The Literature of Shibata Renzaburō and a New Perspective on Nihilism in Postwar Japan, 1945 – 1978

DISSERTATION

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By
Artem Vorobiev, M. A.
Graduate Program in East Asian Languages and Literatures

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Richard Edgar Torrance, Ph.D., Advisor
Etsuyo Yuasa, Ph.D.
Naomi Fukumori, Ph.D.
Abstract

This dissertation intends to delineate and explore the work of Shibata Renzaburō (柴田錬三郎, 1917-1978), author of kengō shōsetsu novels, the genre of historical and adventure novels, which occupies a large and important niche in popular Japanese literature of the twentieth century. Shibata Renzaburō is widely known in Japan; his works have seen numerous editions and reprints, and a number of his most popular works have been adapted for film and television. Shibata Renzaburō is an iconic writer in that he was instrumental in establishing and solidifying the kengō shōsetsu genre, a genre in which stories were usually set in the Edo period (1603-1868) and which involved elaborate plots and revolved around fictional master swordsmen, featuring intrigue, adventure, masterful swordplay, and fast-paced narratives. While the notion of a master swordsman protagonist was not new and came about during the prewar period, Shibata’s writing differed from prewar works in several important aspects. One of the points of difference is the role and influence of French literature in Shibata’s work, in particular, in the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō, the protagonist of the eponymous Nemuri Kyōshirō series.
To my parents
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Vita

September 1968 ........................................Born – Moscow, Russia

1992..........................................................B.A. Psychology, The American University

2010..........................................................M.A. Japanese, The Ohio State University

2008 to present ........................................Graduate Teaching Associate/Lecturer,
Department of East Asian Languages and
Literatures, The Ohio State University

Publications

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Fields of Study

Major Field: East Asian Languages and Literatures
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INTRODUCTION

0.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND

This dissertation will explore the life and work of Shibata Renzaburō (柴田錬三郎, 1917-1978), author of *kengō shōsetsu*, swordsmanship novels – a subset of *jidai shōsetsu* novels, the genre of historical and adventure novels, which occupies a large and important niche in popular Japanese literature of the twentieth century.

*Jidai shōsetsu*, or, period novels (historical fiction) are a subgenre of *taishū bungaku*, popular literature – works written for popular entertainment and, as such, traditionally deemed to be of lesser intellectual and artistic caliber and value than works in the *junbungaku*, or pure literature style. *Taishū bungaku* consists of a number of literary forms, such as *jidai shōsetsu* [時代小説]/historical fiction; *suiri* [推理] or *tantei* [探偵] *shōsetsu*/mystery or detective novels; *katei shōsetsu* [家庭小説]/domestic novels; *jidō shōsetsu* [児童小説]/juvenile or children’s fiction; and even *kaidan shōsetsu* [怪談小説]/supernatural, or ghost-story fiction. The *jidai shōsetsu* sub-genre, in which Shibata Renzaburō made a name for himself, can be further divided into sub-categories, which include *torimonochō* [捕物帳]/detective novels, *denki shōsetsu* [伝奇小説]/romantic
novels, *kengō shōsetsu* [剣豪小説]/swordsmanship novels, *shisei shōsetsu* [市井小説]/urban novels, and *matatabi mono* [股旅物]/wandering gamblers/gangsters’ stories.

Shibata Renzaburō’s writing can be categorized as belonging in the *kengō shōsetsu* genre – swordsmanship novels – in which the protagonists are swordsmen of ability and the stories are set in the Edo period (1603-1868), involve elaborate plots, and revolve around fictional master fencers, featuring intrigue, adventure, masterful swordplay, and fast-paced narratives.

Shibata Renzaburō is widely known in Japan; his works have seen numerous editions and reprints, and a number of his most popular works have been adapted for film and television. Yet, apart from several Japanese films from the 1960s based on Shibata’s *Nemuri Kyōshirō* (眠狂四郎) series, licensed to and released in the U.S. by the Animeigo, Inc., between 2009 and 2013, the body of his literary work remains practically unknown in the United States. The present study aims to redress that. This dissertation will attempt place Shibata Renzaburō’s writings (mostly, the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series) in the greater sociocultural context of postwar Japan and will explore how Shibata’s literature reflects, refracts, and recreates the notions of self, society, and identity in Japan during the three decades between 1956 and Shibata’s death in 1978.

The goals of this dissertation are, thus, twofold: it aims to redress the lack of knowledge about Shibata Renzaburō and the body of his work in the field of Japanese studies in the United States by becoming the first study on the subject; it also aims to analyze the sources of and reasons for Shibata’s success and popularity in Japan. I intend
to show that Shibata’s success is owed, in part at least, to both the successes and failure
of his literary predecessors, most importantly, of Nakazato Kaizan’s Daibosatsu tōge
(The Great Buddha’s Pass, 1913-1941). Shibata skillfully builds upon Nakazato Kaizan’s
precepts where they are successful (the use of a roguish and nihilistic swordsman as main
character) while avoiding the manifestly problematic elements of Kaizan’s writing (a
drawn-out and inconclusive, humorless narrative). Both the shortcomings and the
accomplishments of Nakazato Kaizan have contributed to Shibata’s success. In the
process of reassessing and incorporating Kaizan’s writing experience, Shibata redefines
and reinvents the jidai shōsetsu genre with his kengō shōsetsu novels. I will also argue
that Shibata’s popularity can be attributed to his skillful inclusion of modernist elements
from French literature in the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō, his most famous protagonist.

Shibata Renzaburō is an iconic writer who was instrumental in establishing and
solidifying the kengō shōsetsu genre. While the notion of a master fencer protagonist was
not new and came about during the prewar period, Shibata’s writing differed from prewar
works in several important aspects. In fact, the rapid story development was one of the
important features contributed by Shibata to the genre as it is known today. The rapid
story development was crucial to Shibata’s use of the yomikiri (読み切り) format, the
completion of an entire stand-alone episode within a single issue of a periodical.

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s nihilism is not merely a literary device for captivating the
audience. It is also Shibata Renzaburō’s way of addressing contemporary issues; it is a
two-way mirror, a means, by gleaning the past, to find the reflection of the modern.
The first serialized *Nemuri Kyōshirō* episode was published in *Shūkan shinchō* in May 1956. The success of the novel brought Shibata Renzaburō fame and created a “Nemuri Kyōshirō boom” almost overnight, imbuing a new life into the *kengō shōsetsu* genre. I intend to explore the origins, sources, and mechanisms of Shibata Renzaburō’s popularity; however, the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series are but a tip of the literary iceberg that is the body of Shibata Renzaburō’s work, and in order to attain a better understanding of one of the most popular Japanese writers of the twentieth century, both Shibata Renzaburō’s writings and life will be explored as an organic whole inasmuch as possible within the confines of this study. This dissertation aims to accomplish that and lay the groundwork for further Shibata Renzaburō studies.

Shibata Renzaburō’s works and literary legacy are an important testament to one of the most critical and tumultuous periods in modern Japanese history. Shibata’s life and work coincided with some of the most dramatic and pivotal transformations of Japan in the twentieth century – the rapid waning and collapse of the Taishō democracy, the militarization of the Japanese society, the Second World War and the subsequent horrifying defeat and the postwar American occupation, the restructuring of the Japanese society along democratic lines, the Korean War, and the accompanying revival of the Japanese economy in the nineteen fifties.

Last but not least, Shibata was privy to the Japanese economic miracle of the nineteen fifties and sixties and the myriad psychological metamorphoses and the attendant societal ills, neuroses, and complexes that would inevitably plague a society that had been reduced to ashes and violently reinvented within the lifespan of a single
generation. The challenge and the objective of this dissertation, thus, is to attempt to
glean the Japanese postwar society and psyche through the prism of Shibata’s writing;
though Shibata chose the kengō shōsetsu genre for his writing, it is Shibata’s thinly veiled
running commentary on the contemporary issues and problems that make his writing both
interesting and relevant. I would like to use this dissertation to address some of the
following questions: 1) How does Shibata’s writing fit within the kengō shōsetsu tradition
and how does it deviate from it? Who are Shibata’s predecessors and what are the
congruencies and divergences between them and Shibata? 2) What are Shibata’s
contributions to the Japanese literature of the twentieth century? 3) What can Shibata’s
use of the kengō shōsetsu genre as his medium of choice tell the modern readers about the
social and historical environment of postwar Japan?

In the process of answering these and, no doubt, other questions that will arise, I
hope to lay the groundwork for further Shibata studies in the United States. This will be
the first study in English of this important twentieth-century Japanese writer.

Another feature, which endeared Nemuri Kyōshirō to Shibata’s readers, and
ensured the series’ continuous success, was the protagonist’s fatalism (運命感, unmeikan,
宿命感, shukumeikan), which clearly struck a chord with the audience. In the case of
Nemuri Kyōshirō, it was his fatalistic outlook on life and himself, engendered by the
tragic circumstances of his birth that proved to be the special ingredient in the recipe for
success and popularity in Japan.
0.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to using the primary sources, providing translations of excerpts from Shibata’s works, and offering storyline synopses and close readings of Shibata Renzaburō’s works, the following secondary sources dealing with Shibata Renzaburō’s writing will be referenced. Nakamura Katsuzō’s *Shibata Renzaburō shishi* (柴田錬三郎私史, The Personal Recollections of Shibata Renzaburō) and Sawabe Shigenori’s *Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari* (無頼の河は清冽なり, Wild River Grows Clear) are the only two biographical monographs on Shibata Renzaburō available, and will be consulted and analyzed in detail. The monographs will be of particular importance for understanding the overall context of Shibata Renzaburō’s life, especially insofar as his childhood, early artistic development, and family life are concerned.

Sawabe Shigenori’s *Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari* will be particularly useful for delineating the timeline of Shibata Renzaburō’s life. However, while Sawabe’s monograph is helpful in its adherence to the chronological timeline, it is rather lacking in such critical aspects as close readings and textual analysis of Shibata’s writings. Inasmuch as possible within the format confines, this dissertation will attempt to fill in the blanks.

Nakamura Katsuzō’s *Shibata Renzaburō shishi* will be an invaluable resource; the author knew Shibata personally and his recollections and insights provide a unique and intimate glimpse into Shibata’s life. However, like with any other personal recollection, the strengths of this work are also its weaknesses: Nakamura’s perspective, while
poignant in its ability to draw on first-hand knowledge, is also somewhat limited to personal experience at the expense of other scholarship. Both Sawabe’s and Nakamura’s works will, therefore, complement each other, offering a more complete picture when referenced jointly.

These two biographical monographs will be consulted in conjunction with Shibata’s autobiographical writings, such as Jibeta kara mono mōsu (地べたから物申す, Speaking From the Ground Up), Waga seishun buraichō (わが青春無頼帖, Records of My Youthful Nihilism), Waga dokusetsu (わが毒舌, My Poisonous Tongue), and others in the Zuihitsu essei shū collection.

A number of articles will be consulted in the course of this work. Of those, Makino Yū’s series of articles on Shibata Renzaburō, published in the Chiba University literature research bulletin is invaluable for research and discussion of Shibata’s literary techniques and the popularity of his Nemuri Kyōshirō series. Makino Yū’s research monograph, Shibata Renzaburō; kengō shōsetsu ron; Nemuri Kyōshirō o chūshin ni (Shibata Renzaburō’s Swordsmanship Novels; Centering on Nemuri Kyōshirō) will be of particular importance to this research, as it deals with many of the same issues I will attempt to explore in this dissertation. Additionally, Makino Yū’s articles on the origins and effectiveness of engetsu sappō (円月殺法, moon-circle killing), Nemuri Kyōshirō’s brand of fencing, as well as articles on Nemuri Kyōshirō’s literary and historical predecessors, such as Benkei and Miyamoto Musashi, will be instrumental in the analysis and close readings of Shibata’s texts. While Makino Yū’s articles are indispensable for
close reading and textual analysis of Shibata’s work, their shortcoming is that they do not assess the importance of European modernist influence in Shibata’s writing, an issue this dissertation will address.

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s connection to the illustrious gallery of world rogues, dandies, and rakes, historical and literary, is also dealt with in Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s article, “Bō Buranmeru no byōeitachi; Shārokku Hōmuzu to Nemuri Kyōshirō no ningenzō” (The Offspring of Beau Brummel; a Portrait of Sherlock Holmes and Nemuri Kyōshirō), which will also be consulted for conducting close readings of Shibata’s writings. Other works by Yamaguchi Kazuhiko will also be relevant to the exploration of Nemuri Kyōshirō series’ popularity and appeal, and will include such articles as, “Hyōhaku no morarizumu: Shibata Renzaburō no “Nemuri Kyōshirō doppokō” ni miru dandizumu no issokumen” (The Moralism of Wandering; An Aspect of Dandyism, as Seen in “Nemuri Kyōshirō’s Lone Travels“ by Shibata Renzaburō), “Dandi Nemuri Kyōshirō, sono dokkō to manazashi no shigaku; Shibata Renzaburō no “Nemuri Kyōshirō koken gojūsantsugi” o megutte” (The Dandy Nemuri Kyōshirō and the Poetics of his Gaze and Solitary Wanderings; Concerning Shibata Renzaburō’s “The Fifty-Three Stages of Nemuri Kyoshirō’s Lone Sword) and others.

Yamaguchi’s analysis seems to be the only critical work dealing with the issues of European modernist influences in Shibata Renzaburō’s literature. I intend to draw on it in my own critical assessment and analysis of the influence of French literature in Shibata Renzaburō’s work.
Shibata Renzaburō’s apprenticeship with Satō Haruo and its influence on Shibata’s writing will be explored in detail; towards this purpose Takeuchi Yoshio’s book, *Karei naru shōgai: Satō Haruo to sono shūhen* (A Life of Splendor; Satō Haruo and his Circle), as well as Yasuoka Shōtarō’s *Shijin no shōzō* (Portrait of the Poet) will be consulted.
CHAPTER 1
SHIBATA RENZABURŌ: LIFE AND WORK

Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres;
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts!
J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres
Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.

(Soon, we shall plunge into shadowy chill;
Farewell, lively clear of our summers too short!
Already I hear the fall with a funeral shrill
Of the wood on the paving stones of the court.)

Charles Baudelaire, *Chant d'automne*¹

I wonder if I die today, or on the morrow
But silently I wait...²

Shibata Renzaburō, *Death and Laughter*
Okayama Middle School bulletin, 1932

1.1 FAMILY AND YOUTH

Shibata Renzaburō (柴田錬三郎) was born on March 26, 1917, the third son of Shibata Tomota (柴田知太) and Shibata Matsue (柴田松重). Renzaburō’s two elder brothers were Kentarō (柴田劒太郎) and Daishirō (柴田大史郎). The Shibata house was

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located in Okayama Prefecture’s Tsuruyama village, which during the Taisho Era (1912-1926) was a small hamlet in the bay of the Seto Inland Sea. Okayama Prefecture was the scene of many battles at the close of the Heian Era, and local legends still abounded during Renzaburō’s childhood. Renzaburō’s father, Shibata Tomota was a local landlord and a painter in the traditional Japanese style. Shibata Tomota died when Renzaburō was three years old, and Shibata Kentarō, the eldest of the three Shibata brothers, henceforth assumed a paternal role in Renzaburō’s life. In Shibata Renzaburō’s own words, “Being a nameless Japanese painter, my late father was a man of many skills and talents, but he was gone before a single one of them could come to fruition. All that he left were a few Chinese classics in the study, and a few character traits in his son’s blood.”

Although Shibata is somewhat laconic vis-a-vis his father’s influence in this utterance, it is difficult not to read this as a deliberate understatement. Addressing the above words by Shibata, Sawabe Shigenori writes,

Was Shibata Tomota no more than an amateur? I think not. Just by looking at a single one of his paintings, it is clear that it exceeds the realm of the amateurish. Was it just difficult to work the painting brush in the Okayama countryside, so far removed from the metropolitan painting circles? No, I think that rather than it being difficult, Shibata Tomota was a man of common sense, for whom his responsibility as the head of the household outweighed his accomplishments as a Japanese painter. While his father’s taste for art ran in Shibata Renzaburō’s blood, his integrity and conscientiousness have also been passed on.

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4 Sawabe Shigenori, Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 14.
Despite Shibata’s rather subdued words regarding “all that he left,” his father’s influence – both his presence and his absence – can be traced throughout Shibata’s life and work. Years later, the following description in *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* will be telling in its visual, almost engraving-like attention to detail, as well as the Chinese references; the reader is left with an unmistakable impression that the study Shibata Renzaburō describes, was in part, at least, inspired by his childhood memories of Shibata Tomota’s own study.

Though the house was built like a country house, the study he was led to was of such splendor and exquisiteness, that it was almost startling. Various distinguished-looking decorative objects could be seen everywhere. The landscape hanging scroll three times the usual size, the incense burner, the flower vase, the candlestick, the confectionary box on the bookshelf, the tea container and teacups, the brazier, the kettle – all of them were things of pedigree. Inside as well, the large letter box on the black shelf, and the six-legged Chinese chest, inlaid with the crane-and-pine-branch pattern, reached the heights of elegance.\(^5\)

Memory of his father was not limited to remembering Shibata Tomota himself; rather, Renzaburō’s childhood experience of frequenting his father’s studio and watching him paint, which he liked very much, later resulted in the development of strong visual memory, which helped Renzaburō learn and retain Chinese characters beyond what was expected of his peers in elementary school. Since, as Sawabe Shigenori wrote, Renzaburō “naturally grew up captivated by the dignity of Kanbun,” by the time he entered the Tsuruyama Standard Elementary School in 1924, he could already read and write most of

the Chinese characters taught at that level. By the time he was in his sixth year, he knew more Chinese characters than his own school teacher. Knowledge of the Chinese characters stimulated Renzaburō’s overall sensitivity to text and his interest for reading in general; around the time he was in the sixth year of elementary school, Shibata Renzaburō’s “wild reading” period (乱読, randoku) began. He devoured everything he could find around him – from popular novels in women’s magazines left around the house by the housemaids, and detective stories, to novels by Shiga Naoya, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Leo Tolstoy, and Prosper Mérimée. School studies, therefore, held no interest for Renzaburō, who preferred to spend his time engaging in all kinds of mischief. Whether trying to teach neighbor’s chickens to swim (drowning them as a result), embarrassing a young bride from another village, or asking a schoolteacher awkward questions in front of the class, Renzaburō was always a troublemaker and the reason his mother constantly had to apologize on his behalf to Tsuruyama’s residents.

Renzaburō’s mother, Shibata Matsue, was a woman of strict traditional upbringing and stern character; the death of Shibata Tomota left her with the responsibility of maintaining the household and performing the obligations of a landowner, which she attended to with an unyielding sense of duty, devoting all her time to the never-ending daily chores and mundane tasks. That, however, left no time for the children. Renzaburō’s life was marked by Matsue’s hōnin (放任) attitude of laissez-faire; he was mostly left to his own devices and grew up free-spirited and unencumbered by the

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6 Sawabe Shigenori, Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 23.
7 Sawabe Shigenori, Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 30.
strict disciplinarian confines of traditional child-rearing. In fact, Matsue’s hands-free approach went so far that, years later, when Renzaburō entered Keiō University, Matsue was not even aware of that fact for two years. Until her death, she never knew that Shibata was studying Chinese literature and that he graduated from the Chinese literature department. Yet, Shibata credits his mother with allowing him to become who he was, writing in the December 1962 issue of Fujin seikatsu,

I am rather happy that my mother was not a perfect wise wife, like the mother of some great politician. No, I am even proud of it. It was precisely because my mother was such an extremely mediocre woman, completely disconnected from the world of her son’s thoughts that I have been able to become the free-thinking person that I am today.  

Be that as it may, Shibata Matsue did not live to see Renzaburō succeed. She passed away in 1952, a mere six months before Renzaburō received the Naoki prize. In his inaugural speech for the Naoki prize ceremony, entitled, “The Greatest Filial Piety” (最大の孝養), Shibata Renzaburō dedicated the following words to his mother,

Last autumn, I lost my mother. Having become a widow at an early age, mother raised three sons and made sure they got educated, while working hard to maintain the household for some thirty years. While both of my older brothers repaid mother’s hard work by following a path of conscientiousness and integrity, the extent of my dissolute ways was such that it became a great source of mother’s worries in the latter part of her life. Naturally, my country bumpkin of a mother [田舎者の母], who never had much of an education, and had no conception of what literature was, felt an unbearable amount of concern as to whether a deadbeat like myself

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8 Shibata Renzaburō, “Wanpaku kozō o sodateta haha” [Mother who has raised a mischievous brat], quoted in Sawabe Shigenori, Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 19.
could earn a living with his pen. To relieve my mother’s worries and concerns of many years, this unexpected honor would be the greatest act of filial piety of my life, but, regrettably, it came half a year late. And I am choking on my tears.9

With Shibata Matsue preoccupied with the household, the task of raising the three boys fell on their grandmother’s shoulders. It appears that Shibata Chiyo took pity on the little Renzaburō for losing his father at such an early age, and singled him out as the object of her particular affection. While Matsue was busy and unconcerned, leaving Renzaburō to himself, Shibata Chiyo was gentle and lenient with the boy, turning a blind eye to his transgressions. The relationship between Renzaburō and his grandmother proved to be a fertile ground for nurturing Renzaburō’s early literary aptitude. Vladimir Nabokov’s maxim, “Literature was not born on the day when a boy came running out of a Neanderthal valley, screaming, ‘Wolf, wolf!’ with the wolf in pursuit. Literature was born on the day when the boy came running, screaming, ‘Wolf, wolf!’, but there was no sign of the wolf after him,” is quite applicable to Shibata Renzaburō, whose first exercises in creative storytelling consisted of concocting wild stories with the purpose of extracting pocket money from his grandmother.10 Since he always needed pocket money, necessity dictated that he invent fresh stories to support his requests. Shibata Chiyo saw right through his schemes, but never refused or scolded him. In fact, his grandmother was the first person in whom the little Renzaburō confided about

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wanting to become a writer in the future. Shibata Chiyo was also the first person in his life to react approvingly, when she said to him in response, “Your lying will come handy.”

Nakamura Katsuzō wrote of Shibata’s talent for lies and storytelling.

Speaking ironically, this was a revolt against the adults’ world of lies. That a young boy with such a talent for lying would, in later years, become Shibaren, a storyteller representative of popular literature, was itself an irony of the era. Had he been born and raised in a poverty-stricken household, Shibaren himself might have become a swindler of rare ability. That was because he possessed an impish and contrary character.

Renzaburō’s grandmother also affected him in one other way, and the fateful circumstances of their parting were something that he has always found difficult to explain, or even narrate; the Mogami River incident forever remained etched in his memory.

The summer of his graduation from the university in 1940, the 24-year old Shibata Renzaburō was roaming the countryside of the Oū region (奥羽地方), taking long walks along the banks of the Mogami River. One hot and cloudy day, standing on the ridge of a rice paddy in the afternoon, Renzaburō felt an irresistible urge to swim in the river. Up until that day, he had never tried swimming in waters other than the gentle lake-like Seto inland sea. He had no idea that the placid-looking Mogami River was one of the three strongest-current rivers in Japan. Renzaburō felt the power of the current

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almost immediately, but rashly decided to press on, swimming to the far bank. Though by the time he reached it he was already exhausted, he stubbornly set his mind on swimming back instead of waiting for a boat to rescue him, thinking, “I crossed over by myself and will get back by myself. What I sowed on my own, I need to fix on my own. It won’t do to cause trouble for others. That’s a man’s character.”13 Halfway back, however, his strength nearly abandoned him. He made it as far as the shallows, where his feet could find the stony slippery ground, but there still remained over fifty meters between him and the shore. The rest of the way Renzaburō crawled and stumbled in a half-unconscious state and collapsed, cataleptic, upon reaching his lodging house. The locals tried massaging him back to life and a doctor was called, who gave him a shot of camphor, but even the doctor was not hopeful and expressed doubts about the outcome. Unexpectedly, exactly one hour later, Renzaburō came to. For some reason, upon regaining consciousness, the first thing he looked at was the wall clock and the hour it showed remained in his memory. Three days later, when he made it back to Tokyo, a telegram came for him from Okayama, informing him of his grandmother’s passing. When Renzaburō hastily returned to Okayama, he was shocked to learn that Shibata Chiyo passed away at the exact hour and minute that he regained consciousness in the faraway Oū village. This was no product of his imagination; the next day Renzaburō made sure to contact the Okayama doctor who checked his grandmother’s pulse for the last time, and verified the time that he remembered from looking at the wall clock in the Oū lodging

house. The hours matched. “I could only think that she died instead of me, in order to let me live,” Shibata would later write in *Jibeta kara mono mōsu.*

Another member of the Shibata household who influenced Renzaburō was Kentarō, Renzaburō’s elder brother. Shibata Kentarō, the oldest of the Shibata brothers, was twelve years Renzaburō’s senior, and, in Sawabe Shigenori’s words, “In the eyes of Renzaburō, who has lost his father at an early age, his oldest brother Kentarō, rather than being an elder brother, was a father-like figure eliciting profound respect.” Kentarō started exhibiting literary ability when he was a university student; upon his graduation in 1930, when Renzaburō had just entered the Okayama Prefecture’s Second Middle School, Kentarō found a job with the Asahi Shinbun newspaper. He was first a journalist, quickly making his way through the ranks to the vice-director of the copy department, head of the photography department, and eventually, the head of the Asahi Shinbun Fukuoka office and the editorial writer. On top of his main work with the newspaper, Shibata Kentarō also published novels and essays. Kentarō’s literary ability and prolific output made a great impression on the young Renzaburō; in his preface to Shibata Kentarō’s book, *Seken banashi* (世間ばなし), Shibata Renzaburō wrote in 1969, “My becoming a literary hopeful was due to being motivated by my brother’s publication, at his own expense, of a collection of his works.” At the time of writing this, Shibata Renzaburō himself was at the top of his writing career and activity, contractually

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committed to contributing segments of serialized novels and essays to various weekly and monthly literary magazines, as well as newspapers on a regular basis. Though the early impression of witnessing Kentarō’s workaholic endeavors lasted a lifetime and set an example that Shibata Renzaburō was keen to emulate, Kentarō himself realized the toll this was taking on his younger brother later in life, writing about Renzaburō, “Though the superhuman effort of undertaking to write for two daily, three weekly, and two monthly publications may be thrilling, it is hard labor. It is a waste of talent.”

Nevertheless, Renzaburō followed in Kentarō’s footsteps and was every bit as driven, prolific, and hard-working in his writing as his elder brother. Clearly, Kentarō’s influence affected Renzaburō at his youngest and most impressionable age, and was instrumental in propelling him on his own literary path. Kentarō himself was a rather successful writer, and witnessing the example of his older brother and his accomplished literary career throughout his lifetime must have provided a model that, consciously or unconsciously, Renzaburō strove to emulate.

Shibata Renzaburō graduated from the Okayama Prefecture’s Second Middle School in 1934. In fact, Shibata only completed four years out of the required five of the secondary school system, but the completion of four years permitted a student to enroll in a university preparatory course. By his fourth year, Shibata was sick and tired of the middle school and its draconian rules, which sought to regulate even the minutiae of the students’ private lives. “Going to the movies was forbidden, wearing overcoats in winter was also forbidden,” Shibata would later recall; even though he had no particular liking

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for the cinema, the very fact of the prohibition evoked in him a sense of protest, prompting him to flout the ban by sneaking into movie theaters, getting caught, and incurring the wrath of the school administration. Nevertheless, it was in the Okayama middle school that Renzaburō first tried his hand at creative writing. His first attempt at a novel, *Fuun to kōun* (不運と幸運, Bad Luck, Good Luck) was published in the Okayama school bulletin, *Kōyü* (校友), in 1931, when Renzaburō was fourteen years old. It is a story of a poor vagrant philosopher who, in the course of his travels, attempts to find lodging for the night in a small town, only to get rejected by everyone. When he finds shelter in the woods, the wind topples his lantern and it loses all its oil; later, the wild beasts attack and devour his horse. He laments his bad luck and what he perceives to be his misfortune. The next day, continuing his travel on foot and passing through the town again, the philosopher finds all its inhabitants slaughtered by brigands the previous night; he then realizes that everything he believed to be his bad luck was actually quite the opposite – not finding shelter in the town, sleeping in the woods without the light of his lantern, his horse no longer neighing – all of it kept him safe from the brigands.

Completing his fourth year of the middle school offered Shibata the chance to get away from the school’s suffocating environment. There was also one more reason Shibata wanted to get out of Okayama. The prefectural middle school system geared its students to enter the Okayama High School, located to the southeast of Okayama city. Making the cut was the ideal for many of the students and meant a significant step on the

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path to success in life; the prefectural middle schools competed among themselves as to which school managed to send more students to the Okayama High School. Shibata’s dislike for this prospect was of a rather peculiar nature: students who attended the school would all inevitably fall victim (in his eyes) to the influence of Osaka dialect (since more than half its students were from Osaka), and start speaking with Osaka inflections.

Renzaburō had a profound dislike for the Osaka dialect, considering it the language of merchants, and had no intention to pursue the kind of conventional career of a small-level government bureaucrat that seemed to be reserved for the school graduates. He had other plans for his life.

### 1.2 KEIŌ UNIVERSITY AND THE PREWAR YEARS

In April of 1934, mere two days after completing his fourth year of middle school, Shibata boarded an express train bound for Tokyo. Having moved to Tokyo, Renzaburō settled in his uncle’s house in Nakano, where his uncle was a hospital director. At first, and likely on his uncle’s advice, Renzaburō enrolled in the Keiō University Department of Medicine preparatory course. Technically speaking, Keiō was not even a university at the time, but a private school as indicated by its name, Keiō Private School, 慶應義塾 (Keiō would not officially become a university until 1949). It being a private school, it was easier for a student to enroll, which was the deciding factor for Renzaburō.

Renzaburō’s medical career did not last long however; half a year later, having had his fill of studies of disease, medications and pharmacology, he switched to Keiō’s
Department of Literature preparatory course. At the time, there were no more than sixty students enrolled in the course, and most of them had no connection to literature anyway, being, for the most part, rejects from the economics and law departments. Once students got accepted into the department and separated into major-based sections, there would only be a handful of students in each. The Chinese Literature section Renzaburō chose only had two students. The prospects of finding a job after graduation with a degree in Chinese literature were dim. “In fact,” Shibata wrote in *Waga seishun buraichō*, “of my schoolmates, there were only two or three who would work in the fields related to their studies. I am the only one to have become a writer.”

Upon switching to the Department of Literature preparatory course, Shibata Renzaburō engaged in his Chinese literary studies with passion and dedication; the course on Chinese literature was taught by Okuno Shintarō, a noted Japanese scholar of Chinese belles-lettres, who was thirty six years old, a rather young age for a university professor at the time. He was a man of libertarian convictions, and his lectures created an atmosphere of harmony and refinement that was not lost on the young Renzaburō. It is tempting to think that a professor of Chinese literature this young reminded Renzaburō of the father he had lost and from whom he had inherited his love for the Chinese classics. Be that as it may, he pursued his studies of Chinese literature with the drive and vigor that made Okuno describe him as a man of tenacious character, undeterred by any

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hardship (風雪にめげない強靭な精神力をもった人). Shibata continued his randoku (乱読, wild reading) while in Keiō; he read everything from the Bible and Ihara Saikaku, to the 17th century French moralist writers, and to Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. He was particularly interested in the French symbolist literature and poetry of the late 19th century, devoting special attention to Charles Baudelaire, Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, Prosper Mérimée, and Théophile Gautier.

Having a special affinity for Charles Baudelaire, Shibata was influenced by Baudelaire’s gloom and melancholy; Badelaire’s spleen appeared to be consonant with Shibata’s. That sense of impending doom, of melancholy and the “dying of the light,” was shared between them. For example, Shibata’s poem, Shi to warai (死と笑い, Death and Laughter), which he wrote in 1932 while still a student at the Okayama Middle School, conveys a sense of despondency that is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s poetry:

「死と笑い」
俺は今限りなく淋しい
俺は今日か明日死ぬだろう
だが俺は静かに待っている
仕方ないからだ
俺は母を悲しませたくない、齢とった母を
だからといってどうすればいいのだと
君よ、人生と云うものは、何だと思うね
随分厄介なもであり
なんでもないものであり
苦しいものであり
亦たのしいものである、のだね
笑い

Shi to warai (Death and Laughter)
I am endlessly lonely this moment
I wonder if I die today, or on the morrow
But silently I wait
For there’s naught to be done
I don’t want to cause mother to suffer, my aged mother
Then, what’s there to be done?
You, what do you think of this thing called life?
Such a burdensome thing
Such an empty thing
Such a painful thing
Yet, there’s pleasure in it, isn’t there?
Laughter
Laughter transcending life and death
I wonder if a laughter like that exists

This is not dissimilar to Baudelaire’s feelings of dejection and anticipation of death in his *Chant d’automne* (Autumn Song, 1857), a poem Shibata frequently discussed with Nakamura Katsuzō, his Keiō University mate and later biographer:

> Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres;  
> Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts!  
> J’entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres  
> Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.

> Soon, we shall plunge into shadowy chill;  
> Farewell, lively clear of our summers too short!  
> Already I hear the fall with a funeral shrill  
> Of the wood on the paving stones of the court.

> Tout l’hiver va rentrer dans mon être: colère,  
> Haine, frissons, horreur, labeur dur et forcé,  
> Et, comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,  
> Mon coeur ne sera plus qu’un bloc rouge et glacé.

> Anew all of winter will enter my being: ire,  
> Hate and shivers, and horror, and toil hard and forced,  
> And like the sun in its polar quagmire,  
> My heart will be naught but a lump, red and cold.

> J’écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe  
> L’échafaud qu’on bâtit n’a pas d’écho plus sourd.  
> Mon esprit est pareil à la tour qui succombe  
> Sous les coups du bélier infatigable et lourd.

> In shivers I hear every log that falls crashing  
> Even gallows being raised doesn’t echo this gruff.  
> My spirit’s akin to a tower collapsing  
> Under the blows of the battering ram, relentless and tough.

> Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone,  
> Qu’on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part.  
> Pour qui? — C’était hier l’été; voici l’automne!  
> Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ.

> Rocked by monotonous shock, to me it’d appear,  
> Though a coffin were built in a great haste someplace.  
> What for? Yesterday was summer; autumn’s here!  
> This mysterious clamor sounds like an egress.  

The feelings of gloom and melancholy he gleaned from Baudelaire have left their mark on Shibata. Reminiscing on their Keiō University period, and their discussions on society and literature, Nakamura Katsuzō who was Shibata’s senior by nine years, observed of Shibata, “During those moments, his profile somehow did not look like that

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of an eighteen year old. I would dare say it looked like that of an old man, who had given up on existing society, and lost all hope in the future as well.” Baudelaire wrote in *Spleen*, “I have more memories than if I had been a thousand years old.”

French symbolist poetry of the nineteenth century is credited with providing an early source of inspiration for what would later become Shibata’s characteristic cold and unsparing irony. According to Nakamura Katsuzō, “What Shibaren [Shibata Renzaburō] gleaned from the spirit of those poets was opposition to authoritarianism, antagonism towards the establishment, and resistance against convention, as well as the desire to fight against societal and human deceitfulness.” This interest in and influence of French modernism would later manifest itself to the fullest in Shibata’s best-known work, namely his *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series, in which “the “spirit of nihilism,” the “spirit of self-torment,” and the “fastidiousness of the ego” that came to be at the core of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s mind and became the essence of Shibaren’s writing, are essentially French modernist.”

In 1934, the year Shibata enrolled, Keiō University moved its preparatory course from Mita to Hiyoshi. While nowadays the area around Hiyoshi station on the Tōkyū Tōyoko line is a sprawl of urbanized suburbia, indistinguishable from much of Tokyo or Yokohama (while it is technically part of Kanagawa prefecture, Hiyoshi lies halfway between Tokyo and Yokohama), at the time Shibata was attending the Keiō preparatory course.

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course, it was dreary and gloomy countryside, “looking like a ghost town from a western movie,” as Shibata would later recollect.\(^{27}\) It was a scene much too painfully familiar to someone from Okayama trying to escape precisely that sort of scenery. While gloomy and depressing, the issue of the scenery around Hiyoshi, however, was soon overshadowed by problems of a much more sinister nature. Only five years before, in 1929, a popular song called “Tokyo March” (東京行進曲, Tōkyō kōshinkyoku) took the country by storm, selling more than 150,000 records within a few months of its release. What the public was not aware of, however, was the fact that the last verse of the song had to be changed for it to be released. It mentioned the “long-haired Marxist boys,” (長い髪してマルクス・ボーイ) a reference by the song lyricist Saijō Yaso to seeing “long-haired, serious-looking young men in Tokyo.”\(^{28}\) With the mass arrests of Marxist and left-wing sympathizers in 1928, the lines were deemed too provocative and had to be changed, resulting in the more innocuous lyrics that saw the light of day as the final version. The long-haired young men, however, especially among university students, were a ubiquitous feature of the Tokyo landscape in the early 1930s, including Keiō University where Shibata was a student. Shibata himself sported long hair and as someone of free-thinking and non-conformist character, was acutely aware of the creeping changes brought about by Japan’s militarization of the 1930s. “The wave of fascism was sweeping all over the independent universities and school regulations were enacted to forbid the students of the Hiyoshi preparatory course to grow long hair,” he

\(^{28}\) Saijō Yaso, Saijō Yaso zenshū [Complete collected works of Saijō Yaso], vol. 17, Zuisō/Zassan (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2007), 47.
would later write in *Waga seishun buraichō*. While the issue of hair length may appear to be trivial to an outside observer, it is representative of the lonely struggle an individual must fight against the increasingly oppressive state apparatus in trying to preserve the simple dignity of choosing one’s own appearance in a militarized and authoritarian society. This is how Nakamura Katsuzō, who was Shibata’s university mate at the time, remembers him during that period:

He was five and a half feet tall. Among us, he was the tallest. Myself being five feet three inches, I had to converse with him looking up at his face. Since he was a student, he would wear the Mita uniform and cap, and had long hair. The time for him to show off his unique style was the winter season. The Mita mates would all wear splendid overcoats. Since they were all from good families, they were always fashionable and stylish. The only one who was different was Shibaren. Sometimes, he would wear a pitch-black manteaux reaching down to his shins. To my eye, it looked very dandy-like. Indeed, like a young Rimbaud.

In Shibata’s case, the long hair was a mark of individuality, of intellectual rebellion, a sign of non-conformism, not of Marxist sympathies. Shibata had a keen sense for detecting falsehood; while he despised the hypocrisy and lies of the existing society, he was equally unimpressed by the utopian Marxist propaganda, seeing right through it with ease, something even his older Keiō mates taken in by Marxist ideas were unable to do. Nakamura Katsuzō, himself a Marxist at the time, remembers their arguments, and the following words by Shibata on the subject of the virtues of socialist realism that Nakamura himself was espousing:

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I don’t believe in reality and such. I believe neither in the real society, nor in the people living in it. For instance, even if the utopian society you speak of were to come about, that too would be a world of falsehood and a society of deception. Essentially, nothing would change. That is because human nature does not change. Therefore, I will be a gesakusha [戯作者, frivolous entertainment writer]. The more fictitious the fiction in my novels becomes, all the closer to the truth it will get.

The establishment’s tightening of the screws, insofar as the students’ looks were concerned, were just a sinister foretaste of the things to come. The 1930s were a whirlwind of changes in the world, and none of them for the better. Japan was no exception. In 1931 the Japanese Imperial Army invaded Manchuria, an overt act of aggression, which at the same time whipped up the nationalist and patriotic sentiment at home into frenzy. On February 24, 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations over her continuous military involvement in China. The February 26 Incident of 1936 took place in Tokyo, in which a group of young army officers attempted a coup d’état and a purge of political rivals. Although the coup failed, the repercussions for civil liberties in Japan were severe, as the army assumed even more control over the civilian government as a result of the incident. In November 1936, Japan and Germany signed the Anti-Comintern Pact. 1937 saw the failure of the Nine-Power Treaty Conference in

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31 Shibata’s use of the term gesakusha is significant for two reasons. First, since the term dates back to the Edo period, Shibata’s use of it can be seen as an expression of the desire to inscribe oneself into the pantheon of the Edo-period literary greats, such as Ihara Saikaku and Takizawa Bakin with whom the term came to be associated. Second, Shibata’s deliberate choice of the gesakusha term in the 1930s, an era when, together with the term bunshi (文士, man of letters) it had clear negative and contemptuous connotations, is an act of rebellion; it can be seen as an act of creative valorization of a concept that hitherto had been seen as devoid of value.

October to check Japan’s aggression in China. In Japan proper, the screws were being tightened tighter and tighter. At the end of September 1936, Shibata’s Keiō mate, Nakamura Katsuzō was arrested on suspicion of spying.

While at Keiō, under his Kimio Tetsuzō (君尾哲三) pen name, Shibata contributed to the *Isu* (椅子, Chair) a literary magazine created by Shibata together with his Keiō mates Nakamura Katsuzō, Shiina Ryūji, Yamamoto Tetsuo, and Okada Yoshitarō. The year 1934 saw the publication of the short novels, *Kentaiki no sekai* (倦怠期の世界, World of Ennui) in issue 15, and of *Natsu no shumi* (夏の趣味, Taste of Summer) in issue 16. Under the same pen name, Shibata also contributed to *Bunsai* (文砦), another student-run literary magazine, in which he published *Hototogisu* (杜鵑, Cuckoo). The *Chair* itself lasted for two years and was dissolved in the summer of 1936.

The real prestige, however, was in getting published in one of the university-run literary magazines, such as Tokyo University’s *Shinshichō* (新思潮), Waseda University’s *Waseda bungaku* (早稲田文学), or Keiō University’s *Mita bungaku* (三田文学). In 1937 *Mita bungaku*’s chief editor was Waki Seizaburō (和木清三郎, 1896-1970), who was always on the lookout for Keiō students with literary aspirations. Waki remembers his encounter with Shibata as follows,

The first novel Shibata published in *Mita bungaku* was the novel *Jūen shihei* (1938, June issue). It was probably in the summer a year before that he called upon me, in a somewhat vague manner. He looked to be sensitive, and was a student of pallid complexion, taciturn, and thin, without any cheerfulness about him. However, I recall that his literary
style, unlike any style, was extremely unruly and included crude satire, which rather made people cringe.\textsuperscript{33}

Shibata himself describes the birth of the novel \textit{Jūen shihei} (十円紙幣, Ten-Yen Note) as a reaction to a tuberculosis scare he experienced in 1938:

[O]ne morning, while brushing my teeth, I was suddenly overcome with nausea, and choked, gurgling. Immediately, blood rushed forth, spurting into the sink. “I am done for!” A blood-chilling shock shook my whole body. Back then, lung tuberculosis was tantamount to a death sentence. I was lodging in the house of my uncle, who was a doctor specializing in tuberculosis. After seeing the TB patients in my uncle’s care die one by one, the thought that I myself was consumed by the disease was unbearable.

After agonizing for a while, I decided to keep it a secret from my uncle and my household. However, keeping quiet was torture. Consequently, I assumed a nihilistic attitude. Unexpectedly, this attitude enabled me to write a novel. It was an essay of some twenty pages, entitled \textit{Jūen shihei}. It was a story of student who, having contracted lung tuberculosis, returns home and, one day, while idling away, makes a young boy from a poor household in the neighborhood lick excrement in the field for ten yen.\textsuperscript{34}

Tokubei, the boy character who is made to lick feces in \textit{Jūen shihei}, was based on a real-life person Shibata knew in his hometown of Tsuruyama. He only had about five or six years of elementary school education and was clearly suffering from delayed

\textsuperscript{33} Shibata Renzaburō, afterword to \textit{Bunkyū shishi ibun} [The Tale of a Bunkyū-era Patriot], quoted in Sawabe Shigenori, \textit{Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den}, 1st ed. (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 43.

intellectual development. He was also from the poorest household in Tsuruyama. Nevertheless, Shibata felt an affinity for the boy, writing, “He was the only friend I had in my hometown when I was a university student.”\(^{35}\) *Jūen shihei* is a novel of dejection, baseness, and human degradation; the background of the story is that of disconsolate bleakness, as the story protagonist and first-person narrator comes home from Tokyo – essentially, to die, having just been diagnosed with lung tuberculosis. Miserable and fearful, he torments those he can reach around him – the neighborhood boy Tokubei, his own sister-in-law, and even his own mother. Having encountered Tokubei in the field outside, he offers him ten yen if Tokubei licks excrement. The cruelty of the situation was not only in the narrator’s sense of power over a helpless intellectually disabled boy; the ten yen banknote that he is wielding as the sinister temptation was not an insubstantial sum of money in Japan of the 1930s. The starting salary of a college graduate in a prestigious company was seventy yen per month at the time, so ten yen would be a small fortune to a boy from an impoverished household.\(^{36}\) That Tokubei would succumb to the temptation is not so much a comment on his character as it is a condemnation of the narrator’s. It is Tokubei himself, who, albeit debased, remains untouched by the humiliation. That is, the ultimate degradation, the reader feels, lies with the narrator who while stronger, older, and, as an adult, supposedly wiser, takes perverse pleasure in humiliating another human being. This is how the pivotal moment of the story unfolds:

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To wipe the filth off of the *haori*, I fumbled for the tissue in my sleeve and felt the ten-yen note. These days, I was in a suicidal state. As a way to control this unbearable impulse, I have carried the banknote in my sleeve for four or six hours. If I could, I wanted to casually toss the ten-yen note away.

Looking down at Tokubei in silence, I let go of the *haori* and said, “Hey, lick this shit!” I then waved the ten-yen banknote in front of his dumbstruck face. “And I’ll give you this.”

Tokubei turned his face away. He blinked once or twice without saying a word, and some tears appeared in his eyes. Without paying the slightest heed to him, I declared in an extremely clear and deliberate voice, “Listen you, this is ten yen. You likely have never even seen it. You probably don’t even get its real value. Well, one yen times ten, ten coins times one hundred, one coin times one thousand, that’s five hundred two-coin steamed buns! Hahaha! Hey, how about it?” His head drooping, Tokubei was fiddling with his purse.

“Hey,” I suddenly let out a groan-like scream. Tokubei, as if drunk, jerked his head like a spring, and reflexively put his hand to his fear-stricken face. Without a sound, I got close to his face, so that my nose almost touched his. “Are you going to?”

Swallowing his saliva with a gulp, Tokubei signaled his assent. Squeezing his flat nose with his fingers, fearfully, Tokubei got his mouth close to a portion of the *haori*, when I laughed derisively, “Don’t you pinch your nose! Lick it, stinky as it is. Isn’t that something that’s passed through your mouth anyway?” Tokubei shut his eyes, stuck out his whitish tongue, and having licked the *haori* just a bit, suddenly grabbed his throat with his hand and made a horrible “Argh” sound. A line of his saliva was stretching towards the *haori*.

“Lick it, damn you!” I roared again.

In a self-absorbed trance, Tokubei suckled on the filth. He cut a figure so ugly that I wanted to kick him to death.37

Even death brings no peace to the protagonist or a sense of relief to the reader.

