments.

Literary historian Usui Yoshimi writes that the peak years of the Shirakaba group’s social prominence were “approximately between Taisho 4 or 5 [1915, 1916] and Taisho 8 or 9 [1919, 1920], centered around Taisho 7 [1918] when the ‘Atarashiki Mura’ was established.”

Atarashiki Mura, or the ‘New Village’, was an idealistic farming commune begun by Mushanokôji Saneatsu who saw it as an extension of his literary and artistic philosophies. In an autobiographical novel written in the third-person voice in 1921, while in residence at the village, Mushanokôji recalls that: “[I]n the more than ten years before he began working on Atarashiki Mura, he had been ceaselessly thinking somewhere in his mind that he would like to execute such a task. It was approximately at the same that his desire to create literature and his desire to create a new world came into being. These were his twin children.” The establishment of a new and utopian community had thus been

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52 Usui Yoshimi, “Shirakaba no bungaku undô-Mushanokôji Saneatsu wo chûshin to shite”, Mushnokôji Saneatsu shû, Gendai nihon bungaku taikei (Tokyo, Chikuma shobô: 1951), v.33, 419.

53 Mushanokôji Saneatsu, Aru Otoko (1921-22), Mushanokôji Saneatsu zenshû (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1954), v.3,
declared to be an integral aspect of Mushanokôji’s over-arching vision from the start, though its material actualization would only come about after the commencement of his literary activities and the conceptual clarification of how to situate it within the world at large. It might be said that it was only after conceiving of his literature and his commune as equally held within an ideal that was closed from the pressing conditions of external realities, that he was able to put his theories to practice.

The linkage between Mushanokôji’s idealism and his activism seemed to derive from the same instincts driving his inimitably candid and plain-spoken writings which were hailed as revolutionary embodiments of the genbun-itchi spirit, as discussed at the start of the previous chapter. Akutagwa Ryûnosuke, a novelist from the generation following the Shirakaba group’s, was one of the many who had been struck by the radical frankness of Mushanokôji’s style of writing. Akutagawa recounts that as students coming of age just as the Shirakaba magazine was reaching public renown, he and his peers had been “very pleased that Mushanokôji had opened the windows of the literary establishment to let in some fresh air.”

Akutagawa then explains that “in many of [Mushanokôji’s] essays, there was a virile energy like a storm that stoked the fires of idealism within our hearts and made them momentarily light up”, but that despite his admiration of the older writer’s lofty notions, he was ultimately not a fan of Mushanokôji’s literary creations which seemed to “display too much of a rushed quality in the anticipation of [their] completion.” Akutagawa points out a strictly “neutral relationship between form and content” (形式と内容の不即不離な関

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186. First serialized in Kaizô magazine. The text is written in the third person form, but I translate in the first-person.


55 Ibid., 127-128.
in Mushanokôji’s works, in which ideas appear plainly and starkly, without stylistic flourishes. An intellectual writer with a taste for literary virtuosity, Akutagawa did not admire this artlessness. He valued not just the narrative content and philosophical premises of a given literary work, but also its modes of formal expression, while Mushanokôji’s critical focus was first and foremost on the writer’s ideals and perspectives. As with the Post Impressionist’s prioritization of raw, subjective visions over the conventional techniques of representation in their paintings, Mushanokôji saw the goal of literary work to be the exploration and expression of the writer’s individual ego, rather than his linguistic stylistics. He declares: “The primary task of a literary writer is to let his own individuality thrive as much as possible. [The task] is to follow one’s inner desires and proceed without reserve.”

Writing was just one part of the greater goal of advancing and realizing his visions.

This directness of tone can be used to advantage in conveying the private thoughts of fictional characters, as in his debut novel *Omedetaki hito* (A Naïve Person, 1911), and in his later *Yûjô* (Friendship, 1919) written while Mushanokôji was in residence at the Atarashiki Mura settlement. In these works, the plain nature of Mushanokôji’s language convincingly matches these youthful characters’ raw articulations of their desires and emotions. The same distinct, narrative voice carries throughout his various writings though, even when he discusses ideas and topics of more gravity. For example, he expresses what seems to be the basis of his philosophies in a poem called “Wakaranai” (I Don’t Know), published in the July 1911 *Shirakaba* as part of a collection of similarly short and simple poems under the title “Kaiwa” (Conversation). It reads in its entirety:

You’re thinking you want to make this world better, aren’t you.
Yeah, I am.
You think it’ll get better?

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56 Ibid.

57 Mushanokôji Saneatsu, “Kosei ni tsuite no zakkan”, *Shirakaba*, October 1912, 54.
I won’t know until I try! 58
The contrast between the quotidian tone of the language and the grandness of his wish to change the world jolts readers, and the casualness of the poem makes Mushanokōji’s vision of a better world seem tantalizingly plausible and within reach. But the Atarashiki Mura project would take a limited approach in bettering the world—Mushanokōji was insistent in staying out of political struggles—and perhaps it was because of this grounding that he could be so confident. For Mushanokōji, the better world he sought would exist upon a projected continuum of idealism and artistic expression.

Mushanokōji writes in his aforementioned autobiographical novel that from as early as his university days, he had harbored plans for a small and self-sufficient community that would celebrate the principles of humanism and creative work. In this autobiographical novel, he transcribes passages of a diary entry from November of 1906 that records a strange dream he saw about visiting a “utopian” (理想郷) village.59 He describes: “The people of this village are all like parents, children, and siblings to each other. If you have read the Bible you will know this, but we take as our basis Christ’s saying that all who obey God’s will are my siblings, my parents. […] This place is small but we plan to eventually expand.”60 According to the dream, the villagers grow their own produce, and give the remainder to charity. There is much singing and laughter. Twelve years later, though he had by this time distanced himself from Christianity because of its injunctions against bodily appetites61, Mushanokōji publicly declares his intention to establish a similarly small and ideal rural community.

60 Ibid.
61 He explains that as he and his friends began to explore the expressive and sometimes faintly erotic paintings of Western artists. “He decided to affirm those instincts that exceeded the world of Tolstoy. Besides the world of the spirit, he] decided to affirm the world of the flesh because of its beauty.” Ibid., 196.
Between March and May of 1918, Mushanokōji wrote a three part essay series that came to be called “Atarashiki Mura ni tsuite no taiwa” (Dialogues on the New Village) when they were compiled into a stand-alone volume of writings about the project. Each essay takes the form of a dialogue between two speakers, with one speaker convincing his interlocutor about the goals and purpose of the village. It was over the composition of these three essays, which were Mushanokōji’s first statements to the public about the project, that his long-held vision shifted from a private daydream into a working plan of logistical action.

The Atarashiki Mura Dialogues reveal the raw blueprint of the utopia as envisioned by Mushanokōji. Though written in March, the first essay was published in July, after the other two had already appeared. It begins with an older teacher telling his protégé that he is pondering what an ideal world would be like, and how it might be brought about. However, he prefaces his ideas with a disclaimer, noting: “I am not a practical man. I am merely a thinker. I am foremost the architect, and not the carpenter, who builds the house.” He then goes on to describe an imaginary future regime in which everyone contributes to labor, and in return, all their basic needs are provided for free. “The labor must be such that it makes human beings more human. […] There must come a time when people work not because they are forced to, but for their sense of honor, and for the sake of humanity.” This optimistic notion of a gradation connecting an individual’s hard work with transcendental significance seems to reflect a reworking of the Shirakaba group’s appreciation of Post Impressionistic art; they believed that through their radically

62 The first of the trio was “Aru kuni” (A Certain Country), which appeared in nine segments in the Osaka Mainichi newspaper in July. An editorial column that appeared in the May 1918 issue of Shirakaba—which featured the second essay “Atarashii seikatsu ni hairu michi” (The Path into a New Life), dated April—states that Mushanokōji had already submitted the first essay to the Osaka Mainichi, pointing to its earlier writing despite the delay in publication. The third essay, “Atarashii seikatsu ni hairu michi: II” (The Path into a New Life: II), dated May, appeared in the June Shirakaba. They appear in a volume called Atarashiki Mura no seikatsu, published by Shinchōsha in August of the same year.

non-mimetic paintings, the intensely subjective perspectives of each artist revealed universal meanings. At this point, Mushanokōji’s beliefs too seem to occur at a dimension of ideals and aesthetics, rather than of material action just yet.

Indeed, conscious of how his focus on the importance of communal labor might be misinterpreted in terms of revolutionary politics, Mushanokōji’s fictional narrator stresses that he has no intention to cause any acts of rebellion against the state. “I don’t know if my ideas are similar to those of the socialists. I know nothing about their policies. What I am saying is very obvious, and must be heeded if one wishes for human happiness, progress, and health.” The enlightened subject of this utopia is a generally and timelessly envisioned universal humanity, rather than the members of any one economic class in any specific, modern-day nation. He summarizes: “Return to humanity what belongs to it, return to the nation-state what belongs to it, but also, return to the individual what belongs to him; an age when all of these align is the one we wish for[.]” Though the old teacher claims that a perfect world can and will in fact become real one day, the implication seems to be that that this will be in some undetermined land, at an indefinite future date of enlightenment.

The second essay was written in April and published in the May Shirakaba. In it, Mushanokōji is much more explicit about turning his visions into reality. In what comprises part two of their discussion, the protégée, who had largely been a rather passive listener in part one, presses his mentor for more specifics on the ideal community. The older man elaborates: “I do not want to use violence in the creation of a new world. […] I do not hope to abruptly overturn the world. I want to begin by working with a few other people to create a new life.” He then states that for these participants, a ‘new life’ will begin with a “change to each individual’s inner life” over the span of “ten or twenty years”. He explains that these intrepid individuals will participate in communal labor for the welfare

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of their group, and concurrently, each would focus on cultivating his or her personalities and visions. This double effort would align with the good of humanity. And, because of the personal and interpersonal nature of this community, it would fit within the existent structures of the state rather than challenge it directly. The teacher is adamant that members should “make clear to the nationstate that the development of such a society is not detrimental to it. We will pay taxes, and not go out of our way to resist the draft.” Mushanokôji displays a decidedly pacifist stance and maintains that: “We do not want to use violence to resist violence. We will harmonize with the current society as much as possibly. Rather than engage in a fight that will surely be lost, we will focus diligently on developing our talents.” The third essay, written in May and published in the June Shirakaba, too continues in this vein, and it promotes the call for a community of committed, mutually supportive members serving each other and humanity through their labors, as well as the cultivation of their respective inner lives.65

Though Mushanokôji desired the establishment of a new society based on love and equality for all, he was adamant in maintaining a distance from the class warfare and social strife that revolutionary socialism seemed to imply. The Russian Revolution of the previous year had made the government warier than ever of the threat of socialist dissent, and Mushanokôji displayed a rather uneasy but ultimately passive attitude towards extant social authorities. His unresolved feelings about his inherited social status as an aristocrat seems to reveal itself in his repeated appeals to a universal humanism, which he claimed transcended class differences. Furthermore, his desire to be a productive, working member of society seems to betray a somewhat unrealistic and romanticized vision of the plight of the common laborer. Socialist critics were accordingly suspicious of Mushanokôji’s endeavor and they voiced their misgivings.66 Katô Kazuo (1887-1951), a socialist writer,

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65 Mushanokôji Saneatsu, also titled “Atarashii seikatsu ni hairu michi” in “Atarashiki Mura nit suite no taiwa”, Mushanokôji Saneatsu zenshû, v.23, 235-252.

66 See for example Sakai Toshihiko, “‘Atarashiki Mura’ no hiyô”, Chûô kôron, June 1918; Yamakawa
summarized their common doubts as follows: “The true spirit of universal brotherhood does not consist of breaking apart from the society of reality, and can only be fully realized by living within it.”67 Despite such criticisms that real change can only occur by confronting and refashioning the social structures that govern economic and material conditions of citizens’ lives, Mushanokôji resolutely kept the village a private enterprise, free from any ideological or political associations. He clearly stated in his autobiographical novel: “It is a problem if one’s will cannot live unless he reigns victorious through political movements or violent means. He believes that he can create a world that transcends such matters and will stand unshaken regardless of what comes.”68

In Tokyo in June, he held the first meeting of the Atarashiki Mura council which was attended by ten members. By the next meeting in the following month, the number of attendees had grown to forty-six, and they decided to begin publication of the Atarashiki Mura newsletter, and to begin the search for land to purchase for their village. They also devised a two-tiered membership system in which the first category of participants would actually move to the new village and live in it full-time, while the second category would support the project from outside through financial contributions and promotional activities. In the following months, Mushanokôji and other members of the group embarked on a national lecture tour to spread the news, establishing local chapters of supporters in cities like Osaka, Kobe, Hamamatsu, and Fukuoka. Things began to take shape very quickly.69

Shirakaba members such as Shiga Naoya, Yanagi Muneyoshi, and Nagayo Yoshio wrote articles that publicly endorsed their friend’s undertaking, although they did not

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69 For detailed information on the development of the Atarashiki Mura, see Okuwaki Kenzo, Kenshô: ‘Atarashiki Mura’ (Tokyo: Nôbunkyô, 1998).
become official dues-paying members of the association, let alone join Mushanokôji in the actual village. Shiga Naoya, for example, published a piece entitled “I Believe in Him” in the July 1918 edition of the newly established *Atarashiki Mura* newsletter. In it he expresses support for the project because of his unshakeable confidence in his longtime friend. His enthusiasm is focused on his love of Mushanokôji and not particularly on the new endeavor itself, so the character of his loyalty could be deemed uncritical, or unconditional. In contrast, despite the personal bonds between them, Arishima Takeo’s letter to Mushanokôji in the same month’s *Chûô kôron* magazine shows a deeper understanding of the project and its dream of a humanistic utopia, and a strident, critical rejection of his younger friend’s visions.

Arishima, whose aristocratic family were hereditary landowners, had become attracted to socialist thought following an extensive period of study in America and Europe. While he praises Mushanokôji for his ambitious plan to create a better world through labor and art, he warns that in reality: “War and peace are controlled by a few individuals who are capitalists and the politicians.” He seems incredulous that Mushanokôji’s idyllic and peaceful society could be achieved without a class struggle to overthrow the power of the elites. Arishima declares: “I believe that even if you carry out your plans with much precision and care, it will end in failure. I think it fitting for the plan to end in failure. [...] I pray that rather than achieve a success that does not suit its goal, this plan—the first [of this sort] to be executed in Japan—will meet with failure by committing fully to its philosophies.” Also, since he had spent time on his family’s farmlands in Hokkaido in his youth, and had gone on to attend an agricultural college after graduating from Gakushûin,

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71 Arishima Takeo, “Mushanokôji ani e” (1918), *Arishima Takeo zenshû*, v.7 (Tokyo: Chikumashobô,1980), 206.

72 Ibid., 209.
Arishima must have had a clear-eyed awareness of the challenges awaiting the amateur villagers who intended to cultivate a wild land and live off of its bounty; he did not romanticize farm labor. His predictions of doom and disclaimer that any successful results for the village would be merely superficial flukes, understandably angered Mushanokôji. After an exchange of opinions in the Shirakaba magazine, the two friends ceased contact with each other. They were still at an ideological stalemate but resumed their friendship two years later in 1921, thanks to the intervention of a concerned Shiga Naoya.

Unswayed by criticism and refusing to be discouraged by the harsh conditions of rural life, Mushanokôji and the Atarashiki Mura maintained a steady attitude of pacifist neutrality. Originally, the village’s aura of separateness from political and material realities was intensified by its distant location. Traveling from Tokyo to the village’s first site in rural Miyazaki took over a day. The journey required switching trains multiple times, and from the terminus of the line, visitors had to traverse rugged mountain passes

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73 As socialist thought gained momentum in Japanese intellectual and literary circles in the following years, Arishima’s philosophies too developed. He eventually became convinced that a proletarian revolution must be carried out by the working class for itself. He states in his famous 1922 essay “Sengen hitotsu” (One Statement), that those outside of this “fourth estate” are powerless to aid or hinder such a revolution, and later that year, he turned over ownership of his land holdings in Hokkaido to the peasants who worked there. [See Arishima Takeo, “Sengen hitotsu” (1922), *Nihon kindai bungaku hyōronsensei Meiji・Taishō* (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 2003), 306-314. Originally appeared in the January 1922 issue of *Kaizô* (Tokyo: Kaizôsha, 1922).] The following year, Arishima committed suicide with his married lover. Though he was associated with the Shirakaba group, and shared in their appreciation of humanistic ideals, Arishima lacked their open optimism and could not separate his inner life and its turmoils from the reality of the social and material conditions around him.

