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THE LETTERS OF ARISHIMA TAKEO TO TILDA HECK UNCHANGING LOVE IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

Verena Werner, Zurich

I.

Tildi! (how familiar and dear this name sounds to me) Write me again and again! The oftener the better! Your tiding always brings me strength. It is only the warm heart which encourages the life. I need your heart. Do not forget it. Will you, Tildi!¹

On November 17, 1906, Arishima Takeo (1878-1923) and his brother Mibuma (originally called Ikuma, 1882-1974) arrived in the small Swiss town of Schaffhausen to visit Mibuma's artist friends from Rome. They stopped at the Hotel Schwanen, where they met the owner's daughter Tilda (Louise Mathilde Heck, 1877-1970, called Tildi), a beautiful and well-educated young woman, an accomplished musician and the center of an artists' circle, with whom Arishima was to maintain a correspondence which lasted until shortly before his death.

His feelings for Tildi gradually changed from friendship to love. His emotions (conveyed purely by letter) were always an odd mixture of intimacy and reserve [...]. Arishima discussed problems relating to his home, marriage and to larger issues like war and revolution. There is a paradox which has puzzled many Japanese commentators. Only with a woman such as Tildi, whom he had met for a week and never saw again, could he unburden in this manner. [...] Theirs was a strange relationship which endured almost to the end of Arishima's life, and which so held Tildi that she felt impelled to visit Japan after his death and even 32 years later was still devoted to his memory.²

This paradox, which had its roots in Arishima's background and personality, will be examined in this study within the context of the development of his ideas, his essays, diary, and letters to Tilda.

- 1 ARISHIMA Takeo: *Arishima Takeo zenshū* (1979-86. Collected Works), 15 vols. Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō. 14:2/745, 15.1.1919. Arishima's letters (35 letters and 45 postcards, now preserved at the city library Schaffhausen) were written in English and will be quoted as in: *Arishima Takeo zenshū*, 13:1/774-78/667 and 14:1/746-14/733. The grammar, spelling and underlined passages are Arishima's.
- 2 MORTON, Leith (1988): *Divided Self. A Biography of Arishima Takeo*. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, pp. 72-73.

II.

The Zen priest lent me a book entitled *Nikudan*³ which I read with great pain. [...] The reading of this book convinced me more & more the unreasonableness of fight. The state has no right to expose its people to death. The state does not fight for its existence or even its glorious existence. It fights for its vain vanity, unpardonable selfishness, and in order to attain this object it teaches the people with petty patriotism and agitates them with antihumanitarian conception of life.⁴

Arishima Takeo was born into a time of tremendous political and social change. In 1868 the Meiji Restoration reestablished the formerly politically powerless emperor on the throne and ended the 250 years of Tokugawa rule, Japan's feudal organization and its policy of isolation. The leaders of this "revolutionary restoration" were samurai from Chōshū and Satsuma (today's Yamaguchi and Kagoshima Prefectures) who were to dominate the political scene, providing the new government and its bureaucrats, and becoming Japan's new aristocratic class.

The transformation of feudal Japan into a modern nation-state was directed from above. The Constitution of 1889 and the introduction of universal conscription and compulsory education, that is the founding of a modern army and a schooling system, institutions which were to support the new state and breed submissive patriots, changed the face of society and gave rise to tremendous contradictions. Developments which had taken hundreds of years in the West (liberalization, modernization, industrialization) were (partly) rushed through in Japan in one generation.

The slogans current during the early years of Meiji – *bunmei kaika* (civilisation and enlightenment), *fukoku kyōhei* (rich state and strong army), and *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit and Western learning) – exemplify the trends: Japan's need to modernize, the fear of being colonized or of suffering the same fate as China, the need to become a colonial power itself, the necessity to breed responsible citizens – and the will to preserve and strengthen the old intellectual values. There was no absolute break with tradition, for although the samurai caste had been abolished, samurai

3 *Human Bullet* (1906). A war record by SAKURAI Chūon, glorifying the victims of the Russo-Japanese war and their fighting spirit.

4 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:154; 1.4.1907. Diary entries marked E are originally in English. Translations of Japanese entries are if not otherwise stated the author's.

values (discipline, self-negation, loyalty and service to one's lord), as well as Confucian values – respect for one's elders, family and clan, the importance of social harmony and continuity – were now redirected to the country and its emperor. The Meiji state and the family were defined as patriarchal institutions, with the country as the family, the emperor as the father and the subjects as his children. Individual freedom was only tolerated as long as it served the state.

The prevalent atmosphere was one of utilitarianism, crass materialism and the overriding wish for "success and achievement in life", to be a politician or bureaucrat, to serve one's country and at the same time to promote the fortune of one's family.

But the emergent modern state also gave rise to the emergence of the individual. As Janet Walker put it: "It was during this period of revolutionary change that the concept of the individual as an independent social agent, as a person with a private moral existence and an inner life, emerged for the first time in Japanese history."⁵

For a certain time the "ideal of independence and the ideal of *rishin shusse* (success and achievement in life) that emerged from the Enlightenment movement of the early 1870s must have provided the people of early Meiji with an almost religiously inspiring ideal of secular mobility [...]", but after about 1885 the ideal of independence was reduced to "a fantasy to be read in novels"⁶, whereas ambition (which had been frowned upon in samurai society) was officially condoned.

Intellectuals whose secular ambitions were frustrated or who did not wish to serve the state were forced to seek fulfilment outside society in philosophy, religion, or art. The alternatives "involved a total flight from society on religious or aesthetic grounds, placing the ultimate hope of the individual outside society, either in eschatological anticipation or in artistic creation."⁷ Individuals who had been imbued with the new ideas of autonomy and freedom – and who as a rule were romantically inclined to take these new values as absolute – found no fit object to symbolize their

5 WALKER, Janet A. (1979): *The Japanese Novels of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 16.

6 WALKER, op.cit. pp. 18-19.

7 ARIMA Tatsuo (1969): *The Failure of Freedom. A Portrait of Modern Japanese Intellectuals*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. p. 6.

emancipation and their break with convention in the political or social sphere. It was impossible to abolish the family, there was no established (native) ideology as an institutionalized body (as for example the Church in Europe) to fight against,⁸ and literature was, from a Confucian point of view, a “frivolous pastime of no utilitarian, let alone moral value to the nation. Consequently, the Western educated writer, for whom self-expression was a primary goal, had difficulty justifying his existence not only as a social being but as a person with feelings, longings and aspirations.”⁹ The resulting alienation of the intellectual – and Arishima is an example – prompted him “to distance himself from social life, to observe, observe himself, criticize, criticize himself, and divided in himself, to be unable to spontaneously join a cause”.¹⁰

III.

But Fanny, pity me, I have one thing still undone. I tried to be independent in framing my thought, but not my action. I am still a slave of conventionality and tradition. I hate and am afraid of them because... why, I am very apt to be under the control of them. Oh, with what a joy I should welcome the day when I am independent of action as well as thought. Then, then my aim is attained, and I would cry with ecstasy of joy!¹¹

Arishima's father had been a low-ranking retainer attached to a branch of the feudal clan of Satsuma, had risen to wealth and fame and expected the same from his eldest son. He had given him a traditional education in the Confucian classics and military training, but at the same time sent him to a kindergarten run by missionaries in order to learn English and, as he put it, “best the enemy with his own blade”¹². Takeo had been a sickly child and discovered his love for literature at an early age, but had to keep it a secret. He was educated at the Shūgakuin, the Peers' School in Tōkyō,

8 ARIMA, op.cit. pp. 4-6.

9 WALKER, op.cit. p. 28.

10 PINGUET, Maurice (1984): *Der Freitod in Japan: Geschichte der Japanischen Kultur*. Aus d. Franz. v. Beate von der Osten. Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn. 1996, p. 291.