The narrator’s cruelty extends into the afterlife, coming back to strike at the living even after death. “Two days later, before daybreak, having vomited an enormous amount of

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slushy black blood, I died. Tokubei would probably never have the chance to clear himself of the disgrace,” the narrator’s voice concludes the novel, echoing from beyond the grave.38

*Jūen shihei* was Shibata’s *shojo* (处女作), his first work of note to be published in a professional literary magazine, and he poured into it all the dedication and hard work he was capable of. He was, understandably, extremely nervous about its fate. Shibata recollected in his memoirs,

Trembling with fear, I brought *Jūen shihei* to *Mita bungaku*. Mr. Waki silently accepted it. However, though I stretched my neck like a crane, barely able to wait, there was not the slightest sign of *Jūen shihei* getting printed. Just around the time when I half gave up, thinking that perhaps it was rejected, *Jūen shihei* was published.39

*Jūen shihei* appeared in the special June 1938 edition of *Mita bungaku*, dedicated to the up-and-coming young writers (新進作家特集号). Shibata Renzaburō was twenty one years of age. Recalling his elation at the novel’s publication, Shibata wrote, “For the first time in my life, I felt I was floating in bliss, happy that my novel was in print.”40

That feeling of bliss, however, was short-lived, as after *Jūen shihei*, there followed a period of writer’s block, when Shibata felt spent and was unable to produce anything. However, that same year two other short novels of his appeared in print. In the September issue of *Mita bungaku*, Shibata’s *Banka* (挽歌, Elegy) was published.

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followed by his Nyorai no ie (如来の家, The House of Shakyamuni) in Mita bungaku’s November issue. After the publication of Jūen shihei, Shibata received a commission for a novel from the Chūo Kōron Publishing House. Shibata’s Kaen no naka no shōnen (火焔の中の少年, The Boy in the Flames) was completed in 1938 in response to that commission. Just like Jūen shihei, Kaen no naka no shōnen was set in a place reminiscent of Shibata’s own hometown of Tsuruyama, and dealt with the issues of poverty, leprosy, and fear. Once again, Shibata turned to the Tokubei character from Jūen shihei, making him the protagonist of the novel. Sawabe Shigenori believes that in turning to leprosy as his theme, Shibata may have been influenced by a work of his contemporary, a young writer, Hōjō Tamio (北條民雄, 1914 - 1937), who himself was dying of the disease at the time. Hōjō’s Inochi no shoya (いのちの初夜, First Night of Life) was published in February 1936 by Bungaku-kaikai.

However, in the spirit of the times, and in tune with the ever-increasing self-censorship that the Japanese publishing industry was engaging in in order to appease the increasingly suspicious authorities, Shibata’s novel was deemed too dark and too leftist, and thus, inappropriate for publication. Waki Seizaburō offered to publish it in Mita bungaku, but Shibata, disappointed, declined. Kaen no naka no shōnen would not see the light of day until after the war.

Shibata graduated from Keiō University in March 1940, at the age of twenty-four. By then, he had already married and had a child. His wife was Shōnaihan-born Saitō Eiko (齋藤栄子), the grandniece of Kiyokawa Hachirō (清河八郎), a Shōnaihan samurai.
famous for his opposition to and assassination at the hands of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Eiko’s brother was Saitō Isoo [斎藤磯雄], a well-known translator of Auguste Villiers de L’Isle Adam into Japanese, who shared Shibata’s affinity for French literature. With his marriage, Shibata was adopted into the Saitō household as a *mukoyōshi* (婿養子), the adapted son-in-law, and henceforth assumed the Saitō last name. Renzaburō had absolutely no desire to look for work and lead a “normal” life of a salaryman, but felt that there was no choice. He also felt extremely apprehensive about the political situation and of the war he was sure was coming. 1940 was also the year of the signing, on September 27, of the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Japan and Italy; by then, World War II had already started in Europe and only a little over a year separated Japan from the start of the hostilities against the United States and the Pacific bloodbath. Japan had already been militarily involved in the Chinese quagmire for nearly a decade, with no end in sight.

“With the onset of the war on the mainland, having to work for a living after graduation became an unbearably unpleasant prospect. I longed to continue the life of scholarly research. However, for the third son of a small Okayama landlord, this was an impermissible luxury,” Renzaburō later wrote. Shibata’s first attempt to find work was with the *Asahi shinbun*, where he took an entrance examination. However, during the written portion of the exam, his anger was inflamed by the instructions to list all the Japanese prefectures. In anger, he wrote on the exam sheet, “I am not a schoolboy” and stormed out of the exam room. Despite Shibata’s misgivings about the life of a salaryman,

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following the Asahi failure there followed a brief stint at the National Savings Bank (内国貯金銀行), where Shibata applied on a whim, intent on remolding his own unruly character. The bank was second-rate, the candidates were few and far between, the interview was easy, and Shibata was hired almost on the spot. This experiment in salaryman-ship would not last long however, and three months later, fed up with the abacus, Shibata quit.

Upon his resignation from the National Savings Bank, Shibata found work with the Taitō Shodōin publishing house (泰東書道院) in Tokyo. Shibata’s new job was with the editing department of the monthly Shodō magazine (書道, Calligraphy), published by Taitō Shodōin. The editing department consisted of the grand total of one person: Shibata Renzaburō himself. Shodō was essentially a mouthpiece of Japanese calligraphy at the time, and Shibata’s job consisted of compiling calligraphy works for publication. The amount of work was enormous; Shibata frequently stayed at his desk until late at night, sifting through the endless submissions. His salary was seventy-five yen a month.

Shibata’s work at Taitō Shodōin lasted for two years. While working at Taitō Shodōin, Shibata continued writing and publishing his work in Mita bungaku. In the year 1940 alone, in Mita bungaku’s May issue there appeared his work Rojin yōnenki (魯迅幼年期, Lu Xun’s Childhood), followed by the July issue’s Hakaba no aru ikyō (墓場のある異郷, A Strange Land with a Graveyard), as well as Chūya no kiroku (昼夜の記録, Records of Day and Night) and Indo no aki (印度の秋, Indian Autumn), in the October and
December issues respectively. That same year also saw the birth of his daughter, Mikae (美夏江).

The year 1941 saw the arrival of Shibata’s first full-fledged “long” novel (長編小説), *Bushi* (武士, Warrior), his first work of historical fiction, which had as its subject Kiyokawa Hachirō, his wife Saitō Eiko’s famous granduncle. It was published in the May issue of *Mita bungaku*. A year later, using *Bushi* as the basis, Shibata expanded the novel, producing *Bunkyū shishi ibun* (文久志士遺聞, The Tale of a Bunkyū-Era Patriot). This time, with the assistance of *Mita bungaku*’s Waki Seizaburō, the novel was published by the very publishing house where Shibata was employed, the Taitō Shodōin. *Bunkyū shishi ibun* hit the bookshelves in February of 1942. This was the first time Shibata’s novel saw the light of day not as a publication in a literary magazine, but as a standalone book. Shibata wrote in the afterword to *Bunkyū shishi ibun,*

I am still no more than a helpless young man, who has not experienced any hardship in life. Yet, within less than two years after leaving school, I put on airs of someone who has drunk his fill of woes of this floating world, and in the process of writing three or four such novels, made the determination that a weak-spirited and mediocre person like myself must establish his character in life by writing about some hero. For a year, I wrote in a state of self-abandon. Then, I finally completed this book. I wonder whether in the end I succeeded in describing a hero. And now, my thoughts of what a “hero” is are unclear.42

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Renzaburō need not have worried about being a “helpless young man, who has not experienced any hardship in life.” That was about to change.

1.3 THE ARMY: WORLD WAR II AND THE ENCOUNTER WITH DEATH

In December of 1942, a letter on red-colored paper arrived by mail for Shibata Renzaburō. That ominous piece of paper was destined to mark a pivotal point in Renzaburō’s life. It was the army draft summons. Shibata himself would later write, “With that single sheet of paper with the draft summons, the era of my youth came to a complete end.” World War II was in full swing and Shibata Renzaburō was being drafted into the Imperial Japanese Army. At this point in time he no longer could remain safe behind student exemptions from military service. This was also the point in life when Shibata crossed paths with his second older brother.

Shibata Daishirō, Shibata Renzaburō’s second older brother, was two years Renzaburō’s senior. Daishirō was much less of an influence on Renzaburō, yet his impact made itself felt in other ways. He was studious and serious, his school conduct and grades commendable, he cut a figure of diligence, quite in contrast to the unruly and misbehaving Renzaburō in elementary school, and was constantly used as an example for Renzaburō when the latter was scolded. Setting his sights on a military career early on, Daishirō attended a military academy and became an army major. Daishirō exemplified

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the image of an ideal army man – in the eyes of the contemporary Japanese, that is – patriotic, diligent, hard-working, and dedicated, but underneath the hard military shell there hid a kind and gentle soul, as the following episode illustrates. The night before Renzaburō was scheduled to join the 89th Sagamihara heavy artillery regiment, Daishirō, who was first lieutenant at the time and was an instructor at the military academy, came to visit him in his house in Nagano, where Renzaburō had been staying. Clanking with his army boots and officer’s sword, the first thing out of Daishirō’s mouth was his congratulations to Renzaburō on getting drafted, “Want to congratulate you on the arrival of the draft summons. Hold fast!” Renzaburō was appalled; not only was there a great distance between the two brothers in their view of the war and the world, but Daishirō appeared to be completely oblivious to his feelings. Drinking the whisky he had brought for the occasion, and unheeding of Renzaburō’s sullen silence, Daishirō kept talking about the draft and how serving the country was supposed to be the ultimate pinnacle of a man’s desire. Unable to hold it any longer, Renzaburō shot back that the way the army had started the war was self-serving and had nothing to do with the desires of the ordinary people. In response, his face red with anger and his voice rising in rage to the point of screeching, Daishirō yelled that Renzaburō was not Japanese and punched him in the face. Daishirō was a huge man and the force of that blow threw Renzaburō, who has always been thin, out into the garden. Though unable to defend himself physically, Renzaburō’s reacted the only way he knew how - verbally. In tears, Renzaburō screamed at Daishirō,

Let me just ask you one thing. The military is the path you have chosen. My chosen path is literature. Who would respond happily when ordered to abandon their chosen path? Would you be happy now, if you were told to drop your military career and become a writer? And wouldn’t you be angry to hear some writer’s meaningless congratulations about it? Please go! Take this whisky and go!45

At a loss for words, Daishirō left the house.

The next morning Renzaburō reported to the Sagamihara regimental headquarters. The company commander was Daishirō’s classmate from the military academy. Renzaburō later learned that that very day Daishirō had asked the company commander to discharge Renzaburō, claiming his younger brother was in poor health. Although this proved to be futile, and Renzaburō’s condition was deemed to be adequate for him to serve, the fact that Daishirō took his words close to heart and was willing to risk his own career on Renzaburō’s behalf stayed with Renzaburō for life. Three years later, the incident between the two brothers had something of a closure, when Daishirō grudgingly acknowledged, in a conversation with Renzaburō after Japan’s surrender, “From now on, this must be the era for your literary talent to speak.”46 The year was 1945 and Shibata Renzaburō had just come home, demobilized. Before that, however, there would be the nightmare of army service with its daily humiliation and beatings, and, in the end, the horrifying brush with death in the Bashi Strait.

On the subject of his army experience, Shibata is unequivocal:

The barracks, in which I was thrown for the first time in my life, evoked in me associations with hell. Though everything was orderly, somehow the atmosphere was ghastly. It was as though the floor, the beds, the posts, the gun racks, the neatly arranged shelves, all were permeated with the hatred and grudges of the tightly-packed soldiers. 47

The hatred and grudges Shibata wrote about made themselves felt soon enough. As a first-year army recruit, Shibata encountered the brutal world of primitive physical violence that was endemic in the Imperial Japanese Army. He ended up bearing the full brunt of it. “Because of my looks and my unsociable behavior,” Shibata would later write, “the number of times I was beaten up was much more than other first-year recruits.” 48

The beatings were as brutal as they were senseless. He was beaten with fists, boots, sticks, and bayonet scabbards. Shibata recollected in an essay, entitled, “The Army Barracks” (軍隊内務班, Guntai naimuhan),

I was beaten countless number of times upon joining the army. However, not once did I hit anyone. Now, as I reminisce on this, I can find almost no single instance where the reason for being beaten would be a fault of mine. Likewise, I spent three years without ever having a reason to hit another person. 49

In the course of the initial three-week training alone, Renzaburō had three front teeth knocked out and lost the vision in his right eye for a month, after being beaten by

the barracks’ corporal. This experience of institutionalized daily brutality the Imperial Japanese Army was known for did little to assuage Shibata’s distaste for authority, codified behavior, and structured society, a feature which was to manifest itself later in his writing. It is not inconceivable to extrapolate Shibata’s experience of army hazing and beatings to the protagonist of his representative body of work, the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series, in which Shibata’s experience of physical defenselessness in the face of violence is internalized and refracted in Nemuri Kyōshirō, his protagonist, resulting in a mirror image, whereby every characteristic of the author is met with its opposite in the central character. Where Shibata Renzaburō himself was frail and unable to defend himself physically, Nemuri Kyōshirō, his alter ego, is skillful beyond measure; he is invincible and unbeatable, offering his creator a sort of “poetic justice” and a sense of subliminal retribution, as well as instilling a sense of calm and confidence in the reader that nothing would befall the protagonist. The very first fight in Chapter I of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* ends in the opponent’s near instantaneous death and is concluded with the words, “There had never been a foe capable of withstanding the completion of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s sword’s full-circle strike.” With these words, Shibata sets out to establish Nemuri as undefeatable and untouchable. Obviously, on the more immediate level, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s invincibility is a literary device intended to ensure the character’s survivability and self-perpetuation, as well as the continuation of the series and its

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financial success; it is, however, also possible to see it as the author’s symbolic reinvention and renegotiation of the imaginary self.

Shibata’s attitude vis-à-vis army brutalization seems almost too composed and rationalized; it is almost Tolstoyan in its rejection of violence, even for self-defense. Shibata has read Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, and his descriptions of army life read almost like Pierre Bezukhov’s account of French captivity, replete with his own version of Platon Karataev, an inoffensive and harmless character called Sakura, who suffers abuse and violence silently and stoically. Shibata wrote of his time in the army,

> [A]t that time, I encountered a God-like soldier. An Edokko [Tokyo native], born in Nihonbashi, he was a young man who had been an apprentice in a seaweed shop since he was little. I was a private first class, and this young man called Sakura, who has become my wartime friend (essentially, in fact – my manservant), never betrayed any emotion regardless of how pleasant or agonizing his work was.\(^{51}\)

The image of Sakura that emerges from Shibata’s narrative is very much like Tolstoy’s Platon Karataev – hard-working, meek, and utterly selfless. And like Platon Karataev, he finds death far from home, unaided and alone. The cargo ship that Shibata and Sakura were on was strafed unexpectedly by an American warplane, literally appearing out of the blue near Taiwan’s Kaohsiung. Shibata recalled,

> Sakura fell in the Kaohsiung offing in Taiwan, strafed by the Grumman machine gun fire. As he lay there dying, I asked him if he had any last words. As I did so, Sakura, who had not a soul in this world, shook his head, and with an expression of sorrow on his pain-twisted face, the last

thing he said was, ‘Sir private first class… I am a virgin. That’s a pity.’
Even now, these words keep ringing in my ears.  

Though terse and dry, this narrative is Shibata’s indictment of the horrors of war; he has seen firsthand young men like himself, dying meaninglessly in the prime of their life, before ever having had the chance to experience it to the fullest. In a way, this reads almost like a continuation of his conversation with Daishirō, back in November of 1943. Moreover, it is difficult not to make the same contrasting mirror-image connection between Sakura, who dies a virgin, and Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō, who is something of a womanizer; much like his skill with the sword, his good looks and success with women is never in question, rather, it is a fundamental quality of his persona. Again, this is almost as though Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character were a way for Shibata to obtain symbolic justice for Sakura and others like him.

While Shibata had nothing but good to say about Sakura, his opinion of people much closer to him socially – members of the intelligentsia and university graduates – is much more damning. Ever a good and unforgiving judge of character, Shibata wrote,

When the barracks are filled with the first-year soldiers, their different characters would reveal themselves immediately – from idiot simpletons, sneaky weasels, and dimwits, to self-denying hard workers.

I discovered that the basest and most disgusting people were the university graduates pretending to be intellectuals. Whether returning from visitation and eating alone and in secret on the pallet whatever food they brought back inside, or blaming others for their failures, serving

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themselves extra food, or jeering as others were getting beaten up – all of them were university intellectuals.\textsuperscript{53}

Ever a hint of melancholy in his character, Shibata’s naturally bleak and gloomy view of human nature, reinforced by his studies of French modernist literature of the nineteenth century, was unlikely to change with this experience. It is, perhaps, possible to assume that Shibata’s observations of human behavior and psychology in the army provided, in part at least, a source of inspiration for his creative imagination, offering a panopticon of human types that would later inhabit his works.

The “unsociable behavior,” that was the cause of Shibata’s woes, also manifested itself in his determination to resist the dire circumstances around him, and survive. “The vow I made to myself upon becoming a soldier, was, ‘I won’t become servile!’ Currying favors, flattering, sneaking around in the shadows - I disciplined myself not to stoop to any of it. That was the only form of resistance I was capable of,” Shibata would later reminisce in \textit{Waga seishun buraichō}.\textsuperscript{54} Instead of debasing himself in subservience, or meeting violence with violence, Shibata decided to find an escape; remarkably, the solution presented itself in literature.

After three weeks of basic army training, Shibata was made a medic and underwent three-month training at the Sagamihara Army Hospital; upon its completion, he was sent to a small military hospital at the Yokosuka navy base. There, the circles of hell began anew, with the sergeants and older soldiers beating and brutalizing their

\textsuperscript{53} Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Waga seishun buraichō} (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 76.

\textsuperscript{54} Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Waga seishun buraichō} (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 75.
younger and lower-status mates again. To this was added scorn, derision and mistreatment from the nurses. “Even more so than the nurses, the first-year soldiers were on the lowest rung of the hierarchy,” Shibata wrote in *Waga seishun buraichō*. After an argument with a nurse, Shibata came in contact with an army doctor named Oyamada (小山田), who was working at the Yokosuka military hospital where Shibata was stationed. Oyamada noticed that Shibata was completely unsuited for army life and sympathized with him. He found out that Renzaburō was a writer; it also turned out that Oyamada himself was a graduate of Keiō University. He asked Renzaburō whether he had any chronic illnesses, indicating that should he have any, hospitalization would be possible. That was a hint; hospitalization would be the first step towards discharge from the army on medical grounds. Luckily, Shibata remembered that around the time he was working at the Taitō Shodōin publishing house, he would frequently experience heart spasms; now seemed a particularly good moment to bring it up. Shibata also remembered a story by Yoshikawa Eiji, *Soy Sauce Gamble* (醤油賭, 1928), he had read as a middle school student. In the story, several laborers would place bets on who could drink more soy sauce straight up; since soy sauce is not drinkable in large quantities, this game tested the limits of the players’ endurance, while also placing them in considerable danger of dying from poisoning. Nevertheless, there was one among them who would always win, consistently drinking much more than the others. Moreover, he would show up the next day as if nothing had happened and without experiencing any ill effects. Thinking it

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strange, one of the players follows the winner home and learns that as soon as the man returns, he hurries to a bath house where he submerges himself into scalding hot water and saves his life soaking in it, steaming and washing the salt out of his pores. One day, as a prank, the other players close down the bath house; unable to use it after the usual betting game, the man dies.

Using the story as inspiration, Shibata took a bottle of soy sauce from the barracks’ pantry and drank half a cup of it. “Drinking raw soy sauce like it was sake was not easy. I was only able to do it because I literally was prepared for the inevitable death,” he reminisced later.\(^\text{56}\) Having drunk the soy sauce, Renzaburō found a secluded spot behind the hospital, and ran a hundred meters as fast as he could. This combination of a soy sauce overdose and a strenuous physical effort led to tremendous heart palpitations and a genuine sickness; sick and near-unconscious, Shibata made it to the hospital, where he asked for Doctor Oyamada, and collapsed in front of the orderly. His collapse was genuine. Oyamada came in a hurry and, upon inspecting Renzaburō, ordered him to be hospitalized. After administering a Vitacampher injection, Oyamada looked Renzaburō in the eye and said, “I got it. Put your mind at ease.”\(^\text{57}\)

Shibata spent about three months in the hospital, recovering. He was intent on getting a full discharge from the army; when the hospital director ordered him to be released back into the barracks, after his recovery, in desperation, he repeated the soy-drinking attempt with the same dire results for his health. The gamble worked; after


Shibata’s two cardiac episodes, the hospital director gave his permission for Dr. Oyamada to discharge him on medical grounds. It was during the last formalities of the release that Renzaburō noticed a faint smile on the doctor’s face and learned that Oyamada’s older brother was himself a *shishōsetsu* (私小説, confessional novel) writer.

In the summer of 1943 Shibata Renzaburō was decommissioned from the army and returned to civilian life. He was free, at last – or so he thought.

After his decommission, Shibata found work with the *Nihon dokusho shinbun* (日本読書新聞) newspaper, located in Tokyo’s Ochanomizu district. He was pleasantly surprised and relieved to encounter many like-minded individuals with strong antiwar opinions working there. “Curling up on a deep couch in the sunlit editorial room, and disparaging the military authorities out loud, was indeed, a thing of pleasure. While the weekly newspaper runs would make quite a show of war support, between us, we would place bets on when the Japanese military would come out with its hands in the air,” Shibata would later recall.⁵⁸ The idyll, however, was short-lived. In August of 1944, Shibata received the second draft summons for the Imperial Japanese Army. Japan was losing the war and the army was desperate for cannon fodder, so the sick, the infirm, and the feeble who had thus far managed to slip through the cracks in the system and avoid military duty were now fair game. This time, Shibata was commanded to report to the Akatsuki Unit, stationed in Hiroshima’s Ujina ward. This time, he also believed his luck had now run out. Having successfully feigned illness once before, Shibata Renzaburō was

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now fully prepared to die: “Now in particular, I was prepared that this was it. This was, then, a fitting departure for someone going to his death. My wife and child evacuated to the rice fields near the Mogami River, I boarded the train alone and unaccompanied by anyone.”\textsuperscript{59} The train arrived at the Hiroshima Station early in the morning; not due to report to the Akatsuki Unit quarters until six o’clock later that evening, Shibata decided to kill time and rest at a red-light establishment. The prostitute who welcomed him told him he was the last customer, as she was closing shop the next day. Renzaburō replied that this was a good omen and jokingly said that, perhaps, this meant he would not be killed in the war after all. To which, she replied with all seriousness, “You don’t have the face of one about to be killed in battle. I, for one, can see that. These past five years, there had been so many soldiers as customers, that even with a cursory glance I could always tell the face of someone who would be killed.”\textsuperscript{60} This exchange is eerily reminiscent of Lermontov’s \textit{A Hero of Our Time}, where in a short story entitled \textit{The Fatalist} (1840), a similar passage concerning the facial expression of a soldier destined to die in battle occurs, “Frequently, there is a strange sign of the inevitable doom on the face of the person destined to die a few hours later, so that an experienced eye is unlikely to be mistaken.”\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{60} Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Waga seishun buraichō} (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 90.
Whether part of military folklore worldwide or something real, the prostitute’s belief and words turned out to be prophetic; despite his premonitions, Shibata Renzaburō was destined to survive the most horrific ordeal fate had yet in store for him.

In April of 1945, Shibata’s transport ship, a 7000-ton cargo vessel bound for the Halmahera Island and carrying over sixteen hundred troops of the Imperial Army’s Southern Expeditionary Corps, was torpedoed by an American submarine and sunk in the Bashi Strait, between Taiwan and the Philippines. The twenty-eight-year-old Shibata found himself adrift in the shark-infested sea for seven hours before being rescued. His survival was nothing short of miraculous.

Shibata himself wrote that he survived for two reasons. The first reason was the advice he got, when the ship was struck by the torpedo. The attack occurred in the dead of night and in the panic and confusion that ensued, and in the dark, Shibata’s first reaction to the torpedo explosion was to look for his glasses, which he actually did not even need; his nearsightedness was rather mild. It was a slow and somnambular reaction of a person who had just awakened, and it saved him, for he was still there when someone from the liaison officers’ post found him and yelled that the ship was sinking and that they needed to jump into the sea. The man yelled at Renzaburō, “When you jump into the sea, cup your balls firmly. If you don’t, the water surface will hit you so hard you will pass out and die.” Shibata did as he was told and survived the impact of jumping from the upraised prow of the sinking ship, which reached the height of a ten-story building. “In short, he would later write, if I hadn’t cupped my balls then, today’s

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Shibata Renzaburō would not be here."\(^{63}\) He was one of the lucky ones; over ninety-percent of more than sixteen hundred men the ship was transporting went down to the bottom of the Philippine sea with the vessel.

For the time being, however, Shibata was in the water, struggling to stay afloat and survive. The survivors sought safety and support in numbers, trying to stay in groups and fighting against the waves and the currents. Shibata wrote that more than exhaustion, thoughts of home and their loved ones, and the resulting despair took the greatest toll on the men in the water. Thoughts of home and family only contributed to quicker rate of exhaustion. Shibata credits his studies of literature as the second reason he survived, instead of falling prey to despair and drowning like countless others. In his words,

Having chased away all thoughts of everything I left in Japan, I was in a state of true nothingness. My studies of literature were what allowed me to do that. It was Lermontov, Merimé, and l’Isle-Adam that saved my life. That is, strange though this may sound, there is no doubt that it was through the sense of nothingness I had learned from the works left by these writers that I was able to keep my exhaustion to the minimum.\(^{64}\)

Shibata was in a state between life and death for seven hours, before being rescued. His choice of words in the description above (…私はそれらの文学者がのこしてくれた作品から学びとした虚無思想によって、体力の消耗を最小限にくいとめることができたのである) is telling. That sense of nothingness (虚無, kyomu) he writes of will later become the defining characteristic of Nemuri Kyōshirō, the protagonist of his

\(^{63}\) Shibata Renzaburō, Waga seishun buraichō (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 93.
\(^{64}\) Shibata Renzaburō, Waga seishun buraichō (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 96.
representative body of work, the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s nihilism, his rejection of the society’s norms and his gloomy and pessimistic outlook on life, all originate in this sense of kyomu, nothingness that is so frequently used by Shibata to describe Nemuri Kyōshirō’s appearance and character. In fact, the word kyomu is used the very first time Kyōshirō is introduced in *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*. This is how Nemuri Kyōshirō first appeared to the readers in *Hina no kubi* (雛の首, Doll’s Head), the very first weekly installment to appear in *Shūkan shinchō* in May of 1956:

There was only one person who followed the dice cup with a cold look. It was a *ronin* [masterless samurai] in a casually worn black *habutae* silk kimono, who has been leaning against a wall since a little while ago, without taking part in the gambling. He possessed a set of deeply chiseled features, which betrayed just a hint of foreign blood, and somehow had about him a look of dejected emptiness [虚無 kyomu]. He looked to be under thirty.65

Shibata describes his experience in the Bashi Strait as a void, drifting in a blank state of mind that freezes emotions, removing, in the quest for self-preservation, any possibility of a potentially life-threatening nervous breakdown and anguish that so many around him have succumbed to, likely, poor souls utterly unprepared for the experience in that they did not possess Shibata’s inner resources that helped him to survive:

Despair, grim resolve, rage, sorrow, resignation – I have no recollection of any of those feelings while I was in the midst of the great ocean. In short, a single sentence would suffice, “Blankly, I was just floating on the

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surface of the sea.” That is all. It is not that I was different from other soldiers because I possessed some different quality of character. I was no more than an ordinary cowardly person.\textsuperscript{66}

In one crucial aspect at least, Shibata was in fact different from others – he was capable of reaching the blank mind state, that sense of nothingness he has gleaned from literature, and was now employing towards his survival.

That brush with death in the Bashi Strait cannot have left Shibata unscathed; Nakamura Katsuzō said, in \textit{Shibata Renzaburō shishi}, “I think that Shibaren’s experience of drifting in the Bashi strait is comparable to Dostoyevsky’s near-death experience of getting a special pardon right before his execution by firing squad, in the famous Petrashevsky affair.”\textsuperscript{67}

In Shibata’s own words, “those several hours are truly a void in my mind. I would say that that void is not possible to express in words. Since I make a living selling my writing, my inability to express it is quite shameful, but I have absolutely no psychological wherewithal needed for that description”\textsuperscript{68} Traces of this experience, however, can be found in Shibata’s writing. The nihilistic attitude of Shibata’s literary protagonists can be linked to the author’s own near-death experience and the particular sense of freedom that is experienced by those who have ventured to the threshold of


\textsuperscript{68} Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Jibeta kara mono mōsu} [Speaking from the ground up] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976), 127.
death and lived. Nakamura Katsuzō’s analogy with Dostoyevsky’s experience of getting a special pardon right before getting executed is of particular interest insofar as Shibata is concerned. In Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*, the protagonist, Prince Myshkin, narrates the thoughts and feelings of a person who is about to be executed, as later told to him by the condemned himself:

> The sense of the unknown and the disgust with this new thing that would be and was about to happen were terrible; but he says that there was nothing harder during that time than the incessant thought: “What if I were not to die! What if life were to be returned – what infinity! And all of it would be mine! I would then turn every minute into a century, would not lose a thing, would count every minute, and would not waste anything!”

Though spoken through a literary character, the experience of facing the firing squad and preparing for death is known to be Dostoyevsky’s own. While Shibata himself experienced this state between life and death quite differently, drifting with his mind in a void, one aspect of the experience links both Dostoyevsky and Shibata: the sense of “infinity” upon reprieve. In Shibata’s case, this manifested itself in a newly-acquired sense of freedom and courage to live life without fear. As Shibata himself said, “…the several hours of that void endowed me with a certain kind of courage, no mistake about it.”

In an essay titled *Dokyō* (度胸, Courage), Shibata recalls how one day, after the end of the war, while walking on a Shinjuku street late at night, he was approached by two

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69 Dostoyevsky and F. M, *Sobranie sochinenii v pyatnadcati tomakh* [Collected works in fifteen volumes], vol. 6, *The Idiot*, (Leningrad: Nauka, 1989), 63-64.
young thugs, who wanted money. They seemed to know who he was, were expecting easy pickings, and grew increasingly hostile when he refused. Incensed, Shibata barked, “Shut it! I know kendo, judo, and karate. I can break your bones for breakfast. Scram!”

Incredibly, the thugs fled. Much like a European knight on the field of battle, Shibata lingered on the scene for a while, to make sure the field was his, even though he was drenched in cold sweat; had there been a physical confrontation, he admits, he would have stood no chance. He need not have worried – the field was his. Shibata wrote,

It’s just that during the war, I was only close to dying twice. Anyhow, I might have been killed. That awareness is useful in situations like this. Also, according to this odd pride I have of late, it is unseemly for the man who is the author of Nemuri Kyōshirō, to be a coward. A thing like courage, on top of being a kind of an illusion, also seems to be an artificial construct.

Though Shibata uses the words “artificial construct” (つくられるもの), “acquired learning” seems to be the intended meaning. The near-death experience of drifting in the Bashi Strait seems to have endowed Shibata with the courage he needed to back up his usual “devil may care” attitude.

Upon his rescue, Shibata Renzaburō was in no condition to continue his military service. Seven hours in the ocean led to a case of acute pneumonia. Renzaburō was taken

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72 The first time was the aircraft strafing incident in the Kaohsiung offing, when Shibata’s army friend Sakura was killed. Shibata was sitting next to him on the ship’s open deck when it happened. The second time refers to the seven hours in the open sea in the Bashi Strait.
back to Japan, where upon disembarkation in Hiroshima’s Ujina Ward he was admitted to the Fukuyama Army Hospital, located in the city of Fukuyama, some sixty miles east of Hiroshima. It took him two months to recuperate. Because of an infectious skin condition Renzaburō caught while in the army, he was not allowed to return to his unit, nor was sent back to the army barracks. Instead, he was sent to the outskirts of Fukuyama City, to linger with other soldiers similarly stuck in an administrative limbo between units and hospitals. This was just as well. On August 6, 1945, one month after Shibata’s release from the hospital, Hiroshima was leveled by the first atomic bombing in history. Ten days later, after the second atomic bombing of the city of Nagasaki and the Soviet declaration of war, Japan capitulated. World War II was over and Shibata Renzaburō was a free man, at last – this time, for good. He experienced no sadness over the Japanese defeat; as Sawabe Shigenori writes, “There was no sorrow. There was nothing but joy at his demobilization and a deep sigh of relief, while standing atop the drill building in cheerful spirits.”

1.4 THE POSTWAR YEARS: DESTITUTION AND DESPAIR

In September of 1945, a year after his second fateful conscription, Renzaburō returned to Tokyo, intent on rebuilding his life. At the moment, though, he was as penniless as a church mouse; on the way to Tokyo, his backpack with his few meagre possessions was stolen from him on the train by a thief. “The fellow who stole it has sure

74 Sawabe Shigenori, Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den (Tokyo: Shüeisha, 1992), 126.
gotten a sizeable loot. For inside the backpack, there was about a pound of sugar,” Shibata notes in his memoirs. Shibata felt bitter about that loss. The sugar had been given to him for his daughter, the last act of an army mate from Kaohsiung dying of tuberculosis in the Fukuyama hospital. Now, that too was gone.

Tokyo itself was lying in ruins. Renzaburō’s house in Nakano had been demolished; his uncle’s house in Shimokitazawa was no longer there, having burned to the ground in the course of incendiary bombing. “There was no place for me to go,” Shibata would later recall. The Nihon Shuppankai (日本出版会, Japan Publishers’ Society), where Shibata worked briefly prior to being drafted, had been disbanded on September 30, 1945. Not knowing what to do or where to go, in his bafflement, Shibata could find nothing better than go see the building where Nihon Shuppankai used to be. He did not know himself what he was hoping to accomplish by doing so, but it proved to be a stroke of luck. While lingering aimlessly in front of the building, Renzaburō bumped into Tadokoro Tarō, head of the Nihon dokusho shinbun, whom he was acquainted with from before the war. “Ren-san, I thought you would sure be the one to come if you survived! How about it, would you like to revive the Dokusho shinbun?” were Tadokoro Tarō’s first words. For Shibata, this offer could not have come at a better time. That he agreed to Tadokoro’s proposal would be an understatement; “I poured all my passion into creating a new book review periodical, which would rise up from the burned ground,

chasing the censorship away like a nightmare,” Shibata would later recall that moment. On October 10, 1945, the defunct *Nihon Shuppankai* was reestablished as *Nihon Shuppan Kyōkai* (日本出版協会, Japan Publishers’ Association) and Shibata became chief editor of the *Shohyō* (書評) book review periodical, published by the *Nihon dokusho shinbun* under the *Nihon Shuppan Kyōkai* umbrella. The first issue of *Shohyō* appeared in December 1946.

The timing was opportune. Throughout Japan, new publications and periodicals sprang up “like bamboo shoots after the rain,” to borrow Sawabe Shigenori’s expression. After more than a decade of suffocating censorship imposed by the militarists in power, Japan was now a fertile ground for reinvigorating the publishing industry. According to Marius Jansen, “New magazines and pamphlets discussed the new and better society that should be built, and discussion clubs, seminars, and lectures drew attention that was astonishing in view of the hardships of housing, food, and transportation.” In Shibata’s own words, “This was a period when you could garner long lines on the readers’ digest selling day. Our countrymen were starved for the printed word. No matter what book it was, if you printed it, it would sell like hot cakes. In the blink of an eye, the *Nihon dokusho shinbun* reached the circulation of a hundred thousand copies.”

Despite the publishing boom, Shibata’s own financial situation was dire. The editor’s salary was woefully insufficient and Renzaburō could not afford to bring his wife and daughter to Tokyo from the countryside. He was lodging in a single room of a dormitory of Setagaya School of Physical Education. In order to make ends meet financially, Shibata started collaborating with the so-called “vulgar magazines” (カストリ雑誌), seedy and sleazy popular entertainment magazines that sprang up all over Tokyo in the wake of the war. Shibata wrote of that time, “I had to work for the so-called vulgar magazines, scribbling rubbish low-class novels. Because of that, my name was muddied. It’s quite self-explanatory that having become a writer for the vulgar magazines, I couldn’t show my face in the light of day.” 82 Another reason why Renzaburō had to work with the disreputable periodicals was his wife; Saitō Eiko was suffering from tuberculosis and required treatment. Her condition also required frequent stays in a TB sanatorium. As Yasuoka Shōtarō has said of Renzaburō’s involvement with the vulgar periodicals, “He must have sacrificed his self-respect as a writer in order to keep his self-respect as an ordinary human being.” 83

Nevertheless, at the same time, Shibata resumed his collaboration with Mita bungaku, which had also been revived in January 1946 by the Nōgaku Shorin publishers. The year 1946 also saw the publication of Shibata’s first novel since the end of the war. Shibata Renzaburō’s Ginza sandai (銀座三代, Three Eras of Ginza) was published in the

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March 1946 issue of Jiyū (自由) magazine. Shibata wrote in Waga dokuzetsu, “After the war, by some chance I got acquainted with an elderly gentleman who has lived all his life in Ginza. The life of this man, who has lived it with the utmost integrity, was indeed a pitiful one. Learning from him the details of Ginza’s transformations, I made them into a novel.”84 This novel will later serve as the basis for Shibata’s first mature work of note, Jesu no sue (イエスの裔, The Scion of Jesus,), which received the 26th Naoki Prize in 1951. This, however, would not happen for another five years, and the period between 1946 and 1951 was indeed a dire one for Shibata; despite working with abandon for Nihon dokusō shinbun and writing continuously for a number of publications, including Mita bungaku, Shin shōsetsu (新小説), Tanchō (丹頂), and Wakagusa (若草), he remained a mumei sakka (無名作家), a nameless writer without recognition. By 1949, Shibata felt that his work at Shohyō had run its course; it was taking him nowhere in the world of literature, sapping his efforts and strength away into journalism. He quit the Nihon Shuppan Kyōkai in the spring of 1949. There followed a period of work for the juvenile literature publisher Kaiseisha (偕成社), where Shibata prepared monthly digests of masterpieces of world literature. This only covered the basic necessities of his life, like the rent for his single room in the barrack-style Setagaya dormitory, and food. He did not need more, eking out a very basic hand-to-mouth existence. Though Renzaburō kept writing works of “pure literature” (純文学), the criticism that those few he had dared to

submit to serious publishers had received at the hands of his senior colleagues in the literature world (Shiga Naoya among them) had dimmed his spirit and self-confidence. He grew to think of himself as a third-rate writer and aspired to no more. The future looked bleak and Shibata lost any hope of ever finding recognition as a serious writer. However, as Sawabe Shigenori writes, “As a writer, Renzaburō was still a pupa in a cocoon.”\textsuperscript{85} That would all change one fine morning in 1950, with the arrival of an express mail package addressed to him. When Shibata looked at the sender, he was stunned to see Satō Haruo’s name. “There is something I would like to discuss with you, so I would like you to visit me upon receiving this note,” the message said.\textsuperscript{86} The very next day Shibata went to pay Satō a visit.

1.5 THE FRIENDSHIP: SATŌ HARUO AND THE PATH TO RECOGNITION

Satō Haruo (佐藤春夫, 1882 - 1964) was a lyrical poet, critic, and novelist who, like Shibata, attended Keiō University, where he studied under Nagai Kafu and was associated with the \textit{Mita Bungaku} literary magazine, also edited by Nagai Kafu, in which Satō published scores of his poems. In the beginning of his literary career, Satō was also a disciple of Yosano Tekkan and Yosano Akiko.

Like Shibata after him, Satō was also influenced by the French symbolist poets; Satō’s lyricism and aesthetics are concerned with one’s private, innermost thoughts and

\textsuperscript{85} Sawabe Shigenori, \textit{Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari; Shibata Renzaburō den} (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1992), 143.
experiences, and are imbued with a sense of gloom, despondency, and decay. Satō’s work could be said to exemplify the general shift in writers of the Taishō era from social concern, criticism, and political engagement to the realm of personal cultivation and self-absorption.

At the time of meeting Shibata, Satō Haruo was an established writer and poet of great renown. In the summer of 1948, the then-editor of *Mita bungaku*, Maruoka Akira (丸岡明) approached Satō with the request to join the selection committee for the Minakami Takitarō prize, established as part of the *Mita bungaku* postwar revival project. When Satō acquiesced, Maruoka also asked him to give lectures on the Mita campus, starting in 1949. Satō began his cycle of lectures, entitled “Survey of Contemporary Japanese Literature” (近代日本文学の展望) on May 16, 1949, with great success. Since Shibata also took part in compiling publications for *Mita bungaku*, that work created the context in which contact between him and Satō became possible. The initial point of contact, however, was not what would be expected under the circumstances.

Satō’s name was legendary and elicited profound respect in Shibata, for whom a figure like Satō appeared to be out of reach. Reminiscing on the time of his encounter with Satō, Shibata wrote, “Up until then, I had only come across Satō Haruo Sensei at some meetings, and even in my wildest dreams I could not imagine that in his mind, the maître of literature would remember the name of someone lingering in the shadows, like myself.”

When Shibata went to see Satō in his house in Sekiguchi, he discovered that

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the reason Satō was interested in him was far more mundane and even comical than he could ever imagine. It had to do with a woman.

Shibata’s work for *Mita bungaku* brought him close to a woman (she was introduced to him by Maruoka Akira), who made an impression on Satō. Neither Shibata nor Satō used her real name. Like Satō in *Sobae* (日照雨, The Joke, 1952), Shibata refers to her as Kishimoto Tadako (岸本忠子) in his autobiographical *Ningen no za* (人間の座, The Troupe, 1954); in *Waga seishun buraichō*, he simply refers to her as H (H子), while in the essay, *Sensei to onna to jibun* (先生と女と自分, Teacher, Women, and I), he calls her Matsunaga Matsuko (末永松子). She was a war widow. What really brought her and Shibata together, other than the *Mita bungaku* connection, was Shibata’s words of comfort regarding her husband. Eerily, his fate mirrored Shibata’s own, albeit without the rescue and the happy end. His transport ship torpedoed by the Americans, he found his death at the bottom of the sea. “Your husband did not suffer and, I think, probably just passed away, much like falling asleep,” Renzaburō said to H., remembering his own experience in the Bashi Strait.88 These words had a profound impact on H., whose feelings for Renzaburō had now turned to something more than friendship and respect. Though Shibata treated his relationship with H. as no more than a passing affair, she was more serious, flooding him with love letters, which he left unanswered. It was at this point that Satō Haruo, himself interested in H., interceded. This is how Shibata remembers their first exchange, during his visit:

‘You have received more than two hundred love letters from a certain woman, haven’t you?’
‘That’s right…’
‘You didn’t respond once to any of them, did you?’
Not knowing how to respond to these questions, I felt my whole body turning rock-hard.  

Satō continued querying Shibata on the details of his relationship with the woman, at one point growing visibly annoyed upon learning that Renzaburō had destroyed all her letters. “You do not possess the qualities for becoming a writer. …Looks like you don’t even understand how interesting Matsunaga Matsuko’s character is,” Satō exclaimed in desperation. He confessed that he himself was interested in her, and wanted to know more about the physical aspects of Shibata’s relationship with her. The situation suddenly became comical, when Satō complained of his own thwarted advances, even calling her “she-fox”. “I felt that the moment Sensei had said that he had only been allowed a single kiss without being allowed anything else, he had ceased to be Satō Haruo, the great poet, and had come down next to me as just an old man, driven mad by lust,” Shibata would later recall the moment with tender amusement.  

Satō’s ill-fated love interest notwithstanding, he did have one more thing to say to Renzaburō, “I promised Matsunaga Matsuko, that I would make Renzaburō write a good piece, and give him an opportunity. That is, if you feel like it.” Shibata presents a

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slightly more detailed account of this moment in *Waga seishun buraichō*, where Satō explains, “By the way, since Mr. Kigi [Kigi Takatarō, *Mita bungaku* editorial committee member] and I are charged with the responsibility of moving *Mita bungaku* from Mr. Maruoka’s *Nōgaku Shorin* to *K. Shuppan*, I have become the chief editor. Using this as an opportunity, I would like to promote a talented new writer. Why don’t you try writing a literature piece of some hundred pages? I will be the one to recommend it.”

Shibata was beside himself with emotion,

These words made my whole being tremble with excitement. There must have been many fine writers who have joined the literary world through the graces of the genius of poetry called Satō Haruo. Dazai Osamu was one of them. Inoue Yasushi, too, was one of them. I, too, was selected to join them.

‘I will try!’
I vowed to Sensei right there.  

Understandably, Satō Haruo’s own recollection of the circumstances of their meeting is somewhat more palliated. “Knowing that Shibata Renzaburō wanted to distance himself from the works he has been writing reluctantly for the readers, and had long harbored the desire to try writing for himself, I encouraged him to write one new work,” he would later write in an essay, *Desu masuku ni tsuite* (デスマスクについて, About *Desu masuku*).
A month later, Renzaburō produced a manuscript of some ninety-eight pages, entitled *Desu masuku* (デスマスク, Death Mask), which he brought to Satō for judgement. That month has proved to be exceptionally hard and painful for Renzaburō; though he accepted Satō’s offer enthusiastically, in his heart he had no self-confidence. The first week of writing, in particular, was hard. Though he tried a number of times, nothing would come to his head, which would only strengthen his self-doubt and self-loathing. That feeling of despair and inadequacy pushed him to read Baudelaire – time and again. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the piece he produced had at its center a certain “dandy” writer and the world of his relationships.

This was at some point in the year nineteen fifty-one. This day, one would-be dandy succeeded in committing suicide. His name was Kuroda Kōtarō. He was thirty years of age. As to his profession – he was a literary critic, which amounted to being unemployed.

At this moment, having slipped out of his breathless remains, he is silently crouching in the corner of the room… No, actually, since he no longer possessed any shadow or shape, he himself could not figure out the kind of form he had. However, since he still possessed the raw body sensation, its core was filled with languid fatigue.

That fatigue must have been left by his writhing in agony during his last moments, after having ingested several dozen bottles of powerful cardiac medication. Or perhaps, this was brought about by the despondency of having finally ended his thirty years of mud-smeared life. That was not clear even to himself.

Whatever the case, he is now watching, with the coldness peculiar to that languid fatigue, the figures of his wife, his lover, and his friend, who have long been gathered around his remains in silence. But no, in addition to them, he is also turning his detached and stranger-like gaze towards his own dead body.96

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Thus begins Shibata Renzaburō’s *Desu masuku*, built on the convergence of the perspectives of four people – the wife, the lover, and the friend of the central character, Kuroda Kōtarō, a literary critic who had just committed suicide, and the spirit of Kuroda himself. They have all gathered for a vigil at his deathbed, and the restless spirit of the deceased himself, who can hear each one’s silent soliloquy addressing him. He responds with some thoughts of his own, albeit without being heard. What emerges is a complex, twisted, and poignant story of love, hate, duty, jealousy, and resignation. The protagonists weave their stories, often of conflicting perceptions, revolving around the central character, and leading up to his suicide, but their individual narratives do not translate into a comprehensive resolution of the mystery, and offer no clues to the reasons for his demise.

After a month of agonized writing and three attempts at starting the process anew, Shibata finally brought the finished work to Satō. Satō read the piece right there and then, and pointed out the necessary corrections. Mostly, it had to do with the use of vulgar language that Satō wanted removed from the narrative. Shibata went home and spent the following three days dutifully fixing the story according to Satō’s instructions.

