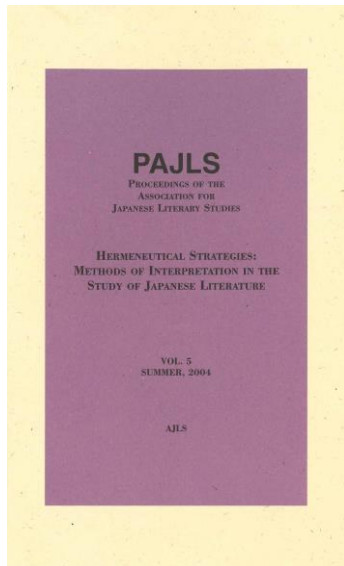


“The Fiction and Criticism of Sakaguchi Ango: The Rhetoric of Ambivalence”

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Takeshi Oshino

THE IMAGE OF ANTICONVENTIONALITY AS AN INVERSION

The image of Sakaguchi Ango as an author who denounced the values of prewar Japan is a deep-rooted one. This image of the author as an anti-war literati and an anticonventionalist may be attributed to the large impact that his works like “Darakuron” (Discourse on Decadence, 1946) and “Hakuchi” (The Idiot, 1946) have had on their readers. Ango is often grouped together with Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) and Oda Sakunosuke (1913-1947) as *Burai-ha* (Decadent faction) writers, a group of writers whose activities carried out through their postwar journalism, along with their destructive lifestyles came to be mythologized.

Such postwar-created myths came to dominate the readings of their wartime writings. Ango’s “Nihon bunka shikan” (A Personal View of Japanese Culture, 1942) is an essay that was written in retaliation against the Orientalism of Bruno Taut’s (1880-1938) essay sharing the same name. In it, we find the following famous passage:

It does not matter at all if Hōryūji and Byōdōin are both burnt down. If necessary, you can take down Hōryūji and turn it into a parking lot. The illuminating culture and the traditions of our race (*waga minzoku*) will not be destroyed by such things. No more are the days of the quiet sunsets at Musashino, but in its place, the evening sun lights up the countless barrack roofs. Because of all the dust, even sunny days seem cloudy, and instead of the view of the moonlit sky, neon signs glow, but as long as the souls (*tamashii*) of our actual lives exist in this place, what could be more beautiful?¹

Translated by Miri Nakamura (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, Stanford University).

¹ Sakaguchi Ango. “Nihon bunka shikan” [A Personal View of Japanese Culture]. 1942. *Sakabuchi Ango Zenshū* 3 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), pp. 356-379. Quote on pp. 378-379. The abbreviation *SAZ* will henceforth be used to indicate *Sakaguchi Ango Zenshū*. All translations here are mine, unless otherwise noted. [Tr.]

Karatani Kōjin's essay "On 'A Personal View of Japanese Culture'"² aptly constructs the image of Ango as a practical rationalist who rejected the Kawabata-esque "matsugo no me" (view at the moment of death)—a mode of observing the world through contemplation and reducing everything to an aesthetic judgment. In the opening of this essay, Karatani comments that, originally, he had been under the illusion that "Nihon bunka shikan" was a postwar work. He confesses that he was swayed by the prejudice that it was impossible for such a writing to be produced during the war.

One must note, however, that Ango never once criticized the legitimacy of Japan's war. In fact, he was actively involved in advocating the war along with the majority of the literati.

Ango was a member of *Nihon bungaku hōkokukai* (Japanese Literary Patriotic Association), a group of writers involved in national policy. One of the anthologies edited by the society, *Tsuji shōsetsu* (Literature at Crossroads), even published Ango's essay "Dentō no musansha" (The Proletariat of Tradition, 1943) during the war.³ This work was actually linked to Japan's "*kenkan kenkin undō*" (Shipbuilding Donation Campaign), as Ango contributed to the movement through the donation of his manuscript fee. Furthermore, the essay contains a line: "I am certain that not many people will be saddened if the tiles of Hōryūji are converted into guns."⁴ The aforementioned passage from "Nihon bunka shikan" about Hōryūji being turned into a parking lot needs to be reinterpreted by taking these historical contexts into consideration. Ango's arguments in "Nihon bunka shikan" are complicit with the wartime policy of *kinzoku kyōshutsu* (the contribution of metal for the Japanese military).