74 The village managed to survive throughout various shifts in Japan’s ideological climate over the more than ninety years since its foundation. Its spiritual mission statement remains unchanged from the time it was codified in 1921, and one of its clauses explicitly states, “We will not engage in conflicts between countries or between social classes.” (Otsuyama Kunio, *Mushanokôji Saneatsu kenkyû- Saneatsu to Atarashiki Mura*, 89.) In 1939, the village was moved from its original location in Miyazaki Prefecture because of municipal irrigation plans that planned to flood their land, to its current location in Saitama Prefecture. According to the Atarashiki Mura’s official website (http://www.atarashiki-mura.or.jp/), as of 2008 there were 17 individuals in 12 households living there as resident-members, and 180 external dues-paying members who support the village from beyond its borders. These numbers are comparable to the membership figures of the village when it first opened in 1918. Mushanokôji had chosen November 14, the birthday of the eminent French artist Auguste Rodin whose spirit of humanistic heroism he had admired from his earliest Shirakaba days, as the date of the village’s official establishment. Records from the following month, December 1918, show that there had been 18 adults and 2 children as on-site members, and 164 external members. At its reported peak, total membership in 1925 had been about a thousand members total, with fifty people residing in the village itself. (Otsuyama Kunio, *Mushanokôji Saneatsu kenkyû- Saneatsu to Atarashiki Mura*, 84.)
either on foot or by carriage. The area was so difficult to access that it did not even receive centralized electricity until the postwar period. Most of the pioneers who moved there at the time of the village’s founding were urban, middle class young men, and in a few cases their wives, who were drawn to the idealism of the project; Mushanokôji was the eldest at thirty-four, and the only aristocrat. Everyone mentally prepared to immerse themselves in the hard work of taming the wild land. Despite the aura of noble adventure that surrounded it, taking the leap to become a resident was a serious commitment on multiple levels. According to the regulations, in addition to participating in daily manual labor, residents were required to invest the entirety of his material assets into the communal village fund, and to leave the village if they were no longer in agreement with the lifestyle and principles of the community.

With the exception of Mushanokôji the residents were not professional artists or writers, but everyone dedicated themselves to creative output such as by staging plays and art exhibits of their paintings and pottery, and to the study of literature, art, and philosophy. The village rules mandated no more than eight hours of physical labor each day so as to leave time for these pursuits. The members, none of whom had a university education or elite access to cultural resources, were given full access to Mushanokôji’s library and phonographs. They presented their own poetry and short essays in the *Atarashiki Mura* magazine, and held concerts and drama performances attended by villagers from nearby settlements as well as supporters from various regions in Japan. Mushanokôji took up painting at this time, and years later, he recalls: “When I lived in the Atarashiki Mura, even if I wanted to buy a painting, I felt rather guilty spending money on a painting. I thought then, that it would be good if I could sell my own paintings and buy [others’] paintings with

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the profit. […] I also imagined that if I ever needed to live in a foreign country, I would not be able to make a living from writing, but if I became very good at painting, I would be able to live by that[.]”

These comments reveal that in the rural and harsh conditions of the Atarashiki Mura, Mushanokôji, perhaps more so than when he was in the city, had considered art as a realm that could be readily entered by amateurs like himself. His thinking about paintings in terms of economic exchange reflects his situation of art within the purview of the straitened circumstances of everyday life in the village, even as his implication that paintings were universally valuable point to his belief in their transcendental nature. Mushanokôji specialized in Japanese ink painting, and his images, often inscribed with a line of inspirational poetry, were printed in _Atarashiki Mura_. Artistic work was as critical as farm work for the villagers, who sought to gain intellectual and spiritual enrichment by their radical lifestyle choice.

It soon became all too clear that practically none of the early settlers had any knowledge of agricultural methods. Resulting harvests were insufficient to sustain the population, and the villagers had no choice but to rely on income from Mushanokôji’s writings and the monthly membership dues from external supporters. Stress levels rose, much in-fighting occurred, and the turnover rate of members was high. The village was far from the pastoral idyll that was originally envisioned.

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78 He continued to paint for the rest of his life. Figure 4-3 shows later examples which are now sold as post-cards in the Mushanokôji Memorial Museum in Chôfu-shi, Tokyo.

79 _Atarashiki Mura 90 nen- Ningenrahiku kiru- Heisei nijû-nendo aki no tokubetsu ten_, 22-26.

80 For more information on the material conditions and personal politics within the village, see Okuwaki Kenzo, _Kenshô: ‘Atarashiki Mura’_ (Tokyo: Nóbunkyô, 1998.)

81 It eventually ended up taking until 1934 for the village to be able to grow enough rice and staple crops to feed itself, and until 1958 to become economically self-sustaining by branching out into the sale of poultry and eggs. Mushanokôji later came to admit many years later, “If I had known more about agriculture, I might not have purchased that land in the first place. […]” In terms of crops, it was a land that required much work
Mushanokôji ended up leaving the village after eight years to focus on his literary activities in Tokyo. He left, not because he had lost his faith in the mission of the Atarashiki Mura, but because he arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that he would better be able to serve the community by earning income and publicity for their cause from within the literary establishment in Tokyo. His dilemma about leaving the village is evident in a journal entry from November 1923. He dispassionately appraises that: “The day to day life of the village should be fine without someone like me. However, it would be good if there were someone who would actively progress towards the direction of growth, and capable of leading both others and himself.”

To revisit his earlier analogy in the “Dialogues on the New Village” from 1918, after five years in village life, Mushanokôji seems to have confirmed his view of himself as more of an ‘architect’ orchestrating concepts than an actual ‘carpenter’ executing them.

However, he also seems to have grasped that his role as leader affected the village in a direct and real way, and that he was needed. He continues: “I have immersed myself too much in my work as a writer. […] I regret that I am unable to completely put aside my writing, and work just for the village, but I think it is also a shame to quit writing. It will be easy to find any number of people more suited than me for the village […]. It doesn’t seem that my work as a writer can be replaced by someone else.”

At this point, he still phrases his labor as a writer in opposition to his labor as a villager, despite the clear fact that from the start, it had been his productivity as a writer that kept the village financially afloat. By 1926, he and his supporters came to realize that his return to writing fulltime would be the sensible choice for the sake of the village, and he left Miyazaki to live in Nara with his
second wife and their child. By then, he had already been spending several months out of the year in Tokyo due to his literary commitments. He moved back to Tokyo the year after this initial step out of the Atarashiki Mura.\textsuperscript{84}
Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Aesthetic History and Aesthetics Historicized

History and Aesthetics

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s (1892-1927) historical fictions are often set against Mori Ogai’s, primarily in terms of the differences in their philosophies towards writing about the past.¹ With “Okitsu Yagoemon no isho” (1912), Ogai began writing novels based on historical events and sources, stating, “I decided to research historical materials and honor the ‘nature’ I perceived in them. I lost interest in arbitrarily changing this [nature].” (OZ 26: 508-509) As Karatani Kôjin and other critics have found, this signaled Ogai’s attempts to forego a centralizing narrative and instead explore, or at least point to, the historicity of past events while deferring the historical imperative to order these according to a present day teleology. Akutagawa, who rose to fame within the Japanese literary world with psychological stories set in the premodern Japanese past such as “Rashômon” (1915), “Hana” (The Nose, 1916), and “Imogayu” (Potato Porridge, 1916), claims a strikingly different reason for his focus on the past. He explains in an essay entitled “Mukashi” (Long Ago, 1918):

Say I set a theme and decide to write a story based on it. And let’s say that in order to express this theme in the most artistically strong way, I need to have fantastic events occur. In this case these fantastic happenings, in so far as they are fantastic, are difficult to write about as events taking place in contemporary Japan, and if I write this regardless, in many cases it will cause readers to feel it is unnatural, and as a result, the theme I had taken pains to set up too will die a stray death. And so, as the phrase “difficult to write about as events that take place in contemporary Japan” shows, there is no way out besides setting these events in lands besides Japan, or in Japan of long ago. My stories that draw from historical materials are generally driven by this necessity, and I stage them in the past to avoid the obstacle of seeming unnatural. (ARZ 3: 88)²


Akutagawa’s interest seems therefore to not be in the world of the ‘past’ itself, but in expressing his presently-held ‘themes’ using whatever means were at hand.

But what did Akutagawa wish to write about that he felt couldn’t be expressed convincingly within the settings of the present day? To begin to address this question, it is illuminating to consider that the literary climate in which he began using the past as the background for his fiction was such that “Rashômon” (1915)—his second published story, and now widely considered to be one of Akutagawa’s foremost masterpieces—received almost no notice when it first appeared in print. Akutagawa draws from the *Konjaku monogatari* (今昔物語), a medieval compilation of folktales, in crafting this drama of a man debating the values of morality and survival at Rashomon Gate on a dark and rainy evening in late Heian era Kyoto. In view of the critical acclaim the story eventually met when it was republished in an eponymous collection of stories in 1917 after Akutagawa’s reputation was more established, the scholar Miyoshi Yukio muses that in 1915: “when the remaining influences of Naturalism have still not disappeared, there was hardly any standard yet for fairly evaluating this sort of story.” Akutagawa’s own assessment of his position within the literary world at this time provides insight into the state of Japanese letters at the opening years of his literary career. Furthermore, it indicates what new directions and concepts he intended to explore therein.

In “Taishô hachinen-do no bungei kai” (The Literary World in Taishô 8 [1919]),

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3 The *Konjaku monogatari*, a compilation of approximately a thousand folktales from China, Japan, and India, was composed some time between 1120 and 1449.

4 To summarize, the story is about a man taking shelter from the rain at Rashomon Gate in Kyoto in the late Heian Period. It was a dark time for Kyoto—the city was stricken by a continuous chain of natural disasters like fires, hurricanes, and famine, and civil society was in tatters. Having lost his employment, the man ponders whether, as a last resort, to turn to crime in order to stay alive. Atop the gate’s tower, he encounters an old hag who shamelessly plucks the hair from the corpses abandoned at the gate in order to make a wig to sell. He is horrified, but she explains that she must do this to support herself. Inspired by her words, the man turns on her and robs her of her kimono, and runs off into the night, embracing the dark philosophy of survival over compassion.

an overview of that year’s literary happenings, Akutagawa assesses that despite recent “political developments”, “the literary establishment has maintained the trajectories of the past two or three years.” (ARZ 5:179) The political events of 1919 that he mentions here include the establishment of the national Futsû senkyo kisei dômeikai group (Universal Suffrage Alliance) and its active demonstrations, as well as the many strikes for fairer wages held by newly formed workers’ unions in growing industries like printing and arms manufacturing. After noting this fluctuating social context, Akutagawa makes the following observations about the main literary trends spanning the past several years.

It is widely known that the Naturalists placed their literary ideals on the sole word of “Truth”(「真」の一字). The critical essay “Genjitsu bakuro no hiai” (The Pathos of Exposing Reality, 1908) by Hasegawa Tenkei, who had been eminent at the time, eloquently attests to this. But like the saying ‘things change when cornered’, as Tayama Katai’s authority in the literary establishment became an event of the past, a group of writers dissatisfied with the Naturalists’ “Truth” let fly an opposing banner that took ‘Beauty’ (美) as its key word. This was the so-called Aestheticism group, centered around Nagai Kafû following his return from abroad, that gained the support of the age. Most works by the writers in this group feature shades of hedonism or devilish decadence, or at least a temperamental nature. […] But over time, in reaction to this, another new movement began to occur in a corner of the literary world. Interestingly, they have Anti-Naturalist traces too, but simultaneously, the group dedicates itself to “Virtue” (善) and does not bow to the worship of “Beauty”, so things were such that within the great wave of Anti-Naturalism, there arose two waves in opposite directions. Needless to say, the leader of this group was Mushanokôji Saneatsu. (ARZ 5:179-180)

The Naturalist movement, as typified by Tayama Katai’s novel Futon (The Quilt, 1907), produced novels that purported to faithfully depict the ‘true’ facts of authors’ personal lives in all their minutiae. Katai’s project was twofold, in that he advocated both the faithful transcription of a writer’s intensively subjective thoughts and feelings, as well as the unflinching ‘flat description’ (平面描写) of the objective, often squalid, material conditions he lives in.⁶ In contrast, the Aestheticism of works inspired by Nagai Kafû, who

⁶ See, Tomi Suzuki, Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press,
published _Amerika monogatari_ (Stories of America) in 1908 shortly after his return to Japan, did not strive to realistically depict either internal or external human lives. They focused instead on creating stylized episodes of dramatic beauty or intense feeling. Akutagawa names as examples such works as Ueda Bin’s “Uzumaki” (“Whirlpool”, 1910), Suzuki Miekichi’s “Kotori no su” (Bird’s Nest, 1910), and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s “Shisei” (Tattoo, 1910). In turn, the group of “Virtue”, led by Mushanokôji and his fellow members at the _Shirakaba_ magazine (established in 1910), were defined by an idealism inspired by Western visual artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Auguste Rodin. They aimed to express sentiments that overrode traditional Japanese worldviews in favor of more timeless and universal values that they felt were more suitable for citizens of the modern world. An overview of Akutagawa’s writings shows both similarities with, and marked departures from, these earlier literary trends.

Like the works of the Aesthetic group, Akutagawa too placed an emphasis on carefully constructed plots and settings. The dark and shadowy medieval world of “Rashômon” could be said to reflect this artistic tendency. Also, much like the works of the Shirakaba group, the broad range of literary and artistic sources that Akutagawa draws upon in his works appeal to the openness of a wider, cosmopolitan world; again, “Rashômon’ serves as an apt example of his inter-textual facility, and its exploration of morality, if through its obverse, too could be seen within the ken of “Virtue”. Furthermore, that Akutagawa is, in the first place, interested in delineating the shifting ideals of modern Japanese literature over time shows his fundamental investment in the discourse as inaugurated by the Naturalists’ search for Truth. He continues:

Within the past three years, yet another group of new writers brought forth a movement to the literary establishment. This group does not take the form of a group gathered under a single banner. […] But if we compare these writers to the previous groups, I think that we can observe the following trait about them.
That is, overall, as a group, either consciously or subconsciously, they are attempting to balance the concepts of “Truth”, “Beauty”, and “Virtue” that have in turn reigned over Japanese letters. [...] They feel more or less that human beings cannot rest if lacking any one of these elements. Hence while their works, in comparison to the earlier writers’ works, cannot be said to be more serious, it would not be an overstatement to say that they contain a richer quality. (ARZ 5:181-182)

Akutagawa counts himself in this latest group, naming as his peers writers like Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948), Kume Masao (1891-1952), Funaki Shigenobu (1893-1975), and others. His critical acknowledgment of the legacy of the writers before his time lends to an understanding of his own work to be at the cutting edge of Japanese letters. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that as Miyoshi Yukio observed, “Rashômon” was first met with incomprehension. The story fit no previous literary paradigm. Perhaps conversely, Akutagawa’s awareness of the newness of his works also explains why he decided to situate many of his earlier works outside the familiar territory of present day Japan. He knew that his own search for “Truth”, “Beauty”, and “Virtue” would have to break with previous modes of literary writing, and to exceed existent frameworks of understanding, even as he builds on the accumulated store of literary heritage.

Indeed, many of Akutagawa’s writings, historical or otherwise, explicitly address and critique the state of Japanese modernity and its values. But in light of the intellectual erudition and poetically refined sensibilities of his oeuvre, Akutagawa’s suicide in 1927 is often ascribed to his keen despair at realizing the impossibility of sustaining the hermetic, bourgeois Japanese values that he seemed to embody so fully in his literature. The essay “‘Haiboku’no bungaku- Akutagawa Ryûnosuke shi no bungaku ni tsuite’ (The Literature of ‘Defeat’- On the Literature of Akutagawa Ryûnosuke) written by the Marxist critic Miyamoto Kenji in 1929 famously captures this sentiment. Miyamoto writes:

In this writer’s ‘world of absolute intellect’, I have only vaguely felt his delicate neurosis and cold gaze towards life. And so, though these shades [of sentiment]

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glimmered within my former path of the petit-bourgeois homeland, this nervous suffering did not fundamentally shake me, and I thought of it as artificial blooms in a distant land.  

Faced with the rise of social movements and Marxist thought in the latter Taisho period, towards the end of his life Akutagawa himself admitted: “We cannot overcome our era. We also cannot overcome our social class.” (ARZ 15: 192) Despite his penchant for artistic and theoretical ideals, he knew he could not remain hermetically unaware of the changing social realities of the age.

