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Accounting for Taste: The Creation of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes for Literature

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IN January 2000, a crowd of reporters gathered in a large banquet room at Shinkiraku, an exclusive restaurant across from the Tsukiji market in Tokyo, waiting for the novelist Miyamoto Teru to appear. Miyamoto was the representative of the Akutagawa Prize selection committee, which had just completed its deliberations for that season's recipient of the prestigious literary award. The committee, composed of established writers who were (with one exception) former recipients of the prize themselves, had made their selection from a seven-work short list.¹ After entering, Miyamoto sat at the front of the room, announced the recipients—two authors were awarded the prize—and then accepted questions from the audience. Reporters immediately asked, not unexpectedly, how the committee had arrived at its choices. Miyamoto responded, "It's obvious if you take even a cursory glance at the stories."² Miyamoto's

I would like to thank Jay Rubin, Komori Yōichi, Kōno Kensuke, Dennis Washburn, Andrew Gordon, and Scott Swaner for their contributions to the writing of this article. My thanks also go to the anonymous reader, whose insightful comments helped me clarify my argument.

¹ Committee members and the year they received the Akutagawa Prize: Ikezawa Natsuki (1988), Miura Tetsuo (1960), Ishihara Shintarō (1955), Miyamoto Teru (1977), Kuroi Senji (short-listed 1968), Kōno Taeko (1963), Takubo Hideo (1969), and Furui Yoshikichi (1970). Furui was absent from this selection.

² Quote based on notes taken by this author at the event.

suggestion that the literary value of the winning works was self-evident obscured the fact that the winning works received support from only the slimmest majority.³

Miyamoto's apparent disinterest and his appeal to objective literary value perpetuated a misrecognition of the nature of the prize—misrepresenting the subjective and *interested* nature of the practice of bestowing it as natural and *disinterested*—that enhanced its worth.⁴ In being honored for the “objective value” of their writing, the two awardees received not only the award and the prize money, but also a form of symbolic capital. This symbolic capital resembles other forms of capital, for which it can often be exchanged, and takes the form of benefits usually grouped under the rubric of “canonization”: legitimacy, as the works and authors are recognized as appropriate objects of serious academic attention; publication (and attendant income), as publishers flock to the recipients with requests for manuscripts; a place in cultural memory, as the writers are added to dictionaries and anthologies of modern Japanese literature; and a vastly expanded readership, as the publishing industry makes authors and their works into objects of national attention. The awarding of the prize produces a moment of celebrity as well: from the

³ The winning works were Gen Getsu's “Kage no sumika” and Fujino Sen'ya's “Natsu no yakusoku.” Although no specific voting results are made available to the public, one can make educated guesses about how individuals voted by reading the selection critiques each member writes after the selection. Based on these published comments, it is likely Ishihara voted against both works, Miura voted against Gen, and Takubo voted against Fujino. Takubo and Ikezawa also disagreed with the selection of Gen and Fujino, respectively, but did not reject their selection.

⁴ The concepts of misrecognition, symbolic capital, and the literary field are drawn from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Disinterestedness in the act of aesthetic judgment, which is essential to Immanuel Kant (cf., *Critique of Judgment* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987], pp. 45–46), is a central object of Bourdieu's criticism. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) and *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). For a clear overview of Bourdieu's concepts, see David Swartz, *Culture and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), particularly pp. 88–94 (symbolic capital and misrecognition) and 117–42 (fields). I differ from Bourdieu, however, in my hesitancy to see “pure literature” (what Bourdieu might refer to as “legitimate culture”) as homogenous, and to link the taste for it with the class background of its producers and consumers. This study should be seen as inspired by Bourdieu's examination of power in the cultural realm rather than as an application of his model to the Japanese case.

creation of the award in 1934 the media has followed the Akutagawa Prize with great interest; today it is a national event.⁵

Miyamoto's posture of disinterest was particularly noteworthy in that it ignored the fact that symbolic capital was both *produced* and *reproduced* through the award. The honor of acting as a committee member, even if often dismissed by the members themselves as burdensome, reproduces the power of the committee and reminds readers of its members' importance and centrality in the literary field—the constellation of competitive relationships among literary producers and consumers who struggle for various forms of capital. Through the act of defining literary “purity,” the members establish a boundary that allows them to determine legitimate literary art. The Naoki Prize, which was bestowed later that night upon a writer of “popular” literature, is then defined as the antithesis of this legitimate art and dismissed by all those who are invested in the existence of a clearly bounded “pure” literature.⁶ According to this logic of literary purity, the Naoki Prize merely celebrates well-written *fiction*, while the Akutagawa Prize celebrates *literary art*. Thus the Akutagawa Prize, a biannual celebration of “pure literature” (*junbungaku*), elevates works of fiction not only above other works of fiction, but into a realm that is perceived to be qualitatively different. In the process it reifies that realm, reproducing its legitimacy and perpetuating all of the industries that depend on “pure literature,” from literary publishing to academia.⁷

The boundary between “pure” literature and “popular” literature has been examined before; some scholars have claimed a single meaning for the term “pure,” while others have traced the history

⁵ Though the Akutagawa Prize did not reach its contemporary levels of national celebrity until 1955, when Ishihara Shintarō received the award, it possessed authority within the literary establishment from the time of its announcement. Even before the first awards were bestowed, for example, their importance was visible in an article on the authority of the prizes entitled “Akutagawa, Naoki ryōshō no ‘ken’i,” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 December 1934), which welcomed the “long-rumored” awards.

⁶ The winner was Nakanishi Rei. In this article, I translate both *taishū* and *tsūzoku* as “popular,” despite the common and accurate assertion that *taishū* is more appropriately translated as “mass.” I do this in order to stress the similarity in function of these two terms. In order not to lose the distinction entirely, I also provide the original Japanese terms.

⁷ Though the use of the category “pure” has declined in recent years, the use of the term “popular” continues to reproduce and reinforce this elevated sphere.

of the term's referents.⁸ Traditionally, however, these studies have focused on what the term "pure" *meant*—what literary qualities it indicated at different points in history—rather than how it *functioned*. An examination of its function, as a term that produces the very difference it appears to describe, reveals the power inherent in the invocation of that distinction.⁹ The ability to elevate works into the category of "pure" literature is a form of power. Miyamoto's comment, however, epitomizes the internalization of this power that makes its *proscriptive subjectivity* appear to be *descriptive objectivity*. Instead of being revealed as a motivated selection made by a small number of individuals with both vested interests in the process and plural (sometimes conflicting) systems of literary value, the award presents itself as a process through which objective literary value is revealed. Miyamoto's response conceals the contingency of the value systems informing the decision, creating the illusion of a uniform system of "purity."¹⁰

A study of the early history of the Akutagawa Prize, particularly when contrasted with that of the Naoki Prize, then, performs multiple functions: first, it reasserts the subjective nature of the award by dissecting its construction and first years of function.¹¹ Second, it reveals the contingency of literary values by showing how many of the early selections deviate from certain accepted beliefs about literary value in modern Japan and thus about the nature of mod-

⁸ Examples of the first category would be Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. xviii, 128–29; Irmela Hijiya-Kirschereit, *Rituals of Self-Revelation: Shishōsetsu as Literary Genre and Socio-cultural Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1996), pp. x, 136–37; examples of the second category would be Edward Seidensticker's "The 'Pure' and the 'in-Between' in Modern Japanese Theories of the Novel," *HJAS* 26 (1966): 174–86, and Matthew Strecher, "Purely Mass or Massively Pure?" *MN* 51.3 (Autumn 1996): 357–74.

⁹ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, p. 122. "Distinction" refers to the establishing and marking of difference, and elevation through an implication of quality and rarity.

¹⁰ For the most authoritative and comprehensive examination of the construction of the discourses surrounding modern Japanese literature, including that of "purity," see Suzuki Sadami's 鈴木貞美 two books, *Nihon no 'bungaku' o kangaeru* (Kadokawa shoten, 1994) and *Nihon no 'bungaku' gainen* (Sakuhinsha, 1998).

¹¹ Because the central issue is the construction of "pure" literature, this study focuses primarily on the Akutagawa Prize, referencing the Naoki Prize only to highlight differences. Future studies of the Naoki Prize will, I hope, address this imbalance and help to dissolve the absolute boundary between purity and popularity.

ern Japanese literature itself. This is especially telling given that authors central to this conception of the literary field made those selections for the purpose of defining the future of modern Japanese literature. Finally, it raises the question of how the functioning of power in the Japanese literary field has determined both the contours of that field and the epistemological structures with which we study it.

THE HISTORY OF LITERARY DISTINCTIONS

The history of literary prizes in modern Japan predates the establishment of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes by more than half a century.¹² When considering literary awards as acts of awarding distinction, the history is even longer. In a sense, all publishing that involves the selection of works to publish involves the awarding of distinction. When magazine editors select a work for publication, for example, the author receives recognition and prestige, and sometimes a material reward in the form of payment. This transaction is not unilateral. In selecting a work for a prize or simply for publication, a publisher wagers that the work will bring him both economic and symbolic returns. That is, he hopes that the work will not only increase sales, but also enhance his magazine's reputation. In the case of a magazine, selecting multiple works distributes both the risk and potential reward. The more works a publisher selects for his magazine, the less the magazine's success depends on any given work.

Contribution (*tōsho*) magazines and contributors' columns (*tōkōran*), in which works that were submitted by readers were selected and published without the intervention of a patron, may be the earliest modern vehicles for granting distinction to unknown writers; as such, they functioned as a path into the literary world, albeit the outer fringes. The contribution magazine *Eisai shinshi*, which began in 1877, was one of the first of these for-profit magazines. Newspapers and larger magazines, in contrast, would usually purchase

¹² The primary source for this historical overview is Senuma Shigeki 瀬沼茂樹, "Bungaku-shō: Sono shurui to seikaku," in *Nihon kindai bungaku daijiten kijōban* (Kodansha, 1984), pp. 1721-24.

or commission works from established authors and from new writers recommended by established authors.

When literary coterie magazines (*dōjin zazshi*) began to appear in large numbers in the early Taishō period (1912–1926), contribution magazines like *Eisai shinshi* began to decline. As a gateway into the literary world, coterie magazines differed from contribution magazines in one important way: they were normally funded, written, produced, and read by coterie members. The gateway was open, therefore, only to those who had access to sufficient resources to produce such a magazine. The primary function nonetheless remained the same: to bring unknown writers to the attention of the authors, critics, and editors who had the power to get them published in large magazines, which would pay them for their work. In this way both contribution magazines and literary coterie magazines resembled literary awards in that they distinguished certain works and rewarded them with publication. In granting distinction, however, the magazines differed from literary prizes in two respects: the prestige they bestowed was implicit and the publisher's risk was spread among multiple works.

Prize-winning novels (*kenshō shōsetsu*) selected for publication by newspapers from submissions and then printed in their pages received explicit prestige. In principle at least, the material benefits of the award became secondary to the prestige itself.¹³ *Yomiuri shinbun* created the first *kenshō shōsetsu* in 1894, after Nakai Kinjō, a newspaper reporter and essayist, proposed an award for historical novels and scripts. Selected by famous authors Tsubouchi Shōyō and Ozaki Kōyō, the first recipient of these awards was Takayama Chogyū; his work was serialized in the paper and he received a watch.¹⁴ In contrast to the contribution magazines, *Yomiuri shinbun* and its judges wagered their symbolic capital on a single recipient at a time—a strategy that increased the recipient's prestige.¹⁵ Other

¹³ For a look at how these awards functioned and the discourse they created, see Kōno Kensuke 紅野謙介, "Sensō hōdō to 'sakka sagashi' no monogatari," *Bungaku* 5.3 (1994): 2–15.

¹⁴ Apparently he requested the alternate prize of fifty yen instead. Odagiri Susumu 小田切進, "Akutagawa-shō no hanseiki," in Odagiri Susumu, ed., *Akutagawa-shō shōjiten* (Bungei shunjū, 1983), p. 8.

¹⁵ An award's prestige could be overspent; the *Yorozu chōhō* award for short stories (*tanpen shōsetsu*), created in 1897, was given 1720 times between 1897 and 1924. Because the award

newspapers—the *Osaka Mainichi shinbun* in 1901 and the *Osaka Asahi shinbun* in 1904—subsequently created similar awards for longer fiction (*chōhen*). All of these newspapers bestowed these awards on an irregular basis, often as part of another celebration, such as the thirtieth anniversary of the newspaper's founding. As a result, the award celebrated not only the work, but also the newspaper. The newspapers saw literature as possessing a certain value—be it cultural cachet or entertainment value—that could benefit the newspaper. Though literature profited from this transaction, the primary purpose of the award was not the amplification of literature.

Not all early literary awards were bestowed on specific works. From 1908 until 1912, the magazine *Waseda bungaku* bestowed its “Words of Praise” on an author for his (all recipients were men) general contribution over the course of a year. Tayama Katai, Shimazaki Tōson, Masamune Hakuchō, Nagai Kafū, Tokuda Shūsei, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Ogawa Mimei, and Osanai Kaoru all received the award. Unlike earlier awards, this honor bestowed by the magazine was entirely symbolic: there was no trophy, no prize money, no ceremony, and no publication. Because *Waseda bungaku* was seen as the central coterie magazine, the prestige of being selected must have been considered reward enough.¹⁶

All the awards mentioned above were privately sponsored awards. There were also forms of distinction bestowed by the government. Though not awards, they nonetheless consecrated authors and works.¹⁷ Two years after the 1910 High Treason Incident, for example, the Ministry of Education formed a committee for the “protection and cultivation of literature,” fearing that Western influence was corrupting it. One of its first (and last) acts was to award Tsubouchi Shōyō a medal and three thousand yen in prize money for his contributions to literature. Again, the benefits of the

was given with such frequency, the wager of cultural prestige made by *Yorozu chōhō* on a specific work was minimal. If *Yorozu chōhō*'s audience disagreed with one selection, they might be appeased the following week.

