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Raise your voice in song! The Origins of the *New Japanese Literature Association*

A Translation of Miyamoto Yuriko's Literary Call to Arms

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Abstract: This translation of Miyamoto Yuriko's (1899–1951) 1946 essay constitutes a unique moment in the melding of politics and literature in Japan. Written in the heady days of immediate post-defeat Japan, the essay highlights the strategy of a profoundly optimistic literary left to win the hearts and minds of the Japanese masses. At the same time, however, it also hints at the complicated problem of how to deal with the large numbers of people – intellectuals and writers in particular – who abandoned their affiliations with the communist movement during the war and embraced the militarist regime.

Keywords: Miyamoto Yuriko, *Shin Nihon bungaku*, *tenkō*, proletariat literature, Japanese Communist Party

1 Introduction

Miyamoto Yuriko's¹ (1899–1951) essay “Raise Your Voice in Song” was published in January 1946 in the pre-inaugural issue of the *Shin Nihon Bungakukai*'s

¹ Miyamoto Yuriko 宮本百合子 (1899–1951), born Chūjō Yuri, was the eldest daughter of Chūjō Seiichirō, a famous architect and descendant of a prominent samurai family. Her mother, Yoshie, came from a similarly elite background with her father, Nishimura Shigeki being a renowned scholar of the nationalist school. Yuriko was considered something of a child prodigy, publishing her first story, “Mazushiki hitobito no mure” in one of the most widely known magazines of the day, *Chūō Kōron* when she was still a seventeen year old student. The story was remarkable not only for having been written by a seventeen year old girl, but, according to noted literary critic and prominent Japanese Communist Party (JCP) figure, Kurahara Korehito (1902–1991), it was unique for being one of the very few works of the time

Original Title: Utagoe yo, okore: Nihon bungakukai no yurai 歌声よ、おこれ：新日本文学会の由来, by Miyamoto Yuriko 宮本百合子

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(New Japanese Literature Association) journal, *Shin Nihon Bungaku* (New Japanese Literature) – an organisation and journal that persisted for the next sixty years, exerting enormous influence over the development of post-war Japanese literature. As Miyamoto's essay makes clear, both the association and its journal have a sharply defined mission whose importance, at least from Miyamoto's perspective, cannot be overstated. Japan, surrendering to allied forces mere months earlier, stands at a crossroads and it is the job of writers to ensure that the Japanese people take the correct path to a future in which their rights and dignity are assured. While Miyamoto's impassioned prose might sound dramatic or even bombastic when read from a distance of seventy years, it is important to remember that the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and leftist movements in general had just been legalised after decades of harsh suppression and, for the moment, had the active support of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) General Headquarters (GHQ). For a while, at least, it seemed that anything was possible.

The essay is significant in that it provides insight into the thinking and strategies of the *Shin Nihon Bungakukai* (hereafter SNB) and the JCP, with which it was then closely affiliated. At the same time, the essay highlights the dilemma

to demonstrate a commitment to “critical realism”, see Kurahara 1976: 51. In 1919, she went with her father to New York where she was an auditing student at Columbia University. It was there that she met her first husband, Araki Shigeru (1884–1932) a scholar of ancient Iranian languages. They married the following year but it was an unhappy marriage and the two divorced five years later. The experience formed the basis of one her most famous novels, *Nobuko* 伸子 (1924). In 1927, she set off on a tour of the USSR and Europe. When she returned to Japan in 1930, it was as a writer committed to the communist cause and determined to contribute to the movement in Japan, see Kurahara 1976: 53. She joined the illegal JCP in 1931 and in 1932 married fellow party member, Miyamoto Kenji (1908–2007), who would later go on to be a leading figure in the postwar JCP. They were not allowed much time to enjoy their newly wedded state, however, and in December of 1933, Kenji was arrested and was not released until after the end of the war in 1945. Yuriko herself was arrested five times, once detained for eight months. She only managed to escape longer sentences because none of her comrades identified her as a party member, see Kurahara 1976: 48. Her imprisonments, and the imprisonment of her husband, only served to harden her resolve and, in a letter to her husband near the end of the war, she likens herself to a “single arrow” utterly and completely focused on one goal, see Honda 1976: 15. This determination and focus is evident not only in the essay translated below, written shortly after the end of the war, but in the enormity of her achievements during the five years between the end of the war and her sudden death in 1951 as a result of fulminant meningococcemia. During this short span, in addition to playing key roles in the now legalised JCP, in the *Shin Nihon Bungakukai* (New Japanese Literature Association) and various other publications, she published two novellas, two novels and over two hundred essays on a wide range of topics, see Kurahara 1976: 46–47.