In contrast to "Nihon bunka shikan," Ango's short story "Shinju" (Pearl, 1942) was regarded as an "opportunistic" piece of work and failed to receive any critical attention for a long period of time.⁵ However, recently, this judgment has come to be reversed and "Shinju" has come to be reexamined as a piece of literature that resists the dominant discourse of

² Karatani Kōjin. "Nihon bunka shikan' ron" [On "A Personal View of Japanese Culture"]. 1975. Karatani Kōjin, ed. *Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji* [Sakaguchi Ango and Nakagami Kenji] (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 1996), pp. 10-53.

³ Sakaguchi Ango. "Dentō no musansha" [The Proletariat of Tradition]. 1943. *SAZ 3* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), p. 464. *Tsuji shōsetsu* [Literature at Crossroads] was a literary anthology to which numerous authors like Ango contributed during the war. The original publication was by Hakkōsha Sugiyama Shoten in 1943.

⁴ "Dentō no musansha," p. 464.

⁵ Sakaguchi Ango. "Shinju" [Pearl]. 1942. *SAZ 3*. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), pp. 390-401.

that time period. Before discussing “Shinju,” a reevaluation of the framework for wartime literary judgment is necessary. How valid is it to presently read a work as a text of ‘resistance,’ when the readers of that period did not consider its textual discourse to be one of ‘resistance’ or even that of ‘criticism’? Although this paper, too, attempts to investigate the critical voice within “Shinju,” it does not treat it as a transcendent or an ahistorical text; rather, its goal is to resituate the text within the context of wartime Japan.

REEXAMINING THE SCHOLARSHIP ON *SENSŌ BUNGA* (LITERATURE ON WAR)

It is not an overstatement to say that “Shinju” was written as homage to the nine members of the Special Attack Forces who, on the morning of December 8, 1941, smashed into Pearl Harbor as human torpedoes. The public was informed of the self-sacrificing acts of these Special Attack Forces the eighteenth of the same month, but at that time, their names were withheld, and no personal details were given. That, however, all changed with the radio announcement of March 6, 1942, transmitted by Captain Hiraide, the section chief of the navy press. During this announcement, the names of what will later come to be known as the “Nine Gods of War” (the Japanese phrase) were released, and the lives of the nine soldiers were quickly mythologized. Hiraide’s words were published in various papers the following day, as well as being recorded in countless books. His words were as follows:

Their eyes did not seek promotion, nor distinction. They threw away their happiness, their own bodies, and even the concept of their own “selves” (*jiko*). They offered their bodies and souls to their ruler and their native land, and though barely in their twenties, they fell like flowers, defending their land [...]

The brave, who decide to depart on such missions are all young. One of these young officers was said to have remarked, “I got my lunch box, my soda, and I even received some chocolate. I feel like I’m going hiking,” before he bravely boarded [his torpedo]. At that moment, childhood memories of joyful field trips (*ensoku*) most likely flashed through this young hero’s mind. This brave hero had gladly sprung into his death, filled with nostalgic remembrances of his boyhood field trips.⁶

⁶ *Asahi shinbun* [Asahi Newspaper] (1942.3/7), p. 8.