¹⁶ Odagiri, *Shōjiten*, p. 11.

¹⁷ An early example is Prime Minister Saionji's “Gatherings in the Murmuring Rain” (*Useikai*), beginning in 1907, for which he gathered famous writers to discuss literature. For similar interactions between literary and governmental figures, see Jay Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), pp. 110–14.

transaction were reciprocal. Not only did the authors selected to serve on the committee gain in prestige through this governmental recognition, but also the government benefited from association with the cultural capital possessed by those authors. The intimate connection with the government, and the tacit support for the government that such a connection would convey, led some literati to refuse the honor.¹⁸

Until the creation of the Akutagawa Prize, *kenshō shōsetsu* provided a way for authors to win recognition from the literary world without relying on patronage. The goal was to advance through the ranks of publications, until one reached the Dragon Gates (*tōryūmon*) to the literary establishment: the large general-interest magazines *Kaizō* and *Chūō kōron*.¹⁹ Though not the highest paying publications, they were the most prestigious.²⁰ When these journals began to solicit works for their own prize competitions, new authors had the chance to bypass publications lower on the hierarchy. The *Kaizō kenshō sōsaku* prize was started in 1928 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the magazine's founding.²¹ Not to be outdone by its rival, in 1930 *Chūō kōron* founded the *Bundan andepandan Chūō kōron kenshō*.²² These soon became the most prestigious literary awards.²³ After the cre-

¹⁸ This reciprocal connection between the government and authors was also pivotal in Natsume Sōseki's February 1911 refusal of an honorary doctorate. For a detailed description of the committee and writers' reactions to it, see Rubin, *Injurious*, pp. 195-219.

¹⁹ "Dragon Gate" is the standard metaphor used to speak of the barrier between dominated and dominant. According to the Chinese legend from which the term came, there once existed a section of the Yellow River where the current was so strong that it was nearly impossible for carp to swim upstream. Any carp able to ascend the rapids, it was said, would become a dragon. While this metaphor for cultural authority was used consistently throughout much of the twentieth century, the actual site of that authority (as it pertains to modern Japanese literature) has shifted a number of times over the past century.

²⁰ By the early 1920s, women's magazines were paying the highest prices for manuscripts. See Maeda Ai 前田愛, *Kindai dokusha no seiritsu* (Chikuma shobō, 1989), pp. 162-63.

²¹ The *Kaizō* award bestowed in 1929 was particularly famous: that year Kobayashi Hideo's "Samazama naru ishō" was awarded second place after Miyamoto Kenji's "Haiboku no bungaku." As that decision suggests, *Kaizō* showed a strong predilection toward works with a connection to the proletarian movement. With the June 1934 announcement of the *Kaizō* award, the editors lamented that few works were proletarian in nature, and that most of them instead seemed to "depict the unrelieved anguish and unrest of petit-bourgeois lives." Quoted in Senuma Shigeki, "Bungaku-shō o meguru shomondai (jō)," *Bungaku* 28.2 (1960): 158.

²² It did not begin to accept fiction for consideration until 1934.

²³ Odagiri, *Shōjiten*, pp. 7, 10.

ation of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes, *kenshō shōsetsu*, *Kaizō*'s and *Chūō kōron*'s included, precipitously declined in importance.²⁴

THE DECISION TO ESTABLISH THE AWARDS

Planning for the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes began soon after the death of the author Naoki Sanjūgo on 24 February 1934. Kikuchi Kan, a close friend, dedicated the April 1934 issue of his literary magazine *Bungei shunjū* to Naoki's memory.²⁵ This was only the second issue dedicated to a deceased author; the first had been for Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, another old friend of Kikuchi's. It seems that Kikuchi did not consider these memorials sufficient. In his monthly column in the April 1934 issue of *Bungei shunjū*, Kikuchi Kan revealed his intention to create two literary awards: "Ikutani Shinzaburō, Sasaki Mitsuzō, Naoki—one by one my closest friends have died. I am plagued by increasingly desolate thoughts. I am considering creating something here at the company called the Naoki Prize as a memorial, to be awarded to a rising author of popular literary art (*taishū bungei*). I am also considering creating an Akutagawa Prize, to be awarded to a rising author of pure literature (*jūbungaku*)."²⁶

Having decided to create the awards, Kikuchi then had to decide how they would function. Originally he envisioned a *kenshō shōsetsu* type of award, in which a committee would judge and make a selection from new manuscripts submitted directly to *Bungei shunjū*. Eventually he was persuaded to introduce a new award format: rather than choosing from unpublished manuscripts, the award would be

²⁴ The *Chūō kōron* award was awarded only three more times before it was cancelled; the *Kaizō* award lasted slightly longer: it was awarded ten more times before finally being discontinued in 1939. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁵ The writer and publisher Kikuchi Kan (1888–1948) was a central figure (known as the *Ōgoshō*, or tycoon, of the *bundan*) in the prewar and wartime Tokyo literary establishment. After he initially established himself as a writer of "pure" literature, his literary reputation suffered with the great success of the so-called "popular" novel, *Shinju fujin* (1920). Despite a compromised reputation as a "pure" writer, Kikuchi assumed a central role in its production when he established the literary journal *Bungei shunjū* in 1923. *Bungei shunjū* rapidly gained importance in Tokyo letters, increasing Kikuchi's influence in the world of letters.

²⁶ Reprinted in Kikuchi Kan 菊地寛, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden* (Bungei shunjū, 1988), p. 79.

given to works that had already been published, not only in commercial magazines and newspapers, but also in coterie magazines.²⁷ During the prewar period literary coterie magazines became the source of most Akutagawa Prize-winning works.²⁸ As the primary source of award-winning works, coterie magazines experienced an increase in status even as they assumed a position of partial fealty to *Bungei shunjū*, which appointed itself the ultimate arbiter over the value of their publishing decisions.

The "Announcement of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes"²⁹ was published in the January 1935 issue of *Bungei shunjū*; the regulations for the Akutagawa Prize read as follows:

1. The Akutagawa Prize shall be awarded to an individual for the best work produced by an unknown or rising author and appearing in any newspaper or magazine (literary coterie magazines included).
2. The Akutagawa Prize shall consist of a prize (a watch) as well as a cash award of five hundred yen.³⁰
3. The members of the Akutagawa Prize Committee shall select the recipient of the Akutagawa Prize. The committee shall be made up of the following people, all of whom are old friends of the deceased with long ties to Bungei Shunjūsha: Kikuchi Kan, Kume Masao, Yamamoto Yūzō, Satō Haruo, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō,

²⁷ Apparently Kikuchi was convinced by Sasaki Mosaku and a group of reporters he had assembled for a discussion about the new awards. Nagai Tatsuo 永井龍男 et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū* (Nihon jānarisuto senmon gakuin shuppanbu, 1970), pp. 8–9.

²⁸ According to the author Funabashi Seiichi, who became a selection committee member when the award was restored after the war, an unwritten rule existed that works that had appeared in commercial magazines would not be considered for the award. Satō Haruo 佐藤春夫 et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," *Bungakukai* 11:9 (September 1957): 16.

²⁹ Kikuchi Kan, "Akutagawa-Naoki-shō sengen," *Bungei shunjū* (January 1935).

³⁰ Nominally the watch was the primary prize and the money the secondary prize. The watch was added because there was concern that a mere cash award would be too crude. Sasaki Mosaku 佐佐木茂索, "Akutagawa-shō no umareru made," in *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, p. 17. Kikuchi had wanted the money to be the only prize; only through Sasaki's urging was the watch added. See Dekune Tatsurō 出久根達郎, "Akutagawa-shō no nedan," *Bungei shunjū* (September 1995): 289. Five hundred yen was a substantial but not tremendous amount of money for a prize; in fact, the 1934 *Tokyo Asahi kenshō shōsetsu* award winner, Yokoyama Michiko, apparently received 10,000 yen as her prize. See Senuma, "Bungaku-shō o meguru shomondai (jō)," p. 153. Kikuchi actually responded in his column to criticisms that the Akutagawa Prize money was insufficient. In March 1935 Kikuchi wrote, "The two awards bestow a total of 2000 yen per year, which is roughly the same as the amount given the runner-up for the Asahi Prize. I wish people would give us credit, Bungei Shunjūsha being the small company it is." Kikuchi, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden*, p. 104.

Murō Saisei, Kojima Masajirō, Sasaki Mosaku, Takii Kōsaku, Yokomitsu Riichi, and Kawabata Yasunari. (Not in any particular order.)³¹

4. The Akutagawa Prize shall be awarded every six months. When there is no appropriate recipient, the award shall not be presented.
5. The Akutagawa Prize recipient's work shall be published in the pages of *Bungei shunjū*.

The regulations for the Naoki Prize were nearly identical, for Kikuchi seems to have desired to establish parity between the awards. The two awards differed in some important respects. To begin with, the Akutagawa Prize celebrated the best original work (*sōsaku*) by a rising author, while the Naoki Prize rewarded the best popular literature (*taishū bungei*) written by a rising author. In addition, though Kikuchi, Kume, Kojima, and Sasaki served on both committees, the Naoki committee was stocked with established authors categorized as writers of “popular” fiction, including Yoshikawa Eiji, Osaragi Jirō, and Shirai Kyōji. Finally, winners of the Akutagawa Prize were published in *Bungei shunjū*, while Naoki award-winning works came to be published in *Oru yomimono*. In each respect the Naoki Prize adhered to the institutional boundaries that were forming according to the discursive divide between “pure” and “popular” literature. The creation of the two separate awards helped to solidify this division, which at the time was still logically ambiguous and strongly contested.³²

³¹ Nagai later states that he has no memory of Tanizaki's having attended, and he believes that there was probably an agreement allowing Kikuchi to use his name even though he would not actually participate. Nagai Tatsuo, *Kaisō no Akutagawa—Naoki-shō* (Bungei shunjū, 1979), p. 16. He speculates that Tanizaki might have agreed to this out of feelings of guilt after he briefly married and then divorced a member of the Bungei Shunjūsha staff, Furukawa Tomiko. Most of the other members of the committee will be familiar to readers as authors of varying degrees of fame. Sasaki Mosaku (1894–1966) was a writer who became general editor at Bungei Shunjūsha in 1929 and was made president of the company when it was reconstituted after the War; Takii Kōsaku (1894–1984) was a writer, poet, and close friend of Shiga Naoya. He worked as an editor at both the *Fiji shinbō* and *Kaizō* before leaving the publishing business to focus on his writing.

³² Matthew Strecher, in his thoughtful overview of specific attempts (primarily one in the early 1960s by Hirano Ken, Ito Sei, and Takami Jun) to clarify this distinction, sees the creation of the awards as evidence that the criteria behind the distinction were “sufficiently settled” by this time, but contemporary debates suggest otherwise. See Strecher, “Purely Mass,” p. 371, and Edward Mack, “The Value of Literature: Cultural Authority in Interwar Japan” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2002), Chapter 4.

Just as Kikuchi chose writers marked as “popular” for the Naoki Prize committee, he selected writers he deemed “pure” for the Akutagawa committee. Not surprisingly, the primary qualification for membership in the Akutagawa committee seems to have been affiliation with *Bungei shunjū*. As early as 19 December 1934, criticisms were being leveled against the award for this bias.³³ Indeed, the committee members were for the most part a closely interrelated group whose elite educational backgrounds were similar, if not identical, and whose careers had long been linked.³⁴ In addition, they were all authors who had known each other for many years and had been established for more than a decade when Kikuchi brought them together in 1935.³⁵

The Akutagawa and Naoki Prize committees handled their responsibilities differently. According to Osaragi Jirō, the Akutagawa committee was made up of strong-willed and opinionated people, none of whom would compromise on their positions. Their debates would go on for hours. The Naoki committee, on the contrary, often made their decisions easily, perhaps because they took the award less seriously.³⁶ Osaragi, for example, once suggested facetiously that they leave the selection to Kawabata so as to avoid the work.³⁷ In addition, because the Naoki Prize tended to reward consistent production, the committee members often had recipients in mind in advance. In contrast to the light-hearted approach of the Naoki

³³ The “Hyōron-kabe” column of the *Yomiuri shinbun* that day expresses concern that neither professional critics nor left-wing writers are represented.

³⁴ For an elaboration of the various links between the committee members, see Mack, pp. 317–21. The Naoki committee members had comparable connections and similarities.

³⁵ In fact, most of them were sufficiently established in the decade preceding the establishment of the Akutagawa Prize to be included in what could be considered a material “canon” of modern Japanese literature, Kaizōsha’s “one yen per volume” (*enpon*) *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū*, which was published between December 1926 and December 1932. Tanizaki, Satō, Kikuchi, Kume, Murō, Yamamoto, Yokomitsu, Kawabata, and Takii were all included in the 63-volume collection. Given their current fame, it is worth noting that Kawabata and Yokomitsu, who were younger than the other members, barely made it into the series. Their works were finally included in volumes 50 and 61 of the series, the *Shinkō bungaku-shū* and the *Shinkō geijutsu-ha bungaku-shū*, respectively. See Mack, Chapter 3.

³⁶ Osaragi Jirō 大佛次郎, “Naoki-shō ni tsuite,” *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* (December 1955): 178–79.

³⁷ Uno Kōji 宇野浩二, “Ku to raku no omoide,” *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* (December 1955): 199.

committee, the Akutagawa committee acted as if it were making decisions that would affect the future direction of the literary tradition.

