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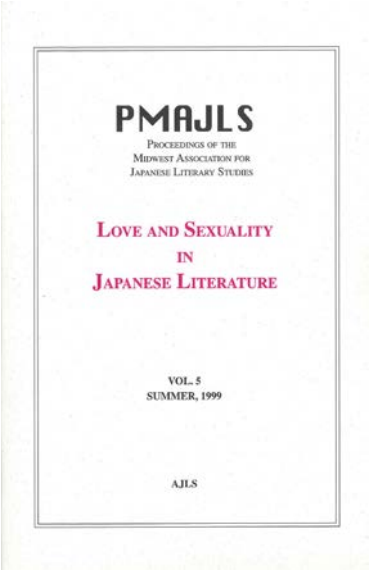

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THE BODY OF POSTWAR LITERATURE: TAMURA TAIJIRŌ'S *NIKUTAI BUNGAKU*

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Nikutai bungaku (the "literature of the flesh 肉体文学) is usually tied to the appearance of Tamura Taijirō's "Nikutai no akuma" ("Devil of the Flesh"),[1] in the October 1946 issue of *Sekai bunka*, and "Nikutai no mon" in the March 1947 issue of *Gunzō*. I am simplifying things somewhat and making Tamura a standard-bearer for *nikutai bungaku*. That is, I could include here, as I do in another study, postwar works by Noma Hiroshi, Shiina Rinzō, Sakaguchi Ango, and Jean-Paul Sartre (I note this because this work is tied to the discourse in which Sartre's early fiction was understood. Sartre's Existentialism came to postwar Japan wrapped in this rubric of the physical and of the *nikutai*. It was received at the same time that Tamura's insistence on the *nikutai* was pervasive). These writers were often referred to as the "flesh-school" (*nikutai-ha*). Focussing on Tamura is justified by the prevalence of this term *nikutai* in his titles, and his popularization of the term. Tamura's images of the *nikutai*—the carnal, sexual, sensual body—and the intense interest in its images, converge across a nexus of representative forms such as fiction, stage, visual arts, and represents a conscious reaction to the increasing militarization and ideologicalization of the populace that began in the 1930s, extended through the Pacific war, and only coming to an official end in 1945.

The years following the war were a physical age. Much fiction of this time is informed by and often energized by the great despair that followed the end of the war as well as its freedom and possibilities. Following the experience of the war—"an existence of nothing but eating, sleeping, and fighting" (Sone 240)—that continued into the postwar period, Tamura's fiction is especially poignant in reflecting the sense of no per-

[1]There is no discernible connection, but it seems suggestive that the translation of Raymond Radiguet's *Le diable au corps* by Shinjō Yoshiakira into Japanese bears this same title—*Nikutai no akuma*—in 1954 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha). Mishima Yukio, whose work I have not the space to treat here, even though he is within the parameters of the discussion, was greatly enamored with Radiguet's novel. The affinities between Radiguet's novel and *Confessions of a Mask*, for example, are not minor. An obsessive fascination with the body of a woman is a theme shared by both works. There is also horror of the erotic object that functions in tandem with the fascination and obsession of that body, in a way that Georges Bataille, for one, would lead us to expect.

ceptible change in lifestyle from wartime to the immediate postwar, for the primary concerns of life are still "eating, sleeping, and fighting." Although I risk being reductive here as well, one can say the postwar was a time in which existence was pre-eminently physical, compounded by the devastating sense of psychological loss, and the difficulties in procuring food during the war and post-war years. Further, in national memory, the corporate remembrance of the war, there was much resonance to a feeling that they, as the people of Japan, had been duped by the miliary leadership to sacrificing for a cause that had been misrepresented to them. It had been a time long on ideas and short on physical sustenance. Tamura is among those who articulate a sense that now was the time to reject these abstract ideals and the daily business of physical existence is to be given precedence. It is now time, in the images encountered again and again in this work, to cast off the ethereal, the abstract, the cerebral, and celebrate the physical. It is, in this way, a time to initiate a trajectory contrary to that of the war years. It is a time to highlight the physical in order to counteract the dehumanizing ideological abstracting structures put into place during the war.