in which the left finds itself – a dilemma that would never be completely resolved despite voluminous research and endless debate. That is, how to understand and respond to the mass wartime *tenkō* 転向 (ideological conversion) of former members of the JCP, the proletariat literature movement and the left in general, many of whom abandoned their support of Marxism and communism and dedicated themselves to the war effort.

Even before the war ended, Tokuda Kyūichi² – soon to become secretary general of the JCP – was working from prison to develop a strategy that would leverage the work of the occupation forces to further the goals of the party. Koschmann describes the temporary alliance between the JCP and with SCAP as an attempt to effect change from above while simultaneously employing “the tactics of revolutionary organization ‘from below’”.³ In January 1946, the same month that the inaugural edition of *Shin Nihon Bungaku* appeared, Nosaka Sanzō,⁴ who had spent the war in exile in the Soviet Union and China, returned to Japan and began to push his idea of a “loveable communist party”. Nosaka sought to cultivate and embrace a broad base that went far beyond workers and farmers to include intellectuals and businessmen. He rejected the rhetoric of direct action, instead promoting an agenda that focused first on realising a bourgeois democratic revolution by peaceful means.⁵

² Tokuda Kyūichi 德田球一 (1894–1953) was a founding member of the illegal JCP and, in 1928, ran for office as a candidate for the Labour-Farmer Party. He was arrested shortly after losing the election and remained in prison until the end of the war. After his release, he was lionised as one of the few JCP members that refused to compromise and he was one of the first to greet the allied forces as a “liberating army” (Gayle 2009: 1263). He helped to rebuild the JCP and became first secretary in 1945, an office he would retain until his death in 1953. In 1946, he was elected a member of parliament. He would be re-elected twice, serving until 1950 when the “red purge” conducted by the occupation government disqualified him from holding public office. In 1950, he went in exile to the People’s Republic of China where he remained until his death.

³ Koschmann 1996: 30.

⁴ Nosaka Sanzō 野坂参三 (1892–1993) first encountered Marxist thought when reading an English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1918–19, becoming a member of the British Communist shortly thereafter, see Scalapino 1967: 4–5. After being expelled from the UK for his political activities, he returned to Japan via the USSR whereupon he became one of the founding members of JCP. Though he, like many other key members of the JCP, faced police persecution and arrests, in 1931 he gained early the release from prison and, evading the authorities, escaped to Moscow, see Scalapino 1967: 42. He remained overseas until the end of the war. Upon returning to Japan he took a prominent role in revitalising the JCP, serving as first secretary from 1955 to 1958 and chairman of the JCP from 1958 to 1982. He was elected to the House of Councillors (upper house) four times and to the House of Representatives (lower house) three times.

⁵ Koschmann 1996: 33–35.

With the occupation forces implementing a broad range of structural reforms that would touch on virtually every aspect of Japanese society, it was – as Miyamoto makes clear – the responsibility of those involved in literary and cultural activities to educate the masses, to raise their revolutionary consciousness and, in her words, make them see “the inexorable movement of world history”. At the same time, however, Miyamoto’s essay reflects the rhetoric of Nosaka’s non-threatening, “loveable” JCP. At no point in the text is communism or Marxism even mentioned. At a time when the entire nation, if not the entire world, was thoroughly sick of bloodshed, there is no mention of revolution – violent or otherwise. Instead, the essay adopts an optimistic tone: “In defeat, Japan steps across an historic threshold and emerges onto a new, sweeping path to a global humanity.” Lest we be carried away by this optimism, however, she is quick to note that serious threats to the realisation of true democracy remain. The “vestiges of the old regime” still possess the ability to deceive, to manipulate and to undermine the potential of this moment. It is the job of the writer to be on the alert to these “reactionary forces”, to speak unflinchingly of the cruel deception of the wartime regime, and to express, correctly, the sentiments of the party.