*Desu masuku* was published in the June 1951 issue of *Mita bungaku*, the second issue of the magazine since the end of the war. Soon thereafter, it was nominated for that year’s Akutagawa Prize. On July 30, the selection committee for the Akutagawa Prize, of which Satō Haruo was a member (other than Satō Haruo, the committee included Niwa Fumio, Takii Kōsaku, Funahashi Seiichi, Kawabata Yasunari, Sakaguchi Ango, Kishida Kunio, Ishikawa Tatsuzō, and Uno Kōji), convened. Sakaguchi Ango, Kishida Kunio,
and Ishikawa Tatsuzō were absent at that meeting, which went ahead with the remaining six members. Satō pushed hard for Shibata’s Desu masuku to be included among the Akutagawa Prize winners, but more than half the committee members were apprehensive and voted against it, though some also noted the work as being praiseworthy. Niwa Fumio, for one, called Desu masuku “an endeavor” (努力作), and expressed his desire to read further works by Shibata. Shibata himself attributes his lack of success with the Akutagawa Prize to his activity as an anonymous newspaper contributor:

The reason is, before receiving the Naoki Prize I had a hard time feeding myself, so I was writing all kinds of things anonymously. Thus, I was lampooning the literary circles in Mainichi shinbun. At that time, I would take the established writers and badmouth them. That is, ridicule them. …A bunch of things like Niwa Fumio is a working bee. Funahashi Seiichi is a louse sponging off of his hostess, Eri, and such… completely meaningless stuff like that. I wrote things like that, but they are all members of the Akutagawa and Naoki Prize selection committees! One can say that a fellow called Shibaren did not understand that, writing those ugly things. But then I became a nominee. I really got myself into trouble that way! That’s why I was not given the Akutagawa Prize. There is no reason for a person who is told he is a louse sponging off of his hostess, Eri, to award me the Akutagawa Prize.

Satō Haruo was adamant about Shibata’s work; he pushed hard for it to receive the Akutagawa Prize at the committee meeting, and was unrepentant even after he was not successful, writing in the October 1951 issue of Bungei shunjū:

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Among all of the works nominated for the twenty-sixth Akutagawa Prize, Shibata Renzaburō’s *Desu masuku* is absolutely the one that has stuck in my mind. To tell the truth, even today, after the awards have been completed, I still will not abandon that notion. That is because *Desu masuku* is a piece that was written while I encouraged Shibata’s spirits, provided advice on writing it up to its completion, and which, having been published in *Mita bungaku*, I believe, remains the oeuvre well-negotiated by the writer of the strongest ability, even after the repeat careful reading of all the nominated works.  

The fact that Satō was writing this in a special issue of *Bungei shunjū*, dedicated to the Akutagawa prize awards after they have been awarded is telling. Though Sato was outvoted at the selection committee meeting, he felt it important to voice his praise of *Desu masuku* – even to the point of including it among reviews dedicated to the winners.  

Although Shibata did not receive the Akutagawa Prize, the very fact of the nomination was a pivotal factor in getting recognition. With Satō’s involvement, support, and promotion of his work, Shibata made an entrance on the Japanese literary stage. After the Akutagawa Prize setback, Kigi Takatarō, the *Mita bungaku* editor directly responsible for *Mita* publications, suggested Shibata aim for the Naoki Prize with his next piece. Encouraged, and intent on succeeding, Shibata started to work on the next story right away. This time the writing process was not as painstaking as before; he did not need to rewrite the piece even once. Using his short story *Ginza sandai* (銀座三代, Three Eras of Ginza), previously published in the March 1946 issue of *Jiyū* magazine as the basis, Shibata expanded it into a full-fledged novella of over a hundred pages. The new work,

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entitled *Iesu no sue* (イエスの裔, The Scion of Jesus), appeared in the December 1951 issue of *Mita bungaku*. Unlike the psychologically tense narrative of *Desu masuku* delving into the protagonists’ inner world, *Iesu no sue* is more of a mystery/detective story. The narrative begins as follows,

The murder weapon was a sashimi knife.

The victim was a Ginza streetwalker, the twenty-eight years old Sashinuki Kazue.

The culprit was Sashinuki Tōsuke, the seventy-four-year-old man who was Kazue’s adoptive grandfather.

After committing the murder, the old man went into a near-total stupor and no amount of interrogation would yield the slightest sign of response.

After waiting patiently for several days for the confession about the crime’s motive, the inspector N. in charge of the investigation finally succeeded in getting the following statement,

“I did not want to let Kazue have a child.”

(Kazue was pregnant).

“Did not want to let her? Why?”

The inspector N. surmised that the old man, having previously been an honest person, could not stand the possibility of a child being born with hair and eyes of a different color.

However, having answered this, the old man plunged into silence again.

Since Kazue’s lover, a certain yakuza by the name of Sugio, admitted that the child might be his, the inspector’s guesswork was undermined, and the old man’s confession only deepened his doubts.

Reluctantly, the inspector N. summoned the two following persons of interest, in addition to Sugio: Sakuchi Nosaru, the owner of a high-class restaurant and the old man’s childhood friend, and some writer, the acquaintance of Kazue’s late father (that writer was occasionally on friendly terms with the inspector).

What follows is the story of those three witnesses.100

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*Iesu no sue* is an amalgamation of stories and perspectives – told from different vantage points by different people and encompassing several generations, but all leading up to a single central event of the narrative – the incomprehensible and unexplainable murder, by Sashinuki Tōsuke, of Sashinuki Kozue, his own adopted granddaughter. The resulting investigation yields a flow of narratives, each focusing on a specific person in Tōsuke’s life, spanning several generations in his family and leading up (in terms of linear time, at least) to the murder. However, just like in *Desu masuku*, the multi-angled perspectives in *Iesu no sue* do not add up to a single understandable resolution, and while the reader can guess as to the motives of Tōsuke’s crime, the novel offers no direct elucidation.

*Iesu no sue* was nominated for both the Akutagawa and the Naoki Prizes for the latter half of 1951. The meeting of the selection committee for the 26th Naoki Prize took place on January 30, 1952. The attending members were Osaragi Jirō, Kojima Masajirō, Ibuse Masuji, Kigi Takatarō, and Kawaguchi Matsutarō. The committee members’ decision marked a pivotal point in Shibata Renzaburō’s life: together with Hisao Jūran, he was awarded the 26th Naoki Prize. “Though there was the opinion that this time there was no suitable laureate, and there was also an opinion that it would not be sufficient to select an incumbent on the principle of novelty alone, Shibata as a novice, and Hisao Jūran as a veteran, were selected,” wrote Ibuse Masuji of the committee’s decision.101

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Maruoka Akira, the *Mita bungaku* chief editor, was the first to hear the news of the Naoki Prize award. He rushed to Shibata’s house in Shinjuku, intent on congratulating Renzaburō. It was after midnight when Maruoka finally found the house and met Shibata. Shibata, however, had already heard the news on the radio. Even though, as Sawabe Shigenori noted, the “Naoki Prize was the gateway into the world of literature. That is what he was awarded,” Shibata’s attitude vis-à-vis the news was lackluster. He appeared to be in shell-shock. In fact, Shibata wrote in *Iesu no sue kōki* (Postscript to *Iesu no sue*).

I remember experiencing an extreme regret after the publication of this book. Five publications, and though I wanted to apply my best effort towards each, I had this doubt whether that effort missed something essential and ended up in a failure. And I remember an inexpressible sorrow. When the limits of one’s talent are in sight (or one thinks they are in sight), there isn’t anything sorrowful for a writer. Occasionally, the fact that *Iesu no sue* has received the twenty-sixth Naoki Prize, forced me to search deep within for an attitude of required humility, but at the same time, thinking whether I have the ability to shoulder that glory, I could not help but feel ashamed.

Shibata’s soul-searching crisis had to do with his feelings of inferiority and inadequacy caused by his previous association with vulgar magazines and his belief that his contributions there have muddied his name beyond repair. “The seal branded into my forehead is not something that can easily be removed with the Naoki Prize,” he wrote in

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his Naoki Prize acceptance speech. The Naoki Prize award also complicated Shibata’s life in an unexpected way in that it made his status as a writer rather unclear. Prior to the Naoki Prize, Shibata’s literary attempts, such as Jūen shihei, Desu masuku, and to some extent, even Iesu no sue, fell within the junbungaku (純文学), pure literature category, with their grittiness and focus on the protagonists’ innermost thoughts and feelings. The Naoki Prize, however, was given to the youngbloods of the taishū bungaku (大衆文学), popular literature genre; as a result, there were no commissions from the literary magazines of either junbungaku or taishū bungaku orientations, as the respective publications considered Shibata as someone from a literary camp other than their own.

Whatever the initial circumstances of their meeting were, the relationship between Shibata Renzaburō and Satō Haruo soon blossomed into a friendship between a pupil and a mentor. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Satō’s intervention in Shibata’s life. Fate had occasioned their meeting at just the right moment; when Shibata felt he was at the bottom of the world, Satō had plucked him out of obscurity. Shibata wrote of that time,

[S]ince I made writing my trade after the war, while I was churning out lowbrow and vulgar novels, I felt jaded, life was in shambles, and I fell into an uncontrollable and self-forsaking cesspool. Indeed, there was an unperturbed sense of being carefree in it. That is why for about a year I was idling without doing anything.

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104 Shibata Renzaburō, “Kore ga watashi no seijitsu de aru; Naoki shō jushō no ben” [This is my sincerity; Naoki Prize acceptance speech], Shibata Renzaburō senshū, vol. 18, Zuihitsu essei shū (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2002), 192.
It was Satō Haruo Sensei who kindly pulled me out of that cesspool.105

The weight of Satō Haruo’s name behind Shibata made the critical difference in propelling him towards recognition. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that Satō’s endorsement alone did the trick. Satō was outvoted at the Akutagawa Prize nomination committee meeting, where he was trying to promote Shibata’s Desu masuku, and later wrote, “I was unable to garner a single person to agree with me at the meeting. Knowing the procedure a bit, and content with just hearing an acknowledgment of Shibata’s talent, I saw that in the end there was not a single person who understood that work’s true meaning and character, so I did not bother saying much.”106 Rather, it would be safer to say that Satō directed the gaze of the literary world towards Shibata; Shibata’s own talent did the rest.

From their shared taste for all things Chinese, to shared poetic and literary leanings, the two developed a strong relationship that was not to wane in the years to come. Shibata would later write,

Mr. Satō’s reception room felt like an anteroom in Chinese style. Timid by nature, I would hide that timidity unnecessarily and spend my days making a show of engaging in literary journalism, bragging, and lying. Sometimes, the weight of that armor would become unbearable and push me, albeit in vain, into desperate behavior. Truth be told, that was the only place where I would discard that armor and turn myself back into a meek

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literary youth. When I was sitting there, there was not the slightest need for showmanship, for boasting, for lies.  

Satō Haruo held Shibata’s literary abilities in high esteem. Describing Shibata as an “expressionist who made clear his intention to escape the vulgar style of his past with the creation of his test work,” Satō always stood by his decision to promote Shibata and was unwavering in his support for him. Shibata Renzaburō repaid Satō in kind. “Satō Haruo is my esteemed teacher. I am proud to have a first-rate poetry genius as my mentor,” Shibata sums up his feeling in an essay dedicated to Satō. The feeling of affection was mutual. In the words of Takeuchi Yoshio, Satō Haruo’s biographer, “Haruo had a strong affection, akin to reliance, for Shibata. Moreover, that feeling was of profound warmth. Shibata Renzaburō is unlikely to be able to forget the warmth of that affection.” Shibata never did. His respect and reverence for Satō were steadfast throughout his life. Satō’s role and influence in Shibata’s development as a writer are important for our understanding of Shibata’s literature; the encounter with Satō came at just the time in Shibata’s life when he was attempting to formulate for himself what it meant to be a professional writer. Writing about the Desu masuku and Iesu no sue period

ten years later, Shibata talks about his desire for what he calls メチエ, a term he derived from the French métier, a profession or trade,

About ten years ago, I started thinking that one way or another I wanted to acquire a ‘métier’. And then, it looks like I got one, I think. It was around that time that I abandoned the desire to write ‘pure literature’. That is, I realized that clinging to pure literature I would be writing horrible works. Having failed to win the Akutagawa Prize with Desu masuku, I won the Naoki Prize with Iesu no sue, but both of them were my stab at gaining a métier.111

Though the Naoki Prize did not engender an immediate change in Shibata’s circumstances, it was instrumental in firming up his ideas of what he did and did not want to do as a writer. “As it were, those being my test works, their technique stank,” Shibata wrote of Desu masuku and Iesu no sue.112 “It was from there that I emerged as a ‘professional’ writer [「メチエのある」作家]. And then I became a popular writer [大衆作家].”113 Shibata’s becoming a pop writer was due to his producing in 1956 a highly successful novel in the kengō shōsetsu genre, entitled Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (眠狂四郎無頼控, The Nihilist Records of Nemuri Kyōshirō). Coming at just the right time, when Japan was experiencing a kengō shōsetsu revival and boom, Shibata’s work became hugely popular; coinciding in time with the publication of Gomi Yasusuke’s Yagyū

bugeichō (柳生武芸帳, Yagyū Martial Chronicles), it served as a focal point in the process of reinvention and rejuvenation of the kengō shōsetsu genre.

1.5 FAME: THE NEMURI KYŌSHIRŌ YEARS

In 1954, Shibata received a commission for a kengō shōsetsu from Satō Chiharu, the editor of a small weekly publication, Shūkan taimusu (週刊タイムス). The timing was opportune: only two years earlier, the American Occupation authorities relaxed the censorship rules imposed after the war designed to curb militarist sentiment, and repealed the ban on the depiction of feudalistic and samurai themes in art and media. The golden age of popularity of the Japanese jidai geki, period drama, began in 1952. It was in the course of writing the novel, Edo guntō den (江戸群盗伝, The Legend of Edo Robbers) for Shūkan taimusu, that Renzaburō felt in himself the talent for and ability to produce popular literature. This was also his first experience with a serialized publication.

Shibata’s novel began to be serialized in May of 1954. Working on Edo guntō den was important in that it rekindled Shibata’s interest in the Edo period; the necessity to keep up with the serialization deadlines also forced him to do a lot of research on Edo daily life, a habit he found “profoundly useful” later, when faced with Nemuri Kyōshirō.\footnote{Shibata Renzaburō, “Sengo jūnen” [Ten postwar years], Jidenshō 1, ed. Kasai Harunobu (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1978), 56.}
Renzaburō also made an important discovery: working with the serialized publication format proved to be easier for him than writing novels from start to finish for publication in a single volume.

Around March of 1956, Shibata’s *Edo guntō den* found itself on the desk of Saitō Jū’ichi (齋藤十一, 1914 - 2000), the “emperor” of the Shinchōsha publishing house. Saitō was also known as a “shadow strategist” (陰の軍師, *kage no gunshi*); constantly reading new works in various literary journals and magazines, he was always seeking out new and talented authors. Using his taste and intuition, he singlehandedly steered Shinchōsha in the direction his vision took him. When Saitō read *Edo guntō den*, he was impressed enough that he decided to pay Shibata a visit – unannounced. His intention was to commission a *kengō shōsetsu* novel from Shibata, for serialized publication in the weekly *Shūkan shinchō*, which had just recently been established in order to generate some extra income for the cash-strapped Shinchōsha. Renzaburō recalls,

> Suddenly, with his pipe in his mouth, Mr. S. [Saitō] asked me straightaway, ‘Won’t you be kind enough to serialize a *jidai shōsetsu* novel in *Shūkan shinchō*?’

> As though bewitched by a fox, I replied, ‘Since I have studied Chinese literature, I have read works like *The Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*, but when it comes to Japanese history, I hardly know the names of even the Tokugawa shoguns.’

> ‘[A]nyhow, please do the serialization. I will wait a month.’¹¹⁵

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Renzaburō had absolutely no confidence about writing a kengō shōsetsu novel for Shūkan shinchō. Saito Jū’ichi, however, trusted his instincts – to the point that a few days after the meeting he sent his representative, Asō Yoshirō, to egg Shibata on. “This is the yomikiri format, and it would be nice for the protagonist to be a swordsman. Please create an insanely strong one,” Asō urged Shibata. After professing his lack of self-confidence and bickering with Asō, Shibata finally acquiesced. “Asō Yoshirō was quite eloquent,” Shibata sums up his recollection of the encounter.

Shibata only had three weeks to complete the first episode (two of which he spent searching for a suitable name for his protagonist), and despite his lack of self-confidence and apprehension, he undertook the assignment, and the first installment of the Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae series was published in the May 1956 issue of Shūkan shinchō.

Shibata felt this work would be an appropriate conduit for the utilization of his “etonne” (エトンネ, Fr. étonner, surprise) concept, gleaned from his studies of French literature, and which came to form the basis of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s dandyism and the essence of his character in the works of the series. Shibata endowed Nemuri Kyōshirō with the very same qualities he admired in the works and personae of Charles Baudelaire, Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, and Beau Brummel – a certain aristocratic disdain for social conventions, willingness to shock, and stoic indifference to one’s own fate. Nemuri Kyōshirō is outside of the hitherto practiced “norm” of the idealized samurai heroes in

the Japanese *kengō shōsetsu* literature. Shibata says the following of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s antecedents:

If not outright truth seekers, up until now the protagonists of the *jidai shōsetsu* have been members of the justice league. And so, they put on airs when it came to drawing the sword. Their lineage impeccable, their attitude vis-à-vis women puritanical, they are way too idealized in a million other things. At that point, I decided to come up with just the opposite in everything.\(^{118}\)

The resulting protagonist of Shibata’s creation is, indeed, the opposite in everything. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s very purpose is to shock the audience with his manner and conduct; he is unconcerned with social mores and rules of behavior. Nemuri Kyōshirō is indifferent not only to the norms of social conduct; his nihilistic attitude extends to his very life. “[H]e becomes the kind of a person who does not give a damn when or whether he gets killed.”\(^{119}\)

Shibata clearly found the formula for success. The look of “dejected emptiness” in a young protagonist with chiseled features and a hint of foreign blood, coupled with fierce individualism and an almost superhuman skill with the sword enthralled the four hundred-thousand strong readership of the *Shūkan shinchō*. The success of the first episode was overwhelming. Shibata was flooded with fan mail; no less than five moving pictures companies expressed an interest in obtaining screen rights. Only twenty episodes


were planned for publication; however, the success of the first installment was such that Saitō Jū'ichi insisted on increasing the number of episodes to one hundred. In all, seven extended *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series have been published; *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* (1956 - 1958), *Nemuri Kyōshirō doppokō* (1961), *Nemuri Kyōshirō sappōjō* (1963), *Nemuri Kyōshirō koken gojūsantsugi* (1966), *Nemuri Kyōshirō kyomo nisshi* (1968), *Nemuri Kyōshirō mujō hikae* (1971), and *Nemuri Kyōshirō itanjō* (1975). In addition, a number of shorter standalone *Nemuri Kyōshirō* pieces have been published between the start of the boom and Shibata’s death, attesting to the series’ popularity and success. Shibata’s *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series continued in the following decades, spanning the sixties and the seventies, and almost up until his death in 1978, never waning in popularity, and enjoying numerous reprints.

Since the publication of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, Shibata was flooded with commissions and requests for new works. While the ten-year period immediately after the war was marked by lack of meaningful work and recognition, ever since *Nemuri Kyōshirō* hit the bookstores and became the new sensation, the situation reversed and Shibata could not complain about either. In fact, the influx of work was such that he found it difficult to find spare time, free of writing. Shibata worked on several other publications concurrently. The serialized publication of *Ken wa shitte ita* (剣は知っていた, Skilled with the Sword) was begun in *Tokyo Shinbun* (東京新聞) in June of 1956, and of *Chansu wa sandō aru* (チャンスは三度ある, Three Chances) in *Sankei Jiji* (産経時事) in December of 1957, respectively. This was followed by the serialized publication in
January of 1958 of Binanjō (美男城, Castle of Handsome Men) in Shufu no tomo (主婦之友) and of Koken wa orezu (孤剣は折れず, Lone Sword Unbroken) in September of the same year, in Tōkyō shinbun. February of 1960 saw the start of the serialized publication of Akai kagebōshi (赤い影法師, Red Silhouette) in Shūkan bunshun (週刊文春).

Shibata’s popularity never waned and he continued writing up to his death, even during his final hospital stay in 1978. Ever of a frail and rather feeble constitution, the sheer amount of work Shibata undertook gradually wore his health down. The several hours of drifting in the Bashi Strait also did not leave him unaffected – there was residual nerve damage in his right shoulder, causing regular pain, and his lungs never fully recovered from the pneumonia brought on by his seven hours in the ocean.

Shibata Renzaburō’s description of his workload in the December 1967 issue of Bessatsu bungei shunjū, in an essay entitled, Waga tobakukō, gives an idea of its scale:

There hasn’t been a month in the space of these past decades when I did not write a single page a night. … I am writing serialized novels for Shūkan gendai, Sandē mainichi, Shūkan myōjō, Hōchi shinbun, and Ōru yomimono. On top of that, add short serialization periodicals, like Shūkan asahi. It takes a bit just to write these down. In my case, it is seventeen pages for each weekly periodical. I need to write for four volumes, nine times each. That’s six hundred pages. Two months’ worth of newspaper contributions is two hundred pages. Bi-weekly contribution for Ōru yomimono is eighty pages. Undertaking to write for other periodicals meant having to complete close to at least a thousand pages within the space of three weeks. It’s fifty pages a day.”

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The accumulation of aging, overwork, and residual health damage from his earlier years led Shibata to an early grave at the age of sixty-one. Shibata Renzaburō passed away at the Keio University Hospital on June 30, 1978. Official diagnosis was *cor pulmonale*. Shibata is interred at the Denzūin Temple in Tokyo’s Koishikawa district. His neighbors in his last resting place are his mentor Satō Haruo and the forebear on his wife’s side, and the protagonist of his novel, *Bunkyū shishi ibun*, Kiyokawa Hachirō.

The obituary in the June 30<sup>th</sup> *Yomiuri shinbun*’s evening edition read,

On the thirtieth of the month, before dawn, Mr. Shibata Renzaburō, or “Shibaren,” the writer of swordsmanship novels who brought Nemuri Kyōshirō into the world, passed away. More than a writer, he was a man of letters, a one-of-a-kind nihilist wolf who kept opposing authority. Even his vivid Full-Moon Killing Style was unable to drive away the disease brought on by extreme overwork. He was sixty-one years of age.\(^{121}\)

Shibata Kentarō, Renzaburō’s older brother, who witnessed Renzaburō’s passing, wrote,

[W]atching my younger brother depart this world was painful. A writer though he was, when he was sleeping on his hospital bed, the sorrow of not having written, or not having been able to write what he really wanted to write, could be read in his face. Near the end, he kept writing while enjoying a TV puppet drama…

*Jesu no sue* is a work of pure literature. Writing pure literature alone like this, a reticent writer must have been born. As for me, that is the younger brother I am interested in.

In September of 1977 it was my middle brother, the army man Daishirō’s turn. In the following year, in June of 1978, as though chasing after him, Renzaburō died.

While still together in this life, we did not meet or speak on the phone all that much. However, once death separated us, my chest is heavy from the loneliness of not having the two of them in this world.\textsuperscript{122}

Kentarō did not seem to approve of the \textit{taishū bungaku} direction Renzaburō’s literary career took off in. Renzaburō himself, however, was unapologetic. Though obviously preceding Kentarō’s obituary quoted above, Renzaburō’s wrote in March of 1977, less than a year before his death, what can be construed as his answer to Kentarō’s disapproval; it is also a fitting end to this chapter dealing with Shibata Renzaburō’s life. “Nemuri Kyōshirō, who was supposed to be over after twenty episodes,” Shibata wrote, “is still alive today. I myself, suddenly getting old in body and mind notwithstanding, the Nemuri Kyōshirō fellow will carry on regardless!”\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{122} Shibata Kentarō, \textit{Ningen no dorama} [Human Drama] (Tokyo: L. H. Yōkō Shuppan, 1985), 104.
CHAPTER 2
SHIBATA RENZABURŌ AND NAKAZATO KAIZAN: INFLUENCES AND CONGRUENCIES

2.1 IN SEARCH OF A NAME

The three weeks in the spring of 1956, during which Shibata had to produce his first installment of a kengō shōsetsu in the yomikiri format, commissioned for Saito Jū’ichi’s Shūkan shinchō, proved pivotal for Shibata’s development as a writer, and for the direction his literary work took thenceforth. Though he agreed to contribute a serialized kengō shōsetsu novel to Shūkan shinchō, Shibata had absolutely no confidence in his ability to deliver. The desperation he was experiencing was so sharp it developed into a neurosis, when he even toyed with the idea of just running away from Tokyo to make the pressure disappear. He frantically tried reading Yoshikawa Eiji’s Miyamoto Musashi and Osaragi Jirō’s Kurama Tengu to get the feel and the spirit of a long kengō shōsetsu novel, but was disappointed and felt that he could not produce anything of the kind. In order to find materials for inspiration, Shibata went on the prowl in Tokyo’s Kanda district, a veritable mecca of used and antiquarian bookshops. It was while walking around Kanda that Renzaburō came to an important realization:
Neither Miyamoto Musashi nor Kurama Tengu is even remotely interested in women, are they?! For a man, isn’t that abnormal? That very moment, my mind was made up.

Fine! I will make my protagonist a villain who has rejected Musashi’s well-known truth-seeking character and Kurama Tengu’s notions or righteousness. He will violate women with chilling composure. Even his sword, he will be thinking of not as if it were a warrior’s soul, but nothing more than a murder weapon. Though he will understand wickedness, he will still side with it. Depending on circumstances, he will cut down even his own father in cold blood. That is the character I will make my protagonist.\textsuperscript{124}

It was also while browsing the bookshelves of an antique bookshop in Kanda in search of inspiration and ideas, that Shibata noticed the title characters on the spine of some volumes that attracted his attention; he was looking at Nakazato Kaizan’s (中里介山, 1885 - 1944) novel, entitled \textit{Daibosatsu tōge} (大菩薩峠, The Great Buddha Pass).

\textit{Daibosatsu tōge} was serialized in such popular newspapers as Miyako shinbun, Mainichi shinbun, and Yomiuri shinbun, eventually running to some forty-one volumes and spanning the period between 1913 and 1941. It is a seminal work in the history of Japanese popular literature in that it created a mold that many later \textit{kengō shōsetsu} writers strove to emulate; its themes of swordsmanship, nihilism, and the sheer scale of its attempt at universality ensured its undying popularity to this day. Shibata himself would later recall, “Having gone to Kanda’s antiquarian bookshops, I was scanning the

bookshelves, when my eyes caught a glimpse of *Daibosatsu tōge*. The moment I muttered to myself, ‘Tsukue Ryūnosuke, heh?’ Got it.”

Nakazato Kaizan’s *Daibosatsu tōge* is of particular importance to our understanding of Shibata’s development as a writer. *Daibosatsu tōge* has at its center the nihilistic protagonist, Tsukue Ryūnosuke, a chilling and ghoulish character, a samurai of almost superhuman skill with the sword, professing blatant contempt for human life— all qualities that accounted for the novel’s tremendous popularity; moreover, Tsukue Ryūnosuke has an insatiable need to kill, and his attempts to quench that thirst provide the novel’s unique driving force.

Nemuri Kyōshirō, the protagonist of Shibata’s most popular work, the eponymous *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series, owes his existence (and to an extent, even his name) to Nakazato Kaizan’s nihilistic hero, the sinister Tsukue Ryūnosuke of *Daibosatsu tōge*. In the words of the literary scholar Makino Yū, “According to the established theory of popular literature, Nemuri Kyōshirō is a descendant of Tsukue Ryūnosuke.”

Nemuri Kyōshirō and Tsukue Ryūnosuke can be compared according to several sets of criteria, such as the connection between their names, their physical appearance, their sword styles, their attitudes vis-à-vis women and the roles women play in their lives and character development, their respective character growth, and the nihilism they espouse, together with its connection to the social environment in which these two

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protagonists were created. It is these sets of criteria that appear to be particularly helpful for our understanding of the connection between the two characters.

Insofar as his protagonist’s name, Shibata recalled his train of thought upon browsing through the pages of *Daibosatsu tōge* in the Kanda bookshop as follows,

> Tsukue Ryūnosuke – what kind of a fresh name is that? … Though I myself had not read *Daibosatsu tōge* up until now, I knew the Tsukue Ryūnosuke name. … Intending to write this great work and having thought long and hard before, to begin with, Nakazato Kaizan must have come up with the name like “Tsukue Ryūnosuke” for his protagonist as a result.

When the name Tsukue Ryūnosuke was born, so it is thought, *Daibosatsu tōge* came to be at the same time. The nihilist who spouts ‘Let a singing man sing as he will, and a dying man die as he will,’ must bear a name to match.127

In fact, Nakazato Kaizan did indeed make a special effort to obtain an unusual and memorable name for his protagonist. While Kaizan was in the planning stages of writing the novel, he once asked his younger brother, Nakazato Kōsaku to write down the names on the votive plaque in the Musahimitake Shrine, while Kōsaku was there on pilgrimage. Kōsaku diligently wrote down the names and gave the list to his older brother upon returning home. Among the various names recorded, there was a certain Tsukue. Kaizan’s biographer, Ozaki Hotsuki, wrote, “There was no information about this Tsukue.

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However, this mysterious last name got stuck in Kaizan’s imagination, and must have caused him to think up the name, Tsukue Ryūnosuke."\(^{128}\)

On the subject of the connection between the two protagonists’ names, Shibata himself says the following:

Indeed, when I created “Nemuri Kyōshirō,” I had “Tsukue Ryūnosuke” in my mind. In fact, Tsukue Ryūnosuke is a great name.\(^ {129}\) No matter how much time elapses, this name does not get old. I started thinking that a name submitted to the mass media should be this kind of a good name. With the exception of those who did not go to elementary school, all people use desks. Therefore, it is easy to remember. At that point, I began to think of some necessary everyday thing people need to do. However, no matter how I tried, I couldn’t quite get it. And then, there it was! I realized that, when it comes to sleep, no one can do without it, can they? From birth till death, there is no escaping sleep. If this were to be made into a name, would this not be immediately memorable?\(^ {130}\)

Thus was born Nemuri Kyōshirō.\(^ {131}\) “Having created the name,” Shibata goes on in a short essay, “Nemuri Kyōshirō no tanjō,” “and in order to create that fellow’s character and his milieu, I kept in mind the heroes from the Japanese historical narratives, and made the effort to endow him with the special traits that they did not possess.”\(^ {132}\) The kengō shōsetsu protagonists Shibata writes about were indeed quite different before the appearance of Tsukue Ryūnosuke. In the words of the scholar Kikuchi Megumi, “Heroes


\(^{129}\) Tsukue (机) means “desk” in Japanese.


\(^{131}\) Nemuri (眠) means “sleep” in Japanese.

encountered in *kōdan* [professional storytelling] that was part of *taishū bungaku*’s history, prior to that [prior to the appearance of Tsukue Ryūnosuke] were the kinds of characters that had a reputation for crushing the strong and helping the weak [強きを挫き、弱きを助け], being fervently dutiful [義理に篤く], and sensitive to human feelings [人情に脆い].”  

It was Tsukue Ryūnosuke that broke that mold.

While Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō is indeed different from the heroes of Japanese historical narratives, in that he is the nihilist antithesis to their righteousness, propriety, and morality, his nihilism links him to Tsukue Ryūnosuke, Nakazato Kaizan’s *Daibosatsu tōge* protagonist, who also cuts a figure apart from the habitual positive heroes of the popular *kengō shōsetsu* novels.

*Daibosatsu tōge* begins with what the scholar Takahashi Toshio, author of *Riyū naki satsujin*, a critical monograph on the novel, called a “connecting murder without a reason” (つながっていく理由なき殺人), a scene in which Tsukue Ryūnosuke kills an elderly pilgrim on a whim, for no apparent reason other than it pleased him in the spur of that moment. The scene unfolds as follows, when Tsukue Ryūnosuke encounters the elderly pilgrim at the top of the Daibosatsu tōge, the Great Buddha Pass:

“Old man!”
That was the samurai encountered previously.

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133 Kikuchi Megumi, ed., *Hikken mau; kengō shōsetsu no sekai* [The secret sword dances; the world of swordsmanship novels] (Tokyo: Gakken Bunko, 2002), 367.
134 Takahashi Toshio, *Riyū naki satsujin; Daibosatsu tōge o megutte* [Murder without a reason; concerning Daibosatsu tōge] (Tokyo: Kösaidō, 2001), 17.
“Yes, Sir,” the old man hurriedly changed his posture, and as he was about to make formal greetings, the samurai looked around and ordered, “Come here!”

As he beckoned with his hand, without taking off his sedge hat and without letting on what his business was, the elderly pilgrim asked with trepidation, “Yes, Sir, what is it?”

As he bowed slightly and approached, there came, “Turn that way!”

And the same instant that voice sounded, suddenly a fountain of blood burst forth, and were anyone to see it, they would marvel at the cruelty of the deed, for in the blink of an eye, his torso cut in half, the old pilgrim collapsed on the green grass.135

It is a connecting murder in the sense that it sets in motion the entire plot of the novel, the resulting developments of some forty-plus volumes of the novel stemming from that single instance. Yasuoka Shōtarō wrote about this scene’s role as the novel’s driving force,

The elderly pilgrim, who departed this world within the space of an instant, as though carried away by the mountain wind, could not possibly have even a moment to experience puzzlement or resentment as to what for or why he was killed. However, after that, Tsukue Ryūnosuke does indeed gradually incur the curse stemming from killing the unlucky old pilgrim. Actually no, at first, neither does the reader think that this was the pilgrim’s curse, nor does the author say anything of the sort. It is just that when Tsukue Ryūnosuke returns from the pass to his home in Sawaimura, all kinds of things begin to happen, as though they were waiting for it. Things that are trifling but troublesome, disquieting, and ominous are happening one after another. To speak bluntly, the author does not say a word about these events being brought about via the curse of the dead pilgrim. Yet, the readers themselves begin to think something like that.136

There was never an explanation in *Daibosatsu tōge* as to why Tsukue Ryūnosuke feels this insatiable need to kill. Nakazato Kaizan only describes it as a “fire blazing in his soul,” and suffice it to say that this fire constitutes the essence of Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s ego, as manifested in his blood-curdling and chilling soliloquy:

‘[I] cut people down because I want to; if I could not cut them down, I could not live – I will surely cut down as many as a hundred people, and having cut down a hundred, I will cut down a hundred more. It’s not that I want to cut down only the strong; I want to cut down the weak as well. I want to cut down men, but will cut down women too. Ah, Kōfu is too small – I want to go to Edo. I will go to Edo and will kill people to my heart’s content! Ah, the feeling of having cut down a person – it is only then that I feel truly awake! Ah, I can’t help but feel relief inside my chest when I cut short someone’s screams of ‘Please help!’

Reaching to the left of his seat, Ryūnosuke picked up Tegarayama Masashige’s sword.

‘Tonight, I also killed with this. It was a woman, surely, she screamed in a woman’s voice, ‘Please help!’ Whether she was young or old, I have no idea. I also have no idea whether she had a beautiful or an ugly face. Doesn’t matter if she is young or beautiful, as long as I can cut her down; so long as I can just cut her down, I feel relief in my chest! As I cut her scream short, she kept clinging to me crying, so I cut her down again, that’s why one of her arms remained stuck to my haori.’  

In Cécile Sakai’s words, “Tsukue Ryūnosuke is a singular kind of hero in the sense that there is no justification to his wrongdoings; on the contrary, he appears to be followed by destiny, which makes him commit gratuitous crimes (he does not hesitate to

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kill old men or women, in sum, all those who cross his path) that only his nihilism and his refusal to take the blame, permit him to forget.”\textsuperscript{138}

Despite the similarities between the two protagonists and the nihilism they espouse, their attitudes towards killing are diametrically opposite. Indeed, Nemuri Kyōshirō also kills; he kills scores of men – enemies, challengers, attackers, and assassins. However, he only kills when attacked. Although once he is forced to kill, he does cut a fearsome figure, he takes no pleasure in killing. Facing an opponent, Nemuri Kyōshirō says, “Thus far, I have not been cutting people down because I like it. [おれは、今まで、自分から好んで、人を斬っては居らぬ].”\textsuperscript{139} In another instance, when Nemuri Kyōshirō is attacked by an assassin, whom he overcomes and subdues, he has no interest in gratuitously taking the man’s life:

[P]lacing his knee on the enemy’s back, Kyōshirō unceremoniously jerked him back to life.

As though insulted, the assassin raised his head, but realizing his disgrace, half-groaned,

‘Kill me!’

‘Life is but one. Why don’t we both keep it?’\textsuperscript{140}

While the events of Nakazato Kaizan’s \textit{Daibosatsu tōge} are set in motion with Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s murdering an old pilgrim, Shibata Renzaburō’s \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae}, the first novel in the \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō} series, begins with exactly the

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opposite: the novel opens with Kyōshirō’s saving a life. He saves a gambling dealer who had been exposed as a cheat in a game of dice, and was facing rather unseemly prospects.

The events at the opening of the novel transpire as follows:

As the game continued for several more turns, finally one of the gamblers saw through the dealer’s cheating. Screaming abruptly, “Bastard! You’re double-dealing!” he shook his fists and punched him, rising up threateningly above the gaming board.

“What the hell are you doing?!”

“You think it funny, cheating, you bastard! Hey, everyone! Let’s whack this bookie dealer!”

This was a crowd used to violence. Instantly splitting into two groups, the mob was now bristling with all kinds of daggers, wooden swords, and knives.

At that moment, the rōnin, who was leaning against the wall, slowly rose and spoke,

“Wait… Why don’t you leave this matter to me?”

“Shut up and scram!”

Though the gamblers, who had just discovered cheating, were looking at him with murder in their eyes, the rōnin said, smiling,

“I would like to take this dealer under my charge.”

This time, it was the dealer, who barked back, “What the… we have no business with the likes of you.”

“Even if you don’t, I do.”

“Get lost! Fresh fry!”

An infuriated gambler struck with his drawn short sword.

However, without even parrying, and without batting an eyelid, the rōnin stabbed the gambler in the solar plexus with the tip of his scabbard. With an “Ugh,” the man sank to his knees.

“Now you’ve done it!”

Screaming, the other good-for-nothings rushed to strike, when at that instant, a command issued from the rōnin’s mouth, so imbued with the frightful battle spirit that it silenced the room,

“Enough!”

Though his voice was not that loud, it held enough power to numb one’s limbs at once.

“Hey, young fellow, put on your kimono and follow me.
“O… ok.”
Seemingly overflowing with a strange respect stirring up in him, rather than being taken aback by the rōnin’s domineering attitude, the young dealer hurriedly slipped on his kimono.\textsuperscript{141}

As can be seen, Nemuri Kyōshirō possesses a powerful aura about him that serves him well, occasionally replacing the need to use the sword and influencing (cowering if need be) those around him into submission. That aura is an integral part of his appearance, which he shares with his predecessor, Tsukue Ryūnosuke.

\textbf{2.2 APPEARANCE AND CHARACTER}

The similarity between the two protagonists begins with looks. They share physical features and characteristics – to the point that the reader gets the impression that the same person is being described by two different people.

This is how Kaizan introduces Tsukue Ryūnosuke, the young samurai who has committed a seemingly meaningless crime and the protagonist of the novel, a few moments before the murder took place:

\begin{quote}
...it was a lone samurai. Dressed in a casual black kimono, his crest a horse rampant, his Hakata sash tied up and his swords in prawn-patterned scabbards inlaid with vermilion, without the formal haori surcoat and without leggings, his geta-clad feet bare, having briskly climbed this precipitous path and arriving to a spot on the peak with a beautiful view, he was now tilting his head in a deep braided sedge hat, scanning the Kōshūji environs.

His age around thirty, his slender face of white complexion, his body was slim, but with a well-defined frame.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

Kaizan’s description of Tsukue Ryūnosuke could very well be that of Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō.\textsuperscript{143} Not for nothing the same actor, Ichikawa Raizō played the parts of both protagonists – that of Tsukue Ryūnosuke in Misumi Kenji’s 1960 screen adaptation of *Daibosatsu tōge*, and that of Nemuri Kyōshirō in the 1963-1969 *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series’ screen adaptations. Both Nemuri Kyōshirō and Tsukue Ryūnosuke are around thirty years of age; both are slim and slender, with a physique bespeaking hidden ability. Both protagonists are casually dressed in black. Despite themselves, both exude powerful magnetism that draws women to them (in Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s case – with fatal consequences). Both carry about themselves the invisible yet all the more real seal of tragic fate; in Nemuri Kyōshirō’s case, it is the “smell of blood” (血の匂い) that is keenly felt by those around him with special senses – usually children, or other trained warriors. In one scene, when Nemuri Kyōshirō encounters children, he inadvertently scares them away; they take one look at his face and, one after another, run away crying. His exchange with an old samurai who witnessed it is as follows:

“My face must look bizarre.” [Nemuri Kyōshirō is a half-blood, whose mother is Japanese and father is European.]
“No, it’s not the shape of your face,” the old man countered in a calm tone.
“What are you saying? If not my face, what then scared the children away?”
“Your swordsman’s appearance is imbued with the smell of blood,” was the old man’s blunt response.
Instantly, Kyōshirō scowled.

\textsuperscript{143} See Chapter 1 for Shibata’s description of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s appearance.
As he did so, the old man continued without abating, “That! That murderous look!”
Kyōshirō lost. His opponent kept smiling.
“Since you perceive my swordsman’s spirit, looks like you are no ordinary man.”
“What nonsense! Even the children feel it!”

In Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s case, it is the unusual pallor marking his face, together with the abject lack of any emotion in his comportment; in moments of stress and tension, that paleness increases manifold, the whiteness permeating his eyes and lips. When Ohama, the wife of Utsuki Bunnojō, his rival in the coming fencing match on Mt. Mitake, is pleading with him to lose the bout against Bunnojō under the guise of Bunnojō’s sister, Ryūnosuke stiffens, affected by her beauty and the passion in her voice; his appearance is described as follows, “Sitting stiff like a carved wood effigy, his complexion about as pallid as usual, and without moving a single muscle in his face, Ryūnosuke, would press his lips firmly shut immediately after each word he uttered.”

At the tournament on Mt. Mitake, one of the pivotal moments at the beginning of Daibosatsu tōge, when Ryūnosuke faces Bunnojō and ends up killing him, his paleness only grows stronger:

“Ryūnosuke’s stance is the usual – silently aiming his sword at the opponent’s eyes. The white pallor spread over his face, the inner workings of his heart all the more inscrutable, his breathing normal, only the tip of his wooden sword can be seen moving.”

Both Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō are fierce individualists, valuing above all their freedom, which included gloomy solitude. Nakazato Kaizan wrote about Ryūnosuke, “A man whose body is on fire will jump even into a well. Perhaps, it was on purpose, to extinguish the fire blazing in his soul that Ryūnosuke was seeking desolate and frightening places.”147 Likewise, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character is articulated in such a way as to suggest an almost direct intertextual borrowing, insofar as the search for solitude is concerned, “When weary of women and tired of the sake, Kyōshirō felt gripped by such despair as though he were peering into a bottomless abyss, and had to seek solitary places.”148

While both Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō share a nihilist pedigree, no discussion of their characters would be complete without addressing their swordsmanship, for it constitutes an essential element of their personae, representing an extension of their looks and serving as a vital connecting link between appearance and character.

2.3 SWORD STYLE/SKILL

There are similarities between the two protagonists’ sword styles. Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s “Silent Style” (音無しの構え, otonashi no kamae) is similar to Nemuri Kyōshirō’s “Full-Moon Killing Style” (円月殺法, engetsu sappō) in that in both fencing forms the protagonists enthrall their opponents by seemingly focusing their gaze.

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elsewhere at the pivotal moment of the confrontation, both enticing the opponent to strike at the supposed opening, and at the same time, causing the foe to drop their defenses by drawing their attention to a novel, unfamiliar, and unexpected stance. This is how Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s “Silent style” is described in the scene of his match with Utsuki Bunnojō:

When facing Ryūnosuke’s stance, Bunnojō, too, despite himself, has to assume the “at the eyes” position. With his plump and rosy face, his clear eyes directly opposite those of Ryūnosuke’s gleaming white, he too was a Kōgen ittōryū school’s fencer of renown, and there was no visible difference between the two men’s posture.

However, this match is really a worrisome affair. If attacking from the “at the eyes” stance while facing this “Silent style”, the attacker inevitably gets beaten. Ryūnosuke never makes a move. Drawing him out requires a move by his opponent so that for the most part, those who face the “silent style” for a long time grow restless.149

The match results in Bunnojō’s death; unable to sustain the tension of Ryūnosuke’s “Silent style,” he strikes, as the judge declares a draw, and is killed instantaneously. In another instance, when Ryūnosuke faces Bunnojō’s younger brother Hyōma at the famed Shimada Toranosuke’s fencing school, some three years later, again, his unusual fencing style baffles all present:

Assuming the “at the eyes” stance, Utsuki Hyōma focused his mind on the fight, but strangely, there was not a sign of contest in his opponent’s breathing. Drawn in in his stance, he would not strike nor thrust; what’s more, not a hint of impatience could be seen in him. Encountering such a stance for the first time, Hyōma had difficulty gauging the opponent’s character and, reluctantly, himself ended up not making a move. Sword to sword, eyes locked, silently the two of them were standing in the middle of the dojo.

Indeed this moment was just like the match on top of Mt. Mitake, where Hyōma’s elder brother and this stranger were facing each other with murderous zeal.\textsuperscript{150}

Nakazato Kaizan’s younger brother, Nakazato Ken, credits one Takayanagi Matashirō, a real-life swordsman of renown and the real inventor of the *otonashi no kamae* style with being the inspiration behind Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s sword style.

Like Nemuri Kyōshirō himself descending from Tsukue Ryūnosuke, so does Nemuri Kyōshirō’s Full-Moon Killing Style share provenance with Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s Silent Style. Like Ryūnosuke, Kyōshirō is an adept of the Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa’s (伊藤一刀斎影久, 1560-1653) *ittōryū* (一刀流) style of fencing with its emphasis on the *musōken* (無想剣) technique of instinctual rather than learned responses. Analyzing the fight scene in the *Engetsu kettō* (円月決闘, Full Moon Duel) chapter of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, Makino Yū wrote, “[It] goes without saying that the description offered is a collage out of *Ittōsai sensei kenpōsho* [一刀斎先生剣法書 (1664), manuscript on fencing outlining the *ittōryū* style precepts].”\textsuperscript{151} Moreover, as Makino demonstrated, the instruction on swordsmanship Nemuri Kyōshirō received from his teacher, an old island hermit, appears to be influenced by *Budō gokui* (武道極意, Secret Teachings of Martial Arts, 1934), a book on *ittōryū* style written by Suzuki Reitarō, who himself was the practitioner and teacher of the *ittōryū* form and signed his name as Itō Ittōsai Kagehisa XIV.

