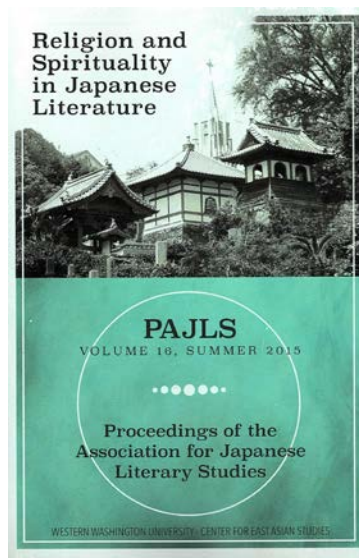


“Mystical Experience as Literary Locus in Ishikawa Jun’s *Fugen* (The Bodhisattva or Samantabhadra)”

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*Mystical Experience as Literary Locus  
in Ishikawa Jun's "Fugen"*  
*(The Bodhisattva or Samantabhadra)*

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**Introduction**

Suzuki Sadami indicates the development of a “vacillating self” (私の ‘揺らぎ’) in 1930s Japanese literature, where a “modern idea of homogeneous identity was disrupting” due to the rise of, from the 1920s, an “urban popular society” (都市大衆社会) that gave credence to the motif of the “double” (分身).<sup>1</sup> The works of Ishikawa Jun (石川淳1899-1987), along with those of Dazai Osamu, in the 1930s, are, according to Suzuki, the culmination of the practice of such “doubling,” underscoring the “split between the self that writes a novel and the self that is written in the novel” (書く己れと書かれる己れの分裂).<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of the 1930s, a literary trend that illustrated this “split” becomes notable among several modern Japanese authors—a novel with the protagonist who suffers from writer’s block,<sup>3</sup> as exemplified by Ishikawa’s novella “Fugen” (普賢, 1936, *The Bodhisattva, or Samantabhadra*).<sup>4</sup> Despite sharing a similar protagonist, however, each author attempts to ruminate differently in his novel on a new theory of fiction pitted against a backdrop of the social reality. Ishikawa’s “Fugen,” with the first-person narrator—*watashi*—

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<sup>1</sup> Suzuki Sadami, “Toshi taishū shakai to ‘watashi’—‘bunshin’ to ‘jiko-zō genshi’ no isō,” in *Nihon bungaku ni okeru “watashi,”* ed. Nakanishi Susumu (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1993), 266. For the translation—“vacillating self”—I borrowed it from Gil G. Noam, *The Moral Self* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 227. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>3</sup> Besides Ishikawa’s “Fugen,” other works include Dazai Osamu, “Sarumen Kaja” (1934); Nakano Shigeharu, “Shōsetsu no kakenu shōsetsuka” (1936); Nagai Kafū, *Bokutō Kidan* (1937).

<sup>4</sup> Ishikawa Jun, “Fugen” in *Ishikawa Jun zenshū [JZ]* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1989), vol. 1, 323-428; *The Bodhisattva or Samantabhadra*, trans. William Jefferson Tyler (New York: Columbia UP, 1990).

as the protagonist, is brimming with Buddhist motifs and imagery, highlighting the writing self's quest for a literary locus—a realm where words in fiction create literary reality against a backdrop of the social reality of Japan's 1930s.

Given that the creative process toward such an elusive realm is always taken by Ishikawa to be more important than its closure, an analysis of how the religious motifs and imagery are used in his fictional works beyond their place in religious dogma is crucial to any reading of such texts. In this article I argue that the religious motifs and imagery, as literary devices, facilitate Ishikawa's quest for a literary locus, focusing on a creative process analogous to mystical experience, in the sense that that process could lead the writing self to the transitory realm. An analysis of this creative process extends to Ishikawa's theory of fiction, particularly in its relation to history and historiography, and to various concepts borrowed from religion, philosophy, and politics in Japan and the West that help to better understand the novella, e.g., metafiction, Edmund Husserl's "life-world," Mircea Eliade's "hierophany," Ueda Shizuteru's "Being-in-the-Dual-World," and Ernesto Laclau's "Populism."