Tamura Taijirō's "Nikutai no mon" is set in the burned-out landscape of Tokyo while "Nikutai no akuma" is set in the brutal expanse of the Chinese continent. In both locales the individual has been reduced to the most basic elements and drives—food, water, shelter, sex. His invocation of this powerful new word *nikutai* represent the physical and carnal body imbued with explicit political meanings. Tamura, like others, have forefronted the body, carnality, sexuality in an explicitly counter-hegemonic move. Foucault has taught us much about the body that "is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies" (Discipline 25). Foucault has also noted that "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (History 95). It is in this sense of the body and its direct relation to political realms that the body becomes important in the postwar Japanese context; it is also as a statement here that the resistance offered by Tamura, and others, is implicated and ultimately reproduces the most basic of paternal and masculine power structures it wishes to discount, that interests me.

The "body" the *nikutai* that Tamura invokes gained new currency in postwar Japan to signify the expressly carnal and physical. It is a postwar usage of a word with a long history, set off by its contrast to words like *karada*, or *shintai*, the terms most often employed for "body" in prewar speech. For example, Iwaya Daishi recalls *nikutai* being a loaded term

(gokan) in the postwar years, noting further that "before the war we would not have used *nikutai* but *shintai* [when referring to the body]" (qtd. in Okuno 250). Tamura's point is also made clear in the title of this article: "Humankind is flesh" ("Ningen ga nikutai de aru") as well as in the phrase that becomes something of a rallying cry: "The body is everything" ("nikutai koso subete da").

Tamura's "Nikutai no mon" caused a major sensation with its publication in 1947 which only grew as it went through various stage and screen adaptations. It was staged in that same year in a dramatization by Ozawa Fujio that also proved widely popular and broke numerous records. It was staged over 1,000 times, for example. (It was staged more than 700 times in 1947 alone). In book form it sold over 700,000 copies and has been made into numerous movie renditions, the first in 1948 directed by Makino Masahiro and the most recent in 1988, directed by Gosha Hideo. The popular appeal may be attributed to the erotic portrayals of the young women, especially in the more sensational theater and movie versions. This is supported by Okuno Takeo's recollection of seeing the dramatization in Shinjuku while still a student: "There still were no strip shows at that time. This play became notorious as 'sadistic theater' because of the scene [in which one of the prostitutes] is tied up and beaten" (249). This heightened sense of eroticism is part of the ideological framework with which Tamura is working, where a revel in the physical is a subversive statement of the most potent kind, especially in the face of the self-denying demands for sacrifice the populace was subjected to by the national body, the wartime state.

As when he wrote in a 1947 article for *Gunzō,*

> "Thought" (shisō) is, at this time threatening to push us down; it does nothing else. "Thought" has, for a long time, continued through the despotic government shaded with the colors of a police state but now the body is rising up in opposition. The distrust of "thought" is complete. We now believe in nothing but our own bodies. Only the body is real (jijitsu). The body's weariness, the body's desires, the body's anger, the body's intoxications, the body's confusion, the body's fatigue—only these constitute reality. It is because of all these things that we realize, for the first time, that we are alive. ("Nikutai ga ningen de aru" 12)

By "thought/ideology" he refers to the project of the wartime government to encourage the populace to subsume individual desires for the goals of the nation. In opposition and reaction, the body will now be the focus. The body—its desires and cruelty, usually relating to sex—is now focused upon. That is, to reject the totalizing project for the purposes of the state, Tamura (and others) wish to focus on the individual, the body, to discount by ignoring, that state project. In vocabulary, Tamura makes use of the powerful postwar term "liberation" (kaihō) and suggests that liberation for this body and from this national body is in, and only in, an emphases on the individual body. In the postwar years of disillusionment and deprivation nothing exists but that body, ideas and abstract moralizing have been discounted. Not only is physical survival the first order of business, thereby forcing an emphasis on the body, that populace is weary of the idealizations of wartime and a physical reaction is the only proper response.