Another difference between the two awards deepened the divide between “pure” and “popular” literature. Although initially the recipients of both prizes were announced in the pages of *Bungei shunjū*, only the Akutagawa Prize-winning work was to be published there, while the Naoki Prize-winning work was to be published in *Oru yomimono*, the company’s less prestigious “popular” magazine.³⁸ This arrangement gave *Bungei shunjū* control of both awards, allowing it to claim the authority to announce the best work of “popular literature” without contaminating its pages with the work itself.

CHOOSING THE FIRST RECIPIENTS

The selection process required substantial time and effort before a list of manageable size could be drawn up for the committee to consider. In theory, any work published in the six months preceding the selection process was eligible to win the prizes. Two winning stages were introduced into the selection process to handle the large number of eligible pieces. In March, over seven months before the final selection, one hundred requests for recommendations were sent by mail to members of the literary establishment.³⁹ Within days the receipt (or lack thereof) of these recommendation cards had unintentionally created what one newspaper article named a “card class” within that community.⁴⁰ For some authors, the article reported, failure to receive a card could be interpreted as a blessing: for example, Ōtani Fujiko’s failure to receive a card gave rise to gossip that she might win the award.⁴¹ In response to its request,

³⁸ *Oru yomimono* began as a special issue of *Bungei shunjū* in July 1930. Because it was so well received, Bungei Shunjūsha began publishing it monthly from April 1931. By January of the following year, *Oru yomimono* had a circulation of approximately 300,000.

³⁹ Uno Kōji lists nineteen authors who submitted recommendations. See Uno Kōji, “Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō,” *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* (September 1952): 243. Thirty-eight authors are listed in the Bungei Shunjū Kabushiki Kaisha, ed., *Akutagawa-shō zenshū* (Bungei shunjū, 1982) [hereafter *ASZ*], 1:340.

⁴⁰ “Akutagawa-shō no kado kaikyū,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, 3 March 1935.

⁴¹ Ōtani Fujiko (1901–1977)’s “Hansei” had recently been selected in August 1934 to become a *Kaizō kenshō shōsetsu*, marking her as a rising author.

the publishing house Bungei Shunjūsha received recommendations from a diverse body of contemporary writers, including Ibuse Masuji, Niwa Fumio, Funabashi Seiichi, Ozaki Kazuo, Tokunaga Sunao, Itō Sei, Hirabayashi Taiko, Takeda Rintarō, Hayama Yoshiki, and Hayashi Fumiko.

Using these recommendations the Bungei Shunjūsha staff compiled a preliminary list, which was then given to Takii Kōsaku and Kawabata Yasunari, who were charged with producing a short list.⁴² For the first award, Takii Kōsaku and Kawabata Yasunari presented the Akutagawa committee with a list that had been narrowed down to five works. The two committees met four times between June 14 and August 10, when, with all eleven members of both committees present, the final decision was made and the results were announced to the press.⁴³

The first Akutagawa Prize was given, in September 1935, to Ishikawa Tatsuzō for his novel, *Sōbō*.⁴⁴ As Kawamura Minato has pointed out, in selecting this work the committee ignored the most prominent literary forms of the time: the conversion (*tenkō*) works recanting support for the proletarian movement, the various works in the "I-novel" tradition, and the modernist stories of the New Sensationalists (Shinkankaku-ha).⁴⁵ Instead, *Sōbō* tells the story of a group of semiliterate Japanese peasants and their experiences of being processed at the Emigration Office in Kobe prior to their departure for Brazil. The narrative primarily focuses on a young woman, Onatsu, and her younger brother, Magoichi. Because individuals had to emigrate as families to receive government subsidies, Onatsu has abandoned the man she loves to travel to Brazil with

⁴² Uno Kōji states that Kawabata and Takii shared the responsibility for the first five awards. See Uno "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 245. Based on the selection critiques it appears that Takii's opinion dominated this process. Around the time that Uno Kōji joined the selection committee (in the latter half of 1937, for the sixth awarded, to be decided in February, 1938), Uno began assisting Kawabata and Takii with this responsibility. Satō et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," p. 10.

⁴³ By 1940 it had become standard for the committees to meet only three times.

⁴⁴ Translated as "The Emigrants," the story appeared in *The East* 21.4-6 (1985) and 22.1 (1986). No translator is credited. This is actually a translation of the first part only, which was the portion that received the Akutagawa Prize. A second part was published between April and July 1946, and a third was published in July 1946.

⁴⁵ Kawamura Minato 川村湊, "'Gaichi' to bungaku-shō," in *Ikyō no Shōwa bungaku: "Manshū" to kindai Nihon* (Iwanami shoten, 1990), p. 143.

her brother, who dreams of success there. The story focuses on Onatsu's and Magoichi's experiences, but not exclusively. Touching on large contemporary events of 1930, such as the London Naval Conference and bribery scandals involving high-ranking government officials, *Sōbō* also explores many other characters' experiences, effectively capturing the mass of people and their diverse situations.

The Naoki Prize went to Kawaguchi Matsutarō for his novella "Tsuruhachi Tsurujirō" and other recent works.⁴⁶ "Tsuruhachi Tsurujirō" is the story of a pair of *shinnai* (a type of chanting [*jōruri*]) performers, Tsuruga Tsurujirō and Tsuruga Tsuruhachi. In the story, Tsuruhachi decides to quit and marry the son of a Ueno restaurant owner after one of their frequent quarrels. Her married life proceeds smoothly, but Tsurujirō's fame and talent wane over time and he starts to drink heavily. Three years later the two hold a reunion performance. Realizing how much she misses performing, Tsuruhachi decides to leave her husband to return to her art. Despite his desire to reunite with Tsuruhachi, Tsurujirō, who realizes how much she stands to lose, turns her away for her own benefit.⁴⁷

SELECTION CRITIQUES FOR THE FIRST AWARDS

In contrast to the literary prizes that preceded them, the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes exposed their inner workings. First *Bungei shunjū* had made public the composition of the selection committees; on 10 August 1935 the magazine made the reasons for the selections public as well. Along with the announcement of the winning works, readers were presented with the selection critiques (*senpyō*) of each selection committee member. The selection critiques for the first Akutagawa and Naoki awards speak directly to the differences

⁴⁶ In a March 1969 article entitled "Shusse-saku no koro," Kawaguchi wrote that, though everyone thinks he was awarded the prize for "Tsurujirō Tsuruhachi"—his first major work—in fact he received it for "Fūryū Fukagawa-uta." As Mawatari Kenzaburō points out, he is right, strictly speaking, as "Tsurujirō Tsuruhachi" did not appear during the period specified by the prize's regulations: January to June, 1935. Hasegawa Izumi 長谷川泉, ed., *Naoki-shō jiten* (Shibundō, 1977), p. 233.

⁴⁷ Hasegawa, *Naoki-shō jiten*, p. 232.

between the two awards, the imperfections of the selection process, and the nature of the values informing the decisions.⁴⁸

While the Akutagawa committee members expressed different opinions concerning the criteria that should be used to determine the recipient, few expressed confusion about the selection process. The Naoki committee members, in contrast, declared their uncertainty from the start. Osaragi Jirō began his critique, “The difficulty stems from the fact that it is not clear what popular literature (*taishū bungei*) is.”⁴⁹ As Osaragi’s perplexity reflects, the Japanese terms for “popular” contain the same ambiguity as the English term. Could something be “popular” prior to its consumption? That is to say, were writers “popular” because they wrote the sort of vulgar or mundane (*tsūzoku*) things “the people” like, or were writers “popular” because “the people” liked what they wrote? That is, could something be accurately judged “popular” before “the people” had spoken through the marketplace?⁵⁰ Kojima Masajirō’s comment, which seems to be addressing this question, suggests not: “I was against the selection of an author as famous as Kawaguchi. But, having heard the argument that an unknown author could not be considered a popular (*taishū*) author, I finally conceded to giving the award to a famous author.”⁵¹ If established fame was the criterion for selection, however, there would be no need for the selection committee, for the highest sales would reveal who had the greatest popularity. The fundamental logic of the award demanded that “popular” be a quality inherent in a work.

In the end, Osaragi decided to award the prize to Kawaguchi for being so prolific and for having drawn attention to the early Meiji period in his writing. Initially, however, he had thought to give it

⁴⁸ The two awards were announced together, though it should be noted that the Akutagawa Prize appeared first, with Ishikawa’s serious picture placed above Kawaguchi’s more playful image. The formats, wording, and prizes were nearly identical, but the hierarchy of the two awards—as manifested in the order of their presentation—was never inverted. The order of presentation was the same for the selection critiques as well: the Akutagawa committee’s preceded those of the Naoki committee.

⁴⁹ Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ This might seem a pedantic difference, but it raises two key problems for these critics: first, if a work does not sell, does that prove that it was not, in fact, “popular”? Second, if sales are the measure of the tastes of the mass reader, then what does it mean when a “pure” work sells well, as in the case of the one-yen classics from the late 1920s?

⁵¹ Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 25.

to Hamamoto Hiroshi, "one of the few who have put in real literary effort in the field of popular literature, where few ever work hard."⁵² In so writing, Osaragi suggests first that in valuing "literary" effort the Naoki Prize is on the same spectrum as the Akutagawa Prize, rather than being an award for an alternate genre. Both committees sought to reward "literary" achievement, without implying that there may be multiple ways to define that achievement. More importantly, Osaragi's comments suggest a class basis to success in the respective fields: while the Akutagawa Prize's "pure" literature relied upon genius, the Naoki Prize's "popular" literature depended on literary labor.

Reaffirming this link between labor and the Naoki Prize, Yoshikawa Eiji contradicted Osaragi, writing, "[Kawaguchi] does not have enough experience with literary hardship."⁵³ For Yoshikawa, an author should not be rewarded for a single good work: "Though I have no objection to this decision [the selection of Kawaguchi], from my experience as an author, in the field of popular literature (*taishū bungei*), the skillful production of one or two works is not the sort of thing to deserve showers of cheap praise. One should praise an author only when his consistent production, lifestyle, and spirit have captured the public."⁵⁴ In Yoshikawa's view, "popular" literature was more of a craft than an art. While an artist could, theoretically, create great art accidentally, an artisan could be considered great only for continued high-quality production. To make matters more complicated, from Yoshikawa's perspective it was not even sufficient for the author to have produced consistently strong work. The quality of the work could be judged only if one knew something about the craftsman himself; the craftsman had to have a certain excellence of character and commitment to be worthy of praise.

The matter of artist versus artisan was clearly put by Sasaki when he wrote, "In my personal opinion, popular literature (*taishū bungei*) requires a kind of artisan-like (*aachizan-teki*) quality that is refined over time, as in the saying 'practice makes perfect.'"⁵⁵ As for

⁵² Ibid., p. 23.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

considering the character rather than simply the work of an author, Sasaki wrote: "The only regrettable thing for Kawaguchi is that, while no one on the Akutagawa committee knew Ishikawa and the decision was made solely on the basis of his works, even [Kawaguchi's] attitude toward life . . . was brought into the discussion. While there are many drawbacks to being unknown, there are also many drawbacks to being known."⁵⁶ The Naoki Prize was awarded not for a literary work of particular excellence, but on the basis of an evaluation of an artisan's lifestyle and character.

Osaragi Jirō described Kikuchi's conception of the prize as follows: "Simply put, the policy was this: the Akutagawa Prize was for a [specific] work; the Naoki Prize was for [overall] ability."⁵⁷ From the beginning, it was an unwritten rule that a Naoki Prize-winning writer had to show the potential to have a long and prolific career. Kume and Osaragi argued that this placed too great a demand on the selection committee, but Kikuchi stood fast; he needed new writers who could produce material for his magazines.⁵⁸

Though Kikuchi did not demand the same from Akutagawa Prize authors, the future potential of authors was clearly in Akutagawa selection committee members' minds as well.⁵⁹ Takii Kōsaku—who went on to be the longest-serving committee member in Akutagawa Prize history to date, participating in 86 selections over a 46-year span—wrote the following in his selection critique: "If I found an author's works generally to be inferior and I was unsure about his ability, I could not recommend him to the reading world even if I were to find a single work by that author that I found to be excellent. Therefore I looked for authors about whose skill I had no doubts, and in whose capacity I could place my confidence" (*ASZ* 1:338). Kume Masao evinced this concern for the future when he wrote, "[*Sōbō*]'s solid style gives me great confidence that we can expect a lot from [Ishikawa] in the future" (*ASZ* 1:335). This dis-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

⁵⁷ Osaragi, "Naoki-shō ni tsuite," p. 178.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁵⁹ In at least one case, the committee rewarded potential and overall achievement instead of a specific work. When Ozaki Kazuo won (the fifth award; spring 1937), the selection committee wrote that the prize rewarded his previous writings and his years of hard work rather than the inferior *Nonki megane*. Uno Kōji, "Senkō iin no kansō," *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* (October 1952): 128.

tinguished the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes from most other awards, particularly *kenshō shōsetsu*, which celebrated a given work with no explicit regard for the author's future career.

There were other similarities between the awards. Kume, who acted on both committees, wrote that Ishikawa Tatsuzō “understands popular (*tsūzoku-teki*) writing methods, and I mean that in a good way. There are not many 140- or 150-page works these days that you read right through in a sitting.” At the same time, he ended his brief critique of Kawaguchi by stating: “If he should now become more diligent as a pure (*junsui na*) writer, then the granting of this award will have even more meaning” (ASZ 1:335). “Pure” works improved with the incorporation of “popular” techniques, while “popular” works benefited from the writer's diligence and purity. One could call upon a popular writer to be pure, but not upon a pure writer to be “popular.”