\textsuperscript{151} Makino Yū, "Engetsu sappō ron I; sono tenkyo," *Chiba daigaku daigakuin jinbun shakai kagaku kenkyūka* 16 (2008, March): 22.
The *ittōryū* connection between the two protagonists does not end there. Both Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō received instruction in the art of fencing from older masters – figures of knowledge and expertise in the art – Ryūnosuke from his father, and Kyōshirō from an old warrior who takes him under his wing after Kyōshirō is washed ashore following a shipwreck. In both cases, the fencing teachers wanted to impart upon their pupils the notions of righteousness and of mystical connection between the spirit of the sword and the spirit of the man. In both cases the teachers failed, the pupils having perverted their masters’ teachings. Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s bloodthirsty inclinations drove him to use his father’s fencing form to develop his own “evil style” of *ittōryū*, which resulted in his *otonashi no kamae* stance. Speaking with Hyōma, the younger brother of Bunnojō Utsuki, who had been slain by Ryūnosuke during the swordsmanship match at the Mt. Mitake, Ryūnosuke’s father, Danjō, says, “It was clear that this kind of swordsmanship would result in the present situation.” Danjō believes that Ryūnosuke’s swordsmanship, itself being evil in nature, corrupted his soul and drove him along the present path of violence and destruction, exerting a magical power over his son’s mind.

Likewise, when instructed in the way of the sword by the old warrior hermit, Nemuri Kyōshirō is uninterested in the finer philosophical details of the way of the sword; he takes from the master’s instruction only what he needs – the mechanical art of killing:

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In response to the master’s teaching that the way of the sword was the symbol of the Divine Will of Heaven and Earth, without the beginning or the end, and ever without cycles or transformations, Kyōshirō suddenly stated that he had devised the killing style whereby without reaching a state of swordsman’s blank mind with his own sword [無想剣], he would draw the foe into a sleepy void.\textsuperscript{153}

This is how the reader encounters Kyōshirō’s Full Moon Killing Style for the first time and witnesses its effect on the adversary:

Running nimbly to the left, the man positioned himself with sunlight behind him, and drew his short sword. Kyōshirō, who had put some distance between them, saw how splendid his adversary’s stance was and grinned.

“Nemuri Kyōshirō’s Full Moon Killing Style will be the last thing you behold of this world.” No sooner had Kyōshirō uttered this in a low voice than he assumed the “low sword” stance. The tip of his sword was hovering three feet above the ground. Then, gradually it started drawing a circle in the air, starting from the left. As the man’s eyes followed it nearly jumping out of their sockets, strangely, they lost their fighting glean, ceding place instead to a lethargic haze. The moment the sword reached the overhead position, having drawn a half moon, Kyōshirō’s whole body made a leap. Spurting forth a fountain of blood, the man’s body jerked backwards. There had never been a foe, capable of withstanding the completion of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s sword’s full-circle strike.\textsuperscript{154}

Nevertheless, insofar as swordsmanship is concerned, despite the obvious similarities, there is an important and crucial difference between Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō: their attitudes towards the way of the sword could not be further apart. Although Nakazato Kaizan’s Tsukue Ryūnosuke is a cold-blooded killer and a sociopath,


he nevertheless shares some rudimentary samurai values with the society he lives in; though he kills indiscriminately, unconcerned with morality or ethics, merely because it pleases him and he feels free to do so, he nevertheless has some notions of samurai honor and endows his sword with honorific and spiritual characteristics, almost anthropomorphizing it. In Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s words, “When I hold the sword, there are no parents and no children, no pupils and no teachers. Come a match, I will treat even my closest friend as my mortal enemy. That is Ryūnosuke’s way of the warrior”. In the scene referenced above, where Ryūnosuke’s father Danjō speaks with Utsuki Hyōma, he asks Hyōma to kill Ryūnosuke, his own son, in order to put an end to his evil sword form. In doing that, Danjō essentially shares the same belief with Ryūnosuke, Hyōma, and with Ryūnosuke’s nemesis, the fencing master Shimada Toranosuke, namely that swordsmanship has anthropomorphic characteristics, exhibiting the capacity for good or evil, and that it alone is the basis of one’s identity, there existing a mystical connection between the warrior’s character and the style of his fencing. Ryūnosuke’s identity is based on his sword; he equates himself to his skill and identifies himself with his sword.

Like the proverbial man who sees nails everywhere because the only tool in his toolbox is a hammer, Ryūnosuke’s ‘language’ is his sword; fencing, swordsmanship, and killing is his means of communicating with the world. He knows no other language; Kaizan endowed him with no other language of significance. The author, however, more than made up for it in endowing Ryūnosuke with this one. It constitutes the core of his being, his identity, and represents the crystallization of his cold gaze. Tsukue Ryūnosuke

“speaks” with his sword. That is precisely the reason his identity is shaken to its core when he witnesses swordsmanship greater than his own. Involved with the Shinchōgumi, Tsukue Ryūnosuke takes part in one of the endless ambushes that were a feature of the brutal pattern of political assassinations immediately preceding the Meiji Revolution and Restoration. In the scene unfolding below, a select group of Shinchōgumi fighters, including Ryūnosuke, attempt to waylay Kiyokawa Hachirō, only to realize that they made a mistake and attacked the wrong palanquin. The mistake proved to be a costly one. The man emerging from the palanquin is none other than Shimada Toranosuke, a swordsman of great renown and Utsuki Hyōma’s fencing instructor. When Ryūnosuke, who is aware of Shimada’s reputation, realizes whom they ambushed, he is curious to observe Shimada’s skill. What he witnesses changes his self-confidence and sense of invincibility; having beheld the scene below, he emerges a different man.

“Ei!” With a yell that could pierce the metal walls of silver mines, reverberating throughout mountains and valleys and reaching the core of one’s heart and mind, and with a frightful fighting spirit that defied description, Shimada Toranosuke, who had been as silent as a night, leapt out like a storm, and with a single stroke of his sword, cut down at the shoulder, the spirit of one Mizushima of the Shinchōgumi, who had taken a step forward, departed for the better world, dyeing the snow with his blood.

The first death by Shimada’s hand is instantaneous, almost gratuitous, providing, via Ryūnosuke’s eyes, a foretaste of things to come for the Daibosatsu tōge readers. At this point, however, Ryūnosuke does not yet have a full measure of the man the assassins are dealing with.
Having cut down Mizushima, Shimada Toranosuke put his back to the tree that stood behind, and assumed the “aiming at the eyes” stance.

Truth be told, cutthroats that the Shinchōgumi men were, when facing, in the dead of night, Shimada’s ferocious tiger-like voice and his fierce fighting spirit, they froze.

Already, with one Ōtsuka collapsed on the snow, his arm cut off, Shimada was once again with his back to the fence, aiming his sword at the attackers’ eyes, having dispatched two veteran fighters in the blink of an eye.\(^{156}\)

Already, having cut down five of the attackers, Shimada Toranosuke leapt back to that fence, his “aiming at the eyes” stance exuding serene composure.

Impressively, however, as befits members of the Shinchōgumi, not a single one of them flinched or displayed any desire to shy away, even as their comrades were being slaughtered like sheep before their very eyes. If Shimada Toranosuke were akin to a tiger, they were a pack of wolves, fighting for their meat.\(^{157}\)

“Ei!” With Shimada Toranosuke’s fighting yell, two more men were felled on the snow.

“Eiya!” The Shinchōgumi fighting spirit suddenly in disarray, the number of the men surrounding him, indeed seemed to be six in the dim light. Already, those cut down by Shimada numbered seven men.

If seen from a distance, it would appear that calm has returned, enveloping the grounds in stillness for a short while. Then…

“Ei!” The fighting spirit on both sides seethed to a boil and opponents sprang into action jumping and running; sparks flew, blades flashed, and when a lull descended, the attackers were reduced to three men. As for Shimada Toranosuke, as before, he was in his “aiming at the eyes” stance.

There now were eleven men dead on the ground; of the remaining Shinchōgumi there were four.\(^{158}\)

Of those four, one was Tsukue Ryūnosuke, who had been kept in reserve and was now standing in the shadow, observing the slaughter scene unfolding before him. Other than Ryūnosuke, three assassins remained, their leader, Tsujikata Toshizō, as well as two


master swordsmen, one Okada Yaichi of the Ono-ha Ittōryū school, and Katō Chikara, of the Mizoguchi-ha school. Theirs is the pivotal attack of the encounter, for they attack Shimada Toranosuke simultaneously, from the front and from the back:

When Katō Chikara pressed on his powerful attack, his sword grasped near the guard, nearly breathing fire and his spirit like thunder, Shimada Toranosuke gently shifted to the left. Be that as it may, so far Katō Chikara was the only one who had come within crossing swords at the guard with Shimada Toranosuke in this fight. Seeing this, Okada Yaichi must have thought this was his chance, and moved behind Shimada Toranosuke, his sword held aloft, intending to deliver an overhand cutting strike.

Shimada Toranosuke was now facing two powerful enemies, front and back. Katō Chikara struck from the front with a yell, and as the swords entangled at the guard seemed to be at the breaking point, with an “Ei!” scream, Shimada disconnected the crossed swords with a flash.

“Oohm…” As his blade by Inoue Shinkai flew off to the side, broken near the guard, Katō Chikara collapsed on the snow with his last horrible scream, cut from the shoulder by Shimada’s unstoppable sword. Simultaneously, there came Okada Yaichi’s lightning-quick overhand strike from behind. Slanting obliquely the sword with which he cut down Katō Chikara, blade still buried in Katō’s body, Shimada Toranosuke instantaneously aimed it backwards. Without argument, this was a strike that cut a man in two at the abdomen.\footnote{\textit{Nakazato Kaizan, Daibosatsu tōge, vol. 1, Kögen ittōryū no maki} (Tokyo: Fujimi Shobō, 1981), 126-127.}

Shimada’s display of skill makes a profound, identity-crushing impression on Tsukue Ryūnosuke. Up until that point, his demeanor of cold aloofness was due to his confidence in his own skill; as far as Ryūnosuke was concerned, a man had not yet been born who could defeat him. Encountering Shimada and witnessing the man’s superhuman skill has indeed opened the gates of hell before Ryūnosuke; he was now keenly aware of his own mortality:
Ryūnosuke’s notions of skill and his spirit suffered a severe blow; he was enthralled. Never before had he seen such a brilliant technique; even if he tried, he would likely never see anything of the kind again. At first, he thought, “What could this Shimada do?!” Then, “Huh, his skill is better than I thought!” Following this, he thought, “Superb!” And in the end, “Is that a man or a God?”

His ever-increasing admiration has reached the point beyond words or thoughts, when Shimada dispatched his enemies in the front and in the back in a single sword motion. And then, the final realization he made was “In the end, I am no match for this man.” For Ryūnosuke that realization was as painful as having his life force ripped out of him. Nevertheless, whichever way he thought of it, he could not reach any other conclusion.160

This last excerpt is rather crucial to our understanding of the position Nemuri Kyōshirō occupies vis-à-vis Tsukue Ryūnosuke. Shibata Renzaburō endowed Nemuri Kyōshirō with the very same set of skills that caused the collapse of Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s self-confidence and occasioned a rift in his identity when he witnessed Shimada Toranosuke’s swordsmanship. Nemuri Kyōshirō faces no such qualms about his own abilities. Essentially, Nemuri Kyōshirō begins where Tsukue Ryūnosuke ends, or, to reinterpret Ryūnosuke’s self-doubts, Nemuri Kyōshirō is precisely what can end Tsukue Ryūnosuke. Endowing his protagonist with these skills, Shibata enters a conversation with Nakazato Kaizan, whereby Kyōshirō surpasses Ryūnosuke at exactly the point where the latter has “his life force ripped out of him.” Though chronologically, Kyōshirō is Ryūnosuke’s descendant, the tables have now turned; Kyōshirō’s skill eclipses that of Ryūnosuke in the ihatsu o tsugu (衣鉢を継ぐ), “mastering the craft from one’s teacher” meaning of the Japanese maxim. In an apparent reference to the Daibosatsu tōge scene

above, Kyōshirō faces his own challenge, when he finds himself in an ambush, trapped in
the mansion of his arch-foe Bizenya, and facing a group of assassins specially selected to
take him out. Tellingly, the number of the killers – thirteen – is the same as the thirteen
swordsmen Shimada Toranosuke dispatched with such ease in Daibosatsu tōge. Like
Shimada in the Daibosatsu tōge scene quoted above, Nemuri Kyōshirō emerges
unscathed and victorious from this encounter in the Shura no michi (修羅の道, The Path
of Carnage) chapter of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae, all thirteen assassins having found
their death at his hands. The fight unfolds as follows:

As soon as Bizenya disappeared behind the fusuma, the eighty-foot
study immediately filled with murderous intent, emanating from the
thirteen unseen foes. Springing to his feet and lowering his long sword to
his thigh, his tall lean figure casually dressed in black, Kyōshirō imbibed
this moment of frightful silence, and, shadow-like, made a step.
That very instant…
Just as a sorrowful smile etched itself upon his pale white face, he
kicked the tatami and leapt sideways.
“Ei!” With that scream, in a scything sideways motion, he
obliquely sliced the central two panels of a six-panel reed folding screen.
At the same time as that strange yell sounded, a man hiding in that
shadow collapsed together with the screen. As though sailing in the wind,
Kyōshirō’s body moved towards the veranda, sliding on the tatami.
It was soon after sitting down in this study that Kyōshirō saw
through the scheme – to hide a man behind that folding screen, with the
muzzle of a gun trained on him. It was precisely because of this protection
that Bizenya was so calm.

Just like in the Daibosatsu tōge scene quoted above, the first death in this
Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae ambush scene is instant and almost gratuitous,
serving as a prelude to the real fight that follows it:

The fight is in getting the drop on one’s foes.
Running to the right of the veranda with the swiftness of a swallow grazing the surface of a river, Kyōshirō keenly felt with his nerves the signs of movements made by the throng of his invisible foes.

Having run along the veranda for about thirty feet, Kyōshirō hopped into the garden. Kyōshirō sensed that if he traversed the veranda straight from the study and made for the garden, the foes that had been hiding underneath the veranda would come for him in silence, raining swords blows.

Their attack strategy brilliantly thwarted, the ambushers poured from under the veranda, from under the adjacent spaces, from the side shadows, and facing Kyōshirō, they rushed upon him like a pack of wild dogs closing in on their prey.

Cutting through the lawn, Kyōshirō put his back to the two-tiered lantern standing near the earthen entranceway, and lowered down the tip of his sword. A dark and bewitching fighting spirit was exuding from his self-composed and still figure. Quickly spreading, the twelve assassins formed a half-circle in front of him.

The earthen entranceway to the warriors’ mansion was designed to fend off the foe, and with this contraption made of artificial mound, stones, and trees, it was possible for a single person to hold off the enemy. Planting the trees in front of and behind the lantern made it hard to see the entrance clearly because the foliage got in the way, and in addition to the esthetic result of creating a sense of quiet and seclusion, it was intended to shine the light in the enemy’s face, while remaining in the shadow. Thus, the very position of this light, both for friend and foe, was the place of the last stand. Kyōshirō was, so to speak, placed in the same position as the first line of invaders attacking the mansion.

Instantly, the group of assassins forced into the defensive and gradually closing the gaps, furiously resolved to strike one by one, as that was the only thing available to them.

Handpicked by Bizenya and persuaded by the eloquence of his gold, every one of them is a man of great skill. They recognized the frightful magical power permeating Kyōshirō’s unusual stance of lowering the tip of his sword three feet away from his hands.

“He’s mine!...” In a rush to distinguish himself, one of them slowly advanced, sword raised high above his head.

At that intense moment a bloodcurdling and tragic expression appeared on Kyōshirō’s lips, as he made half a step.

“Crossing into the other world, even if you muster the skill to break my full-moon killing style, it is too late!” With these words, silently, he started to spin the tip of his sword.

As Kyōshirō’s sword reached a level position, his adversary, who had been searching for an opening to strike, his pupils widely open and
eyes nearly jumping out of their orbits, suddenly squinted, and an indescribable expression of fear spread over his face.

“Whoo!”

Though it was impossible to see Kyōshirō’s sword finding its mark, his adversary, still holding his sword aloft, staggered. Then, as his face suddenly jerked upwards, a crimson fountain gushed forth from his throat, spurting a foot into the air.

Kyōshirō’s posture reverted to its original stance, and was not making the slightest movement.

At last, coloring the leaves and branches vermillion, the sunlight imbued with heat dappled Kyōshirō’s figure, emanating mysterious energy with spots of light and shadow.

“Kyah!”

Proudly displaying his speed of a bird in flight, a man rushed at him from the left. However, the fell blow of his sword only connected with the edge of the lantern behind Kyōshirō, producing a firework of sparks.

“Wah!” the attacker screamed, his eyes running wild and his face cruelly bloodied like a crushed Chinese lantern plant.

By then, Kyōshirō, already turned to the fourth opponent and started drawing a half-moon figure in the air with his sword. Yelling like a man cornered into a wall, beyond fear and hate, his adversary bared his white teeth in despair, and, abandoning his hasso posture, came at him with a ferocious cutting blow. However, having gotten a fierce slash in the blink of an eye, he too collapsed on the mossy ground.

That same instant… Quickly and nimbly moving to the right, Kyōshirō started drawing the full moon with his sword for the third time, drawing the fifth and the sixth opponent to its gliding tip with the magnetic pull it exuded. Mysteriously, tinted maniacally like glowing embers, Kyōshirō’s pupils were fixated blankly on the empty space between the fifth and the sixth attacker. Absorbing the golden sunlight, his spinning blade was glittering radiantly.

“Hyei!” In a rush to meet his death, and nearly rending his throat with the onslaught of fighting spirit, his looks fearsome, the fifth attacker, confronted that flash.

Pivoting his foot, Kyōshirō opened up ever so slightly to the right, and in the blink of an eye, splitting his foe diagonally from the base of the neck to the thorax with the dull bone-ripping sound, and dodging the fountain of fresh blood, returned his sword to the original stance.

The moment the sixth attacker’s overhand strike whooshed in the air, passing just over his shoulder, Kyōshirō’s sword riposted, striking the man’s torso with full force.
Having felled two men in the blink of an eye, Kyōshirō shook off the blood, and abandoning his hitherto assumed ‘silent’ fighting attitude, suddenly felt his whole being overflowing with the merciless fighting spirit.

“Come on!” With that scream, his alter ego eagerly moved on the offensive, gliding his sword tip over the ground.

His back to the attackers, Kyōshirō boasted in his mind, as he entered within the range of their swords,

“Bizenya! Take a good look at my killing style!” As he did so, he faced the opponents from everywhere, and turning all around, one after another, he offered them to his full-moon-style sword, drenching the white gravel, the stones, and the moss with their life blood.\textsuperscript{161}

Although, technically, Nemuri Kyōshirō is of samurai stock, being a rōnin (masterless samurai) like Tsukue Ryūnosuke, his attitude vis-à-vis swordsmanship is an antithesis to the traditional sword worship encountered in the earlier kengō shōsetsu novels, Daibosatsu tōge included. Nemuri Kyōshirō “regards his sword as simply an implement for wreaking destruction.”\textsuperscript{162} The sword to him is a tool, to be used for rather mundane and ignoble purposes. Shibata says as much himself, in his essay, “The Birth of Nemuri Kyōshirō,” “[For him] the sword is not ‘the warrior's spirit,’ but no more than a lethal tool, and being such, is convenient enough to be used for whatever purpose at hand. Whether stripping off a woman's clothes, cutting down a dog, or even poking at excrement – he has no compunctions about any of it.”\textsuperscript{163} In fact, giving up the hitherto requisite veneration of the sword as a magical extension of the self, results in the opening

\textsuperscript{161} Shibata Renzaburō, Shibata Renzaburō senshū, vol. 1, Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1997), 81-84.

\textsuperscript{162} Scott Langton, "A Literature for the People: A Study of Jidai Shōsetsu in Taishō and Early Shōwa Japan," (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 343, ProQuest (304632034).

up, in Shibata’s treatment of the Nemuri Kyōshirō character, of an assortment of additional other functions for the weapon – ranging from erotic humiliation (which, incidentally, replaces killing), as can be seen in the passage below, to an instrument of mercy:

Her features twisted dreadfully, Shima pulled the third and fourth by-knife from behind her back and threw them. Parrying them with ease, Kyōshirō kept advancing step by step, composed and unblinking. As soon as Shima threw her fifth by-knife, she pulled a dagger from her chest, grasping it backhandedly; upon seeing this, Kyōshirō let a sarcastic smile cross his lips. Aiming at Kyōshirō, who had come to within four feet, with his sword lowered, Shima struck with a piercing screech. Kyōshirō’s body swiveled sideways, and at the same time, Shima’s sky-blue sash of patterned satin slid down to her feet, cut to pieces. As the panic-stricken Shima dropped her dagger and was trying to hold her skirt, Kyōshirō’s sword came dancing from behind, slicing her ornate crisscross-patterned dress diagonally from the hem. Splitting wide open on her back, her garment rolled forward and down to her feet, leaving Shima tottering. Facing this pathetic form, Kyōshirō’s sword renewed its merciless onslaught. Soon, cutting and peeling her white inner kimono and her red silk undershirt, it revealed her plump and fleshy shoulders, breasts, back, and thighs. Then, at last, simultaneously with the woman’s scream of despair, Kyōshirō peeled off the last layer of clothing covering her loins with the tip of his sword, sending it flying through the air; he then abruptly, sheathed his sword, turned towards Ieyoshi and, bowing politely, withdrew.164

Kyōshirō’s sword could also serve as the “sword of mercy” (慈悲の剣), quickly and painlessly dispatching the wounded enemy.165 Other than the requisite shock value intended to generate interest in the series and help sales (and perhaps a manifestation of Shibata’s own distaste for all things martial and military that only a decade before


165 See chapter 3 for Shibata’s discussion of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s hypnotic use of the sword.
Japan’s military authorities were drilling into the populace so relentlessly and with such dire consequences), the reason for such attitude on Nemuri Kyōshirō’s part can be traced to his origins.

While Nakazato Kaizan’s Tsukue Ryūnosuke is from a respectable samurai family, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s lineage holds a terrible secret that renders his pedigree beyond ignoble: he is the product of an unholy union between a disgraced foreign priest who renounced his faith and sold himself, body and soul, to the devil under torture (on top of being manifestly the “other,” Nemuri Kyōshirō’s father displays the additional disgrace of weakness of character), and a daimyo’s daughter, whom he raped in revenge for being tortured by her father. Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s conduct and nihilistic attitude are shocking precisely because they constitute a rejection of and a contrast to everything proper; a grotesque deviation from the norm. In Nemuri Kyōshirō’s case, the opposite holds true: his character and behavior are the direct result of his dark and twisted beginnings. It is not so much his conduct as it is his very existence that represents an aberration of reality and a deviation from the norm. Shibata himself said the following regarding the origins of his favorite protagonist in his essay, “The Birth of Nemuri Kyōshirō”:

His birth was a most sorrowful affair. It became the most extreme fate-twisting circumstance of his life. [A priest [伴天連] from a foreign land, who, having been tortured, has betrayed his faith, fallen, sold himself body and soul to the devil, raped a woman, and the child born as a result — physically or metaphysically — there isn’t any provenance as tragic as this. How could he not be a nihilist?166

Although Nemuri Kyōshirō is indeed doomed to be a nihilist by the “sorrowful affair” of his birth, as Shibata’s pen seemed to have ordained it, it is in the manner his persona and his nihilism change and evolve throughout the novel that there appears to be the greatest source of character complexity that sets him apart from Tsukue Ryūnosuke; that complexity and character evolution come to the fore in the two protagonists’ relationships and interactions with female characters.

2.4 FEMALE COUNTERPARTS AND CHARACTER GROWTH

The effect the two protagonists have on female characters around them can be likened to a fire attracting moths. The magnetism that both Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō exude is of a lethal nature: women do not survive around them. Yet, female characters in both Daibosatsu tōge and the Nemuri Kyōshirō series serve as important markers of the protagonists’ character development – or lack thereof. In Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s case, the character’s bizarre lack of capacity for even the basic introspection means that he is not consciously aware of any feelings other than his thirst for murder – even when he does feel a genuine human emotion, as he did when he met Ohama. As a result, this desire to kill trumps all the other human feelings and traits of the character. In fact, it is rare to encounter in the body of the Daibosatsu tōge any descriptions of Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s thinking or any kind of inner processes; the narrator’s voice either describes his actions and movement, or provides a third-person
omniscient perspective of his character. When Ryūnosuke encounters Ohama for the first time, he feels an emotion that he is unable to articulate; as Ohama leaves after his refusal to lose against Bunnojō, he orders his manservant Yohachi to kidnap her, tormented by a vague yearning. What for? Ryūnosuke himself appears to be unsure. The narrator’s voice goes on to say,

Until Ohama left the mansion, he had no such thought, but after the woman left the gates a thought suddenly occurred to him that no matter what, he must not allow the woman to go back; thus, mixed in Ryūnosuke’s heart were two feelings – the stone-headed stubbornness and the impulsiveness that went beyond reason or logic. In the beginning, there was still some attempt at reasoning, but the thing he did after that, was indeed a loss of face.¹⁶⁷

For a man whose only language is the sword, there is no possibility, no means to experience any other emotion fully. What he does feel, he is barely conscious of. That is why Nakazato Kaizan’s protagonist is a prisoner inside his own mind, subject to his own murderous urges. Tsukue Ryūnosuke can be likened to an autist possessing of a single set of skills far surpassing anything an ordinary person can muster, but lacking in every other aspect of human development. This mental handicap cannot have left untouched Ryūnosuke’s development as a character. Encapsulated within the narrow confines of his murderous urges, Tsukue Ryūnosuke is in stasis; his character does not change, improve, or develop to any meaningful degree. His interactions with women – Ohama, Otoyo, Ogin, and others, do not occasion any change in his personality. Nakazato Kaizan

peppers the narrative with occasional hints that point to a potential character change (such as Ryūnosuke’s shock of witnessing Shimada Toranosuke’s swordsmanship, his encountering Ohama’s doppelganger Otoyo after murdering Ohama, or his professed affection for his son Ikutarō in later volumes), but these turn out to be false alarms and at the end of the novel Ryūnosuke is as bloodthirsty as he was at the start, and his character every bit as inscrutable. Encountering female characters does nothing to change his personality; in fact, the opposite happens – his very being warps the world around his female counterparts, changing them with tragic consequences. For instance, Ryūnosuke’s relationship with Ohama has been described from the rather misogynist point of view that ascribes blame for Ryūnosuke’s misfortunes to her manipulations. Scott C. Langton, in his dissertation, “A Literature for the People: A Study of Jidai Shōsetsu in Taishō and Early Shōwa Japan,” called Ohama a “manipulative virago” and posited that her character belonged within the dokufu (毒婦, evil, poisonous woman) narrative tradition of fictional accounts from the 1870s. However, a close reading of the text reveals quite the opposite: Ohama is not the manipulative seducer enticing a hero with her charms (essentially, a perspective taken almost verbatim from Ryūnosuke himself). Rather, she herself is a helpless victim, drawn into Ryūnosuke’s orbit from which there is but one escape – death. Analyzing Ohama’s role and conduct, Nozaki Rokusuke wrote in his book, Nazotoki Daibosatsu tōge (謎解き大菩薩峠, The Riddle That Is Daibosatsu tōge, 1997),

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The circumstances that have led to Ohama’s visiting Ryūnosuke’s mansion are not necessarily her responsibility. It’s not like Ohama had the evil streak inside of her, as she came to be abused and maligned after her death. She had gone to beg for consideration from Ryūnosuke, selected as her husband Bunnojō’s opponent in the ceremonial match, but as it were, her luck ran out and her misfortune began. It was her counterpart who was evil.\footnote{Nozaki Rokusuke, \textit{Nazotoki Daibosatsu tōge} [The riddle that is \textit{Daibosatsu tōge}] (Osaka: Kaihō Shuppansha, 1997), 37.}

To borrow Francisco Goya’s maxim, “The sleep of reason produces monsters,” the sleep of every human feeling in Tsukue Ryūnosuke, except the desire to kill, produces monsters, warping reality around him (in the example below – in the very real sense, materializing Ohama’s feelings of guilt and nightmares into rats), twisting Ohama’s mind and driving her to madness and despair:

Come the dead of night, Ryūnosuke was tormented by nightmares. Awakened by the sound of her husband’s moans, Ohama looked at his sleeping face, finding it indescribably frightful. His horrible growls, mixed with the sound of grinding teeth deep in the night, sounded like the laughter of a demon. Shivering, Ohama, embraced Ikutarō, pulling him closer to her bosom, and as she was about to cover him with a blanket, she chanced to glance towards the funerary shrine. Since the couple did not own a shrine for the dead, this was something left over by the previous tenant. Stained and covered with spider webs, the image of the Buddha or some such that was inside, was not something Ohama would be particularly concerned about, but at this moment, the shrine was rumbling loudly. This was nothing mysterious, for inside rats were running amok. Even so, since the noise was too much, Ohama tried to shoo them away, ‘Shh!’

As she did so, the rats’ noise suddenly stopped, but before long, a huge rat leaped, landing right near Ohama’s headrest with a flapping noise. Shocked, Ohama raised her headrest and tried to hit the rat, but flustered,
it bounded right between her breast and the face of Ikutarō, who had just fallen asleep in her arms.

‘Ah!’

In panic, Ohama tried to pull away. Ever maddened, the rat vaulted inside her clothes, towards her stomach.

‘Aaahh!’

Ohama leapt from her bed. That very moment, as the rat fell down on Ikutarō’s face with a plop, Ikutarō burst in tears as if he had been burned.

‘Oh, baby, baby’

In a hurry, Ohama lifted Ikutarō. As she did so, the rat climbed the fusuma sliding screen and disappeared into a corner hole where the crumbling wall met the ceiling. All the while, Ikutarō’s crying sounded as though emanating from the very core of his being.

‘Oh, all’s good, all’s good, the rat’s gone!’

Opening her garments, Ohama tried to offer him her breast, but then found a drop of blood there.

‘Dear, please wake up! It’s bad!’

Holding the screaming Ikutarō with one hand, Ohama stretched her other hand, frantically pushing Ryūnosuke to wake up.

‘What is it?’

Ryūnosuke opened his eyes. He was startled by the sound of Ikutarō’s crying, but upon feeling himself, he was also startled to discover that his body was drenched in sweat as though soaked in water.

‘Take a closer look, the baby got bitten by a rat!’

‘What? By a rat?’

‘Yes, a huge rat came out of the shrine, got here and bit the baby.’

‘Let me see.’

Ryūnosuke got up, lit a wick lamp, and as he was examining Ikutarō’s body, he found a linear scratch on his throat. It wasn’t a particularly deep scratch, but blood was seeping from it in earthworm-sized drops.

‘He had his throat bitten!’ Ohama screamed madly.170

Within Ryūnosuke’s orbit, in the dead of night, Ohama’s mind begins to warp, twisting and playing tricks on her:

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[T]hen, though he started crying again, he had no more voice left in him for screaming, so he was only shedding tears, drop after drop, while fixing his mother’s face with such a stare of his wide-open eyes that her whole body shook.

‘My baby, is it still hurting? Please don’t gaze at your mother with such a frightful look!’ Ohama started crying, exhausted. Ikutarō, his body trembling, kept staring fixedly at his mother’s face with the same unblinking eyes.

‘Oh, why are you so mean to your mother? What could it be, I wonder.’

Crying, Ohama looked at her child’s face, but then, ‘Ah, this is the retribution, indeed it’s retribution. This is the true divine retribution, no mistake about it.’

The darkness closing in on her, Ohama is going mad, experiencing tunnel vision and hallucinations:

[T]he face of the suffering Ikutarō had Bunnojō’s deathly pallor; rats’ noise from the ceiling was Bunnojō’s voice; ghosts seemed to emerge from behind the folding screen; inside the shrine for the dead, his face blue, Bunnojō was scowling at her; looking at the futon’s arabesque pattern, she felt as though those slippery tendrils were reaching for her, coiling around her neck; from behind the dresser a long arm was stretching towards Ohama, trying to caress her breasts and stomach; from the drawer of a sewing box, a cloud was seeping, intent on stuffing Ohama’s eyes and mouth; demons were about to appear from the rips in the sliding door and carry Ikutarō away.

This warping of Ohama’s mind in Ryūnosuke’s orbit can have but one outcome—in the end, the psychological tension she experiences translates into her physical death at Ryūnosuke’s hands. In Nozaki Rokusuke’s words, referenced earlier, “[H]er luck ran out and her misfortune began” the moment she appeared at the doorstep of the Tsukue

mansion, intent on begging on her husband’s behalf. In fact, only two actions of Ohama’s can be read as direct results of her free will: her fateful decision to come see Ryūnosuke in order to ask him to lose in the coming bout against Bunnojō, and her attempt to kill Ryūnosuke in order to stop him from killing her brother-in-law Hyōma; everything else in between – eloping with Ryūnosuke to Edo, their life as husband and wife, giving birth to Ikutarō – was no more than milestones of doom, leading to and culminating in her death in the early morning near the Zōjōji Temple. The words, “Ryūnosuke has finally murdered Ohama” do not merely conclude the life of one character – Ohama; they serve as the affirmation of the static nature and intransience of another – Tsukue Ryūnosuke.¹⁷³

In contrast to Daibosatsu tōge, an examination of the role female characters play in the Nemuri Kyōshirō series reveals that they serve as measures of the protagonist’s growth and development as a character. While the female characters in Daibosatsu tōge are unable to influence the protagonist and are truly secondary to Tsukue Ryūnosuke (Even though Kaizan himself disputed Ryūnosuke’s status as the main protagonist), broken, killed, and discarded by him, the dynamics of the interaction between Nemuri Kyōshirō and his female counterparts paint a more complex picture of a character capable of evolving. Nemuri Kyōshirō stands out from the previous nihilist protagonists, Tsukue Ryūnosuke included. In Makino Yū’s words,

[K]yōshirō’s nihilism being of an ever-deepening nature, he is set up as a character capable of growing with experience. Were a comparison to be made to prewar nihilist swordsmen, whether it be Tange Sazen, or Gunji Jirōmasa’s Shinnō Tsuruchiyo, nihilist though they are, it is hard to think

of them as basing their actions on intellect; they are dissolute from one
scene to the next.

[T]o think of it, would it not be possible to say that Kyōshirō has
long overtaken Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s and Shinnō Tsuruchiyo’s position?\textsuperscript{174}

Indeed, Nemuri Kyōshirō is a protagonist capable of changing – all the more so
because Shibata endowed him with the ability for self-reflection, a feature conspicuously
absent in Tsukue Ryūnosuke. That ability could not leave the character’s development,
especially as occasioned by female characters, unaffected. Structurally, \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō
burai hikae} shares an important element of the storyline with \textit{Daibosatsu tōge} – that is, in
both works, soon after female characters make an appearance, they suffer rape at the
protagonists’ hands. Infatuated with Ohama, Tsukue Ryūnosuke orders his manservant
Yohachi to kidnap her and rapes her in an abandoned watermill; she later becomes his
wife and, in the end, is killed by him. Similarly, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s relationship with
Mihoyo – one of his main female counterparts in \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae} – begins
with a rape in the following scene:

[L]ike a wind, the attack came from the rear. Coiling his body, Kyōshirō
twisted backwards the arm holding a short sword, effortlessly pinning the
denemy to the floor.

‘Not a chance, you won’t…’

With his eyes wide open in the dark, Kyōshirō peered into the
foe’s face. There was a pleasant scent of makeup and skin. The adversary
was struggling violently in total silence. The supple resilience of the thighs
and arms he was pressing against brought Kyōshirō’s blood to a boil.

‘If you realized that resisting is pointless, you’d resign yourself to
it. They should have taught you that. Spies have to accept all kinds of
humiliation.’

\textsuperscript{174} Makino Yū, "Nemuri Kyōshirō; Seikaku no hensen - burai kara kyomu he," \textit{Chiba daigaku nihon bunka
Kyōshirō’s whisper was the last straw that took the woman’s strength away.

Enveloping the man and the woman in silence, the darkness continued.

Suddenly, pulling away from the woman, Kyōshirō got out of the bed. The woman did not move, as though she were dead.

The moment Kyōshirō’s hand struck a flint with a click, the woman rose as though laid bare, emitting an ‘Ah!’ in a voice of frightened shock.

‘Anything but the light, I beg of you...’

Kyōshirō coldly turned down this supplication of deathly urgency.

‘You did not stealthily get in by observing all the niceties, so be good to bear it now.’

Miho’s rape takes place in the very first chapter of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae; she later becomes Kyōshirō’s wife (common-law), and in the end, dies, though not by his hand. This, however, is where the similarities end. Unlike Tsukue Ryūnosuke, for whom rape is simply an act of taking what he wants – in this instance, taking a woman’s body (much like taking someone’s life, as is his custom), Nemuri Kyōshirō does not do it to merely please himself; he is constantly tormented by gloom and self-loathing, and rape, much like incessant drinking and whoring, appears to be merely an attempt to drive away the dejectedness by inflicting more pain upon himself first and foremost. Later on, Kyōshirō also gets sexually involved with another female character, Shizuka, who is the daughter of his mother’s sister. Writing about that aspect of Kyōshirō’s personality, Nakamura Katsuzō pointed out the following,

Kyōshirō rapes his own cousin, knowing she is his cousin. Rather than an extreme enjoyment of sex, this is due to infatuation with emptiness

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[虚無] and self-torment [自虐]. Sometimes, Kyōshirō also roams the prostitutes’ dwellings. That is the self-tormenting world where he descends further and further into the abyss of nothingness while trying to shake off his obsession with his dejected emptiness. 

Although Nakamura Katsuzō uses the word “rape” (犯す), a close reading of the text of the scene paints a more complex picture. However, the text bears out Nakamura Katsuzō’s assertion: Kyōshirō’s dissolute meandering does not have as its purpose the pursuit of pleasure – rather, to this man, pleasure is a means to an end – that is, plunging into forgetfulness, chasing away gloom and pain, and the burned-out skies in the passage below are a metaphor for Kyōshirō’s state of mind and a fitting setting for his roaming:

Aimlessly, Kyōshirō would wander from one prostitute’s dwelling to another, under the skies so frequently burned-out by the incessant street

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177 The scene Nakamura Katsuzō refers to unfolds as follows:

Kyōshirō regained his awareness of holding a girl in his arms after hearing her murmuring, ‘I am cold.’

‘Cold? Are you shivering?’

‘Y.. yes.’

Her teeth making small chattering, sounds, Shizuka curled her trembling body in a ball.

Kyōshirō hugged her with both hands even more vigorously.

However, Shizuka’s shudders gradually got only stronger. The stronger Kyōshirō’s arms became, the more violent her shudders felt.

Finally...

Having shut the door, Kyōshirō nimbly untied Shizuka’s sash and removed her kimono, undershirt, underskirt, and loincloth.

She lost her strength to refuse.

Likewise, having also undressed, Kyōshirō unfurled a straw mat that was resting next to a pile of brushwood, and spreading it on the earthen floor, lowered Shizuka on her back, positioning himself on top of her.

As he embraced her neck with both hands, ran both hands along her body, enveloping both her legs with his own, and slowly started the friction that would bring to life warmth between the two bodies, an entranced cry, ‘Ah!’ escaped Shizuka’s lips. (Shibata Renzaburō, Shibata Renzaburō senshū, vol. 1, Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1997), 213-214)
fires that were called the flowers of Edo. More than anything, plunging into amnesia from one moment to the next was all he could do to chase away his ever-deepening fixation on gloomy emptiness.\footnote{178 Shibata Renzaburō, Shibata Renzaburō senshū, vol. 1, Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1997), 173.}

In fact, the scene of Mihoyo’s rape above appears to have some foundation in Shibata’s own experience, when, still a middle-school student, he forced his affections on one Tomie, his family’s married neighbor. Shibata recalled the incident as follows,

> Whispering, Tomie resisted, ‘No! No! You mustn’t!’
> At the time, it was extremely rare for women to wear underwear.
> As my hand accidentally touched her there, she stopped resisting.
> ‘Just this once, alright? Only tonight!’
> Having stressed this, Tomie stretched both her hands and embraced my neck, fixing her lips to mine.\footnote{179 Shibata Renzaburō, Waga seishun buraichō (Tokyo: Chuo Kōron, 2005), 14.}

The above-referenced scene of Kyōshirō’s raping Mihoyo in Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae appears to share an important element with Shibata’s own experience with Tomie – despite the forced nature of the encounter, the woman’s resistance is soon replaced by genuine passion (At least, that is how Shibata himself chose to articulate it). Unlike Tsukue Ryūnosuke, who falls in love with Ohama without ever being able to articulate it to himself, Nemuri Kyōshirō is fully aware of his feelings for Mihoyo.\footnote{180 Although Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s feelings for Ohama are never articulated in the narrative, there are indications in the text of Daibosatsu tōge that point to his affection being genuine. Scott C. Langton believes that Ryūnosuke’s encountering Ohama-like doppelgangers after murdering Ohama is a manifestation of the Buddhist theme of karmic cause and effect (Langton, 176). Were this true, however, Ryūnosuke would be bound to encounter countless copies of everyone he has killed; yet he only encounters Ohama’s look-alikes after killing her, which suggests that of all the people whom he had murdered, it is Ohama who occupies a special place in his sub-consciousness, coming back to haunt him.}

\*124
love begins as an enchantment, a reaction to her beauty, and the constant resurgence of her image in his mind causes him to engage in introspection and self-analysis; as a result, his feelings for Mihoyo deepen, eventually maturing into full-fledged love. Despite the rape that began their acquaintance, the feeling is mutual; Mihoyo falls under the spell of this strange rōnin, who took her by force at first, but would later risk his life, saving her on numerous occasions. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s feelings for Mihoyo evolve; at first, despite being in love with her, he still prefers his solitary life:

Now, if there was something Kyōshirō could do for this drifting woman, who looked so much like his dead mother, he would willingly do it no matter how hard it was. It is just that the two of them sharing life under the same roof was something unbearable for Kyōshirō. Choosing Mihoyo, who did not know better than abandon herself, body and soul, to love, made his heart heavy. Even more than Mihoyo’s rare kind of beauty, Kyōshirō still loved his dejected solitude. 181

With the progression of the novel, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s feelings for Mihoyo evolve, from the initial attraction and affection “despite himself,” to genuine love. When Mihoyo’s life is in danger in the Shōgun no bishō (将軍の微笑, The Shogun’s Smile) chapter of Burai hikae, Kyōshirō’s reaction is a scream in his heart, “I love Mihoyo!

The vague yearning he experiences upon meeting Ohama for the first time, allowing her to convince him to elope with her to Edo after the fateful match where he killed Bunnojō (despite being fully prepared to fight those intent on avenging Bunnojō), not showing up for his duel with Hyōma after killing Ohama (despite his apparent lack of fear and preparedness to fight) – all point to an emotion specifically connected to Ohama, and powerful enough to interfere with his intentions of the moment.

Mihoyo is mine!”\textsuperscript{182} The narrator’s choice of words, “おれは美保代に惚れている！美保代はおれのものだ！ 烈しく、心中で叫んだ” indicates the evolution of a feeling in the protagonist, and a metamorphosis that is a far cry from Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s chilling composure vis-à-vis female characters. It is therefore natural that the evolution of Kyōshirō’s feeling for Mihoyo goes hand-in-hand with his evolution as a character; her presence in his life, and eventually, her death, changes him from a man who bases his nihilistic actions on impulsive reactions to the environment and events around him, to a man whose nihilism, having deepened and matured, relies more on intellect and a measure of restraint.

Makino Yū makes note of the character transformation that occurs between the first novel of the series, \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae} and the seventh novel, \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō mujō hikae}, a transformation that was specifically occasioned by the female characters, Mihoyo and Shizuka:

The two female heroines of \textit{Burai hikae} are Mihoyo and Shizuka; after the end of \textit{Burai hikae}, having experienced both their deaths, Nemuri Kyōshirō no longer gives vent to extreme violent emotions and does not engage in constant moment-driven behavior, like the swordsmen from the prewar \textit{jidai shōsetsu} novels did in similar circumstances. This being one of the balancing elements, insofar as maturity, it shows the shift that has taken place from the “nihilistic man” [虚無的な男] to the “nihilist man” [虚無の男].\textsuperscript{183}


Indeed, Nemuri Kyōshirō undergoes a transformation, as he reminisces over Mihoyo’s death and the role she played in his life, as evidenced in the text, at the close of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae:

[W]ith her passing, it again became clear to Kyōshirō what it meant for a man like himself to have a companion as important and irreplaceable as Mihoyo.

Silently, he compared his conduct before and after knowing Mihoyo. His dissolute actions, his natural selfishness, turned to something possessing orderliness. Before he knew it, there was born in him a sense of temperance that kept insanity at bay, and he would not forget that sense of life equilibrium even on the threshold of death. It could be said that it was because of Mihoyo’s love that he himself forged the fetters for keeping his own self in check.184

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s attitude vis-à-vis women can also be seen as serving another important function – that of an anchor linking him to Shibata’s own time, rather than the late Edo period in which the novel is set. Though Kyōshirō does not kill unnecessarily, there is something of a misogynist contempt for women in the ease with which he takes them – either buying them in brothels, or taking them whenever it suits him, as was the case with Mihoyo and Shizuka, discussed above. In that, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s attitude could not have been much different from and, likely, reflected that of thousands of ex-soldiers, who suddenly flooded all strata of the Japanese society after the end of World War II. Those were men used to living on the edge, used to meting out and receiving violence; they were also prepared to suffer death at a moment’s notice and were

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desensitized to all kinds of viciousness, including sexual violence. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character can be seen as incorporating that collective experience, translating it into the bitterness and intensity of the protagonist’s existence between life and death and his treatment of women as commodities.

On the subject of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s views on women, Akiyama Shun wrote the following in his article “Shibata Renzaburō – mō hitori no fukuinsha” (Shibata Renzaburō, one more demobilized soldier), likening Kyōshirō’s attitude to that of a demobilized soldier,

How about these words by the protagonist of Ōoka Shohei’s novel, *Fires on the Plain*, who having returned to Japan after the war, describes the peaceful everyday life, ‘Men are all cannibals, and women are all whores.’ Are these words not fitting something Nemuri Kyōshirō would say? In fact, he does indeed tread throughout the novel muttering something like this. 185

In an imaginary conversation between Shibata and his creation, however, Nemuri Kyōshirō explains his views on women, rejecting accusations of misogyny:

I have no disdain for women. No, rather, at times, I accept that in this existence women are to be cherished beyond measure. It’s just that I cannot stand it when no matter what tragic circumstances women find themselves in, they immediately try to affirm the world around them. My mother was like that. Raped by a fallen priest [転び伴天連], she gave birth to me, and thinking this to be her fate, resigned herself to becoming a sacrifice in that merciless Black Mass. That is why I resent my mother. Not because she gave birth to me. Mihoyo, too, is walking the same path

as my mother. After she was raped by me, she decided that it was her fate to follow me.\footnote{186 Shibata Renzaburō, "Nemuri Kyōshirō no joseikan," \textit{Fujin kōron} 43, no. 3 (1958, March): 275-276.}

When Shibata objects, remarking that the times have changed, and so have women, Kyōshirō responds, “Too bad, it’s hard for me to think that it is that different from the period I lived in!”\footnote{187 Shibata Renzaburō, "Nemuri Kyōshirō no joseikan," \textit{Fujin kōron} 48, no. 3 (1958, March 1): 276.} Thus, Shibata confirms, via Kyōshirō, that although the latter lives in the Edo period, this is no more than a ruse, a literary device for bringing the action to the present.

