ILLNESS IN THE ECHO CHAMBER: THE RISE OF LEPROSY LITERATURE IN JAPAN

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This chapter will assess the quick rise of "leprosy literature" in Japan during the latter half of the 1930s using much of the primary sources available, including diaries and letters privately penned by Hōjō Tamio, a young writer who was at its epicenter. I will begin by taking a look at the collection of "confessions" compiled by the government in 1921 to see how the authorities manipulated the voices of patients before the boom. Then I will focus on Hōjō, who was uniquely ambitious to join the mainstream literary establishment, while many residents of the leprosarium were reluctant to have their voices heard knowing that public scrutiny would only make them vulnerable in a society brimming with eugenic ideals. Finally, some discussion from a wider historical and cultural context should facilitate a clearer understanding on different forms of power that sought to control and sometimes aggravated the situations surrounding Hōjō and other patients.

Keywords: leprosy literature, Hōjō Tamio, Kawabata Yasunari, censorship, eugenics

1. Introduction

An "echo chamber" is where "like-minded people" gather and form an environment in which somebody encounters only opinions and beliefs similar to their own, "a breeding ground for information to spread," hence relieving the need of considering alternatives (Roese 2018, 327). While the term is increasingly associated with social media, it is not hard to imagine a similar environment in real society, especially when society at large seems to be merciless against anything that could cause hindrance to its progress. In Japan in the 1920s, for example, the popularity of eugenics was thriving. With war against the Western powers imminent, the nation no longer desired to accommodate the sick and weak who would be useless on battlefields and the home front.

Eugenics, of course, implies a broader sense of racial selectivity. Race was already a crucial component of Japanese ideology during the process of the Meiji Restoration (1868–1889), as it is engraved in the symbolic slogan *sonnō jōi* (尊王攘夷, "revere the Emperor and expel the barbarians"), which was a reflection of Neo-Confucian and nativist ideals that sought to overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate and restore the power of the Emperor of Japan. But "foreigners" were not always repelled. Several Japanese people who traveled abroad during the 1870s and 1880s became believers of *jinshu kairyō* (人種改良, "racial eugenics"), proclaiming that the Japanese race could be improved by mixing it with the Western race through marriage (Takahashi 1884, 115). However, as Japan further militarized, eugenics turned into more of an intra-racial, intra-national issue. Radical beliefs harbored by people like Ikeda Shigenori (池田林儀, 1892–1966), the founder and editor of the magazine *Yūsei undō* (優生運動, *Eugenics Movement*), can be baffling from a current perspective. They not only incorporated ideas such as "shared heredity" or "shared ancestry," but also the belief in good and bad blood-types, which pertains to fortunetelling rather than medicine (Robertson 2002, 191). They did, however, appeal to many patriotic readers.

Of course, medical practitioners by far played the most important role in the movement. It was their duty to modernize the nation by keeping its people from diseases that would stunt healthy advancement. Since the Restoration, Japan implemented several health policies to contain persisting epidemics, such as tuberculosis, smallpox, cholera, and leprosy.

Mitsuda Kensuke (光田健輔, 1876–1964), dubbed "father figure and savior of lepers," quickly came into the limelight as a champion of headstrong policies. In 1909, he was appointed the first director of Zensei Hospital (全生病院) located on the outskirts of Tokyo, which was to become the largest public leprosarium in Japan. Its basic function was to quarantine patients, possibly for the rest of their lives, in accordance with the Leprosy Prevention Law (癩予防ニ関スル件), first enacted in 1907. Whether this was a precaution to protect the lives of the diseased is at least partially questionable. Mitsuda, who firmly believed leprosy to be highly contagious despite the lack of evidence, did not hesitate to enforce vasectomies, or surgical sterilization, to inhibit reproduction among the patients. Perhaps he could not agree more with the following passage in Plato's *Republic*:

> The best men must cohabit with the best women in as many cases as possible and the worst with the worst in the fewest, and that the offspring of the one must be reared and that of the other not, if the flock is to be as perfect as possible. (Perseus Digital Library, n.d.)

