

INTRODUCTION

The four stories and one novella that appear in translation here represent the best and most frequently anthologized short fiction by the Japanese novelist Ishikawa Jun (1899–1987). Published between 1938 and 1953, they also span the most tumultuous years in twentieth-century Japanese history – from Japan’s invasion of China in the summer of 1937 to prolonged war, defeat, and occupation in 1945, to final reinstatement in the community of nations in 1952. Thus, these works allow us to hear a rare Japanese voice raised in protest against the war, the popular interpretation of defeat, and the meaning of peace as it was to be defined early in the postwar era. As political documents, they are bold and outspoken: the Japanese wartime authorities banned “Mars’ Song,” and when the Allied Occupation censored “The Legend of Gold,” Ishikawa deliberately withheld it from publication. As literary texts, they are equally avant-garde: written in the wake of Ishikawa’s “dashing entrance” (*sassōitaru tōjō*) upon the literary scene in 1935 and his initial acclamation as winner of the Akutagawa Prize for Literature in 1937, they rank in the forefront of what one prize committee member identified as “the spirit of modern novelology” (*kindai shōsetsugaku no seishin*),¹ or what I shall call here the modernist movement in Japanese prose. As works with a simultaneously progressive political and literary bent, they also speak to two lacunae in the study of modern Japanese literature, namely, the neglected areas of political writing and literary experimentation.

The history of dissent during the war by a handful of Japanese writers has gone largely untold in English. In the mid-1960s, attention was directed to the general topic of Japanese writers and their involvement as patriotic zealots or collaborators in the promotion of imperialism at home or on the battlefield. Yet it is startling to realize how little was written then and how little since.² It is as though, once the issue was given a hearing, the heavy tome

of history snapped shut, and we are left with only the dull echo of “case closed.” Such is not the case with the literature on writers and the war in Germany, Italy, or even Vichy France. In pursuit of new revelations and insights, scholars revisit these topics with considerable regularity. Surely reexamination of the case of Japan is also important and long overdue.

It is hardly a whitewash of the past to recall, moreover, that there were voices in Japanese literary circles who not only refrained from joining the heated chorus of what Ishikawa calls “Mars’ Song” but also were courageous in speaking against it. In fact, one might argue that as the events of the war recede by more than a half century—the coffin lid of history now closing over heroic and putrid alike—it is far more instructive in our global age to ask not who conformed to the old enmities but rather who chose to be different and to dissent. How was it that these uncommon voices managed to be independent and farsighted? To hear them again requires that we reopen the books and proceed with the time-consuming task of sifting through the evidence to provide scrupulous documentation. By revisiting Ishikawa Jun in translation and telling his story in the critical essays, this book hopes to provoke a larger discussion by presenting at least one part of the missing picture.

A similar predicament obtains in the case of modernist prose in Japanese: it too is a movement that has not been chronicled. Although modernism has been a key term in the discourse on twentieth-century Western literature since the appearance of Cyril Connolly’s *The Modern Movement: One Hundred Key Books from England, France and America* (1965) and Irving Howe’s *Literary Modernism* (1967), it has received scant attention in the case of Japanese. This fact is doubly perplexing given all the talk concerning Japan as the preeminently post-*modernist* culture. If so, whither its modernist phase?

The label “*modanizumu*” in Japanese literature has been confined largely to the futuristic experiments of minor poets and imitative Dadaists from the 1920s or, more recently, the beginnings but inanitions of Satō Haruo, Yokomitsu Riichi, Itō Sei, and Hori Tatsuo.³ It has been treated as a foreign affair in which Japanese writers flirted with European avant-gardism before wedding themselves to traditional and domestic themes. Kawabata Yasunari, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, and Mishima Yukio are the classic examples of this theory of writers’ inevitable “return to Japan” (*Nihon e no kaiki*), and it has been

applied even to authors provisionally identified as modernist. In short, modernism has been seen as a passing fancy.