### The Writing Self's Metafictional Quest for Literary Locus

In his 1941 essay "Literature Today" Ishikawa states:

Literature is inconceivable where it is detached even a bit from the modern (現代) and its people, and thereby literature becomes timeless. Latent in the tensions between the modern and literature are refined circumstances that lead one to think simultaneously about the eternal/immutable (不易) and the fluid/transitory (流行), and about being (存在) and phenomenon (現象).<sup>5</sup>

If the first set of simultaneities concerns Ishikawa's affinity to the pre-modern poet Matsuo Bashō's dialogic poetics of the *haikai*, the second set shares the philosophical landscape of 20th-century Western thought on reality as part of an "intellectual development that traversed life-world experiences articulated in the perspective of phenomenology, historicism, and existentialism."<sup>6</sup>

Neither of them, however, prompts his literature to any kind of closure, but they point to "tensions" in his literary acts, where seemingly opposite

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<sup>5</sup> Ishikawa, "Bungaku no kon'nichi," in *Ishikawa Jun zenshū [IZ]*, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1990), 609.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Holmes, "José Ortega y Gasset," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gasset/#OntFacConTraPhe>), par. 1. Phenomenological views in Ortega y Gasset's Philosophy can relate to Ishikawa's literary idea, particularly, in that both share Paul Valéry's thoughts and the notion of "revolution."

drives—those of order and disorder—intertwine in both simultaneities. Here the central ideas of his literature—namely, “the action of the spirit” (精神の運動) and “revolution” (革命)—are formulated, constantly seeking alternatives to what he calls Japan’s “abstract modernity” (観念的な近代)<sup>7</sup>. In other words, the central ideas serve together as the dynamics for Ishikawa to envision a literary reality throughout his interplay with the layers of meaning that his writing self can perceive in the social reality of Japanese modernity.

A series of stories that center around such a writing self, or *watashi*, who suffers writer’s block are epitomized by Ishikawa’s novella “Fugen,” underlying the “minimal” plot as William Tyler shows it: “a young man [= *watashi*] rushes to a train station to warn his love, whom he has not seen during the decade of her hiding in the political underground, that the police have set a trap to apprehend her.”<sup>8</sup>

In the beginning of “Fugen,” the first-person narrator states: “[T]he breezes that stir the pages of the novel are far different from the gusts of the mundane world” (元來物語の世界の風は娑婆の風とは又格別なもの),<sup>9</sup> calling our attention to the mundane world where the novel unfolds as further paraphrased in his 1940 essay “The Structure of the Short Story”: “What maintains the world of the novel is the [author’s] Spirit [...] That spirit is contextualized in a literary work only through the struggle with the mundane world” (小説の世界を支へるものは精神にほかならぬ。[...] 精神は現實との対決に於てのみ作品に示現される).<sup>10</sup>

Unlike the manner of the Naturalist or the I-novelist among modern Japanese authors, though, the “mundane” world in “Fugen” brings the writer’s block into a metafictional context in which Ishikawa portrays the creative process of a first-person narrator. According to Mark Currie, metafiction is “a borderline discourse, as a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject.”<sup>11</sup> He further points out a marginal case that is important here: “The boundary of art and life within the fiction, by reproducing the boundary of art and life which

<sup>7</sup> Ishikawa, “Rekihi shōsetsu ni tsuite,” in *IZ*, vol. 12, 666.

<sup>8</sup> *Watashi*, who suffers writer’s block, frequently appears in his early works since his maiden work “Kajin” (1935). Others include “Hinkyū mondō” (1935), “Ashide” (1935), “Ikkyū banashi” (1936), and “Marusu no uta” (1938).

<sup>9</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 1; *IZ*, vol. 1, 323.