This was not however, a statement of an effete literature’s “defeat” against the rise of a pressing class awareness. Akutagawa continues: “Our souls are stamped with the mark of our social class. But what binds us is not class alone. Geographically speaking, where we come from—on a large scale Japan, and on a smaller scale, our towns and villages—also binds us. Furthermore, in considering our genetics and living environments, we cannot help but exclaim at how complex we are.” (ARZ 15: 193) This critical grasp of the various ideological as well as material conditions shaping human perspectives, more than anything, served as the driving force in Akutagwa’s works. In them, “Truth”, “Beauty”, and “Virtue” are considered within the greater sphere of these intersecting living factors.

Throughout his oeuvre, Akutagawa focuses especially on the overlapping values and thought systems that have cumulatively come to constitute his persona as a modern Japanese literary writer. Thus his critiques of Japan’s unique cultural legacy—particularly the dynamics involved in the Japanese people’s eager incorporation of competing foreign influences as examined in his fictions set in various historical contexts—might be read as an analysis of his own modern Japanese intellect which takes it as natural to draw ideas and references from a range of foreign and Japanese cultural sources. On the other hand, his

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8 Miyamoto Kenji, “‘Haiboku’ no bungaku-Akutagawa Ryūnosuke shi no bungaku nit suite” (1929), Kindai bungaku hyōron taikai, v.6 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1973), 225.

stories that consider the nature of artistic passion and aesthetic inspiration, no matter their historical settings, could be seen as his attempts to question what it means to be a literary writer. Akutagawa’s writings and critical gaze therefore have a double focus: an interest in the history of the events leading up to the formation of present Japanese outlooks, and an interest in a timeless and universal artistic spirit that is not delimited to his position in time and space. As will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter, it is at the juncture of these allegiances, wherein history is aestheticized and aesthetics is historicized, that so much of his literature bears fruit.

**Poetic Spirit and the Call of the Wild**

While Akutagawa states in the essay “Mukashi” (Long Ago, 1918) that as a writer of fiction, he freely borrows settings from history to give himself creative license to develop the “artistic themes” that concern him in the present, a broader analysis of his writings shows that historical consciousness—both in the sense of being aware of the present as connected to the past within the purview of a linear historical vision, and in the sense of his interest in the unique characteristics of each historical era—played an integral role in shaping his literary imagination. The story “Saigō Takamori” was published in the *Shinshōsetsu* literary magazine on January 1, 1918, on the same date that the essay “Mukashi” was featured in the *Tokyo nichi-nichi* newspaper. As in the essay, the story examines the notion of a writer’s artistic freedom even when treating historical matters, but here, Akutagawa goes further and questions the objectivity presumed in the historical project itself.

The story is presented as a retelling of an account that the narrator heard from his esteemed acquaintance Homma, now an academic, who had been researching the history of the Meiji Revolution as a university student. The narrator is presumed to be Akutagawa himself because he notes meeting with Homma “last winter before moving to Kamakura”; Akutagawa himself moved to Kamakura in December of 1916 from Tokyo. As the narrator
enters the body of the story itself, Akutagawa further removes himself from the tale by quoting Homma’s disclaimer that: “It is up to the listener to determine if this story is true or false.” (ARZ 3:63) These multiple diegetic layers bracket the story and call attention to the uncertain nature of its veracity, echoing and underscoring the very themes it explores.

The story is set seven or eight years ago when Homma was completing his graduation thesis on Saigō Takamori (1828-1877), a samurai from the domain of Satsuma (present-day Kagoshima) who played an important role in the Meiji Restoration and came to be regarded as a folk hero for his rebellion against the centralization of power under the new Meiji government. Homma had just concluded a research visit to Kyoto, where Saigō had been posted early in his career as a Satsuma bureaucrat. Homma is on board the train headed back to Tokyo when he happens to fall into conversation with an eccentric elderly man in the dining car. Upon learning that Homma is studying history the old man identifies himself as a fellow historian, and he says, laughing, “Historians are nothing but almanac-makers”, quoting the words of the eighteenth-century British poet and critic Samuel Johnson. (ARZ 3:67) The old man becomes garrulous as he nurses his glass of whiskey. He warns Homma to be careful in researching the Seinan War of 1877 in which Saigo took his last stand, because “There are many false records about that war, and those false records have become enshrined as accurate historical materials. So unless you are very cautious in treating your historical material, you will unknowingly commit errors.” (ARZ 3:69)

Homma grows increasingly irritated at the pompous tone of the stranger, until the old man agrees to share his secret knowledge of an example of a widely held misconception about the history of the Seinan War. “The thought that this man might be crazy suddenly crossed Homma’s mind. But at the same time, having pursued the matter this far, it seemed a shame to simply let this so-called truth slip away.” (ARZ 3:71) In the transitory space of a train car, the young Homma is enticed by the possibility of learning some hidden historical truth from the bizarre but oddly authoritative stranger, despite, or perhaps because of, the
unlikeness of the entire madcap scenario. He is still not entrenched enough into the discourses of his field to be unable to question its tenets.

The old man states that contrary to conventional beliefs, the samurai hero Saigô Takamori had survived the Battle of Shiroyama where he is said to have died, and that he is in fact still alive, decades afterwards. Exasperated and disappointed by the wild claim, Homma patiently tells the man the widely held theory that Saigo had died at Shiroyama “in an argument as precise in its deductions, and as decisive and as logically sound, as was usual for him.” (ARZ 3:73) The old man shrugs off the historical documents that Homma names as evidence supporting Saigô’s downfall at Shiroyama, saying that the former samurai was at that moment in the very next train car. After Homma is led to a man greatly resembling the famous warrior asleep in his seat, conflicting emotions run through him. “He was at a loss. What should he believe—the historical materials accepted as conventionally accurate, or the aging giant he had just seen? If doubting the former is to doubt his own head, doubting the latter would be to doubt his own eyes.” (ARZ 3:77) Seeing the student’s confusion, the old man offers:

First, think about these historical materials you want to believe in. Leaving aside for the time being the theory of Saigô’s death in battle at Shiroyama, there is no such thing anywhere as historical material that can be sufficient for casting judgments about historical matters. In recording a fact, everyone naturally writes by selecting its details. This cannot be helped because despite their intentions, they actually do this. This is to say, it already means a distancing from objective reality. (ARZ 3: 77)

The old man points out that while historical documents agree that Saigô had died on September 24, 1877 at the Battle of Shiroyama, in fact, all that is known is that someone believed to be him died. And now, it is also known that someone who greatly resembles Saigô is asleep in their very train. Homma is clearly flummoxed by these arguments, until the old man bursts out laughing and tells him that the sleeping man is in fact his friend who

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10 Saigo Takamori is said to have been legendarily gigantic in physical stature.
is a doctor and amateur poet. He then presents his business card, which reveals himself to be a noted historian. Homma is humbled and says: “Professor, you are a skeptic.” (ARZ 3: 81) The story ends with the professor saying: “We know nothing, not even about our own selves, let alone about the life and death of Saigo Takamori. Hence, in writing history, I do not purport to write a history free of fabrication. I am satisfied with writing a beautiful history (美しい歴史) that seems convincing. When I was young, there was a time I thought about becoming a novelist. If I had done this, I would have written such stories.” (ARZ 3:81)

Akutagawa thus delineates a categorical divide between history, with its attempts to determine the truth of past events, and literature, whose concern is to craft “beautiful” stories that merely sounds convincing. At the same time, he emphasizes that in either case, a writer must select his premises with care, and that there is no hope for a truly objective account. Though the professor first calls historians “almanac makers”, referring to their task of recording facts, he undermines this later by questioning the fundamental possibility of such an impersonal writing. He suggests that the novelist and the historian are equally adrift in a sea of facts and shifting conditions that they must assemble for themselves. “We know nothing” for certain, but must continue onwards amidst the flux of unfolding realities. Akutagawa’s choice to become a literary writer thus implies his commitment to the pursuit of the impression of beauty rather than objectivity in his narratives, and this was rooted in the sobering awareness that no mode of knowledge was free from the human propensity to construct selected facts into a conceptually cohesive logic.

In the later series of essays Bungei-teki na, amari ni bungei-teki na (Literary, All Too Literary, 1927), begun from a debate with the writer Tanizaki Jun’ichiro, Akutagawa elaborates further on the unique nature of literary writing. Here, he declares that “I write novels because out of all the arts, novels are the most encompassing, and it is possible to throw everything and anything into them.” (ARZ 15: 154) This echoes his earlier
sentiments about the literary writer’s freedom to choose his influences and premises from amongst the expanse of all available facts for the sake of artistic effect. Akutagawa writes this by way of response to Tanizaki’s claim that “Of the literary arts, the novel has the most capacity for a structurally aesthetic perspective (構造美観).” (ARZ 15: 151) Akutagawa argues against this by observing that “even a seventeen syllable haiku is not devoid of a structurally aesthetic perspective.” (ARZ 15: 151) He seems to refer here to a writer’s role in recording only selected details and sentiments about any given event; this is a task that he knew befalls not only novelists and historians, but even poets, and all other writers. And against Tanizaki’s opinion that, “What is most lacking in Japanese novels is the power to construct (構成する力), and the talent to geometrically assemble together complex plot lines” (ARZ 15: 152), Akutagawa further states that beginning with the epic classic Tale of Genji and even in the present day, Japanese literature is rich in examples of authors constructing intricate storylines. He names Tanizaki’s oeuvre, which is full of imaginative plot twists and fantastic premises, as an example of this. The “power to construct”, Akutagawa seems to say, is immanent in all forms of writing and critical thought. In novels encompassing “everything and anything”, structure must therefore order the various elements included in them.

This helps to frame his reply to Tanizaki’s supposition that “Akutagawa’s attack on the interest of literary plot may be based less on the aspect of ‘construction’, than on the ‘materials’ [used therein].” (ARZ 15: 152) Akutagawa answers that on the contrary, he finds no shortage of materials included in Japanese literature, and names several of Tanizaki’s works as evincing a satisfactory range of sources. His contention is instead about the manner in which these raw materials are incorporated into literary texts. He writes: “I want to critically flagellate myself along with Tanizaki, (He knows of course that my whip is without the barbs of malice), about the poetic spirit (詩的精魂) that enlivens these materials.” (ARZ 15: 153) For Akutagawa, the expression of the “poetic spirit” is the
crux of a literary work, and the quality that separates it from other non-artistic modes of writing.

Akutagawa tries to explain the nature of this spirit through metaphors drawing on the visual arts. Addressing Tanizaki who seems to have interpreted his statements on structure in literary writing as about the role of explicit plotlines in a novel, rather than about the underlying critical posture of the writer as manifest in the work, Akutagawa writes: “There can be no painting without [an underlying] dessin. Similarly, a novel stands atop a ‘story’.” (ARZ 15: 147) He explains:

A novel without a ‘story’-like story (「話」らしい話のない小説) is not one that just merely depicts quotidian events in one’s life. Out of all novels, it is a novel closest to poetry. But it is much more like a novel than what is called a prose-poem. To repeat, I do not think that this novel without a ‘story’-like story is supreme. However, from the perspective of ‘purity’—in the sense of it lacking vulgar interests (通俗的興味)—it is the purest form of novel. Returning again to the example of paintings, there can be no painting without a dessin. (Several of Kandinsky’s paintings entitled ‘Improvisations’ are an exception.)12 However, there are paintings that entrust their spirits more to color than to the dessin. Fortunately, several Cezanne paintings that have come to Japan clearly prove this truth.13 I am interested in novels that, in this way, are close to painting. (ARZ 15: 148)

Through this analogy of paintings based more on color than composition, Akutagawa strives to articulate an example of an artwork in which expressivity stands over the intellectual imposition of form and structure. Yet his admission that a “dessin” is necessary in the constitution of any image suggests his basic awareness that all acts of putting pen to paper requires rational intention and selection. He would later write in the essay “Geijutsu sono ta” (Art and Other Issues, 1919): “Artistic activity, no matter how great a genius one may be, is conscious.” (ARZ 5:169) By “dessin”, Akutagawa therefore seems

11 Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944): Russian painter, regarded as a pioneer of abstract art.

12 Figure 5-1.

13 Figure 5-2.
to mean form, rather than representational content; he, and abstract painters of all stripes, would concur that while there does not have to be definite narrative subject, or a “story”, in a painting, the work nonetheless needs to be consciously realized in a visible form. Even more so in the case of a novel sustained over the course of a narrative span, “pure” expression requires this sort of constructive design.

Akutagawa continues: “To take the example of Cezanne again, he has left many unfinished works to our later generation. This is just like Michaelangelo who has left behind unfinished sculptures. However, even with the Cezanne paintings deemed unfinished, there remains some doubt about whether they are complete or not. To wit, Rodin has called some of Michaelangelo’s unfinished pieces complete!” (ARZ 15: 149) Akutagawa’s attraction to these incomplete, but nevertheless expressive, works of Western art shows his hope to uncover alternative dimensions in an artwork that exceed the artist’s rational will to “construct” his images. According to Akutagawa, it seems that what suffuses the suggestive openness of these works is a “poetic spirit” that enlivens them while eliding a finished structure.\(^\text{14}\)

That he resorts to the terminology of the visual arts when describing this pan-artistic poetic spirit might be ascribed to Akutagawa’s desire to separate it from the register of language, the medium in which he must articulate this critical discourse, as well as compose his novels. Since it is the nature of novels to include “everything and

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\(^\text{14}\) Perhaps this rather unclear notion of poetic spirit can be illuminated through the ideas of theorist Daniel Tiffany, who states in *Toy Medium* that both the comprehension of material reality and the appreciation of art depends on constructing models of, and thus assigning a provisional reality to, invisible phenomena so that they can be envisioned by the mind. He writes that in scientific thought, the basic substance of empirically unseen atoms is conceptually posited as constituting all physical things. Similarly, in art, and poetic works in particular, Tiffany suggests that a “lyric substance, a consistent and perhaps even systematic doctrine of corporeality proper to the devices of lyric poetry” is posited as constitutive of the mental images evoked by the artistry of an artwork. (Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 15.) Creative works “apprehend sensuous nature by inventing it, by producing ‘illusions’ or impossible pictures that exceed the qualities of intuitive experience or understanding.” (Tiffany, *Toy Medium*, 28.) Tiffany argues that the sort of reality evoked through art works is ontologically different from that of a general empirical reality grasped through the senses, but that it is nonetheless rooted in its own rich materiality in the mind. Akutagawa’s poetic spirit too might be understood as an immaterial presence that can be perceived in works of art across all genres.
anything” including non-aesthetic concerns such as historical and critical logic—Akutagawa describes his own novels as “varied and disorderly” (雑駁) (ARZ 15:154)—he knows how carefully he must tread in order to write a literary work without appearing “vulgar” (通俗的) and without effacing its poetic spirit. According to his foregoing arguments, in paintings too, excessive focus on dessin too could diffuse the poetic spirit of an image, Akutagawa seems to harbour a distinct admiration of the visual arts as a purer repository of aesthetic ideals than written texts could be. This critical esteem of the visual art plays a pivotal role in many of his novels, as will be examined in subsequent analyses.

Besides diegetically referencing great artworks’ capacity to evoke the elusive specter of the poetic spirit that they manifest to their viewers, Akutagawa was also interested in incorporating visuality into the substance of his prose itself. In an essay entitled, “Me ni miru yôna bunshô—ika naru bunshô wo mohan to subeki ka—“ (Prose That Is As the Eye Sees—What Sort of Prose to Aspire To—, 1918), Akutagawa states: “I like prose in which scenes come to be visualize[d](are made to appear to the eye). [The English word is used in the original.] (...) From the start, there is a different feel to someone who writes “The sky is blue”, and someone who writes “The sky is as blue as steel. (...) In this case, to add ‘as steel’ is not just a matter of technical virtuosity (技巧). I think it means this writer has captured the scene all the more accurately.” (ARZ 3: 154) Particular attention to visual description and details is another important aspect in Akutagawa’s literary writing.

These elements are displayed in the story “Jigokuhen” (Hell Screen, 1918), which investigates how the artistic pursuit of poetic spirit, when skewed out of balance from the other concerns of an individual’s life, could lead to horrifying results. As with “Saigô Takamori”, the tale is told from the perspective of a narrator not directly involved with the main story, drawing attention to the power of the isolated narrative itself to evoke the story’s lyric substance. The narrator begins with a discussion about the fierce but honorable and beloved “Great Lord of Horikawa”, a historical epithet that had been attached to several
Heian period lords who had lived in a mansion in the Horikawa district of Kyoto. The uncertainty of the identity of this lord also makes it impossible to pinpoint when exactly in time the story is set, although reference to the Heian Period through Lord Horikawa, and some of its customs and events as conveyed through episodes attributed to him, effectively sets up a historically vague but artistically atmospheric context for the story to come. Akutagawa evinces here the methodology of creative historical borrowing that he had described in the essay “Mukashi”.