Overlooked is the considerable body of experimental writing that began appearing in Japan in the 1920s and reached a high point of production in the 1930s. It can be argued that, following the dead-end passage of naturalism and the I-novel in the Taishō period and the collapse or suppression of left-wing ideological prose after 1928, Japanese writers began to experiment seriously with narrative construction (both under the influence of and independent of foreign stimuli), and it is these experiments that give real meaning to the “revival of the arts and letters” (*bungei fukkō*) that occurred in Japan in the early and mid-1930s.⁴ One recalls, for instance, Tanizaki’s playful deconstruction of narrative authority in *Shunkinshō* (1933; trans. *Portrait of Shunkin*, 1963) and Nagai Kafū’s sauntering novel-within-the-novel *Bokutō kitan* (1937; trans. *Strange Tale from East of the River*, 1965) as examples of modernist experimentation that are available in English. But the works of other experimentalists such as Makino Shin’ichi, Kajii Motojirō, Yumeno Kyūsaku, Edogawa Rampo, Hisao Jūran, Inagaki Taruho, Okamoto Kanoko, Uno Chiyo, Tachibana Sotoō, Ryūtanji Yū, and Yoshiyuki Eisuke remain virtually unknown outside Japan owing to inattention and a very limited number of translations. Meanwhile in Japan, for a decade or more the critic and scholar Suzuki Sadami has taken the lead in calling attention to modernist writers, getting their works before the reading public once again, and rethinking their place within the historical schematization of modern Japanese literature.⁵ Thus it is that writers who have been treated in the past under the overly broad rubric of “antinaturalists” (*han-shizenshugi-sha*), narrowly pigeonholed in unhelpful categories such as “the newly emergent aesthetes” (*shinkō geijutsu-ha*) and “actionists” (*kōdōshugi-sha*), or abandoned to the no-man’s land of *sui generis* can now be better understood as belonging collectively to a major movement or *Zeitgeist* called Modernism. Their work has also paved the way for postwar writers such as Abe Kōbō and Ōe Kenzaburō, whose novels are more commonly identified as modernist.

ISHIKAWA JUN BEGAN early in his career to ask what was fundamentally modern about contemporary consciousness East and West. Translating novels

by André Gide into Japanese (*L'immoraliste* as *Haitokusha* in 1924; *Les caves du Vatican* as *Hōōchō no nukeana* in 1928), and then drawing upon Henri Bergson's concept of *élan vital* in his study of the novel titled *Bungaku taigai* (All about Literature; 1942), he argued that a modernist orientation resided not in a fixed point of view or philosophy but in movement, energy, or spirit; and while he considered his concept of "the movement of the spirit" (*seishin no undō*) to be no more than a working hypothesis, he looked to it for whatever he found to be spontaneous, relativistic, pluralistic, and free in the history of art and ideas. The measure of the novel, he wrote, lay not in the traditional literary norms of characterization or emplotment, but in the quality of the energy that the novelist unleashes upon the blank page with which every writer begins.

In his maiden work, *Kajin* (The Beauty; 1935), he employed parody of the first-person narrator as his means of departure from the unmediated authorial voice of the naturalistic I-novel. "I, I, I . . .," the story begins in a mocking, deprecatory tone. "It was as if the sluice gates of my pen had opened and the backwater that is myself surged forth in an endless torrent." In his first novella, *Fugen* (1936; trans. *The Bodhisattva, or Samantabhadra*, 1990), he took his metafictional approach a step further. In addition to the seriocomic treatment of the narrator, he introduced the concept of *mitate*, "doubles" or "look-alikes," to create a multilayered or palimpsest structure. In constructing his novel by having analogy call forth analogy (which, mirror-like, reflect previous parallels and allusions), he sought to liberate it from the traditional chronology of rising and falling action and thereby give the text a high degree of stylistic complexity. While analogies are not deployed as heavily in the works in this anthology, Ishikawa's layering technique is to be found in the multivalent play on the word "traces" in "The Jesus of the Ruins" or the brand name "Peace" in *The Raptor*.