In this fashion, Hiraide emphasized the altruism of the nine and narrated their journey to the end, metaphorically, as if going on a field trip. Ango, as if reproducing these mythologized images of the “Nine Gods of War,” calls out to them as *anatagata* (you honorable ones) while praising their actions throughout the text. In one scene of “Shinju,” the character *boku* (I) is at a barbershop and becomes filled with emotion as he listens to a radio program announcing the declaration of war against the U.S. and Britain:

I searched for a barbershop with a radio. I was expecting some news. I was the only customer. When I was getting my beard shaved, the speech of our Majesty came on, followed by a lecture by Prime Minister Tōjō. Tears fell from my eyes. The time had come when words were no longer needed. If necessary, I too, would have to sacrifice my own life. We must prevent even one enemy soldier from entering our land.⁷

Although Ango wrote, “The time had come when words were no longer needed,” “December 8th” actually became a large marker in literary history. Numerous stories regarding “December 8th” were produced, while the “Nine Gods of War” became a popular subject matter, especially for poems and *tanka*. Moreover, many texts surrounding “December 8th” were mostly written in the confessional mode, in a diary format. Hence, it is possible to read “Shinju” as a somewhat particular “diary of a burai-ha author,” where “December 8th” is captured and privileged as a dramatic, emotional day.

“December 8th” also became the catalyst for a huge period of transition in genres such as the *shōsetsu*, modern poetry, and classical poetry. Not only poets of the conservative faction, but also those of *modanizumu* (modernism), all at once rushed to compose *sensōshi* (war poems), which gave rise to an age of poetry, hitherto unseen. The dramatic feelings of December 8th and the following battles were first captured in poetry, and composers of poetry, *waka*, and *haiku*, whose existences had been shadowed by the *shōsetsu* up until then, all competed with one another to praise the war in their songs. In order to disseminate the people’s excitement, their poems were taken up in the pages of newspapers and magazines, and poetry came to be appraised as the form of expression most suitable for representing the heightened emotion of war.

“December 8th” thus marked the transition of genres, where *shōsetsu*, or prose, moved over to make room for poetry. What matters here,

⁷ “Shinju,” p. 395.

however, is not just the rise of poetry as the leader of all genres, but that poetic or aesthetic discourse, out of all the genres came to take on the role of glorifying the war. Through this discourse, war and fascism would come to be represented not as something cruel, but something that embodies beauty itself. Aesthetics is ideological in that it has the political function to legitimize and naturalize the relationship between individuals and society. Even in the case of prose literature concerning “December 8th,” these texts took advantage of the rhetoric of poetic language, and this is how the nationalization of a unified historic sentiment advanced.

It is therefore erroneous to read an anti-war “intention” into Ango’s text. Instead, the intention of the text as homage to the “Nine Gods of War” should be regarded as a betrayal by the text itself. This kind of reading may seem like a postmodern deconstructionist reading or one that treats the text as strictly being performative, but even at the constative level, the ambivalent nature of this short story is evident. The readers of Ango’s time, too, were aware of this aspect to a certain degree, and the ambivalent nature of their criticism stands as proof of this. Hirano Ken, for example, praised the text as follows:

National sentiment normally has the nature of refusing to be weaved into literary works. However, our Sakaguchi Ango daringly accomplished this without a moment of waver, and by mixing with it what may seem at first like a careless description of his own lazy lifestyle, he succeeded in producing a marvelous literary world. He created “*shinwa*” *no zettai sekai* (an absolute world of “myths”) that would have rendered any mediocre author to a loss of words. Sakaguchi Ango, however, was able to knock on its door without even trying.⁸

By contrasting the excitement of the people with the lazy everyday life of *boku*, Ango had succeeded in creating “an absolute world of ‘myths.’”

On the other hand, Shibukawa Gyō criticized the text’s I-Novel aspect and pushed for a historical fiction that was more fitting for its time:

Sakaguchi Ango’s “Shinju” (Bungei) praises the nine brave heroes who attacked Pearl Harbor aboard special submarines.

⁸ Hirano Ken. “Bungei jihyō” [Literary Review]. 1942.6. Sekii Mitsuo, ed. *Sakaguchi Ango Kenkyū I* [Research on Sakaguchi Ango I]. (Tokyo: Tōju-sha, 1972), pp. 36-37. Quote on p 36.