The narrator then presents the main character of the story, Yoshihide, a renowned painter in Horikawa’s service:

He must have been on the cusp of fifty. In appearance, he was just a short man, emaciated to skin and bones, who seemed to have a mean spirit. When he would visit the great lord’s residence, he often wore a richly dyed hunting garment with a soft hat, but his character was completely ignoble. And for some reason, oddly for an old man, his lips were conspicuously red, which added to the beastly, creepy impression he made. (AZ 3: 158)

The image conjured up by this description is unpleasant but striking. In turn, his daughter is described as a beautiful and kind girl who worked in the Horikawa mansion as a lady in waiting. Her name is not specified. Also, instead of via visual imagery, her persona is defined at this early point by an incident in which she valiantly defends a pet monkey who had stolen a tangerine from Horikawa’s son. These tactics already indicate that she will be a pawn to the main forces of his narrative.

For all his meager appearance and uncouth personality, Yoshihide is incredibly arrogant about his superior painting skills. He thinks nothing of having his assistants pose in uncomfortable and dangerous positions for the sake of sketching them, or of using rotting corpses to study their forms. One day, Horikawa commissions him to paint a screen depicting the Buddhist hell. The narrator, who speaks in retrospective view of the story, describes the painting that Yoshihide ends up producing. Although this is a conventional
topic in Buddhist religious imagery, Yoshihide’s screen was remarkable in its graphic
depiction of various sinners burning in torment within the flames of hell. In a sort of
foreshadowing, the narrator describes that of all the scenes of uncensored violence, the most
arresting image was of an ox-carriage falling from the burning sky:

   Behind the carriage’s screen which was blown upwards by the winds of hell was a
woman dressed so richly that she could have been a lady in the imperial household,
with her floor length black hair waving in the flames, writhing in agony with her
white neck arched. Every element, from her appearance, to the burning carriage,
evoked the intense suffering in the inferno. It was as though all the horror in the
wide screen was concentrated into this one figure. It was so divinely inspired
that anyone seeing it thought they could hear the screams through it. (ARZ 3:169-
170)

Yoshihide throws himself into the task, savagely torturing his models in order to
depict their suffering. Months pass, and at a meeting with Horikawa, the artist asks him to
torch a woman in an ox-carriage so that he could paint the scene accurately. He states: “I
absolutely cannot paint anything I have not seen. Even if I manage, I do not arrive at
satisfaction. This is the same as not being able to paint at all.” (ARZ 3: 187) Horikawa
concedes, but on the day of the burning, Yoshihide discovers that the woman in the burning
carriage is his daughter. The narrator observes, “Most strangely, the man gazed delightedly
at his only daughter’s death but it wasn’t only that. Yoshihide at that moment displayed an
awe-inspiring gravitas that for some reason seemed superhuman (人間とは思われない),
like the rage of a lion king in a dream.” (ARZ 3:198) The narrator adds that despite rumors
that Horikawa had ordered this horrible event because the girl had spurned his amorous
advances, in fact, he wanted to punish the twisted priorities of her father who abused so
many people for the sake of his art, and even asking that a murder be committed towards this
end. A month later, after presenting the finished screen to Horikawa, Yoshihide hangs
himself.

Through this nightmarish tale of a man whose passion for art overcame his reason

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15 Figure 5-3.
and human decency, Akutagawa seems to arrive at the conclusion that living by aesthetic ideals alone is ultimately impossible. Yoshihide’s suicide after completing his magnum opus would support this reading. However, by the careful, vivid descriptions of the virtuosity of Yoshihide’s works and the visceral effect that they have on his viewers, Akutagawa also praises the artist’s consummate skills, and the power of his aesthetic creations. Furthermore his own skillful prose, which draws readers into the story and brings them to visualize the ghastly unfolding scenes, underscores the seductive, evocative powers of a skillfully executed artwork. The poetic spirit of Yoshihide’s magnificently horrible work might have burned all the more brightly because it was so pure, unclouded by other logics and concerns, and though this is shown to be ultimately self-destructive, the painter seems to arrive at a state of diabolic, “superhuman” grace in completing his final work.

Indeed, that Yoshihide is at turns described as “beastly” and “like a lion king” shows that Akutagawa associates pure poetic spirit with a savage nature that goes against the values of civilized society. In a section entitled “Yasei no yobigoe” (The Call of the Wild) in the late essay series Bungei-teki na, amari ni bungei-teki na (1927), Akutagawa addresses this primitive aspect of art by again drawing on the language of the visual arts. He begins by comparing his reactions to a Gauguin\textsuperscript{16} painting of a Tahitian woman\textsuperscript{17}, and to a Renoir\textsuperscript{18} painting of French woman\textsuperscript{19}. While originally, the discordant colors of the Gauguin had struck him as unpleasant he writes that:

Over time, the tan colored woman began to overpower me. The power was as though the Tahitian woman were really staring me down in expectation. But this is not to say that the French woman had lost her appeal. In terms of the beauty of

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Gauguin (1848-1903).

\textsuperscript{17} Figure 5-4.

\textsuperscript{18} Pierre-August Renoir (1841-1919).

\textsuperscript{19} Figure 5-5.
surface images, I still want to depict the shades of the French woman more than the Tahitian one…

I feel this sort of thing resembling contradiction in literature too. Moreover, I feel that there is a Tahitian school and a French school amongst the critical writings of each writer. Gauguin—at least the Gauguin that I saw—depicts the human beast (人間覇) within the tan colored woman. He expresses this more poignantly than the realist painters. Some critics—for example, Masamune Hakuchô—take this expression of the human beast as their measure. Others—for example, Tanizaki Jun’ichiro—generally take as their measure the beauty of the image that includes this human beast, more than its depiction in itself. […] Of course, the Tahitian school and the French school are not mutually exclusive. The difference between them, as are all differences that arise on this earth (この地上に生じたあらゆる差別), are blurry. But noting these two ends, we have to admit at least there is a difference between them. (AZ 15: 201-202)

Through the examples of Gauguin and Renoir paintings Akutagawa identifies two opposing types of artistic appeal, one being the expression of a raw life force, and the other being its expression within a carefully ordered design. He aligns himself with what he metonymically names the “French school”—accurately it seems, given his meticulous and controlled approach to his craft—but the expressionistic energies of the Gauguin painting also tug at him. He describes that it is like “the artistic appetite is being stimulated by something urgent. By something desperately trying to find expression from the bottom of our souls.” (ARZ 15: 203) In “Jigokuhen”, written long before this clear-sighted analysis of the conflicting forces at play in artistic production, Akutagawa already seems to affirm that an absolute aestheticism would come at too great a loss for him, through the doomed Yoshihide character who gives in all too fully to this wild artistic appetite.

Akutagawa examines another artistic master in his earlier work “Gesaku zanmai” (A Life of Gesaku, 1917), which covers a day in the life of the Edo period writer Kyokutei Bakin (1767-1848). Though he uses Bakin’s journal as a reference²⁰, the story is not a historical biography of the famous author. Instead, Akutagawa explores the disconnects

²⁰ Miyoshi Yukio writes that Akutagawa had referred to Bakin nikki shô (1911), compiled by Aeba Köson.
between the quotidian life of an author and his artistic aspirations, through the perspectives of his long-ago counterpart. Gesaku (戯作) was the late Edo period popular fiction genre that Bakin was renowned for, and that Akutagawa includes this term in the title instead of the more general term of ‘literature’ or ‘art’ seems to suggest his understanding that the forms of artistic expression change over time, even as its spirit—and the challenges of pursuing it—remains timeless.

The story opens in the busy public bath as Bakin, age sixty-five, soaks in the tub, quietly relaxing. The sight of his wrinkled skin causes him to think about his long career as a writer and his mortality.

The shadow of ‘death’ crossed the old man’s heart at this moment. But this ‘death’ did not harbor any morbid trace as that which used to frighten him previously. Like the sky reflected in the tub, it was quiet and pleasant, a peaceful feeling of rest. If only one could escape the cares of life and rest in this ‘death’—how wonderful it would be to sleep dreamlessly like a carefree child. It is not just that he is tired of life. He is also tired from suffering through decades of ceaseless creative production. (ARZ 3: 4-5)

But this poetic, philosophical contemplation is interrupted when he is recognized by a reader who promptly joins him in the bath. The man unctuously compliments Bakin’s works, but seems not to realize that he is an imposition. After Bakin finally manages to extricate himself from the conversation and exits the bath to dry off, he overhears someone criticizing his works. He thinks it is the man with a squint who had earlier been looking at him in the bath with distaste. Bakin heads home in a dark mood. He thinks to himself: “What makes me irritated is that first, that the squint-eyed man bears ill feelings towards me. This can’t be helped because regardless of the reason, having someone think ill of me is unpleasant.” (ARZ 3: 14) He tries to dismiss the comments on his literature, knowing better than to let an amateur’s words bother him. “But there is another factor that irritates me. This is that I was put into an offensive position against him. I have always disliked putting myself in such situations. This is the reason I don’t engage in competitions. […] Finally, I
am irritated that the one who put me in such a position is that squint-eyed man. If it had been a higher quality opponent, I no doubt would have felt enough will to fight back against him.” (ARZ 3: 14-15)

Though he laughs to himself, it seems that his ego is bruised. That Bakin tries to belittle his critic as insignificant, even after the time of possible confrontation with him has passed, indicates that his words had in fact had a more lingering impact on him than he would admit, even to himself. Akutagawa thus seems to imply that psychology of the artist is delicate. And, as would be underscored multiple times throughout the tale, this early episode shows that an artist’s aesthetic contemplation is very easily disturbed by immediate annoyances of a less exalted nature.

Bakin returns home to find an editor who has been waiting for him. He badgers him about submitting a piece and will not desist although the writer explains that he is overwhelmed with work. The editor tries to persuade Bakin by talking about the prolific output of other writers. Bakin’s ego is further shaken, though he covers this up by expressing irritation. After lunch, Bakin again retreats into a contemplative mood in his study, perusing the Suikoden (Water Margin), a Chinese vernacular fiction. Like Akutagawa, a voracious reader who incorporated elements from texts from a variety of origins and period into his own stories, Bakin’s imagination too is ignited through books. His thoughts then turn to “the question that always entangled him, of the relationship between himself as an ethicist and himself as an artist.” (ARZ 3: 27) He questions whether his writings should reflect his feelings, or the ethical mores by which he tries to live.

This contemplation is broken by his friend, the painter Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841) who comes to visit. They engage in a conversation about their work and about art. At one point, Kazan laments that he envies the virtuosity of the painters of the past, although he cites an adage that it is the future generations that is to be feared. Bakin replies, “We are stuck between the past and the future generations, unable to move, pressed along
forward.” (ARZ 3: 29) Even as artists, they are not exempt from the reality of time’s passage. Echoing the opening passage about death, this comment seems to pit the immortality of art with the finitude of human existence.

After his visitor departs, Bakin is alone again and at work at his desk, “Gazing at his failed manuscript with the eyes of a captain watching his ship sink from a life raft, quietly fighting against despair.” (ARZ 3: 35) This mood is dispelled though when his grandson bounds into the study and jumps into his lap, greeting him. “‘Grandfather, I’m home!’ ‘Oh, you were early!’ And with these words, the wrinkled face of the author of Hakkenden lit up with a delight that seemed to belong to another person.” (ARZ 3:36) Akutagawa seems to indicate by this that the realities of life are not always unpleasant obligations that hinder art, and that the bonds of life itself could serve as source of strength, giving succor to the artist wearied from his solitary aesthetic battles.

That night, Bakin continues his writing with renewed inspiration. Akutagawa describes Bakin’s delight in his work: “There is a strange joy. Or a deep emotion of entrancing pathos. How can anyone who does not know this emotion understand this spiritual state of infatuation with gesaku? How can they understand the awe-inspiring soul of the gesaku writer?” (ARZ 3: 41) Though Akutagawa uses the Edo-period term ‘gesaku’, that Bakin’s joy in his work is described as a “spiritual state” shows that it transcends the conditions of his era; it seems that Akutagawa writes from his own experiences as a modern writer. Secluded in his study, it might be said that Bakin enters that privileged realm of what Akutagawa has named the ‘poetic spirit’. But outside, life is unfolding relentlessly. Bakin’s wife and daughter-in-law sit at their sewing, conversing quietly. In response to their daughter-in-law’s casual comment that Bakin must be staying up late engrossed in his writing, his wife harshly replies: “What a nuisance. It doesn’t even pay that well.” (ARZ 3: 41)

Though his family does not understand his commitment to gesaku, Akutagawa
seems to indicate that it is nonetheless their continued presence that keeps Bakin from falling into the despair that accompanies artistic creation. As stated at the start, “It is not just that he is tired of life. He is also tired from suffering through decades of ceaseless creative production.” (ARZ 3: 5) But as compared to Yoshihide in “Jigokuhen”, who plunges fully into his art and loses the one human bond that tethers him to his life, Bakin is in a much better state even though he suffers between the conflicting registers of his life as an artist and his life as a material and social being.

“Gesaku zanmai” was written in the earlier stage of Akutagawa’s writing career, before the onset of his own neurosis and depression, but he already empathizes with the much older Bakin’s world-weariness, as well as his hard-won delight in the mastery of his creative calling. Akutagawa understands the joys and perils of a professional artist as shared across time and genre; it is significant that like Akutagawa who is aesthetically inspired by the works of Western artists and in his personal life counted amongst his closest friends the painter Oana Ryûichi (1894-1966), Bakin is enlivened through exchanges with his friend Watanabe Kazan, a painter. In an essay about his friendship with Oana, Akutagawa writes that while his friend’s paintings will be admired by future progeny, his own literature may be forgotten over time. “I say this because I take into account the differences between the plastic arts (造形美術) and literature. (Literature—and especially this thing called the novel, will hardly be in circulation in three hundred years or so.)” (ARZ 14: 264) This suggests Akutagawa’s view that although both the literary and the visual arts express a transcendental aesthetic energy, forms of the linguistic arts are more likely to change over time, while the visual arts—perhaps because of its purer distillation of the ‘poetic spirit’—will continue to be appreciable for a longer, if not indefinite, duration.

That Akutagawa’s idea of art and artists is thusly flexible shows his identification of ‘poetic spirit’ as an essence that pertains throughout time and space in various
manifestations. This is also supported in his stories about the role of art in life which take place in modern times; these too show similar conflicts between individuals’ urges to fully engage in poetic spirit, and their obligations to the more immediately shifting concerns of life. These stories show that the modern age too, can offer atmospheric settings that could serve Akutagawa’s creative visions. “Negi” (Scallions, 1920) is an example. The story begins in the quintessentially modern space of the urban café and features as its heroine a waitress. Again, Akutagawa employs the evocative powers of visual narrative to depict his waitress.

At a certain café in the Jimbô-chô district, there is a waitress named Okimi. She is fifteen or sixteen years old but appears older. With her pale complexion and cool eyes, and slightly up-turned nose, she is a legitimate beauty. Standing in front of the player-piano, her hair split down the middle and fastened with a comb shaped like a forget-me-not, and wearing a white apron, she is like a figure that stepped out of a Takehisa Yumeji image.—For such reasons, it seems that the regulars of this café call her ‘the popular novel’. There are other nicknames. Because of the flower on her comb, ‘the forget-me-not’. Because she looks like an American screen actress, ‘Miss Mary Pickford’.

Okimi is thus presented on the surface as the picture-perfect embodiment of the trendy Japanese modern girl. Incidentally, in his 1924 novel Chijin no ai (Naomi), Tanizaki

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21 This construction of an imagined essence is conceptually similar to the ideological move articulated by Prasenjit Duara in his discussion of the emergence of the modern concept of nationhood. Duara examines the Hegelian view of teleologically progressing history, and Paul Ricouer’s paradigm of temporality as mediated by a sense of continuity, to argue that “nations emerge as the subjects of History just as History emerges as the ground, the mode of being, of the nation.” (Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China, 27.) Akutagawa’s view of the poetic spirit as that which remains even as aesthetic modes change, and of the artist’s identity as its agent, too might be seen as emerging in tandem with his fundamental understanding of the fluctuating and multiple conditions of life within, and against, which art is created. In the way that ‘nation’ becomes the collective subject of a teleological conception of world-History, it might be said that for Akutagata, ‘poetic spirit’ becomes the subject for art conceived of as the creative construction of elements chosen from amongst all possible alternatives. (Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 17-33.)