Miyamoto’s literary call to arms must have resonated powerfully with those who, confronted with the complete collapse of a belief system into which so much had been invested, found themselves at a loss as momentous change swept the country. Miyamoto offered them a way back, a way to atone for their failure to resist the war and a way to contribute to the construction of a new Japan. However, even as Miyamoto reached out to welcome the lost sheep back into the fold, she highlighted a schism in the left that would become the focus of much agonised debate and discussion over the next several decades. That is, the undeniable fact that many – indeed, almost all – erstwhile supporters of the left had, to varying degrees, been co-opted by the militarists during the war.

Much of the JCP’s cachet at the end of the war derived from its reputation as the one group that steadfastly and uncompromisingly rejected the militarist regime and Japan’s wars of aggression. After the end of the war, when hundreds of communists were released from prison, they were given a hero’s welcome.⁶ In reality, however, somewhere between three quarters and ninety-five percent of those communists arrested ended up recanting their beliefs, albeit with varying degrees of sincerity.⁷ Nor was this mass abandonment of the party limited to the

⁶ Dower 1999: 236.

⁷ Tsurumi gives the figure of three-quarters whereas Donald Keene, citing Honda Shūgo’s *Tenkō bungaku ron*, puts the figure at ninety-five percent, see Tsurumi 1991: 24–25; Keene 1998: 847.

rank and file. On the contrary, it was two party leaders who opened the flood-gates. In June 1933, Sano Manabu⁸ and Nabeyama Sadachika⁹ issued their “Proclamation from prison” (*gokuchū yori seimeisho*). In it they blast the JCP for blindly following Comintern to the neglect of the Japanese working classes and assert that the “Japanese war against Chinese military cliques and American capital is progressive.” They go on to state that it “is the duty of the Japanese workers to lead the workers of Asia” in this “progressive” war.¹⁰ Ten days after the proclamation was issued roughly half of the political inmates in Osaka recanted.¹¹ Within a month, one-third of the party membership had undergone *tenkō*, or ideological conversion.¹²

In the immediate postwar, the party leadership – comprised almost solely of people who did *not* renounce their ties to the party and, as a result, spent the war in prison – faced something of a dilemma. On the one hand, their credibility and appeal lay primarily in the fact that they – and by extension, the party – did not yield in its opposition to the war even in the face of imprisonment, torture and murder. On the other hand, there is the inescapable fact that the vast majority of those who were members of the party or were sympathetic to the party underwent *tenkō*. Without the support of these people, the ability of the party and its various affiliated organisations – the SNB being one – to effect change would be highly limited. At the same time, simply acting as though nothing had happened would weaken the moral authority currently wielded by the JCP.

The SNB, then, created a kind of hierarchy of writers based on their actions during the war. At the top were those whose beliefs had been beyond question. Though they may, under duress, have committed *tenkō* their actions during the war showed that their loyalty to the party remained firm. Organising members of the association were limited to these people. The next step down the hierarchy

⁸ Sano Manabu 佐野学 (1892–1953) joined the JCP in 1922. He was an active participant in the party and, on recommendation of Moscow, was made chairman of the JCP central committee in 1928, see Beckmann 1969: 138. Arrested in 1929 and he provided police with extensive inside information about the JCP and its membership during interrogations while awaiting trial. Though he did not make his “proclamation” until 1933 – one year after being sentenced to life in prison – he admits to having nationalist leanings even before his arrest, see Beckmann 1969: 216. In 1934, his sentence was reduced and he was released from prison in 1943.

⁹ Nabeyama Sadachika 鍋山貞親 (1901–1979) A member of the JCP Central Committee arrested at a brothel on 29 April 1929, see Beckmann 1969: 180. Tried and sentenced to life in prison along with Sano, he too renounced the JCP in his proclamation from prison in 1933.

¹⁰ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 1933a.