From this point of view, the work is one that touches upon contemporary history. The form of addressing [the nine] as *anatagata* may seem like a novel idea, but in the end, it is just an alteration of the I-Novel form. On top of this, I felt a strong dissatisfaction after I finished reading it. This is because the life of *boku* that appears here, compared to the nine heroes, seems like such an irresponsible, shabby life. If one is going to compose such a song of praise, *boku* himself must show some effort of trying to make steps towards their lives.⁹

In this fashion, critics noted how the text on one hand praised the heroes as *anatagata*, while at the same time depicting *boku*'s irresponsible lifestyle. They brought to light the distinction between *boku* and the superhuman aspects of the lives of *anatagata*. The critical appreciation of the text was largely divided by how one grasped this contrasting relationship, and in the following pages, I hope to shed light upon what Shibukawa described as a certain "dissatisfaction" in his time. The story of "Shinju" is at once sympathetic to its historical moment, at the same time that it is critical of it. It is a text that is filled with various conflicts and contradiction—a text of ambivalence.

THE DISCOURSE OF *HONMATSU TENTŌ* (PUTTING THE CART BEFORE THE OX)

Let me first outline the structure and the chronology within the text. The story of "Shinju" describes *boku*'s life between December 6 and December 8, 1941. During those days, *boku* pictures how *anatagata* must have spent those same three days. The existence of the "Nine Gods of War" was not publicized until March 6th of the following year, so the narration of *boku* is one where he reconstructs it from the present moment. By narrating through *boku*'s awareness about how he had spent the same three days in comparison to *anatagata*, Ango probably tried to praise *anatagata* through their highly contrasting image to the portrait of the author, who leads an irresponsible lifestyle. There is no question that the main dish of the text is *anatagata*, with *boku* being served as an hors d'oeuvre of sort to whet the appetite for the former.

However, in this story, if we are to borrow a phrase from the text itself, numerous *honmatsu tentō* (Putting the Cart Before the Ox) take place. At the beginning of the tale, for example, *boku* goes to Odawara for

⁹ Shibukawa Gyō. "Rekishiteki jijitsusei to genjitsusei— bungei jihyō" [Historical Truth and Reality— A Literary Review]. *Bungei Shuchō* [Main Currents of Literary Art] (1942.7): 4-13. Quote on p. 8.

the purpose of picking up a padded *kimono* from his friend Garandō, but his objective is soon replaced by his search for fish. He spent the previous night at the house of Ōi Hirosuke. There, he was asked by Mrs. Ōi to buy her some fish when he reached Odawara. *Boku* explains:

If that was the case, I couldn't just walk down Tōkaidō with my padded *kimono* hanging from my arm, so I decided to put off picking up the *kimono*. I no longer knew why I had come to Odawara in the first place, but these kinds of *honmatsu tentō* always occurred wherever I went, and there was nothing I could do about it.¹⁰

Honmatsu tentō describes an action of events where one's original purpose is replaced by a superfluous one. If we are to extend its meaning and examine how it is more generally used, the phrase implies the inability to accomplish one's original task, having to postpone it, or having one's expectations betrayed. Under these contexts, as *boku* himself states, he experiences *honmatsu tentō* wherever he goes. In fact, *honmatsu tentō* occurs to him so often that one may say that the entire text is governed by its discourse.

Boku first calls out to *anatagata* and expresses his overflowing sentiment for them, whose actions of "December 8th," in his opinion, transcended death itself. Then, the narrative style abruptly changes, as he begins to talk about how he himself spent the same "December 8th." Here is how his narrative begins: On the afternoon of December 6th, *boku* was supposed to go pick up a padded *kimono* in Odawara, but he never reaches Odawara because he was drinking *sake* with his publisher that night. This marks the beginning of his tie to *honmatsu tentō*. *Boku* arrives in Odawara the evening of the following day, but his friend Garandō, who is in possession of the padded *kimono*, is not there.