<sup>10</sup> Ishikawa, “Tanpen shōsetsu no kōsei,” in *IZ*, vol. 12, 288.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Currie, ed. & intro., *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), 4.

surrounds the fiction, subverts its own referential illusion and in so doing places it on the boundary between fiction and criticism.”<sup>12</sup> Currie’s remark defines metafiction as a literary form that highlights the discrepancy between the author’s fictional world and the mundane one. Writing this discrepancy in turn enables authors to critically grapple with the mundane world, or social reality, and to reformulate their theory of fiction within the metafictional narrative.

In the case of Ishikawa’s fiction, the metafictional narrative first and foremost stresses the role of language in creating fiction: “A single line of written words certainly acts in and of itself (確實に書かれた一行のことはかならずそれ自體の運動をおこす). Within the flow of these dynamic words (運動することば), sentences have life and rhythm. All the secrets about sentences lie in such dynamic words that are changeable and flexible.”<sup>13</sup> Here the point is that individual words, and particularly in novels, are taken to be no less important than the thematic contents, in that the “dynamic words” are what Ishikawa calls “another truth” (これまた真実).<sup>14</sup> These words are not so transparent to the writing self as to describe the mundane world as static or a closure, but they constantly envision alternatives to the mundane world. It may even well be that without such “dynamic words,” no sentence can be conducive to reifying a literary/creative narrative, and hence such words enable the writing self to search for a literary locus where a possible world, or literary reality, unfolds. It is in this realm of possibility that the self-reflexivity of Ishikawa’s novels proceeds. Again, in “The Structure of the Short Story,” he situates within that realm his life-long project to create novels: “The novel is made possible vis-à-vis the author’s attempt to know just what the novel is” (小説とは、作者が小説とはなにかといふことを知らうとする努力に於て成立してゐる).<sup>15</sup>

The literary locus endemic to a possible world that Ishikawa seeks is often depicted as elusive in “Fugen,” and thereby to seek this literary locus throws the writing self into being not only at an intersection of literary and social realities, but also at that of literary narrative and historiography. The latter leads Ishikawa to make a distinction between a novelist’s attempt to grapple with history of “diverse human actions” (人間の群運動)<sup>16</sup> in the modern world

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ishikawa, “Bunshō no keishiki to naiyō,” in *IZ*, vol. 12, 276-277.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>15</sup> Ishikawa, “Tanpen shōsetsu no kōsei,” 302.

<sup>16</sup> Ishikawa, “Rekishī to bungaku,” in *IZ*, vol. 12, 362.

and a historian's positivistic history of the "social image of the people in the past" (過去の人間の社会像).<sup>17</sup> In doing so, he integrates historiography from the perspective of the author's stance in a mundane world with his theory of the novel, or the "author's efforts to know what the novel is." Thus, Ishikawa's quest for literary reality underscores the fact that the temporality of historiography demands the potentiality of fiction in order to grasp a larger picture of historical reality.

Inspired by Paul Ricouer, Todd S. Mei addresses such a temporality: "freedom from historical defeat lies in aggravating the historical problem in a way that makes it the point of reflection at which the interpreter remains or is reminded of his/her fragile relationship to the flow of history. The point is not to resolve the historical aporia but to understand its hermeneutical demand."<sup>18</sup> If Japanese modernity is not a matter of closure but is brimming with aporiae as an ongoing process, Ishikawa's concern about history and literature extends to his perception of the contemporary events of his time, and in turn the history of Japanese modernity is renewed in his theory of fiction that centers on the multivalent "historical situatedness."<sup>19</sup>

In "Fugen" the first-person narrator, or *watashi*, is working on a biography of the medieval French author Christine de Pizan, whose last work—"hymn to Joan of Arc"—*watashi* highlights as Christine's social response to the crisis in France in her time. This *watashi*'s writing project metaphorically is in tandem with the writing self's search for a literary locus in his perception of the mundane world in Japan in the mid-1930s, when the reconciliation of the mundane world, or life, and literature is repeatedly tackled in Ishikawa's corpus. But this reconciliation is never completed. Rather, the discrepancy itself between literature and life can also be seen as the source of his literary creativity, suggesting that the creative process never ends. In this context, *watashi*'s love (Yukari), "whom [*watashi*] has not seen during the decade of her hiding in the political underground [and] the police have set a trap to apprehend," is juxtaposed with Joan of Arc for Christine with whom *watashi* himself has an affinity in envisioning the potential of the "political underground."