11 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:5; 1.9.1906.

12 Quoted in MORTON, op.cit. p. 13.

which sons of successful samurai could attend side by side with the offspring of the imperial family, the court nobles and the new aristocracy. There his behaviour proved to be so immaculate that he was selected as playmate to the Crown Prince, the later Emperor Taishō – he was always to act as a “gentleman among gentlemen”¹³. But instead of advancing to the Imperial University of Tōkyō and engaging in an official career, he chose to attend the Agricultural College of Sapporo (later the Agricultural Faculty of Tōhoku Imperial University) in Hokkaidō¹⁴, the “Wild West of Japan” which fired his imagination and was located at a comfortable distance from his father.

Here he converted to the displeasure of his family to Christianity – the puritanical brand of Christianity as expounded by Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930) with its emphasis on the responsibility of the ego, conscience and soul-searching self-observation (in Arishima’s case linked to a good measure of narcissistic navel-gazing), which, together with his peculiar friendship with the young zealot Morimoto (1877-1950), led him to the discovery of sin and threw him into an abyss of guilt due to Morimoto’s homosexual advances and his own professed “sexual weakness”, driving him close to suicide.¹⁵

13 YASUKAWA Sadao (1983): *Arishima Takeo: Higeki no chishikijin (Arishima Takeo: Tragic Intellectual)*. Tōkyō: Shintensha, p. 119.

14 See also KARATANI Kōjin (1980): *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Transl. ed. by Brett de Bary. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 1993, p. 41: “Hokkaido was a place where various types of religious reforms flourished, as émigrés lived their lives cut off from the traditions of the mainland. Hokkaido in the Meiji period might in this sense be comparable to New England, both in terms of its climate and its political role. The first head of the Sapporo Agricultural School, Dr. Clark, who had been recruited from Amherst, for example, had greater influence in Hokkaido as a Protestant missionary than as an agricultural scientist. It was this influence that produced the prototypical Meiji Christian, Uchimura Kanzō.”

15 KARATANI, op.cit. p. 79. Karatani shows the importance of Christianity in developing interiority, the “new consciousness” which would be Arishima’s frame of reference: “But in Christianity we find an inversion unprecedented in any other religion, for adulterous feelings, rather than acts, become the object of prohibition. To maintain this kind of conscience requires constant watch over one’s ‘interiority’ at all times. One must scrutinize the passions that surge up ‘within’. It is this surveillance, in fact, that produces interiority. In the process the body and sexuality are discovered.” It was the influence of Christianity and European romanticism

After graduation in 1901 Arishima had to do his military service, which made him a pacifist – at a time when Japan was still in the grips of jingoism after the victory over China in 1895. Arishima found unusually violent words for his opinions:

To what can we compare our state? It is like a lid on a bucket of shit! Within men heap together all their sins and evil desires and indulge in their evil natures, but in order to avoid the stink spreading the state is used to as a lid to cover it. To what can we compare the state? It is like a whitewashed tomb. Seen from the outside it is solemn and majestic, upon opening the tomb we see only white bones, human ash and corruption.¹⁶

Arishima left for America in 1903, where he studied at Haverford, a Quaker College, and at Harvard. Here his Christian ideal was jolted by what he considered the hypocritical attitude of American Christians during the Russo-Japanese War, supporting the Russian side out of racist preconceptions and watching the war as a game. Arishima condemned the Christian ethic for being a system of irredeemable sin and damnation, and could not accept the idea of life after death.¹⁷ He was introduced to the work of Walt Whitman (1819-92), whose writings opened new dimensions in his understanding of “good and evil” and whose conception of instinct, love and freedom were a revelation to him. He now gave up his endeavours to devote himself to God and live the pure life of a saint (he strove to be like St. Francis of Assisi at the time), and decided to devote himself to literature instead, his avowed goal being his “wish to be wholly myself. *Realization of personal character*, this is what I want to attain urgently.”¹⁸ At the same time he got in touch with Japanese socialists and discovered his leanings towards anarchism, which peaked in his admiration for Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), whom he visited in London in 1907.

He had imbued Western culture as few other Japanese had and enjoyed a certain measure of freedom in America. His misgivings upon

which prompted young Meiji intellectuals to discover ideal love (*ren'ai*) as opposed to physical love (*koi*).

16 Diary. *Zenshū*, 10:227; 31.12.1902. Transl. in MORTON, op.cit. p. 50.

17 In: *Ribingusuton-den Jō. Zenshū*, 9:363-381 (1919; *Preface to “The Life of Livingston”*). When this early work, written together with Morimoto in 1901, was included in Arishima's *Collected Works* in 1919, he felt the necessity to define his new position in a long and candid biographical-confessional preface.

18 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:140; 14.3.1907.

returning to Japan, “the place where I regard with utmost interest, respect, disgust, sadness and hatred!”¹⁹, burst out in his ambivalent feeling towards the Japanese:

I have a particular hatred toward the so-called Japanese. They are extremely affected and their behavior is very impolite. I hate them with all my heart.²⁰

[...] I could not help admiring – in spite of all my intellectual objection – beauty and loveliness of my birth place. Yes, there is something beside intellect. [...] I must be frank and love this country until one day her degradation disgusts me thoroughly or my behavior enrages her deeply.²¹

He was eager to take his life into his own hands – only to clash with his family’s expectation of him as eldest son over the “marriage question” and his choice of “work”. His studies in America, his interest in history and social problems had made him into one of the few intellectuals of his time with first-hand knowledge of Western culture and one of the few writers who was unwilling to identify with the state or their fathers who represented this state – and yet Arishima would not dare to go against his father – unlike Nagai Kafū (1879-1959) or Shiga Naoya (1883-1971).

A letter from Father; read rather harsh in tone. I wonder whether he had again a suspicion of my attitude toward him. [...] He also seems to be anxious that I may turn out an openspoken Christian and exclude myself from my father’s control. Oh, my dearest and kindest Father! If you only could put confidence upon me and analyze me not from seamy side, but from proper side, you would find in me a humble boy, not obstinate rascal, who is struggling inwardly with view as to how he can reconcile with his father, or what is the best, how to make him understand the intention of his worthless but well-meant son. How good he is as a father. His golden pure heart yearns simply for the success and welfare of his sons. I do not fail to appreciate it to its full extent. But the trouble is that I cannot quite agree with his life attitude. Ah, what shall I do? If my father scold & beat me, and I can stand whatever a persecution. But the whip of tear and agony! I cannot suffer it. I almost am inclined to yield to it. God help me.²²

It was his father – or so Arishima believed – who prevented him from achieving his ideal of expressing himself through art and engaging in a

19 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:158; 4.4.1907.

20 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:153; 30.3.1907.

21 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:162; 11.4.1907.