Boku then remembers Mrs. Ōi's request for fish, and goes to Ninomiya the next day to find it, accompanied by Garandō. However, they do not go directly to the fish market, but instead make a stop at a Zen temple. The grave of Garandō's relative is there, and although it is the anniversary of that person's death, they walk past the grave without stopping to pay their respects and head toward a different temple. There, a graveyard is being relocated and the workers are exhuming the bones in order to expand the railroad. Garandō's behavior thus deviates from the "family-state" model, to say the least, and what more, we discover that his

¹⁰ "Shinju," pp. 394-395.

true objective for graveyard shopping was to excavate pre-imperial, native Japanese earthenware. *Boku* describes the scene:

However, because the objective [of the workers] was different [from that of Garandō] and they had used hoes for the exhumation, the earthenware were all broken into pieces and scattered all over the place. Even if one were to assiduously look for the matching pieces, it would have been impossible to make them whole again.¹¹

Hence, not only for *boku* but for Garandō and the workers as well, their objectives constantly shift and their original goals are never accomplished. The two friends then take a shortcut to get to the fish market. However, as may be expected by now in this story, they are unable to find any suitable fish:

At the fish market of Ninomiya, there was a shark about three and a half meters in length. We found the fish vendor that we intended to shop at, but not a single fish from that area was left. It's a bad day. On a day like this, even shoppers don't come here to look for fish.¹²

Thus *boku* is told, and he barely manages to scrounge one tuna there.

Overall, rather than focusing on the aestheticized or sympathetic image of "The Nine Gods of War," the story contrastively zooms in on the daily lives of the common people. With the exception of *boku*, characters do not show any excitement regarding "December 8th." The wife of Garandō is not even certain at all if war has started, and Garandō, too, is ill-informed. The text then does not end up overemphasizing or privileging the date of "December 8th."

THE LAND WHERE POESY PROSPERS

Ango was most likely interested in the "Nine Gods of War" because of their image as "superhumans" and the anecdote about them "going on a field trip." In "Shinju," the word *ensoku* (field trip) appears four times, so it may be said that the image of the latter was particularly striking. The image of the Special Attack Forces as "superhumans" was an aestheticized image that existed in the popular imagination of the time, but the image of them going on a "field trip" was not widely spread. Here, Ango was drawn

¹¹ "Shinju," p. 397.

¹² "Shinju," p. 397.

to the metaphorization and the poetic rhetoric of describing the nine's actions as going on a field trip. Even if they were "superhumans" who "would go forth even if death were certain,"¹³ Ango was already used to those types of "superhumans" through various materials on Christianity and had seen the images of Christian martyrs to the point where he was weary of them. Moreover, Ango was even hardhearted toward Christian martyrs who had transcended death.

What moved Ango was not the actions of the nine themselves, but the poetic rhetoric used to express their actions as going on a "field trip." In the narrative, an anecdote suddenly appears, about an old man who writes in his will to have his ashes scattered over his flower field. Although this story may seem at first to have no connection to the story of the nine, this too is an example of the poetic rhetoric that is only brought to light through the mythologized image of the "War Gods" who "shatter like pearls." The same could be said to the image of the fragmented earthenware, which were of course "shattered." In this manner, objects that at first seem completely unrelated are connected through the rhetoric of poesy. Furthermore, the reason why the old man plays such an important role for Ango lies precisely in the description of his death. As the text states, the old man had experienced "a joyful period of time where he actually sought a certain poetic sentiment towards his afterlife."¹⁴ This image of poetry and death once again connects him to the nine, as one of *anatagata* had also left a verse before his death, which read "Let us pass, beyond the ropes and the mines. Let us attack, then shatter like pearls." This poem thus serves the same role as the old man's will. Poetic rhetoric and imageries, such as the old man's wish to have his ashes scattered over a flower field or the nine young men shattering like pearls, result in aestheticizing the notion of death itself. Aesthetic discourse, as stated earlier, has a highly ideological power in that it naturalizes the relationship between individuals and society. It also has the function of making one repress or forget one's objective, logical thoughts surrounding an event, December 8th being a good example. In other words, aesthetic discourse is one that seduces its readers to the point where they can no longer see through its ornamental words. Here then, it is no coincidence that the old man and the soldiers' "*matsugo no me*" all call out for poetic language and rhetoric to narrate their deaths.