The four short stories are conceived in the same seriocomic, first-person narration as "The Beauty" and *The Bodhisattva*. Likewise, they are written in the garrulous style in vogue worldwide in the 1930s and 1940s. By *The Raptor* Ishikawa had switched to writing in the third person, and his style, now characterized by shorter sentences and paragraphs, became noticeably streamlined. Yet in making his prose easier to read, he sacrificed none of the

parodic tone, kinetic rhythm, use of “today” as a story’s pivot in time, or long and close-up shots produced by the zoom-lens effect of his narratorial eye. Moreover, his works began to grow in length, the literary parodies and social satires of *Aratama* (The Bad Boy of the Gods; 1963), *Shifuku sennen* (On with the Millennium; 1965), *Kyōfūki* (Chronicle of a Mad Wind; 1980), and *Hebi no uta* (Song of the Snake; 1987) being analog constructions of four to nine hundred pages that are not only verbal tours de force but also call to mind the great solo marathons of linked-verse composition undertaken by the *yakazu* improvisationalists of the Edo period.

At the same time, Ishikawa remained outspoken on contemporary issues, whether as literary critic for the *Asahi* newspaper (1969–1971) or as essayist writing under his nom de plume, Isai. He joined forces with Abe, Mishima, and Kawabata at the time of China’s Cultural Revolution in an “Appeal for the Protection of the Autonomy of the Arts and Sciences” (1967); and he appeared for the defense in the famous “*Shitabari* trial” (1975), in which the novelist Nosaka Akiyuki, in a deliberate challenge to Japanese censorship laws regulating erotic materials, was prosecuted for reprinting and distributing an allegedly pornographic novel by Nagai Kafū.⁶

Ishikawa was not one to boast of his posture of resistance during the war. To the contrary, in 1960 he took the initiative in unearthing and republishing three wartime fragments that he considered to be shameful lapses. And he often scoffed at the suggestion that his works had a political or social thrust. Calling them *uso* or “lies,” he insisted on their worth as solely fictional constructions or fabrications. This attitude reflects in part his desire to be identified as a writer of the “pure novel” after the manner of the French Symbolists and André Gide. At the same time, it is a pose adopted from the literati writers of the Edo period, when an author feigned disengagement from politics to avoid censorship or, quite literally, being handcuffed by the Tokugawa authorities. But the fact that an author pronounces his works to be lies or fabrications alerts us to the possibility of a hidden or subversive agenda. Japanese scholars have been particularly attentive to the elements of indirection, camouflage, and false scents by which, in sending up a cloud of smoke (*kemu ni maku*), as the conventional saying goes, Ishikawa sought to protect himself from censure. Accordingly, one also needs to read for allegory:

indeed these stories are not simply tales of a man who loses his cousin to suicide or belatedly learns to ride a bike. Furthermore, it is necessary for the reader who is not conversant with Japanese history and customs to know that Ishikawa alludes to his times when he refers, for example, to the “Concept of Guilt” in “The Legend of Gold” or to “Peace” in *The Raptor*. As for the “Concept of Guilt,” he has in mind the slogan of “The Repentance En Masse of the Hundred Million” (*ichioku sōzange*) that circulated in the postwar press as a popular expression of contrition for war guilt. Meanwhile, “Peace” refers to a brand of tobacco marketed in celebration of the end of hostilities in 1945 and upgraded and repackaged in 1952 to commemorate the end of the occupation. Since these allusions point to a deeper reading of the texts, they are discussed in further detail in the essays that follow the translations.

The artistic subtleties of indirection and allusion notwithstanding, one is struck by the sheer audacity and bold clarity with which Ishikawa enunciates his social or political positions. He is often outspoken at the same time that he uses allegory and metafiction to reiterate his overt or literal message in a thoroughly literary way. Moreover, seen in comparison with Japanese writers canonized in the West as aesthetic and apolitical—take the example of Kawabata (1899–1972), who is Ishikawa’s exact contemporary in age—Ishikawa does seem atypically bold, political, and perhaps even “un-Japanese.” But that semblance is due in part to efforts in the past to identify Japanese writers in terms of what makes them most orientalist or non-Western. Moreover, in the historical evolution of the introduction and reception of Japanese letters abroad, there has been a marked tendency to marginalize fiction concerned with politics, be it the political novels of the Meiji era, the proletarian literature written by left-wing writers in the 1920s, or the works of the so-called new aesthetes from the 1930s who attempted to address political concerns from a nonideological position. The recognition of Ōe Kenzaburō as Japan’s second Nobel laureate in 1994 has done much to reveal the activist side to Japanese literature. As a matter of fact, the emergence of writers like Ōe in postwar Japan points to the debate that ensued after the war over writers’ responsibilities in times of trouble and peace, and Ōe has spoken of Ishikawa as an important model in the formation of his own attitudes concerning the role of the novelist as social critic.⁷