The purity the selection committee found in *Sōbō* was not that of the so-called “I-novel.” Although the definitions for what makes up this genre vary, they have in common the presence of what Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner has called a “focus figure,” often identifiable as the author, whose life becomes the central preoccupation of the text.⁶⁰ Kume Masao is frequently quoted as having given the most succinct description of the genre's centrality to the modern Japanese literary tradition. In 1925, ten years before the first Akutagawa Prize was given, he wrote, “In the final analysis, the basis of all art lies in the self. It follows that the form that expresses the “self” directly and frankly, without pretense and disguise, that is to say, the I-novel, should become the main path, the basis, and the essence of the art of prose.”⁶¹ Yet *Sōbō* has no single focus figure, nor are the characters to be identified with the author. Kikuchi Kan wrote, “Most new authors recently tend to write on the monotonous subject

⁶⁰ See Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 1–12 for a concise rendering of the discourse on the “I-novel.” Hibi Yoshitaka provides a similar overview that divides the I-novel discourse into periods. See Hibi Yoshitaka 日比嘉高, ‘*Jiko hyōshō*’ no bungaku-shi: *jibun o kaku shōsetsu no tōjō* (Kanrin shobō, 2002), pp. 12–15.

⁶¹ From “Shishōsetsu to shinkyō shōsetsu.” The essay appeared in two parts, the first in *Bungei kōza* (January 1925): 7, and the second in *Bungei kōza* (February 1925): 8. They appear in Hirano Ken 平野謙 et al., eds., *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsō shi* (Miraisha, 1975), 1:108–14. The translation above is quoted from Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, p. 1.

of themselves; in contrast, Ishikawa depicts a group of illiterate emigrants . . . in a skillful way that results in a powerful work.”⁶² Kume himself, now in a position to judge works directly, praises *Sōbō* for its unique subject matter, writing that “one feels compelled to read the story because the experiences are interesting and the material is unusual.” Rather than demanding that Ishikawa plumb the depths of his own consciousness and experience to reveal a (universal) truth of existence, Kume seems to be calling for writers to look outside themselves at disparate others.

This attention to others, particularly those of lower social classes, was common to proletarian literature, the genre most literary histories depict as distinct from bourgeois “pure” literature. Yet in commenting on the works short-listed for this prize for “pure” literature, certain committee members explicitly and positively referred to proletarian literature while criticizing “pure” authors. Kawabata Yasunari, for example, states, “Among those [in my proposed short list], Watanabe [Hiroshi] and Asai [Hanako] recently emerged from the working class.”⁶³ I was quite moved by the proletarian subject matter and the authors’ lives. One doesn’t often see this kind of author among the new members of the enervated art-for-art’s-sake school (*geijutsu-ha*)” (*ASZ* 1:336). Kawabata’s public statement suggests that some “pure” literature writers felt sympathy (and to some extent, solidarity) with the proletarian literature movement. By printing his alternate list, Kawabata also displayed his resistance to the direction the selection process took.

Rather than seeking a fixed set of literary qualities that might be implied in a singular definition of “purity,” the committee preferred stylistic freshness. Kume expressed concern, in fact, that *Sōbō* was insufficiently innovative in its style; Nagai Tatsuo recalls one committee member’s—he thinks it was Kume Masao—comparison of the two prizes: “Roughly speaking, the Akutagawa Prize is a proper young lady. What we buy first and foremost is freshness and youth. Even if two or three years pass and she comes to be slightly tainted by the world, the judges are not to be blamed. What we bought was the freshness of the works. In contrast, the Naoki Prize is an appren-

⁶² Kikuchi, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden*, p. 118.

⁶³ I have not been able to find any information about these writers.

tice geisha. What we are after is not just the winning work, but a person who is going to continue to produce.”⁶⁴ While the Akutagawa Prize was nominally for “pure” literature, the selection committee had no clear definition of literary purity.

Whatever the committee was seeking, one thing soon became obvious to them about this mechanism of cultural authority they had created: they did not have complete control over it. This lack of control is apparent in the prewar selection critiques of the Akutagawa Prize, which often expressed a general dissatisfaction about the selection or about the public reception to their selections. Dissatisfaction arose because decisions were rarely unanimous and the power held by committee members greatly varied.⁶⁵ For the first competition, the individual with the most power, Takii Kōsaku, determined the final short list. Satō Haruo explicitly recognizes Takii’s power: “I am a supporter of Dazai’s work, but I was put in a bind when ‘Gyakkō’ was short-listed instead of ‘Dōke no hana.’ . . . Of course, I suppose that ‘Dōke no hana’ didn’t fit Takii’s demands for realism and that is why he short-listed ‘Gyakkō’ instead” (*ASZ* 1:335–36). Takii had included only one of Dazai Osamu’s works on the short list, thereby eliminating the other from consideration; in that way his demands for realism overruled Satō’s appreciation of the imaginative.

Kikuchi Kan had created a powerful mechanism for the consecration of young authors, but its actual functioning brought him disappointment. His comments concerning the first awards touch on a number of points:

For the purposes of selecting the Akutagawa Prize I read works by new authors for the first time in a long while. I was disappointed. I found their freshness false, nothing more than trivial detail. In fact, it struck me that literature hadn’t progressed at all in the last ten years. I particularly felt that the writing style, decked out with all sorts of novelties, had made the works increasingly inaccessible to all but a select few, to the point that I felt they were alienating themselves from a general readership. Being read by the masses is a necessity for popular literature (*taishū bungaku*). For pure literature as well, the more it is read by the masses, the better.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nagai, *Kaisō*, pp. 30–31.

⁶⁵ Part was also due to the reception of the award by the public, which tended to interpret it as an award for achievement rather than potential.

⁶⁶ Kikuchi, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden*, p. 119.

Things were not turning out as Kikuchi had hoped. If he believed that his award would discover and celebrate the new hopes of modern Japanese literature, he was disillusioned by what he found. In closing, he isolated what he believed was one of the key problems in the “pure” literature of his time: namely, that authors had no eye toward readers outside of the literary establishment. In effect, Kikuchi was agreeing with Kume, saying that pure literature required a certain “popular” quality, or at least that it needed to keep a broad body of readers in mind.

The official comments by the prize recipients illustrate both the prestige brought to the awards by their namesakes, Akutagawa and Naoki, and that each of the two prizes was perceived differently. As was fitting for the recipient of the Akutagawa Prize, Ishikawa wrote in extremely polite language about how flattered he was to be honored in the name of a genius like Akutagawa, how uncertain he was that he could produce good work in the future, given his limited talent, and how he would nonetheless work hard to do so. In contrast to Ishikawa’s flowery and humble words, the winner of the first Naoki Prize, Kawaguchi, wrote with blunt frankness: “During his lifetime Naoki scorned my work and barely read any of it. Of the one work he did read, *Dassōpei*, he warned me, ‘Too much explanation. Use more description.’ Despite our long friendship, this was the first and last literary advice I received from him. I bet that old baldy, hearing that I had received the Naoki Prize, is down in his grave grinning at the irony.”⁶⁷ Though presented as equals, the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes never were.

DAZAI OSAMU AND THE AKUTAGAWA PRIZE

As Satō Haruo’s comments suggest, Dazai Osamu and his works were on the minds of a number of committee members. Undoubtedly, the award and the distinction it could convey were on Dazai’s mind as well. From the time he read the announcement of the award’s establishment, Dazai had lobbied to be selected as the first recipient. The award would have meant a lot to his career as a writer, which had only recently begun in earnest. Dazai had entered

⁶⁷ Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 27.

Tokyo Imperial University in 1930 but did not graduate. He had been publishing in Aomori coterie magazines for many years and had begun establishing himself in Tokyo. In his personal life, he suffered a series of problems, including a near-fatal case of appendicitis, and he made multiple suicide attempts. By the time the first Akutagawa selection committee met, Dazai was deeply addicted to Pavinal, a form of morphine, which he had begun taking as a pain-killer after the surgery for his appendicitis. His addiction had become so profound that abstention left him mentally unstable. Perhaps he felt that the award would justify his life choices to his parents, from whom he had become estranged. His drug habit, his need for social approbation, and his profound ambition made him desperate for the money and the legitimacy that the prize would bring.

What stood between Dazai and the award was not lack of literary talent. Kawabata Yasunari, like Satō, expressed an appreciation for Dazai's writing; his recommended short list included both "Gyakkō" and "Dōke no hana." He had reservations, however, about Dazai's physical and mental condition: "I regretted that dark clouds in his personal life at the moment seem to be keeping him from expressing his talent more clearly" (ASZ 1:336).⁶⁸ These comments about his personal life led Dazai to write a harsh letter to another Bungei Shunjūsha magazine, *Bungei tsūshin*, in response.⁶⁹ In it, he taunts Kawabata, asking, "Does keeping small birds and watching dancers perform constitute such an admirable life?" He continues, "I felt, deep in my vitals, the perverse, hot, strong, Nelly-esque affection you must have for me." He then intimates that not only was Kawabata not solely responsible for his decision, but also that he was likely coerced into making it, and that someone else must have written his selection critique. "In those words of yours I sensed 'society [worldly pressures]' (*seken*) and the suffocating odor of 'financial relationships.'"⁷⁰ Kawabata responded in the following

⁶⁸ "Dark clouds," according to Nagai (*Kaisō*, p. 214 n. 3), probably refers to Dazai's failed attempt to pass the employment examination for *Miyako shinbun* in 1935, his failed attempt to take his own life, and his subsequent hospitalization for appendicitis.

⁶⁹ October 1935.

⁷⁰ Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, pp. 53–54. The translation until the ellipsis comes from Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston,

month's issue of *Bungei tsūshin*: "Mr. Dazai does not understand how the committee functions. It would be best for him not to indulge in wild speculation or groundless suspicion."⁷¹ Dazai's more inflammatory accusations aside, Kawabata's comments reveal that extra-literary factors affected the decision-making process.

The passage of time has shown that the Akutagawa Prize was not essential to Dazai's achieving the approbation he so strongly desired. The likelihood that he would eventually win recognition was obvious to at least one member of the committee as well. Shortly after the heated exchange of letters, Dazai was introduced to Satō Haruo and began lobbying him for the second Akutagawa Prize. Satō, who thought highly of his ability, feared for Dazai's well-being and, in cooperation with Dazai's mentor, Ibuse Masuji, had him hospitalized.⁷² At the same time, he tried to reassure Dazai that his failure to receive the award was not catastrophic. Satō later recalled how he had gone about consoling Dazai: "It was really tough when Dazai was begging me for the award. We weren't going to select Dazai, nor Dan [Kazuo.] 'Even if you two don't get the award, you are going to gain more fame than the award can provide, so don't brood over it. Look, I didn't win the Akutagawa Prize either.' That was how I consoled them. I even joked with them, saying, 'Let's form an obscure writers' society. Let's force them to recognize how great we obscure writers are.'"⁷³

The Dazai incident reminds us that the Akutagawa Prize never became the sole bearer of cultural authority, but it also shows how quickly its power grew and how quickly writers recognized that power.⁷⁴ At the time the incident played yet another function. Dazai's and Kawabata's exchange was public, appearing in the

1984), 1:1043, with one exception: I have replaced "flannellike" with "Nelly-esque" for *Neruri no yō na*, presuming that Dazai is referring to the character Nelly from Dostoyevsky's *The Insulted and Injured*, to whom he also refers in the story "Ha." The sentence after the ellipsis is my own translation. Dazai is referring to Kawabata's *Kinjū*, published in the July 1933 issue of *Kaizō*.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 54-55.

⁷² Ibid., p. 55.

⁷³ Satō et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," p. 12.

⁷⁴ It also reminds us that the prize was not omnipotent: at this historical moment Dazai's literary fame has clearly surpassed that of Ishikawa, despite the legitimacy bestowed by the prize.

pages of *Bungei tsūshin*; Sato's response to Dazai's letters and visits appeared in *Kaizō* (November 1936).⁷⁵ While Kawabata's and Sato's actions suggest that they respected Dazai's ability and cared for him as a person, they nonetheless showed little hesitation in exposing his desperation to readers. This public display elevated Kawabata and Sato's reputations as literary kingmakers and helped fix the Akutagawa Prize in the general imagination as a Dragon Gate for emerging talents.⁷⁶

ANNOUNCING THE FIRST AWARDS

Kikuchi originally said that he wanted the award ceremony to be a grand event, in the hopes that it would play a major role in the literary world. In the end, though, little ceremony accompanied the first presentation. In December 1935, Kikuchi explained, "I had wanted to hold a *bundan* celebration, but I was extremely busy traveling and in the end lost the opportunity altogether."⁷⁷ The response of some newspapers, which he thought took the award to be nothing more than a publisher's gimmick, dissatisfied Kikuchi.⁷⁸ Kikuchi criticized the press coverage in his October "Rubbish Bin" column:

I resented the fact that, even though we cordially invited each of the newspapers to the Akutagawa and Naoki Prize announcements, some newspapers did not write a single line about it—especially when the announcement of something like the Nikakai Exhibit selection is made before a whole array of photographers. Which has more value as a news item—more social value even: one of the countless selectees of the innumerable exhibitions or the sole recipients of the Akutagawa or Naoki Prizes? They're idiots. They even announce the Literary Chat Society (Bungei Kon'wa-kai) award.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ For the public statements at the time on the matter, see Yamanouchi Shōshi 山内祥史, ed., *Dazai Osamu ronshū: dōjidai hen* (Yumani shobō, 1992), 1:57–88, 115–40.

⁷⁶ It was referred to this way as early as 8 December 1934, in an article entitled "Shinshin sakka yorokobe: hiraketa tōryūmon" (*Yomiuri shinbun*).