Tamura reacts throughout to shisō by which he means, among other things, "ideology", I think. This is a reference to the strictures that make up societies, ideology that is manufactured, the societal/governmental filters for reality. Tamura reacts to the codes of conduct that are seen as divorcing the individual from their basic human instincts and drives. This is ideology, to borrow from Harry Harootunian's wording (building again from Foucault), where the claims to knowing, what can be known and who can know it and, especially here, the determination and presentation of knowledge, of reality, is enveloped in structures of power. Tamura reacts against the ideology of the government which presumed to present reality and stripped the populace of a connection with their individual production of reality. It is an ideology (borrowing from Althusser) that in presenting a reality constructs individual subjectivities.

To borrow one of Tamura's examples from "Nikutai no Mon", this is the ideology at work in society lauds the fishmonger who advertises bargain prices because he has cut out the middle man, while it disparages the pan-pan girls who can offer their wares at "bargain" prices because they do not rely on a pimp or a madam. Tamura is at pains to point out that it is only the society of women in his story which is "natural", that is primitive and pristine. Their society is wild and natural in a manner that resembles wild cats (to which they are often compared). This is to construct a society of little pretense, a network that ensures mutual survival, a mode of life where the individual is in close relation to basic desires for food, sex, shelter, and companionship. They have established a community where those needs are satisfied without external interference.

It is to be the source for liberation, an antidote to the governmental ideologies.

Tamura began an early article by noting that his recent work has been criticized for its lack of thought (again, shisō). He muses that thought/ideology had existed, in abundance—and look where that got us—following blindly we were led into a disastrous war, is the unwritten answer. A work that lacks such "thought" (ideology) is then to be lauded. There had been more than enough of the selfless sacrifice encouraged by the State during the war and it had been rendered meaningless by the Surrender, the lies it exposed, and the postwar disruption of society.

> The "ideology" that the Japanese have up to this point taken to be a system of thought was an ideology unable to prevent this war. Further, it is an ideology that was dismembered and lost with the advent of battle. . . . Thus, the high place [I accord] this "*nikutai*", which denies the "ideology" still existing in Japan following the defeat, is to bring us back to the situation of freedom which is the original form of humanity. ("Nikutai bungaku no kiban" 228)

And again,

> The ideology which forgot the *nikutai* has held a monopoly and from this has arisen the discourse (*setsu*) of a deified emperor, from this has arisen the ideology of the *kamikaze*, from this has arisen the idea of the holy warrior. The fragility of the Japanese view of humankind which forgets the *nikutai* has been fully blown open to exposure by this last war. ("Kore kara no watakushi" 231)

Since the ideology and morals of Japan to this point have been proven entirely bankrupt by the war, he therefore proposes exactly the opposite approach by a focus on the carnal, for the body is now "everything" (12). "No more of the ideological" he wants to say, "now it is time to focus on the individual." He will further insist that since this body is the correct focus of our interest it will of course be the correct focus of literature.

This emphasis on the body is also an attempt to rectify what he sees as the over-spiritualized body promoted during the war years. During the war thought/ideology emphasized the spiritual divorced from the physical/body. During the war, that ideology forgot the body while in fact, in

the struggle for survival, the body was everyone's prime concern. It was an age when the spiritual was over-emphasized, when "higher" ideals were continuously being pushed on people, divorced from everyday physical experience. It is that imbalance, intimates Tamura, that contributed to the sterility of the war years. The war years were primarily physical, years of struggle to maintain physical survival, but there was no support of the physical. All was rhetoric and ideology. The thought/ideology of the State offered no help, no assistance, no resistance, for the people to use in their plight. In that dehumanized time the reigning ideals of government and society were useless. The ideology of the State was, after all, the cause of that dehumanization. As he says at the end of the article "Ningen ga nikutai de aru," it is only by exploring the carnal that we will know what it is to be human. Herein is liberation. (Herein, as well, is a common tie to Sakaguchi Ango and his use of daraku.) Again, in Tamura's work being human means a focus on the physical, the quotidian, needs of food, shelter, and sex.