The actions of Mitsuda and his colleagues could serve as a textbook example of the phenomenon Michel Foucault discusses in his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. To control the spread of the disease (in this case, the plague), "panopticism" is reinforced to govern and keep the patients under strict

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

surveillance, while attempts to disobey or escape are punishable by imprisonment, or even death. And it is scientific knowledge, not physical force, that provided the enforcers almost god-like power (Foucault 1995, 18). Here, the French philosopher could very well be describing leprosariums established throughout Japan; the five public colonies that opened their gates in 1909 accepted 980 patients in total during the first year and continued to accommodate between 300 and 800 new patients each year (Mori and Ishii 2017, 76). The Leprosy Prevention Law urged directors to police the patients; they had legal rights to lock up rebellious residents in solitary confinement for up to two months, and take away a half portion of food for up to seven days (Miyasaka 2006, 123).

The battle against leprosy entered the next level in 1931 when the Leprosy Prevention Law was renewed. It was now permissible to arrest patients who are reluctant to hospitalize themselves and send them to colonies for compulsory quarantine. This inspired a nation-wide campaign called the *muraiken undō* (無癩県運動, "movement for leprosy-free prefectures"), which spurred each prefecture to locate and accommodate all patients to realize a leprosy-free community. Within the year, by the end of 1931, a total of 3,546 patients were residing in eight public leprosariums, a great leap from the 2,339 patients in the year before (Mori and Ishii 2017, 76).

In addition, the Association for Leprosy Prevention (癩予防協会) was set up in 1931 to support the nation's mission to rid of the disease by enlightening the public as well as monitoring the well-being of patients both physically and mentally. Here, too, Mitsuda served as one of the masterminds. It is also noteworthy that Sadako, the Empress Dowager Teimei, bestowed her personal fortune for the cause (Nichibenren Hōmu Kenkyū Zaidan 2015). The donation had a great symbolic value, since legend has it that in the 8th century, the Empress Kōmyō used her lips to suck out the puss of a wandering leper who then revealed himself to be Akshobhya, a form of Buddha.

In short, during the 1920s and into the 1930s, an echo chamber was constructed around leprosy. It was rare to hear the voice of the actual patients; it seems that medical practitioners, lawmakers, and the public had a larger say on the illness. However, this does not mean that the patients were completely muzzled, especially inside the colonies. There, different parties with different interests gathered in a small arena of illness to create echolalia that is resounding, converging, and often contradicting. This paper aims to examine the threads of voices, especially those surrounding the movement of "leprosy literature." Namely, I will begin by taking a look into the collection of authentic voices of patients gathered by the government, and then juxtapose it with written words of Hōjō Tamio, the pioneering author of this particular genre, to see how different parties coped with the situation through varying self-representation.

2. The confessions of patients

In 1921, amidst the heightening effort of the nation to contain leprosy, the Home Ministry's Department of Hygiene (内務省衛生局), a branch of the government in charge of managing public leprosariums, asked the directors of each facility to gather "confessions" from patients that pertain to their "thoughts upon the diagnosis," "hardships on concealing or treating the disease," "hatred towards other patients and relatives," "experience of vagrancy and possibly spreading the disease," "mental situations upon acceptance to the facility," and "hopes for the future" (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 172). The objective of such an attempt was quite clear-cut; the department will use these confessions to "improve preventive facilities" and to "diffuse better understanding of leprosy while arousing public sympathy to the disease" (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 172). The collection was compiled as *Rai kanja no kokuhaku* (癩患者の告白, *The Confessions of Leprosy Patients*) in 1923, and was published by the said department.

The names of the authors of the confessions are concealed, while their gender and age are mostly visible. Out of 106 contributors, at least 75% are men and 15% are women; the mean age of the patients is 33 years old (Gotō 2016, 47). Each confession, on average, is approximately 2,700 characters long (Gotō 2016, 47).

It is impossible to share the details of all the confessions, but here are four summaries of confessions made by patients of different age group and gender, to demonstrate their basic nature.