⁷⁷ Quoted in Odagiri *Shōjiten*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Nagai, *Kaisō*, pp. 14–15. It is not clear what Kikuchi was expecting, because articles did run in a number of newspapers, some as early as 8 December 1934 (both the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* ran articles on it that day). The papers dutifully announced the recipients on 11 August, and on 13 August *Tokyo Asahi* ran an article on the Akutagawa Prize's success entitled, "Akutagawa-shō wa seikō."

⁷⁹ Kikuchi, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden*, p. 120–21. From the October 1935 issue of *Bungei shunjū*. For more on the Literary Chat Society and its awards, see Rubin, *Injurious*, pp. 246–55.

The press coverage would eventually satisfy Kikuchi's expectations. In October 1936 Kikuchi praised the media's response to the awards:

For the winner as well as for the selection committee members, the extremely positive reception of the Akutagawa Prize was the realization of a dream. Thanks to that reception, the September issue of *Bungei shunjū* sold very well—yet another reason for celebration. I would be ecstatic if the authority of the Akutagawa Prize grew like this with each new prize. As for the Naoki Prize, though it wasn't especially well received, it wasn't badly received either. It seems everyone understood our reasons for giving the award.⁸⁰

The Naoki Prize was not enjoying the same degree of attention, but this did not overly concern Kikuchi, because the Akutagawa Prize was rapidly becoming the powerful mechanism that he wanted it to be. Aside from providing publicity for Bungei Shunjūsha, the award had already begun to produce concrete benefits for its recipients. For Ishikawa, one result of winning the award was that the commercial magazines on which his livelihood depended treated him more generously. Ishikawa later recounted that prior to winning the award, he would have to take works to *Chūō kōron* and *Kaizō* only to be rebuffed; after the award, they came to him not only for his writing, but also for his photograph.⁸¹

By design, Bungei Shunjūsha did not simply bestow the award and then turn its back on the winning authors. As had been stated explicitly in the announcement of the award, the company assumed some responsibility for cultivating the authors it had chosen. Generally it followed through on this promise. A case in point concerns Ishikawa's first work after winning the prize, *Shinkaigyō*, which was treated roughly by the critics. Sasaki urged a head editor of Bungei Shunjūsha to encourage Ishikawa to keep writing, reminding the editor of their commitment to cultivating the author after the award.⁸² At first the publishing house extended such support even to its short-listed authors, publishing their stories in *Bungei shunjū* as well.⁸³ Consequently the magazine was dedicating so many of its

⁸⁰ From the October 1936 *Bungei shunjū*; quoted in Nagai Kaisō, p. 50.

⁸¹ Satō et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," p. 10.

⁸² Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, p. 11.

⁸³ Even Dazai, because he had been one of the short-listed authors, was commissioned to write a new story for the October 1935 issue of *Bungei shunjū*. As a result of his subsequent behavior, however, he was not published by *Bungei shunjū* again, but was instead picked up by *Shinchō*.

pages to these writers that by December 1936 Kikuchi was compelled to comment: "Every month since September we have been running the works that were short-listed for the Akutagawa Prize; January's issue will carry Tsuruta's and Oda's works. The result is that the Akutagawa Prize dominates *Bungei shun'yū*'s 'new works' section. It would be a bore if this section were effectively to lock out established authors of the *bundan*; therefore starting next time the short-listed works will be published separately in book form."⁸⁴ Roughly two years after its inception, Kikuchi's Akutagawa Prize threatened to dominate the entire magazine. Despite Kikuchi's dissatisfaction with the Prize's initial reception, it quickly became powerful. Contributing to its growing authority were several factors: the Dazai incident, the prestige of the committee members, the association of the award with a well-respected writer, and the concrete career benefits winning authors received. Even as it gave young writers the imprimatur of its distinguished committee members, the Akutagawa Prize reproduced and amplified the committee members' authority and allowed them to affect directly the development of modern Japanese literature. By wielding the ambiguously defined but decidedly effective designation of "purity," the committee elevated fiction that best adhered to their literary ideals and allowed them to affect the course of literary development.

BEHIND THE SCENES, 1935-1941

The Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes continued to be awarded twice a year through the end of 1944, after which they took a four-year hiatus as a result of the War. Over the course of those first twenty competitions (1935-1944), twenty-one Akutagawa Prizes and fifteen Naoki Prizes were awarded. During that time the official composition of the selection committees remained largely consistent. Until 1943 the only changes were as follows: the writer Uno Kōji joined the Akutagawa committee from the sixth competition (fall 1937)⁸⁵

⁸⁴ As quoted in Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes are dated according to the half-year period from which eligible works are drawn. Thus the second competition, which took place in early 1936, examined works published between July and December, 1935. I have labeled these half-years as "spring" and "fall." In my translation, the selection process that occurred in early 1936 would be "the second competition (fall 1935)."

and the Naoki committee from the eleventh competition (spring 1940); the writer Kataoka Teppei joined the Naoki committee from the thirteenth competition (spring 1941). Despite this consistency, each selection process was unique as the committees confronted different issues each time they convened. Every six months, the committees considered a new group of works and interpreted their responsibilities in light of the contemporary cultural and political situation.⁸⁶ The vicissitudes in the selection process, then, revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the awards, the forces at play upon their selection, and the various desires of the individuals involved.

The episodes that follow have been reconstructed using both the selection critiques and subsequently published reminiscences of committee members, and are thus inevitably highly subjective. They are intended to illustrate the value systems each committee member brought with him to the table when selecting the awards.

The Third Competition: The Spring 1936 Akutagawa Prize

Some of the award competitions and selection critiques help us to extrapolate the guiding principles of the committee members. The two works awarded the Akutagawa Prize for the first half of 1936, Oda Takeo's "Jōgai" and Tsuruta Tomoya's "Koshamain-ki," are particularly useful in this regard. The committee members' deliberations illuminate not only these principles, but larger issues as well: the capacity of works to contain criticism of the government during the war years, the centrality of the "I-novel" form to modern Japanese literary production, and the complex relationship between the colonies and the home islands during the period of the Greater Japanese Empire.

"Koshamain-ki" purports to be the record of a third-generation Ainu chieftain. Set in the Edo period, the story follows Koshamain as he flees his home village of Setana (on Hokkaidō) after deceitful and conniving Japanese who have begun to colonize the island kill his father, just as earlier they had killed his grandfather. Narrowly escaping Japanese forces that have been sent to kill him, Koshamain survives thanks to sacrifices made by village chieftains who have yet

⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis of the changing political situation as it impinged upon publishing and writing, see Rubin, *Injurious*.

to succumb to the invaders. More of an epic than a novella, the narrative depicts Koshamain becoming an adult and learning various skills, as it builds readers' expectations for a denouement in which Koshamain repels the Japanese menace and saves his culture from destruction. In the final scene, however, the story abruptly deviates from readers' expectations. Koshamain meets a Japanese lumberjack who invites him to share a drink with a group of fellow Japanese lumberjacks remaining on the island for the winter. Koshamain, who has been careful to avoid the *sake* he knows the Japanese have used to corrupt his people, finally accepts a drink to show his willingness to make peace. When Koshamain turns to leave, the formerly friendly Japanese lumberjacks turn on him, stab him in the back (literally), and then race one another across the river to rape and murder his wife and mother. The story closes with Koshamain's body floating downstream to a formerly sacred spot, where rats and crows peck at the corpse.

"Koshamain-ki," which uses the long-established tradition of veiling political criticism in historical events, can be read as a surprisingly overt attack on Japan's imperial ambitions and the means the Japanese had used to achieve those ambitions. In an afterword included in a postwar reprint of the story, Tsuruta makes this point explicit: "My point was that reexamination of the Japanese attitude toward other ethnicities was essential, particularly given the invasion of Manchuria underway at the time."⁸⁷ The government did not suppress the story despite its harsh portrayal of Japanese. The unfettered publication of this story—not to mention the attention it subsequently enjoyed as a prize recipient—belies the common image of the literary world during the rise of the militarist government as barren and incapable of producing anything critical of the militarist regime.⁸⁸ Perhaps the story escaped censorship because the timing

⁸⁷ "Goki" in an earlier *Akutagawa-shō zenshū* (not to be confused with the *ASZ*), vol. 1 (Koyama shoten, 1949); quoted in the *Akutagawa-shō jiten*, p. 237.

⁸⁸ Komori Yōichi made the argument (in a personal interview) that censors were primarily concerned with criticism of the imperial system (*tennō-sei*) in the second half of the 1930s after activist Marxism had been largely suppressed. "Koshamain-ki," which is set in the Edo period, portrays actions directed by the Tokugawa Bakufu. Since the Meiji imperial system overturned the Bakufu, the story could be read as implicitly supporting (or at least not criticizing) the imperial system. Komori added that Tsuruta Tomoya was a member of the Rōnō-ha, which was generally not perceived as a threat to the imperial system.

of its publication in *Bungei shunjū* was fortuitous, before the Cabinet Information Committee (established in July 1936) was fully functioning and before the crackdown on Kōza-ha and Rōnō-ha members the following year.⁸⁹ It is also possible that many contemporary readers did not view the story as criticism. The selection critiques betray no awareness that the story could be controversial; they make no excuses for the inflammatory content of the story. The selection critique closest to recognizing the critical aspect of the story came from Murō Saisei, who opines (rather ambiguously): “In its depiction of resistance to a terrible, irresistible force, the tale contains extremely harsh criticism of ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’” (*ASZ* 1:350).

Nonetheless, the potential of the story to comment on contemporary imperial expansion was noted by some commentators at the time. In a 9 September article in the *Asahi shinbun*, Yamakawa Kikue suggested that the story brought to mind the European conquest of indigenous Americans, the East India Company’s domination of India, and even the recent fall of the Ethiopians to the Italians, all examples of “the fate of an undeveloped (*mikai*) people that come in contact with a civilized people possessed of more advanced weapons and organization.” In a 25 August article in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, Katsumoto Seiichirō had a Marxist version of the same reading, applauding the story as one “that accurately depicts the toppling of northern undeveloped (*mikai*) people by the expansion of capitalism, and is thus a work of the new generation in the most precise sense, a new generation informed by a materialist view of history.” It is unclear whether these comments are critical of the processes they describe, however. While they could be read as implicitly criticizing imperialism (including Japanese imperialism), they could just as easily be read as noting a process of social evolution (as described by Herbert Spencer) or historical materialism (as explicated by Marx.) In the end, the work was not suppressed, although censors did keep a close eye on Tsuruta’s works and did not allow the story to be turned into a film.⁹⁰

Reactions to the two works chosen to receive the third Akutagawa

⁸⁹ As far as I can tell, Tsuruta was not arrested as a part of this crackdown.

⁹⁰ *Akutagawa-shō jiten*, p. 237.

Prize reveal unexpected praise for the epic and scorn for the “I-novel.” In the afterword to the postwar reprint of “Koshamain-ki,” Tsuruta explained that he had chosen the epic form in order to break away from the “extremely tedious naturalism that dominates Japanese literature.” Apparently the selection committee approved of this move, giving the work nearly unanimous support. While the anti-naturalist “Koshamain-ki” was, as a 9 September article in the *Yomiuri shinbun* put it, “universally praised,” the other Akutagawa Prize-winning work, “Jōgai,” which Itō Sei labeled an “I-novel,” was not.⁹¹ Katsumoto Seiichirō, who had raved about “Koshamain-ki,” put it the most bluntly when he declared that the selection of “Jōgai” to share the prize “is clearly a failure for the Akutagawa Prize selection committee.”⁹²

In addition to being an “I-novel,” “Jōgai” is one of many Akutagawa Prize-winning works of the prewar period that take a pronounced interest in people and places outside Japan. Of the twenty-one prewar and wartime Akutagawa Prize works, fourteen either take place abroad or focus on non-Japanese characters.⁹³ “Jōgai” tells the story of Shigetō Yōichi, a young man who goes to the Japanese consulate in Hangzhou to work as a clerk (*shokisei*) in the Foreign Ministry. Kawamura Minato has examined the marked interest in both the winning and short-listed works to the “outer territories” (*gaichi*; Japan’s settlements, colonies, or occupied territories) and other areas of Asia.⁹⁴ He notes twelve such works between 1935 and 1944 and asserts that the prewar prize “even played the role of stimulating the appearance of a literature that collaborated with foreign expansion strategies. It would not be an overstatement to say those literary works were running a three-legged race with the period’s social trends and national policy ideology.”⁹⁵ As a closer look at “Koshamain-ki” reveals, however, it would be incorrect to

⁹¹ Itō Sei 伊藤整, “Akutagawa-shō no futa sakuin,” *Asahi shinbun*, 2 September 1936.

⁹² *Yomiuri shinbun*, 25 August 1936.

⁹³ *Sōbō*, “Koshamain-ki,” “Jōgai,” “Chichūkai,” “Fun’nyō-tan,” “Noriai basha,” “Niwatori sōdō,” “Mitsuryōsha,” “Chōkō Deruta,” “Renraku-in,” “Tensoku no goro,” “Ryūkanfuku,” “Tōhan,” and “Karitachi.”

⁹⁴ See Kawamura, *Ikyō*, pp.143–46, for a list of the Akutagawa Prize-winning stories in the prewar era that deal with *gaichi*, including relevant details from each of the works. Kawamura also discusses how colonial literature took advantage of the awards.

⁹⁵ Kawamura Minato, “Akutagawa-shō senpyō o yomitoku,” *Bungakukai* (July 1999): 204–5.

say that all the works displayed expansion in a positive light. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Akutagawa selection committee was fascinated with works that placed Japan in an international context—both multiethnic and multilingual—and favored works that took up this topic. The committee rewarded looking out as much as (or more than) it did introspection.