¹¹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 1933b.

¹² Tsurumi 1991: 24–25.

found the mass of intellectuals, writers and artists. Those who had been sympathetic to the aims of the left but who had allowed themselves to be silenced by the change of mood in the country or by police persecution. They committed *tenkō* and, according to Miyamoto, failed to grasp the significance of the historical moment in which they found themselves. Miyamoto urges these writers to reflect upon their failures and to write of them unflinchingly. In this way, they can expose the deceit of the wartime regime and lead the people back to the “correct” path.

At the bottom of this hierarchy are those deemed to have thrown their lot wholly in with the militarists. These are writers who enthusiastically supported Japan’s wars of aggression, writers acted as the military’s “megaphone” and did their utmost to inflame the Japanese masses, rousing their support for the war. They are those who denounced fellow writers to the secret police, and who deliberately twisted the ideology of humanism to glorify Japan’s invasion of its neighbours. Miyamoto’s brief criticism of Hino Ashihei¹³ and Ozaki Shirō¹⁴ is mildness itself compared to Odagiri Hideo’s¹⁵ excoriation of twenty five writers – including Hino and Ozaki – in his “Bungaku ni okeru sensō sekinin no tuikyū” (Pursuing war responsibility in literature), which appeared in the third issue of *Shin Nihon Bungaku*.¹⁶

Miyamoto’s essay captures the heady optimism of the left in immediate post-defeat Japan, where a revolution seems not only possible but also inevitable. Her

¹³ Hino Ashihei 火野葦平 (1907–1960) expressed an interest in Marxism in his youth and was actively involved in labour unions, becoming the secretary general for the Wakamatsu Longshoremen Labour Union in 1931. He was arrested the following year, however, on suspicion of his leftist affiliations and recanted his leftist beliefs while under detention. He was drafted into the army in 1937 and, working as a war correspondent, became famous for his *heitai* (soldier) trilogy of novels with *Mugi to heitai* (Wheat and Soldiers, 1938) being the first of many war novels he would go on to write. In 1948, he was banned from literary activities as a war collaborator, though this ban was lifted some two years later, see Tanaka 1977.

¹⁴ Ozaki Shirō 尾崎士郎 (1898–1964) was a popular and prominent novelist who became an enthusiastic supporter of the war effort and published a number of accounts from the war in China and elsewhere. Ozaki occupied prominent positions in a number of pro-war, militarist organisations such as the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei Yokusankai), was a member of the “Pen Battalion” and director of the Japanese Literature Patriotic Association, see Tsuzuki 1977.

¹⁵ Odagiri Hideo 小田切秀雄 (1916–2000) was a first year student at higher school when he was arrested in 1933 under the “Peace Preservation Law” for his role in organising a communist student group. He was released after recanting his affiliation with the party. After the war, he was a central figure in the founding of the Shin Nihon Bungakai as well as the less overtly political literary publication, *Kindai bungaku* (Modern literature). He joined the JCP in 1946 and went on to become one of the most prominent Marxist literary critics of the postwar era, see Itō 1977.

¹⁶ Odagiri 1946: 71.

prose, which does not easily lend itself to translation, paints a glowing picture for the reader, with the people of Japan standing on an historic threshold, a “[...] sweeping path to global humanity” laid out before them. At the same time, she offers a way back for Dower’s “remorseful intellectuals”, who felt a deep sense of guilt at their failure to resist being swept away by the tide of militarism and war.¹⁷ In this, the essay is also one of the earliest, or at least most widely known early post-defeat writings to begin to tackle the question of wartime complicity and *tenkō*.

The essay is also significant in that this period of heady optimism, where the people walk shoulder to shoulder, where SNB and JCP leadership work hand in glove, was very short-lived. By 1949, top members of the JCP were openly criticising Miyamoto. In 1950 *Jinmin Bungaku* (The People’s Literature) commenced publication as a rival to SNB, as a journal that more faithfully reflected the thinking of the JCP. Nor did the cooperative relationship between the JCP and the GHQ last. Just as Shiga Yoshio¹⁸ (1901–1989) predicted as he and Tokuda Kyūchi used their time in prison to plan for a post-defeat JCP, General Douglas MacArthur turned on the party.¹⁹ Beginning with the prohibition of the 1947 February 1 general strike, GHQ became increasingly hostile to the party and the communist movement. A hostility that culminated in a “red purge” beginning in 1950, which saw hundreds of communists removed from public offices and replaced by de-purged militarists.