22 Takehisa Yumeji (1884-1934), a popular Taishô era illustrator.

23 Figure 5-6.

24 The term ‘popular novel’ (通俗小説) came to be used in literary discourse to refer to mass entertainment literature as opposed to high literature.
Jun’ichirō would write that his femme fatale heroine, also working as a café waitress when she is discovered by the story’s protagonist, too resembles Mary Pickford.  

But Okimi is not a typical café waitress who “has been listening to vernacular story tellers, eating sweet-bean desserts, and chasing men since graduating from elementary school”, which is how she haughtily assesses her fellow waitress Omatsu. (ARZ 5: 236) Her inner life is more refined as is shown by the objects in her apartment and her hobbies. Her room is filled with literary magazines and books like “Hototogisu [(The Cuckoo), a poetry magazine], Tōson’s Poetry [a 1904 anthology of the romantic poetry of Shimazaki Tōson], The Life of Masui Sumako [a 1919 biography of the life of the Japanese stage actress], The New Morning Glory Diary [a drama magazine], Carmen [a novel by French author Prosper Mérimée]”, and “several women’s magazines”. (ARZ 5: 236) The walls are covered with an eclectic selection of images cut out from magazines, such as a print of an Edo period woman by the illustrator Kaburaki Kiyokata, Raphael’s Madonna, Kitamura Shikai sculpture of a woman, and a portrait of Beethoven. Okimi’s tastes are thus intellectual and she harbours interest in the greater aesthetic world beyond her lowly station.

But the narrator, who speaks in a chatty tone, begins to uncover the shards of a less glamorous reality that plague her even in her sanctuary. He observes: “Against the wall by the window is a desk covered with Indian cloth. I will call this a desk for practical purposes, but it is nothing more than an old tea table.” (ARZ 5: 236) There is also a single artificial flower cast charmingly in a slender vase, but it is described as taken from the café where it would be gracing a customer’s table were it not lacking a petal. Furthermore, Okimi’s apparent worldliness is put in question when the narrator reveals that the image she believes to be of Beethoven is in fact that of the American president Woodrow Wilson. But he concludes, “It should already be clear beyond question how rich in artistic color is Okimi’s life of interests.” (ARZ 5: 237)

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25 Figure 5-7.
It seems that Akutagawa posits himself as this narrator, as he prefaces the story by stating that tomorrow is the deadline and that he must hurry to write his story, and once inside the body of the story itself, he complains that none of his novels are to be found amongst Okimi’s volumes. Akutagawa seems to bring himself further into the story at this point, stating that while he cannot but smile at Okimi’s wistful and sentimental tastes, “included in my gentle laughter is not a bit of malice.” (ARZ 5: 238) He notes that apart from the books and the pictures, in her apartment are the cooking tools needed in her daily life. “The tough reality of actual life in Tokyo (世知辛い東京の実生活) as represented in these tools had oppressed her who knew how many times. But seen through the mist of tears, even a malodorous life could open up into a world of beauty. To escape the oppression of actual life, Okimi would hide herself in the artistic pathos of her tears.” (ARZ 5: 238) Through an analysis of Okimi, Akutagawa seems to explain his own tendencies to escape into the artistic sphere when the demands of his actual life dampen his spirits. After expressing sympathy for his heroine’s struggles against “malodorous” reality, he comments: “If I’m not careful, I too might get too sentimental. Me, who is said by the critics of the world to lack emotion and be thoroughly intellectual.” (ARZ 5: 239) Akutagawa seems to imply that despite such criticisms—which may or may not bother him, suggesting a mindframe akin to Bakin’s in his reaction towards his critics in “Gesaku zanmai”—his attraction to beauty is not just an intellectual pose, but a more personally felt and emotionally rooted necessity. To have recourse to aesthetic grace is integral to his sustenance.

Okimi pines for Tanaka, a young man she meets at the café. She is nervously enthused when he asks her out for her next day off, but the narrator is critical of Tanaka, whom he describes as a flaneur of sorts.

He is a nameless—well, he is an artist, I suppose. This is because Tanaka is a talented man who writes poetry, plays violin, paints in oils, acts in dramas, is skilled at poetic card games, and can play the Satsuma lute, and no one can ascertain which of these is his main occupation and which of these are his hobbies.
Accordingly, his actor’s face is flat, his hair glistens unctuously like oil paints, his voice is gentle like a violin, his words are as considerate as poetry, he is as efficient in seducing women with words as he is with his cards, and his manner of refusing to pay back his debts as virile and active as the Satsuma lute. (ARZ 5: 240)

The narrator’s skepticism about the character of this dilettante would reflect Akutagawa’s seriousness about the suffering that a true artist must endure. But in her state of infatuation, Okimi imagines him to be full of potential. “For Okimi, Tanaka was not much different from Ali Baba, who knows the spell to open the doors of the treasure vault. What unknown realms of delight would appear when the spell is intoned?” (ARZ 5: 241)

This tone already sets up the inevitable denouement of the story. On the day of their date, Okimi is excited to set off walking hand in hand with her suitor. “Tears of emotions spring to her eyes as they do when she reads Hototogisu. Seen through these tears of feeling, the beauty of the streets of the Ogawa-chô, Awaji-chô, and Suda-chô were beyond question. […] To Okimi’s eyes, everything seems to shine and sing the great joys of love, shining and continuing to the ends of the world. Tonight alone, the stars above are not cold.” (ARZ 5: 245) But at that moment, the couple passes a storefront grocery where a variety of vegetables are on display. Her eye happens to catch the crudely printed price tag attached to a pile of scallions. “In this day of inflation, scallions at four sen were a rare find. Staring at this blatant tag, the actuality of life (実生活) that had been submerged in Okimi’s happy heart drunk on love and art awoke from its sleep. […] The roses, rings, nightingales, and the flag of the Mitsukoshi department store disappeared instantaneously from her sight.” (ARZ 5: 245) Okimi pauses and buys two bunches of scallions as Tanaka gazes in foolish wonder at her smiling face.

Though the tale might be read as reflecting the “defeat” of aestheticism at the hands of an undeniable material consciousness, as Akutagawa’s œuvre was derided by Marxist critics at large, the text does not end at this point. In an endnote, Akutagawa exclaims that he is at last finished with his story. He writes that Okimi went home
uneventfully that night after dinner with Tanaka, and that she will probably keep seeing him unless she changed her occupation. He addresses her from his narrative remove: “Goodbye Okimi. Go forth energetically into the world tonight, as you did that night, heartily—and be assailed by the critics.” (ARZ 5: 247) Akutagawa thus manages to both acknowledge the pressing demands of material existence, and examine how artistic sentiments therein can be defended in full knowledge of, and in defiance to, the conditions of reality. In the final scene of the story, Okimi is depicted as beautiful as ever, and she is smiling when she turns to face Tanaka after purchasing her scallions, an undecidedly quotidian article the purchase of which represents her admission of material circumstances. It seems she is indeed still capable of “going forth energetically” in her artistic ideals. Akutagawa’s endnote serves as a jaunty snub against the critics he expects would deride his obstinate aesthetic values.

In an essay entitled “Puroretaria bungaku ron” (Theory on Proletarian Literature, 1924), Akutagawa writes that he is not opposed to the rise of a class conscious literature, but that he questions the nature of a proletarian literature. He argues that “because of the artistic considerations of form, one can defend the proletarian spirit and be fundamentally unable to express it. Even in novels and plays that are said to be free on this point, just as it is impossible to emphasize the proletarian spirit when the central theme is love, it is besides the point to deem something bourgeois art just because the proletarian spirit is not explicitly expressed.” (ARZ 12: 31) Despite his own understanding of novels as able to encompass “everything and anything”, Akutagawa points out that artistic forms—which are fundamentally necessary in literature as such—and ideological emphasis are so far impossible to cohesively frame together.

Leaving aside the question of what exactly an ideological literature should be, Akutagawa writes,

[With its emphasis on blatant or covert propaganda, even if proletarian literature says that its goal is to realize a proletarian society in the future and that it is only a temporary didactic means towards this end, [this implies that] in the future there will be a venerable proletarian literature but for the time being, it is merely in
preparation. This does not justify the theory that [current proletarian literature] does not have to be of good quality. […] It has to be something that has the power to strike our heart. […]

It has been three or four years since I have started to hear the cries of proletarian literature in the literary world, but as far as I see, it seems that a proletarian literature capable of striking our hearts has still not appeared. (ARZ 12: 32)

The debate about socialism and proletarian literature had been gaining momentum in the literary world from around the late 1910s as per Akutagawa’s designation, and would become increasingly dominant through the appearance of theorists like Aono Suekichi and Nakano Shigeharu in the 1920s. They too would debate the proper literary value and form of a writing that would artistically express the spirit of a class revolution. Despite Akutagawa’s reputation as a ‘bourgeois’ aesthete, his critical awareness was very much in tune with such intellectual developments of his era.

To revisit a statement cited earlier, Akutagawa has observed that “[w]hat binds us is not class alone.” (ARZ 15: 193) As this section has attempted to show, Akutagawa’s literary project aimed to express the multiplicity of fluctuating factors that determine human lives and values, and particularly the position of aesthetic values within this chaotic plenitude. He did not deny the pressing demands of material awareness as amongst these factors.

Translating Cultures and Gods: A Critique of Modernity

As Seiji Lippit writes, “Akutagawa had been regarded by many as the archetype of the man of letters (bunjin) and a representative of the ideology of self-cultivation, which placed almost limitless faith in the value of literature and “culture” generally.” Lippit quotes Aeba Takeo and identifies that “for some Taishô writers and thinkers, what the concept of ‘self-cultivation’ in fact signified was a rejection of a particularist notion of


27 See Lippit, Topographies of Japanese Modernism, 41.
culture and a desire for universality.”

Writers of various persuasions, like the Shirakaba writer Mushanokōji Saneatsu (1885-1976) and the intellectual philosopher Abe Jirō (1883-1959) endorsed a self-identity that was rooted not just in Japanese traditions, but in an open and universalist perspective that reflected ideas and values from multiple cultural sources. Indeed, the broad range of Akutagawa’s literary and artistic influences and sources shows a cosmopolitan ease within a global cultural outlook. But he was also interested in investigating the nature and origins of this intellectual eclecticism.

Thinkers and writers from previous decades, such as Mori Ogai, Natsume Sōseki, and Kinoshita Mokutarō, had already been commenting on Japanese culture’s incomplete understandings of imported Western values over the course of its modernization, but the rise of Marxist criticism in the Taishō period occasioned further questioning of Japan’s supposed cultural universalism. An anonymous editorial from 1922 in the Tane maku hito journal, a socialist publication, phrases this renewed skepticism about Japanese intellectuals’ purported cosmopolitanism:

An art that has no nationality and is universal is being created under the bourgeois mentality. The best examples of this, in political terms, are the Hague Peace Conference, League of Nations, and the Institute of Pacific Relations initiatives and in terms of art, a bourgeois universalism means multi-culturalism. [...] This means taking only the commonalities amongst the [different cultures’] bourgeois arts, and locking oneself into the tower of artistic absolutism.

This suggests that elements in artworks that go beyond common ideals—such as the specific

28 Ibid., 41-42.

29 Mushanokōji Saneatsu declared, “We are psychologically and spiritually [seishin-teki ni] children of humanity [jinrui no ko]. We are children of the world to an extent that cannot be felt by people older than us. This is because there are great men [idai naru hito] in foreign countries, and they provide support and harmony for our spirits.” (“Jinrui kara kuru eiyōbun”, Shirakaba, September 1911, 161.) Abe Jirō’s Santarō no nikki (1914-1918) stated, “The fundamental motivation that drove us to seek cultivation was a desire to achieve a universal content.” (Qtd. in Lippit, Topographies of Japanese Modernism, 42.)

30 See previous chapters.

social, historical, and material aspects of each work—are ignored, and as a result, the aspects that carry across the cultural differences are superficial, divorced from ground realities in the closed sphere of “artistic absolutism”. The multiculturalism of Japanese intellectual culture, the argument alleges, is therefore just theoretical and aesthetic, lacking true understandings of difference.

As the previous section has reviewed, Akutagawa was a skeptic of a singular view of history, and he borrowed freely from a variety of historical facts and settings to serve his artistic needs, in effect, ‘aestheticizing history’. The notion of Japan’s modernity as having reached a global level, such that its people could now lay claim to fully universalist identities, too was not above suspicion for Akutagawa despite his being an apparent embodiment of this phenomena. Had Japan really had reached a level of universalism, or was this cosmopolitanism superficial? Akutagawa analyzes the nature and origins of Japan’s universalism through stories that ‘historicize’ this ideal, focusing on historical periods when the seeds of multi-culturalist values seemed to be sown.

Akutagawa’s 1920 story "Butôkai" (The Ball) is set in the era called the Meiji Enlightenment period from the 1870s into the 1880s. At the time, Japan took on an ambitious mission to learn and incorporate modern Western culture and ideas, after centuries of restricted contact with other nations. "Butôkai" is based on the short story "Un Bal à Yedo" (A Ball in Edo) by the French writer Julien Viaud, who had published essays and fiction under the pen-name of Pierre Loti. Written in 1886, the story was included in Loti’s 1889 collection of writings entitled Japoneries d’Automne (Japanese Ways of Autumn). Viaud had traveled to Japan as well as to many other foreign countries in his capacity as a naval lieutenant, and “Un Bal à Yedo” is semi-autobiographical. It recounts a Frenchman's impressions of an opulent ball held at the Rokumeikan, a Western-style building in Tokyo that was built in 1883 to serve as a space for entertaining foreign dignitaries.
The Rokumeikan had been conceived of by the foreign minister Inoue Kaoru who had hoped that the building, designed by the British architect Josiah Conder (1852-1920) who equipped it with gas lights, and the fancy parties held there in full Western regalia, would convince visitors that Japan was civilized enough to join the ranks of the world's leading nations despite its later arrival to the arena of international politics. However, Inoue's eagerness to gain foreign acceptance by imitating European customs and norms eventually earned him the scorn of the Japanese public, and following the minister's resignation in 1887, the Rokumeikan too fell into decline. Indeed, if Loti's account of the ball he attended there is any indication, Inoue's tactics for gaining the respect of Western countries by aping their traditions were bound to fail.

Loti is for the most part unimpressed by the Rokumeikan, and he ridicules the Japanese guests in their awkward attempts to appear at ease in formal European clothing and surroundings. Yet, though he deems the ball an "immense farce officielle"32, he is intrigued by a young Japanese girl who speaks French and ballroom dances with him passably well. Ultimately though, she remains an object of his Orientalist gaze as he idly imagines her going home to a house of paper and bamboo. He is even unsure of her name, and remembers her vaguely as "une demoiselle Miogonitchi ou une Karakamoko, je ne sais plus bien."33 Loti ends the story with a few remarks about his lack of cruel intentions behind the disparaging comments he makes throughout the tale. He writes that the Japanese are marvelous imitators who are very rapidly learning European customs, and that one of their principle strengths as a people lay in their power of adaptation. In closing, he muses that perhaps future generations of Japanese will be able to look back upon this record and be amused by this awkward stage of their modern cultural development. This indicates his expectation, however tinged with irony, that Japan will someday attain a firmer sense of its

33 Ibid., 485.
own modern national identity, and claim its place as a subject of world-Historical discourse.\textsuperscript{34}

“Un Bal à Yedo” was translated into Japanese in Meiji 25 (1893) by Iida Hatanoki and in Taisho 3 (1914) by Takase Toshio, and Akutagawa's story is said to be based on the latter version.\textsuperscript{35} Akutagawa too focuses on the encounter between the French officer and the young Japanese girl he dances with, but he narrates their time together from the point of view of the girl, whom he names Akiko. By empowering her with her own perspective and situating her as his main character, Akutagawa's textual reworking might be seen as a confident response to Loti's call for future Japanese readers to reflect upon his account of the early state of Japanese modernity in 1886 in light of the cultural progress made since then. The Rokumeikan in Akutagawa’s story might then appear to be a space of Japanese modernity in its early stages, wherein different cultures were beginning to mingle in camaraderie. The charged but friendly dynamics between the French officer and Akiko could be said to show Akutagawa's approval of Japan's enthusiastic absorption of Western customs in the quest for modernization. Considered on its own, the story can in fact seem to endorse a reading that finds in it the happy manifestation of Japan’s ability to adapt different cultural elements into an optimistic, cosmopolitan outlook.

But a reading of Akutagawa's portrayal of the relationship between Akiko—or by synecdoche, a modernizing Japan—and the French officer—or the Western world as the enlightened realm to impress and aspire towards—as mutually respectful and positive starts to lose clarity when considering Loti, the narrator of “Un Bal à Yedo”, as not just an artistic starting point outside of the "Butôkai" text, but present within it as Akiko's dancing partner.