One finds here Tamura reacting to a wider sense of abstraction, of cerebral unsubstantiality, he identifies as having plagued Japan's literature and thought. On this point Tamura invokes the *seishin* as another counterpoint to the *nikutai*. In Tamura's work this refers to abstract and ethereal aspect of Japanese culture and artistic practice that prevents the individual from living authentically, as he sees it. In literature it is the effete sort of abstractions and introspective ruminations of a writer like Shiga Naoya or others in the *watakushi shōsetsu* tradition that he blames for this tendency. He frames this emphasis on the distinctly immaterial and unsubstantial ideology, in place before the war, that makes a sacrifice of the body. Tamura has, then, prewar literature and cultural production as much in his sights as that of the war period itself. Kamiya Tadataka expands the focus a bit and brings in the eroticism of writers such as Nagai Kafū and Dazai Osamu and equates the *nikutai* with a "true sensitivity" (*jikkan*), who also notes that there had been a growing prewar interest and literary treatment in the physical as the base for truly grasping the individual, but this tendency had been quashed by the censors (6). With Tamura's work, this prewar tendency was expanded and given greater urgency and immediacy. As Tamura repeatedly writes, it is a viewpoint based on his own experiences.

Tamura is concerned that this physical individual be restored so that the abstracting tendencies of the national body can no longer bend the people to its pernicious will. A society of such individuals is, in his mind, the best insurance that the war years will not be duplicated. Tamura fears that the prewar tendency to abstraction is being resurrected in the

postwar period and that even while many are ostensibly trying to overturn the oppressive militaristic tendencies of wartime society, the result may be that the people will again lose touch with their true natures, as it were, and Japan will again be over-spiritualized. In Tamura's mind it was precisely the emphasis on abstract spiritual purity at the expense of physical needs that left his countrymen susceptible to the militarism that lead them like sheep into the war. Like his characters, Tamura wants his readers to value the physical. Part of his point is the timing: given the postwar deprivations an awareness of the physical is unavoidable; his hope is that this experience may begin a tradition of the physical that will have wider repercussions ("Ningen ga nikutai de aru" 12-14).

"Nikutai no akuma" was Tamura's first story published following the war, and the story that drew initial attention to his work. It is not as well constructed nor as important, in a literary historical sense, as the following work, "Nikutai no mon" (discussed below). In this story a Japanese soldier falls in love with a Chinese Eighth Army soldier, a woman prisoner of war, in contrast to his more usual stories of soldiers and their relations with Japanese women. The title belies the concern for the physical body—"The Demon in the Flesh". The soldier of this story, like many in Tamura's, is sympathetic figure because he is not an unreflective member of the Japanese political machine, but retains a critical distance. They are constantly in a potentially compromising position because of their implicit, and sometimes explicit, criticisms of the Japanese political configuration, and also by the empathy they express for the Chinese prisoners and the Chinese cause.

It is not a very satisfying story, nonetheless. It is long on diction and short on action. The actions and thoughts are prosaically recounted for us. Nor does it deliver the eroticism promised in the title and in Tamura's reputation. This is a very cerebral work, one that underscores one of the difficulties Tamura gets himself into: he is a cerebral writer calling for a physical existence. Ultimately, he suggests a cerebral system that varies little from that which he criticizes in its masculine power relations.

The story opens with the description of a particularly brutal battle between the Chinese forces and the Japanese. Among the Chinese prisoners of war are a handful of women. Among the group of women is a particularly striking tall woman of "exotic' features. This, of course becomes the romantic interest of the main character. He catches her eye, and

> I felt myself beginning to blush, embarrassed, feeling your contempt. It was at that time that I saw your eyes, saw the contempt and

hostility in your eyes, the way they glittered with suspicion. And then I became aware that something that I had been searching for through long periods of battle was there [in your eyes]. I knew in that instant the painful truth of why I was so drawn [to you]. (12)

This introduces some themes that keep reappearing: a Sartrian concern for the eyes and the gaze, for the Other, a male gaze that is consistent in his fiction, the scopophilia that Peter Brooks has identified as being a key narrative structure of the bourgeois novel.

They become lovers of course. In a key scene she threatens to escape and he raises his pistol to stop her. He threatens to shoot her but of course cannot. She relents and rushes back to his arms. The war ends shortly thereafter with myriad issues unresolved for the contemporary reader.