22 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:224-225; 8.5.1908.

literary career. When his father fell ill with stomach cancer in 1916, he wrote:

To confess the fact I have covertly hoped the death of my father, in order (with no other purpose, my conscience has it) to do my work to my heart's content. But upon hearing the fatal news, my attitude toward his life took a total change. I only wish and hope my father's recovery. My God! It is too cruel, cruel.²³

On the one hand Arishima could not accept the inherited cultural identity (he rejected the state, but internalized the underlying Confucian values), but he never found a new sense of identity: he was an intellectual who would try to adapt his ideas to the new needs as the times changed, and by the same token inevitably got entangled in new contradictions. Forever striving for perfection and refusing compromise, he moved from his Christian beliefs towards the concept of love, rejecting the notion of sin and reinterpreting “altruistic love” as “self-love”, the force which was to ruthlessly take and overcome the distance between the self and the other by assimilating it and interiorizing it.²⁴

He moved, influenced by Whitman and Bergson, towards the idea of perfection and autonomy of the self and its expression, towards the concept of “impulsive life” (Arishima’s translation of *honnōteki seikatsu*), which would give the irrational side of the personality its due and open a realm of perfect freedom and creativeness, touching “life” itself beyond any dualism, based solely on the demands of the individual;²⁵ he moved from the rejection of bourgeois society and its values to the ideal of free love, women’s emancipation and political anarchism. These concepts, he hoped, would reconcile the contradictions under which he suffered, the duality of mind and body, of feeling and intellect, of love and sex, of his socialist convictions and upper-class life, of theory and practice. But they were too removed from reality, too abstract, idealistic and romantic to be put into

23 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:194; 8.11.1916.

24 Arishima expounded these ideas in his long essay *Oshiminaku ai wa ubau* (1920; *Love the Generous Plunderer* [Arishima’s transl.]), *Zenshū*, 8:126-216.

25 *Oshiminaku ai wa ubau*. *Zenshū*, 8:168-170. The most perfect expression of “impulsive life” (as compared to “habitual” or “intellectual life”), he felt, was in “the climax of mutual love, the embrace of two lovers.” (*Zenshū*, 8:170); “the greatest expansion of self at the moment of death through self-destruction” (*Zenshū*, 8:184).

practice. Unbridled individual autonomy proved to be a bottomless illusion leading into isolation – and yet Arishima refused the “middle way”, as he wrote in his early essay *Futatsu no michi* (*Two Paths*; 1910)²⁶, likening himself to Hamlet and preferring to be a “solitary self”, even at the cost of loneliness and severe depression:

One traveler is going through an eternal path. There is no one who understands him so well as himself. When the sun shines, his shadow is the only faithful companion. When it is cloudy or dark, he does not even have the companionship of his shadow. Then he has to find the faithful companion only within himself. No matter how frail or ugly, where else could he find something more certain than he? Sometimes I look at myself as such a traveler.²⁷

But he was also an intellectual with a deep sense of honesty who refused the easy way out which so many writers chose, such as the *Shirakaba*²⁸ group's (to which he belonged) flight into an elitist egoism tinged with humanitarianism or hedonism; or the aestheticists' – such as Nagai Kafū or Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-19659) – flight into a reinterpreted and hence idealized or utopian past; or the naturalist writers' lachrimose confessions of their private sins.

As a man with an acute social and moral sensibility, Arishima lived in constant conflict between his privileged background and the dictates of his conscience²⁹; he was deeply ashamed to live off his inheritance and be a landed proprietor. The estate his father had bought for him as a playground for his youthful dreams to be an agricultural reformer proved a constant source of irritation and shame to Arishima.

26 *Zenshū*, 7:5-11.

27 *Oshiminaku ai wa ubau*. *Zenshū*, 8:127. Transl. in ARIMA, op.cit. pp. 133-134.

28 Also *Shirakanba* (*White Birch*). The group founded a magazine of the same name in 1910 which served as a literary forum for writers with a cosmopolitan background and humanitarian tendencies. Important members were MUSHANOKŌJI Saneatsu (1885-1976), SHIGA Naoya (1883-1971) and the ARISHIMA brothers Takeo, Ikuma and SATOMI Ton (1888-1983).

29 One aspect of this attitude is his insistence on action as opposed to thought, his stressing work as a means to support one's life and the rejection of private property. He attempted to live up to his convictions – he taught at the Sapporo Yōgakkō, a school for the destitute, worked in a lunatic asylum in America and finally gave away his farm in 1922 – but did not regard these attempts as achievements.

I was going to visit my farm and do some business accumulated for whole year. [...] It seems on one hand that I can continue to be a proprietor with clear conscience and on other my principle seems to deny me. I always feel great uneasiness in mind which makes me awfully disagreeable to take up this work. [...]

I was ashamed to see such neat building [the office] in such poor looking farm. But, to speak truth, we live in such a comfort either in Tokyo or Sapporo [...] I must change my living entirely before to say anything about the luxury of this building.³⁰

Arishima had always represented himself as a divided personality, which he attributed to his background and upbringing. He was unable to live according to the demands of his inner self, feeling controlled by others, and never satisfied with his achievements:

What is it that makes me melancholy? [...] Perhaps I have strange contradiction in me. I am sometimes very pure, sometimes very impure. One time I am so sympathetic and other time I am absurdly egoistic. I hope this contradiction of nature will sometime or other come to end. [...] Please, please let stand like a man, and do good or evil (if I do evil at all) discarding the criticism of others, and also from my inner heart. Let me do anything sincerely, if it were a sin.³¹ I am as ever gloomy. There are two things within me which are decidedly unreconciled and antagonistic each other, and they torment me. [...] And you, you only whimsically are upset and tormented by what they [those men you know] think a mere nothing. Oh, no, no, no!! They do not even think of it as a mere nothing. They do not think deep enough at all. They content with the tradition, that is, what their fathers told them to be, while I can not. I cannot rest until I find my own ground to stand. Am I wrong?³²

On the one hand, he burnt with ambition to serve “his people” and mankind:

Pluck your spirit and be sure to make yourself famous – famous for what? – famous for anything. There is thing admirable enough in making oneself fittingly famous. Fame does not smile on a lazy fellow, nor a lazy fellow on Fame. Fame belongs to God.³³

30 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:15-16; 28.7.1908.

31 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:141; 16.3.1907.

32 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:213; 13.4.1908.

33 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:198; 23.3.1908.

But he would not serve the establishment with its imperialist tendencies, its stress on duty and its demands of self-sacrifice; his ideal of freedom led him to anarchism, his conscience to socialism, making him into an individual of “dangerous thought”³⁴, but by the same token he never dared put his ideas into practice out of respect for his family.

I must make a complete change in my life. I come to feel it ever stronger these days. But to break from the bond which unites me to my parents is impossible, if not impossible, insufferably piteous.³⁵

Although Arishima believed that only action was morally valid,³⁶ he was paralyzed by his introspection, his self-consciousness and hesitation arising from constant self-doubt and consideration of others, which in turn drove him to consider himself a “hypocrite”, call himself a “coward” and a “lukewarm, weak being”, unable to live consistently (e.g. according to the demands of his “inner self”) – be it good or bad. He utterly rejected the accepted social morality (“habitual life”), regarding it as mere convention, but was never able to be even slightly rude. His professed ideal of the “lonely individual” was totally opposite to the demands of society, and above all his desire to be loved and acclaimed. His sometimes irritating tendencies at both self-depreciation and self-dramatization – in fact he took a somewhat perverse pride in his sufferings (Arishima quotes Nietzsche making a virtue out of his weakness³⁷) –, must, as Nakamura points out, have been difficult to accept:

Arishima was a man who, in short, because of his wide intellectual horizon and too sensitive conscience was forced into the role of a star of self-consciousness, and even though he was earnest in his so to speak Western style exaggerated gestures accompanied by Shirakaba-style elitism and narcissism, he provoked

34 Arishima’s group for the study of socialism, which he established in Sapporo after returning from America had to be disbanded after several warnings, and he was removed from his duties as supervisor of the student’s dormitories and teacher of ethics. See YASUKAWA, op.cit. p. 77.