It is somewhat contradictory then that Ango himself actually attempted to change from being a poet to being a novelist. In discussing

¹³ "Shinju," p. 392.

¹⁴ "Shinju," p. 401. The old man was based on an actual person, whom Ango discovered through newspaper articles.

the difference between his literature and that of Makino Shin'ichi (1896-1936), who had committed suicide in (1936), Ango explains, "I turned into a novelist from being a poet. Or at least, I tried to do that."¹⁵ He also writes in "Nihon bunka shikan:"

You cannot have a single line whose purpose is to show beauty. Beauty will not be born from a place where it was consciously created. One must write about what must be written, only what is necessary to be written, and write with the single purpose of answering this necessity... When one ignores the demands of essence (*jishitsu*) and builds a pillar from the stance of beauty and poetry, that [pillar] becomes a frivolous piece of a meticulously crafted work. This is the spirit of prose and the epitome of *shōsetsu*.¹⁶

For Ango, "the spirit of prose" always stood in contrast to Japanese aesthetics. The rest of the section will take a look at this self-conflict of the author, who had to negotiate this "spirit of prose" with Japanese aesthetics.

In order to historically ground this contention about "the spirit of the prose," a few words must be said about the 1930s debates surrounding prose and art between the members of *jinmin bunko-ha* (The People's Library Group) led by Hirotsu Kazuo (1891-1968) and those belonging to the *nihon roman-ha* (Japanese Romanticism Group) like Hayashi Fusao (1903-1975). Toward the beginning of 1930s, Hirotsu defined "the spirit of prose" as a spirit that resists fascism, or "the powerful wall that obstructs the advancement of Japanese culture" and as "a spirit that seeks reality and one that pushes forth for the verdict little by little, without being influenced by good or evil."¹⁷ Certainly, at the time when the poetic spirit represented by the Japanese romanticists was being praised, the claims of the *jinmin bunko-ha* had the chance of turning their words into a critique of fascism. However, when one reads the words expressed in the wartime writings of Hirotsu, it is evident that their claims stopped at the opportunistic level.¹⁸

¹⁵ Sakaguchi Ango. "Makino-san no shi" [The Death of Mr. Makino]. 1936.5. *SAZ* 2. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999), pp. 110-121. Quote on p. 112.

¹⁶ "Nihon bunka shikan," p. 377.

¹⁷ Hirotsu Kazuo. "Sanbun seishin ni tsuite" [On the Spirit of Prose]. *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* [Tokyo Daily News] (1936.10/27-10/29). Republished in *Hirotsu Kazuo Zenshū* 9. (Tokyo: Chūō kōron-sha, 1989), pp. 276-279. Quote on p. 276.

¹⁸ For example, Hirotsu has expressed how moved he was by December 8th and has praised the "Nine Gods of War" in various texts. See his articles in the

Ango, at the same time that he advocated “the spirit of prose,” was also drawn to something poetic, as we saw in the case of “Pearl” and as he states in the third and a distinctive chapter of “Nihon bunka shikan” entitled “Ie ni tsuite” (On Homes). The text reveals that a home, which should be a place to which one returns, is actually a place of repentance and introspection. It is a place, as Ango claims in “Bungaku no furusato” (Literature’s Hometown), which captures “the absolute solitude conceived by life itself.”¹⁹

Ango was aware of the inevitability that one must ultimately return to ‘Japan,’ that one could not escape from the concept of ‘home’ and ‘Japan.’ This essay in its entirety reveals the ambivalence of accepting ‘Japan’ at the same time rejecting it. Returning to one’s *furusato* (home or ‘Japan’) is tied to a sense of guilt in Ango’s works, and this reflects his understanding that human beings can never escape from their “home” called “the absolute solitude.”