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 362.

<sup>18</sup> Todd S. Mei, "Commitment and Communication: The Aesthetics of Receptivity and Historicity," in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, vol. 4 (May, 2006), accessed April 11, 2015, <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=407>, par. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, par. 1.

In this regard, two historical events in 1936 should be noted. First was a failed attempt by the Japan Socialist Party to launch a movement inspired by the establishment of the *Front Populaire* governments in France and Spain in the same year. Indeed, that historical event, together with the second of that year, an attempted military coup on February 26, are indicative of the atmosphere of the time that was to bode dark years under a growing militarism. But such an atmosphere and layers of meanings underlying “diverse human actions” during those years would not be fully described by the facts only found in framing the social events. Perhaps the facts from the perspective of positivistic approach to history fall into a “referential illusion.”

Given that “referential illusion” is an issue to grapple with in the aforementioned metafictional novel and that what Ishikawa calls “dynamic words” projects another kind of truth than a positivistic account of the mundane world as closure does, the relationship between literary words and the writing self’s experience resonates with Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological notion of “life-world” (*Lebenswelt*). According to Oliver Holmes, the primary question of the concept is “What is meant by ‘truth’?” He further elaborates:

Truth has been defined here as lived experience of truth—that is, evidence. Evidence is revealed exclusively in present experience, and thereby truth is always and exclusively tested in present experience as one cannot relive the flux of experience. There is no absolute truth, as postulated by either dogmatism or skepticism. Rather, truth defines itself in process, as revision, correction, and self-surpassing. This dynamic process occurs at the heart of the living present.<sup>20</sup>

The mundane, or the surrounding world, is extended by Holmes to a point of departure for one to explore layers of meaning of current social events that could bring forth the deconstruction of what is taken for granted as truth in the mainstream historical account. Here the writing self of historiography can also be characterized as an “individual living in the world” who “respond[s] correctly to the question of truth by describing the experience of the true and insisting on the genetic development of the ‘ego’: truth consists not as an object but as a movement, and exists only insofar as this movement is *actually carried out by the ego*.”<sup>21</sup>

Reminiscent of Ishikawa’s “action of the Spirit,” Holmes’s sketch of the Husserlian notion of “ego” is also *watashi*’s response to the mundane world

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<sup>20</sup> Holmes, par. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Holmes, par. 25.

in his attempt at historiography. In “Fugen,” it turns out that Yukari as a character falls from a status idealized by *watashi* (“What devil had put his disfiguring hand to her visage?”),<sup>22</sup> and thereby *watashi*’s project of the biography of Christine de Pizan—a project that *watashi* has sustained by idolizing Yukari almost as Joan of Arc—comes to an end, implying an unsuccessful socialist revolution marked by the aforementioned failure by Japanese socialists. Here, a novelistic way to depict historical events is illustrated by what Ishikawa calls a history of “diverse human actions,” in that the human actions, Ishikawa states, “cannot be pinned down as the [people in the socially framed past]” and “though it is perhaps rooted in fiction, literature, in its (temporarily) finalized world, gains reality, which in turn positions itself in the mundane world” (文學では、あるひはウソからはひつて行くのかも知れないが、出来上つた世界自體がレアリテを持つといふことに依つて、それは現實の世界の中に割りこんで行き、そこに位置を見つける).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, in “Fugen,” literary characters, who reflect the contemporary social events which surround the fiction, and historical figures are juxtaposed in *watashi*’s historiography of the diverse human actions in Japan around 1935, and the “dynamic process of the [historiography] occurs at the heart of the living present,” highlighting the potential of the actions (e.g., the revolutionary cause) in both Ishikawa’s and Christine’s times, even if they historically failed.