35 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:56; 26.3.1916.

36 PINGUET, op.cit. p. 299, quotes a saying by the Confucian Wang Yangming (1472-1529): “Knowledge which is not followed by action is not knowledge.”

37 *Oshiminaku ai wa ubau*. *Zenshū*, 8:141.

misunderstandings and revulsion, but withstood this kind of ridicule [...] to the very end.³⁸

The self-control his education and social status imposed on him led to immense tensions with his suppressed passions, extravagant ambitions and romantic aspirations. He felt that he was out of touch with real life, hankered after spontaneity, intense feelings and what he idealized as the instinct and the vitality of “natural man”.³⁹

Shame though not to be acquainted with anything vital and serious of the very actual life, for instance, hunger, fury, unconventionality, not to say independence of the self, love and sacrifice! Beware you, lest you shall end your life as but a mere book-worm.⁴⁰

Oh, I am gloomy enough! No one and nothing could console if they would. Only if I could touch more vitally the human life! No, not human life, but “Life”, Life itself. I do not live life, I live Death. Confound it, this cursed lukewarm existence!!⁴¹

The obstacle to the realization of his ideal, he felt, was bourgeois society with its conventions and restrictions, and its stress on rational thinking.

His idealization of pure love stood in stark contrast with his sexuality and soured, as he himself confessed, his marital relations considerably.⁴²

38 NAKAMURA Mitsuo (1954): *Nihon no kindai shōsetsu (Japan's Modern Novel)*. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten. 1985, p. 189.

39 An entry in his diary (E) illustrates what he meant by “natural man” (*Zenshū*, 12:16; 29. 7. 1908): “There was a girl about 15 in the hotel. I thought she is lovely, and at last caught and *kissed* her. She didn't only seem to detest me, but on the contrary, she evidently attached to me. How I liked to be a free son of nature and did what I liked to do for her! Oh! What a strange enigma I am! Sometime I am solemn even unto death, and other time I am so playful and so full of life that I feel it is so easy to cast off all reputation and habit which are loaded upon me.”

40 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:198; 23.3.1908.

41 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:204; 1.4.1908.

42 Arishima's obsession with purity (a keyword in all his writings) and his ambivalent feelings toward women have been interpreted by Egashira as puritan “abhorrence of the flesh”, or as “fear of woman” by Honda. In: EGASHIRA Tasuke (1992): *Arishima Takeo no kenkyū (A Study of Arishima Takeo)*. Tōkyō: Obunsha, p.15, and HONDA Shūgo (1968): “Shirakaba”-ha no sakkatachi (*The Writers of the “Shirakaba” School*). Tōkyō: Miraisha, p. 293. In his *Ribingusuton-den Jō* (*Zenshū*, 9:378) Arishima relates how in order to preserve the “purity” of love for his wife, he tried to abstain from sexual relations for six months. The author believes that Ari-

He held that women were men's slaves, and could only fight back by entrapping them with their sexuality. This led him to the rejection of the family system which forced women into well-defined roles and made him an advocate of women's liberation.⁴³ He was, as he wrote to Tilda, "reserved, and especially with women".⁴⁴ On the other hand he had a tendency to cultivate unrequited loves, mostly for young girls (reflecting his infatuation with Goethe's *Werther*). The first of several "pure, innocent" girls he fell in love with was the 13 year-old sister of a fellow student, Frances (Fanny) Crowell, whom he had met in America and to whom he remained attached all his life. He dedicated his diary upon leaving America to her:

My dearest Fanny, the fondest creation of my dream! You are a creature who never breathed in the world. No mortal ever saw you but I, nay, not even I, but when I am asleep. Still you are real, so real to me. I feel your hands around my neck, I feel your lips on my lips, I feel your heart beating against mine. O my! Is this dream? Is this fancy? Nay! Dreadful reality of the world! Dream exists, and you exist! And you exist, I love you madly! [...] Let us die, Fanny, into eternal silence. No-body must know us.⁴⁵

It was only in his novels and short stories that he was able to let off steam, creating works of art in which he delved into the psychological depths and hidden motives of (suppressed) sexuality, its perversion⁴⁶ and sublimation⁴⁷, in which violence and passion explode in forceful language, and strong characters follow their instincts, such as Nin'emon in *Kain no matsuei* (*The Descendant of Cain*; 1919) in an unreflected, rebellious way,

shima's narcissistic concern with himself and his need to be loved prompted him to turn to idealized relationships with far-away lovers.

43 In: *Oshiminaku ai wa ubau*. *Zenshū*, 8:209-210.

44 *Zenshū*, 13:54/691; 16.4.08. When he struck up a friendship with Kamichika Ichiko (1888-1981), a journalist and later politician (the earstwhile lover of the anarchist Osugi Sakae), he noted in his diary (E): "Took a ramble together. We trespassed the barrier which we put between us. Horrible accusation of self took place in me. In fact, I was forced to kiss her. Shame!" *Zenshū*, 12:220; 12.7.1917.

45 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:3; 30.8.1906.

46 *Ishi ni hishigareta zassō* (1917; *The Weed Crushed by the Stone*) and *Jikkenshitsu* (1917; *The Laboratory*). Inspiration for his treatment of suppressed sexuality was the reading of Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1904).

47 *Kurara no shukkei* (1917; *The Ordination of Clara*).

or Yōko in *Aru onna* (*A Certain Woman*; 1911-1919) who consciously chooses to live according to the demands of her sexuality.

While he enjoyed a measure of success due to his treatment of “explosive” subjects and to his social sympathies (his heroes often came from social strata not his own), recognition from the literary world was denied him – be it that the problems he described (the unconscious and its effects on the psyche) belonged to the literature of a future age, or be it that the methods of expression he used (postromantic realism) belonged to a past age and were too intellectual, too influenced by the “West” to be appreciated in Japan. It was only after the war that he was praised by socially conscious critics for his work, particularly for *Aru onna* and for his dissociation from auto-biographical writing.⁴⁸ The way Arishima described his “setting himself up” in Sapporo in the following diary entry illustrates his intellectual background and his distance from the Japanese literary world:

I filled it [the bookshelf] with my beloved books, and felt a great satisfaction to look at them. On the first row, Tolstoi's work and that of Ibsen, with some other Russian stories. The second, Carlyle's work, Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Kropotkin's *Russian Literature*, and other; third, Byron, Milton, Wordsworth, Whitman, Shelley, Selvantes, Dante (*Vita Nuova*), Buckle's *English History*, Guizot's *Political Crime*, Michaele's *People*, and other; the forth, St. Augustine, Renan, *Life of Bruno*, Brandes' *Ibsen*, Brandes' *Shakespeare*, and Japanese books on political, literary, historical interests; the fifth, *Life of George Fox*, Spencer's *Data of Ethics and Psychology*, Patten's *Development of English Thought*, Plato's *Republic*, Ingersoll's *Speeches*, Zola's *Truth*, Foggazalo's *Woman*, Gorky's *Tales* and so on. What a mess I have made. This is exactly the condition of my inner life. Properly speaking, I have no harbour to set my anchor. I am still in doubt, and am but a poor and humble beggar after truth.⁴⁹

In his later years Arishima's life was overshadowed by depression and loss of creativity. By then the social and intellectual climate in Japan had changed dramatically. The country was shaken by economic crises, social unrest and strikes. Marxism was spreading rapidly among the intellectuals as a means to harmonize social contradictions, and gave rise to the

48 ANDERER, Paul (1984): *Other Worlds: Arishima Takeo and the Bounds of Modern Fiction*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 102.