Gaichi was, literary critic Hashizume Ken argues, more than just a source of material for modern Japanese literature. According to Hashizume, from 1935 to 1945 the Japanese home islands provided a sterile environment for literature, with leftist, nihilistic, and liberal writing being suppressed. Police and the military constantly watched *tenkō* writers, and even authors not specifically under observation felt some pressure. Consequently, many writers fled to the *gaichi* and their experiences there were reflected in the prewar Akutagawa Prizes.⁹⁶ Hashizume's account does not explain, however, why these works were chosen within Japan during the repression and then celebrated despite it. Any work produced abroad that received the Akutagawa Prize—no matter how free the writers may have been abroad—was scrutinized as closely as one produced in Tokyo. While many authors may have composed subversive material abroad, the prize-winning works published and celebrated in Tokyo enjoyed no special freedom.

From the beginning, Sasaki Mosaku was calling on the committee to use the Akutagawa Prize to “let some fresh air ‘inside the walls’” of existing pure literature (*ASZ* 1:346). This “fresh air” included voices from the Japanese colonies, which the committee was keen to encourage. Take the tenth award, for example. In his selection critique, Takii Kōsaku comments on Korean-born Kim Saryang, whose “Hikari no naka ni” was short-listed, as follows: “I was happy to see that such a talented writer had been produced in Korea” (*ASZ* 2:393). Takii points out that the committee had considered pieces from a collection of stories by writers living in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo and he congratulates the writer Kitamura Kenjirō for having created a literary magazine there and for having “pioneered (*kaitaku*) Manshū literature” (*ASZ* 2:394). A

⁹⁶ Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, p. 87.

year later, a story by Ushijima Haruko from a similar collection was short-listed for the twelfth award.

The interest in *gaichi* was again expressed on the occasion of the thirteenth award, which went to “Chōkō Deruta.” Of the author, Tada Yūkei, and his circumstances Takii Kōsaku stated: “Not only does he reside in Shanghai; his work also appeared in a Shanghai-based magazine. Needless to say, at a time like this, it seems a good idea for us to bring attention to these facts through the Akutagawa Prize” (*ASZ* 3:352). As this quote suggests, however, colonial literature was usually a product of place, not identity or ethnicity; nearly all of these authors of “local” literature (*genchi bungaku*, that is to say, literature that is not produced in Japan, and more specifically, Tokyo) were ethnically Japanese. Despite the attempt to include colonial production in a new conception of contemporary Japanese literature, ethnic differences (and stereotypical understandings of those differences) had not been erased under the assimilation policies of the new imperial regime. During the twelfth selection process, for example, Kawabata Yasunari praised the short-listed story by Ushijima Haruko: “She described the baffling character of the Manshū people as it is, baffling” (*ASZ* 3:343). Difference and the exoticism that accompanied it were highly desirable to most, though not all, committee members. As early as the fourth award Satō Haruo declared, “Thus far too many novels about foreign countries (*gaikoku shōsetsu*) have received the award.”

The committee’s uniform praise for “Koshamain-ki,” a work that was not realistic, contemporary, or introspective, shows yet again that the criteria for literary value held by the committee members—writers central to the modern literary tradition—were not monolithic. It also shows that in 1936, works critical of the military government’s policy could still be celebrated, even if that criticism could not be explicitly recognized. Finally, the selection of “Jōgai” follows a trend established by *Sōbō* and carried on throughout the early years of the prize whereby the committee carefully attended to the world outside of the main islands, particularly in the new colonies of the Greater Japanese Empire.

The Sixth Competition: The Fall 1937 Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The selection process for the sixth competition resulted in the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes going to two authors who went on to play important roles in the history of modern Japanese literature: Hino Ashihei, whose *Mugi to heitai* (1938) set off a pro-war literary boom; and Ibuse Masuji, who has come to be seen as a central writer in the modern literary canon. The events surrounding the selection of these two writers reveal numerous contingencies inherent in the awards. The process by which Hino Ashihei's "Fun'nyō tan" was selected to receive the Akutagawa Prize illustrates not only the inequality of opportunity for writers from different geographical regions in Japan, but also the caprice of the selection process and the importance of extraliterary factors in the decision making. The process by which Ibuse Masuji's *Jon Manjirō hyōryū-ki* was selected to receive the Naoki Prize reveals once again the lack of parity between the two awards, despite Kikuchi's intentions.

A string of coincidences allowed Hino Ashihei, a nearly unknown author, to receive the Akutagawa Prize.⁹⁷ His "Fun'nyō tan" came to the attention of the committee as a result of the survey of literary figures that Bungei Shunjūsha had conducted before creating a short list. In that survey, the works that received the most recommendations were Wada Den's "Yokudo" and Mamiya Mosuke's "Aragane."⁹⁸ Hino's story came to light only because it had been recommended by Tsuruta Tomoya, whose "Koshamain-ki" had won the Akutagawa Prize for the first half of 1936. A native of Fukuoka, Tsuruta had come across another story of Hino's in the Kyūshū literary coterie magazine *Toranshitto*. This led him to "Fun'nyō tan," which appeared in another Kyūshū literary coterie

⁹⁷ Hino had come to Tokyo from Kyūshū to study English at Waseda University. While there, he started the literary coterie magazine *Machi* with Nakayama Seizaburō and others. In 1928 he enlisted in the army, but was soon discharged. He then returned to Kyūshū to become more active in the labor movement. After being arrested and performing *tenkō* in 1932, he returned to writing, submitting works to the Kyūshū literary coterie magazines. Hino published "Fun'nyō tan" in September 1937, around the time he re-entered the army and was sent to the mainland.

⁹⁸ According to Uno, Kume Masao dismissed the number of votes any given work received as simply being what he called "a multiplicity of one" (*hitori ga tasū*). He explained that if one person liked a work, that individual could often convince a number of others to submit votes for it as well; therefore, a large number of votes often only reflected the opinion of one person. See Uno, "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 245.

magazine, *Bungaku kaigi*. As Hashizume Ken points out, it was remarkable that the work made the short list on the basis of a solitary recommendation, from an author who had himself been short-listed on the basis of a single recommendation.⁹⁹ Had it not been for Tsuruta's link to these provincial coterie magazines, the committee would not have discovered Hino's story. These mundane logistical problems produced a geographical bias in the nominally national literary award.

These coincidences merely got Hino's story short-listed; another series of contingencies, which Uno Kōji described in a 1952 article, resulted in its selection.¹⁰⁰ Despite Tsuruta's strong support for the work, "Fun'nyō tan" survived the process of elimination precisely *because* Hino was unknown. As Kume Masao put it in his selection critique, the other candidates were all writers who "were already 'registered'; who had already 'mounted the stage.' That is to say, they had already appeared in magazines like *Chūō kōron* and *Kaizō*" (*ASZ* 2:347-48). Wada's story, considered excellent by much of the committee, was too long. Rumor also had it that the story had been selected to receive the Shinchō Prize, so the committee did not consider it seriously.¹⁰¹ According to Uno, the committee felt that Mamiya's story was also a little long, had a weak ending, and had a somewhat popular (*tsūzoku*) feel; Uno quotes Kume Masao as referring to it as "a failed proletarian work (*puroritaria-kuzure*)."¹⁰² The selection committee was on the verge of not awarding a prize when Uno suggested awarding it to Hino. Both Satō and Kume had found Hino's work interesting, if in bad taste. Murō Saisei expressed his aversion to such writing—as the title indicates, it was a tale of night soil—until Uno pointed out that Saisei's own writings were similarly

⁹⁹ Tsuruta was recommended by Hayashi Fusao. Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, p. 68. This was also the case for Ibuse Masuji's selection for the Naoki Prize: Ozaki Kazuo cast the only vote nominating his work. See Uno, "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 245.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-52.

¹⁰¹ Uno suggests that length—whether it was too long to publish in the magazine—was a serious consideration. When one member of the selection committee, who was also on the Shinchō Prize committee, told them "Yokudo" would receive the Shinchō Prize, they all breathed a sigh of relief. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁰² A parenthetical remark in Uno's comment elaborates on the meaning of a "tsūzoku feel" by saying they both dealt with love. In another aside, this time glossing *tsūzoku shōsetsu*, Uno equates it with a *shinbun shōsetsu*, or newspaper novel. *Ibid.*, p. 246. By the time he wrote his selection critique, Kume had tempered this sentiment (*ASZ* 2:349).

sordid.¹⁰³ The story's selection depended less on its literary merits than on contingency and a process of elimination.

"Fun'nyō tan" depicts a man struggling to restore his family's wealth by entering into the night soil business. Unable to turn a profit, the protagonist, Hikotarō, falls on hard times and is forced to leave his wife and family and live alone in a small shack next to his warehouse. Though he is able to secure a contract through the town boss to become its designated collector, that contract turns out to be less profitable than he had imagined and results in further economic distress. It is only through the auspices of the town boss's son-in-law that Hikotarō is able to renegotiate his contract with the town and turn the business around. Just when the business is becoming profitable, however, it is nationalized, with only a quarter of the proceeds going to Hikotarō. Hikotarō continues working with the company and, in the process of its operations, regularly comes into conflict with local toughs. In the final scene, he snaps. In a rage, he begins heaving the contents of the night soil buckets at his tormentors, screaming at them as he, too, becomes covered with excrement.

The selection committee convened for five days, during which time Kikuchi read Hino's story (he had not originally read it), and the other members read other stories by Hino, which they requested from *Bungaku kaigi*. None of the committee members wanted to commit himself to an unknown author without some further evidence that he would continue to produce fiction. The notes from the meeting, which were also published, state that two or three committee members had thought highly of Hino's other works, including "Fugu" and "Yamaimo." Each committee member, the notes assured readers, had prudently reflected on his decision. This comment was likely meant to stem criticism that the work had received the award simply as the result of a process of elimination. Indeed, from the committee's perspective, the story had merits that went beyond its literary value: it was topical and it made for good advertising.¹⁰⁴

Awarding Hino the prize made good press. At the time he was

¹⁰³ Uno, "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 247.

¹⁰⁴ Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, pp. 65-67.

on active duty as a soldier on the front lines in China, and the committee took advantage of the situation, asking Kobayashi Hideo, who was in China, to deliver the news.¹⁰⁵ Kobayashi was initially apprehensive about how the military would react to his request to hold a small ceremony. When Kobayashi first approached Hino's commanding officer, the officer replied that he had never heard of the Akutagawa Prize. When Kobayashi likened it to the Order of the Golden Kite (*kinshi kunshō*) military award, however, the officer was delighted and immediately ordered that a ceremony be held. In his report from the front, Kobayashi described the scene:

With commanding officer S, commanding officer M, and lieutenant S from the press corps in attendance, the whole unit lined up in the courtyard of the headquarters. My heart pounded when I heard the orders 'Attention! Listen up!' but I forced myself to speak the ceremonial phrases as if delivering orders myself. After words from corporal Hino and commanding officer S, the ceremony ended. It was the kind of simple, serious ceremony one would expect at the front. I was a little overwhelmed by it all, but I was very happy. Hino was also overjoyed.¹⁰⁶

Not only was the military happy to perform a ceremony; it even began treating this new celebrity in its midst with favor as a result. Soon after the award ceremony, Hino was transferred to a relatively safe post in the Central China Contingent Information Division. In this case, the benefits of winning the award were more profound than having one's picture taken—for the award may have saved Hino's life.

Despite its investment in a concept of literary purity, the Akutagawa Prize remained anything but pure. At the same time, much authority was to be gained by an association with literary purity. The point is perhaps best seen in terms of the growing gap between the Akutagawa Prize and the Naoki Prize, a gap made extremely clear in the selection of Ibuse Masuji as recipient for the Naoki Prize.¹⁰⁷ Given contemporary literary tastes, it is deeply ironic

¹⁰⁵ Kobayashi Hideo (1902–1983) was a central critic of modern Japanese literature who has been called everything from the “first critic” of modern Japan to the “god of criticism.” See Paul Anderer, ed. and trans., *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo—Literary Criticism, 1924–1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 52. From *Bungei shunjū* (May 1938), within the column “Kōshū.”

¹⁰⁷ In *Jon Manjiro hyōryū-ki*, the work that received the Naoki Prize, Ibuse retells the famous story of John Manjiro, the Japanese fisherman who in 1841, at the age of fourteen, was stranded on a deserted island, only to be rescued by an American ship. He traveled throughout

that Hino received the Akutagawa Prize while Ibuse received the Naoki Prize; at the very least it suggests the contingency of literary tastes and the heterogeneity of an author's output over the course of his or her career. The question of whether the Naoki Prize was appropriate for Ibuse was apparent to contemporaries as well.¹⁰⁸ A few selection committee members had been hesitant to offer Ibuse the award out of concern that he might be insulted and not accept it.¹⁰⁹ Trying to finesse the decision, Kikuchi Kan explained, "A new path was opened for the Naoki Prize when it was given to Ibuse. By awarding him the prize, we are not saying that his writing is popular (*taishū*) literature; we are saying that in his literature we discovered a popular quality (*taishū-sei*) that we liked."¹¹⁰ Fortunately for them, Ibuse took no umbrage. In recalling the event, Ibuse recounted that, just before he received the award, a special-delivery letter arrived from Sasaki Mosaku asking him to come to the offices of Bungei Shunjūsha immediately.¹¹¹ When he went there, Sasaki said to him: "Between us, it has been decided that your *Jon Manjirō hyōryū-ki* will be given the Naoki Prize. . . . Would you accept it even though it is the Naoki Prize and not the Akutagawa Prize?" Ibuse responded to the seriousness of their concern with humor, asking: "Will I get a watch, too?" Assured that he would, Ibuse told Sasaki he would happily accept the prize. Ibuse's response is perhaps less telling than the committee members' concern, which reminds us that the parity of the two awards was understood to be fictional even to contemporaries.

the world for the next twelve years, mastering the English language and being introduced to nineteenth-century American culture before returning to Japan. Soon after his return, the Tokugawa shogunate ordered him to Edo, where he served a vital role as an interpreter in the government's negotiations with Admiral Perry.