\textsuperscript{34} For a detailed overview of the concept of nationhood as necessary in modernity, see Duara, \textit{Rescuing History from the Nation}.

\textsuperscript{35} According to the annotations appended to the story in the \textit{ARZ} v.5, 343, Akutagawa had used Takase Toshio’s 1914 translation, although Ebii Eiji examines the possible relationship between the 1893 translation and commentaries by Iida Hatanoki, with Akutagawa's version of the story. See Ebii Eiji, “‘Bumei kaika’ to Taisho no kümusei”, \textit{Akutagawa Ryûnosuke sakuhin ron shûsei}, v.4—\textit{Butôkai: kaika-ki gendaimono no sekai}, ed.Shimizu Yasutsugu (Tokyo: Kanrin shobô, 1999), 52-27.
As literary writers, both Loti and Akutagawa create their own stories within the space of aesthetic imagination, and “Butōkai” can be seen as co-existing with, rather than over-writing, the earlier work.

For example, rather than suppress passages from Loti’s text that portray the Japanese in an unflattering light, Akutagawa instead foils their sting by focusing on Akiko’s impressions. For example, although in Loti's story the Frenchman stares at the Japanese girl's feet because they “turn inwards in the old style that was considered elegant in Japan, and so they had a certain heaviness”36, Akutagawa has Akiko interpret her partner's downwards gaze as one of admiration directed at her new shoes. Because of this misperception, Akiko’s charming confidence does not flag. Similarly, though Loti consistently makes condescending comments about his partner's dress being "a bit provincial" and about the other Japanese guests looking "un peu Louis XV"37 and of a "an old-fashioned style"in his story,38 Akutagawa's French character’s comparison of Akiko to a painting by Watteau, an eighteenth-century painter, is interpreted as praise by her. Akutagawa accentuates Akiko's appealing naïveté and protects her aesthetic aspirations by leaving her immune to these veiled insults.

Akutagawa's story begins with a description of Akiko's excitement at attending her first formal ball. She is nervous but proud of how beautiful she looks in her fancy evening dress: she notices that a Chinese official wearing his hair in the traditional long queue and a young Japanese man in a tailcoat stare at her in astonishment as they pass her on the staircase: "Her innocently sweet rose-colored ball gown, the light blue ribbon arranged tastefully on her neck, and the single rose fragrantly gracing her thick hair—in truth, Akiko's appearance that night represented the full and unreserved beauty of a Japanese girl of the

36 Pierre Loti, "Un Bal à Yedo" (A Ball in Edo), in Oeuvres Complettes de Pierre Loti (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1893-1911), v.6, 484.
37 Ibid., 478.
38 Ibid., 488.
Enlightenment." (ARZ 5: 249) Her self-consciousness is heightened in her new outfit, and when she greets the duke hosting the ball, "she does not miss the momentary expression of joyous astonishment that crossed his face." (ARZ 5:249)

However, she is not unflappably confident, for the French officer’s (Akutagawa does not mention him by name) invitation to dance causes her to blush involuntarily. Waltzing together, she notices him apparently contrasting her skillful Western dancing with the exoticized images he seems to have held of her as a girl from an alien culture. She sees him stealing glimpses of her feet clad in new, rose-colored dancing shoes and interpreting this to be a sign of approval, she enlivens her steps. Akiko’s fleeting insecurity about how her dance partner sees her are seem more rooted in feminine wile rather than in a sense of cultural inferiority, and wanting to be reassured of her beauty, she exclaims upon the beauty of European women. The French officer, not missing this subtext, tells her that Japanese women, especially herself, are as pretty as Western ones. Akiko expresses her desire to go to Paris one day, but the officer assures her that balls are the same everywhere. His light world-weariness is lost on her, and she enjoys her evening of beauty. Later on, the two characters watch a display of fireworks in the night sky, and he poetically compares their fleeting brilliance to life itself. Akutagawa seems to underscore here his own awareness of the interminable passage of time and the evanescence of the events within it.

The story ends with a coda that takes place in 1918, more than three decade after the ball. The now matronly Akiko recounts her memory of her evening at the Rokumeikan to a young writer that she meets on a train. Being of the present generation that looked back on the Meiji period with nostalgia rather than real familiarity, "he could not help but feel a great fascination at hearing this story in her own voice." (ARZ 5:256) When he inquires about the name of the French officer she had danced with and she informs him that it had been Julian Viaud, he recognizes this name and is excited. He asks her, "So it was Loti, who wrote Madame Chrysanthème?", citing another Orientalist work of the French author.
Akiko, however, is adamant about maintaining her own version of the story and denies ever having known anyone named Loti. It is not clear whether she truly is not apprised of Viaud’s career as a writer, or whether she is “writing a beautiful history”, as the old professor in Akutagawa’s earlier story “Saigô Takamori” phrases it, instead of adhering to a conventionally objective one.

In the original version of his story, Akutagawa had in fact intended for Akiko to mention that her dance partner, Julian Viaud, was better known as Pierre Loti, the author of Madame Chrysanthème. But he soon revised this so that intentionally or not, Akiko does not recognize the name of Loti, suggesting that Akiko/Japan ultimately could not challenge his story about her, because she had not actualized the potentials that he had seen as possible for her when they had met. Ebii Eiji writes:

That she does not know of Loti sheds light on her life in the years after that night at the Rokumeikan, and the fact that with the end of the ‘Rokumeikan Era’ she returned to a Japanese, ‘Edo’-era worldview, and became an ‘old woman’[.] […] The path to a Parisian that she had envisioned when she was seventeen was clearly cut off, and her youth and romanticism were locked inside the Rokumeikan.

But perhaps, like Okimi in “Negi” who maintains her artistic aspirations despite knowing of the gap between these and her actual circumstances, Akiko’s denial of knowing Loti could in fact be a willful defense of her aesthetic idealism against what she knows to be a reality clouded with less ideal facts. “Butôkai” was published on the same date as “Negi” (January 1, 1920), and some overlap might be seen between the two willfully idealistic heroines. Akiko’s conceptual retreat into the aesthetic realm is also refracted through the young writer's familiarity with Loti as an author, although he has never known the romance of the Rokumeikan days during which Viaud had lived and written under this pseudonym. Akutagawa seems to indicate by this that one outcome of Japan’s attempts at incorporating multiple foreign influences from the Meiji period onwards was a cosmopolitan attitude towards literature and art, despite the failure to establish a similarly confident eclecticism in

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39 Ebii, “‘Bumei kaika’ to Taisho no kûmusei”, 50.
the value systems of its people. Even his own reference to Pierre Loti’s French work in
the writing of this story seems to attest to the text-based nature of his supposed
cosmopolitanism.

Despite his ambivalent views about the results of the modernization process in Japan,
Akutagawa refrains from suggesting how the Meiji period Japanese should have handled it
instead. It could be because of this that he downplays in his story the presence of the
Chinese guests who arrive in their native costumes, to whom Loti in his version devotes
several passages of praise. Loti describes them as “the beautiful Northern race, who have a
noble grace in their gaits under their bright silks. They prove their good taste in preserving
their national costumes, their long robes magnificently pinned and embroidered, their long
drooping mustaches, and their queues.” 40 They signify to Loti a proud, cautious resistance
to the sudden adoption of modern Western customs and ideas. He is amused by the
Japanese guests who, in marked contrast to them, enthusiastically attempt Western outfits
and dances. They strike him as “a bit too gilded, a bit too colorful”. 41 When Loti and his
dancing partner step out onto the balcony to watch the fireworks, they find themselves faced
with a group of Chinese guests already gathered there, and he records that "We regarded
each other with cold curiosity, belonging to absolutely different worlds that would never mix
or understand the other" 42, including the Japanese girl in his first-person plural while
regarding the Chinese as a mysterious, unknowable other. Though all who are present
behold the same grand sight of the fireworks in the nighttime sky, this clear demarcation
situates the modernizing Japanese in a curious half-way position between the modern West
of Europe and the pre-modern East as represented by the Chinese.

Ebii Eiji suggests that it was because of the anti-Chinese sentiments prevalent since


41 Ibid., 479.

42 Ibid., 489.
the Sino-Japanese War, and the general Japanese sense of national superiority at having become a modernized nation, that Takase Toshio who had translated Loti's story in 1914 had entirely cut out these passages comparing China's resistance to Westernization to Japan's foolish efforts to become superficially Western. If Akutagawa had used only Takase's translation in writing his story, his omission of the musings on the Chinese guests would be devoid of any particular significance. But if he had also had access to Iida Hatanoki's earlier translation from 1893 which does not censor Loti's text, or better yet a copy of Loti's story in the original French, his exclusion of these passages would have to be attributed to a personal choice, akin to Akiko’s professed ignorance of Loti.

While the culture of resistance that the Chinese embody in Loti’s story might have been feasible at the time of its writing when it was not yet certain that modernization could not be successfully refused in parts of the world that chose not to compromise their traditional values, by the Taishô period of Akutagawa's literary activities, the impossibility of such an intellectual posture and social policy was already becoming apparent. China had already suffered incursions from the imperial nations, and in order to survive in the changed global climate, it was undergoing social upheavals and revolution. The nation was far from unaffected by modernity, and its plight could not have seemed any more preferable to Akutagawa than Japan's in the Taishô period, despite the cultural identity crisis that was starting to stir its social consciousness.

Akutagawa is drawn to the cosmopolitan spirit of the "East-West eclecticism " (和洋折衷) that he feels had been budding in the Meiji period when the direction of Japan’s future evolution was still uncertain. The story "Kaika no otto" (Husband of the Enlightenment, 1919) for example, opens with the narrator at a museum exhibition “on the

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43 Ebii, “ ‘Bumei kaika’ to Taisho no kûmusei”, 55.

44 Ebii Eiji examines the Meiji translator Iida's pointed commentaries that accompany the uncut text. Iida remarks upon the nobility of the Chinese who were able to resist indiscriminate Westernization and urges the Japanese to follow their example and exercise more caution in adopting new customs. Ibid.
He happens to meet Count Honda, an elderly gentleman acquaintance of his, and together they examine the various prints and photographs also on display. They pause in front of an old map of Tokyo, admiring how it "manifested a certain type of East-West eclecticism that was beautifully harmonious in a way specific to that period. The arts have since lost this harmony. The city of Tokyo in which we live too has lost this harmony." (ARZ 4:178) Observing the mix of traditional woodblock prints and the Western style etchings around them, Honda says, “It’s as if that era—which cannot be defined as either Edo or Tokyo, and like the conjoining of night and day—rises before my eyes.” (ARZ 4:179) Made nostalgic by the images around him, Honda begins to narrate a story from his youth which had been during the height of the Meiji Enlightenment era. It is significant that the story begins amidst an expressly aesthetic space; Honda’s reveries transport them to a different world, in which a sentimental idealism—since discarded, Akutagawa seems to suggest—had existed in Japan. That they are at a special exhibit about the Enlightenment era further emphasizes how distant that era must have seemed from their Taishō period present although it has only been less than half a century since, and older individuals like Honda are still alive to remember it.

Honda’s story is about his friend Miura, an aristocrat and firm adherent to the new Enlightenment values imported from the West. Miura refuses to be introduced to prospective marriage partners as was customary in Japan, especially for someone of his social class. He instead holds out for "a marriage of amour". (ARZ 4: 184) Honda, out of consideration for his friend’s happiness advises: “If you must examine your feelings so thoroughly before you do anything, you will be barely be able to move or stand. So why not accept that the world is not ideal, and settle for someone passable?” (ARZ 4: 184) Akutagawa seems to indicate the path of Japan’s modernization through this advice for prioritizing expedience over true satisfaction. Miura refuses though, and continues to seclude himself with his foreign books. It is while Honda, a diplomat, is posted abroad that
Miura gets engaged to a girl he happens to meet while strolling at a picturesque temple. Honda is a bit disturbed that this romantic scenario is a bit too picture-perfect, but dismisses his doubts because his friend is thrilled by his "amour".

Honda begins to suspect that Miura's wife—whose energetic mannerisms and flirtatious gaze upon their first meeting had caused Honda to exclaim, in a not entirely flattering tone: "You should have been born in some place like France rather than here in Japan!" (ARZ 4: 188)—is having an extramarital affair. Miura too becomes jaded as he gradually discovers that his wife is indeed cheating on him with multiple partners. At the end of the tale when the two friends meet after an interval, Miura says that he has divorced his wife. He starts to mention the foolishness of the romantic ideals he had held, but Honda finishes the sentiment for him. "Indeed, it may have been a childish dream. But this project of Enlightenment we are pursuing as our goal, too might be revealed as a childish dream in a hundred years." (ARZ 4: 201) At the end of the narrative, Honda and the original narrator leave the exhibition space in contemplative silence, "as though [they] were ghosts who had stepped out from the past." (ARZ 4:201)

Akutagawa's story shows that while the early Meiji Japanese had envisioned a world in which the values of Western civilization are seamlessly integrated into their Eastern realities, the Taishō period Japanese are already looking back at the idealism of the Enlightenment era as a thing of the past. It is only in "ghostly" form that the past can be recalled. Showing that Miura's flowery ideals of "amour", born from reading Western literature, were unable to be actualized in the soil of his Japanese life, Akutagawa seems to present the optimism of the Enlightenment as having been founded on a romantic vision, rather than true critical engagement with reality. By this, he casts the same doubt unto the universalist values in vogue in the Taishō period.

However, Akutagawa seems ambivalent as to how different notions and concepts from abroad could have been truly grasped by the Japanese without a fundamental negation
of their own value systems. He does not specify whether a cosmopolitan acceptance of all cultural differences can be meaningfully sustainable over time and if so, what form such a harmonic synthesis would take. His stories explore how an aesthetic universalism, in which the poetic spirit of foreign artworks and texts can be appreciated by viewers or readers from elsewhere, does not guarantee similarly cosmopolitan experiences. The ideal of universalism is revealed to be nebulous upon closer inspection, and Akutagawa focuses on the cultural junctures in which its seams are revealed.

Thus, in addition to the Meiji Enlightenment project, another historical setting that particularly interests him is the Japanese reaction to Christianity as introduced by Jesuit missionaries before the prohibition of foreign religions became the Edo shogunate government’s policy in 1612. This distant period of Japan’s early contact with Western, Christian ideologies presented Akutagawa with yet another grounds on which to explore the dynamics of cross-cultural exchange. In stories set in this context, Akutagawa could examine Japanese characters’ reactions to the new religious ideas at a remove from the discourses of politics, progress, and profit that more overtly and specifically color Japanese-Western contact in the Meiji period and beyond. While power dynamics in fact exist in all encounters, those that prevail in his pre-modern stories are different from his modern ones and allow Akutagawa to examine more closely the other aspects involved in cross-cultural interactions.

An example of such a work is "Kamigami no bishô" (The Smiles of the Gods, 1922). The story unfolds in the sixteenth century at the Nanbanji Catholic Church in Kyoto, and its main character is Padre Organtino, a Jesuit missionary. Despite the growing numbers of converts to his church, he has an uneasy suspicion that his followers do not truly understand or accept the Christian God, who is called “Deusu” (written 泥鴉須) by the

45 Organtino is based on the real historical figure of Gnecchi Soldi Organtino who had arrived in Japan in 1570. Kanda Yumiko, annotations to the text, ARZ 8: 340.
Japanese. Organtino retires to the chapel to pray and regain inner strength. He says in prayer: “There is a strange power in the mountains and forests, as well as the cities, of this land. This power somehow is thwarting my mission.” (ARZ 191) He is then greeted by a mirage of a "Japanese Bacchanalia" wherein the naked, native gods of Japan dance by firelight. Although he does not recognize this, it is a scene from the foundational Shinto myth of Japan in which the supreme sun goddess Amaterasu-Ôhirumemuchi is lured out of hiding from her cave by the other gods so that light is restored to the world. When he revives, “Organitno could not comprehend the meaning of his vision. But it was clear that the vision was not sent to him by Deusu.” (ARZ 8: 195)

The next day while strolling in the garden of the church, Organtino is approached by an old Japanese man who identifies himself as one of the many native deities of Japan. He tries to explain to Organtino that the Christian mission in Japan will ultimately fail because of the Japanese tendency to recast all foreign gods and knowledge into their own unique frame of reference. Many teachings have come to Japan from overseas—those of Confucius, Mencius, Chuang-tzu, and others from China, as well as of Siddhartha's Buddhism from India—only to be subsumed into the structure of traditional Japanese worldviews. The old man also states that from the time of Kakinomoto Hitomaro's poetry in the eight century, even the writing system imported from China underwent an alteration to become a phonetic alphabet that transcribed the syllables of Japanese words, and that in the process of assimilation into the Japanese linguistic sphere, the Chinese characters lost their original Chinese significations. The old god explains: “Instead of conquering us, [Chinese writing] was conquered by us.” (ARZ 8: 199) He tells Organtino that the strength of the Japanese spirit lies in “the power not to destroy [other teachings] but to remake (造り変へろ) them.” (ARZ 8:201) He warns Organtino that the Western concept of an omnipotent Deus too will be ‘adapted’ by the Japanese, instead of being ‘adopted’ as a challenge to the cultural status quo of polytheism.
In an epilogue that Akutagawa later deleted when the story was anthologized in 1923, he makes this impasse more explicit. That night, after meeting with the nameless Japanese deity, Organtino is praying in the chapel when he sees a mural of Christ at the Last Supper come to life. He finds that the face of Saint Peter resembles the old Japanese god he had seen that afternoon. Much to his horror, the Christ figure also turns into that of a beautiful woman. The twelve disciples chant "Hosannah to Ôhirumemuchi", praising the Japanese sun goddess. (ARZ 8: 207) This seems to confirm Organtino’s fear that the Japanese in fact do not understand the concept of the Christian God as monotheistic, and they conceive of ‘God’ in terms of the pantheism that is native to them.