49 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:172-173; 29.1.1908.

Proletarian Literature movement, which for a time held a commanding position among the literary schools.⁵⁰ Arishima, who longed to play a role in the intellectual discussion of his time, tried to define the position of the bourgeois writer in the class struggle in his essay *Senden hitotsu* (*A Manifesto*; 1922)⁵¹, which provoked much controversy. He criticized the intellectuals' mania for "fashionable" thought, arguing that they would be unable to produce "proletarian art" unless they lived like workers, that the proletariat could well manage its own affairs, and that the only role the bourgeois writer could play was to announce his own demise.

Although Arishima was convinced that the rule of the proletariat was imminent, and hoped that Marxism would bring about a world where the unity of thought and action would be realized, he believed that he, a member of a dying class, would have no part in it – and by doing so deprived himself of his social role as a writer.

When he decided to give away his estate to his tenants, it was an act (which he believed doomed to failure) to soothe his conscience, an act of a lonely individual trying to overcome his alienation and inability to write by having to "work for his bread" and "changing his life".⁵² In a letter to Tilda he wrote:

In this coming spring I shall realize the wish which I have cherished long in my bosom, that is to abandon all my inheritance from my father, and to live a life of a mere literary labourer. Social position and material possession encumber my life career. I must be a naked man before I can produce any worthy production. Otherwise I cannot cipher the real situation of the coming generation. You may take me foolishly radical, I am not. I am only doing the thing which every man in Japan shall do in near future. I think I can well stand this trial.⁵³

It was also the act of an individual who in the name of perfect freedom was unable to commit himself and whose only means of showing his sincerity was *le grand geste* – the liquidation of his status as a bourgeois.

Arishima's entire life was overshadowed by irreconcilable demands and he was never to achieve a sense of unity. Anderer characterizes him as a man who, having renounced his cultural heritage, was stuck in the void

50 ARIMA, op.cit. pp. 174-175.

51 *Zenshū*, 9:5-10.

52 Diary. *Zenshū*, 12:306 and 309; 9.11.1921 and 18.11.1921.

53 *Zenshū*, 14:7/740; 14.1.1922.

between two extremes, unable to decide himself for one or the other for fear of losing the whole; an artist creating an imaginary world of his own, peopled with travellers never arriving, "wanderers without citizenship", or heroines like Yōko in *Aru onna*, a "queen, sent down by heaven, but at the wrong time and place".⁵⁴ Arishima lived in a dream world, never to find his place in reality, ever changing his position until he perceived that in a changing Japan there was no place left for a bourgeois writer, and he chose to leave the stage.

IV.

How is our friendship pure and noble and deep! Is there another such dear friendship on earth? Tildi! let us keep it dear. Let us carry it dear to our tomb!⁵⁵

On his way back from America Arishima joined his brother Mibuma in Naples for a tour of Europe, which led them through Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, France and England before boarding ship to Japan. They spent one week in Switzerland in the company of Mibuma's artist friends Wilfried Buchmann (1878-1933), Gustav Gamper (1875-1943) and August Schmid (1877-1955). Arishima described his meeting with Tilda Heck in a later letter to her:

It was chilly winter evening, wasn't it, when we got under your hospitable roof. I stepped up that stair case and you shook my hand with such a open-heartedness and simplicity. I felt at that moment that you were very congenial to me.⁵⁶

54 ANDERER, op.cit. p. 48.

55 *Zenshū*, 14:4/743; 15.3.1919.

56 *Zenshū*, 13:37/708; 18.7.1907. His first meeting with Fanny impressed him (after several years) in a similar way: "Do you remember the night when I first met you? The night when we came back from a walk we took in a dreary winter? When we passed the threshhold from outer coldness into warm fireside, you opened the door and let me in first. Since then, Fanny, I became your slave, and cried in my inner heart, 'I was a stranger, and you took me in'. (Diary [E]. *Zenshū*, 11:5; 1.9. 1906). His attachment to Fanny might have, as in Tilda's case, been due to the welcome into a family or friendly circle, and his feelings of being accepted and feeling "at home".

He left Tilda at Zurich station on November 23 after a walk spent in eager conversation on the shores of Lake Zurich. These two small, but significant happenings impressed him deeply and would be alluded to again and again, serving as the centre-piece of a great love.

The week spent in Schaffhausen, the society in which he found himself must have been very different from the puritanical life in America: His diary from November 17 to 23 speaks of a week of warm hospitality and friendship, excursions, musical soirées and dinner parties full of "childlike fun" (Nov. 19), "enourmous delight" (Nov. 20), "happy laughter" (Nov. 22) and "frolicking" (Nov. 23), followed by tears upon leaving Schaffhausen, and a sleepless night on the train to Munich.⁵⁷

The first postcard from Munich in his somewhat stilted English, his typical predilection for hyperbole and dramatic effects, was as follows:

Dear Tildi,

I didn't sleep a wink last night and reached here this morning 7 o'clock & found myself just like a corpse without spirit & strength. Nothing does interest me. A week of the life of Paradise is passed. Look at poor Adam astrayed in the darkness where there is no sympathy exists. I will still hope that you remember me & anxiously waiting for your tiding.⁵⁸

On Dec. 6 he wrote (his 3rd communication!):

My dear Tildi: -

Yes, I was making my mind to try my best to forget you, as I failed to receive even a word from you until do-day. I thought I was awfully wrong to have asked you to keep our friendship as ever in future, because I am but a strange stranger in strange country, with but short acquaintance to you. I concluded myself that it is matter of course that you could forget me right after our parting, and I still have reason to thank you of your kindness during my stay in Schweiz. Having reasoned this way, I was trying to forget you, to my heart-rending sadness.

And why! I received your letter to-day - dear letter. You did not forget me! Receive my thanks that I cannot express with writing. You bless my heart with unspeakable warmth. You must not think that I ever neglect to think of Schweiz - that beautiful land of Tell - , Schaffhausen - that quaint town - , Schwan - that hospitable roof - , and *Tildi* - that kindest and warmest heart.⁵⁹

57 *Zenshū*, 11:63-65.

58 *Zenshū*, 13:1/744; 24.11.1906.

59 *Zenshū*, 13:2/743; 6.12.1906.

The letters which followed served to “demarcate boundaries” and define the positions, which would make their friendship possible. On Tilda’s invitation to pay another visit to Schaffhausen, he wrote from London:

Then I unlocked my trunk to take out your photograph and letters. I sat down in the arm chair. I looked into your face, and read all your letters carefully and repeatedly. I wept. I pity my poor soul!