While "Nikutai no Akuma" is the story that established Tamura's reputation, it is "Nikutai no Mon" for which he is now remembered and which propelled him to popular fame. It is also a clearer statement of his construct, as well as more focused in its eroticism. It is also a much better constructed story. It opens like the dime store gangster romance it sometimes thinks it is, replete with prostitutes, gangsters, tattoos, and the underworld: "When Osei no sen and the self-named Asada sen are unclothed, their breasts do not yet swell in mature fullness. They are nineteen but their skin lacks the glow one expects, their muscles lack a healthy plumpness. The paleness of their bodies (*shintai*) seems a trifle sickly" (33). The next paragraph focuses on Osei no sen who is getting a tattoo. She is in a cramped two room shack, one room of which is a famed tattooer's shop. The burned-out and crumbling buildings of the *ashiato* line the banks. She is having her name emblazoned on her upper arm, a totem to scare off pan-pan girls who would dare encroach upon her territory.

Likewise, an anti-establishment subversive stance is readily apparent. First, the story is of a society of women in a society we know to be controlled by men. The opening scenes present the male-dominated criminal underworld, itself preying on the established "society". This society of men appears only briefly. It is a scene that pictures the topsy-turvy nature of postwar Tokyo. The professionals mix with the amateurs in a confusion of professions and classes. Returned soldiers, last year the nation's heroes, are now black marketers (in another echo of Sakaguchi Ango). They stand alongside careerist yakuza and other criminals, some important, most petty. "The distinction between professional and amateur is blurred; as it is in society at large, so it is here" (33). All the old accepted

patterns and assumptions have broken down. It is a new world. It is still somewhat unreal but full of possibility.

The group of women who work as prostitutes and live nearby are consistently portrayed as a pack of animals in a Tokyo that has become jungle. The women are themselves innocents; it is a coming of age story. Cast as animals, as innocent children, we are again reminded of their displacement from "society", whether that of men or of adults. It is primitive yet somehow pristine and innocent; their business of prostitution is purely for the purpose of survival. They are too young to know the "pleasures of the flesh" as it is worded here. The story's central conflict arises when adult, mature emotions—love—interferes with an emotionless sex-as-trade that is their means of survival. Their naiveté and youth is underscored by the fact that they exchange pleasures of the flesh but do not themselves experience that pleasure.

This work also ends in a death wish, and this ending also complicates Tamura's seeming model of salvation or authentic living. One of the women breaks the most basic commandment of this group: she falls in love and sleeps with a man without exchange of currency. The punishment for this transgression, and the erotic source of appeal for many, is to be whipped, upper body unclothed, suspended by ropes. It is a result of her transgression, we read, that she becomes aware of her body, comes to know sexual pleasure and moves from childlike innocence to adult-like knowledge, that she is also banished from the community. She is damned by her move to another realm of existence, a new understanding of society and human relationships. "Maya was struck with the idea that even if she were banished to Hell, she would not be separated from the pleasure of the flesh she experienced for the first time [with Ibuki]. She felt that a new life was beginning" (54). A new life is indeed beginning, but this entrance into a fuller knowledge of her body, replete with adult understandings, portends death and banishment. If death is requisite before moving into a new life then the ideal life does not exist in their society after all. For the story ends with her death: "In the subterranean gloom [of their lair] the body of Borneo Maya, hanging from the ceiling, is enveloped in a faint corona of light and has a solemnity and magnificence like that of the prophet on the cross" (54). This final line of the story casts her as a prophet, a martyr for an impossible cause. It is also curious for it hints at the impossibility of this project. It works against the ideology that Tamura has expounded in his essays. He has proposed to do away with any ideology, yet his proposal is, after all, an ideology of its own. It follows an intellectual, not carnal, logic. His ideology seems to follow the path of the ideologies he decries, as ultimately unhelpful in the im-

portant crises of life—like the transition from innocent childhood to knowing adulthood. In that sense the story still remains the "truer" by putting the lie to enforced and cerebral ways of living. His basic premise is upheld, to the detriment of the proposed plan. That is, it casts doubts on the viability of the utopian vision which Tamura introduces. Nonetheless, it was a powerful and compelling vision for his readers.

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