Miyamoto’s essay, in short, captures that ephemeral moment when communism in Japan was not a rigid political party dominated by dogma and factional infighting but rather a revolutionary, transformational movement. It was not revolutionary merely in the political or economic sense, but revolutionary in that it offered hope to Japanese writers who, suffering disease and malnutrition, were traumatised by the war and its aftermath. It offered them a

¹⁷ Dower 1999: 233–239.

¹⁸ Shiga Yoshio 志賀義雄 (1901–1989) joined the JCP in 1923 while a student at Tokyo Imperial University. Arrested in 1928, he was not released until after Japan’s defeat in 1945. Upon his release, he, along with Tokuda Kyūichi, played an active role in the reconstitution of the JCP. In contrast to Nosaka’s “loveable communist party”, Shiga espoused a hard line, publicly naming the emperor the “top war criminal” and supporting, amongst other things, the complete dismantling of the emperor system, see Scalapino 1967: 48–50. Elected six times to the House of Representatives (1946–1950 and 1955–1966) he was a key figure in the party as well as a vocal participant in the endless factional strife that plagued the JCP. He was expelled from the JCP in 1964 for his public support of the pro-Soviet faction of the party during a time when the mainstream of the party was supporting China, see Scalapino 1967: 169–171.

¹⁹ Koschmann 1996: 28.

chance of absolution and redemption. It offered them a new vista for literary expression; one that they truly believed might change the world.

2 Translation

Raise your voice in song! The Origins of the *New Japanese Literature Association*²⁰

Today we find Japan on the cusp of a new, historical departure. We hear talk of the old militarist Japan being replaced by a cultural Japan and for the very first time since the Meiji era democracy, in its proper form, has begun to take root in our everyday lives.

The word “democracy” echoes in all corners even as we see the word “new” emblazoned across a host of publications that, navigating paper shortages and other obstacles, are being rushed into print and onto crowded shelves.

Yet, oddly, though we see such vibrant activity on one level, a kind of reluctance lingers. The power of true Japanese culture to elevate us, a power that crashes down upon us like waves of youthful joy – immediately and viscerally – has not yet made itself felt. Is there anyone who would deny this?

Clearly, this reluctance does not arise out of a suspicion toward the new, international path onto which Japan has been placed. Who amongst us can fail to rejoice at the defeat of our oppressors, at the end of senseless violence and the physical and spiritual slaughter it engendered? Who could fail to rejoice now when, at long last, we are able to see ourselves as human beings again, able to speak with our own voices? In defeat, Japan steps across an historic threshold and emerges onto a new, sweeping path to global humanity.

This is perfectly understood by all. Each of us, hampered though we may be by external circumstances, has turned in that new direction and has begun to move forward. What is more, we see a spark in the people’s eyes as they march down that path. Yet, it is a spark whose significance they themselves do not seem to fully grasp. Why should this be?

The authority of beliefs thought unshakeable for decades – if not centuries – have come crashing down across society as a whole in the space of a few

²⁰ The following is a translation of Miyamoto Yuriko’s essay, “Utagoe yo, okore – Shin Nihon Bungakukai no yurai”, first published in 1946 in the pre-inaugural issue of *Shin Nihon Bungaku*. The translation is based on the public domain version of the text available from Aozora bunko at <http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000311/card2956.html> (accessed 09/15/2016)

months. Even as we stand beside these vast, historical ruins we cannot with complete confidence affirm that the flag of the people waves, that the hammer peals, and that the establishment of a complete and whole people progresses. The old regime, grasping at the vestiges of their power, has seized this last chance to reposition itself before the blindfold that deceived the people falls away entirely, before those whose eyes have at last been opened can glimpse more than a small part of the vista before them. On the other hand, they seek to lure the great masses of people who have but one eye open into a convenient wasteland, so that they might be more easily managed. Thus do they plot to throw into turmoil the judgment society would pronounce upon them.