### 2.5 THE CONTEXT OF NIHILISM: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Scott C. Langton’s premise regarding the \textit{jidai shōsetsu} novels, namely that, “Although it [the \textit{jidai shōsetsu} genre] follows received conventions in portraying characters and events in the past, \textit{jidai shōsetsu} is also about the present, for it reflects the author's consciousness of his contemporary milieu,” is equally applicable to Japan’s postwar historical fiction, which likewise reflects the contemporary circumstances surrounding the author and his milieu to a far greater extent than it reflects the historical era in which it is purportedly set.\footnote{188 Scott C. Langton, "A Literature for the People: A Study of Jidai Shōsetsu in Taisho and Early Showa Japan," (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 8, ProQuest (304632034).} Both Nakazato Kaizan and Shibata Renzaburō’s novels discussed in this chapter follow the pattern of reflecting their respective eras far
more than the past they are set in. Their respective protagonists’ nihilism is the authors’
way of reacting to and, perhaps, lashing out at the society they observed and knew.

Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s grim obsession with killing is generally interpreted as a
product of the suffocating political atmosphere in Japan at the time Nakazato Kaizan
started writing the novel. During the 1910 High Treason Incident, the government
arrested scores of leftists and socialists, among them, Kōtoku Shūsui (幸徳秋水, 1871-
1911) a prominent anarchist thinker whom Kaizan knew personally and whose writing he
had read. Kōtoku was accused of planning a violent overthrow of the Meiji monarchy and
of conspiring to assassination the emperor. Although the evidence against the accused
appeared circumstantial, they were found guilty and sentenced to death. Kaizan himself
did not seem to have any doubts about the outcome of the trial. At the end of 1911,
Kōtoku and eleven of his co-defendants, including a woman, Kanno Sugako (管野須賀子,
1881-1911), were executed by the authorities and the period of reaction in Japan began.

In Scott Langton’s words, “The hopelessness expressed in Daibosatsu tōge has been
interpreted as his attempt to portray feelings common to many during the “winter years”
(fuyu no jidai) of the socialist movement.”¹⁸⁹ Takei Masahiro wrote, “Unmistakably,
Kaizan felt dissatisfied with and resisted the society’s transformation, brought about
heavy-handedly by the new Meiji government.”¹⁹⁰ It is also telling that Daibosatsu tōge
was not an overnight success; though its serialized publication began in 1913, the

¹⁸⁹ Scott C. Langton, ”A Literature for the People: A Study of Jidai Shōsetsu in Taisho and Early Showa
Japan,” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 136, ProQuest (304632034).
¹⁹⁰ Takei Masahiro, Nakazato Kaizan; ai no kussetsu [Nakazato Kaizan; love refracted] (Kōfu: Yamanashi
Furusato Bunko, 1992), 18.
published portions were few and rather far between; it was only in 1921, when Shunjūsha
published the first part of the novel as a standalone book, that Daibosatsu tōge gained
recognition. That same year Daibosatsu tōge was adapted for stage by the New National
Theatre (新国劇). The publication of the standalone volume led to the renewed interest in
the novel and happened at the time when Japan was undergoing a downward shift –
politically and economically. In Richard Mitchell’s words,

By the early 1920’s [sic] many Japanese saw signs of institutional
decay. Because of growing economic and social problems, plus the feuds
and corruption rampant in parliamentary politics, people were inclined to
turn their backs on the emerging political system in favor of a return to the
stability they imagined had existed earlier. In other terms, Japan was
suffering from a too rapid modernization which had led to a state of social
disorganization, or anomie, in which large numbers of individuals felt that
stable institutional patterns were crumbling and that their own personal
stability was in jeopardy…

Thus, Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s nihilism, his utter contempt for the human life and
blatant disinterest in the political realities and morals of the day, have all found a
sympathetic audience in the Japanese readership of the 1920s – not only because of the
suffocating political environment of the post-High Treason Incident Japan, but also
because the political reaction that followed brought neither economic prosperity nor
stability; in the early 1920s the public felt that the very foundations of the society were
eroding and the newly-emerged interest for the protagonist that defied the society was
consonant with the overall disintegration of the social contract between the individual and

191 Richard H. Mitchell, Thought Control in Prewar Japan (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press,
1976), 32.
the state. Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s dark nihilism “mirrors the despair which Kaizan and other progressive Christian socialist thinkers felt in the early Taisho.”192 In the words of the scholar Yanatori Sangi, “Kaizan threw suffering, betrayal, and resentment against society in front of Ryūnosuke’s magic sword”.193

Ryūnosuke Tsukue’s nihilism is underlined by Kaizan’s use of and affinity for the imagery of mountain passes, tōge, transitory passages between two opposing poles, in Ryūnosuke Tsukue’s case, in Cécile Sakai’s opinion, between life and death, “because they are situated between life and death, the mumiō (absence of light) and the yumiō (the light), the feeling of the ephemeral and the great compassion of the gods.”194 Beyond mere sociopathy, the protagonist’s lack of moral scruples, his lack of conviction or belief in anything other than his sword and his skill, the ease with which he takes human lives suggest a deliberate choice of unmitigated evil as his life path; although some researchers believe that the Japanese left-wing intellectuals recognized a bit of themselves in the hour of the darkest pessimism in Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s person with the novel’s serialization in Miyako shinbun in 1913, there is an element to Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s personality that runs deeper than and defies the conventional psychological explanations, which make it all the more chilling.

192 Scott C. Langton, "A Literature For The People: A Study Of Jidai Shosetsu In Taisho And Early Showa Japan," (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 118, ProQuest (304632034).
Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s character possesses a depth not usually associated with one-dimensional evil characters without any redeeming qualities, because Nakazato Kaizan was preparing him for the grand Buddhist transformation at the end of the novel. He was never able to carry it out in the novel, leaving it unfinished in the end. Nakatani Hiroshi compared Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s sword to Raskolnikov’s axe suggesting his deliberate rejection of established norms of morality, while Hashimoto Mineo offered a contrary opinion that the nihilism of Kaizan’s protagonist was merely a form of self-assertion.\(^{195}\) In fact, “the entire lineage of negative, desperate and nihilist heroes stems from Tsukue Ryūnosuke; rebellious characters, prey to the feeling of absurdity of this world, their murderous swords exteriorize a certain unease with life, which perhaps is also that of the reader, whether intellectual or not[.].”\(^{196}\)

Shibata Renzaburō’s Nemuri Kyōshirō is part of that lineage Cécile Sakai wrote of, and represents an intellectual internalization of Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s character in the new postwar reality. Nemuri Kyōshirō, a hero who is obsessed with his own gloom, engaging in self-damning introspection and self-doubt, would in fact be more at home in postwar Paris or Tokyo than in Edo-period Japan. Forever an outcast, he questions his place in the society, and by extension – the society itself; it is not too difficult to discern Shibata’s own figure behind Kyōshirō’s. When Shibata describes the reality of postwar

\(^{195}\) Nakatani Hiroshi, *Taishū bungaku*, quoted in Nakamura Fumio, *Nakazato Kaizan to taigyaku jiken; sono hito to shisō* [Nakazato Kaizan and the Great Treason Incident; the man and his thought] (Tokyo: San-ichi Shobō, 1983), 18; Langton, p. 160.

Japan, it is difficult to separate the author from his creation, and the lawless and barren world he speaks of could very well be described by Kyōshirō himself:

With the end to this dark war declared, a tragic reality unravels before our eyes. However, at the very least, while we are gazing upon this lawless world with as much composure as we can muster in the midst of this newly acquired freedom, there must be something akin to secret pleasure in our uncertainty about breathing a sigh of relief.  

That secret pleasure in uncertainty Shibata wrote of, is the characteristic of Nemuri Kyōshirō, who takes a certain masochistic pleasure in self-torment and questions his place in the society, the feature that, together with his bi-racial origins, ties him to the world of postwar Japan. Shibata wrote of his decision to make Nemuri Kyōshirō a half-blood: “While I was thinking of this and that related to this cruel circumstance [the circumstance of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s birth], I became aware of the bizarre way in which the existence in the postwar period of mixed-blood children was drawing the attention of countless people.”

The Japanese of Shibata’s generation, who came to know wartime death and destruction firsthand (including Shibata himself), the hundreds of thousands of the demobilized soldiers, who suddenly found themselves having to survive and eke out a living in a new and unfamiliar peace, had about them a mix of cynicism and mistrust for the new postwar reality. Speedy industrial recovery and urbanization of the 1950s, which followed the wartime destruction and suffering, contributed to the underlying feeling of

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unease and unsettledness that accompanied the newly found orderliness. The postwar political elites, who rapidly espoused the ideals of democracy, while in fact being little different from the prewar oligarchy, elicited in the population a sense of profound ambivalence and mistrust. With the influx of uprooted young workers, demobilized soldiers, and students from rural areas to the cities’ new mass housing developments came the sense of isolation and loneliness. In Kiyohara Yasumasa’s words,

In the midst of the modern society, said to comprise the urbanization, the condition of the public and the society, and the public administration, the people’s sense of isolation continues to become ever more complex and multifaceted. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s sword is explained as ‘a feature of masochism-displaying fiction, having been born out of the modern person’s self-tormenting character,’ but at the point in time in the thirty-first year of Showa [1956] when the series began to be serialized, the ideas of loneliness and dejectedness that Shibata Renzaburō presented to the readers via Nemuri Kyōshirō can be seen as positioning him as a standard bearer opening up the way for ‘Romanesque’ literature in the midst of postwar conditions.199

Akiyama Shun draws a parallel between Shibata’s writings and the rapidly developing postwar Japanese society by pointing out that Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō offered a formula of facing that loneliness and dejection. “Look! He is all alone. Because of the circumstances of his birth, he is without parents. He rejects having family. In short, he does not have the life of a regular person. That man goes it alone, relying only on his sword and his solitude,” the text seemed to be saying to its readers, mostly young men,

separated from their families and surviving on their own, alienated in large unfamiliar cities.\textsuperscript{200}

Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s madness and his choices warp the world around him (killing the old pilgrim, ensnaring Ohama, Bunnojō’s divorcing Ohama, Ohama going mad, murdering Ohama) while it is the world around Kyōshirō that warps his mind and being from birth, forcing his hand and his choices, making him the nihilist that he is. If Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s nihilism has a hint of the transcendental in its sheer inscrutability, the nihilism espoused by Nemuri Kyōshirō is of a different nature: he is set up as a victim of the world’s cruelty, and the “tragedy” of his birth, his loneliness, his love and yearning for his dead mother, his ever-thwarted attempts at finding a measure of inner peace, have all found a sympathetic audience in the postwar Japanese public, who, having experienced suffering and loss throughout the war, could relate to his loneliness and his rejection of the world. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s nihilism is transparent; moreover, his Full-Moon Killing Style represents a way, albeit subliminally, of acting on that nihilism and taking on the world. Akiyama Shun wrote, “What he is cutting down… is the image of the society permeated by lies. He is not cutting down people. He is cutting down the shadow of the society.”\textsuperscript{201}

Cécile Sakai pointed out this important distinction between Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s and Nemuri Kyōshirō’s brands of nihilism,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{201} Akiyama Shun, \textit{Kotoba no toge} [The Thorns of Words] (Tokyo: Hokuyōsha, 1975), 110.
\end{footnotesize}
Since 1945, the main representative of the new negative hero is Shibata Renzaburō’s Nemuri Kyōshirō (*Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*), the character that expresses a rejection of the realistic currents of the *jidai shōsetsu*, while at the same time criticizing the prevailing “positivism” that was spearheading the efforts towards economic and national reconstruction. However, Nemuri Kyōshirō differs from his predecessors in the sense that the Evil he represents is no longer a mystical endowment: the circumstances that have taught the hero to manifest a certain nihilism, are clearly exposed, affirming a pragmatism (which, incidentally, is not devoid of opportunism), which obliterates any moral Manicheism. 202

The transcendental nature of evil present in the spirit of the protagonist that Cécile Sakai refers to is, perhaps, the most important qualitative distinction between Nakazato Kaizan’s Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Shibata Renzaburō’s Nemuri Kyōshirō. While on the surface, Tsukue Ryūnosuke’s thirst for blood and propensity for murder are inexplicable, leading Langton to dismiss Tsukue’s character as “one-dimensional,” it is precisely this absence of any compelling rational explanation for his behavior that makes him interesting and ensures the character’s undying popularity and appeal; in Nakazato Kaizan’s case, the mystery that is Tsukue Ryūnosuke is essentially self-sufficient and self-perpetuating, providing the reader with an endless variety of possible interpretations. 203 In contrast, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s nihilism is devoid of *Daibosatsu tōge*’s transcendentalism: it has clear roots and origins, as evidenced in Shibata’s “Nemuri Kyōshirō no tanjō” essay referenced earlier, and is almost logical in its inevitability.


203 Scott C. Langton, "A Literature For The People: A Study Of Jidai Shōsetsu In Taishō And Early Shōwa Japan," (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2000), 166, ProQuest (304632034).
Despite the differences in the nature of their nihilism, both Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Nemuri Kyōshirō share an important common function insofar as their respective effect on the readership is concerned; their popularity has its roots in the public’s rejection of society’s injustice, real or perceived, and responds to the popular demand for straightforward and simplistic justice. Nakamura Katsuzō went so far as to ascribe humanist agency to both protagonists:

[K]aizan’s Tsukue Ryūnosuke, Shibaren’s Nemuri Kyōshirō, are modern villains. Their disregard for the things like the laws of society of the period they live in, its manners and customs and the social order, can be said to stem from their sense of impermanence and nihilism. However, it is not possible to disregard the public’s notions of justice and humanism. The reason is, the public’s own ethos, which, while dwelling in their [Ryūnosuke’s and Kyōshirō’s] violent sense of justice vis-a-vis their own misfortunes and the society’s reason, and completely unrewarded in the actual society, represents a flare-up of humanism. If this is ignored, the very essence of popular literature becomes extinct. Thus, villains though they may be called, they must be humanists of the sort that elicit the public’s sympathy to the end.204

It is difficult to accept Nakamura Katsuzō’s conclusion; though it is true that the nihilistic attitude of both protagonists is consonant with “the public’s notions of justice and humanism,” this is at best, unintended. Neither Tsukue Ryūnosuke nor Nemuri Kyōshirō is a humanist in the proper sense of the word; one for the obvious reasons of his blood-curdling cruelty, and the other, because of his pragmatic opportunism, which not only obliterates the duality of “moral Manicheism,” but blurs the lines between good and evil in the process.

Tsukue Ryūnosuke does not see anything wrong with his murderous actions; killing is his nature and he needs it to live. Kaizan endowed Ryūnosuke with a God-like agency and, God-like, he is not subject to human notions of crime and punishment, sin and retribution. Kaizan himself wrote about Ryūnosuke:

Though he goes out night after night, killing people, he lives in the blind conviction that, much like seeking water to quench his thirst, he is driven by the uncontrollable urge stronger than his own existence. Aren’t the lives of many thousands of people sacrificed when one country fights against another? Does it not so happen that countless humans and beasts are killed when nature manifested its power? Who would fault countries and nature with sin?205

Consequently, when Tsukue Ryūnosuke kills, he genuinely does not expect consequences. As far as Ryūnosuke is concerned, he did not commit a sin killing Ohama (or anyone else for that matter); therefore, encountering Ohama’s ghost in the Mibu to Shimabara volume shocks him because in his mind there is no reason for the ghost to appear, bearing a grudge. Analyzing the evolution of Daibosatsu tōge between different editions, Itō Yūji wrote, “Though it is not perfectly clear in the standalone volume, Ryūnosuke ran amok in Shimabara because he saw Ohama’s ghost; however, in Miyako shinbun [where the novel’s serialized publication started], at the very scene of his psychotic outbreak, Ryūnosuke screams, ‘Hama! Since our connection is evil there is no

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205 Nakamura Fumio, Nakazato Kaizan to taigyaku jiken; sono hito to shisō [Nakazato Kaizan and the Great Treason Incident; the man and his thought] (Tokyo: San-ichi Shobō, 1983), 17.
right or wrong. Why do you bear me a grudge?"

What to Ryūnosuke is an incomprehensible situation, to Kyōshirō is quite clear – things happen to him because his actions caused them to happen. Unlike Tsukue Ryūnosuke, Nemuri Kyōshirō has a keen, and perhaps, exaggerated sense of cause and consequence, crime and punishment. When he is wounded, he wanders the streets of Edo, until he collapses from pain and exhaustion. Yet he cannot seek help from Mihoyo, for the day before he violated Shizuka; he saw his pain as the consequence of his action:

Like a dead man, Nemuri Kyōshirō was prostrate on his back inside a boat moored under the Ueno Bridge. As the old woman hurried away, desperation coursing through his veins, Kyōshirō suddenly got up, standing near the wooden entrance. That was because the scene of Shizuka’s rape in a woodcutter’s shack in the middle of a tempest came back to life in his mind. He felt that the agonizing pain was his retribution for that crime.

“This feeling of guilt is also something that is lacking in the uncaring Tsukue Ryūnosuke and Shinnō Tsuruchiyo,” wrote Makino Yu about Nemuri Kyōshirō. While Kyōshirō is indeed different in that respect from his nihilist predecessors, in comparison to the unfeeling Tsukue Ryūnosuke, Kyōshirō’s sense of guilt adds an inescapable burden of responsibility, and thus, a layer of complexity to the character whose affinity for raping and killing has its origins in the character of Tsukue Ryūnosuke.

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206 Itō Yūji, Daibosatsu tōge o Miyako shinbun de yomu [Reading the Daibosatsu tōge in Miyako shinbun] (Tokyo: Ronsōsha, 2013), 71.
Thus, Kiyohara Yasumasa’s words, “Nemuri Kyōshirō, who had made his entrance possessing qualities completely distinct from those of the swordsmen heroes before him, not only greatly influenced the image of the later *jidai shōsetsu* protagonists, but has not lost his superhero-like brilliance even in the modern era,” will not only conclude this chapter dealing with Nemuri Kyōshirō’s kinship with Tsukue Ryūnosuke, but also serve as a segue into the next chapter that will continue the close reading and analysis of the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* texts.209

CHAPTER 3

3.1 THE ALIEN-NESS OF NEMURI KYŌSHIRŌ AND THE STIGMATIZATION OF “THE OTHER”

“Master, what is your name?”
“You’d do well to remember me as Nemuri Kyōshirō.”
“Nemuri… Huh?”

In the reign of Mikado Go-Nara no In… a Southern Barbarian trading vessel came to our shores. From this ship for the first time emerged an unnamable creature, somewhat similar in shape to a human being, but looking rather more like a long-nosed goblin or the giant demon Mikoshi Nyūdō. Upon close interrogation it was discovered that this was a being called Bateren.211

The length of his nose was the first thing which attracted attention: it was like a conch shell (though without its surface warts) attached by suction to his face. His eyes were as large as spectacles, and their insides were yellow. His head was small. On his hands and feet he had long claws. His height exceeded seven feet, and he was black all over; only his nose was red. His teeth were longer than the teeth of a horse. His hair was mouse-grey in color, and over his brow was a shaved spot in the outline of

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211 Bateren (伴天連) is the corrupted 16th century Japanese rendering of the Portuguese word, padre (father, priest).
a winebowl turned over. What he said could not be understood at all: his voice was like the screech of an owl.\footnote{212}

Thus the *Kirishitan monogatari* of 1639 describes one of the pivotal moments in Japanese history – the first contact with and the immediate stigmatization of “the Other” in the form of a Christian missionary, the contact that marked the beginning of what would later be termed “The Christian century” (1549 - 1639) in Japan.\footnote{213 This passage is also instrumental in delineating the origins and pedigree of Nemuri Kyōshirō, the half-blood rōnin at the center of the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series. For although the incident the *Kirishitan monogatari* narrates predates the events in the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* books by some three hundred years, the narrative’s account quoted above essentially describes the arrival in Japan of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s father, one Juan Hernando (ジュアン・ヘルナンド), a Dutch doctor and a secret Christian priest, a bizarre and sinister figure, an alien clad in black garb, sporting an enormous nose, and – the Satan-worshiper that he eventually becomes – with a penchant for sacrificing beautiful young women to the Devil.

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s first encounter with his father takes place when, as a young boy, he accidentally witnesses the scene of devil-worshipping Black Mass in the mansion where he was living with his mother. Awakened by his mother’s absence in the middle of the night, the little Kyōshirō gets up from the bed and goes throughout the mansion searching for her. What he encounters sets him early on along his path of self-loathing,

\footnote{212 George Elison, *Deus Destroyed; The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 30.} \footnote{213 The referenced passage of *Kirishitan monogatari* describes the arrival in Japan in 1569 of Padre Gnecchi-Soldo Organtino (Urugan Bateren), the Italian missionary with the Society of Jesus.}
inner emptiness, and the eventual hatred of Christianity. The images etch themselves into his mind when, attracted by strange guttural sounds, Kyōshirō comes across a bizarre ritual he cannot begin to comprehend:

The moment he peeked inside through a hole in the shoji, Kyōshirō reeled, assaulted by a horrible nausea. It was only thanks to his training in the way of the warrior through his mother’s stern discipline that the ten-year-old boy was able to cover his mouth with his hand and stop himself from screaming. But was it not his mother, stark naked, prostrate on her back on the floor? Moreover, candles were set upon her brow, her breasts, her arms and thighs, and were dripping their flickering flames. A hanging scroll depicting a hideous shape in black habit, its mouth split to the ears in a snarl, was adorning the wall. Lifelike, it held aloft all of its ten long-clawed fingers, reaching for the mother’s naked form. Kneeling before this bizarre altar was a huge man with dark brown hair and a frighteningly large nose. A young boy, who had just reached the age of awareness and had not once been to a town, could not possibly deduce on the spot that this was a foreigner. Yet it was precisely because of this that, instead, he could not escape the shock of encountering this alien monster. Strange low sounds emanated from the huge man’s lips. In his right hand he also held a crystal goblet filled with red liquid.²¹⁴

Though Kyōshirō is too young and inexperienced to understand what is going on, the bizarreness of what he witnessed, the alien shape of the man, the image of his mother, naked and prostrate, imbue him with a vague sense of taint and forbidden mystery; that there never was a father in his life, that his mother never spoke of the incident after that night, that she never smiled or laughed throughout his childhood and until her death, only strengthened in him the feelings of some fatal flaw in his origins and the conviction of the corrupt nature of his own being. That feeling of inadequacy Kyōshirō grew up with

propelled him to set out in search of information about his father as soon as he was able to.

Intent on finding out the truth, Nemuri Kyōshirō sets out in search of information. This is how Nemuri Kyōshirō first discovers the identity and origins of his father:

The reason Kyōshirō went to Nagasaki when he was about twenty years old, was the sudden chance to face his grave doubts as to whether his own blood was half-foreign. The shock of that astonishment was such that it chased him from Edo, absorbed in his thoughts. After searching desperately in Nagasaki, Kyōshirō learned two things. First… Two years before his birth, an English ship, “Frederick van Belgan” arrived in Nagasaki, carrying onboard a Dutch doctor. After his arrival, with the tacit approval of the Bakufu government, the doctor started teaching Maeno Ryōtaku’s practitioners of Dutch medicine new medical science. However, resenting this, the traditional doctors accused the Dutchman of using medicine as a cover, and coming to Japan from Manila as a clergyman, in order to propagate Christian faith. The doctor was arrested, forced to trample on the image of Christ, and, in the end, succumbed to doing just that.

Another thing… It was said that having once succumbed, instead of serving Jesus Christ, the priest now turned to devil worship, trying to escape the torment of having committed a sin. Hoisting the devil on the altar where Lord Jesus was supposed to be worshipped, he was said to offer naked women in sacrifice, and instead of the holy wine, he would gulp a mix of the menses’ blood and semen, reciting God-forsaking incantations. It was said this was the Black Mass practiced by heretics in foreign lands. 215

Kyōshirō was confirmed in his suspicions about his origins; he now also knew the significance of the scene he had witnessed earlier as a child – he had seen his own father, the heretic and Christian apostate, perform the satanic Black Mass. He also realized the

role his mother was playing in the ritual – she was subjected to the indignity of being a sacrificial offering to the Devil.

In the context of discussing Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character, Shibata’s use of the figure of a foreigner for Kyōshirō’s father is of interest for two reasons. First, as had been mentioned in Chapter 2, Shibata’s making Nemuri Kyōshirō a half-blood was a deliberate reference to the multitude of mixed-blood children, products of the American occupation, whose rather pitiful “floating” existence was not lost on Shibata. Second, Shibata appeared to be borrowing from, if not rekindling, the tradition of vilifying “the Other,” the tradition that had never died out and had the history of being reanimated depending on the era and political expediency. In the words of Jan C. Leuchtenberger, “[T]he Kirishitan [Christian] was still the protagonist in the familiar narrative of penetration and expulsion, still the repository of a generalized anxiety about the world outside of Japan’s borders that was not eased by the abjection and expulsion that had been replayed for centuries.” Shibata turned to that collective neurosis about the outside world at just the time when it was again in a state of disquiet, brought about by the rapid economic and political changes in the postwar period.

The postwar Japan was rapidly remolding itself, but the process was not an easy one. Nor was it straightforward. In the immediate postwar period the office of the SCAP (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) lacked the manpower, resources and sufficient knowledge of the culture, to implement political and economic reforms. The

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articulation of these reforms was one-sided, heavily favoring the United States; moreover, the advent of the cold war saw many of these reforms scaled back. Explaining how the initially wide-ranging reforms General MacArthur had in mind for the postwar Japanese society ended up in half-hearted compromise, Robert Harvey wrote in his book, *American Shogun*:

> MacArthur, who had won so many battles, had been decisively defeated by a large and formidable combination of conservative and military enemies in Washington, by Willoughby’s fifth column within the SCAP hierarchy, and finally by the most formidable power of all, even in national defeat – the Japanese ruling class, determined to frustrate any real change in the system of government established by the Meiji oligarchy. The Japanese elite effectively obstructed most, though not quite all, of the significant reforms.\(^{217}\)

In the words of Yumiko Iida, “Japanese society was left with the task of making its socio-cultural content conform with the bestowed legal and institutional form, that is, forming the nation based on a given state model, rather than forming the state on the basis of the specificity of the nation.”\(^{218}\)

The rapid economic improvements in the ten years following the end of the Pacific War alleviated many of the hardships experienced by the people, but in turn, brought about new neuroses. Although many in the Japanese society and intelligentsia espoused the new SCAP-promoted ideas of democracy and the individual as rational,


\(^{218}\) Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan; Nationalism as Aesthetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 70.
independent, and autonomous political subject, there also were those did not. While in the world of literature, the Kindai bungaku literary journal pursued a broad liberal and left-wing cultural agenda, embracing the rapid democratization of the Japanese society, seeing it as paving the way for the “human, subjective dimensions of history and creativity,” the conservative journal, Kokoro, established in 1948 by such cultural heavyweights as Yanagita Kunio, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, and Shiga Naoya, would serve as a mouthpiece of those opposing the precepts of political individuality, seeing them as foreign-imposed logic that undermined the received wisdom of the ancien régime’s socio-cultural order. The literary and ideological terrain of postwar Japan was comprised, in the large part, of these two conflicting national narratives. Outside of that schism, the Burai-ha (the nihilist faction) group of writers comprising such writers as Dazai Osamu, Sakaguchi Ango, and Oda Sakunosuke, pursued their own intellectual path, mostly unheeding the ideological confrontation unfolding around them, focused on the existential despair of a lone individual faced with the restrictive confines of family and society whereby, “even when freed of the shackles of the family itself, the internalized superego of restraint performs the analogous function of initiating a self-oppression equally as frustrating to the individual as the external binding chains of ie and seken, if not more so.” The Burai-ha writers were interested in depicting the defeat of a man

facing two walls: “that of the indifference and hostility of the world, on the one hand, and that of impotence to overcome internalized despair on the other.”

Referring to the postwar Japanese writers as *sengo-ha*, the postwar faction, the French literary researcher Jean-Jacques Origas wrote, “They drag the reader into the heart of metropoles in ruins. They live in a place, where time annihilates itself every moment, yet they still, refuse to situate themselves under the sign of the moment.”

Observing what he perceived to be the barren literary landscape of postwar Japan, Shibata himself wrote,

I am extremely angered by the fact that there is no longer true literature in the defeated Japan. I would like to point out that just like in the war where there is victory and defeat, there is victory and defeat in literature as well; moreover, those victors and losers, if they truly were apostles of literature, if this tradition was really passed on, all the more, the wretched emptiness [無] of today’s Japanese literature seems to have been overlooked.

In politics, the ten postwar years saw a return to the prewar persecution of communists and left-wingers, the conflict that peaked in the late 1940s and early 1950s with the onset of the Cold War and the adoption of the government’s *gyaku kōsu* (逆コース, reverse course), the policy aimed at countering and containing the communist influence in Japan. The bitterness and viciousness of this infighting culminated in the

death sentences for five communists in August 1949, accused of a plot to overturn a passenger train. The appeals and the resulting investigation revealed “that not only were the accused innocent but that the entire Matsukawa incident was staged by the police.”

By the early 1950s, the populace was so tired of politics and the associated bickering and infighting that the “materially driven societal changes whose effect began to be increasingly evident in the second half of the 1950s,” made the government’s new rhetoric of rapid economic growth an attractive proposition indeed. On July 31, 1956, two months after the first installment of Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae was published in Shūkan shinchō, the Japanese government’s white paper on economy (経済白書) declared the end of the postwar period. “As has been narrated above,” the government’s report read, “the nation’s life can be seen to have improved considerably in the thirtieth year of Shōwa [1955]. Incomes having risen, spending has also grown moderately.”

While the bureaucrats painted an “overtly optimistic picture of the coming age of prosperity that would supposedly guarantee the greatest ‘happiness’ for all,” the resulting image was too much, too soon, and felt too false to many. Although the optimists introduced the もう戦後ではない, “No longer postwar period” sentence as a

224 Yumiko Iida, Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan; Nationalism as Aesthetics (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 90.
225 Yumiko Iida, Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan; Nationalism as Aesthetics (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 114.
227 Yumiko Iida, Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan; Nationalism as Aesthetics (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 115.
catchphrase, the reality (genuine positive changes in economy and standard of living notwithstanding) was somewhat more sobering. The Italian writer Fosco Maraini, who had spent most of the Pacific War interned in Nagoya and returned to Tokyo in 1953, wrote of Japan of the mid-fifties,

The newspapers are full of stories (though allowance should be made for journalistic distortion, exaggeration, or invention) of corruption in high places, juvenile delinquency, vast-scale smuggling, illegal foreign exchange deals, the drug traffic, and that festering sore which is most difficult to eradicate because it is a deeply rooted custom, the selling into prostitution of young girls, particularly by the poor peasants of north Japan (Tohoku and Hokkaido). The death rate from tuberculosis is very high, particularly in the towns. The suicide rate (23.4 per 100,000 inhabitants) is the highest in the world, and in the great majority of cases is attributed simply to ensé (tiredness with life).

The economic situation of the great majority of the population is sufficient to make one’s hair stand on end. The average monthly pay in urban areas was recently (in 1955) increased to 18,608 yen (about £18 or $50) but half the industrial workers receive barely 12,000 yen. A Socialist Party proposal to establish a legal minimum of 8,000 yen monthly for adult workers was rejected as ‘unrealistic.’ Innumerable women work long hours in bars and restaurants for 7,000 or 8,000 yen a month; the Kyushu coalminers have to manage on 250 yen (5s. or 70¢) a day.

In addition, post-Occupation Tokyo was a breeding ground of crime – the overwhelming majority of it inflicted by Japanese upon their fellow Japanese, but at the same time, attracting the less than savory elements of the thirty thousand-strong expatriate community. The magazine Jinbutsu ôrai ran an editorial entitled Tokyo sokai (Tokyo colony) in 1956, complaining of the “foreign crime:”

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228 Maraini quotes numbers from articles by H. Tiltman in Asahi Evening News, specifically, August 23, 1956.
Gaijin crime has been increasing since the days of the occupation. Just look at last year, 1955, alone. 1,760 cases of theft, 76 cases of robbery, 10 murder incidents, 20 cases of rape, 415 cases of assault, and 53 cases of narcotics sales. And these, these cases reported, represent only the tip of the iceberg. In reality, one can estimate that the figure is several times higher.

Tokyo presents a sad figure. It is taken for either a colonial city or an occupied city.\(^\text{230}\)

Symptomatically, the editorial chose to focus on the foreign element of the overall crime landscape, conveniently overlooking “the 300,000 thefts, robberies, kidnappings, assaults, and other mayhem” that the Japanese themselves were visiting upon each other every year in Tokyo alone.\(^\text{231}\)

Shibata turns to the figure of a foreigner to address the collective anxiety at this juncture in time when Japan’s place in the modern world once again seemed to have been established – while doubts and unease persisted under the surface. In the words of Kiyohara Yasumasa, “Were we to reflect on the thirty-first year of Showa [1956] that saw the birth of Nemuri Kyōshirō, and the state of the society around that time, this superhero was born out of the necessity for him to be born, or to rephrase it, he is also a hero created by the era. That is where the sharpness of the writer’s eye observing the era is felt.”\(^\text{232}\)

With this background of unease, Shibata elects to make Christianity (or rather, the rejection of it) one of the defining characteristics of his protagonist – by making it an

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inescapable, ineffaceable, and hated part of his lineage. When asked for his reasons for disrupting a secret Christian gathering, in the *Kirisutotei ihen* (霧人亭異変, Christian Pavilion Incident) chapter at the beginning of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, Nemuri Kyōshirō responds, “Because I am a heretic who hates Christian priests.” Kyōshirō’s words, “おれは、切支丹伴天連を憎む異端者だからだ” are indicative of Shibata’s intentions for Kyōshirō via his use of the furigana reading of the word 異端者, heretic, in the text: instead of the customary いたんしゃ (itansha) reading, Shibata uses ぜんちょう (zenchō), which is derived from the Portuguese gentio – heathen, heretic – using a Portuguese word to read the Japanese one, thus making one the hated but inalienable part of the other in Kyōshirō’s mind and in his sense of identity. Shibata’s use of furigana for 天国 and 地獄, heaven and hell, follows the same logic: instead of the native Japanese てんごく (tengoku) and じごく (jigoku) readings, he uses はらいそ and いんへるの, derived from the Old Portuguese parayso and Italian inferno, having thus made the detested Christian precepts seep into the very fabric of the Japanese language.

What gave Shibata the impetus to introduce Christianity in his work? Shibata himself is rather cryptic on the subject. “At that point,” Shibata wrote in “Nemuri Kyōshirō no tanjō,” “I decided on bringing in Christianity, shunned in the prewar period

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even more than the proscribed ‘Bolshevism’ [赤].’

The new opening of Japan and the removal of prewar stigma associated with Christianity may have been one factor. After all, as Mark R. Mullins wrote about the brief Christian renaissance in postwar Japan, “In the decade between 1948 and 1958, membership in the Catholic Church more than doubled from 111,209 to 227,063.”

Takahashi Chihaya also credits the Christian writer and a friend of Shibata’s from Keiō University, Endō Shūsaku, with being the source of the idea to introduce Christianity. “It so happened,” Takahashi wrote, “that around the time he [Shibata] started writing Nemuri Kyōshirō, Mr. Endō, upon being asked his opinion as to how the protagonist, Kyōshirō, should be described, said that he responded, ‘How about Nemuri Kyōshirō being a secret Christian?’”

Takahashi goes on to recall, “Mr. Endō said, looking very pleased, ‘That thing is not bragging, but it is indeed my idea.’ He seemed to be happy, even secretly proud that his own idea was brought to life in the work of his esteemed senpai.”

Thus, through the graces of Endō Shūsaku, Nemuri Kyōshirō acquired a Christian pedigree. It is with Endō Shūsaku, the Catholic “who had received the baptism in his childhood, was harboring profound suspicions towards the faith that he had made his own, towards the Catholic Church, towards the European civilization in its entirety” that Nemuri Kyōshirō, who screams in a moment of

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239 Although Endō was Shibata’s elder mate in Keio University, Shibata was Endō’s elder insofar as Mita bungaku was concerned, having published there before Endō, hence Takahashi’s use of the term senpai refers specifically to the Mita bungaku connection.
despair, “What is God? What is Christ? [なにがでうす！なにがきりすと！],” shares key psychological traits of a believer in crisis.240 241

However, by 1956, when the first installment of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae was published, the “second opening of Japan” was in full swing, and merely being a foreigner and a Christian was no longer enough to be an Alien and no longer enough to represent “the Other.” The postwar Tokyo was so full of foreigners that their presence “caused many Japanese observers to bemoan the transformation of Tokyo as a ‘miserable colonial city.’”242 Therefore, in addition to making Nemuri Kyōshirō’s father Dutch and Christian, Shibata went even further, making him a heretic and an apostate, who sells his soul to the Devil. Initially, Shibata was somewhat hesitant about this choice, concerned that the notion of selling one’s soul to the Devil was an alien concept to most of the Japanese readership. He wrote,

In Japan, a thing like ‘Faith’ is not something that permeates the ordinary people as deep as their blood. Therefore, a thing like the corrupt priest’s selling his body and soul to the Devil is hard to explain. I did have some unease about that point, but at the same time, there wasn’t anyone who did not know about the dreadful tortures the Communist Party members were subjected to by the Secret Police before the war, and the shameful conduct of people who had folded [転向した人間] was also widely known. As it were, I then decided that it would be met with better reception if I switched ‘Faith’ [信仰] and ‘Idea’ [思想].243

Shibata’s scheme worked. Indeed, as Kirsten Cather writes, “From the time of the murder of proletariat author Kobayashi Takiji by police in 1933 until the start of the Pacific War in 1941, leftists imprisoned by the police for being Communists often committed either a formal tenkō [転向], a public renunciation of their political ideals, or an informal, less-public one.” Thus, Shibata’s stratagem of substituting political ideology with Christianity proved to be effective; the prewar context was still fresh in everyone’s memory so as not to be lost on the postwar readership, the substitution notwithstanding. The “shameful conduct” of those who have yielded (whether to government pressure or to propaganda) that Shibata refers to is indicative of the stigma of humiliation widely perceived to be associated with the act of tenkō. In her book, *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity*, Peng Hsiao-yen quotes the author Tsurumi Shinsuke, who posited that the notion of tenkō was inevitably linked with humiliation and disgrace,

Indeed, since the term “tenkō” is mainly used from the viewpoint of the institutional power that directed the turnabout phenomenon, for the individuals who are implicated in it, a sense of humiliation [kutsujoku 厌辱] is accompanied, however voluntary [jihatsuteki 自発的] each of them can be.²⁴⁵

That stigma of humiliation associated with the act of tenkō serves as yet another element completing the portrait of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s father – the man who had folded under torture, abandoned his beliefs and betrayed himself – and by extension, offers additional insight into the workings of Kyōshirō’s tortured mind. The inner torment Kyōshirō experiences knowing that he had a monster for a father, that he carried within himself an indelible taint, constitutes one of the defining elements of his character:

As he linked his hands behind his head and shut his eyelids tightly, a single calm voice reverberated in his ears. ‘One of your parents couldn’t have been Japanese.’ …These were the words spat out by the townsman Bizenya in the basement of the court doctor.

‘Doesn’t the reason you cleft the image of the Virgin Mary lie in the cruelty of your birth?’ That was undoubtedly what Bizenya meant.

Indeed, it was exactly so. In Kyōshirō’s recollections of the days of his youth, there had not been a moment when he did not harbor a dark secret. The moment one of those abhorrent memories suddenly resurfaced, Kyōshirō could not help but experience a violent shudder throughout his limbs. Devoting himself, body and mind, as though possessed, to swordsmanship when he was around twenty years of age, was also an attempt to break away from his violent past. Ironically, he did not escape his past, but instead discovered his natural ability when holding a sword.246

Having that alien monstrosity for a father adds a dimension of perversion, of decay-smelling sickness to Nemuri Kyōshirō’s image. When asked who his favorite actor to portray Nemuri Kyōshirō was, Shibata responded that it was Ichikawa Raizō. His reasoning was rather unflinching and macabre. Shibata wrote,

When Raizō was first performing Kyōshirō, there was some sweet­ness about him, but as the hour of his death was approaching [Ichikawa Raizō died of cancer in 1969, while fil­ming Nemuri Kyōshirō], there appeared ghastliness in the Kyōshirō that was being performed [死期が間近になって演った狂四郎には、凄絶さがあった]. In short, he was becoming even more like Kyōshirō. Looking at it made me cringe. So, for Kyōshirō, in short, no matter how hard a healthy person might try performing him, he won’t become Kyōshirō.247

Eventually, Nemuri Kyōshirō finds and confronts his father. The setting is Edo and the circumstances are the recurring disappearance and murder of beautiful young women with nothing in common except the remarkable similarity in their looks. Kyōshirō’s instinct is aroused: “The moment he heard that for the second summer in a row, a young woman had been murdered and a black cross drawn on her lower abdomen, Kyōshirō instinctively knew, ‘This is the handiwork of the fallen priest [転び伴天蓮].’”248 Intent on finding out the truth, Kyōshirō asks his consort, Mihoyo, to serve as bait, and when she readily agrees, sets her up to be kidnapped. His instinct and calculations proved to be correct; Mihoyo is kidnapped like all the previous victims and Kyōshirō follows her kidnappers to an isolated mansion, where, as he suspected, a satanic Black Mass was being held. There, he beholds the same foreign man he had seen years earlier as a child in his mother’s mansion, performing a bizarre ceremony. As to Mihoyo, she was prostrate, drugged and unconscious, at the foot of the altar with a wax effigy

depicting a nude woman. This time, however, the tables have turned. Kyōshirō interrupts
the diabolical ritual, killing the priest’s acolytes in the ensuing fight, and in the end,
confronts the old man (conveniently recapitulating the prior events for those readers who
have missed previous weekly installments):

“A Dutch doctor who had arrived on the English ship “Frederick Van Belgan” thirty years ago, Juan Hernando – that is your name!
After arriving here in Edo, you were teaching medicine to the adherents of Dutch medical knowledge, with the government’s
permission. At that time, you lodged at the mansion of the Superintendent
Matsudaira Mondonoshō, that is, right here. Ironically, it was Matsudaira
Mondonoshō himself who first discovered that you were a priest. You
were then apprehended, tortured, and ordered to trample on the image of
Christ; in the end, you yielded. That is when the tragedy begins. Intent on
taking revenge against Matsudaira Mondonoshō, the man who caused your
downfall, you raped his daughter and fathered a child in secret!
Listen, old fool! Standing before you is no ordinary man! Know,
that I am the child born of the girl you raped!”

[ ]urning his head again and looking up at the wax effigy,
Kyōshirō too suddenly felt his breath taken away. That is because once
more, unforgettable even in his sleep, the face of his dead mother appeared
before him. He had heard that when it came to wax effigies, the Christian
brethren’s [いるまん] skill knew no equals, but the indescribable
vividness of this nude image that he beheld with his own eyes, rivaled that
of Mihoyo’s, prostrate and unconscious at his feet.

Selecting that nude effigy as the incarnation of the devil, they were
kidnapping women of similar appearance and offered them up in sacrifice.
Rage welling up in him anew, his eyes burning, Kyōshirō turned
around, and at the same time, the corrupt old priest collapsed like a rotted
tree. He was no longer breathing.249

Later, Kyōshirō visits his mother’s grave, driven by the need for closure:

249 Shibata Renzaburō, Shibata Renzaburō senshū, vol. 1, Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (Tokyo: Shūeisha,
1997), 112-113.
Bringing his unruly self here was torment for Kyōshirō. Even though giving birth to Kyōshirō consigned her to the life of a living corpse, his mother, who had strictly disciplined him in the ways of the warrior, would be unlikely to greet happily her child of today, so reeking of fresh blood.

As Kyōshirō stood before his mother’s grave, there was his cruel deed that he needed to confess.

This was his confession,

“I did cut down the foreign corrupt priest who raped you, Mother, and caused me to be born!”

He could not think in the least, whether his mother would be happy to hear that.250

The deed is done, but he is not – will never be free of the residual taint left by his father. In fact, in Kyōshirō that taint serves as Shibata’s reinvention of the burden of Original sin, the perpetual state of humankind’s disgrace, resulting from the fall from divine grace. Shibata admits as much, “I had no intention to describe Nemuri Kyōshirō as a great swordsman. I was attempting to endow him with the karma whereby, burdened with the modern sense of guilt, he would have to live his life suffering from this dilemma.”251 In Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s words, “more than anything, he [Kyōshirō] is a man who bears the cross of conscious awareness that first and foremost, his having been born into this world was a sin.”252

This suffering and the sense of his own sinfulness are major elements of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character, his gloomy disposition and self-loathing bordering on obsessive madness, his self-hatred extending to his own name. “This man,” Shibata wrote of

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Nemuri Kyōshirō, “has a real name. For the time being, let’s make it Matsudaira Shumenosuke [松平主馬之介]. Loath to use that name, this man himself is always using a bizarre kana [for his name] that no one would be able to forget upon hearing it just once.” A hint of that obsessive madness can perhaps be gleaned from Kyōshirō’s name. To do so, we first need to turn to Shibata’s own name for clues. Shibata’s first name, Renzaburō (錬三郎), contains the 三郎 kanji characters common in Japan for denoting the third son in the family such as Renzaburō himself, his two elder brothers being Daishirō and Kentarō. The Kyōshirō (狂四郎) in Nemuri Kyōshirō’s name contains the characters 四郎 – fourth son, while the first character, 狂 – stands for madness. Thus, the choice of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s name can be seen as an affirmation of Shibata Renzaburō’s kinship with his protagonist, whereby Nemuri Kyōshirō represents Shibata Renzaburō’s own “mad” alter ego and the extension of his own self and family: he is “the fourth Shibata,” “the mad fourth son [of the Shibata household],” in whom all of Renzaburō’s own self-doubts and insecurities crystallized and manifested themselves. It is also, perhaps, possible to see the 狂 in Kyōshirō’s name as Shibata’s tribute to Lu Xun (魯迅, 1881 - 1936), the iconic Chinese writer he studied while in Keiō University, and whose work, 狂人日記 (A Madman’s Diary, 1918) he explored in his graduation thesis, Rojin ron (魯迅論, The Lu Xun Discourse, 1940). In it, Shibata wrote,

253 Matsudaira is Nemuri Kyōshirō’s true family name; his hatred of this name stems from the fact that he despises his mother’s family for treating her as an outcast after her rape and consigning her to the life of a “living corpse.”

Failing to establish the inner subject when confronting reality, Lu Xun too could not escape the tragic anguish of solitude — the gates of hell a writer must pass through. “The Madman’s Diary” was not born out of mere revolutionary thinking of an ideologue’s struggle- and purpose-driven consciousness. It was born out of “solitude.”