Moreover, in Chapter Four of the same work, “Bi ni tsuite” (On Beauty), Ango raises as examples: Kosuge Prison, the dry ice factory at Tsukudajima, and destroyers, in order to praise the beauty of functionality. The Kosuge Prison was famous for being an aesthetically pleasing prison. Japan boasted of its *modanizumu* architecture, and there is even an anecdote about how Chaplin once enjoyed a tour of the place. At first, Ango may seem to simply valorize the prison’s functionality over its aesthetics, as he conspicuously contrasts such concepts as “necessity” and “practice” to the idealism of traditional culture. However, it would be a mistake to reduce this to mere functionalism. Instead, Ango specifically inspects why one is drawn to such objects and explains these reasons through words such as “nostalgia” and “longing.” His idea of functionalism, hence, is a very unique one.

Ango had found his own Ango-esque poesy, be it in Japanese architecture, or in the “Nine Gods of War.” The story of “Shinju” is one where on the one hand, the author depicts the vulgar world of prose, where *boku* resides, at the same time that he is strongly drawn to poetic world of the “Nine Gods of War.” It is a text that constantly fluctuates between being poetry and being prose.

Furthermore, Ango’s own attitude towards death should not be forgotten when discussing his poetic discourse. Although “Shinju,” in a

“gōgai” [special edition] of *Nihon hyōron* (1942.1) and see “Ā kono jinchū-tokubetsu kōgekintai ni yosu” [Oh, This Loyalty—I Dedicate to the Special Attack Forces] in *Miyako shinbun* [Miyako Newspaper] (1942.3/7)

¹⁹ Sakaguchi Ango. “Bungaku no furusato” [Literature’s Hometown]. 1941.8. *SAZ* 3, pp. 264-270. Quote on p. 269.

way, predicts the future deaths that the U.S. would cause in return, *boku* himself never faces death. Ango, however, stares death in the face during the air raids, and it is there that his perception of death becomes clear.

As he states in an essay called “Waga sensō ni taisho seru kufū no kazukazu” (The Numbers of Ways that I Countered the War)²⁰, when Ango actually saw the face of death, he did not just look beyond it like the “Nine Gods of War.” In fact, he came up with ways to try to avoid death. This is when he began to train himself by swimming against the waves in the Sea of Japan. He practiced holding his breath in cold baths and practiced running with over one hundred pounds of rocks on his back. At the same time, Ango was also aware of the contradictions within himself, for example when he refused to evacuate even when pressed to do so:

It is such a contradiction to think that I, who of course have no deep understanding of death—no, I, who fear death more than anyone else, would decide to put that all aside to stay in Tokyo, to run and survive until the end amidst the furor of war, that even if the enemy comes ashore and surround the place and we are attacked viciously by cannons, or if countless bombs are dropped here by their planes, I would hold my breath and hide somewhere until the last white flag is raised. However, this kind of self-contradiction is a contradiction that has been just a part of my life. I have always lived with these kinds of contradictions, and I do not feel any regret towards them.²¹

It is evident from “Darakuron” [On Decadence, 1946] that Ango saw in the air raids “a powerful force of destruction and an unexpected sense of affection from it.”²² At the same time, Ango also felt a sense of beauty and sublimity towards the war. His self-conflict lies in the fact that he continued to aestheticize death, at the same time that he was more than willing to live for his prose. In other words, Ango represented the limits and the borders of wartime discursive space, where one was always torn between poetry and prose.

²⁰ “Waga sensō ni taisho seru kufū no kazukazu” [The Numbers of Ways that I Countered the War]. 1947.4. *SAZ* 5. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1998), pp. 158-168.

²¹ “Waga sensō ni taisho seru kufū no kazukazu,” pp. 165-166.

²² Sakaguchi Ango. “Darakuron” [On Decadence]. 1946.4. *SAZ* 4. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1998), pp. 52-60. Quote on p. 57.