¹⁰⁸ Osaragi Jirō claims he pushed for this work because he thought that the Akutagawa committee—which considered only novels to be literature—would not have considered it. He wanted to use the Naoki Prize to reward all forms of writing, including non-fiction, which is what he considered Ibuse's story of *Jon Manjirō* to be. Osaragi, "Naoki-shō ni tsuite," p. 179.

¹⁰⁹ Nagai, *Kaisō*, p. 52.

¹¹⁰ Odagiri et al., *Akutagawa-shō shōjiten*, pp. 151–52. In 1952 Uno wrote that he thought, if forced to choose, he would say that Ibuse's *Jon Manjirō* was more pure than Hino's "Fun'nyō tan." Uno, "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 248.

¹¹¹ The incidents depicted in this and the next paragraph come from Ibuse's own account, "Tokei to Naoki-shō," which appeared in the October 1963 issue of *Oru yomimono*. Reprinted in Ibuse Masuji 井伏鱒二, *Ibuse Masuji zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1997), 22:440–42.

For literati invested in the concept of pure literature, the Naoki Prize may have possessed far less prestige than the Akutagawa Prize; for both the general public and many authors its prestige was nonetheless significant, as the incidents surrounding Ibuse's receipt of the award make clear. Despite his humor and the selection committee members' concern, Ibuse took the Naoki Prize seriously. When he went to Bungei Shunjūsha to receive it, for example, he dressed in formal Japanese attire (*hakama*). In contrast to Ibuse's seriousness, Kikuchi's actions perhaps reflect his true feelings about the award, the importance of which he defended again and again in print. Kikuchi, an avid Japanese chess (*shōgi*) player, merely glanced over his shoulder at Ibuse for a moment, quickly turning back to the board. An assistant brought the award and the certificate to Kikuchi, who merely passed them to Ibuse without looking up. At first, Ibuse says, he thought that Kikuchi wanted him to learn some moral from this; later he realized it was just that Kikuchi found him less interesting than the *shōgi* game. Still, Ibuse was not the only person who took the honor seriously. On his way home from the Bungei Shunjūsha offices, he stopped by a restaurant he frequented in Ginza in order to pay off his debt there. The woman who ran the restaurant had learned of the award from the paper, and quickly realized that he was paying his bill with that money. She then said to him, "Because this is auspicious money, I am going to use it to pay for my daughter's entrance exam." Despite the indifference to the Naoki Prize shown by such individuals as Kikuchi, who were attached to the concept of an elevated literary sphere, many persons, like Ibuse and the *restauratrice*, did value the award.

The Eleventh Competition: The Spring 1940 Akutagawa Prize

A testament to the power of the Akutagawa Prize is that it has only been refused once, when Takagi Taku declined the eleventh award (Spring 1940).¹¹² A graduate of Ichikō and Tokyo Imperial University, Takagi was an instructor of German at Ichikō and at

¹¹² The Naoki Prize was also refused once, by Yamamoto Shūgorō in 1943. He felt that it should be given to someone who was more of a newcomer, thus fulfilling the expressed purpose of the award more closely. Nagai Tatsuo, "Naoki-shō shitabatara-ki," *Bessatsu bungei shunjū* (October 1952): 114.

the Mito Higher School, and the nephew of Kōda Rohan. Given his background and position, perhaps he felt no need for the recognition the award had to offer. There are other theories about why Takagi refused the award. Takagi initially told reporters that he preferred another work he had written, which had been passed over for an earlier Akutagawa Prize, and that he did not want to accept the prize for what he considered to be a lesser story. Later, he attributed his decision to skepticism about literary prizes. According to the author (and close friend of Takagi) Sakurada Tsunehisa, however, Takagi refused it because he thought that it would then be given to Sakurada for his story, "Kairo no shō," which had also been short-listed.¹¹³ Hashizume Ken not only supports this contention, but also adds that Kikuchi was aware of the fact.¹¹⁴

Whether he was aware of this motivation or not, Kikuchi was furious about Takagi's refusal:

The accuracy and propriety of the selection are the responsibility of the selection committee and not of the recipient. Once an author puts a work into print, he should leave praise and criticism to others; if praise is going to bother him, he should not publish it in the first place. Particularly in the case of the Akutagawa Prize, once the unofficial decision has been made, the honor has already been conveyed; after that it is just a matter of the money. Though he flaunted his modesty by refusing the award, he had actually already received its benefits. It is the same as Sōseki's refusing the doctorate of letters; the act gave him even more prestige because he did it publicly. When one doesn't graciously accept recognition such as this it creates problems for the selection committee. Such a refusal calls into question the ability of the committee members, and that is unacceptable.¹¹⁵

Kikuchi Kan's response to Takagi's refusal illuminates the reciprocal nature of the award. Takagi took the honor without reproducing Bungei Shunjūsha's symbolic capital or producing sales revenue. When the award is considered in these terms, the reason for Kikuchi's anger is clear: Takagi had effectively stolen from him. Since both the committee's decision and Takagi's refusal quickly became public knowledge, he not only received the prestige of having been selected for the award, but he also perhaps gained addi-

¹¹³ Hasegawa Izumi, ed., *Akutagawa-shō jiten* (Shibundō, 1977), p. 169.

¹¹⁴ Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, pp. 76, 79.

¹¹⁵ *Bungei shunjū* (September 1940). Quoted in Kikuchi, *Hanashi no kuzukago to hanjijoden*, p. 257.

tional prestige for having refused it. Yet, from Kikuchi's perspective, Takagi vandalized the legitimacy of the committee itself.¹¹⁶

The story for which Takagi was to receive the prize, "Uta to mon no tate," illustrates an aspect of the Akutagawa Prize selection committee's conception of "pure" literature not yet mentioned, namely its attitude toward historical fiction. The story, set in eighth-century Japan, describes the life of Ōtomo no Yakamochi, the dominant poet and primary editor of the *Man'yōshū*. It begins with Ōtomo's return to Nara with his family as a child and recounts the key moments in Ōtomo's career through the composition of his last poem in 758. There is no doubt that the committee members considered the work a historical novel. In his selection critique, Kojima Masajirō laments, "The one thing that is regrettable [about the work] is that reason, which demands the accuracy of historical facts and their criticism, has overwhelmed the artistic desire of turning those facts into a story, with the giant leap beyond those facts that novelization requires" (ASZ 2:408). What saved the work for Murō Saisei at least, however, was that "fortunately it avoids the disagreeable pitfalls into which historical novels have a tendency to fall, including cheap jokes and trickery (*inchiki*)" (ASZ 2:408-9).

The selection committee was clearly aware of the apparent contradiction in selecting the work for a prize directed at pure literature. Since many literati considered a contemporary context to be essential to literary purity, they often excluded, by tacit definition, historical fiction from the category of pure literature. As Yokomitsu Riichi declared, "My personal understanding is that an excellent contemporary work should receive the prize before an [excellent] historical work" (ASZ 3:337). Some committee members felt the distinction between historical fiction and pure literature was flawed to begin with and would be best ignored; others tried to rationalize their selection of the story while preserving the divide. When Sakurada Tsunehisa's "Hiraga Gennai" won the twelfth award, for example, Satō Haruo described the use of a historical persona as merely symbolic, actually representing contemporary intellectuals.

¹¹⁶ Not all committee members reacted the same way. Satō Haruo wrote, "When I heard the news that Takagi had refused the award, I was impressed by his self-knowledge and admired his self-respect more, even, than that of a recipient" (ASZ 2:410).

"As such," Satō explained, "'Hiraga Gennai' is neither a so-called historical novel nor a realism-centered Naturalist novel. I see it as a type of new conceptual novel that uses this sort of symbolic technique" (ASZ 3:336).¹¹⁷ Kawabata Yasunari agreed with Satō, insisting, "'Hiraga Gennai' is a contemporary novel that has borrowed the form of an historical novel" (ASZ 3:343). Clearly the selection committee recognized that their selection of an historical novel might be perceived as inappropriate. Nonetheless, three works of historical fiction were chosen to receive the Akutagawa Prize between 1935 and 1944. Though a boundary between historical works and literary "purity" was present, it remained porous.

The Thirteenth Competition: The Spring 1941 Akutagawa Prize

As the Pacific War increased in intensity, its effect on literature in general and the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes in particular became more pronounced. For example, the censorship of literature tightened, allowing less and less implied criticism of wartime policy to be published. When Ishikawa Tatsuzō published "Ikite iru heitai," which described atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers, in *Chūō kōron* in 1938, the issue was banned. Ishikawa received a four-month sentence of imprisonment for having violated the Newspaper Law, though the sentence was reduced to a three-year suspended sentence. After this incident, writers and editors became much more wary of the government.¹¹⁸ Around the same time, supplies of paper also became limited. The government began curtailing paper consumption as early as August 1938, and instituted rationing programs in July 1941.¹¹⁹ Small literary coterie magazines, which were so vital to the award, were the most affected. By the end of 1941 the government had reduced the number of literary coterie magazines from ninety-seven to eight through either mergers or cancellations.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Satō also wrote, "Had he made even the slightest misstep, it would have been a Naoki Prize work"; clarifying what he meant, Satō added, "[The work's] interesting plot was not constructed solely in order to be interesting; instead, it was born out of the writer's essential desire to express certain ideas and feelings" (ASZ 3:335).

¹¹⁸ Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, pp. 82-83.

¹¹⁹ Rubin, *Injurious*, p. 233.

¹²⁰ Hashimoto Motome, *Nihon shuppan hanbaishi* (Kōdansha, 1964), p. 560. It is likely that far more than 97 existed. Fewer than 97, however, were probably regularly combed for potential award recipients. Uno notes the existence of about 20 or 30 in Tokyo and another 20 or

Since these publications had been the source of most of the works considered for the Akutagawa Prize, the pool of potential nominees was drastically reduced.

Consideration of the wartime situation (*jikyoku*) naturally became more prevalent in the selection critiques as well. This is most apparent in the 1941 selection of "Chōkō Deruta" for the thirteenth Akutagawa Prize.¹²¹ The story is set in the Yangtze River Delta area, which includes both Shanghai and Nanjing, and focuses on the Japanese protagonist, Saburō, and the Chinese En siblings, Tenshi and Kōmei (using the Japanese pronunciations). The brother and sister, though close to one another, are ideologically divided over the future of China. This rift is so severe that when Tenshi is shot while he and Saburō are driving in the International Settlement in Shanghai, Saburō is torn over whether or not to contact Kōmei. Though Tenshi's sister would surely be concerned, Saburō realizes, she also sympathizes ideologically with the very individuals who shot her brother. This friction between the two leads Kōmei to leave Shanghai for Hong Kong. Not long after, Saburō and Tenshi receive word that Kōmei has taken her own life. Saburō attempts to comfort Tenshi by telling him that in death Kōmei has reconciled the diverse elements within her, and become a "pure" Chinese woman, "an Asian" again. In death she had unified the self that modernity had sundered.

As with previous prizes, the selection process began with surveys sent out to representative members of the literary establishment asking for recommendations, from which Uno, Sasaki, Takii, and Kawabata produced a short list.¹²² By the end of their meeting (19

so in the countryside in one source (Satō et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," p. 10) and over 10 in Tokyo and 7 to 8 in the countryside in another (Uno, "Kaisō no Akutagawa-shō," p. 250).

¹²¹ Senuma Shigeki, "Bungaku-shō o meguru shomondai (jō)," p. 164. See also Nagai Tatsuo et al., *Akutagawa-shō no kenkyū*, p. 83. Arguably it was already visible in the selection of the twelfth prize, which came down to two works: Shirakawa Atsushi's "Gake" and Ushijima Haruko's "Iwai to iu otoko." In the end the selection committee avoided "Gake," which dealt with the problem of war widows' remarrying and thus could be read as critical of the war effort. Senuma reads this decision as the first to show a prejudice for works that were in line with the dominant ideology. Senuma Shigeki, "Bungaku-shō o meguru shomondai (jō)," p. 163-64.

¹²² Thirty-six recommendations were received for this Akutagawa Prize. For a complete list of individuals who submitted recommendations, see *ASZ* 3:362.