Shibata closes his thesis with the words, “I would like to conclude that I, too, am proud of embracing the same solitude that negated the establishment of belief in oneself and that is the source of the strength of Lu Xun’s character.” The solitude that Shibata wrote of would later translate directly into the creation of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character. In a pamphlet, written for the Shibata Renzaburō jidai shōsetsu zenshū, Shibata wrote, “What I like depicting is ‘a solitary man.’ I think that enduring solitude is a thing far more painful than facing a ten thousand-strong army. My jidai shōsetsu novels are the drama of a man who struggles to endure solitude, treading along the path of darkness.” It is, perhaps, not inconceivable to perceive that “solitude, treading along the path of darkness” in the 狂 character in Nemuri Kyōshirō’s name. In propelling his protagonist along this “path of darkness,” Shibata turned to the literary tradition that offered the best framework and resources for bringing the character to life — European modernism. In so doing, Shibata rejuvenated and reinvented the kengō shōsetsu genre, for his experimentation with it resulted in a creative amalgamation of the inherited kengō shōsetsu conventions.

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(Edo-period settings, intrigue, strong swordsmen-protagonists, sword-fighting, and gratuitous violence) and elements of European modernism (Introspection, gloom, sense of guilt, religious ambiguity, self-doubt, and the search for uniqueness and originality). It was Shibata’s familiarity with the works of European, mostly French literature that was instrumental in crafting the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō – a man tormented by guilt, self-loathing, and self-doubt.

3.2 DANDYISM AND EUROPEAN MODERNIST INFLUENCES IN THE CREATION OF NEMURI KYŌSHIRŌ’S IMAGE

The nineteenth-century European tradition of dandyism played a major part in the formation of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character. “One of the standard bearers representing the postwar world of jidai shōsetsu,” wrote Yamaguchi Kazuhiko, “was also Shibata Renzaburō, the writer who imbued the creative foundation of his works with the esthetics of dandyism [...]”

In particular, the figure of George Bryan “Beau” Brummel, the late eighteenth–early nineteenth century English dandy and socialite played a special role in the creation of Nemuri Kyōshirō. What was it about Beau Brummel’s personality that attracted Shibata? It appears that Brummel’s sense of humor, stoicism, and the careful crafting of self-image – even at the price of making powerful enemies – made a great impression on

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Shibata, prompting him to study the dandyism tradition in depth. In his essay, *Dandisumu ron*, Shibata narrates an episode from Beau Brummel’s life that clearly impressed him, where some time after a falling-out with the Prince Regent (later to become George IV of England), Beau Brummel, having met him after a game of cards in which Brummel had lost all of his remaining fortune, feigns not having recognized the Prince and mutters audibly, “Who on earth is that fat fellow [あのブタはいったい誰だ]?”

Shibata was interested in dandyism for quite some time before starting his work on Nemuri Kyōshirō. “What attracts my mind of today is the single line connecting three men – Beau Brummel, Baudelaire, and Villiers de L’Isle-Adam,” Shibata wrote in his essay, *Dandisumu ron* (ダンディスム論, The Dandyism Discourse), in the June 1948 issue of the *Tanchō* magazine. What was it that attracted Shibata to the tradition of dandyism? Based on his reading and internalization of works by such writers as Charles Baudelaire, Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, and Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly, Shibata

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259 Shibata Renzaburō, “Dandisumu ron” [The dandyism discourse], *Shibata Renzaburō senshū*, vol. 18, *Zuihitsu essei shū* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2002), 158. It is unclear what Shibata’s sources are for this episode, for there exist multiple versions of it. Possibly, Shibata was referring to the episode narrated by W. Russel in *Eccentric Personages* (1864): “Once after the final rupture with the Regent, the Beau, riding through Bond Street with Lord Sefton, met the Prince, who was taking an airing in a carriage. Seeing Sefton the carriage was stopped. The prince and peer exchanged some commonplace courtesies. Sefton presently rejoined Brummell. “Who is our fat friend in the carriage?” he asked, affecting not to have recognised [sic] the Prince. This sort of thing used to be thought very witty, cruelly sarcastic!” W. Russel, *Eccentric Personages* (New York: The American News Company, 1866), 68. A different rendering of this remark is offered by Ian Kelly: “The prince arrived and bowed first to Henry Pierrepont. Next in line was Brummell, but the prince ignored him and moved on to Alvanley, then on from him. Many witnessed the event: the four dandies and the guests both behind and in front of the royal party. There was a slight shocked silence at this “cut”: Brummell was, after all, one of the hosts. Then Brummell’s classically trained voice enunciated loudly to his neighbor: ‘Alvanley, who’s your fat friend?’” Ian Kelly, *Beau Brummell; The Ultimate Man of Style* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 190-191.

perceived dandyism to be first and foremost the pursuit of individuality and uniqueness, and the rejection of the mundane and the conventional, as attested to by his words in the September 1975 essay, *Tobakusha wa dandi de aru beki da* (賭博者はダンディであるべきだ, Gamblers Must Be Dandies), “Dandyism means demonstrating one’s true worth through the pursuit of originality that strictly guards against any resemblance to others.”

Shibata’s own notion of *burai* (無頼), nihilism, as first encountered in *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, is inextricably linked to his understanding of the concept of *dandizumu*, dandyism, as pursuit of individual uniqueness at all costs. When asked by a 17-year-old reader, “What is *burai*?” in the May 1978 issue of *Shūkan pureibō*, Shibata responded:

> I am one who utters his own lines, unheeding what others around me are saying. Should others be saying something like, ‘He is a bad fellow,’ or ‘He is hopeless’ and all kinds of other things about my conduct, there is absolutely no need to heed those words. The important thing is to follow one’s own rules. Up until this point the conduct was to observe one’s own rules, but from now on – *burai* all the way. In short, it is the intellectual control.

> That is why, in Nemuri Kyōshirō’s case, he never strikes back until his opponent comes trying to cut him down. Because the very act of cutting someone down is murder, isn’t it. That is what *burai* is all about.

> He observes his rule of never doing something as cowardly as attacking under the cover of darkness. Kyōshirō acts from the standpoint of that rule.

> However, when seen from the outside world’s perspective, it can be seen as nihilism [無頼に見える]. Because it is difficult to balance out a man’s actions in that respect, what becomes necessary there is, in fact,

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The pride of basing one’s actions on correct rules, no matter what the outside world might say. Behaving with that pride is what burai is.  

Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō is a dandy in the true, brummellian sense of the word. Considering that, as Ian Kelly wrote, “Brummell’s early celebrity rested on the role he assumed as poster boy for a new version of metropolitan masculinity: restrained, muscular, unfoppish, anything but the “dandy” of folklore,” Nemuri Kyōshirō conforms to the model set by Brummell: his image is simplicity itself, bordering on austerity. Shibata’s description of Kyōshirō is minimalist, Kyōshirō’s “黒の着流し姿,” figure casually dressed in black, serving as the understated visual counterpart to his face imbued with “虚無,” emptiness. In Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s words,

This rōnin, who possesses the unmistakably Japanese heart behind his deep-chiseled features infused with alien blood, is described as a person who maintains a unique sense of beauty about his personal appearance. Dandy clothes and meticulousness providing the inner lining for his restraint and formality, everything being grasped minutely yet distinctly inside Kyōshirō’s coolly awake awareness, the steel-like tension of his nerves is diffused throughout his comportment. Though he calls himself an urban villain, Kyōshirō is a man who has the distinction of never cheating his own heart, and that stoic self-discipline manifests itself in the guise of esthetics driven to obstinacy.

Above all, though he is said to be considered a dandy, seeing Kyōshirō as a successor to Western dandyism requires reservation. That is also because in Kyōshirō’s case, as a lip service is made to distinguish his essence from that of a traditional dandy, his conduct inverted the

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masochist spirit ingrained within; as it were, this is because it is controlled by reverse dandyism.\footnote{Yamaguchi Kazuhiko, "Bō Buranmeru no byōei tachi: Shyāroku Hōmuzu to Nemuri Kyōshirō no ningenzō," \textit{Shinshū daigaku jinbun shakai kagaku kenkyū} \textbf{5} (2011, April): 5.}

One of the instances of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s “reverse dandyism” can be observed in the concluding scene of *Engetsu kettō* (円月決闘, Full-Moon Duel) chapter of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, where Kyōshirō faces one of his most difficult and perilous challenges:

Opening a stave of the storm shutters without a sound, Kyōshirō peered at a slender silhouette standing some twenty feet away. The sixteenth night’s hazy moon was up in the sky. Bathed in the quiet night’s light, that upright figure was flooded with an eerily beautiful hue, but though it was giving off a foppish, almost fragrant air, it was also emanating beauty akin to a gorgeous illusion. In one of its hand, it held a magnolia branch with rich petals in bloom.

Closing back the storm shutter’s stave, and having slowly advanced some ten feet barefoot, Kyōshirō said,

“Since the Princess is sleeping soundly, please kindly settle on this place.”

Shuzen nodded without saying a word.

Taking the lead, Kyōshirō set foot in the snow-white garden in front the main hall. As he stood nine feet away, gazing intently at this powerful foe of such mysterious gentle beauty, Kyōshirō thought,

‘This is one of those dangers in my life that I could count with the fingers on one hand. Quite possibly, it will be my blood that will spill like a fountain.’

Still, it was bizarre that he did not experience even a hint of shudders in his spine and limbs. Previously, Kyōshirō had faced attacks from two powerful enemies in this old temple – Musasabi Kiheita and Sama Ukon. In both of those cases he remembered shudders running throughout his body.

Now there was none of it.

However, Kyōshirō had a hunch that because of this third foe’s fathomless strength, the likelihood of danger of being defeated was much higher than in the instances with the two previous adversaries.
To think, both Kiheita and Ukon were suddenly imbued with the frightful murderous spirit at the moment of that macabre encounter. However, Shuzen declared the battle with every courtesy and with the faint signal of a single pebble. Then, while drawing Kyōshirō out, indeed as though he had come to entertain himself with a moonlit flower-watching, his magnolia-adorned figure maintained elegant stillness. This was proof Shuzen was not in the least concerned about winning or losing. It was a thing of dread.

There exists the following exchange of questions and answers in Jōseishikendan [常静子剣談].

It is said “In victory there is a mysterious win. In defeat there is no mysterious loss.”

Question “What does it mean, a mysterious win?”

It is said “When observing the Art of the Way that one follows, though one’s heart may not always be brave, one will be victorious. It is when examining that heart, that it becomes mysterious.”

Question “What does it mean, no mysterious loss?”

It is said “When one’s Art runs contrary to the Way, one will undoubtedly lose.”

Perhaps, Shuzen had an understanding of that mysterious win. Kyōshirō said, “Before we fight, there is something I would like to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“When you took the Princess from the Katsura Imperial Villa and were accompanying her on the way to Edo, why did you go to your own mansion, what for? Were you suppressing your aspirations to make her yours? I would like to ask you about your feelings.”

Upon hearing that, Shuzen, his eyes shining in the dark, opened his beautiful teeth in a graceful smile aimed at Kyōshirō.

“I am different from someone as contrary as yourself. I have a dream. I have no qualms whatsoever about raping some low-class female pickpockets, but in front of the Princess I turn into a submissive manservant. Were the Princess to allow it, I would probably lick the soles of her feet, and if she wanted, would drink her urine. The Princess possesses sublimity that can make me do that. …You, on the other hand, the Princess cannot touch even with one finger. I believe that just the Princess’ sublimity is such that no matter what evil fool, he won’t be able to rape her. That is precisely why I do not stop the Princess from going about anywhere she likes. Whoever it is, they won’t be able to touch her. My dream will not be taken from me for all eternity.”

“I see…”

At that moment, a cold sarcastic smile suddenly crossed Kyōshirō’s lips.
“However, what would it be, were this Nemuri Kyōshirō here to embrace the Princess?”

Instead of screaming upon hearing his, Shuzen silently let the magnolia drop to the ground from his left hand. For the first time, the garden in the moonlight was overflowing with the spirit of murder.

Sakura petals fluttered in the spring breeze, dancing in the space left after the two drawn swords flashed, rivaling the moonlight, but that disquieted defoliation only imbued the fierce confrontation’s “sense of calm” with a suitably delicate “sense of motion.”

Both adversaries were in the jizuri gedan [地摺り下段, lower stance] position.

Moreover, as soon as Nemuri Kyōshirō’s Musō Masamune [無想正宗, Kyōshirō’s sword] gently began the engetsu sappō motion, Shuzen’s sword as well, as though reflecting it, gradually began the same movement in the air.

That is… Shuzen was parroting the attitude of “Mimicking the foe’s style, make it your own, mimicking the foe’s advantage, make it yours” described in Ittōryū gokui.

In Ittōryū gokui, it also says, “The Art is in knowing the point of losing and the point of not being able to win. The point of losing then surely will become the point of victory. The point of not winning becomes the enemy’s most protected point. I have the point of losing, while the foe has the point of not being able to win. Knowing the losing point in victory, and the winning point in defeat, makes one accomplished in the Art.

This is what Sun Tzu said – knowing the other and knowing oneself means fighting a hundred battles and winning a hundred victories; knowing oneself but not knowing the other means winning and losing in equal measure; fighting without knowing oneself or the other, means inevitably losing every time.”

Matching Nemuri Kyōshirō’s engetsu sappō, Shuzen too finished drawing his own circle.

As he did so, the two sword tips completed drawing their full circles.

That very instant… As a joint double scream sounded, breaking the silence of the dim moonlight… it dissipated far away in midair.

As one black shadow collapsed to the ground, the other one slowly turned its steps towards where Akiko was sleeping. One step after another, as the distance from the fallen man was lengthening, blood dripping on the white earth was drawing a straight black line.

The above scene is of interest because, in it, Nemuri Kyōshirō encounters a mirror image of himself. One could see in this scene an inevitable culmination of Kyōshirō’s self-loathing, a symbolic suicide by proxy: having encountered his own “white” doppelganger, Kyōshirō emerges victorious, having killed “himself” in his double. Moreover, Shibata’s words on dandyism, quoted above, whereby he defines dandyism as “demonstrating one’s true worth through the pursuit of originality that strictly guards against any resemblance to others,” acquire a sinister and macabre meaning in the scene of the duel, because preserving that originality here means that Kyōshirō needs to annihilate physically that which resembles him – Shuzen. This victory, however, comes at a price and the final lines, “One step after another, as the distance from the fallen man was lengthening, blood dripping on the white earth was drawing a straight black line,” are deliberately vague and ambiguous: the reader is left to wonder whose blood it was – Shuzen’s, dripping from Kyōshirō’s sword, or Kyōshirō’s own, from his injuries?

On the subject of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s duel with Shuzen, referenced above, Yamaguchi Kazuhiko wrote,

What Kyōshirō embodies while facing Shuzen’s whiteness is not the dandyism that is made the obverse of dazzling pure white. Rather, it is esthetics that is formed in the diametrically opposite position; I daresay it might be the esthetics that must be called black dandyism [黒のダンディズム]. However, it being, after all, one variation of the mode of existence called dandyism, whether it is the difference between light and shade, or positive and negative, it is not a choice of an absolute value. In other words, that which Kyōshirō espouses is blackness without a hint of sweetness in it, brought about as a reaction to the pure white, and being an
integral reverse of white, that is where the precepts of extreme willful
dandyism rule, as a variation of stoicism.\footnote{267}

Nakamura Katsuzō wrote, “[I]f we removed Brummel, Shibaren’s story would not
be complete. That is because within Shibaren’s soul there dwelled inseparably
Brummel’s spirit and dandyism. Therefore, when the yet unborn, the unexpected
offspring, Kyōshirō, saw the light of day, it was precisely from there that Shibaren’s
literature was created.”\footnote{268} Indeed, Shibata’s “unsociable behavior” that got him into
trouble in the army or any time he crossed paths with authority, was in fact an
internalization of dandyism, a result of his search for uniqueness and individualism, traits
that he passed to Nemuri Kyōshirō.\footnote{269} Nakamura Katsuzō continues,

…Brummel’s art of expression goes extinct with Brummel’s death. This is
also the model for what Shibaren calls “the esthetics of ruination” [滅びの
美学]. However, that very evanescence, for the reason of being evanescent,
accomplishes a certain kind of perfection. Sinking this much into the
solitude of the self makes the conviction in the existence of the self
possible for the first time for a valiant and intellectual man of the highest
rank. Brummel the dandy was the valiant man inside another valiant man
[Kyōshirō].\footnote{270}

Saito Jū’ichi’s commission of Nemuri Kyōshirō for Shūkan shinchō in 1956
provided the opportunity for Shibata to create a character possessing the traits he had

\footnote{267} Yamaguchi Kazuhiko, "Bō Buranmeru no byōei tachi: Shyāroku Hōmuzu no
\footnote{268} Nakamura Katsuzō, Shibata Renzaburō shishi (Tokyo: Hōwa Shuppan, 1986), 143-144.
\footnote{269} Shibata Renzaburō, Waga seishun buraichō (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), 74.
\footnote{270} Nakamura Katsuzō, Shibata Renzaburō shishi (Tokyo: Hōwa Shuppan, 1986), 141.
been admiring all along. Shibata endowed Nemuri Kyōshirō with the very same qualities he admired in the persona of Beau Brummel – a certain aristocratic disdain for social conventions, self-consciousness, willingness to shock, and stoic indifference to one’s own fate. Referring to the final scene in Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, where the mortally wounded protagonist, Cyrano, says, before dying, that he had kept one last thing for himself, having given up all the others, before facing God, “Mon panache” [the French word *panache*, with its multiple meanings, such as feather, character, and spirit, had been rendered in the Japanese translation as "それはな、このおのれの心意気だ"], Shibata wrote, “This is my favorite scene. One of the reasons I kept writing popular novels is being able to endow the protagonist with spirit [心意気, *kokoroiki*].”

Nemuri Kyōshirō is the man possessing that spirit. He is undaunted by danger or threats, and not because he exemplifies a perfect image of the samurai, the traditional Japanese iteration of *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, but because his gloom and self-loathing leave no room for seeing any value in his life. He is not afraid of death because he has no love for life. Nevertheless, the *kokoroiki*, the spirit Shibata endowed him with, will not let him be intimidated. When speaking with the Chamberlain Tadakuni, a man of power whom he slighted and who could have him executed, Kyōshirō is so composed that Tadakuni finds himself drawn to him:

“Enough! What a perverse fellow that man is!”
“As you wish…”

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Kyōshirō even let a cold smile etch itself on his lips.
For Tadakuni, this was something incredible. Aren’t there some outrageous villains in this world! When he got the news, he flew into a rage, but as he looked appraisingly, suddenly enchanted by the matchless composure hung over this rōnin’s face, Tadakuni felt himself falling under the sway of the interlocutor’s smile[.]272

When commissioned to write a serialized kengō shōsetsu novel in the weekly Shūkan shinchō, by Saitō Jū’ichi, the head of the Shinchōsha publishing house, Shibata felt this work would be an appropriate conduit for the utilization of his etonne (エトンネ, Fr. étonner, shock, surprise) concept, gleaned from his studies of French literature in translation, and which would form the basis of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s dandyism and the essence of his character in the works of the series. Shibata addressed the connection between the etonne concept and Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae in his essay, Waga shōsetsu II Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae (わが小説II・眠狂四郎無頼控):

First, I have been entertaining this secret thought that a thing like the novel is based on the etonne [fr. surprise, shock エトンネ (人を驚かすこと) sic] spirit. For example, there is this episode when, one evening, friends witnessing Charles Baudelaire’s return to his apartment, would murmur, ‘Tonight, he might sleep under the bed, just to shock the bed, right?’ Remembering the extreme appeal of this poet’s fate, whereby ‘to scorn his heart, he tormented his spirit,’ I would constantly think just how much the public might appreciate that self-effacing style. Appraising Baudelaire, Gautier wrote ‘He saw things from a unique perspective,’ and pointed out that that logical yet bizarre mystery would astound people. It was with this in my heart that I resolved to write the piece.

Therefore, to begin with the protagonist, I needed to come up with a bizarre name. Up until three days before the deadline, I thought of nothing else but the protagonist’s name. Then, I effected the birth of

Nemuri Kyōshirō. As it were, this was the result of my etonne calculations. Perhaps, there would be at least a few people, who, in response to this name, would either raise an eyebrow, or might think it interesting, and end up remembering it.

Formerly, having challenged to mortal combat the ugly and bizarre dual monster of the seventeenth century’s catholic cabal and the nineteenth century’s positively philistine attitudes, the geniuses of the nineteenth century would go for bloodletting. A tremendous pride was needed for that.

The twentieth-century mediocrity that I am, I have no stomach for challenging today’s perfected science. However, this does not mean that I could not occasionally provide entertainment for the sense of fantasy still remaining inside people’s minds. That would become my unworthy service of offering an overabundance of swordsmanship reading. Should it be widely read, my objective would be fulfilled. As for the tendency to laugh off Nemuri Kyōshirō’s acrobatic swordsmanship as absurd, if 20 years ago [Shibata wrote this in March 1962], we had heard of the atomic bomb, we would have certainly dismissed the idea with a laugh of derision. Should anyone fail to realize that vis-à-vis the new weapon, like the atomic bomb, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s sword represented modest humanism, that would probably be due to the writer’s error. However, I can assert here that this esprit [エスプリ] has been borrowed from the geniuses of the nineteenth century.²⁷³

Speaking of the “tremendous pride” in the passage referenced above, Shibata again coins his own furigana for the term 慢心 whereby the customary まんしん is replaced with オルグィユ – the katakana rendering of the French word, orgueil, pride, a creative act of tribute to Charles Baudelaire. Shibata’s use of furigana オルグィユ for 慢心 could be dated as early as June 1948, when he articulated in his essay Dandisumu ron his understanding of the impact Beau Brummell and Charles Baudelaire had on the European dandyism tradition:

In order to positively curse the nineteenth century, he made all kinds of scientific preparations – there is tremendous pride in that. Is that not the dandyism running in Brummell’s and Baudelaire’s blood? Isn’t dandyism the form that is born out of ‘pride’ acting contrary to expectations, being drawn to the novelty of eternity?\textsuperscript{274}

Shibata had a special liking for Baudelaire. Perhaps, he felt a certain kinship, based on the common and shared experience between Baudelaire and himself; like Shibata, Baudelaire lost his father early in life, and like Shibata’s, Baudelaire’s life was marked by feelings of loneliness and rebellion against convention. Whatever the case may be, Shibata liked to think of himself as Baudelaire’s literary relation, having once written, “Myself, being of the same ilk, I can be forgiven for my impertinent attempt to comprehend Baudelaire’s true talent.”\textsuperscript{275}

Care needs to be taken when assessing Baudelaire and other French writers’ influence on Shibata; although Shibata did not know French (“Since I am Japanese, I can only speak Japanese”), he read French literature in translations voraciously.\textsuperscript{276} Moreover, there is rather strong anecdotal evidence that Shibata had other, unconventional kinds of access to French literature, including untranslated works. In his speech at the Thirteenth Shibata Renzaburō Commemoration Meeting (柴田錬三郎を偲


It was the kind of a job where I would read all kinds of modern French novels untranslated in Japan, especially mystery novels [推理小説] and detective novels [探偵小説], and would then narrate their storylines to Shibaren-san [Shibata Renzaburō]. He would then pay me a small fee. Five hundred yen each time, now this would probably be around five or ten thousand yen. Even so, at that time, this was a valuable source of income to me.  

It is also worth noting that Shibata’s own brother-in-law, Saitō Isoo (斎藤磯雄) was a well-known translator of French literature who contributed to the 1954 edition of Bōdorēru zenshū, Baudelaire’s complete collected works by the Sōgensha publishing house. While it is not known to what extent, if any, Shibata discussed Baudelaire’s work with Saitō, it would also not be prudent to discount the possibility of Shibata’s getting additional insights into Baudelaire from Saitō. It is therefore important to attempt to glean specific aspects of Baudelaire’s poetics and idiosyncrasy as understood and internalized by Shibata.

It appears that Baudelaire’s flagrant disregard for social norms and conventions, his rejection of the bourgeois morality, and his doubt- and conflict-laden relationship with religion, as it manifested itself in his stylized conduct and writings, made a great

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impression on Shibata and reverberated with the latter’s own feelings vis-à-vis the
contemporary society and his place in it. Shibata grew to value his ability to be alone, to
gaze at the surrounding society with cool and somewhat detached eyes; his position was
that of an observer, and the rebellious model provided by Baudelaire played a major part
in forming this persona of his character. It appears that Shibata was influenced by
Baudelaire’s idea of viewing the society through the eyes of an outcast. In Baudelaire’s
case, one such image was a rag-picker, a social pariah associated with the dregs of
humanity, with filth, who, unnoticed and unappreciated, goes through the garbage of the
world, and who, possessing of a keen sight and the perceptive inner eye, observes and
reassigns value to items, people, and ideas, as the poem, *Le vin des chiffonniers* (Rag-
pickers’ wine, 1857), illustrates,

Souvent à la clarté rouge d’un réverbère
Dont le vent bat la flamme et tourmente le verre,
Au cœur d’un vieux faubourg, labyrinthe fangeux
Où l’humanité grouille en ferments orageux,

On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête,
Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète,
Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets,
Epanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets.

Il prête des serments, dicte des lois sublimes,
Terrasse les méchants, relève les victimes,
Et sous le firmament comme un dais suspendu
S’enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu.

Oui, ces gens harcelés de chagrins de ménage
Moulus par le travail et tourmentés par l’âge
Ereintés et pliant sous un tas de débris,
Vomissement confus de l’énorme Paris,

Revienennent, parfumés d’une odeur de futaillles,
Suivis de compagnons, blanchis dans les batailles,
Dont la moustache pend comme les vieux drapeaux.

Oftentimes in the clear of the lantern’s red glow
As the wind hits the flame, on the glass it rains blows,
In the heart of an old suburb, in that labyrinth of mire
Where humanity teems in disquiet of ire,

A rag-picker is seen, when he comes, his head bobbing,
Like a poet he stumbles, at the walls he is groping,
Unconcerned with the spies, who are but his subjects,
He pours his heart into glorious projects.

He offers his sermons, hallow laws he dictates,
Strike he does at the wicked, and the victims he aides,
And with heavens his baldaquin, like a dais suspended,
He gets drunk with his virtue and the splendors attendant.

Yes, these people, careworn by the sorrows of daily affairs
Ground down by work and tormented by years
Beaten down and folding under the heap of debris,
Tangled retch of enormous Paris,

Coming back, all perfumed with the odor of barrels,
Followed by cronies, grey-haired in battles,
Whose moustaches are hanging like old standards and
Les bannières, les fleurs et les arcs triomphaux
Se dressent devant eux, solennelle magie!
Et dans l'étourdissante et lumineuse orgie
Des clairons, du soleil, des cris et du tambour,
Ils apportent la gloire au peuple ivre d'amour!

C'est ainsi qu'à travers l'Humanité frivole
Le vin roule de l'or, éblouissant Pactole;
Par le gosier de l'homme il chante ses exploits
Et règne par ses dons ainsi que les vrais rois.

Pour noyer la rancœur et bercer l'indolence
De tous ces vieux maudits qui meurent en silence,
Dieu, touché de remords, avait fait le sommeil;
L'Homme ajouta le Vin, fils sacré du Soleil!

Baudelaire’s image of the rag-picker is the poet’s reassessment of the role of the artist and the outcast in contemporary society. He is an artist possessing super-sight, which allows him to lead an existence outside of what is visible, a life that takes place on dual planes, both in the underworld of human debris and filth, and in the empyreans of artistic vision and judgment. That notion of super-sight is of particular importance to our understanding of Shibata’s literature. On the subject of Baudelaire’s rag-picker and his particular capacity for sight and vision, scholar Mikhail Yampolsky wrote, “Super-sight becomes necessary for the artist when the clear hierarchy organizing the world disappears. At the moment when the world turns into a chaotic hoard of objects, using the rag picker’s shop as its model, there comes about the need for particularly sharp sight.”

The disappearance of the “clear hierarchy organizing the world” and the world turning

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279 Mikhail Yampolsky, Nabljudyatel; Ocherki istorii videniya [The observer; studies in the history of vision] (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2000), 41.
into a “chaotic hoard of objects” is precisely the environment in which Shibata Renzaburō’s Nemuri Kyōshirō was conjured up — postwar Japan, the society that had been all but destroyed in World War II and was now struggling not only with foreign-imposed reforms, but also with the way these reforms “were turned upside down and emasculated.” This is how the literary critic Akiyama Shun described the period that saw the birth of Nemuri Kyōshirō,

That humans exist alone was thoroughly taught to me by my wartime and postwar experience. I saw that having lost its order, the society began to show its reverse side. I saw that the human ways of living and dying began to show a character completely different from everything hitherto known. Well, then, I thought, was all this a lie, all the everyday life and human condition that this peaceful society was showing? I was young and I could say that through this new fundamental experience, my own perception has undergone a change. Insofar as my character, this was a small, but hard to change condition. Thus, from then on, as my sense and sensibility could not help but experience a sort of fundamental disharmony and dissonance, I would not try to fit in with the society. Especially, as this so-called postwar society was established little by little, as though a theater screen being painted on, to the eyes of the people observing the process, this was akin to an act from a huge comedy. Nemuri Kyōshirō made its entrance at the exact moment that period was in the process of changing.

Much like Baudelaire’s rag-picker, Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō appears at the time when the society has lost its familiar forms; something new and unfamiliar was emerging in the postwar decade from the ruins. Like Baudelaire’s rag-picker, Nemuri Kyōshirō possesses culture, education, and artistic judgment that enable him to navigate

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in the world around him. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s dandyism and his uniqueness vis-à-vis other kengō shōsetsu characters is in the completion and all-roundness of his character; like a Renaissance prince, he is equally skilled with a sword and a brush. He is an intellectual in whom the extremes of culture and education merge with the extremes of martial training and prowess. In Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s words,

\[\text{[T]he fact that Kyōshirō, who is always coolly awake inside his mind, was created as an intellectual city dweller, evoking in one’s mind the high-class idlers of modern society, is no accident. Possessing the spirit of elegance that admires things of sophistication, Kyōshirō, on the one hand, has compassion for the social conditions of Edo’s ordinary people, while on the other, he also has personal opinions about calligraphy and art. Should he pick up a brush, he is a skilled calligrapher in the style of Wang Xizhi [王義之], and not only does he like the kouta ballads [小唄] and tokiwazu kabuki narratives [常磐律], as well as things like Noh singing [謡曲], but he is also suitably schooled in haikai waka verse [俳諧], Japanese [日本の古典] and Chinese classics [漢籍], and even Western learning [洋学]. In short, Kyōshirō’s urban refinement is lined with his extensive culture and intellect.}^{282}\]

And like Baudelaire’s rag-picker, Nemuri Kyōshirō is a man possessing super-sight. His sight could be read at several levels, the most immediate of which is his highly polished senses. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s extraordinary sight is introduced right away, in the first chapter, Hina no kubi, of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae, the first work in the Nemuri Kyōshirō series to see the light of day in the May 1956 issue of Shūkan shinchō: “There is no change in stillness. The darkness unmoving, not a sign of life could be heard within.

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Nevertheless, Kyōshirō’s instincts were such that if anything were about to come into contact with his sharply polished nerves, he felt it in advance.”283 As a result of this super-sight, Nemuri Kyōshirō is always one step ahead of his foes. This capacity for super-sight extends to Kyōshirō’s detective-like abilities: no matter how sophisticated the plot he is drawn into, he sees through it, always emerging unscathed and victorious in the end. On another level, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s super-sight is extended into and crystallized in his movement; Kyōshirō is in constant flux, drawn into intrigues that happen outside of his volition, and he is moving from neighborhood to neighborhood of Edo and from city to city in his bid to solve the puzzle and outsmart his enemies. Sight and movement are inseparable; to see, he needs to move; to move he needs to see. Analyzing the function of Kyōshirō’s travels, Akiyama Shun notes, “This is not due to the convenience of the creative process.”284 He explains Kyōshirō’s travels as a means of escaping from the society. While this argument does have merit, it would, in my opinion, be of more interest to link Kyōshirō’s travels to the notion of sight. His travels constitute, in fact, a line of sight and an act of seeing; Nemuri Kyōshirō himself, moving through the Edo society, in essence, embodies the notion of sight – piercing and penetrating. His movement is an integral part of his vision and super-sight; the movement itself is a way of seeing – seeing through the plots, through the lies, and through the society itself. Nemuri Kyōshirō’s sword and his famous full-moon circle killing style are also part of his super-sight. If Nemuri Kyōshirō’s gaze is cutting and penetrating, so is his sword,

which is an extension of his vision. His finely attuned senses and his movement are melded in his sword, with which Kyōshirō cuts through enemies, schemes, plots, and lies. In fact, Kyōshirō “sees” with his sword.

Nemuri Kyōshirō is an observer in Baudelaire’s sense. Charles Baudelaire wrote of the role of the observer, “He can also be compared to a mirror as large as the crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with conscience, which, with each of its movements represents the multiple lives and the moving grace of all the elements of life.” Nemuri Kyōshirō is indeed a mirror, reflecting the world around him, and is a tool for Shibata to address contemporary issues via Kyōshirō’s gaze from the Edo period. Akiyama Shun wrote about Nemuri Kyōshirō’s mirror role in the postwar Japanese society, “What he was showing was indeed the feelings vis-à-vis life, feelings vis-à-vis fate that we already had deep down in our hearts.” In Kiyohara Yasumasa’s words, “addressing the various problems and the accompanying new issues arising in the postwar society, Shibata Renzaburō, with his keen sense of the contemporary, did a splendid job of revealing and bringing them to the fore.”

Baudelaire’s rag-picker is a bottom-dweller, a pariah whose social status allows him to remain unseen and anonymous. Not dissimilarly, Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō is an outsider, a masterless rōnin, an outcast of mixed-blood origins, and a Christian apostate, who drifts through the Edo society, cutting his way through enemies and falsehoods with

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equal ease, all the while seeing the society and the world around him with cold and distant eyes:

When Kyōshirō, a high-class urban idler possessing both intelligence and refinement, dressed casually in black, his hands stylishly in his sleeves, walks back and forth along the streets of Edo, or steps into the isolated alleyways and red light districts, his movement incessant, his mind is usually coolly alert. That is, while Kyōshirō is a society insider, his fate at the same time, is to occupy the outside position; that is precisely why he is always glaring at Edo crossroads through that coolly alert self-consciousness, through the prism of his own position, and always as though overlooking from a high vantage point. 288

In fact, Kyōshirō’s roaming through the streets of Edo, alone in the crowd, his aloof yet alert gaze, and his powers of observation and deduction, make him a flâneur in the baudelarian sense, “an idle man-about-town,” occupying the position of both the society’s insider and outsider at the same time. It the words of Walter Benjamin, “[T]he man of leisure can indulge in the perambulations of the flâneur only if as such he is already out of place. He is as much out of place in an atmosphere of complete leisure as in the feverish turmoil of the city.” 289 Thus, endowing Kyōshirō with the qualities of a London dandy and a Parisian flâneur, Shibata transplants a modernist protagonist into the Edo-period Japan, “with this skill of a chef wielding a kitchen knife,” creatively

combining modernist and traditional kengō shōsetsu elements, and imbuing Kyōshirō with the psychological dimension hitherto unknown in kengō shōsetsu.290

Moreover, introducing Christianity as a constituent element of his protagonist, Shibata once again turns to the essential conflict of Modernism, gleaned from French literature, namely that between faith and doubt, religion and disbelief. In this, Nemuri Kyōshirō is closer to a protagonist of a nineteenth century French novel than he is to an Edo-period samurai. Making Nemuri Kyōshirō an apostate Christian, Shibata is toying with the image of Don Juan – a killer and a womanizer who knows he is doomed, but remains unrepentant. One work of French literature in particular comes to mind in connection with Nemuri Kyōshirō: Prosper Mérimée’s Les Âmes du purgatoire (Souls of Purgatory, 1834), which takes on the legend of Don Juan. Parallels can be drawn between Mérimée’s and Shibata’s writing, as the intensity and the visceral significance of religious and religious-inspired imagery appears to be shared between the two writers.291 In particular, the apocalyptic visions of hell and torment that both Don Juan de Maraña and Nemuri Kyōshirō experience early in life, both through the agency of their mothers, seem to be consonant. The passage in Mérimée’s Les Âmes du purgatoire reads as follows,

In the countess de Maraña’s chapel there was a painting in the Morales’ hard and dry style, depicting the torments of purgatory. All kinds of tortures that the painter could imagine were represented there with so

291 While it is not known whether Shibata read Mérimée’s Les Âmes du purgatoire, a Japanese translation of this work was available, translated by Okada Hiroshi [岡田弘], and published by Sekai Bungakusha [世界文学社] as Jigoku no Don Huan [煉獄のドン・ファン] in 1947.
much precision that even an inquisition torturer would be hard pressed to find fault with it. …Every time he entered his mother’s quarters, the little Juan would remain motionless in contemplation before this painting, which at the same time frightened and captivated him. Above all, he could not take his eyes away from a man who was suspended over a burning brazier by iron hooks piercing his ribs, while a serpent was gnawing on his entrails.\footnote{Prosper Mérimée, Nouvelles (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1962), 163.}

The above description from Les Âmes du purgatoire appears to have been filtered into Shibata’s vision, traces of it perceivable, if not directly visible in the Black Mass scene quoted earlier, where Kyōshirō, still a child, witnesses his father’s unholy ritual using his mother as a sacrificial victim. That scene is conductive to our understanding of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character: it was pivotal in his later rejection of Christianity; it also followed the model set by Mérimée – that of a man who carries hell within himself since childhood.

Shibata’s Nemuri Kyōshirō is a dandy, in the nineteenth century meaning of the word; much like England’s Beau Brummel whom Shibata admired, his Kyōshirō is a complete image, in whom outwardly appearance, speech patterns, and conduct are all carefully calculated for eliciting and sustaining the readers’ interest via shock effect. Baudelaire wrote on the subject of dandyism,

Dandyism is not even, as some ill-informed people seem to think, an immoderate taste for appearance and material elegance. To a perfect dandy, these things are nothing but a symbol of the aristocratic superiority of the spirit. Also, to his eyes, enamored above all with distinction [sic], the perfection of appearance lies in absolute simplicity, which effectively is the best way to distinguish oneself. What then, is this passion that,
having become a doctrine, has created domineering adepts, this unwritten institution that has formed such a haughty caste? It is, above all, the burning need to make oneself original, contained by the exterior limits of convention. ... It is the pleasure to surprise and the proud satisfaction of never getting surprised.²⁹³

Shibata espouses Baudelaire’s concept of dandyism to the point where he uses the katakana spelling of the French word étonner (to surprise) to coin his own furigana phonetic guide for the expression 人を驚かす (hito o odorokasu), to surprise people.²⁹⁴

Indeed, Nemuri Kyōshirō, Shibata’s alter ego, follows Baudelaire’s pattern to the letter: his conduct takes others by surprise, while he himself is never taken aback or caught by surprise, as the following exchange indicates:

“Do you know why your elder brother has not been home for a long time?”
“No, I do not know.”
“Please listen to this. Your elder brother has been killed in Mizuno Echizen-no kami’s mansion. The one who cut him down was I,” Kyōshirō uttered bluntly.²⁹⁵

Having perverted his teacher’s instruction on swordsmanship, Kyōshirō uses techniques that would be considered illicit from the traditional swordsmanship’s point of view – drawing the adversary into a sleepy void via the hypnotic effect of his engetsu

sappō style. Cécile Sakai wrote about Kyōshirō’s swordsmanship, “The combat style that he employs to defeat his adversaries, called *Engetsu Sappō* (Full Moon killing style), makes use of treacherous methods, such as hypnotism.” 296 The result is two-fold: Kyōshirō’s sword is endowed with the *jihi no ken* (慈悲の剣, sword of mercy) properties, whereby the entranced enemy does not suffer as he is cut down, and Kyōshirō himself, having turned to proscribed swordsmanship, loses his swordsman’s status. He is not so much a rōnin, a samurai, or a swordsman, as he is a tortured soul, for whom swordsmanship is no more than a mechanical device of survival. Swordsmanship, therefore, is an important element of Kyōshirō’s image, but is not a constituent of his identity. Shibata wrote on this aspect of Nemuri Kyōshirō:

> As it were, in order to propel him on a path opposite that of the way of a swordsman, I came up with the *engetsu sappō*. The person who is being cut down passes out. Therefore, he does not experience the pain of being cut down. The person who cuts him down is the one whose conscience is overflown with the sense of guilt of having slaughtered a person. So it is just the reverse. The woman, who had been deceived and raped, forgets all her suffering in the throes of ecstasy. The Don Juan is the one who is experiencing the unbearable suffering from the feelings of guilt of having ruined the woman’s future. That is because Kyōshirō is not a swordsman. 297


While Nemuri Kyōshirō does not kill the innocent and only kills when attacked, he nevertheless kills scores of men throughout the series, and the tally of his fallen enemies is innumerable. Yamaguchi Kazuhiko wrote on this aspect of Nemuri Kyōshirō:

Because Kyōshirō intentionally accrues Evil, he might be seen to be beckoning towards himself the inevitable shadow of retribution via these extremes. During those moments, the phase Kyōshirō is in is extremely close to the position of Judas Iscariot who attempted to prove the glory of Christ by becoming a traitor.²⁹⁸

While Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s analogy to Judas Iscariot is not without merit, a different one appears to be just as possible. Shibata described Kyōshirō as a “traveler.” Nemuri Kyōshirō’s travels are of a dark sort. His movement is elliptical – like that of a caged animal; there is no redemption, salvation, or any sort of a positive outcome for Kyōshirō; the “tragedy” (悲惨, hisan) of his birth predetermined his way of life and the manner of his projected death – nodareji (野垂れ死, death by the wayside). Death following in his wake, it is his fate to move in perpetual motion, mirroring Agasfer, the Wandering Jew of medieval European legend, who, according to the legend, threw a stone at Christ and for that was condemned to wander the earth – without respite and without the relief of death. The resemblance to Agasfer is all the more poignant because of Kyōshirō’s intense dislike of Christianity. In Yamaguchi Kazuhiko’s words, “For a

drifter without a fixed abode, those paths exactly correspond to the expanse of his inner world, while his travels indeed amount to an allegory of living in this world.”

The dandyism of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character can be read at two levels. First, it is his conduct, quite in line with the precepts left by Baudelaire and Barbey d’Aurevilly – aloof and stoically calm, never taken aback himself, yet always catching friend and foe alike off-guard. Second, Nemuri Kyōshirō is the antithesis to the previous kengō shōsetsu protagonists with their obsession with righteousness, samurai values, and swordsmanship-based identities in that his actions are directed, first and foremost, towards the pursuit of self-interest; his ego, with all the self-absorption, gloom, self-loathing, and self-deprecation, requires immediate gratification, be it money, women, or sake, and he has no qualms obtaining that gratification whenever it suits him – though the very act may plunge him into further depths of existential despair and self-hatred.

### 3.3 Nemuri Kyōshirō’s Impact on and Significance to Japanese Society

“I wonder,” Akiyama Shun wrote in his essay, Shibata Renzaburō – mō hitori no fukuinsha [Shibata Renzaburō – one more demobilized soldier], “how could I ever explain to others the appeal of a novel like Nemuri Kyōshirō here?” Perhaps, one clue towards answering that question could be found in a gossip circulating in Japanese society.

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literary magazines circa 1967: according to it, when asked, “What kind of a writer are you?” in an interview to France’s Nice matin newspaper, Shibata responded, “I am a writer like Alexandre Dumas [余は、アレクサンドル・デュマの如き作家である].” Referring to that rumor, Shibata himself wrote, “I have no desire to sing my own praises, but since the island where Edmond Dantès (the protagonist of Dumas’ Count of Monte Cristo) was incarcerated was in Cannes’ offing, I simply thought that if I answered I was a chambara writer like Dumas, it would be easier to understand. Whether it ever took place or not, Shibata’s self-comparison to Dumas was accurate; Alexandre Dumas’ famous maxim “What is history? It is the nail on which I can hang my novels” is equally applicable to Shibata, who, to borrow André Maurois’ words concerning Dumas, “had a love of history, but no respect for it”. Indeed, that Shibata is rather liberal with history is evident to all but the least discerning eye: a certain suspension of disbelief is required, for instance, in order to overlook the improbability of a Dutchman with the Spanish-Portuguese name of Juan Hernando (ジュアン・ヘルナンド, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s father) and a Catholic (The Black Mass described in Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae is, after all, a perversion of a Catholic ritual), arriving in Japan from the fiercely Protestant Netherlands in the early 1800s. Nor does it pass the test of scrutiny that a foreign priest should roam at will the streets of the sakoku-period (鎖国, national isolation) Edo, abducting beautiful young women – at a time when foreigners were banned from Japan under the penalty of

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death and only a handful of Dutch traders were allowed in the country, confined under strict watch on Dejima Island.

Nevertheless, whether Shibata’s readers were willing to overlook these infractions, or these fine details were simply lost on them, when *Nemuri Kyōshirō* hit the bookstores in 1956, it had an effect that even Shibata himself could not foresee. *Nemuri Kyōshirō* became an instant hit and a catchphrase. In this respect as well, the analogy with Dumas proved to be accurate insofar as *Nemuri Kyōshirō*’s popularity and mass appeal were concerned. Shibata’s work became immensely popular, capturing the imagination of thousands. Akiyama Shun continues in *Shibata Renzaburō – mō hitori no fukuinsha*:

> When this novel was being published, I immediately became one of its fans. The first of it, *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* was serialized between May of the thirty-first and March of the thirty-third years of Showa [1956-1958] in *Shūkan shinchō*. As I was barely able to wait for the newly published issue, immediately opening the pages of this novel, still smelling of fresh print, on my way to work, was a great pleasure for me. I would read it two or three times.

> Then, I have a secret confession to make: truth be told, even now, I still love reading this novel. When you have a depressing day, there are moments when no matter what you do, you feel like a worthless fellow. That is when I open this novel. In order to cheer myself up on a depressing day.  

> This sentiment is echoed in letters Shibata received from the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* readers. “Having read those [*Nemuri Kyōshirō*] works, I was so amazed I was speechless,” a sixteen-year-old young woman from Yamagata wrote in her letter to Shibata.  

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Another, a twenty-one-year-old female reader from Kagawa Prefecture wrote,

“[W]henever something happened, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s image would suddenly float before me, and I would end up thinking – in this situation, would Nemuri Kyōshirō say this, would he do that?”

In another instance, a young man complained in a letter that his girlfriend accused him of being so unlike Nemuri Kyōshirō that she lost any interest in being with him. The fascination with Nemuri Kyōshirō would even take some bizarre and grotesque forms. A ryokan inn owner in Hakone Tōnozawa went as far as to get a bank loan in order to rebuild his inn in the hatago style, replete with a sign, Nemuri Kyōshirō goteijuku (眠狂四郎御定宿), so as to suggest Nemuri Kyōshirō had stayed there.

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s popularity took Shibata by surprise. “I had no idea,” Shibata would write later, in 1962, “that something I wrote would be read as much as it was, and even when I did realize that it was, there was quite a bit of a feeling of resistance somewhere in my heart.”