Though the word "freedom" rings sweetly both in ear and in heart, the reality of the present food shortage means that the threat of starvation looms large over us all. Millions of honest Japanese, arriving in the modern era without ever having been taught how to bridge the gap between uncertainty and liberation, mill about, shoving and jostling one another.

At such an unprecedented historical moment, literature bears an enormous responsibility. What is more, dreams and hopes for the future so strong as to defy description fill the breasts of those immersed in cultural and literary activity. Yet, has it not been difficult to discover a solid foothold from which to advance? Does not the ground against which we push yield overmuch? Though it is widely accepted that Japan's literature must change, it seems to me that there are only vague notions of how or where this fundamental renewal should commence.

The atrophied legs upon which Japanese literature stands today are nothing other than a reflection of the essence of Meiji culture. For all that it accomplished, the Meiji restoration proved unequal to the task of firmly establishing human rights. For seventy years the idea of the individual as developed in European cultures, and the possibility of developing individuality remained tangled in the chains of feudalism. Thus, the central axis upon which modern western European literatures developed – the concept of the individual in society, the individual as an independent self – only reached, and that after much labour, its apex in the deformed self of the works of Natsume Sōseki.²¹ For realism, we have only the realism of Shiga Naoya,²² whose position is not unlike that of Cezanne's in western art history.

²¹ Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916), the most famous Japanese novelist of the twentieth century, he is widely known for his introspective examinations of the alienated intellectual, exemplified in his 1914 novel, *Kokoro*.

²² Shiga Naoya (1883–1971), sometimes referred to as the "God of the Novel", is known for his literary style and as one of the foremost practitioners of the "I-novel". He was also, briefly, a supporting member of the New Japanese Literature Association (NJLA) until a rift with poet and

After the end of World War I in 1918, a wave of international social transformation swept across Japan just as it did in other countries. The problem of social engagement was debated, and the development of humanity and of literature was at the core of this debate. Yet, a persistent aversion to social issues – that hallmark of Japanese literature as it transitioned from the Tokugawa to the Meiji periods – continued to exert a powerful, reactionary influence across the whole spectrum of cultural and literary activity.

Then, fourteen years ago (1931), just as the Japan's military forces in Asia were embarking on one of the worst catastrophes the world has ever known, World War II, reactionary forces in the government choked the life from the greatest accomplishment of democratic literature: the proletariat literature movement. Thus, the old Japanese literature was utterly undone, its very foundations destroyed by the same reactionary spirit it had long considered to be one of its pillars.

As pressure to aid the war effort mounted, reactionary writers, aping military and government officials, sought to mobilise writers on a grand scale to support the militarist cause in a variety of ways. Those who did not obey, those who possessed a degree of insight into the essence of the war, and those who sought to protect literature as literature were silenced and thrown into prison.

Six years ago, just as people were beginning to talk of the collapse of the “I-novel”,²³ the literature of the past was on the brink of death.

With each passing day, authors intuitively sensed both the terrifying changes taking place throughout the world and the shifts occurring in Japanese society. In such an environment writers could not but ponder their *raison d'être*. War is not a state in which the flower of culture blooms, and this no doubt magnified the anxiety felt by those who relied on their pens for their livelihoods. To escape from this predicament established writers sought, with utmost seriousness, to employ this new, powerful passion to discover a new foundation for themselves as artists and as individuals. They tried to see the war as a catalyst. They sought a way out of their dilemma by transforming literature, by developing new genres such as reportage²⁴ or national literature.²⁵

NJLA founding member, Nakano Shigeharu, led to his withdrawal from the association. Shiga Naoya's invitation to become a supporting member was no doubt intended to help broaden the appeal of the NJLA beyond the relatively narrow readership of pre-war proletariat literature.

²³ The “I-novel” (私小説 *watakushi shōsetsu*) is a genre of semi-autobiographical, confessional writing that dominated Japanese literature during the first half of the twentieth century.

²⁴ I.e., the writings of literary figures sent to the front as war correspondents.