### **Buddhist Imageries, Mystical Experience, and Action of the Spirit**

It should be noted that an elusive realm like a literary locus is envisioned in the novella “Fugen” by the first-person narrator *watashi* in the process of structuring into a novelistic narrative a possible world, or layers of meanings of social reality, by adopting various dichotomies from Buddhist imageries. These images include the “besotted poet of Cold Mountain, Han-shan (寒山)” and “his sidekick, the broomsweep, Shih-te (拾得),”<sup>24</sup> both from Zen iconography; and the two classic bodhisattvas, Mañjusrî (文殊菩薩) and Samantabhadra (普賢菩薩). According to William Tyler, Han-shan is characterized as “the eccentric T’ang-dynasty poet of ‘Cold Mountain’ fame; Shih-te, ‘The Foundling,’ the lowly monk and sweeper of the kitchen at the Kuo-ch’ing monastery. [...] Legend grew that they were incarnations of Mañjusrî (Jp: Monju) and

<sup>22</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 112; *IZ*, vol. 1, 410-411.

<sup>23</sup> Ishikawa, “*Rekishu to bungaku*,” 366.

<sup>24</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 14; *IZ*, vol. 1, 333.



Samantabhadra (Jp: Fugen), the bodhisattvas of wisdom and wisdom-in-action.”<sup>25</sup>

Reminiscent of the techniques prevalent in popular Edo culture, notably in Kabuki, Ukiyoe, and Haikai, “incarnations” (やつし) take place when a figure in a higher status is “transformed” into another figure of a lower status, whereas any existence in a lower status “corresponds” (見立て)<sup>26</sup> to that in a higher status. In a few cases, according to Shindō, the two techniques can be interchangeable, depending on the spectator’s viewpoint. For instance, a famous Edo painting where a prostitute (遊女)—who can also be taken to belong to the ruined Taira clan in rural Eguchi—rides on a white elephant is called an “incarnation” of Samantabhadra (やつし普賢菩薩). But at the same time, given that Samatabhadra is usually portrayed as riding on a white elephant in the Buddhist iconography, it can be said that the prostitute corresponds to Samantabhadra (見立普賢菩薩)<sup>27</sup> as well. Here the “lower status” can be secular as opposed to sacred, as is the case in “Fugen” with depiction of a secular Shih-te and a sacred Han-shan, while in Zen iconography the dichotomy further corresponds to that of Samatabhadra and Mañjusrī, respectively. The point here is that Shih-te, as comparable to Samantabhadra, acts as an agent between the mundane world and a realm of literary locus represented by Han-shan and Mañjusrī, underscoring in “Fugen” that proximity to that latter status as almost a mystical experience is commensurate with the writing self’s efforts to reach that realm. “The written content is the amount of effort sustained by the spirit, and thereby form is the function of the language of the effort” (書かれた文章の内容とはそこに持続された精神の努力の量であり、形式とはその努力のことに於ける作用である).<sup>28</sup> And the “effort sustained by the spirit” at its best produces words that capture literary reality: “I know *words* are my

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<sup>25</sup> William Tyler, “The Art and Act of Reflexivity in The Bodhisattva,” in *The Bodhisattva*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Shindō Shigeru, “‘Mitate’ to ‘yatsushi’ no teigi,” in *Zusetsu “mitate” to “yatsushi”*: *Nihonbunka no hyōgen hōhou*, ed. Kokubungaku kenkyū shirōkan (Tokyo: Yagi Shoten, 2008), 115-116. Shindō recommends “transformation” for “yatsushi” in his article.

<sup>27</sup> Shindō, 117. Ishikawa also explicates a similar view on both terms in his “Edojin no hassōhō ni tsuite,” in *Bungaku taigai*. See *IZ*, vol. 12, 328-338.