In fact, initially Shibata was planning on killing his hero off at the completion of the projected first twenty stories. However, Shinchōsha’s Saitō Jū’ichi realized, with the success of Nemuri Kyōshirō, that the magazine had struck a gold mine, and insisted on the series’ continuation. Shibata was not happy, writing,

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This deep emotion is very vague, but not having any recollection of having written a work after my own heart up until then (this is not at all humility), after that I think I still did not have a great deal of confidence. I had not the slightest intention to make *Nemuri Kyōshirō* my representative work.\(^{308}\)

Several elements could be said to account for *Nemuri Kyōshirō*’s success. One such element is the popularity of the *yomikiri* format in the postwar period and Shibata’s ability to use the most out of it. The rapid story development was crucial to Shibata’s use of the format, the completion of an entire novel’s episode within a single issue of a periodical. In Kiyohara Yasumasa’s words,

On top of the *yomikiri* format, the series’ special characteristic was that each episode would be permeated by a single key theme. Moreover, through the speedy development, the exquisite motion of the brush propels the reader’s interest from one point to the next, so that from the very beginning the reader finds himself drawn into the narrative world of Shibata Renzaburō’s creating.\(^{309}\)

While the *yomikiri* format indicates that an episode of a serialized novel is completed in a single weekly installment of a literary journal, Shibata made skillful use of what he called *takara sagashi* (宝さがし) or treasure hunt, and *donden gaeshi* (どんでん返し) or unexpected twist techniques in each episode. The novelist Yoshiyuki Junnosuke recalled that Shibata had once said to him, “When a *takara sagashi* element is included, it makes it both interesting to the readers and easy to write [「宝さがし」の要


According to Endo Shūsaku, Shibata himself would explain his use of *donden gaeshi* as follows, “Using *donden gaeshi* just once won’t do. It won’t do unless you use *donden gaeshi* twice [とんでん返しは一回ではいかんのだ。どんでも返しは二回やらなくっちゃいかんのだ].”

Thus, each *yomikiri* episode of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* included the element of *takara sagashi* – resolving some mystery or searching for some secret that required Nemuri Kyōshirō’s perception and keen senses; the search for answers and unraveling of that mystery would provide the story’s plot. The *donden gaeshi*, the unexpected twists in the storyline were both instrumental in keeping the readers’ interest and stimulating their hunger for more, while also offering the opportunity for Kyōshirō’s Full-Moon killing style to resolve these twists in the most immediate and gratifying way.

Writing in response to a critic who accused the *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series of essentially following the same pattern of “some incident [ある事件] followed by a resolution via Kyōshirō” in each episode, Shibata wrote,

The problem is that very “some incident.” “Some incident” cannot be the same. The situation where a different incident is occurring, one after another, every week, is extremely hard for a writer. Within the space of a week, there is no room for thinking at leisure. While you reflect, the week is up in the blink of an eye.

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Above all, in the early case of Burai hikae, when the agreement for the twenty stories was first extended, and I had not a clue as to what sort of story I could write, writing one story a week was such a hellish torment, I don’t know how many times I begged the Shukan shincho editorial department to please let me stop writing this. However, as Mr. S. [Saitō Jū’ichi] who had made me write Kyōshirō would have none of it, there were incidents when Mr. S. and I would meet, glaring at each other in anger in the Shinchōsha office.312

While each Nemuri Kyōshirō episode in the weekly installment of Shukan shincho was a more or less self-contained story, together they wove into a greater overarching narrative with its own plot. Most of Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae is the story of Kyōshirō’s involvement in the shadowy struggle between the Shogun Tokugawa Ienari’s (徳川家斉) inner circle advisors, the Chief Superintendent Mizuno Tadanari (本丸老中筆頭水野忠也) and Chamberlain Mizuno Tadakuni (本丸老中水野忠邦). The background to that struggle is as follows:

At that time… The use of secret agents in the power struggle between the top bakufu elders had become an everyday occurrence.

Now, in the twelfth year of Bunsei [1830], the Superintendent Mizuno Dewanokami Tadaakira [老中筆頭水野出羽守忠成], desiring luxury and influence, was intent on gaining the sole power in the inner circle of the Edo Castle [Shogun’s seat of power]. Having obtained Shogun Ienari’s and his birth father Harusada’s special favor, he was bestowed the right to crested clothing that extended even to saddle clothes, which was unprecedented, the only exception being Tokugawa Ichimon. Then, with the three men that comprised the inner castle’s evil faction, such as the wakadoshiyori [若年寄, assistant councilor] Hayashi Higo-no-kami [寄林肥後守], the osobagoyotoritsugi [御側御用取次, chamberlain] Mizuno Mino-no-kami [水野美濃守], the onandotodori [御納戸頭取, 

privy chamberlain] Minobe Chikuzen-no-kami [美濃部筑前守] being Tadaakira’s confidants, the other elders were powerless to counter them.

However, the year before, as soon as Mizuno Echizen-no-kami Tadakuni, having been transferred from his duties as Kyoto Magistrate and Chamberlain to being the Chamberlain of the Western Palace Quarters [西丸老中], made his entrance as the advisor of Ienari’s successor, Ieyoshi, the government started showing signs of subtle change.

That Mizuno Tadakuni harbored the desire to govern the country singlehandedly was evident to anyone’s eyes.

Tadakuni was a feudal lord worth sixty thousand koku of rice according to the tōritsu code [唐律, the feudal Tang-era code]. However, since those who were the recipients according to the code had the important duty of guarding Nagasaki while alternating with the various lords of the Western domains, they were not allowed to rise up to the palace chamberlain responsibilities. Resenting this, Tadakuni willingly petitioned to have his seal moved to Hamamatsu, and in the end, was granted his wish. Were the true incomes to be compared, according to the tōritsu code system, it would be over two hundred and fifty thousand koku, while in Hamamatsu it would be a bit below a hundred thousand koku. It was then that his vassals tried to dissuade him from moving his seal. However, firm in his intent, Tadakuni would not listen. That is how fierce Tadakuni’s ambition to serve as Chamberlain was.

There was no reason for the Tadaakira clan to give their tacit approval to Tadakuni’s entrance to the Edo Castle. The silent struggle was about to take a frightful turn.313

The struggle involves hina dolls, bestowed by the Shogun upon the Mizuno Tadakuni’s household. Intent on causing and then exposing the affront to the Tadakuni clan, which would lead to its removal from the shogun’s good grace and downfall, Tadakuni’s enemies employ Tadakuni’s retainer, Takebe Senjūrō (武部仙十郎), to orchestrate the insult. Takebe uses Nemuri Kyōshirō, who cuts off and steals the hina dolls’ heads. In the course of adventures that follow, the heads become separated and

change hands multiple times. Thus, the search for the dolls’ heads becomes the overarching *takara sagashi* of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*.  

Another element that clearly accounted for *Nemuri Kyōshirō* series’ success was Shibata’s own skill as a storyteller, and his ability to make the narrative relevant to the readers’ present, despite it being set in the Edo-period past. In his essay, *Horobi ni wa bigaku ga aru* (滅びには美学がある, There Are Esthetics In Ruination), Shibata links the events of the Edo-period past he wrote about to his own postwar present:

> Were the rice prices to rise, the retainers of every clan that depend on rice, low-level *hatamoto*, low-level vassals, would naturally be overjoyed, but accompanying this, the valuation of everyday goods would skyrocket, and life would become miserable. It is the same with the modern salarymen.  

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Thus, when addressing Kyōshirō in the *Nise shūjin* (贋囚人, Fake Inmate) chapter of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae*, a character called Ōshio Heihachirō (a real-life person) says,

> The people are suffering because the corrupt officials and dishonest merchants have conspired to jack up the price of rice, but on top of that, there is the incompetence of government administrators who let this happen; it has gotten to this unbearable point because the government’s own finances are in dire straits. Things like this relief rice are no more than a measly stopgap measure. …The hour is coming. The hour is coming when the people, who will deal a crushing blow to this corrupt polity [乱れた政道] and shake this country, will have to appear. If those in authority are unable to strategize and warriors are unable to die, then

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how will the people be ruled – that is the question. Were just one patriot to rise up and sacrifice himself for the country, for the first time, countless patriots would follow in his stead, and it will be possible to take down the entire edifice rotten at the joists. Thinking that if thousands of people simmer and grumble in the shadows, it will somehow reverberate with the Bakufu government, is just great nonsense. Rather, if just one person were to rise up with a lion’s roar, whoever it may be, would it not provide a powerful impetus for the reform of the country – that is the only thing I am thinking about now.\textsuperscript{315}

The atmosphere of general unease felt by Shibata’s readership at the time was such that it required no special effort to discern allusions to the present time and draw parallels between Shibata’s writing set in Edo period and the postwar reality. In another essay, Shibata wrote, “Where is the difference between the Tokugawa period sales clerks and modern trading companies’ employees? It has not changed one bit.”\textsuperscript{316}

If \textit{Daibosatsu tōge} reveals the gloom and despair of the suffocating social and political environment of the post-High Treason Incident Japan, being the reaction to the eroding social contract between the individual and the state, Shibata’s \textit{Nemuri Kyōshirō} series provide exactly the opposite. The character of Nemuri Kyōshirō offered a way to avoid and escape, albeit subliminally, that social contract altogether – at precisely the time, when the state’s insistence on it was at its highest in the postwar era, and the accompanying positivist message was felt to be too rushed and too insincere. This is precisely where Nemuri Kyōshirō’s dandyism, its “wilful \textit{vanité} in the Pascalian sense,

that is his futility and his rejection of any relation with the other” came in, providing a means of escape from the surrounding reality, as it were, to Nemuri Kyōshirō’s readers.\textsuperscript{317} Therefore, Kyōshirō, whom Ōshio speaks to, has no desire to get involved, preferring the habitual retreat into his own private world:

> Although Kyōshirō did harbor a vague loathing for the Bakufu government’s contradictions, he was a man who in his emptiness would turn his back on general trends. As it were, he was a drifting rōnin who entrusted to the daily wind his empty shell of a man engulfed by the sense of evanescence that made resisting fate difficult.\textsuperscript{318}

Thus, Nemuri Kyōshirō’s dandyism, his individuality, lack of interest in politics, unashamed self-interest and self-absorption, made possible by his Full Moon killing style, was a way for the readers to experience the same, to turn their back to the social reality around them that they felt profoundly ambivalent about to begin with.

The renewed interest in the Edo period in the 1950s Japan was, in part, the reaction to that rapid onslaught of economic reconstruction and the attendant flurry of social neuroses. As Tsurumi Shinsuke wrote, “After 1952, in parallel to economic recovery and accelerated industrialization, the cult of Edo emerged in the field of young people’s fashion as an expression of their yearning for simple living.”\textsuperscript{319} That yearning came about at the time when that “simple living” was deemed to be getting further and

\textsuperscript{317} Bernard Howels, \textit{Baudelaire; Individualism, Dandyism and the Philosophy of History} (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre Of The University Of Oxford, 1996), 115.


further out of reach, its idealization increasing proportionately with the progress of economic and industrial recovery and the increase in the overall pace of life. The Russian poet Lev Rubinstein offered a rather convincing elucidation of the psychological mechanisms that account for that idealization and the inevitable simplification of the past in the popular imagination, whereby the image of the Golden Age, the imagined past appears in the form of its purely visual attributes that are immediately idealized by the public, which in its majority, has no knowledge of history. Visualization and imagination, thus, lead to the stylization of the past, which inevitably leads to enshrining it in the form of a myth.

[T]he circumstances that gave birth to that style are ignored altogether. The perception of the style of an era in its pure form is essentially, savage perception that is superhistorical. Style gives birth to myth. And myth gives birth to the bright and warm yearning for the passed and the unrealized.320

While not written about Japan, Rubinstein’s analysis is equally applicable to the circumstances of Shibata’s work and can account for the warm receipt Nemuri Kyōshirō series found with the Japanese readership, a “people spiritually reduced to zero, which [sic] has suffered destruction even in the secret places of the heart, faced with the huge task of finding new reasons for hoping and living [...].”321 Nemuri Kyōshirō went a long way towards responding to that hope and yearning at a time when Japan was in a state of

flux – a state of unease all the more disquieting because it was felt rather than seen. In the words of Jean-Jacque Origas:

[A] profound change appears to materialize between 1950 and 1960. Up until then each writer maintained certain ties (that he was free to accept or reject) with the social community he came from, with nature that surrounded him. These ties disappear. A chaotic forest of concrete housing projects is rising up to the sky. The great cities drain the population from the countryside. A man of letters must face a torrential development of daily and weekly press, radio, cinema, television, this whirlwind of images brought by the civilization of “information,” of “spectacle,” and of “pastime.”

The “torrential development” Jean-Jacques Origas wrote about was hardly an exaggeration. The 1950s decade was characterized by a veritable renaissance in magazine production, starting on February 19, 1956, when the first issue of *Shūkan shinchō* was published, marking a new trend in the Japanese publishing industry – the backing of magazines by major newspaper publishers. This tactic proved to be effective and within a short time the weekly magazine circulation in Japan reached twelve million copies, magazine stands appearing everywhere, including storefronts and even pharmacies. Availability went hand in hand with unprecedented affordability: more than half of the available titles cost just thirty yen. It was in this “thirty-yen culture era” (三十円文化時代), as it came to be called, that Shibata’s *Nemuri Kyōshirō* made its entrance.

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Shibata categorized himself as *akusho tsukurinushi* (悪書製造人, producer of vulgar writing) and *gesakusha* (戯作者, popular entertainment writer), having once said, “Being a pop writer and taking pride in it is exactly what makes a true writer.”\(^{324}\)

However, falling within the realm of popular literature carries the danger of tying the writer’s work to the domain of the “popular” of his era and putting it in peril of fading away with the passage of time. Shibata’s *Nemuri Kyōshirō* appears to be facing that test of time. In Makino Yū’s words,

[T]he greatest enemy of popular literature is the public. As has been pointed out, Shibaren’s writing with its heavy use of Chinese words is difficult to understand to begin with; moreover, with the high schools of today where Japanese history is no longer mandatory, how much ‘public’ could there be that is capable of understanding the ‘popular literature’ of the past? ‘Popular literature’ being the measure of an era’s knowledgeability, it is difficult to gauge by the modern yardstick. Therefore, when a piece that surpasses the scale is being neglected, it can all but gradually fade.\(^{325}\)

Shibata’s own self-assessment notwithstanding, his writing possesses a wealth of erudition, education, and culture that indeed make it “surpass the scale.” Nemuri Kyōshirō’s nihilism, dandyism, and fierce independence of the spirit, the panache-koikon of Cyrano de Bergerac found their way into Shibata’s other works and translated themselves into his other protagonists; it is with them that the next chapter of this dissertation will concern itself.

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CHAPTER 4
SHIBATA RENZABURŌ’S OTHER WORKS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Though *Nemuri Kyōshirō* is considered Shibata’s *daihyō saku* (代表作) – his representative work – the themes of nihilism, solitude, and gloomy stoicism vis-à-vis the world do not end with the *Kyōshirō* series. Nor are they limited to the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō. Rather, Kyōshirō-like protagonists found their way into Shibata’s other works, all exhibiting, to various degrees, the same qualities Shibata endowed Nemuri Kyōshirō with. All of them could be characterized by independence of the spirit, unwillingness to bow before authority, and, invariably, martial prowess to back it all up.

In his afterword to Shibata Renzaburō’s *Kenma inazuma tō* (剣魔稲妻刀, *Diabolical Lightning Sword*), the novelist Hisama Jūgi wrote,

*The works selected are, at the present time, out of print or out of stock, but regardless of the protagonists’ fame or lack thereof, their real-life or fictional status, there are common features linking these short stories. First of all, it is what could be called the protagonists’ “anti-establishment”-like inflexibility [非順応性, *hijun’nōsei*] vis-à-vis the conventional values; yet another one is the author’s own uncommon*
fascination with protagonists who are well aware of their own maladjustment.\footnote{Hisama Jūgi, afterword to Shibata Renzaburō, Kenma inazuma tō [Diabolical lightning sword] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1994), 356.}

The protagonists’ “maladjustment” Hisama Jūgi wrote about is precisely what constitutes the driving force, the *gendōryoku* (原動力) of Shibata’s novels. It is that unease with life, their own position in it, their disquiet vis-à-vis the world that drives them to seek solace in solitude, as well as cut out their path in life with the sword. Shibata’s protagonists indeed walk the path of solitude that places them in a state between life and death. Much like Nakazato Kaizan’s imagery of *tōge*, mountain passes that symbolize transitory passage between life and death, Shibata’s liberal use of the words *setsuna* and *shunkan* (剎那, 瞬間, instance, moment) in his descriptions of swordfights serves to achieve the same purpose.\footnote{See Chapter 2 for the discussion of Nakazato Kaizan’s use of *tōge* imagery.} Shibata himself wrote the following on the subject of his swordsmen protagonists’ ethereal existence between life and death in 1976:

> The essence of the sword is in positioning one’s body and mind right at the boundary between life and death. For human beings, there are no other moments as ghastly as that. That is precisely why warriors who have mastered the sword’s innermost secrets never experience such things as fear.

> As far as I know, such existence as that of people who have mastered the essence of the sword, and are advancing through life towards the goal of mastery, is not encountered anywhere other than Japan.

> To begin with, the sword itself being a murder weapon, people who have mastered this craft after making their first step, are entering Hell.
There, it is possible to become aware, in a way incomprehensible to average people, that hand-in-hand with the terror of the sword, there exists the “unity of heart and spirit.” The “heart” is a moving entity, while the “spirit” is an unmoving entity. The only thing that can bring these two mutually opposing entities to unity is the essence of the sword.  

At the meeting of *Waseda bungaku*’s discussion society, “Writers and Historical Consciousness” (作家と時代意識), in December of 1951, Shibata said, “There have been comparatively few demons in Japanese literature.” “Confronting the demon,” Shibata went on to say, “is one of the goals of our literature.” It could be said that the protagonists of the works considered here are doing exactly that – confronting the demon, the demon of their birth, appearance, station in life, or circumstances beyond their control, that defined the course of their lives.

### 4.1 *UME ISSHI* (梅一枝, A SINGLE BRANCH OF PLUM TREE, 1961)

*Ume isshi* is a bleak and dark novella that follows the life of one Takakura Gengo (高倉源吾), a child of “unfortunate” (数奇) origins who attempts to defeat the circumstances of his birth by becoming a proficient swordsman. Tragedy defines his birth and life. Gengo is introduced as follows:

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At the end of the eleventh year of Tenpo [1841] there appeared in the household of a Komoro Clan’s retainer, Takakura Shinzaemon [高倉信左衛門], a small child from Iida. This was on the order of the clan’s lord, Makino Tōtōmi-no-kami Yasutomo [牧野遠江守康哉]. All of a sudden, Shinzaemon now had two children.

The child’s name was Gengo [源吾], and he was the grandson of the Iida Clan’s retainer, Yamaguchi Danjirō [山口団二郎]. A mere ten days before, his mother, by the name of Fujiko [藤子], had been beheaded on the orders of the Iida Clan’s lord. The father’s name was not known. That was because the mother, Fujiko, was not married.

Gengo’s birth could truly be called unfortunate. That is, because he was a child born after his mother, Fujiko, having laid with the Awa Clan’s warrior and gotten pregnant, received a stay of execution for a month from the sentencing.

“There was a reason for all this,” the narrative goes. Though Gengo’s birth took place under tragic circumstances, there was dignity and nobility in his mother’s conduct; knowing her actions would spell her death, she did not flinch along the path that took her to her grave.

The Lord of Iida had a beauty by the name of Toyoura [豊浦] for a concubine. She was a woman of humble birth, but extreme ability, and as soon as she became a concubine, she immediately had the Lord of Iida wrapped around her little finger [とりこにしてしまった]. Before long, Toyoura started interfering in the governing of the domain, and though the domain’s warriors despised her, there wasn’t a single one to admonish her.

Finally, as this fact became clear throughout the domain, the Chief Chamberlain Yasutomi Kazue [城代家老の安富主計] made up his mind and went to the capital. Seeing through the purpose of Yasutomi Kazue’s visit, Toyoura made the first move, writing a welcome poem to welcome Kazue.

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“I shall confer this upon Lord Kazue,” she said, handing it to the Iida lord.
Kazue received the poem from the lord of the domain, but stuck it in his pocket without so much as looking at it.
“Seeing that I caught a bit of a cold, my unreserved apologies, my lord,” he declined, and, turning his back to the lord, pulled out the paper from his pocket and blew his nose.
Since the paper he pulled from his pocket was Toyoura’s inlaid colored paper, Kazue blew his nose, deliberately letting the lord see it.
The lord turned deathly pale in the face.
Turning to face the lord, Kazue joined his hands in supplication, muttering,
“My lord! Do you have the courage to take off this wrinkled head of mine?”
Rather than wasting endless words, the method Kazue elected had its effect.
The lord of the domain had no choice but make a promise to stay away from Toyoura.
However, two years later, upon hearing that while in the capital, Kazue had fallen victim to palsy, the lord of Iida had Toyoura renamed to Wakayama [若山] and brought her back to his household.
At first, Wakayama was very discreet, but as soon as she felt confident that the lord’s affection was as deep as before, she started acting as the lord’s scribe, even meddling in the domain’s affairs. Within half-a-year, her power doubled compared to before.
Having had his wife moved to the lower mansion, the lord would now spend every night in Wakayama’s quarters.
When Wakayama was removed and was living in the lower mansion, Fujiko, the daughter of Edo-based Yamaguchi Danjirō, had become a lady-in-waiting, and was learning writing and waka poetry. That is to say, they had a teacher-pupil relationship.
One day, summoned by her father Danjirō, she was ordered,
“For the sake of the domain, kill Lady Wakayama” [国のため、若山殿を刺せ].
She kept silent for a while, with her head downcast, then responded,
“Understood” [かしこまりました].

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Fujiko does indeed carry out her father’s orders, killing Lady Wakayama. “For the sake of the domain, I humbly take your esteemed life [国のため、お部屋様のおん生命を、申し受けまする],” Fujiko says to Lady Wakayama and proceeds to stab her multiple times with a dagger, finally administering a coup de grâce to the throat. Since this took place in Edo, Fujiko is sent back to Iida, where her death sentence would be carried out. However, the lord’s wife took pity on Fujiko and pleads with the Chief Chamberlain Yasutomi Kazue to save her. Kazue instructs one Tada Sōji (多田草司), a samurai from Awa domain, and his confidante, to abduct Fujiko while she is on her way back to Iida. “Please help, even insofar as getting Fujiko pregnant. We will wait with the execution until a child is born,” Kazue directs Tada Sōji.

Kazue was hoping that after a year, the Iida Lord’s heart would show signs of softening and Fujiko could be saved from execution. However, he is proven wrong; when, at the close of a year, he reports to the lord that Fujiko had been apprehended, the lord is implacable. He orders Fujiko executed. Yet, not a single warrior of the Iida domain would consent to carry out such a task. It was then that Tada Sōji, the father of Fujiko’s child, volunteered. He was the man who carried out Fujiko’s execution.

“Such were the dire circumstances of Yamaguchi Gengo’s birth.”

Gengo grows up in the household of Takakura Shinzaemon, surrounded by the warmth and loving care of his adopted family. Tragedy struck when Gengo was fifteen

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years of age. Plague wiped out over thirty families in the Komoro domain; Gengo’s adopted mother and elder brother were among the dead. His adoptive father, Shinzaemon, took to bed with the same affliction. “Mysteriously, Gengo alone was overlooked by the demon of disease.”

Makino Tōtōmi-no-kami Yasutomo, the Lord of Komoro summoned a well-known practitioner of Dutch medicine from Osaka in an attempt to stem the flow of disease. Shinzaemon was the first patient the doctor came to see. The doctor brought a powerful medicine, but using it was fraught with danger. He said to Gengo:

This medicine is something used by the Southern barbarian tribes [南方の蕃族], and is extremely powerful. You have to be aware that trying it is dangerous. This is the first time it is being used in our country, so I myself do not quite understand well what the correct dosage should be to treat your father. Knowing that the tribesmen’s essence is in their wild toughness, I am thinking whether half-a-dose would work for your father, but even with half-a-dose, I still cannot chase away my unease.

“I will take it,” Gengo replied and swallowed the medication. Though it affected him adversely, knocking him out until morning, Gengo survived the medication’s effects; he gambled with his own life in order to save that of his adopted father – and won. “Since it put the fifteen-year-old and healthy me in deep sleep like this,
I believe this half-a-dose should be good for my father,” he said to the doctor. Gengo’s sacrifice did not only save Shinzaemon, but many other people in the domain as well.

Though the lord wants to reward Gengo for his bravery and sacrifice, all Gengo requests is the permission to travel away from the domain for three years. When asked for his reasons, his response was, “I want to learn a skill.” The lord gave his assent.

Three years later, the very same month he had left, on the day and on the hour, Gengo returned home. He appeared unchanged, and since he did not say what he had been doing for three years, Shinzaemon chose not to pry. Six months after Gengo’s return, the secret of what he was doing while traveling unraveled.

A wandering swordsman by the name of Shōji Kahei (庄司嘉兵衛) visited the Komori domain, asking for a customary match at the domain’s dōjō. Shōji Kahei was a well-known swordsman of great prowess, and that day at the Komori dōjō was rapidly becoming an embarrassment for the clan; one after another, Shoji defeated all the best fighters of the fencing school as though they were no more than mere kittens. At last, three of the school’s best swordsmen attacked him simultaneously. They fared no better that their mates before them, having been knocked down to the floor by Shōji’s sword. It was at this point that Makino Tōtōmi-no-kami Yasutomo, who had been observing the match incognito, ordered Gengo to be brought forth to face Shōji.

Ordered by Tōtōmi-no-kami, Gengo got up from his seat and, without even putting on the breastplate, grasped a steel sword and stepped into the center [of the dōjō]. As he did so, Shōji Kahei too, removed his  

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mask and gauntlets and, having changed his bamboo sword to a steel one, stood facing him.

Then, as they exchanged courtesies and assumed the proper distance, in response to Kahei’s “at the eyes” [青眼] position, Gengo displayed a mysterious stance.

Slanting his body to the right and presenting his left shoulder to the adversary, he held the sword in his right hand close to his chest, tilting it upwards slightly, aiming the tip of the blade forward and supporting it with his left hand. That is, to the enemy’s eyes, he was barely showing the sword tip from behind his left shoulder, while concealing most of the blade.

Needless to say, never before had such a stance been incorporated into any of the fencing styles. The left side of the torso was completely exposed to the opponent’s sword.

Both the viewers sitting in a row, and Shōji Kahei in his “at the eyes” position, were instantly dumbfounded. Then, the very moment the young man who had not yet reached the age of twenty, flew into rage at being derided, and raised his sword to the “overhead” [上段] position, intent on making his opponent crawl on the floor…

No reaction from Gengo.

All of a sudden, his eyes jumping out of their orbits, Kahei choked on his own swordsman’s spirit [おのが剣気を、嚥んだのである].

Moving slightly, Gengo’s concealed sword would show its tip, sticking out by some two inches from behind his left shoulder, but that this movement alone displayed some frightful power, was all too clear to the eyes of Kahei who was a first-rate swordsman. That was because, akin to a deadly venomous snake, the sword tip was aiming straight at his throat. That is to say, the bizarre stance was meant as a means for striking the flint [すなわち、異形の構えは、石火の突きを為すためのものであった].

Facing the frontal cut from the overhead position, the striking of the flint would decide victory or defeat in a split second. Gengo had terrifying confidence in his speed.

Kahei stuck to his “overhead” stance.

As long as Kahei would not strike, Gengo and his sword would not make the slightest move.

As the referee saw all blood draining from Kahei’s face, he had no choice but to call out,

“That’s enough!”
By then, any semblance of fighting spirit was gone from Kahei’s eyes. It disappeared while he was peering at the sword tip peeking out from behind Gengo’s left shoulder.\footnote{Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Kīru} [Kill], 1st ed. (Tokyo: Kōfūsha, 1961), 18-20.}

Although the match ended without the swords ever being crossed, it was clear to the observers who the victor was. “To figure out the thrust devised by that young man, I think I would need three years’ time,” Shōji Kahei later told the referee.\footnote{Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Kīru} [Kill], 1st ed. (Tokyo: Kōfūsha, 1961), 20.}

When Gengo turned twenty, he left the domain again. It is during his travels that Shibata shows the reader the essence of Gengo’s character – a man driven by a vague foreboding and gloom, who, like Nemuri Kyōshirō, is only able to find a measure of peace when he is alone.

Sometimes, all of a sudden, Gengo would be overcome by an indescribable feeling of the futility of life [時おり、ふと、源吾は名状し難い無常感に襲われることがあった]. When that happened, he felt an irresistible desire to be alone. That feeling of futility could not be chased away by reading or practicing martial arts, and in addition to that, strangely, Gengo’s instincts were not roused by beautiful women. He thought his lonely heart could reach peace in unknown lands, by placing himself in the midst of unknown people. In fact, it was ridding himself of that dark feeling of futility that Gengo turned north and started walking, following the Chikuma River [千曲川].

As Gengo crosses the village of Kaminojiri (上野尻の聚落) in Fukushima, he comes to a Nezumi Inn (鼠宿) to spend the night. What transpired there marked a pivotal change in Gengo’s life. A young warrior in the company of a beautiful young woman
took the adjacent room. Though neither Gengo nor the other samurai looked particularly closely at each other, somehow, each became aware of something unusual in the appearance of the other.

Closer to dawn, Gengo woke up, his warrior’s nerves tingling with the presentiment of some yet unseen threat gathering around him: “Something’s about to happen!” (異変が起こる！). His instincts proved to be correct. His senses pick up the presence of a group of men, who, still unheard and unseen, gather around the inn with drawn swords. Suddenly, the sliding door separating his room from the adjacent one opens by a couple of inches, and Gengo hears the young warrior’s urgent whisper.

“Though it’s abrupt, but seeing that you are a trustworthy person, I have an urgent entreaty.”
This pressing attitude made it clear that the group assembled outside with murderous intent was there to attack this young samurai.
Having gotten up, Gengo sat up straight.
“If there is something I can do, I will.”
“Thank you!”

Gengo learns that the young man’s name is Tadokoro Mondo (田所主水) and he and his elder sister were being pursued because, avenging his late father, he killed men who had falsely accused his father of a crime. Tadokoro Mondo pleads with Gengo to save his sister. By this time, the group of assassins was already rummaging through the garden and some rooms. “I will take her,” Gengo promises the young samurai.

As Tadokoro Mondo goes outside to confront his pursuers, Gengo puts the young woman into his bed and covers them both with the blanket. “In this extremely tense atmosphere, embracing the young woman’s body for the first time in his life, Gengo felt for some reason, that this was a fateful moment. He even felt that he had had a presentiment from long before that such a night would be coming his way.”

Meanwhile, the garden outside filled with screams of rage and the sounds of clashing swords. It appeared that despite Mondo’s felling some of his enemies in combat, his own death at the assassins’ swords was only a matter of time. However, here, the events took an unexpected turn.

That moment, Mondo’s elder sister who was in Gengo’s arms, shuddered violently with her whole body, pushed Gengo away and jumped out of bed.

“You mustn’t!” Gengo sprang to his feet and as he attempted to hold her,

“No!” Shaking her head forcefully, thinking something, she quickly removed her sash and threw off her garment.

“What are you doing...?”

There was nothing else the twenty-year-old Gengo could do, but gaze at her actions with baited breath.

As she removed her silk kimono, she also threw off her white undergarment. But no, she continued, slipping her crimson crepe undershirt off of her shoulders, followed by the throwing off of the loincloth wrapping her thighs; having gotten stark naked, Mondo’s sister grabbed a short sword and throwing open the sliding screens, ran out into the corridor.

Had Gengo been a middle-aged man of sound consideration, he most likely would not have permitted such mad actions.

For Gengo, who still had not experienced the feeling of a woman’s skin, seeing a young woman getting naked was an indescribable shock.

“Mondo, run!”

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Hearing that sorrowful scream as she ran into the garden, Gengo recovered his senses and realized, for the first time, the meaning of her actions.

Exposing her own nude body to the cold dawn air, throwing the pursuers’ hearts and minds in disarray and attempting to allow her younger brother to escape in the ensuing gap – together with her plea, flinging off her bashfulness was her quick-witted stratagem of facing inevitable death.

Mondo screamed, “Elder sister!”
“Mondo, go on, live,” his sister also screamed.

As Gengo tried to get out into the corridor, he saw the stark-naked white form in the midst of a dozen or so blades, her thighs spread widely, brandishing a short sword.

It was clear that the pursuers were shaken and were losing their cohesiveness.

Mondo, aiming to break through in the corner, made a mad dash.

In tune, the naked shape made a leap.

“Don’t!”
“Wait!”

Though they were rushing to pursue, indeed, faced with that white naked body, the men’s instincts were hard to control, and their footing was in disarray.

The moment Mondo hurled himself through the bamboo hedge and disappeared outside, the naked woman turned about, and made a throat-rending scream,

“Have mercy!”

The next moment, her naked form staggered under the onslaught of flashing swords.

Gengo beheld the gruesome scene of her breasts being slashed open and blood gushing forth.

As soon as the group of pursuers disappeared completely, chasing Mondo, Gengo hurriedly approached the woman’s naked body, fallen against the live fence, and lifting it up, returned to the room.

The naked woman, placed on the bed, was no longer breathing.

As though possessed, Gengo’s unmoving and staring eyes were blank, appearing demented.

Perhaps, it was because he was resigned that the image of that pitiful naked female body would forever be burning in his mind, that half a year later, after Gengo returned to his domain and his father suggested that he take a wife, Gengo responded,

“I will never marry.” 344

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After the death of Makino Tōtōmi-no-kami Yasutomo, lord of the Komoro domain, Gengo uses the opportunity to leave again. At the recommendation of one Chiba Eijirō (千葉栄次郎), his acquaintance from the Chiba Fencing School, Gengo takes up employment under the Superintendent-General (大目付) Matsudaira Ooinokami (松平大炊頭), the Bakufu government’s official, charged with maintaining order in the country and keeping crime in check. Matsudaira’s is an unenviable task; since at this point Gengo is over twenty years of age, the chronology allows us to date the events unfolding at the end of the narrative to the early to mid-1860s, the period immediately preceding the Boshin War and Meiji Restoration, a time of upheaval and turmoil. Japan was simmering in discontent: though the country had been opened to foreign trade by the American Commodore Perry since 1854, it had been done so with a show and an implicit threat of force, and the treaty thus imposed on Japan was unequal, favoring the United States. The Tokugawa Shogunate at this point in the story is in its last dying stage – already unable to stem the flow of change, yet still able to resist that change violently. Although not yet spilling into open conflict, the frictions between the anti- and pro-Shogunate forces in the country have already reached the level of political assassinations and skirmishes.

Matsudaira is tasked with bringing to heel the unruly Mito domain, where a vacuum of power gave rise to violence and disorder. Only a few years ago, in the Sakuradamon Incident (桜田門外の変) of 1860, the samurai of Mito assassinated Ii Naosuke (井伊直弼), the Shogunate official deeply unpopular for signing the Harris
Treaty with the United States. This time, Matsudaira has to deal with the consequences of an attack by Mito samurai on the British legation. Gengō, who had been working under Matsudaira for three years now, was included in Matsudaira’s small retinue to travel to Mito. The task is dangerous. “We may not be able to come back to Edo alive,” Matsudaira tells Gengō, but “Gengō’s facial expression did not noticeably change.”

When Matsudaira’s party arrives in Mito, there ensues a series of secret negotiations and consultations with various clan officials, at the close of which, Matsudaira needs to visit the castle. He takes Gengō along as a bodyguard, unsuspecting, or perhaps, not showing his apprehension that this might be a death trap.

“I am afraid, today being Lord Gikō’s (義公, posthumous name of Tokugawa Mitsukuni, 徳川光圀, second lord of Mito domain) memorial day,” one of the guards tells them, “it is the custom of this household to request that an offer of incense be made in Lord Gikō’s death hall.” Matsudaira agrees – in fact, not doing so would amount to an insult against the household. Before kneeling in front of the Buddha effigy, Matsudaira has to surrender his weapons – both the long and the short sword. Unusually, the same request is made of Gengō, who is not even expected to take part in the ritual incense offering. He finds it strange, but complies nonetheless.

If the readers felt unease at this point in the narrative, that feeling would be quite justified. Separated from Matsudaira, Gengō was led to a small waiting room to wait for his master’s return. However, within the space of less than five minutes, Gengō heard

strange sounds from deep inside the mansion, sounds that soon turned to screams. As he jumped to his feet, his highly trained warrior’s instinct picked up on the spirit of murder, or murderous intent (殺気), permeating the hallway outside. Unarmed, however, Gengo could not come to his master’s aid. Nor could he sit there idle. Desperate, he pulled a branch of plum tree out of the vase on the floor.

At that moment, the sliding door opened, and a man with a drawn sword stepped inside the room. “This was the clan council’s decision, please forgive me,” were the assassin’s words. His face looked familiar to Gengo. Gengo’s realization of the assassin’s identity and the aftermath constitute the conclusion of the novel:

This was none other than Tadokoro Mondo, who had entrusted him with his sister at the Nezumi Inn, and escaped. Chancing upon him in a strange twist of fate, Gengo was momentarily seized by the impulse to tell him that, but he immediately suppressed it.

The adversary was oblivious.
If he told him, the tip of the assassin’s sword would surely lose its edge. Had he escorted his sister somewhere safely, after taking charge of her, he could have reminded Mondo of it. But he let her die. There was no need for Mondo to feel grateful.

… Slowly, Gengo leaned his body to the right, and presenting his left shoulder to Mondo’s “at the eyes” stance, moved the plum tree branch in his right hand close to his chest, and supported the branch tip with his left hand.

In response to this strange stance, Mondo squinted slightly.
“Come!” Gengo snarled in a clear voice, while wishing for a proper sword.
“Sorry!” Mondo made three steps, and with a deafening yell of “Ei,” emanating from his whole body, attacked.
The next instant, Gengo’s entire body dove obliquely to the floor.
“Uh!”

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Turning to him, Mondo was steadily closing the distance.
As before, Gengo’s stance remained unchanged. What did change was the tip of the branch, which had now been sliced to a sharp point. That is, attacked by Mondo’s sword the first time around, Gengo caused him to cut the tip of the branch. The branch, having been cut to a tapering sharp point, now turned into a weapon.

Having lost the opportune moment, ferociously, Mondo attacked a second time.

With the futility of hitting empty air, Mondo yelled, “Oi,” but the moment he raised his sword to the “overhead” position to strike, the branch-sword, aimed at his throat, was thrust like an arrow.

Sticking the plum tree branch, with two or three white flowers still clinging to it, deep into the collapsing Mondo’s throat, with superhuman speed, Gengo grabbed the sword from his hand, and dashed into the mansion’s interior like a wind.

However, Ooinokami was already prostrate, face down, in the pool of his own blood in the hall.

Lifting him up in his arms, Gengo joined his master’s hands in praying posture, and waited a while. No one entered.

Tearing off a sleeve and wrapping it around the blade, slowly and deliberately, he loosened the front of his garment.

As he slit his stomach in a straight line, observing the proper ritual, gradually lowering his head, and enduring the pain, Gengo’s face acquired an expression as though he were thinking of something.

Was it, perhaps, the memory of the white skin of that woman, who saved her brother by exposing her naked body?

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*Ume Isshi* was published in 1961, during the period of continuing rapid industrialization of Japan, when “swift economic growth drove the agricultural population into factories and service areas so that by 1960 the majority of Japanese lived in an urban environment.” It is difficult not to see in Takakura Gengo’s character a manifestation, of sorts, of an uprooted young urban male without a clear sense of

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belonging or purpose in life. Those moments in Gengo’s life when he is searching for solitude, when he is overwhelmed by this sense of futility of life, are eerily reminiscent of what the sociologist Mita Munesuke, in his study of Japanese urban population in the 1960s, called, “moments in their city lives of a diluted sense of social existence: a sensitivity to the randomness of existence, the uncertainty of relationships, the instability of social identity.”

Though Gengo commits seppuku – the ritual suicide by disembowelment at the close of the novella, his death is not so much a samurai’s atonement in death for failing to prevent the killing of his master, as it is a culmination of a life of loss and failure. The loss of his mother, whom he never knew, his failure to prevent the death of Tadokoro Mondo’s sister, despite being entrusted with safekeeping her life, and the failure to protect his master, Matsudaira Ōinokami, from being assassinated, despite his (by then) meaningless and hollow victory over Tadokoro Mondo.

Yet, Gengo’s suicide can be seen in another light. In keeping with Shibata’s interest for characters that choose their own path and follow it to the end, Gengo’s seppuku can be seen as an affirmation of individual will and as the final act of exercising control over one’s own life – albeit via the act of ending it.

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4.2 HITOKIRI HANPEI (人斬り斑平, HANPEI THE ASSASSIN, 1965)

All of the works considered in this chapter could be said to follow Shibata’s formula of depicting a “man who struggles to endure solitude, treading along the path of darkness.”*351 Hitokiri Hanpei (1965) is one such work, focusing on Hanpei, a lowly and despised man of humble birth, who attempts to cut a destiny out of life, and a name for himself with the sword. Like Nemuri Kyōshirō’s, Hanpei’s name is more than a mere name; it bears the mark of taint, stemming from his suspect origins:

In a certain clan in Shinshū, there lived an impoverished man called Hanpei [斑平]. Impoverished, because being lower than the lowest-rank salaried foot soldiers, he did not even own a suit of armor, so he came to bear that name.*352 Though it is written as 半平 in the clan retainers’ records, a gravestone remaining in an old temple by the name of Teishōji in the outskirts of N-city, still has 斑平 chiseled on it. If seen from the birth destiny point of view, the character 斑 should probably be corrected.*353

In fact, Hanpei’s low station in life and his looks conspire to make his life miserable; in the household he is called inukko (狗っ児), dog-child, because of his ears’ resemblance to those of a dog. He cuts a figure that precludes any notion of success or achievement, happiness even, and is treated accordingly by others around him:

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*351 See Chapter 3 for the discussion of Shibata’s use of solitary man “treading along the path of darkness” imagery.
*352 The kanji character 斑 in Hanpei’s name (斑平) means mottled, irregular, pointing to the character’s humble origins.
In fact, both his ears were of a low unworldly shape. There was almost no flesh in his earlobes, while the tips were sharply pointed. However, his resemblance to a dog was only in the ears, and his appearance was extremely ordinary. Rather, with his puffy eyelids, his narrowed and always sleepy eyes seemed to give off the impression of a slow-witted and kind person, while the round tip of his nose and his thick lips seemed to be a symbol of destiny that consigned this man to leading a wretched life of the lowest strata.

However…
Starting with the poor tenement house where Hanpei was living, all in the household were avoiding getting close with him. No, Hanpei was on the receiving end of a cold-hearted attitude that made him hesitate to even open his mouth.

Ever since he reached the age of awareness, Hanpei was an outcast.  

In fact, the clan’s treatment of Hanpei is of a more sinister nature than a mere reaction to his appearance. Hanpei’s mother, Kin, having ingratiated herself with one of the clan’s ladies-in-waiting through her untiring service and kind nature, was bequeathed the lady’s favorite white dog, when the latter passed away. Three years after her death, Kin mysteriously became pregnant and died giving birth to a boy. The white dog refused to eat after Kin’s death, and died ten days later. Kin had never been seen to socialize with men and her pregnancy took the household by surprise: no one knew the identity of the father. An investigation was conducted, but all was in vain; the culprit could not be found. Sinister rumors started circulating that Hanpei was the son of Kin’s white dog.

Since Kin had occupied a rather high-ranking household position, the clan could not simply get rid of the child. Hanpei was sent away from Edo to Shinshū, where he was given to a low-ranking old ashigaru, foot soldier, to take care of. The old man was kind

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and gentle, raising the boy as his own. However, when Hanpei was nine, the old soldier felt the hour of his own death approaching. Before dying, he called Hanpei to his deathbed, to impart the following:

Your whole life, you will be a man whose unlucky destiny it will be to be despised by the people of the household. Because of that, it might be best if, in secret from others, you acquired a skill. Not just some skill. The kind of a skill that would make the household people drop their jaws in awe upon learning of it. Surely, it will be best to acquire one. Be sure not to forget it.\(^{355}\)

After the death of his caregiver, Hanpei found himself alone and shunned by everyone. “Since the age of nine, Hanpei grew up truly alone. His neighbors would not deign to speak to him even a bit. The lonely fate of living for ten days, twenty days on end without speaking was not likely to turn Hanpei into a cheerful person.”\(^{356}\) When Hanpei turned fifteen, he came to the village head to ask for a job, but was met with a cold, “For you, not necessary.”\(^{357}\)

It was at seventeen that Hanpei discovered in himself the desire and the talent for growing flowers; though he was not sure that this was the “skill” the old soldier spoke of before his death, Hanpei dedicated himself wholeheartedly to this new pursuit, discovering in himself a rare and hitherto dormant ability to grow beautiful flowers. The new skill was noted, and Hanpei was called to the castle,

where he was entrusted with a plot of land and ordered to grow flowers on it for the lord of the clan.

“It was in the summer of his twentieth year of life that Hanpei displayed an unexpected ability other than growing flowers.”

Shikibu-no-shō Masanobu (式部少輔正信), the lord of the Shinshū domain where Hanpei lived was beginning to show signs of madness; the discovery of it would be tantamount to the clan’s ruination. However, the lord had a habit of riding his horse every morning, going far from the castle. The presence of the mounted grooms only served to infuriate the lord and he would lash out at them with his whip, leaving them bruised and injured. Yet, leaving the lord unattended was out of the question, so that accompanying him on his morning rides quickly became the most detested duty in the household that no one wanted to undertake. It was then that Hanpei made an unexpected appearance in the horse grooms’ quarters.

“Though the request I have is beyond my station in life, would it be possible to be included in tomorrow’s ride?” he beseeched with an earnest expression on his dull face with prickly dog-ears.

“You could be included, but what, are you going to run?”

A poor man of the lowest rank would not be allowed such a thing as mounting a horse.

“Yes, with your permission, I would run.”

“Are you confident you can follow a galloping horse?”

“I am not confident, but… with your permission, I will somehow not lag behind.”

“Well then, we’ll include you.”

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Though they could not understand Hanpei’s reasons for such a reckless request, the horse grooms acquiesced.359

The following morning, however, when the lord went on his customary morning ride, Hanpei followed, running every bit as fast as the lord’s galloping horse. No matter how much lord Masanobu would spur on his horse, Hanpei followed, not three feet away, without lagging behind and without even breaking a sweat. “I seem to have been born with legs somewhat stronger than ordinary people,” Hanpei admits, when the incredulous Masanobu presses for answers, confirming the suspect circumstances of his birth.360

From then on, Hanpei was ordered to follow lord Masanobu daily on his morning rides.

However, in keeping with Shibata’s donden gaeshi – the unexpected twist in the narrative principle, Hanpei’s incredible ability to run with superhuman speed is not the only thing he is capable of, as he soon discovers. One day in the early winter, Hanpei came across a sight that took his breath away; in the woods, he stumbled upon a rōnin practicing iaidō (居合道), the art of drawing one’s sword, cutting down the enemy, and returning the sword to the scabbard in a single quick motion. Hanpei was awe-struck, watching the man’s skill with baited breath, absent any other thought. As the rōnin was about to leave, unthinkingly Hanpei blurted out,

“This art of iai – how could it be mastered? Could you teach me please?” Hanpei asked with all politeness.

The rōnin looked at Hanpei intently, but replied, “It is not a particularly difficult thing. Draw fast, sheathe fast – that is all.”

“However, I have not been trained in the art of the sword…”

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“The art of the sword and the art of iai are different. There are countless tricks in the art of the sword, but there is but one in iai.