I suppressed my desire to accept your tempting invitation. Yes, I’d like to meet you again, but how I can bear to depart from you again and forever. [...] For your most tender and considerate feeling toward a worthless fellow like me, I deem it my happiest & saddest event, and I will never forget it in spite of my attempting to forget it. Alas! if there was a land in future life, where each man & woman stands bare, able to disclose all feelings he or she holds, where also there are no nationality, social prejudice, absurd tradition & the ability is judged according to its real value! *Then I will meet you there.*⁶⁰

That is, Arishima distanced himself by refusing another encounter in order to be able to indulge in his feelings. He insinuated having heard about an artist who was in love with Tilda, which brought forth a declaration of her secret engagement. This in turn plunged Arishima into guilty feelings for having clasped her hand on the shores of Lake Zurich and prompted him to reproach her for her behaviour and define the nature of the relationship he sought:

If I become a beggar, or a convict, or a mad, you will kindly sympathize with me & lift me up-ward as long as I live honestly. That I will certainly do for you. I do believe in your sincerity, your purity and your sympathy. [...] After reading your letter, I more & more firmly made my mind not to visit you once more. Don’t ask me about it anymore. If you do it again I will think of you as cruel.⁶¹

Tilda was obviously willing to grant him confidence and sympathy, for after a letter full of confessions from her, followed by an explanatory letter from him, the situation was cleared and Arishima could write:

To make a real friendship is to make a conquer, – or more fitly, a discovery. I owe you for my life for your helping me to enter hitherto unknown domain

60 *Zenshū*, 13:11-12/734-733; 19.1.1907.

61 *Zenshū*, 13:14/731; 30.1.1907.

where I can reap the harvest of confidence and sympathy – the two essentials of human life.⁶²

But he was also willing to help her if necessary (this is an example of his sometimes rather unsufferably priggish attitude):

Dearest friend, stand firmly upon your faith, and meet every vicissitude of human life with calm resolution. Remember also that there is at least one on the earth who is ever ready to rejoice over your fortune and to weep over your distress. Let me share your sorrow with you if only you allow me to. It is a great consolation for me even to know your sorrow. Every bit of your career interests me so. Remember it, Tildi!⁶³

This beginning of their correspondence has been quoted at length because it throws a light on Arishima's attitude to women: Tilda must have been able to give him what he most needed – sympathy and confidence (which he incidentally also expected from his future wife⁶⁴), combining purity with maturity, the role of a motherly friend (Tilda was one year his senior) with that of a "forbidden" love due to her being engaged, a relationship never to be sullied by physical contact, made secure through distance. Arishima could worship her without being disappointed by childishness⁶⁵, would never be awakened to the reality of a meeting or disturbed by too great a demand upon his freedom.

At morning on the bed, the recollection of Tildi seized me strongly – she appeared before me with her beautiful sides – her simpleness, sympathetic feeling, uncultured⁶⁶ but rich intelligence and so forth. I loved her extremely.

62 *Zenshū*, 13:20/725; 21.2.1907.

63 *Zenshū*, 13:33/712; 25.5.1907.

64 See also his diary (E) entry of 13.2.1908 (*Zenshū*, 11:182), defining the role of his future wife: "She [Nobuko, the woman he intended to marry] is nothing but a mere child. It will take a long time before she could thoroughly understand my situation and cherish appropriate sympathy towards me. I missed what I am looking for – unrestrained affection."

65 Fanny, although he adored her, could not satisfy his intellectual needs: one of her few letters mentioned in his diary (which "set his heart aflame") asked him to name her new cat (*Zenshū*, 11:73); and it was childishness which disappointed him in his wife.

66 This is not necessarily a deprecative statement, as in Arishima's mind "civilisation" – by putting too much stress on habit and rationality – "poisoned" indi-

She was very dear to me. But after all what is it? I was born alone in the world. My pulse does not beat same to other. Solitary but free life! Don't spoil your solitariness and you can be free!

The morning finished the reading of *Nikudan*⁶⁷. Oh, Fanny! I love you!!⁶⁸

The further he got away from Europe and the nearer to Japan, the more his ideas concentrated on this woman, in whom he would confide his hopes and fears: the hope of taking his life into his own hands, to establish himself, his misgivings about the Japanese state, his fears of his own weakness. And the more his hopes were dashed, the more he was convinced that he loved Tilda, idealizing her and her country – and celebrating his feelings.

I found out Tildi's pictures and violent yet beautiful emotion overtook me.⁶⁹

It is obvious that Arishima was in love with himself being in love, the object of this love being interchangeable.

But at the same time, he had to confront the reality of Japan. In his last letter from London to the circle of artist friends in Schaffhausen, who had formed themselves into a group of Japan lovers and called themselves *Circo Fujiyama*, he wrote:

My idle wandering of six months has passed like a fantasmagoria, and I see before me a horrible image of actual life. With my scanty knowledge and too sensitive a nature I feel awkward to face this monster. Nevertheless I will try to meet and defy him.⁷⁰

It was not to be easy, as he wrote to Tilda:

They have received me with much expectance too. I now live here in my native land. I have got to start my life work. [...] I'm simply restless for any work. Work! work! what a tempting word for a youth of 30 years of age!⁷¹

duals. See also his appreciation of Walt Whitman as a man “uncorrupted by culture”. (Quoted in ANDERER, op.cit. p. 60.)

67 See note 4.

68 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:155; 2.4.1907.

69 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:160; 7.4.1907.

70 *Zenshū*, 13:21/724; 21.2.1907.

71 *Zenshū*, 13:34/711; 25.5.1907.

And in July 1907 he commented on Japanese politics in Korea:

[...] Tildi, that is the way any nation looks at each other. Rumour begets rumour. [...] I hate those politicians and patriots from the bottom of my hearts. Your country has been long in peace, and you cannot realize what the punishment of blood-thirst is! Unless we break off the petty patriotism, that is in reality national prejudice, we cannot enjoy universal brotherhood at all. As to our country's relation to Korea, I am ashamed to tell you detail of it. Our country, under the guise of helping her, exercises a strong grip of control, her own cabinet acting like a puppet. [...] Japan pretends to help her. So far is well. But Japan does not help her but kill her.⁷²

It was not long before the marriage question came up, all the more serious as he was the eldest son. The candidates his family presented to him were unacceptable (he would have preferred not to marry at all),⁷³ but realizing that he could not avoid it, he tried to marry his first love, a niece of Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933)⁷⁴, his teacher and spiritual mentor at Sapporo.

It was during this period that Tilda was his only confidante and their correspondance reached an emotional peak.

Tildi, I have got to enter military service from to-morrow for three months. What do you think of that? As the consequence of it, I have to abandon the work which I have been pursuing with great interest. Is it not pity? I have got to put on butcher's apron from to-morrow. [...]

As to me, my parents are awfully anxious to select the bride for me. But I have yet no position, no conviction in my life work, and how can I dare to enter married life. Besides I would rather be dead than to be contented with a wife whom I do not love. It is awful even to think.⁷⁵

[...] Why did I not write you so long? Do you want to know why? Perhaps you may laugh at me! Really I am ashamed of myself of my unability to bear every vicissitude like a man does. However I will tell you the truth. I think I

72 *Zenshū*, 13:37-38/708-707; 18.7.1907.

73 On 2.2.1908 he wrote in his diary (E; *Zenshū*, 11:176): "Ah! how thankful shall I be if no one cares for my matrimonial concern, and leave the matter entirely to myself, to which I will pay no attention and live the life of solitariness. How I strongly became to detest the woman! Pick up most graceful and obedient of them, there is still reeking there a stinging smell of vanity and narrow-mindedness. Woman's devotion means her selfishness. Give her gold or fame, & remain yourself poor and obscure, she will, with little hesitation, trample on you and ridicule you."