²⁵ While *kokumin bungaku* 国民文学 (national literature) existed in various iterations since the Meiji period, here it seems most likely that Miyamoto is referring to the school of thought endorsed by Hayashi Fusao (1903–1975), Asano Akira (1901–1990), Yasuda Yojūrō (1910–1981)

Yet, despite the sincerity of their attempts, these efforts were undermined by the semi-feudal state of Japanese society. They were confounded by a culture whose tradition has never possessed a subjectivity capable of opposing authority or an independence capable of constructing a self. Thus, in the end, they were served up as the garnish atop the barbaric platter of war support and had no choice but to be carted off here and there along the various paths of Japan's military invasions.

There is something concealed in this narrative that is highly relevant to our task of creating a literature for the future. Regardless of whether or not you yourself were a writer in such a situation, you nevertheless experienced a fragment of the reality of that terrible war. From a sweeping, international vista, you witnessed the acute contradictions of a backwards Japan. Amidst that maelstrom, that heart-wrenching, reckless, endless expenditure of human life, it is impossible – *impossible* – that some event, or perhaps the entire situation itself, did not engrave itself deeply onto your mind, never to be forgotten while you live. There must have been an instant where something happened, something that changed the way you look at life, at society. Even a writer such as Ozaki Shirō,²⁶ whose thoughts on the war are well known, who all but flees from lasting impressions, even amidst *his* confused jottings we can still find hints of moments of suffering. In his articles from the Burmese front, written for *Bungei Shunjū*,²⁷ Hino Ashihei²⁸ mocks the US Air Force in a manner typical of war correspondents yet, at the same time, he vividly depicts the contrast between Japanese and American military tactics. The Japanese army, having inherited decades-old, two-dimensional tactics, drags its supply lines across the land like a slithering tail, carrying with it even the sick and wounded – thus increasing their bitter suffering. In contrast to this is the modern, scientific approach of the Americans using air power, creating a three-dimensional link

and other enthusiastic supporters of Japan's war effort. Post-Meiji literature was criticised as a kind of “parasitic intellectualism” that was utterly cut off from the masses and, amongst other things, supporters of *kokumin bungaku* promoted a literature written in the language of the working masses and, in that at least, its aims coincided somewhat with the then defunct proletariat literature movement, see Izu 1977.

²⁶ See note 14.

²⁷ A popular literary magazine established and run by Kikuchi Kan (1888–1948) that was disbanded in 1946 due to its cooperation with and support for the war. Kikuchi, one of the twenty-five writers singled out by Odagiri in his denunciation of war collaborators, was purged from public life due to his active cooperation in the war effort and the militarists. The magazine was reformed under new management three months after being disbanded and continues to be published today. It is particularly well known for its semi-annual award of the Akutagawa prize to new writers.

²⁸ See note 13.

between earth and sky, employing three-dimensional manoeuvres to push the lines of battle forward quickly and with minimal loss of life. The words themselves reveal the deep impression that this scene made upon the author. If only he had pursued that one, sincere impression, if only he had attempted to view the situation from a stance based on the dignity of human life, how different might have been his later years, both as a human being and as a writer. Yet, whether due to his dishonesty or to a weakness worse even than deliberate malice, he expunged such key moments from the paths of his literature and of his life.

Up to a certain point in the war's development, many writers were mobilised in Japan and overseas. They participated out of an unquestioned desire to "mature" as writers, out of an attraction to the old naturalist version of realism²⁹ that sought only to accumulate experience. As the war progressed, however, the military itself began to interfere with the work of these war correspondents, issuing instead reports filled with lies. At the same time, these correspondents, witnessing firsthand the conditions on the front, felt their ardour cool. Why did they lose their initial hopes and expectations? I believe that, standing there amidst the essence of the war itself, they must have awakened, in good conscience as writers and as human beings, to the fact that those hopes and expectations could not possibly endure in the face of the reality before them. As government war correspondents, these writers occupied positions detached from those of the tragic masses of the soldiers, or the bitter fates of the soldiers' families. The vague realisation that they were nothing but decorative touches on a fraud must have borne down on them in the end.