…Draw, cut, sheathe, that’s all. The only thing is, when drawing and sheathing, it is crucial that you draw all your strength from the core of your being,” were the rōnin’s parting words.\(^{361}\)

For half a year the mysterious rōnin would come to the same stretch of the woods to practice. And for half a year Hanpei, who had not been to a dōjō even once in his lifetime, would watch him from a distance, studying his moves. “Watching was learning. Hanpei did not beg for instruction, while the rōnin too, made no effort to instruct.”\(^{362}\)

While at first, Hanpei was unable to follow the warrior’s movements with his untrained eye, as time went by, little by little, he started noticing minute patterns in the rōnin’s motions, his eyes learning and translating the knowledge within the mind’s inner eye:

As half a year went by, while watching intently the rōnin’s long starting stance, Hanpei became able to predict correctly the exact moment he would draw.

The moment he would think, “Draw!” the rōnin would draw.

Moreover, as the rōnin was unsheathing, power emanating from all his being, frightfully imbuing his blade at the moment of cutting from the overhead position, and then again, being released from his very core at the moment of sheathing the sword, Hanpei himself grew to feel all that as though he was practicing iai.\(^{363}\)

Throughout his observation, Hanpei never again spoke to the rōnin or exchange greetings, even though the warrior was aware of his presence. The only conversation they had was the brief exchange in the beginning. One day, at the close of the half-year period,
just as suddenly as it began, the rōnin’s period of practice was over. Seeing Hanpei’s silent form at the edge of the woods, the rōnin suddenly addresses him and gifts him with a sword, encouraging him to practice with it on his own. “The moment he received the sword from the rōnin, Hanpei felt that this was his destiny.”

Indeed, having learned the new skill marked a sinister turn in Hanpei’s life. Rumor of his mastery reached the castle soon enough; one month after the rōnin’s departure, Hanpei was summoned to the castle, where he was entrusted with the task of cutting down a Shogunate spy. The clan elders were determined to keep the news of their lord’s madness from reaching the Shogunate’s ears and avert the clan’s takeover. Hanpei had no choice but to obey the order. He was led to the spy’s whereabouts where he fulfilled the clan’s command, cutting the man down. Much to his shock, the spy turned out to be none other than the rōnin Hanpei learned the art of iai from. “Ironically… Having just allowed Hanpei to learn his art of iai, having given him the iai sword, the result the rōnin ended up inviting was being cut down.”

Having killed his benefactor, Hanpei is inconsolable and breaks the sword with which he committed the murder. However, learning the art of the iai has put Hanpei on a downward spiral: having killed, albeit unwittingly, the rōnin who had taught him and having broken the sword he had received from the man, Hanpei now needs to find another sword. With that purpose in mind, Hanpei came to a deserted shrine some distance away in the woods; the shrine is known as a repository of “evil” swords, weapons that had been used for some malevolent
deed and were now being kept in the shrine to pacify the spirits. Hanpei finds one, a rather inconspicuous, but unusually long blade, which he decides to pick up:

That very moment, not understanding why, he felt a chill running down his spine. A ghostly glow was clearly emanating from the patterned narrow-bladed sword.

“That’s it!”

Though Hanpei knew nothing at all of the sword’s condition and provenance, he could feel keenly the ill-omened fate concealed within it.

Naturally, the swords kept inside the chest as offerings were all without exception ominous things representing terrible tragedies. However, it wasn’t just the swords themselves that bore that destiny. Perhaps, were another man to pick up that sword, the curse might not have transpired.

The sword that Hanpei was now holding was clearly imbued with a ghastly fate that would twist its owner’s life.  

Why does Hanpei select such a sword? On the one hand, poverty could be one factor: the shrine would offer a selection of free swords to anyone unscrupulous enough to peruse the blades assembled there. However, the obvious counterargument would be that having killed the spy, he performed a service for the clan, so that the very least Hanpei could ask for would be a new sword. Yet, he chooses the macabre shrine with its ghastly offerings. In selecting the most evil of the swords gathered in the shrine, Hanpei follows the pattern set by Nemuri Kyōshirō – he chooses his own fate and is willing to follow the chosen path to the very end. Hanpei’s soliloquy sheds light on his reasoning,

I am a man despised as a dog-child. Though I myself do not believe in such things, since there is no proof that would allow me to deny it, I resigned myself to the fact that there is nothing I can do but be seen as ill-fated in the eyes of the world. Then, ill-fated that I am, I will act accordingly. I decided I wanted to fight something like a curse. Should I

possess this sword and not incur any kind of a curse, I want to resolve that I am not a dog-child, and tell it to my heart.\textsuperscript{367}

Hanpei is now facing insurmountable odds. He has to withstand prejudice and scorn of others around him on account of being an inukko, dog-child; he now has to contend with and survive the clan’s cynical use of him as a disposable assassin; to that, is now added a third and even more sinister obstacle – he now has to face the curse of the sword.

The clan having split into two opposing factions – those who want to keep the lord’s madness a secret at all costs and for as long as possible, and those who advocate removing him in favor of his younger brother, Hanpei continues to be used as an assassin by the former faction. One after another, the spies, the messengers from the reform faction, and the turncoats fall under his sword; his superhuman running speed negates any advantage a horseman might have, so that not even a rider galloping away from the domain at full speed is safe. Within the space of half a year, Hanpei cuts down fourteen men attempting to leave the domain with the news of the lord’s madness. It was after his fifteenth victim, a warrior of experience and skill, whom Hanpei only defeats by accident, that Hanpei’s clan handler, Kanbe Kazuma (神部数馬) finds him with the news of Shikibu-no-shō Masanobu, their lord’s death. Kanbe informs Hanpei that there is no more use for his services as an assassin.

\textsuperscript{367} Shibata Renzaburō, \textit{Kenki [Sword Devil]} (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1982), 208-209.
“I am running away to Edo now. There is no longer use in this domain. Hanpei, why don’t you follow me?” Kazuma invited. His eyes downcast, Hanpei was deep in his thoughts, for a moment, but then shook his head, “No. I am staying.” “You have enemies everywhere, Hanpei!” “I am resigned that such was my fate. Though it could be said that it was an order, there is no escaping the crime of having taken the young lives of fourteen men,” Hanpei said, as though thoroughly enlightened.  

The new lord orders Hanpei to be seized. Hanpei had incurred the wrath of many families, having killed fourteen men – all from good families – of the clan. The relatives petitioned the new lord for revenge and were granted permission to seek retribution in a final duel, in which Hanpei would have to face fourteen swordsmen – all at once. 

The day of the fight, emaciated from his detention, where he would only drink water, and near-blinded by the bright sun after a long time in the dark, Hanpei is brought to the fenced enclosure, where his enemies await him. The novel concludes as follows:

At once, imbued with the spirit of murder, the revenge group [仇討隊] drew their swords, but Hanpei, having assumed his stance absent-mindedly, with Azamaru [Hanpei’s sword] in his left hand, stood with his gaze to the ground. Little by little, the revenge group started tightening the circle around him. Ironically, not a single one among them had yet seen Hanpei’s art of drawing the sword. Finally, lifting his face, Hanpei slowly, one after another, peered into the faces of the revenge group. Then, all of a sudden, one of the swordsmen came at him, cutting with a roar. That very moment, a fountain of blood bursting forth from the base of his neck, he staggered. There was not a single person who saw Hanpei draw and cut.

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At that moment of shock, Hanpei pulled a dirty towel from his pocket and reverently wiped the blood-stained sword blade two or three times. After that, having sheathed the sword, he reverted to his former absent-minded posture.

Following that…

As Hanpei was gazing at them one after another, one of the swordsmen, his whole body emanating battle lust, attacked, cutting. The bizarre combat, where the man collapsed in a fountain of blood, and Hanpei, wiping the blood-stained blade, returned it to its sheath, repeated four times.

Had there not been a lone hunter, observing from behind the fence, all ten swordsmen would probably be cut down.

The hunter had his gun with him.

“This is endless! I will shoot him!”

Muttering so, the hunter lit the cord and aimed at Hanpei.

At that moment, as though sensing it, Hanpei turned his head.

At the same time as the thundering gunshot sounded, Hanpei’s lean figure turned about once and collapsed to the ground.

It is said that as he was pierced repeatedly by the swords of the fourteen bereaved, Hanpei’s death face was peaceful, as though he finally completed his work in this world.

Hitokiri Hanpei is yet another novella featuring themes of alienation, resignation and determination to resist fate – determination of such tenacity that the protagonist’s physical death matters little to him on his quest. Hanpei has truly insurmountable odds to overcome; more than his poverty or low social status, his suspected canine origins place him below ordinary humans in the eyes of people surrounding him.

Two elements of Hanpei’s “suspect” birth spring to attention upon reading the novella. First, the inukko, dog-child aspect of Hanpei’s pedigree appears to be an allusion to the status in the Japanese society of burakumin (部落民, settlement dwellers), also

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known in the pre- and early-modern period as *eta* (穢, much impurity), or *hinin* (非人, literally, “non-person”), the marginalized caste of the “untouchables,” a sub-stratum of the Japanese society that existed outside of the traditional four-class social structure (warriors/farmers/artisans/merchants) since the Middle Ages. They were relegated to occupations that traditionally were considered unclean in the Buddhist and Shintoist canon, such as the slaughtering of animals, handling dead bodies, and tanning leather. The *burakumin* lived in segregated settlements that were also depositories of everything that was not wanted in other parts of cities – things like garbage dumps, slaughterhouses, and crematoria. Their neighborhoods were also the locations of dog pounds, and the *eta* were mobilized, when ordered, to drive away wild dogs from execution grounds, hence the possible canine connection between Hanpei’s suspect origins and the *burakumin* near sub-human status in Japanese society.\(^\text{370}\)

Thus, though the conventions of *kengō shōsetsu* dictate that Hanpei be a warrior, the absolute bottom rung of the warrior hierarchy Shibata placed him on, coupled with his ignoble pedigree, essentially reduce him to the *burakumin* status.

Despite Japan’s rapid postwar economic, political, and social development, the *burakumin* were “a group that has been least benefitted in the development of Japanese society.”\(^\text{371}\) Despite various laws promulgated since the Meiji era (Meiji government’s Edict Number 61, Article 14 of the Constitution of Japan, among them), designed to abolish the *burakumin* status in Japanese society, discrimination persisted, made all the


more pervasive by the absence of clear markers, such as race or skin color. In fact, attempts at emancipation made things worse. Kang Sang-jung, the second-generation zainichi (在日) Korean political scientist, wrote, explaining the phenomenon:

In previous times, even as ‘burakumin’ were pushed to the outer extremities of society as uncivilized people they were nonetheless guaranteed a partial livelihood in exchange for this discrimination. In modernity, however, not only was this economic chance taken from them, but ‘burakumin’ were incorporated as the Emperor’s subjects, as members of a national community rooted in the idea of ‘one sovereign and his subjects’. This was the birth of ‘new commoner-citizens’ who joined the ranks of the other citizenry. In reality, however, they came to occupy the very lowest place in the transfer of oppression which saw those at the top of society weigh down those at the bottom. These people were really only transformed into ‘foreign bodies’ who became personal targets of discrimination. Without a doubt, ‘buraku’ became a modern hell.372

The life Hanpei had to live was indeed hell. Despised and shunned by everyone, he was facing the same obstacles a modern burakumin would, including inability to find work. “We were up against a wall,” wrote one man of his experience of trying to find work as burakumin.373 Echoing this modern experience, “For you, not necessary,” お前は、よい, were the words Hanpei was met with when trying to find employment with the clan.374 Another area of discrimination that the burakumin frequently experience is love and marriage; in cases when one of the partners is from the burakumin background,

the union frequently falls apart under the non-`burakumin`’s family pressure. The conspicuous absence of any female characters in *Hitokiri Hanpei* could be read as pointing to the `burakumin` link, as love, attraction to opposite sex, female companionship are not an option for Hanpei the dog-child.

*Hitokiri Hanpei* was first published by Shinchōsha in 1965, five years after the government openly acknowledged the `burakumin` discrimination, and the same year as the issuance of the recommendation of the Dōwa (同和, assimilation, the word officially used to refer to `burakumin` issues) Policy Council of the Prime Minister’s Cabinet for “massive government aid to remove the negative environment and life conditions as well as to improve the educational and vocational situation among Burakumin.”[^375] It is rather difficult to overlook the possible role and importance of this period, characterized by the `burakumin` struggle for liberation, in the creation of *Hitokiri Hanpei*.

The second element immediately noticeable in *Hitokiri Hanpei* is the apparent similarity of the story’s driving mechanism to Prosper Mérimée’s *Lokis* (1869), whose protagonist, Count Shemet, is the product of an unnatural union between a bear and a human female.[^376] Both stories feature progenies (implied or suspected) of strong and violent animals, and both stories end in violence – Mérimée’s Count Shemet mauling his young wife to death and disappearing forever from the world of men in the woods, and

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[^376]: While it is not known whether Shibata had read *Lokis*, that work was available in Japanese, translated by Shinjō Yoshiakira [新庄嘉章] and published in volume 4 of *Purosuperu Merime zenshū* by Kawade Shobō [河出書房] in 1939. Shibata does refer to reading Mérimée in his essays, so the possibility of his familiarity with *Lokis* cannot be ruled out, given the work’s availability.
Hanpei, killing men he had no enmity for, and eventually himself going down in a bloodbath. Though Hanpei is at the center of the narrative, and the reader feels authorial sympathy for the protagonist in the text, it is also somewhat disturbing to see in Hanpei’s character a possible repository of burakumin-related stereotypes frequently espoused by non-burakumin – images of burakumin as violent, irrational, and defiant. That latter is, perhaps, the element that attracted Shibata to his protagonist – the man intent on overcoming the confines of fate, no matter the price to himself or others.

4.3 GOKENIN ZANKURŌ (御家人斬九郎, ZANKURŌ THE RETAINER, 1976)

Despite not having legs, the beautiful apparition he was embracing was of such elegance that she could be compared to the beauties of the Imperial Court, and he was smack in the middle of enjoying her plump rice cake-like breasts, when suddenly,

Splash! He was drenched with a bucketful of freezing water.

“Damn hag! Not again!”

Zankurō screamed, springing to his feet and shaking his soaked head and chest like a dog.

Imperturbably, his seventy-nine-year-old mother, Masajo, said,

“Isn’t your job today in Shibuya? You only have four-and-a-half hours until your appointed hour at seven (four in the afternoon). Enough with your hangover!”

Though this was a retainer’s house, it was the most worn-out one in Honjo Warigesui, where the mother and son lived.377

Thus begins *Gokenin Zankurō*, a novel featuring a lower-level retainer Matsudaira Zankurō (松平斬九郎), the man from the lowest stratum of Edo-period retainers, the so-called *sanjū hyō sannin-buchi* (三十俵三人扶持), the warrior underclass whose life and economic situation was marked by poverty and destitution. The *sanjū hyō* in their name refers to the monetary value of thirty bags of rice they were paid per year, which roughly equals $8,000.00 yearly in modern USD equivalent. The *sannin* refers to the number of people this money was supposed to sustain for one year, which would include the warrior himself and his two mandatory retainers. Needless to say, even at face value, this payment was insufficient; with the fluctuations in rice prices added to the equation, survival was next to impossible. However, as Shibata writes, “Mysteriously, no low-level warriors have starved to death.”

The reason is – they found ways to survive, whether secretly engaging in trade, or hiring out their sword skills to various shady undertakings.

Zankurō lives with his mother in a dilapidated house and does indeed hire out his sword skills in order to support them both. There is a comical element to his relationship with his mother; she is an inordinate eater, whose gourmet habits take an exorbitant toll on his earnings:

Truth be told, his mother Masajo ate a lot. Though she was nearing eighty, she could easily polish off seven bowls of boiled barley and rice

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with added ground Japanese yam within half an hour, and keep munching on rakugan sweets nonchalantly.

Should someone else think of it from Zankurō’s personal expenses’ point of view, these food costs would probably be high beyond comparison, but no, since in addition to being a glutton, this seventy-nine-year-old hag was also a great gourmand, she managed to cook such delicacies as to make sparks flow from Zankurō’s eyes.\(^\text{379}\)

To support his mother’s extravagant food tastes, Zankurō makes his living as a secret suicide assistant, employed in situations where a punishment of death is meted out, but the household where the crime occurred would like to hush up the affair and use discretion. Zankurō’s role is either beheading the condemned, or assisting in the ritual suicide, administering the final decapitating coup de grâce during the seppuku, ritual disembowelment.

Just like in the case of Nemuri Kyōshirō, Shibata follows his tactic of imbuing his protagonist’s name with special significance via a play of kanji characters, as can be seen from the following passage in the beginning of the novel, where Zankurō is introduced:

Of course, Zankurō [斬九郎] was the assumed name he went by. His real name was Zankurō [残九郎].\(^\text{380}\) In her fecundity, Masajo gave birth to four boys and five girls, and when the ninth child was born, rather


\(^{380}\) Shibata is using a play of Chinese characters to achieve a pun-like effect in his character’s name. While both versions of the name Zankurō sound identical, in writing, the first characters of the two versions of the name are different. The 斬 kanji character in his assumed name indicates a swordsman’s action of cutting with the sword, while the 残 in his real name means “remainder,” or “left-over,” pointing to his status as the last remaining child out of nine.
than meaning “the last one,” his father Kizaemon called him Zankurō [残九郎, the remaining ninth child], meaning a “surplus youngest child.”

Zankurō’s assumed name has a direct bearing on his profession:

The nickname Zankurō [斬九郎] took root because of his “job” [仕事] His katatewaza – in short, his side job was serving as a suicide assistant [介錯, kaishaku] to criminals. Beheading though it was, the executed were not criminals condemned by the town magistrates. Whenever people committed crimes in the households of various daimyō, high-ranking hatamoto, or sometimes, great merchants, they were disposed of stealthily and without publicity. Zankurō would serve as the assistant for the condemned.

The protagonist of Gokenin Zankurō inherited Nemuri Kyōshirō’s traits. He is skilled with the sword (“Rather than learned, Zankurō’s swordsmanship could be said to come from natural talent”) [斬九郎の剣は、修業によるよりも、天稟といえた], independent, and unafraid of pursuing his own path, even if that course puts him at odds with authority. Moreover, Zankurō possesses a keen and penetrating mind and quick wits, qualities that allow him to face the challenges arising in each episode. In the first chapter of Gokenin Zankurō, entitled, Otokottē yatsu wa konna mono sa (男って奴はこんなものさ, This Is What A Man Is Made Of), Zankurō is summoned to a mansion,

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382 Once again, Shibata is reinventing the Japanese language in the process of writing. He is using the word, 仕事, shigoto, work, job, but endows it with his own furigana, かたてわざ, katatewaza, which comes from an entirely different word, 片手業, and means, work on the side.
where his job is to behead a young couple accused of an illicit affair. This is what transpires:

Riding at full gallop and ignoring the passers-by, a few of whom showered him with curses, Zankurō arrived at the appointed mansion with a bit of a delay. The master of the household was Nagatoro, lord of Ushū Murayama district, worth eleven thousand koku of rice [according to the tōritsu code]. The lord barely had any say in the country, but it would appear his ancestors were the ones treading in front of Ieyasu Hidetada’s horse; while unbeknownst to others and unseen, they were the unsung power behind the throne, serving with their blood and sweat. Maintaining the family names, the small hereditary daimyo, propped by the qualities of these Mikawa warriors, would hide the smallest shameful infractions from the eyes of the world at all costs. 385

As Zankurō was being introduced to the overseer, the culprits were already bound and placed on the ground in the back garden.

The culprits were two – a man and a woman. Neither had yet reached the age of twenty, and Zankurō, having given a cursory glance, saw from the young man’s smooth and pale face that he had been raised as a page. The woman must have been a servant of the lord’s wife. Contrary to the young man’s drooped head, his deathly pale face looked defiant, as though shouting, “Where is the crime in loving!?”

For a man making his living as the kaishaku suicide assistant, feeling pity for the precious young flowers he is about to scatter, is useless.

Zankurō assumed his position behind the adulterous couple.

At that moment, Zankurō became aware of a face that appeared in a window of a privy facing the inner garden.

It was a middle-aged and a very lordly face. It had to be the head of the household himself. Hiding in the privy, he was trying to witness the beheading…

“As befits our cowardly magnates, right?” Zankurō muttered to himself, when suddenly, a thought crossed his mind.

Zankurō asked the adulterous couple,

“Have you already shared a bed?”

Immediately, looking back at Zankurō, the girl countered,

“We haven’t so much as held hands!”

Smirking, Zankurō said,

“Did you hear this answer, Your Excellency in the privy?”

385 Mikawa warriors [三河武士] Tokugawa shoguns’ traditional power source, recruited from among the Mikawa region warriors.
A confused expression appeared on the overseer’s face. Addressing the head of the household, Zankurō pressed on.

“The punishment is not only in taking off heads. Playing it by the ear and fitting the punishment to the crime committed is also interesting, methinks.”

“What measures are you talking about?” the overseer asked.

“Hiding in the privy and secretly peeping in on the culprits’ beheading spectacle does not quite feel right. If peeping, how about this punishment of undressing these two young culprits, who have not yet shared a bed, somewhere in a secret room and making them do it, while covertly watching it from a hole in the fusuma?”

In complete bewilderment, the overseer turned his gaze in the direction of the privy.

One of the overseer’s duties is to read his master’s facial expressions.

The face in the privy was displaying a mixture of interest and hesitation.

That very moment…

“Ei!”

At the same time as his yell, Zankurō’s sword flashed.

Instead of the culprits’ heads, their topknots flew up in the air simultaneously.

“I fulfilled the required ceremony. I will now thank you to pay me the kaishaku’s fee.”

Zankurō uses his position of kaishaku to carry out what he believes to be right—in this instance—saving the lives of the condemned. In fact, Zankurō turns his role upside down, serving both as an independent witness to the household’s unsavory conduct, and as an arbiter of righteousness with the power to alter the punishment. However, Zankurō is far from being a paragon of righteousness. From the very start, in the very same chapter, Shibata sets him up as a cold-hearted cynic; he believes in life—for he saves it, but not in love. As he was returning from his assignment, Zankurō was attacked by a

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young samurai in the woods. The man attempts to spear him from an ambush, but is too young and inexperienced. Zankurō easily overpowers him and then learns the young samurai’s motives:

“Sa… Sasayo was m… my betrothed!”
“Right, she must have been enamored with that smooth-faced page a lot more than with your colt-like shōgi piece of a face.”
“Bastard! You made Shūma and Sasayo share a bed in front of the lord… I won’t forgive you!”387

Zankurō has no patience or respect for the young man’s feelings. Adding insult to injury, he speaks to him bluntly:

“By the way, by the looks of it, you probably have never used that cock of yours?”
He was met with stunned silence.
“It is clear as day to me that if you take that spirited girl, what’s her name, Sasayo, as your wife, and use your cock, you will come to bitter regret within five years. I will teach you how to use your cock, so follow me. Kind girls will take good care of you and will pleasure your cock beyond anything that arrogant and inexperienced girl could ever do.”388

Zankurō the character proves to be an astute reader of character and a keen psychologist. His senses pick up on what was perhaps the most fragile and easily penetrated chink in the young man’s ego; his instincts prove to be right. Once the issue of his virginity is broached, the young samurai is no longer a threat (It also did not hurt that in the brief struggle, Zankurō displayed his fighting skills,

slashing open the attacker’s clothes in the front with the tip of the man’s own spear, without so much as scratching him).

Shibata the writer proves adept at using his donden gaeshi technique. He follows his recipe of using more than one unexpected twist in the story. The first twist is Zankurō’s saving the condemned couple with his rather “innovative” suggestion, instead of executing them on the spot; the second twist is Zankurō’s handling of his young attacker. Instead of killing the assailant who had tried to take his life, not only does Zankurō spare his, but he also renders him a service, ridding him both of his virginity and his infatuation with Sasayo, when he takes the man to a brothel in Yoshiwara. The chapter concludes as follows:

In the afternoon of the following day…
With that young samurai following him, Zankurō emerged from Yoshiwara’s Great Gate.

Strolling along the Hachō embankment [土手八丁] with his hands in his kimono, a toothpick in his mouth, Zankurō said, when they reached the Amigasa tea room [編笠茶屋],
“Well, we part here.”
The young samurai was at a loss.
With the expression of slight embarrassment on his face, he bowed to Zankurō and went on his way.

In the second chapter, Nito o ottara nito o toru sa (二兎を追ったら二兎を獲るさ, When chasing two rabbits, better catch both), Zankurō is employed by one Wakibe Kyūzaemon (脇辺久左衛門), the Takatō clan’s (高遠藩) accountant. According to the

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man’s accusation, his wife Shizu (志津) is engaged in an extramarital affair with the clan’s privy councilor (側用人). Wakibe Kyūzaemon retains Zankurō’s services to kill both his own wife and the councilor in order to wash away his dishonor with blood. The task appears to be straightforward, yet, there is more to the job than meets the eye.

Stealthily, Zankurō enters the councilor’s mansion under the cover of darkness, expecting to catch the perpetrators in the act. However, what he encounters there has nothing to do with the alleged affair.

Moving like a ghost towards the next room, Zankurō opened the sliding door without a hint of hesitation. There was no appearance of impropriety in that room. Sitting by his table, the councilor was poring over some bound documents, while Wakibe Kyūzaemon’s wife, Shizu, was sitting politely in the proper posture, with both her hands folded on her knees, her head bowed reverently.

Strangely, even as Zankurō stepped inside, the councilor remained calm, as though it was the most natural thing to expect his arrival.390

Zankurō explains the purpose of his visit and tells the man and the woman, “Since this is a job that pays ten ryō, please make yourselves ready.”391 The councilor, however, does not bat an eyelid, and instead offers Zankurō twenty-five ryō to be left alone – more than twice the amount Wakibe Kyūzaemon had paid him. It is a rather damning commentary on Zankurō’s character that he agrees. However, as he is speaking to the councilor, there is an unexpected development in the story:

Before Zankurō had the time to respond, there came a frightful attack at his back from the adjacent room’s sliding door.

Though he dodged it in a flash, Zankurō still felt in his spine the shudder left by the deadly blow.

The man who attacked him with a terrifying look on his face was Wakibe Kyūzaemon.

“Thanks to the accountant, I can persevere in practicing the iai cut,” Zankurō laughed coldly.

Then he asked,

“Councilor, how much money allocated for the maintenance of the Edo mansion has the accountant pilfered?”

“Some three hundred and seventy ryō.”

“So then, you made his wife secretly investigate his pilfering each month, and report to you late at night? The wife, then, not wanting her husband banished, undertook that role…”

In that period, it was common knowledge that no matter the clan, its accountants appropriated the clan’s money.

Stretching both hands towards Zankurō, Shizu screamed in despair,

“Please spare my husband’s life!”

Looking coldly at the accountant up close, Zankurō stretched his left arm towards the councilor behind him.

The moment he grabbed the single kirimochi [切餅] package (twenty-five ryō) that was placed in his palm, Zankurō made off.

The accountant Wakibe Kyūzaemon’s right arm had been cut off at the shoulder.

“This way, you won’t be using the abacus,” were Zankurō’s parting words.392

The first part of Gokenin Zankurō, titled Katatewaza jūwa (第一篇 片手業十話, Ten stories of a side job), containing ten episodes, was published as a standalone book (単行本) by Kōdansha in 1976. Starting with the second part, Hakone no yama wa koenikui ze (箱根の山は越えにくいぜ, Hakone Mountains Are Hard To Cross), the remainder of the work was serialized in Ōru yomimon (literary magazine published by

the Bungei Shunjū publishing house) from 1977. Nevertheless, both the standalone and the serialized parts follow the yomikiri format, whereby in each episode Zankurō has to resolve some difficult and frequently secret situation using his quick wits and sword skills. Structurally, therefore, it is not dissimilar to Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae.

Zankurō shares with Kyōshirō his nihilist outlook on life, his dissolute ways, talent for swordsmanship, drinking and womanizing. The scholar Ozaki Hotsuki wrote on the link between Zankurō and Kyōshirō:

Despite being loved by the geisha Otsuta, the nihilist retainer Zankurō [無頼の御家人斬九郎], is a man drowning in women and saké, and most of the time his sword, albeit displaying divine skill, is performing for a fee. In that sense, he displays a facet of himself that is different from the pale nihilist swordsman, but his people-killing trade, links him to the consciousness of Nemuri Kyōshirō, who sees his sword as his occupation.393

Zankurō continues, albeit in his own and somewhat shallower way, Kyōshirō’s tradition of dandyism. To Kyōshirō’s drinking, idling, and womanizing, Zankurō adds gambling, brawls, and even an occasional instance of cross-dressing. While part of Kyōshirō’s quest for individuality is in his carefully crafted image, Zankurō achieves the same effect via just the opposite – he is indifferent to his appearance, to the point of donning a woman’s kimono if need be.

393 Ozaki Hotsuki, afterword to Shibata Renzaburō, Gokenin Zankurō [Zankurō the retainer] (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1984), 387
However, the interest of the novel is not so much in Zankurō’s own character, as it is in the dynamics of his relationship with his mother, whom he supports and who exercises complete control over him.

Ozaki Hotsuki wrote on the subject of Zankurō’s relationship with his mother:

[T]he interest of this work is in the tangled relationship between Zankurō and Masajo, and though the intolerable brunt of the old woman’s gourmandizing is keenly felt, it is also in the contrastive dynamics between the two. To the nervous thrill that imbues Zankurō’s sword, is added the humorous mixture of human idiosyncrasies; there, the suffering writer’s own distinctive characteristic can be felt, though at the same time, it displays both the sharpness and the warmth of his gaze vis-à-vis humanity.394

The “writer’s own distinctive characteristic” Ozaki writes about could perhaps be gleaned were we to treat the Zankurō-Masajo dynamic as a metaphor. Zankurō’s convoluted relationship with his mother, the controlling and gluttonous Masajo, could be read as a metaphor of the relationship between the domineering society and its unruly nihilist brood. On a greater scale, it can be seen as a metaphor of a relationship between power and individuality, the state and the individual, or as a representation of the Freudian conflict between the id (Zankurō) and the super-ego (Masajo). However nihilist, debauched and carefree Zankurō may be, no matter his sword skills, womanizing, and propensity for drink, he is inevitably brought to heel by his iron-willed mother. In addition to her willfulness and gluttony, she is proficient with naginata, (薙刀, Japanese

394 Ozaki Hotsuki, afterword to Shibata Renzaburō, Gokenin Zankurō [Zankurō the retainer] (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1984), 387
long-bladed polearm), which she does not hesitate to threaten her son with, when she requires money, which again, underlines the analogy with the overbearing society, enforcing its will. The confines of traditional authority inevitably subdue the rebellion.

It is difficult to imagine a character like Masajo appearing in the 1950s or 60s. Her gluttony appears to be consonant with the rampant consumerism of Japan’s “consumption revolution” of the 1970s and the emerging and shared sense of “middle class.” Zankurō’s having to support Masajo in her gourmandizing represents a symbiosis of sorts, whereby, the powers that be – Masajo – allow him a degree of freedom to roam as he pleases, while in order to continue his dissolute lifestyle and enjoy a semblance of freedom, he has to submit to her control.

Simplistic though it may be, the analogy inscribes itself into the reader’s perception, and could be extended to represent the relationship between Shibata the nihilist himself, and the society that produced him. Tellingly, Sawabe Shigenori’s biographical monograph on Shibata, referenced elsewhere in this dissertation, is entitled *Burai no kawa wa seiretsu nari*, Wild River Grows Clear, suggesting if not an outright submission, then a subsequent compromise between the nihilist writer and the establishment he was rejecting. Were the relationship between Zankurō and his mother to be seen as such a metaphor, it would be clear that Shibata’s success and his very image as a nihilist writer was only possible as part of and from within the literary establishment, and his effort of inscribing himself into it was in itself a compromise – from his receipt of

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the Naoki Prize and to his uneasy relationship with the Shinchōsha publishing house. In his book, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature*, Edward Mack wrote on the importance and the status of receiving a literary prize (Akutagawa Prize):

> Rather than being an objective identification of literary value, the awarding of this prize was an exercise of power that had direct consequences for the works that received the prize, the authors of those works, the authors who made up the selection committee, the publishing industry, the concept of literature, and perhaps even a Japanese identity. It was an exercise of power in which all parties had vested interests. 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.\(^\text{396}\)

As Mack’s analysis demonstrates, the receipt of the prize meant a two-way relationship, an implied symbiotic contract between the writer (however nihilist) and the literary establishment representing the society. Shibata strove to get the Akutagawa Prize; failing that, he aimed at and received the Naoki Prize. Edward Mack’s analysis is equally applicable to the significance of Naoki Prize in Shibata’s life.

All the protagonists in the works considered here could be said to be reincarnations, or perhaps, represent different facets of Nemuri Kyōshirō, Shibata’s alter ego. Takakura Gengo, of *Ume isshī*, shares his superhuman skill with the sword, as well as the sense of evanescence of life and yearning for solitude with Nemuri Kyōshirō. Yet, he lacks the womanizing aspect of Nemuri Kyōshirō’s character. Hanpei of *Hitokiri Hanpei* is also talented with the sword and shares with Kyōshirō an ignoble pedigree, since he is widely suspected of being the offspring of a dog – a worthy parallel to a corrupt foreign priest. He, however, lacks Kyōshirō’s *unmeikan* (*運命感*), his sense of doom and Kyōshirō’s sex appeal. Zankurō, of *Gokenin Zankurō* is yet another swordsman of note and a womanizer, much like Kyōshirō, but in his turn, he too lacks Kyōshirō’s gloom and foreboding.

Combined together, they could be said to reconstitute Nemuri Kyōshirō. Yet all three are different individuals, unified by something even more than just Kyōshirō. For behind them, we see Shibata himself – the man, interested in reliving his notion of *burai* time and again, and differently each time, via the different lives of his many protagonists.
CONCLUSION

The nature of magnificence in dandy first and foremost consists of cool looks, which stem from the unshaken resolution not to be moved; one could say, a latent fire that can be gleaned, that could but does not want to spread.  

Shibata Renzaburō was not blessed with a long life. He was only sixty-one years of age at the time of his death in 1978, and his short lifespan only serves to underline the tremendous literary output he produced. The body of writings he left is enormous; in fact, to this day his works have not been compiled in a zenshū – complete collected works. The selected works alone, take up eighteen volumes of Shibata Renzaburō senshū, but the selection included is far from comprehensive.

Though Shibata is well-known in Japan, his fame did not translate into much academic research and scholarship in his home country, there existing only two biographical monographs on him, of which only one – Nakamura Katsuzō’s Shibata Renzaburō shishi – is something approaching a critical biography. Part of the reason is

Shibata’s status as a *taishū bungaku* writer – writer of popular entertainment fiction, which, from the point of view of the *junbungaku*/*taishū bungaku* – “pure literature” versus “popular literature” schism – relegates him to the underclass of writers who do not belong with the highbrow category of pure literature – someone writing for the masses, aiming “primarily at a popular, less aesthetically sophisticated audience,” a writer of rather low intellectual and artistic caliber, not worthy of serious academic research.  

It would be a mistake, in my opinion, to argue Shibata’s position as something other than belonging in the *taishū bungaku* class of writers. In fact, that argument would inevitably validate and strengthen the existing schism, the only place left for debate being bickering over the writer’s supposed belonging (or not) in a predefined and perhaps somewhat arbitrary category. Suffice it to say that were we to accept the existing *junbungaku* – *taishū bungaku* division, it could be said, however, that Shibata’s literature straddles both, the author’s own culture and education imbuing his works with interest and erudition hitherto not encountered in *taishū bungaku* and elevating them to a position that is higher than the category confines would normally allow. However, to understand Shibata’s position in modern Japanese literature, it is necessary to assess what and how Shibata contributed to the *taishū bungaku* genre and what he has done with the received conventions of *jidai* and *kengō shōsetsu* literature. Understanding that will also advance our understanding of Shibata’s popularity.

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Though Shibata did experiment with the *junbungaku* genre (the Naoki Prize of 1952 was, after all, awarded for *Iesu no sue*, a work in the *junbungaku* style) prior to achieving fame as a *taishū bungaku* writer, his heart had always belonged elsewhere. In a conversation with Nakamura Katsuzō, as early as his Keiō University days, Shibata once said, “I don’t believe in the Shiga-style realism you are talking about, much less the socialist realism Gorky and others are talking about. That stuff is not real art. Where is the interest in that? I’ll rather become a pop writer [戯作者].”\(^{399}\) We can see that Shibata set his sights on a *taishū bungaku* career early on; his experiments with the *junbungaku* genre can be attributed to literary currents of the time and the pressure of his literary peers, rather than any genuine personal interest in the genre. Shibata Renzaburō eventually completed the full circle, having experimented with the *junbungaku* genre, only to abandon it in favor of *taishū bungaku* with his *kengō shōsetsu* novels. His opinion on *junbungaku* did not change. Shibata wrote in 1974, four years before his death, “What I cannot stand is how uninteresting the contemporary *junbungaku* is [私が我慢ならないのは、現代の純文学のあまりの面白くなさである].”\(^{400}\) Shibata’s choice of the *taishū bungaku* can be read as an act of valuation that contravenes the literary norms of the day; Shibata chose the field of popular literature because he believed it to be more interesting, rather than any other reason – though a confluence of historical and social environment of 1956, when the first installment of *Nemuri Kyōshirō burai hikae* was

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published, and sheer luck were also instrumental in propelling him on that path. Electing popular literature, Shibata eventually settled on *kengō shōsetsu*, novels of swordsmanship, though he also wrote in a variety of other genres, including *yakuza*, gangster-themed fiction, and even *kaidan*, ghost stories. Shibata wrote about his *kengō shōsetsu*,

As far as I am concerned, since I did not become a writer of swordsmanship novels [*剣豪小説, kengō shōsetsu*] because I particularly liked it, there is also no need to conceal my knack for them, akin to some Soviet magician. When I started writing novels of swordsmanship, I thought of some ways to ignore the laws of the traditional *jidai shōsetsu*, or how to rebel against them. As it were, this became my monopolized niche.  

What are the origins of Shibata Renzaburō’s popularity? First and foremost, I believe it fair to say that it was Shibata’s ability to “monopolize” this niche in a novel and unique way that contributed to his appeal and popularity in Japan. “It cannot be denied,” Ozaki Hotsuki wrote in his afterword to *Nemuri Kyōshirō itanjō* [*眠狂四郎異端状, Heretical Records of Nemuri Kyōshirō, 1975*], “that as a condition of the novel’s interest, the protagonist’s appeal needs to play a large role.” It is precisely the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō – the man plagued by self-doubt and self-loathing, gloomy and utterly alone, that ensured the series’ popularity with the readers. It was Nemuri Kyōshirō’s

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401 See Chapters 1 and 3 for the discussion of the state of the Japanese society in mid-fifties.  
ability to engage in introspection that endowed him with a measure of sensitivity and melancholy, as well as his unmeikan, sense of doom – all qualities that set him apart from the familiar protagonists of kengō shōsetsu, such as Nakazato Kaizan’s Tsukue Ryūnosuke, or Yoshikawa Eiji’s Miyamoto Musashi. Shibata’s erudition and knowledge of European cultures and literatures was the element that made Nemuri Kyōshirō so appealing – to different groups of readers and for different reasons. Having made Kyōshirō a modernist hero, Shibata imbued his character with traits that most readers – of both genders and of different socioeconomic backgrounds – found interesting and could identify with. Uprooted urban males in the postwar period, alone vis-à-vis the world, could identify with Kyōshirō’s loneliness and find comfort in the courage and stoic dignity he displayed in the face of adversity. Salarymen, office and company workers, faced with unbearable work hours and plagued by impossible demands on themselves, brought about by the rapidly rebuilding economy, could relate to the death-defying odds Kyōshirō had to face, and could find solace and satisfaction, however evanescent and subliminal they may have been, in the skill with which Kyōshirō resolved those challenges. Female readers found Kyōshirō’s character fascinating for yet another set of reasons – imbued with the traits of European romantic heroes, variously encountered in such protagonists as Lermontov’s Pechorin (A Hero of Our Time, 1840), or Mérimée’s Don Juan (Les Âmes du purgatoire, 1834), or even Choderlos de Laclos’ Valmont (Les Liaisons dangereuses, 1782), among others, Kyōshirō is possessed of a mixture of introspective sensitivity, melancholy, and cynicism, that rank him alongside his
nineteenth-century European counterparts, so popular in the aristocratic salons of Paris
and London for the same reasons.

Whether these men are called refined, incredible, beautiful, lions, or dandies, they all have the same origin; they all participate in the same manner in opposition and rebellion; they all represent what is best in human pride, that need that is so rare today, to fight against and destroy the trivial. It is from there that is born in dandies that haughty attitude of a caste that is provoking even in its coldness. Dandyism appears in particular during transitory periods, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and when the aristocracy is but partially unstable and debased. 404

To the brotherhood of dandies Baudelaire was writing about, could now be added the character of Nemuri Kyōshirō. However, Kyōshirō’s status of a dandy positions him in an ambiguous relationship vis-à-vis society. Juxtaposing eccentricity and dandyism, Jules Barbey D’Aurevilly, another French exponent of dandyism, wrote,

It [eccentricity] is an individual revolution against the established order, at times against nature: here one touches upon madness. Dandyism, on the contrary, plays with the rules, while nevertheless still respecting them. It suffers from them and avenges itself against them all the while submitting to them; it reclaims itself from them when it escapes them; it dominates them and is in turn dominated by them: dual and mutable character! To play this game it is necessary to have at one’s service all the flexibility that makes up distinction, much like the nuances of a prism form an opal when they are combined. 405

Thus, Kyōshirō’s dandyism, with all his individuality, all his nihilism and outward signs of rebellion, paradoxically, serves to stress his conformity. According to the formula enunciated by Barbey D’Aurevilly, Kyōshirō’s very status of a dandy ties him to the system in an unbreakable compromise. Nemuri Kyōshirō is not a rebel; his nihilism does not extend to the social system around him – despite his individualism and desire for solitude, he continues to serve as Takebe Senjūrō’s underling, remaining at the latter’s beck and call throughout the series.

“Dandyism,” Baudelaire wrote, “is a setting sun; like a falling star, it is superb, without the heat and full of melancholy.” It is perhaps no accident that in the end, Nemuri Kyōshirō does not get killed, as originally planned by Shibata. Nor does the “immortal hero [不滅のヒーロー],” as Nawata Kazuo called him, find any measure of peace in his own country. In fact, much like Baudelaire’s simile of the setting sun, Kyōshirō disappears from the Japanese literary horizon as the era that gave birth to him came to an end: at the close of the last work in the Nemuri Kyōshirō series, Nemuri Kyōshirō itanjō (begun in 1975), Kyōshirō’s adventures take him aboard a ship that is later attacked and sunk by an East India Company warship – but not before Kyōshirō disembarks in Macao. It is there that his handler Takebe Senjūrō, and with him – the Nemuri Kyōshirō readers – lose all traces of him. Kyōshirō disappears from Japan in the mid-seventies, at precisely the same time as there appears another protagonist of another

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work by Shibata – the retainer Zankurō of Gokenin Zankurō, a capable swordsman who is held captive to the desires of his gluttonous mother, her gourmandizing and voracious appetite, as well as overbearing control, synonymous with Japan’s economic prosperity of the 1970s.

The sea played a pivotal role in the lives of both Shibata Renzaburō and his literary progeny, Nemuri Kyōshirō. In April, 1945, one Shibata Renzaburō went into the water in the Bashi Strait, surviving the sinking of his ship and the grueling seven hours in the ocean. Eleven years later, sometime in 1956, one Nemuri Kyōshirō emerged from the sea after a shipwreck during his return journey from Nagasaki, to be washed ashore on an islet and to learn his deadly swordsmanship there from an old warrior hermit. Some thirty years later, Kyōshirō disappears – again, across the sea. That vast void has the significance of both life and death in the lives of Shibata and Kyōshirō – much like it does in L’Homme et la mer poem by Baudelaire, whom Shibata loved so much:

L’Homme et la mer

Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!
La mer est ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme
Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame,
Et ton esprit n’est pas un gouffre moins amer.

Tu te plais à plonger au sein de ton image;
Tu l’embrasses des yeux et des bras, et ton cœur
Se distrait quelquefois de sa propre rumeur
Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage.

Vous êtes tous les deux ténébreux et discrets:
Homme, nul n’a sondé le fond de tes abîmes;
Ô mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes,
Tant vous êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets!

Et cependant voilà des siècles innombrables

The man and the sea

Free man, you shall cherish forever the sea!
The sea is your mirror; you gaze at your soul
In its waves’ unbounded roll,
And ever a chasm, of rancor your spirit’s not free.

You love plunging to the depths of your image;
Its eyes and its arms you caress, and your heart
You at times from its murmurs distract
In the noise of this lament, unyielding and savage.

Both of you are tenebrous, restrained:
Man, none has delved into your abyss’ depth;
O sea, none would know your intimate wealth,
So jealous you are to keep your secrets contained!

Yet, indeed, now centuries countless
You are fighting each other, no pity, remorse,
Que vous vous combattez sans pitié ni remords,
Tellement vous aimez le carnage et la mort,
Ô lutteurs éternels, ô frères implacables!

You love so the carnage and death and the loss,
O foes most eternal, o implacable brothers,⁴⁰⁸

Nemuri Kyōshirō’s last voyage and disappearance across the sea are also eerily
reminiscent of Badelaire’s last poem in Les Fleurs du mal, “Le Voyage”, the poem that
speaks of the same thing – one’s last journey and departure beyond the sea:

I
Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers,
Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,
Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers.]

We shall part on the morn, our mind full of flame
Heart by rancor and bitter desire so seized,
And we go, to follow the rhythm of the blade,
And to rock our infinite void on the finite of the seas.[]

VIII
O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l’ancre!
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Apareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l’encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!

Oh Death, old captain, it’s time! Have the anchor pulled back!
We are bored of this realm, oh Death! The sails we shall raise!
Though the sky and the sea may like ink be pitch-black,
Our hearts that you know are filled with light rays!

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu’il nous reconforte!
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brule le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel,
qu’importe?
Au fond de l’Inconnu, pour trouver du nouveau!

Pour your venom for it to vacate our cares!
We would, for that fire does our mind so burn through,
Plunge to the depths of the gulf, Hell or Heaven, who cares?
To the depths of unknown, to find what is new!⁴¹⁰

Walter Benjamin called “Le Voyage” the “last journey of the flâneur: death. Its
destination: the new.”⁴¹⁰ It is a fitting description for Nemuri Kyōshirō’s disappearance
from the Japanese literary world – dandy and flâneur to the end, even his departure is
ambiguous; synonymous with death, yet at the end we learn that Nemuri Kyōshirō is

University Press, 1999), 896.
alive. He is alive but in a strange and unknown land beyond the sea, his status between life and death, beyond this life, but not quite in the next.

The scale of Shibata’s literary output and his fame in Japan are not matched by his reception in the United States. None of his works have ever been translated into English, and there is no discussion of note of his literary heritage in the English-language scholarly journals. It is my sincere hope that the present study will pave the way towards greater recognition of Shibata Renzaburō’s contribution to Japanese literature of the twentieth century and will lay the cornerstone of further Shibata Renzaburō studies in the United States.
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