74 Educator and diplomat; author of *Bushidō, the Soul of Japan* (1899).

75 *Zenshū*, 13:43-44/702-701; 31.8.1907.

have told you that I asked my parents to have me married to a girl who had been rather strongly attached to me. But my parents refused my request, under the excuse that her social standing is not as high as ours, and she was forced to be married to a man of whom she does not know a bit – consequently she even doesn't know whether she would like him or not! – [...]

Under such circumstances, it was absolutely necessary that I quit Tokyo and go somewhere to live just alone. At that time the position at this University was offered to me, which I accepted with ready and sad resolution, and since I live here alone, like a wounded beast in the desert. [...]

[...] I have fixed my room a little bit cosy, hanging the pictures of Gamper (by the way his sister is dead! I don't know how to express my regret), Schmidt, my brother on the wall, and set the photographs of Goethe, you, Mibuma, Fanny (a little girl I was acquainted in America whom I am very fond of) and a friend of mine, on my table, together with a pot of dry flowers, given by Emma Forster, of higher parts of Alps. It happens very often here in my little cell, that I sit at table & pose your photograph with so crowded recollections & thoughts on you. [...] As to your kind offer to send me anything I like, I wish I could get something, which I can use daily, carrying always with me, and which was previously used by you or made by you. Would you grant this selfish desire of mine?⁷⁶

Arishima was teaching English at his old school, now Tōhoku Imperial University, and although he was very popular as a teacher, he felt lonely and depressed:

Come, come, write me something in your bright spirit dancing with the bliss of spring, so that you may soothe my solitary situation.⁷⁷

Arishima's situation did not improve, he felt deeply melancholic, thought of suicide and finally wrote his often-quoted love-letter to Tilda, which he regretted as soon as he had sent it off:

76 *Zenshū*, 13:51-52/694-693; 26.2.1908. The same description is found also in his diary (E), but without mention of Tilda's picture (11:173; 30.1.1908): "My cloister has a big window opening to the street (on the north side), and 'tokonoma' and 'chigaidana', the latter of which is now serving as a book shelf, the 'Angelus' by Millet being hung above it. My reading table is set by the window, and it is ornamented with the cabinet size portrait of young Goethe, the photograph of Furia [Julia], from Museo delle Terme, Rome, and a vaseful of Swiss high-mountain flowers bound together with the bunch of flowers gathered at the rear garden of a restaurant at Pompei. Over wall are hung the paintings by Gus. Gamper, Mibuma, and Watts. [...] Behold my cloister, nay, my kingdom! force will be born from here. Here lives a *man*, and he will deserve for right appreciation of *man*!"

77 *Zenshū*, 13:53-54/692-691; 4.4.1908.

Tildi, I confess. I have long been deceiving myself and you. When I said you are my friend or dear friend or dear sister, I was unconsciously talking you lie. I do not like you. I am not fond of you. I *loved* you and *love* you. You may laugh or even be angry of my saying this. A worthless and strange fellow, who has but a few days' acquaintance with you loves you! This is ridiculous. I submit myself to whatever you think. Only I must say what I *must*. You have become part of my life. Whenever I feel melancholy or lonesome, you suddenly appear in my vision, and by you I am consoled, like a baby consoled by his mother's bosom. Ah, only once, if I could weep all my tears in your embrace! Tildi, Tildi, Tildi! Dearest soul!

Do you know that I wept bitterly in the train when I left Schaffhausen? Ask it Gamper or Buchmann. Do you know that I did not sleep a bit in the night when I took leave of you at Zurich? And then I thought it is only because that I was going away from kind friends. But now I realize it was not so. Because I loved you then (unconsciously), that I felt such an unspeakable sorrow. Will you despise me? Or will you pity me?

I know you are already engaged. And I never even imagine to claim of you to return your love. No!!! I tell you this because I feel a sacred obligation to be honest and frank with you. After my declaration of my innermost thought, it seems to me proper to cut communication with you. If you also think it proper, you may just write me a few words telling me not to write you any more.

My relation to you has changed from this very moment, and you must protect yourself from me. A sinner I am that I cannot suppress my feeling. But Tildi, how cruel is the Fate. We were born in different race and nationality. The chance of our knowing each other was ephemeral. You have sacred shrine of your affection. And I can by no means suppress my feeling. May you prosper for ever [...]⁷⁸

And the entry from his diary:

I regret to write such a letter like last to Tildi. I am ashamed of it. Why could I not restrain my feeling? In fact I confessed to her my love in most fervent way. Rubbish! Did I really feel it? Yes, at that moment when I wrote. But I am so impulsive these days. I will write her again and erase all I wrote before.⁷⁹

Arishima did not write again until November (Tilda having forgiven him his indiscretion); by then he was engaged to Kamio Yasuko, the daughter of a high ranking officer. He had been neglecting his diary because of

78 *Zenshū*, 13:56-57/689-688; 8.5.1908.

79 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 11:227; 17.5.1908.

“being busily engaged in mind and body with my marriage affair”.⁸⁰ He now did his best to convince himself of his love for Yasuko:

I thought she was childlike for her age and brought up in a very sober home. She is sharp enough to act and to perceive any concern, if immature. She has an undefiled, clear, loving heart, which is the most precious possession of her. She is not aesthetic, that is true. But her tenderness can fill its place. She is by no means a woman of strong will and principle, who can help her husband with wise suggestion and console him with an unexpected valour, but she can pour her heart out and shed true sympathetic tears were her husband in distress. She is not Colneria [Cornelia], but Desdemona or Ophelia. [...] I am not so weak to need a woman’s encouragement. I rather have a helpless sex under my wing and try to protect her against all sorts of attack. Yasuko – her name is Yasuko – will answer to this desire.⁸¹

Oh Yasuko! How you strongly seize upon my heart! To think even of your name, it makes me melt into the tears. Sometimes I am cool and sceptic enough that you are not attached to me on account of your shallow-heartedness. You are perhaps too childlike and too simple to understand my ardent love which I sincerely and manly offer to you.⁸²

Diary entry from Oct. 6, 1908:

I have lost my critical power, I confess. Yasuko now appears to me as a girl endowed with every virtue and all beauties. She is so dear to me that I feel ever ready to give my life for her sake. But at the same time, I confess, I demand her love more than she demands of me. Has love a nature so egotistic like this? Or am I the only one who is so egotistic?

Strange fellow! I am so cool when I am so exciting. If I were a genuis, I can produce a great work watching even my own sentiment with a cold impartial eyes.⁸³

A couple of months of correspondance, however, cured him of his willingness to be in love. His heart was:

80 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:22; 12.8.1908. Arishima goes on to say: “I regret ever so much that I did not faithfully write down every sentiment and thought which occured under the circumstances.”

81 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:24; no date.

82 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:31; 30.9.1908.

83 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:35.

[...] miserably cooled up of Yasuko recently. Where is the ardent love which I had so madly thrown upon her? At this moment all women are abominable, brutelike, a crystal of vanity and dependency.⁸⁴

He decided to educate her instead. – The marriage was unhappy, and, as Arishima put it in his *Preface to "The Life of Livingstone"*, “destroyed everything”.⁸⁵

After Arishima’s marriage the correspondance with Tilda quietened considerably. The letters are somewhat stereotyped, beginning with profuse excuses and ending with protestations of friendship, but the style is calmer, less given to histrionics. They are charming, well composed and reflect Arishima’s emotional stability while a teacher at Sapporo and during his most creative period after his father’s death in 1916, lasting until 1919.