Although we cannot assume a one-to-one correspondence between Ishikawa and his central characters, nonetheless the works presented here constitute a metafictional portrait of a writer who lived through war, defeat, censorship, and a fair amount of privation. They present a catalog of the wellsprings of his independence and good humor: the feisty and cosmopolitan disposition of a native son of Tokyo; the cool and unruffled sophistication of the comic versifiers and pun-book novelists of the city Edo, most notably Ōta Nanpo; the mentoring example of the anti-establishment novelist Nagai Kafū, who appears as the patrician Mr. Gūka in “Moon Gems”; as well as the raw courage and naked energy of a new postwar generation of Japanese as represented by the plebeian woman in red in “The Legend of Gold” and the wild child of “The Jesus of the Ruins.” Moreover, an encyclopedic command of world literature and thought emerges in allusions to the New Testament, Jacobus de Voragine’s thirteenth-century classic on the Lives of the Saints, *Legenda aurea*, and the poetry and erudition of the literati of China and Japan. It is an eclectic list: Mars, Jesus, *kyōka* comic verse, Pali, a Peace cigarette. Yet in taking world culture as his musée imaginaire, and combining and juxtaposing artifacts and icons East and West, Ishikawa sought to push language—especially Japanese—beyond its limits to create the language of tomorrow, “Futurse,” or in Japanese, *ashita-go*. “In order for something to be so,” as Einstein once remarked, “first we have to think it.”

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS the furor pro and con that engulfed the mayor of Nagasaki, Motoshima Hitoshi, after speaking forthrightly of Hirohito’s culpability in the war as the emperor lay dying in December 1988—as well as, more recently, the brouhaha that canceled the Smithsonian Institute’s retrospective on the atomic bomb or the row that ensued in Japan over an exhibit illustrating atrocities committed in the Nanjing Massacre—it appears there are words that are still unspeakable, and closure on the historical record and meaning of the war eludes us still.⁸ It may be far more difficult than we realize to escape the rhetoric of the past and soar beyond the prisonhouse of the status quo.

Yet there is cause for optimism, because the language of the future appears already to be in the making with the emergence in Japan of late of a discourse on a new kind of cultural hero. One thinks of the recognition now

being accorded to Sugihara Chiune, the “Japanese ‘Schindler’ or ‘Wallenberg.’” It has become widely known in Japan that, by exercising discretionary powers as a diplomat and issuing transit visas while posted in war-torn Lithuania, Sugihara created a brief window of opportunity in the summer of 1940 for Jews to escape both pogrom and holocaust.⁹ Or, one is reminded of the long and valiant battles fought in the courts of Japan by the historian Ienaga Saburō, who has endeavored to keep in check those forces who have glossed over the harsh realities of Japanese imperialism in the writing and authorizing of school textbooks.¹⁰ Nor should we forget the example of Mayor Moto-shima, who, breaking the funereal pall of “self-restraint” (*jishuku*) urged upon every citizen by the powers-that-be, courageously addressed issues of imperial, national, and personal responsibility for the war and stood by his beliefs even at the risk of his life. To this new and honorable list, I would add Ishikawa’s name and his parables of war and peace.

How responsible is each of us for the oftentimes crotchety world in which we live? And how far are we expected to go in setting it aright? These are difficult, even tortuous questions, as we are often caught by conflicting sets of loyalties and demands. One must approach a reexamination of social and intellectual accountability with the reluctance of trepidation, taking care to avoid an air of condescension. For, after all, to take up the tome of history that has been closed, to reopen the books both figuratively and literally, and to inquire again into the issue of writers and the war is not only to weigh the acts of others but also to bring ourselves before the bar and ask by what high standard we too shall be judged.