<sup>28</sup> Ishikawa, *IZ*, vol. 12, 279.

true bodhisattva. Words are my *Samantabhadra*” (普賢とはわたしにとってことばである).<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in “Fugen,” the two vectors—an incarnation of the sacred into the secular and correspondence of the secular to the sacred—form a dynamic for the writing self to play a role of an in-between agent to envision a literary locus, as the narrator *watashi* confesses: “Allow me to be the one to take the gem of Mañjuśrī’s wisdom, and sundering it like a diamond into chips and pieces, translate its essence into the words of ordinary speech and publish them throughout the land” (文殊の智慧の玉を世話に砕いて地上に撒き散らすことこそ本来の任務).<sup>30</sup>

Mircea Eliade’s notion of “hierophany” (i.e., “that something sacred shows itself to us”)<sup>31</sup> helps us better understand Ishikawa’s plotting of a possible path to a literary locus, where words are transcended from their quotidian values to a language charged with a new meaning and/or texture. Emphasizing the opposition between the sacred and profane, Eliade states that “we are confronted by the same mysterious act—the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ world.”<sup>32</sup> When the protagonist of “Fugen” (i.e., *watashi*) confesses that “Words are my *Samantabhadra*,” words for literature are also construed as “something of a wholly different order in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ [or mundane] world,” and thereby a literary reality could become visible.

Furthermore, Eliade’s concept of hierophany reminds us of the process for ordinary words to be elevated to literary words that project an elusive literary reality: “By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu.”<sup>33</sup> In this regard, Eliade elaborates two ends of the spectrum of hierophany; that is, the most elementary hierophany is the “manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object,” whereas “the most supreme hierophany” is,

<sup>29</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 78; *IZ*, vol. 1, 383.

<sup>30</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 14; *IZ*, vol. 1, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard E. Trask (Orlando: A Harvest book, 1957), 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

“for a Christian, incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Though it would be uncertain to what extent one can succeed in making progress from an elementary to supreme hierophany, it is the case that the religious process, as Eliade puts it, and a process toward a literary locus, as Ishikawa envisions, shares an in-between agent in each creative process. In fact, Eliade indicates the nature of such an agent in terms of a modern concept: “[S]acred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history. The modes of being in the world are not of concern only to the history of religions or to sociology; they are not the object only of historical, sociological, or ethnological study.”<sup>35</sup>

“Hierophany” is actually compared by the philosopher Ueda Shizuteru to what he calls “Being-in-the-dual-world” (二重世界内存在), which signifies a self in an invisible duality of a place that surrounds him—the world (世界) and empty void (虚空).<sup>36</sup> In Ueda’s view, which is drawing heavily here on a central idea of Mahāyāna Buddhism, an individual lives in the so-called objective world—a world the he/she takes for granted, but there could be a time in that world when an individual has a chance to experience “unlimited openness” (限りない開け) toward overcoming impasse in, or deconstructing a perception of, the ordinary world. Connected with this notion, Ueda proposes the term “Self/Displaced Self” (自己ならざる自己), pointing to the self’s possible intellectual or creative progress (Ueda 233-235). It is tempting to say that the term resonates with Ishikawa’s notion of the writing self, as can be found in the following remark in “Fugen”: “Given my present situation, in which I do not know what this thing is I call ‘myself,’ I have nothing to do” (自分がなにものであるかはつきり判らぬ現在の境遇にあつては、何をしようにも宛はなく.)<sup>37</sup> Hence *watashi* is portrayed as the writing self who suffers from writer’s

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 11. Also note that Ishikawa extends his use of religious motifs to the Biblical imagery in his “Yakeato no Iesu” (1946). *IZ* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1989), vol. 2, 465-482; “The Jesus of the Ruins” *The Legend of Gold and Other Stories*, trans. William Jefferson Tyler (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1998), 72-96.

<sup>35</sup> Eliade, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Ueda Shizuteru, *Jitsuzon to kyojō: Nijūsekainai sonzai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999) [Originally, *Bashō—Nijūsekainai sonzai* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1992)], 14-15. As for Ueda’s comparison between “Hierophany” and “Being-in-the-dual-world,” see 125-170.

<sup>37</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 77; *IZ*, vol. 1, 382.

block, finding himself in an in-between situation.<sup>38</sup> But at the same time, the very existential situation marks the inception of his journey to a literary locus.