By this, Akutagawa seems to show that the plurality embedded in the Japanese worldview is such that when new ideas and terms are introduced to it, they become absorbed into its structure and become a part of it. While in linear logic, an unadulterated adherence to the notion of a single omnipotent God necessarily rules out the coexistence of many minor gods, Akutagawa suggests that the uniquely multiple nature of the Japanese perspective is able to accommodate the new concept without giving up the older ones. That the Last Supper mural transforms into a scene of the Japanese gods gathering shows Organtino—literally—how within the Japanese gaze, foreign world-pictures are transformed into something fundamentally different from the original.

The poet Hitomaro's usage of Chinese characters to create an original writing system for the Japanese language is presented as analogous to Japanese culture's appropriation of various foreign teachings. Language is thus conceived of as reflecting and representing the ideas and cultural premises it is rooted in, and Akutagawa seems to have perceived that new concepts are rendered comprehensible in Japanese by negotiating their position within this multidimensional framework. Lydia Liu’s concept of translingual practice helps to articulate this process. She defines translingual practice as “the process by which new words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and
acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter’s contact/collision with the guest language. Meanings, therefore, are not so much ‘transformed’ when concepts pass from the guest language to the host language as invented within the local environment of the latter.” Indeed, it could be said that in “Kami gami no bishô”, the Christian God acquires legibility in the Japanese worldview only by being reinvented in terms of the Japanese host language.

Under the model of translingual practice—which considers ‘host’ and ‘guest’ languages rather than ‘target’ and ‘source’ languages—the notion of ‘universal’ meanings becomes highly fraught, because all such meanings must inevitably exist within the conditions of the host language. Organtino realizes with much shock that even his almighty ‘God’, the metaphysical basis of his worldview, is not exempt from this. Liu writes, “the crossing of analytical categories over language boundaries, like any other crossing or transgression, is bound to entail confrontations charged with contentious claims to power. To be sure, universality is neither true nor false, but any intellectual claim to it should be rigorously examined in the light of its own linguistic specificity and sources of authority.”

Akutagawa too seems to grasp the conceptual significance of ‘analytical’ terms bearing on meta-linguistic premises, such as ‘God’, which must contend with the analytical terms present in the host language to secure a position within its matrix. This is further examined in the story “Ogin” from later in 1922. The story is set after the 1612 ban on Christianity, and the title character, along with her step-parents, are put to torture to recant their alien faith. Ogin complies, stating that: “my dead parents who did not know this religion are now fallen in the inheruno [inferno]. I cannot bear to enter the gates of haraiso [paradise] by myself. I must follow my parents to the depths of hell.” (ARZ 9: 215)


47 Ibid., 7.
Through Ogin, whose Japanese heritage does not allow her to die for the sake of a foreign god, Akutagawa might be pointing out that a nation’s historical roots cannot be entirely overcome by the importation of new value systems.

But “Kami gami no bishô” is not just about his skepticism of the universality of monotheistic logic. He also examines aesthetic terms as another grounds for translilingual translation. At one point, the unnamed Japanese deity tells Organtino that:

four or five days ago, I met a Greek sailor who had landed on Western shores. That man was not a god. He was a mere human. I sat with this sailor on a rock under the moonlight and heard various stories from him. Tales about being captured by one-eyed gods, a goddess who turns humans into pigs, mermaids with beautiful voices—do you know the name of this man? From the moment he met me, this man turned into a native of this land. He now calls himself Yuriwaka (百合若). (ARZ 8:202)

Readers familiar with Western literary canons would immediately recognize this as alluding to the tale of Ulysses. Upon entering Japan, the story was eventually turned into Kabuki and jôruri plays, which reformatted the story of the Greek sailor to fit in to the conventions of Japanese drama. The Japanese appreciated the legend of Ulysses not as a Greek epic poem—that is, not through the conventions of Greek lyricism and narrative, or the associations implied in the narrative—but as an adventure story that could be appreciated through their literary sensibilities. The hybrid result of ‘Yuriwaka’, while substantively different from both the Western ‘Ulysses’ and the heroes of homegrown Japanese drama, has attained its own value within the space of aesthetic appreciation. Akutagawa seems to propose through this reference that the story of the fiercely individual warrior, who fights his way home to his true love using his logic and cunning, of course presume certain culture-specific values—such as of the ‘individual’, ‘logic’, etc.—but that in the space of art these too are able to be appreciated. Even if they are not fully internalized as such by Japanese audiences, they are understood from within their frame of reference.

48 Annotation for Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, "Kami gami no bishô", ARZ 8: 343-344.
Though Akutagawa thus returns again to the theme of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, he indicates that the appreciation of foreign art is also mediated by the dynamics of the translingual process. The view of the rich hybridity that can result from it is explored more centrally in the whimsical story “Nagasaki shôhin” (A Short Nagasaki Piece, 1922). The story takes place as a dialogue amongst a collection of art objects from Nagasaki of the Edo period, when Japan’s foreign contact was restricted to Chinese, Korean, and Dutch traders in this port city. The figurines, plates, ceramics, and paintings on display are a mix of foreign made works, and Japanese ones made under foreign influence. The main character of the story is a Dutchman as painted by Shiba Kôkan (1747-1818)\(^49\), who had lived in Nagasaki and had become a pioneer of Western style painting. He is in love with a woman painted on a plate imported from Holland. The other characters include a Maria-Kannon statuette\(^50\), a priest painted on a Japanese sword handle, and a Western woman painted on Japanese porcelain. The Maria-Kannon tries to relay the Shiba Kôkan Dutchman’s love to the woman on the plate from Holland, but she sniffs: “He might pass as a Dutchman here in this country. But in truth, he’s not Dutch, and is a weird person who is neither Western nor Eastern.” (ARZ 9: 147) The other objects are insulted by her haughtiness.

The owner of the art collection enters the room at this point with guests who exclaim over the range of objects. One immediately compliments the Shiba Kôkan Dutchman, who had been reduced to tears before the humans stepped in. Another guest admires the Japanese porcelain of the Western woman and says she is much more beautiful than the one on the imported plate from Holland. The owner picks up the plate to find that it is wet, to which a guest quips that she might be crying in jealousy because of the insult. They converse amongst themselves: “There is a distinct taste to Western-style works made by the

\(^{49}\) Figure 5-8.

\(^{50}\) After the ban on Christianity, some hidden converts continued their worship by using statues of the Buddhist goddess Kannon in place of the Virgin Mary.
Japanese, which are lacking in Western works.” “Indeed, for this is where today’s civilization was born. In the future, there will be greater works to come.” (ARZ 9: 149) The “distinct taste” of these hybrid objects seem to point to Akutagawa’s ideal manifestation of multiculturalism, wherein Japanese values are maintained while the influence of Western styles and techniques enliven them.

In a brief essay written in the aftermath of the Kantō earthquake of 1923, in which downtown Tokyo was destroyed and had to be completely rebuilt, Akutagawa laments that what he will miss most about the old city is not the olden romance of the Edo-flavored Tokyo which was foreign to his sensibilities, but "the Ginza landscaped with willow trees, where cafés did not replace shiruko [a kind of traditional Japanese confectionary] shops, a more generally balanced Tokyo—you probably know this Tokyo, which wore a light haori [traditional Japanese outer garment] even while donning a straw hat." (ARZ 10:161) Akutagawa mourns the last vestiges of this organic coexistence of the Eastern and Western—or traditional and modern—elements within the urban sprawl of Tokyo. He seems to understand all too well that when the city is reconstructed, it would be along a more unified modern, Western style. Despite his fondness for European art and literature, he does not want Japan to lose its unique heritage. It is thus not a pre-Western, pre-modern Japan of the past, nor an entirely Westernized Japan of some yet unforeseen future, that appeals to Akutagawa’s sensibilities. He seeks instead a polyphonic harmony of multiple cultural registers such as that which, he believed, had been possible for a brief but exciting time in the early Meiji period, and whose spirit can be seen in the arts created at the interstices of contact with foreign cultures.

Though his death has come to be interpreted as representing the “defeat” of literature conceived as a hermetically aesthetic endeavor\(^{51}\), throughout his career,

Akutagawa had sustained a keen inquiry into how aesthetics and the ‘poetic spirit’ stand both in and against lived experiences. Akutagawa’s understanding of Japan’s modernity was nuanced, and it was the creative freedom offered by the ‘poetic spirit’ that enabled him to question its premises and conditions from various angles.

As the Showa period (1926-1989) unfolded, Japan became increasingly embroiled in imperial and colonial endeavors abroad, and ultra-nationalist forces gained power over the cultural climate. The alarmed intelligentsia increasingly began to examine and critique the true state of Japanese culture beneath the self-image of its having successfully attained a level of universal modernity, and to debate its subsequent directions. Although developed at an earlier historical point, Akutagawa's thoughts about Japanese cultural history, and the position of the arts in the modern age, could be seen as having foreshadowed the ideas of several of such Showa theorists.

For example, Akutagawa's ideals cultural cosmopolitanism—a state of "East-West Eclecticism" (和洋折衷) in which multiple value systems could be accepted alongside each other, rather than a complete transformation of Japan into a culture totally modernized according to the 'universal' standards imported from the West—could be seen as echoed by later 'universalists' who opposed the ultranationalist philosophies in the Overcoming Modernity symposium of 1942.52 This meeting was convened by prominent intellectuals of war-time Japan in order to discuss the state of the nation, as the ideologies of ultranationalism and Japan's involvement in World War II escalated to unprecedented heights. Nakamura Mitsuo (1911-1988) had suggested in his paper at the symposium that it was necessary to finally examine the inner values that are implied by the technological and industrial rational methods of the West which Japan had diligently subscribed to since the Meiji era. He questions the extent to which the Japanese truly understood what 'modernity'

meant beyond the fruits of its advent such as material wealth and mechanization in all areas of life, and whether the shift to the new way of seeing and understanding life through the universal standards conceived of in the Enlightenment West had stopped at the superficial level of discourse. He remarked that it may in fact be difficult to face the true nature of modernization and its imported status from the West: "The influence of the West is so omnipresent in our quotidian lives that we are no longer conscious of them as such,"\textsuperscript{53} and that "The reason we aren't conscious of [these influences] as Western is that foreign influences have permeated our lived so deeply."\textsuperscript{54} This echoes Akutagawa's observations about Japan's uniquely inherent tendency to 'remake' foreign elements to fit into its cultural framework.

Nakamura however, goes beyond observing this phenomena, and points to the need for understanding the dire historical circumstances in which Western values and customs were adopted by the Japanese in the short time of less than a century since the start of the Meiji period, and how this has shaped the insubstantial nature of modern value systems in Japan. He reasons that: "if the cultural confusion that our country has passed through since the Meiji period was primarily due to the imbalance of power between the West and Japan, this present modern age when we no longer feel this 'distracting' threat now that this imbalance has been amazingly overcome, is a good opportunity for truly coming to understand the West."\textsuperscript{55} As Japan's war efforts escalated at a rapid pitch, Nakamura suggests that slowing down and understanding a modernity that is specifically Japanese would be important for providing firmer grounds for deciding future policies, as well as regaining a sense of cultural identity.

Akutagawa's recognition that Japan's importation of the superficial signifiers and the

\textsuperscript{53} Nakamura Mitsuo, "'Kindai' e no giwaku"(1942), \textit{Nihon bungaku hyōron sen—Shōwa hen} (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2004), 282.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 283.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 296.
material manifestations of modernity was not the same as a real and conscious acceptance of
the values and logics that are necessarily implied therein, could also be seen as echoed and
deepened in the postwar political philosophies of Maruyama Masao (1914-1996). In an
essay from 1949, Maruyama determines that ultranationalism had spread so rapidly and
thoroughly throughout the nation because the country had lacked the conceptual means of
distinguishing between man-made political means from unquestionable nature.

In societies such as medieval ones in which people are situated according to their
origins and ranks, and social relations are thus fixed, these human social
environments take on quality of a natural existence such as the mountains, oceans,
and moon have, and they enclose people within them. Even regarding policies
which were once established towards a specific end, the deeper they become
entrenched into the environment, they become regarded as their own phenomena,
that is, not as manmade but naturally occurring; thus the reasons behind their
existences no longer are questioned.56

Just as the Meiji Emperor had been culturally given as an absolute and timeless power that
could not be challenged, Maruyama argues that modernity too was "grafted from above as a
ready-made"57, and so ultranationalist agendas were similarly able to spread throughout this
'modern' society without meeting sufficient resistance. Akutagawa's suspicions about
Japanese tendencies to too easily subsume all new phenomena into its traditional
worldviews—thereby diffusing a firm understanding of the different values and concepts
that come from other contexts—seems to be reflected in this political analysis.

Takeuchi Yoshimi (1910-1977), another postwar thinker, also develops this line of
thought. He suggests that the Japanese, too eager to be cosmopolitan, overlooked how their
unique cultural values made their experiences of modernity unlike those in all other cultures.
Takeuchi writes in 1961 that "it will no longer suffice to think of Japanese modernity just in
comparison with the leading nations of the West."58 He notes that although Japan had

56 Maruyama Masao, "Nikutai bungaku kara nikutai seiji made", Zōho-ban: Gendai Seiji no Shisō to Kōdō

57 Ibid., 388.
58 Takeuchi Yoshimi, "Hōhō to shite no Ajia", Nihon to Ajia (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1993), 454.
indeed succeeded in mastering the Western techniques of science and industry, thereby gaining a level of material wealth on par with the West, the nation had not developed an understanding of rational inquiry, which gives rise to experimentation and innovations, and to new technological advancements.

Like Maruyama, Takeuchi deems Japanese modernity since the Meiji period to have occurred more at the level of appearances, than of critical awareness. He contrasts it to the case of China, which had suffered social upheavals in its facing and coming to terms with the advent of modernity, and as a result, had gained a more substantial sense of its national identity as it made its way forward. He writes in 1960: "Chinese modernity was very internally motivated, that is, it came about as a result of its own demands and so it is stronger." Takeuchi suggests that Japan too needed to gain awareness of its unique identity, rather than adhere to the specter of ‘universalist’ understandings. In his contributions to the National Literature (国民文学) movement which rose to prominence in the mid-1950s, he focuses on Japanese literature and language as the venue through which such a cultural consciousness could be raised. As Akutagawa had begun to do decades before him, Takeuchi explores how art and literature could be meaningfully and consciously deployed to raise the quality of life.