Arishima wrote about his activities in Sapporo, told Tilda rather shamefacedly that he would be a father, and spoke with much pride about the founding of the magazine *Shirakaba* and his literary activities:

I tell you this because you would not tend to be ironical towards me like some other people, but are glad, ('sympathize' I almost say) of me. Besides the teaching I have started with my Mibuma & some other friends a literary monthly called "Shira-kanba" ("white birch") last April. It was received by the public rather with favour, and we issued a special number in November commemorating the 70th anniversary of Rodin's birthday, and tried to open a passage, if narrow and poor, for the introduction of the essence of Western culture. I am glad to inform you, for the sake of Western civilization and withal for the assimilation capacity of our people, that it was welcomed with the overwhelming applause.⁸⁶

In a later letter he wrote:

Well, I am still working hard on my literary production. My books (the 7th volume has appeared so far) meet with appreciation and encouragement, especially among younger generation. Some of my books sold about 10'000

84 Diary (E). *Zenshū*, 12:42-43; 31.1.1909.

85 *Ribingusuton-den Jō*. *Zenshū*, 9:378. This means that the joys of married life had destroyed his ideal of pure love.

86 *Zenshū*, 13:64-65/681-680; 25.12.1910.

volumes, which is rather rare case in Japanese publication. I am so glad to know that I am doing some service to my brethren.⁸⁷

This is a part of one of his “charming” letters:

The destiny which befallen on those people whom we met during our stay at Schaffhausen interests me and saddens me. Beschlin is no more on the earth? How strange and sad! Your mother is still healthy and sound? How nice! You are still waiting the heart of your betrothed to return to you, but almost in vain! How tragic and heartrending! How the fortune is cruel to you! You say you come to Japan sooner or later? How good!! Do not fail your word. As long as I live, I shall welcome you with all my heart!⁸⁸

The death of his wife and the breaking up of Tilda's engagement allowed Arishima to call their friendship “love” again. He stylized their relationship, idealizing it by recalling the memory of their short meeting:

You remember that night when we left Zurich for Germany. How we walked from Goethe Strasse to the station. How you and I talked warmly with eyes till the last moment of departure. Since then we are not two! We are joined by heart. How is our friendship pure and noble and deep! Is there another such dear friendship on earth? Tildi! let us keep it dear. Let us carry it dear to our tomb!

[...] You shall read my love between the lines. Dear, dearest Tildi,

Yours as ever
Takeo⁸⁹

Tilda herself joined him in this game of “memory” as Arishima's answer to one of her letters proves:

Yes, Tildi! I remember the walk by the lake. The moon was beautiful then. The air was pleasantly cold, other people were walking before us. I was so taken to you that I dared plunge my hand in your pocket and tried to grasp your hand. You did not allow me to; & no wonder, you were in engagement then. But take me not amiss. My feeling toward you at that time was toward my dearest sister. I didn't feel ashamed of my deed. I thought I could not transmit my feeling unless I touch you personally.⁹⁰

87 *Zenshū*, 14:3/744; 15.3.1919.

88 *Zenshū*, 14:2/745; 15.1.1919.

89 *Zenshū*, 14:4/743; 15.3.1919.

90 *Zenshū*, 14:6/741; 14.1.1922.

Only once, when Tilda sent him a new photograph of hers, “reality” broke in and shocked Arishima:

Your photo which you kindly gave me does not seem to represent you very faithfully. You look too hard in it. You are ever so much more warm and tender in reality. Still it is a long since I have met your likeness. I am so glad to keep it and feel you at my side. Thank you again and again.⁹¹

In his heart, Tilda was to be young for ever, as he wrote in his last letter:

I feel my heart beat whenever I address you. May you live ever young and kind in the very bottom of my bosom.⁹²

Arishima never told Tilda bad news (apart from his wife’s death in 1916) and never mentioned his depressions, his loneliness and his troubles which beset him after 1920, when he suffered from writer’s block. Yet he hoped that after the Second World War the contradictions created by the forced modernization would be solved. By this time the Japanese intellectuals were beginning to be concerned about social questions, a situation Arishima was very much aware of.

From now on, the aspect of world civilization shall change to entirely new direction, although we can by no means expect an “golden age” as the outcome of this great occasion. May the “State” recede to its limited sphere, and on its place humanity and proper dignity of personality stand out as the leading power of progress.⁹³

Japan is now at critical time, almost coming to the point of social revolution. The democratic tendency has already been felt among the populace. And they are not be satiated unless some means or other is tried to remodel the social life. We passed what we call a Reformation some 60 years ago. It was but a wholesale adaptation of European Civilization (especially material side). Now the European thought is running in the country, and trying to change the national sentiment from its foundation. What the outcome will be? No one knows it. Anyhow it is as hopeful as interesting.⁹⁴

91 *Zenshū*, 14:5/742; 26.9.1919.

92 *Zenshū*, 14:14/733; 20.6.1922.

93 *Zenshū*, 14:1/746; 15.1.1919.

94 *Zenshū*, 14:3-4/744-743; 15.3.1919.

In January 1922 he had announced to Tilda that he was going to “liberate his farm”, even before he told his family, and in one of his last letters he wrote:

Beside I am seriously planning to abandon all inheritance from my dead father and to become an utterly naked man. You may think it too eccentric. But I am confident enough with myself, that by so doing I can produce the work unparalleled to my past work. My past work has been mere plaything so to speak. Hereafter by narrowing my life persuit to the literary production I am sure I can appeal to the uttermost depth of may reader's heart. Be glad of my change Tildi! Just only few can appreciate my determination, and you ought to be the foremost of them. [...] I have utterly despaired of the bourgeoisie's life. That kind of life has come to it's catastrophe. There is no hopeful opening in it. It is a blind alley. I must get rid of it in order to breathe fresher and more purified air. I feel it as much keenly as I am an artist.⁹⁵

Getting rid of one's estate was not as easy as he had thought as he wrote in his last letter to Tilda: “It seems to take rather long time, before it is all finished. It is a mighty job, I tell you. And I must do it quite by myself.”⁹⁶ He met with much resistance from his family and from the authorities – communal ownership was legally impossible in Japan, and after he succeeded in signing over his estate to his tenants, and in converting it into a cooperative, its manager was arrested for embezzling government funds (possibly a trumped up charge).⁹⁷

Towards 1923 his continuing depression and isolation once more led him to contemplate suicide. He fell in love with a young married woman who was suffering from tuberculosis. The resulting affair was followed by a blackmail attempt by her husband and ended in their double suicide on June 6, 1923 in Karuizawa.

95 *Zenshū*, 14:9/738; 4.3.1922.

96 *Zenshū*, 14: 13/734; 20.6.1922.

97 TAKAYAMA Ryōji (1993): *Arishima Takeo no shisō to bungaku. – Kuropotokin o chūshin ni* (*The Thought and Literature of Arishima Takeo. – Centering on Kropotkin*). Tōkyō: Meiji shoin, p. 572. Takayama argues that Arishima's suicide was also a gesture of protest aimed at insuring the existence of the farm.

V.

But in you I find myself at home. I seem to be in the presence of one who knows to the full extent all my defects and my merits, and still not only despises me not, but is tender and affectionate because of my very defect. Precious soul you are to me!⁹⁸

Tilda's letters have been lost in the war, but it can be gathered that she was able to play the role Arishima assigned her, the role of the understanding and sympathetic friend. And maybe she was able to give him the one thing, he was not able to do for himself: accept him as the person he was, and giving him something which he had lost, a sense of belonging, a "home".

98 *Zenshū*, 13:54/691; 16.4.1908.