I am certain that this was a universal experience, with each person arriving at this point in his or her own way, through a range of profound impressions. How different would our literary landscape be today if each of those writers had felt, in the depths of their hearts, the value of these moments as part of the historical experience of the Japanese masses, if they had sought to convey them, and if they had done so in open opposition to unforgiving authorities who would have never permitted it? These newly opened doors would be crammed with the hopes and desires of the people. The power of a living, literary creativity would burst forth in a gushing torrent, the prospects of suffering, of perseverance and of victory thrumming in the peoples' breasts. No doubt these writers would have been by being swept away by this tide and, in being swept away, would have

²⁹ Though initially inspired by it, "Japanese naturalism" (*shizenshugi* 自然主義) differs significantly from the Naturalism of Zola in Europe insofar as its focus was on highly subjective, personal confessional accounts, culminating in the "I-novel" that was to exert such a profound influence over early twentieth century Japanese literature.

secured a firm foothold, deployed in the lives of the masses, that true womb of new literature.

Yet, such was not the case. Most writers let this opportunity for the historical transformation of both self and literature slip by. This happened because the Japanese democratic literary tradition, that wellspring of all possible understanding of self and literature, had failed to grasp the significance of an objective sociality that had been ceaselessly expounded upon over many arduous years. This happened because these writers did not firmly, yet humbly, use their literature to propagate the notion of the self as being inextricably embedded in the masses.

We know how many youths, a mere sixteen or seventeen years old, perished in this war. We know how many fathers, brothers, and husbands died. What is more, we know that there are a vast number of people who know how the dead lost their lives, who know how the living managed to survive. Who could possibly believe, amongst all those who returned alive, amongst the masses of Japanese who today greet the returnees, that none of them have so much as a single thought to express?

Just as the lack of a historically based social awareness caused many writers to miss this chance to develop and to renew their creativity, a similar situation exists amongst the Japanese people. For years, wisdom and judgment have been ignored. Government policies muzzled their true voices. So effective were these policies that, despite fearing death in the morning, soldiers sitting down to write their families at night could only aver that they serve faithfully still. They were robbed even of their ability to affirm their own deeply held feelings.

When one looks at writers with a reasonable body of work today, nearly all are in their forties. Where the next generation should be, the younger generation, less experienced but possessing prospects for a bright future, there is only a void. This caesura, hewn at this particular spot in our literature, reveals the grim reality we face even as it shows how completely that precious, youthful creativity inhabiting the lives of the Japanese masses has been obliterated.

Writers today, if they can recall opportunities let slip in the past, must dedicate themselves with a simple passion to recapturing that living moment. This must become the very reason for their existence. They must grasp this moment as but one of the many bitter experiences of the oppressed Japanese masses. They must interpret it through a firm understanding of social history and, in so doing, make possible a new departure for their literature and for their lives. A true people's literature is nothing other than a literature in which each of us is dedicated to a more rational and historically based transformation of ourselves as individuals and as a society. A true people's literature is a voice raised in song, a voice that sings, unflinchingly, of the inexorable movement of world history.

At first, the voices may be weak or few in number. Yet, gradually they will grow and swell, beckoning to the voices in the hearts of others, to people from all corners of society. We must advance into a new, bountiful Japan as a great choir of the people, each chorus distilled, each note expressing our sentiments correctly.

The New Japanese Literature Association was established and planned with these aspirations in mind. We publish our journal, *New Japanese Literature*, in the hopes that, handed from person to person, from village to city, from seaside to mountain, the literature of a still-traumatised Japan will serve as a catalyst, will rise on its atrophied legs and march forth with a new, bold stride. We, the people of Japan, have the right to live. To live is not simply to exist. It is to live with one's head held high, to have a life that, of itself, cultivates discussion of song and reason. It is that noble ability to create an art capable of expressing this belief that distinguishes human beings from the animal nature of all the creatures that populate this earth. It is by the fruits of such labours that we are, for the first time, able to see ourselves objectively as we lead our lives. It is with the intention of becoming just such a literary fortress that we publish *New Japanese Literature*.

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