In contemporary cultural discourse too, Akutagawa still remains a relevant cultural figure. The internationally popular Japanese author Murakami Haruki writes in the foreword to a 2006 anthology of Akutagawa’s stories in English translation that: “Akutagawa Ryūnosuke still lives and functions in actuality as a ‘national writer’ of ours. He lives on as an immovable fixed point in Japanese literature, as a part of our shared cultural foundation.” Murakami writes this towards an English-reading audience to

59 Ibid., 453.

whom not just Akutagawa, but his cultural background in a modernizing Japan, need introduction:

With great pain and suffering, the self-consciously ‘modern Akutagawa groped for his identity as a writer and as an individual in the clash of the two cultures, and just at the point where he had begun to find what was, for him, a hint of a way to fuse the two, unexpectedly ended his life. For us now, this is by no means someone else’s problem. Long after Akutagawa’s time, we are still (with some differences) living amid the clash of things Western and Japanese, only we now call them “global” and “domestic”. […] W]e novelists and other creative individuals must simultaneously broadcast our cultural messages outward and be flexible receptors of what comes to us from abroad. Even as we unwaveringly preserve our own identity, we must exchange that which can be exchanged and understand that which can be mutually understood. […] Emotionally, [...] I continue to be drawn to several of the best works that Akutagawa left us.61

Murakami displays here his identification with Akutagawa both as a fellow Japanese and as a writer. As a contemporary Japanese, he notes the yet-ongoing negotiations between ‘global’ and ‘domestic’ values, and as a writer aware of his broad readership, he notes the social responsibility of the position to articulate these exchanges. Although much has happened in Japan and the world since the time of Akutagawa’s death, it might thus be said that ‘Japaneseness’ since Akutagawa’s era still consists in the dialectic between competing cultural paradigms, and that being a writer therein requires the capacity to express these to a wider public. In the essay “Mukashi” (1918) discussed at the start of this essay, Akutagawa called himself a “skeptic” (ARZ 3: 81) of the teleology of history, aligning himself instead with the pursuits of literature instead. But perhaps that his insights and his attitudes should continue to live on to this day indicate that he occupies an important position in Japan’s evolving cultural genealogy, and that literature is not antithetical to, but crucial for, these pursuits.

61 Ibid., xxiv-xxxv.
Epilogue

The writings of the Japanese literary authors I analyzed in this dissertation illuminate the intricacies of how they arrived at new conceptualizations of themselves as participants in not only the evolving conditions of a local and national, but also a global, world order during Japan’s period of intense modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time the nation embarked on a program of overseas imperial and commercial expansion, and domestically, it underwent drastic processes of industrialization and urbanization that affected all aspects of its citizens’ lives. As new technologies, products, and concepts became rapidly available to Japanese consumers, they had to establish various modes of reception and reaction towards the increasingly complex and eclectic objects of knowledge around them. My dissertation examines how certain literary writers of this period attempted to organize their broadening worldviews around a belief in the purportedly transcendental nature of the arts—particularly the visual arts which elided the specificity of linguistic boundaries, and thus seemed to offer direct access to universal aesthetic values. In their respective manners, each writer had considered the idea that insofar as they could appreciate the arts from a variety of origins, they could gain a cosmopolitan outlook that extended to their critical and creative perspectives at large.

But eventually, each discovered that even their aesthetic contemplations could not but be unmediated by their own discursive positions within Japanese socio-cultural realities. The writers seemed to find that information, whether in the form of visual images or
philosophies, could not be transferred across different contexts without first reframing it as intelligible on local epistemological grounds. Thus, Ogai concluded that his understandings of foreign philosophies had to be carefully tempered in his fictional works as well as in his political stances; his role as advisor of Western thought in the Great Treason trial, and his stories inspired by the case, particularly highlight this dynamic. And try as the Shirakaba group did, it became increasingly clear that their ardor for Western paintings and sculptures could not give them critical exemption from their Japanese realities; their attraction to the expressivity of the French Post-Impressionists’ artworks ultimately served to reflect their critical perspectives towards Japanese literary and social discourses. Akutagawa’s cultural criticisms more directly tackled the disconnects that he found to be inevitable between foreign ideas and Japanese understandings; in his stories, he refers to a conceptual “power not to destroy [other teachings] but to remake (造り変へる) them” (ARZ 8:201) as having historically driven the cultural processes of syncretism, whereby foreign teachings that arrived in Japan came to be reinterpreted to fit existent structures of thought. I have proposed that for Ogai, the Shirakaba writers, and Akutagawa, the articulation of their self-images and identities as modern Japanese writers and thinkers was achieved in exploring the tensions between their global aspirations and local consciousness, and their aesthetic ideals and lived experiences, through the unique medium of literature.

Japan’s rapid modernization a century ago was an uneven process, with people’s inner landscapes often out of synch with the rapid social and technological developments around them. Though in many ways far from ideal, retracing through their literary legacies the insights and struggles of those who lived through the formative stages of this epochal
paradigm shift might illuminate the challenges still inherent in all locales affected by the current phases of globalization. In the present state of developed civilizations widely referred to as post-modernity, the trans-cultural flows of information and images that was a central feature of modern life has reached even greater levels with improvements and developments in new technologies. It has been popularly observed that digital interconnectivity is “driven by the newfound power of individuals to collaborate and compete globally”\(^1\) via their ability to not only download content, but also to upload their own, on the open platform of the Internet. The greatly expanded ability of individuals to actively take part in this globally accessible virtual public platform signals a major shift in human epistemology; the dialectical relationships between representations and their referents, aesthetic ideals and reality, and between foreign and local, are further complicated. The scholar Arjun Appadurai too notes the contemporary emergence of multiple “imagined worlds”\(^2\) through individuals’ active and immediate identification with others across national and spatial distances via the newly expanded means of communication media.

But despite this assertion and proliferation of competing collective worldviews, the notion of cosmopolitanism too is thriving today. As the Internet and its social media platforms enable more real-time sharing of information than ever before, not only hard news about world affairs but also music, films, celebrity gossip, and various aspects of both high-brow and popular cultures are becoming equally accessible to audiences worldwide. There seems to be an underlying premise that many products of ‘global’ culture can be


appreciated across differences in the linguistic and cultural contexts of its many and farflung fans.

In the international art market, this assumption of cosmopolitan receptivity is very clearly at work. Collectors and connoisseurs seem to believe in ‘art’ as a universal discourse, whose validity is manifest by the international flow of capital and objects in its name. Museums in every country showcase works by a mostly overlapping roster of artists admitted into this system. Yet, art enthusiasts describe their appreciation of specific works in their own respective languages and using their own local frames of references, apparently locating within these pieces meanings that are personally and immediately resonant, as well as universally and abstractly aesthetic. As one industry expert states, “Critics and curators may debate what a work means; most collectors just want to hang a work that touches their souls.”

Successful artists featured in exhibits around the world are hailed as personal heroes, as well as global superstars. Initially, it was through my own interest in the worldwide phenomena of the contemporary arts that I had initially come to ponder how individuals from the past had experienced and envisioned the ideals of cosmopolitanism in the arts and in the world at large.

In analyzing their creative and critical works, I have thus focused on how Japanese authors envisaged the imagined contours of a universal realm of aesthetics against their awareness of local collective norms and conditions, and I have tried to illuminate their ideas on how the visual and linguistic mediums could each accommodate and express these

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multiple registers of thought. Furthermore, I have tried to discern how they sought to use and mold the Japanese language in order to articulate their perspectives, and how their conception of ‘literature’ as a uniquely privileged medium framed these efforts. I admit that I have found it a challenge to fully explore these multiply layered dynamics in their rich interconnectivity, especially as regards the relationships between aesthetic ideals, and the unique processes of visual—as opposed to linguistic—representation and signification; insofar as the main subject matter of this dissertation is literature, it has been a challenge to depart from textual treatments of these broader topics. I intend in future revisions of this dissertation to better organize these different dimensions of the newly emerging hybridity of modern imaginations in Japan, and to broaden the scope of my analyses accordingly.

As it is though, my work contributes to the scholarly field of modern Japanese literature in the following ways. First, although Mori Ogai is amongst the most seminal figures in modern Japanese literary history, and his interest in aesthetics and art is essential to understanding the broader context of his worldviews, little has been published about Ogai in this regard, particularly in the English language. Attention has been given mostly to Ogai’s later historical fictions and biographies, and to his portrayals of the psychology of youthful protagonists seeking their way in Japan’s developing social orders. Ogai’s

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essays on several Japanese visual artists of his day were introduced in an anthology in 2004 though\textsuperscript{6}, and my work contributes to what will hopefully become a growing body of research on the importance of aesthetic thought in Ogai’s work.

Secondly, as regards Mushanokôji Saneatsu and the Shirakaba school, there is still little information in English.\textsuperscript{7} What references there are, are mostly in association with the more studied literary figures of the Shirakaba writers Shiga Naoya and Arishima Taeko.\textsuperscript{8} In Japanese scholarship too, the Shirakaba project tends to be dismissed as having been naively optimistic and essentially elitist, especially in light of the pro-war sentiments expressed by some of its members during WWII. But it is the discursive intersections of imported images and ideas, with the formation of new Japanese literary perspectives, in the early years of the Shirakaba magazine that is of import to my project. The intensely subjective perspectives and cosmopolitan idealism expressed by Mushanokôji and his peers, and the linguistic styles through which they articulated these, should be further studied since they made a lasting impact on later Japanese literary developments.

Thirdly, my chapter on Akutagawa Ryûnosuke focuses on his questioning of the


\textsuperscript{7} There is one book on the Shirakaba group in English. Maya Mortimer, \textit{Meeting the Sensei: The Role of the Master in Shirakaba Writers} (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2000).

very cosmopolitanism he so widely came to represent in literary history. Akutagawa’s later works, which show the disintegration of his faith in modern literature’s coherence and reflect his own descent into madness, have been fruitfully examined by recent scholars. My work comments though on a range of his writings from earlier periods, and hopefully will enrich and support the existing body of Akutagawa scholarship. Akutagawa’s innate skepticism towards surface appearance, and his awareness of the fragmentary and multiple nature of perspectives and interpretations, often served as the central crux for these earlier stories as well as his later ones. And a study of Akutagawa’s views on aesthetics provides context that is relevant throughout his entire oeuvre, given his sustained attention to the elements of style in his prose, and his continued self-reflexive efforts to define and justify the goals and ideals of literature.

For future revisions of this project, in addition to editing these existent chapters, I would like to add a new first chapter on the development of official and institutional notions of ‘art’ (or ‘bijutsu’) in Meiji Japan under Okakura Kakuzo and Ernest Fenellosa who founded the Tokyo Art School in 1887. I intend to focus on how their decision to promote certain strands of Japanese traditional art over imported Western styles and techniques contributed to discourses on national perspectives and aesthetic standards in the face of Japan’s heightened international involvements. I will concentrate in particular on how Okakura and Fenellosa’s ideas of aesthetics influenced concurrent debates about the

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definitions of literature, and the future directions of the Japanese literary language.

Furthermore, I would like to analyze the works of Japanese visual artists from the historical periods I cover in my current chapters. I will delineate how artists developed their personal styles and philosophies through exposure to the multiple concepts and images made available for their perusal in a rapidly expanding media environment. I also plan to trace their interactions with literary writers so as to highlight their shared investment in investigating the shifting nature of perspectives, representation, and aesthetic idealism. The artists’ conceptions of themselves as both specifically Japanese, and as participants in the universal endeavors of art, will provide both support and counterpoints to the attitudes and outlooks of their writer peers whose craft and consciousness was first and foremost grounded in the medium of the Japanese language.

My inquiry into the junctures between the dynamics of seeing and knowing in the worldviews of Japanese literary writers in the late Meiji to Taisho period, will be enriched by these more explicit examinations of the roots of aesthetic discourse per se in their cultural milieus, and of the activities of their visual artist contemporaries.
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APPENDIX

Figure 1-1.
60.3 x 46.5 cm.  Oil on canvas.
Tokyo University of the Arts.

Figure 1-2.
Harada Naojirō, *Kiryū kannon* (Kannon Riding a Dragon). 1890.
272 x 181 cm.  Oil on canvas.
Tokyo Museum of Modern Art, Gokokuji Collection.

Watanabe Seitei. Illustration for Yamada Bimyō, “Kochō”. In *Kokumin no tomo*, January 1890.
Figure 2-2.
(Image from Wikimedia Commons.)

Figure 2-3.
Auguste Rodin. Mask of Hanako. (1908-1911?)
55 x 39 x 29 cm. Bronze.
Shizuoka Prefectural Museum.
Between 1908 and 1911, Rodin composed 53 masks of Hanako.
Figure 2-4.
Oil on canvas. Size unspecified (though described as ‘large’). Azumino Municipal Museum.

Figure 3-1.
*Shirakaba* magazine covers.
From left: February, 1912. Cover art by Minami Kunzô; December, 1912. Cover art by Heinrich Vogeler; January, 1913. Cover art by Bernard Leach.
Figure 3-2.
Image of Auguste Rodin’s *Bourgeois de Calais* in *Shirakaba*, November 1910.
(1895. Bronze. 217 x 255 x 175 cm)
(All titles of artworks as listed in *Shirakaba*. No dates or information for works are provided in the magazine; I supplement to the extent possible)

Figure 3-3.
Image of Paul Cezanne’s *Nature Morte* in *Shirakaba*, May 1910.

Figure 3-4.
Image of Paul Cezanne’s *Nature Morte* in *Shirakaba*, January 1912.
Figure 3-5.
Image of Paul Gauguin’s *La Femme de Tahiti* in *Shirakaba*, April 1910.
(*Seed of the Areoi*, 1892. Oil on burlap. 92.1 x 72.1 cm. Museum of Modern Art, NY.)

Figure 3-6.
Image of Paul Gauguin’s *Dans l’Isle de Marquesas* in *Shirakaba*, January 1912.
(*The Sorcerer of Hiva Oa*, 1902. Oil on canvas. 92 x 73 cm. Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Liège, Belgium.)

Figure 3-7.
Image of Vincent Van Gogh’s *Chemin de la Campagne en Provence* in *Shirakaba*, October 1911.
(*Country Road in Provence by Night*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.)
Figure 3-8.
Image of Vincent Van Gogh’s *Portrait of Père Tanguy* in *Shirakaba*, January 1912.
(1887/1888. Oil on canvas. 65 x 51 cm. Tate Gallery, London.)

Figure 3-9.
Image of Max Klinger’s *An die Schönheit* in *Shirakaba*, April 1910.

Figure 3-10.
Image of Max Klinger in his studio in *Shirakaba*, December 1910.
Figure 3-11.
Signed photograph from Rodin to the Shirakaba group, featured in Shirakaba, November 1910.

Figure 3-12.
Shirakaba cover for Rodin issue, November 1910.

Figure 3-13.
Three bronzes by Rodin sent to the Shirakaba group, featured in Shirakaba, February 1912.

From left: Image of Buste de Mme. Rodin; Une Petite Ombre II; Tête de gavroche Parisien.
(Now at the Ohara Museum of Art in Okayama, Japan. Mme. Rodin (1890-1891) is 25.3 cm in height; Une Petite Ombre II (date unknown) is 31.5 cm; Tête (1885) is 8.8 cm.)
Figure 3-14.
Image of Henri Matisse’s *Etude* in *Shirakaba*, January 1912.

Figure 4-1.
Oil on canvas. 80.3 x 65.2 cm. (Original no longer extant.)

Figure 4-2.
Oil on canvas. 23x 33 cm. Kōchi Municipal Center.
(Image from Kagioka Masanori, *Yamawaki Shintoku: Nihon no Monet to yobareta otoko.*)
Mushanokōji Saneatsu. Ink-paintings.

From left: (Undated.) “You are you/ I am me/ But we are friends.” ; (Dated- Musha, age 88.) “It is beautiful to get along well.”

Wassily Kandinsky. (Examples of Improvisation-style paintings.)

From left: *Improvisation 21a*. 1911. Oil on canvas. 96 x 105 cm. Standtische Galerie, Lembachhaus, Munich, Germany.; *Improvisation 26 (Rowing)* 1912. Oil on canvas. 97 x 107.5 cm. Standtische Galerie.

Paul Cezanne. (Examples of work.)

From left: *Mont Sainte-Victoire and Chateau Noir*. 1904-1906. Oil on canvas. 66.2 x 82.1 cm. Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo.; *Chateau Noir*. 1903-1904. Oil on canvas. 73.6 x 93.2 cm. Museum of Modern Art, NY.
Figure 5-3.
(Example of a jigoku-e, (Buddhist hell painting).)
Details from Rokudô Saifukuji jigoku-e. Muromachi era. (ca. fifteenth century.)

Figure 5-4.
Paul Gauguin. (Example. Also see Figures 3-5 and 3-6).
*Et l’Or de Leur Corps.* 1901. Oil on canvas. 67 x 76.5 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France.

Figure 5-5.
Pierre Auguste Renoir. (Example.) *Madame Gaston Bernheim de Villers.* 1901.
Oil on canvas. 93 x 73 cm. Musée d’Orsay.
Figure 5-6.
Takehisa Yumeji. (Example.)
Cover of Fujin Gurafu, April 1926.

Figure 5-7.
Mary Pickford in Little Annie Rooney (1925).
(Image from IMDB.)

Figure 5-8.
Shiba Kōkan. (Example.)
Ikoku fūkei jinbutsu zu, (Foreign Landscapes and Figures.)
(Year unknown; Edo period.) Oil on silk. Each image is 114.9 x 55.6 cm. Kōbe City Museum.