When the Buddhist dichotomies are further related to that of Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc in the in-between, existential situation for *watashi*, they become of central concern not only for the writing self's struggle with the literary locus, but also with how to respond to the social reality, specifically Japan's in the 1930s: "Yes, enough of this. I should be thinking about Joan of Arc. It is imperative that I get back to my manuscript and write as much and as fast as I can! I had no other hope than to throw myself upon the infinite mercy of the bodhisattva Samantabhadra" (さうだ、おれは書かなければならん、ジャンヌ・ダルクだ、書きまくるんだ、かかるときにこそ普賢菩薩の無邊の慈悲にすぎるほかなし).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the nature of Samantabhadra—the bodhisattva of wisdom-in-action—does not fail to add a socially activist undertone to *watashi*'s creative acts: "What I want to do is set the world on its head by taking the mumbo-jumbo of the conundrums [...] and put them into words that people can understand. Because, I tell you, we shall never see the promised Buddhahood here on earth unless we are prepared to stand the world on end and upset the normal order of things" (文字に立てて此世を顛倒させる願望だ。ところで此世というやつは顛倒させることなしには報土と化さない).<sup>40</sup> This remark clearly echoes Ishikawa's central notions—revolution and action of the spirit. In this light, the "diverse human actions" that I analyzed above in relation to Ishikawa's attempt to incorporate historiography into his fiction also points to Ernesto Laclau's notion that "populism has no referential unity because it is ascribed not to a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena. Populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political."<sup>41</sup> Populism, or "diverse human actions," has no

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<sup>38</sup> In Ishikawa's literature, a protagonist in such an in-between situation appears frequently. This is derived in part from the so-called "literature of the hermits" (隠者文学) in medieval Japan. In the pre-modern *Edo* period, hermits who returned to the urban areas were called "recluses in a city" (*Shiin*, 市隠/市井の隠者), whose stance to the mundane world is epitomized by *watashi* in "Fugen." See Ibi Takashi, et al., "Zadankai: Nihoninja ko," *Bunkaku—tokushu: kakureru*, vol. 2:1 (2001), 41-66 (Tokyo: Iwasani shoten).

<sup>39</sup> Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva*, 93-94; *IZ*, vol. 1, 396.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Bodhisattva*, 67; *IZ*, vol. 1, 374.

<sup>41</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), xi. Also see, Yoshihiro Yasuhara, "Senryōki no Ishikawa Jun bungaku to 'Kakumei' no shutai—*watashi* to iu jinmin," in *Ishikawa Jun to senjo nihon* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2010), 79-93.

referential unity, and neither do the words that the writing self, *watashi*, seeks to find in literary locus. And yet, such elusive realms allow *watashi* to form an ongoing process of critically confronting a social reality and a burning question: what is the novel?

## Conclusion

The process, rather than closure, of the writing self's quest for literary locus in Ishikawa Jun's metafictional novella "Fugen" offers various perspectives not only on the interpretation of Ishikawa's oeuvre, particularly from the middle of the 1930s to the early 1950s, but also on the social concerns that underlie the oeuvre, such as the possibility of socialist revolution and the development of democracy. Indeed, Ishikawa has not been considered to be an activist type such as proletarian writers over the decades, but the political and societal vicissitudes within Japanese modernity during the decades leads a *literati* type like Ishikawa to respond to the social reality all the more critically.

As I have argued, the literary locus Ishikawa seeks is elusive, and so is the kind of words he seeks in his efforts to realize literary reality. In this context, the Buddhist motifs and imageries, as a literary device, provide his quest with a creative process that never ends because the creative process resonates with the religious struggle before reaching Buddhism's enlightening closure. In this regard, the novella foreshadows his notion of "diverse human actions" in 1941, which would be further nurtured at the end of the Occupation (1952). During those years, as history shows, no form of *kakumei*, or revolution, actually succeeded in modern Japan, but its intertwined drive for order and disorder led the writing self to continue to tackle the possibility of "diverse human action" as an aporia within Japanese modernity.

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