July 1941) they had selected nine works for all of the committee members to read and consider. The second meeting (July 24), with eight selection committee members present, resulted in the list's being narrowed down to three works: "Chōkō Deruta," by Tada Yūkei; "Yamabiko," by Ainoda Toshiyuki; and "Geshoku-nin" by Hanihara Ichijō. Nine selection committee members were present for the third meeting (July 29), but Kikuchi, Kume, and Kawabata were absent.¹²³

Kawabata, however, had sent a telegraph stating his position. In it, he recommended the selection of either "Chōkō Deruta" or "Geshoku-nin." He said that he felt "Geshoku-nin" was more solid, but that "Chōkō Deruta" showed more promise and was more interesting. Satō and Uno supported "Yamabiko" and went against "Chōkō Deruta" because it "lost its nerve" (*ASZ* 3:350) and "had insufficient literary spirit" (*ASZ* 3:351), respectively. Kojima also went against "Chōkō Deruta," thinking it was too journalistic and immature. Yokomitsu, who was Tada's mentor, strongly favored "Chōkō Deruta": "If the youth of China could read 'Chōkō,' I think it would make a real contribution to Sino-Japanese cooperation. Of course, if Tada hadn't really thrown himself into it, he couldn't have written this kind of work. You say the story is awkward, but that sort of awkwardness would appear in anyone's treatment of the issues because the problem that he is dealing with is very difficult. . . . Ultimately, I think that literature today has to be like this" (*ASZ* 3:351 and 358). Murō Saisei said that he thought the work sounded like a "sophomore's speech" (*ASZ* 3:356). Sasaki and Takii, while admitting that the prose was rough, supported "Chōkō." Sasaki wrote: "It is not easy to get a work that is perfect from a literary standpoint, and it seems there really aren't any works on the short list that have enduring value. If that is the case, it might be better to turn the spotlight on ['Chōkō Deruta'] rather than 'Yamabiko.' If we do that, the selection may at least be of some use" (*ASZ* 3:352). In response, Satō clarified the repercussions of this position: "In that case, we would be placing more emphasis on its political efficacy than on its literary worth" (*ASZ* 3:352). This left a four-four tie between "Chōkō Deruta" and "Yamabiko."

¹²³ A transcript of this third meeting appears in *ASZ* 3:349–62.

“Yamabiko” tells the story of Moriyama Sankichi, a member of the outcaste class and town cremator (*onbō*), explaining the key factors—including his father’s madness, his uncle’s compulsive gambling, and his own paralyzing shyness—that caused Sankichi to descend into this scorned position. An object of contempt in the eyes of the townspeople, Sankichi is eventually reduced to handling corpses in order to feed himself and his mother. The grim story comes to an end with mother and son discovered dead in their remote cabin. Throughout the story Sankichi is portrayed as an undeserving victim of others’ weaknesses, misunderstandings, and malfeasance; thus his fall functions as social criticism (though of the vaguest sort), particularly of Japanese society’s treatment of descendants of former social outcaste groups (*hisabetsu burakumin*). Unlike “Chōkō Deruta,” it completely ignored the fact that Japan was at war, and thus lacked topicality in that sense; instead, it struck most of the committee as being artistically superior. The debate revolved around this distinction. According to the notes of the deliberations, Murō Saisei suggested, “If we are talking about topicality, then it will have to be ‘Chōkō Deruta,’ right?” When Uno Kōji asked him which he would choose if topicality were not an issue, Murō responded, “Well then, I suppose ‘Yamabiko’” (ASZ 3:356). Uno summed up: “So what you are saying is, in terms of topicality, ‘Chōkō Deruta.’ In terms of artistry, ‘Yamabiko’” (ASZ 3:358). To which Kojima responded, “If it weren’t 1941, this wouldn’t be a problem at all” (ASZ 3:358).

The committee also discussed the possibility of awarding no prize, but instead just publishing both “Chōkō Deruta” and “Yamabiko.” Sasaki Mosaku suggested, “Since the Akutagawa Prize process is made transparent [through the publication of the selection deliberation], it doesn’t matter which one we choose in the end. If we show how we debated the decision, when people read the critiques and read the works it will be clear why we chose what we did. So it really isn’t a problem at all” (ASZ 3:359). At this point Yokomitsu stepped in again, saying, “However, in the end, it is a question of which is the right way to go: for us to recognize the current state of affairs or not. In fact, at a time like this, it isn’t even correct to refer to a [special] ‘state of affairs’; it has become the everyday. That’s the problem” (ASZ 3:361). In the end, even the strongest proponents of

“Chōkō Deruta” recognized that, were it not 1941, this would not be a question. They remained locked in the four-four tie.

To break the tie, the committee telegraphed Kikuchi and Kume, who were abroad in Sakhalin. Their responses came the next morning. Kikuchi telegraphed back, “‘Chōkō Deruta’ didn’t impress me, but ‘Yamabiko’ is a problem too.” Kume wrote, “‘Yamabiko’ is too bleak (*insan*) and pessimistic (*fukō*). I recommend ‘Chōkō Deruta’ because it is the first sign of a budding colonial (*gaichi*) literature” (*ASZ* 3:362). With Kume’s vote as the tie-breaker, the prize was awarded to Tada’s “Chōkō Deruta,” at least in a sense. Satō said, “So, in the end, we are actually giving the award more to the author, Tada, than to the work.” To this Murō added that even that was not the case, that the award had in fact “transcended even the author” (*ASZ* 3:361).

The quandary faced by the selection committee (and Sasaki’s proposed solution to that quandary) may have been why the thirteenth selection process alone is represented by a transcript of the debate, rather than by formal critiques. While Sasaki’s suggestion to publish the transcript and let readers decide seems reasonable, it betrays an underestimation of the mechanism they operated. Even if the debate suggests that both works were worthy, receipt of the award had important practical consequences: “Chōkō Deruta” has been reproduced subsequently and is readily available to readers; “Yamabiko” and its author are now practically unknown.

The Fourteenth Competition: The Fall 1941 Akutagawa Prize

While the effect of the war on the thirteenth selection was largely indirect, by the time of the following round, the selection committee’s autonomy had begun to be compromised. The recipient of the fourteenth Akutagawa Prize was Shibaki Yoshiko for “Seika no ichi.” The story chronicles the experiences of a family of fruit and vegetable wholesalers in Tokyo as they try to keep their business from going under despite the restrictions imposed by the wartime government. Yae, the eldest daughter, sets her mind on restoring the business and bringing the family back from the brink of financial ruin. Despite the regulations on profiting from speculation, Yae purchases a supply of apples on a rumor that coming snows will prevent the normal shipments from reaching the market. When the

shipments are indeed delayed, the family receives a windfall. Such successes are rare, though, and the business remains tenuous. The government soon increases restrictions in an attempt to eliminate competition and excess profit, depressing the market altogether. The story closes with Yae reflecting on the sacrifices she has made for the sake of the business and the family, after she hears that her childhood friend, Suetsugu, will marry.

Because the story sympathetically portrays a victim of the wartime government's price-fixing policies, it can be read as implicitly criticizing those policies. Compared to "Koshamain-ki," the criticism is mild and indirect. Nonetheless, in this case, the selection committee immediately attempted to explain away the apparent criticism. As Kume Masao stated:

In the light on the current situation (*genzai no jikyoku*), I did feel a little sense of danger, but [I needn't have because] this is by no means a piece of social criticism. It is not a history of the regulation of produce markets that have been swept away by the times. Needless to say, it is not resistance fueled by the petty bourgeoisie against that regulation. It should be viewed as the history of a common woman's struggle. While it is a beautiful elegy for such petty bourgeois concerns, it neither regrets nor resists their passing. Therefore, the overall sense given by the work is not the least bit unwholesome, nor, therefore, is it against government policy. Rather, in times like these, an artless plea such as this one might even be what saves the individuals involved in the nation's small and middling commerce and industry. I suspect that those in charge of our wise cultural policy will read this work seriously, accepting it as the voice of the people. (*ASZ* 3:363)

Despite these attempts to control the reception of the story, "Seika no ichi" did not escape unscathed: the selection committee asked the author to change the conclusion to avoid greater controversy (*ASZ* 3:367).¹²⁴

The committee's concerns over the government's reactions were allayed when Kikuchi Kan reported the following to them: "I just got back from the Information Bureau. They say we are going to have some trouble with the end of the story, when the shopkeeper falls into despair. So I had the author change that last part, telling

¹²⁴ Satō Haruo wrote that Shibaki had shown great care not to "cross that subtle line" between acceptability and unacceptability. Satō pointed out that the central problem for the committee was not its rather "popular" or perhaps "vulgar" (*tsūzoku*) character, but the danger of handling this sort of material "at times like these" (*ASZ* 3:367).

her that we want to give the revised version the award and run it in the magazine.”¹²⁵ In his selection critique, Uno wrote that Shibaki was asked to make the revisions because committee members felt that “the subject matter of this novel, in these important times, was a problem” (ASZ 3:367). According to the selection critiques, the committee did it both to satisfy certain aesthetic concerns and to avoid difficulties that would arise due to governmental censorship; a reading of the two versions today suggests that the latter reason far outweighed the former. Most of what is excised from the story is Yae’s frustration, indignation, and sadness over what has become of her life, thus significantly diminishing the tale’s poignancy and implied criticism.¹²⁶

The “Information Bureau” here was the Cabinet Information Bureau, which was created in 1940 as an expansion of the Cabinet Information Committee. The Committee had been established in July 1936 to augment the censorship activities of the police, and it “marked the beginning of the truly fanatical suppression of any but the most worshipful references to the imperial house.”¹²⁷ *Bungei shunjū* had been under particularly intense scrutiny since 1937, when it was deemed by the military to be one of the most influential magazines. That year the military established the Four Company Society, which included Bungei Shunjūsha, Chūō Kōronsha, Kaizōsha, and Nihon Hyōronsha, and forced these companies, thought to have particular sway over the opinions of the intelligentsia, to meet with military censorship authorities each month. In response, the publishing industry formed the Japan Publishing Culture Association to self-police its activities, particularly the distribution of limited paper supplies. Despite the Association’s facade of self-determination, the Cabinet Information Bureau set all of its policies.¹²⁸ Thus,

¹²⁵ Uno, “Ku to raku no omoide,” p. 202.

¹²⁶ The story originally appeared in the October 1941 issue of *Bungei shuto*. Substantial excised portions can be found in this original version on pp. 6–7 (references to an undercover police inspector), p. 33 (Yae as a “sacrifice” to the market changes and Yae’s sadness over the pending dissolution of the market), p. 35 (Yae’s emotional declaration that her twenty-eight years of life thus far have been “wasted,” that she had mistakenly thought that all her efforts would result in something—anything—good, and that she wanted to die), and pp. 36–37 (almost entirely changed).

¹²⁷ Rubin, *Injurious*, p. 256.

¹²⁸ For a detailed account of the expansion of the Cabinet Information Committee and its activities, see Rubin, *Injurious*, pp. 256–78.

when the Akutagawa Prize selection committee met in early 1942 to determine the award for the latter half of 1941, Kikuchi Kan was careful to consider the Bureau's opinion. Awareness of external pressure was not new to the committee; the need to modify a work in reaction to that pressure was.

WHY THE AKUTAGAWA PRIZE SUCCEEDED

Kikuchi occasionally considered abandoning the Naoki Prize altogether.¹²⁹ From the beginning, the inherent paradox of the Naoki Prize—the best of the rest, from the perspective of “pure” literature—had limited the award's prestige within the literary field. The Akutagawa Prize, in contrast, rapidly became the most important award in the literary establishment and then in Japanese society as a whole. Soon after its inception, it had become one of the premier goals of aspiring writers. In no small measure, this success was due to Bungei Shunjūsha's recognition that the award itself required cultivation. In part, Bungei Shunjūsha has done this by publishing nearly every study of the Akutagawa Prize that has appeared over the subsequent decades. This sort of cultivation has made the award a valuable asset for the publisher.

Not only did Bungei Shunjūsha make the Akutagawa Prize a success; the Akutagawa Prize helped make Bungei Shunjūsha and *Bungei shunjū* successes. By focusing on works that appeared in literary coterie magazines when choosing its nominees, the Akutagawa Prize selection committee elevated the importance of those magazines for establishing young authors. And while elevating the coterie magazines, the committee positioned *Bungei shunjū* as a transcendent judge of literary value.¹³⁰ In 1957 the magazine *Bungakukai* held a roundtable discussion on the effects of the Akutagawa Prize on the world of literature. The writer Niwa Fumio played down the importance of the prize to a literary career, suggesting that a writer could make it on the basis of talent alone, without the imprimatur of the Akutagawa Prize, as proven by Dazai Osamu's case.¹³¹ Satō Haruo

¹²⁹ Uno, “Ku to raku no omoide,” p. 200.

¹³⁰ As the place of publication for the award-winning works and the selection critiques, this remained true even after the “independent” Nihon Shinkō-kai foundation was formed in 1937 to administer the awards.

¹³¹ Satō Haruo et al., “Akutagawa-shō to bundan,” *Bungakukai* (September 1957): 8–16.

agreed that the prize was not essential, but pointed out the award's tremendous influence: "Theoretically that's true, but if no one recognizes a writer's ability, editors will not feel comfortable publishing his work. That is why the Akutagawa Prize is necessary. That is why there is such demand for people who win the award." Inoue Yasushi, himself a recipient of the award in 1949, also pointed out this somewhat intimidating side of winning: when an individual won the prize, requests for stories came flooding in; some writers were ready for this, but some were not.

Ultimately, the Akutagawa Prize did more than become a new Dragon Gate to the literary establishment. The author Funabashi Seiichi once commented that he felt the Akutagawa Prize created a mental complex for authors who failed to receive it, and that such a complex had not existed before the award. When Ishikawa Tatsuzō responded that even nominees received some prestige (*meiyo*), Funabashi replied that in the world of up-and-coming writers there had been no such thing as "prestige" before the Akutagawa Prize.¹³² Funabashi must have been aware that there was "prestige"—symbolic capital—to be had prior to the creation of the awards. He was trying to point to a different development. Soon after its creation, the Akutagawa Prize became an end, rather than just a means; this was why Satō's joking consolation to Dazai about an "obscure writers' society" would have been so unsatisfying. Dazai later became a writer whose manuscripts were regularly solicited. What he had been denied, then, was not access to the literary establishment, but access to a special prestige that only the award imparted. The Akutagawa Prize became an end in itself because it produced a form of symbolic capital that had not previously existed: a mark of distinction that sanctified authors even as it reproduced the prize's own cultural authority and that of the literary field itself.

¹³² Satō et al., "Akutagawa-shō to bundan," p. 14.