Summary A (female, 28 years old)

One of the longest entries at 306 lines, her confession is the first to be featured in the volume. Her prose, which displays a high level of education and taste in literature, is a brief autobiography. She begins by recounting her life story from the age of four and recalls her happy childhood. She quotes her letter to her brother, stating that her childhood seems to "belong to somebody else, a dream, events that took place in a fairyland," and that presently her mind is in "such lonely and desolate state" (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 173). She was diagnosed with leprosy three years after she got married at 20 years old. Ever since, she has been spending a quiet life at a leprosarium. In the latter half of the entry, she recounts the shocking memory of her brother, who, out of despair, advised her to take her own life. The brother, however, took back his words and encouraged her to "study literature" in the quiet environment (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 175). He further suggested that it is her "destiny" to suffer from such a disease, and that "there are other ways to live [...]. Spiritual life is much higher and valuable than material life" (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 176). She also shares her poetry, some in freestyle and some in the form of *tanka*, a traditional 31-syllable verse.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

Summary B (male, 66 years old)

He was 18 years old when he realized there were some blisters on his body and spots on his face. Anxious of his conditions, he visited a Buddhist temple to pray and even fasted to no avail. Suspecting leprosy, he spent two years at a hospital, after which his condition seemed to have improved. Believing himself almost cured, he went on to get married, and had two children. However, he decided to leave the family when he discovered that his wife was having an affair. Instead of finding a new home, he wandered through the country as an outsider, taking odd jobs here and there. After coincidentally meeting his son in Tokyo, who was now 17 years old, he turned himself over to the police to confess his illness, and was taken into custody. He is now blind.

Summary C (female, 48 years old)

With her younger sister, she helped her parents to farm the family field. When she was 21 years old, her parents passed away in rapid succession. Although the sisters were able to survive thanks to the support from their relatives, she was diagnosed with leprosy at the age of 23. Her relatives started to abuse her. Her sister remained supportive but eventually left the household. When she was finally hospitalized, she was "pleasantly shocked" because the "treatment was just perfect. Attentive doctors and abundant supply of clothing and food" helped her put her feet back on the ground (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 208). While she misses her sister terribly, she is thankful "for the grace bestowed upon me by the nation," and is ready to spend the rest of her life in happiness (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 208).

Summary D (male, 11 years old)

The last section of the volume is titled "The struggles of children with leprosy" and consists of 16 entries by children between ages 11 and 19. The youngest boy's father, a carpenter, died when he was seven years old. His grandfather, who is also a carpenter, worked hard to feed him. The boy, however, ran away from his home at the age of 10, due to his worsening relationship with his abusive step-grandmother. From Osaka, he sneaked onto a train bound for Tokyo. During the trip, two gentlemen discovered him and took pity on his circumstances. They accompanied the boy to an orphanage in Tokyo. Soon afterward, he was diagnosed with leprosy and was taken to the hospital. He has lost contact with his family, but "feels no pain" about it (Naimushō Eiseikyoku 2002, 280).

While these entries recount life stories of the patients with utmost reality, we must take into consideration the unreliable nature of these "confessions." First of all, it is unclear in what fashion the testimonies were collected. While it is plausible that some entries were actually written by the patients, as in Summary A, most of

the articles were likely edited after an oral interview was conducted. The logical explanation for this is that most entries are written in formal *bungo* (文語) style, a style of writing requiring a certain level of education that was not available for most patients, let alone children. Moreover, many of the older authors were blind at the time of the interview as their symptoms progressed and could not write at all.

Another point that stands out is that while several patients do complain that they are sometimes treated cold-heartedly, the majority describe themselves as being in a happier state than they were before. Most of the entries pay great attention to the hardships and misfortunes they endured *outside* leprosariums. In other words, the colonies are depicted as some sort of haven they have finally discovered after years of suffering. Even if it was true that life at leprosarium was comfortable for many patients, it is hard to believe that only a handful of patients had complaints, given the often strict and harsh environment they were forced to live in. In reality, it was not uncommon for patients to desert the facility, and many such patients were caught and punished, often by incarceration into a small and dark cellblock, where it was common for the "prisoners" to die from malnutrition and various illnesses (Miyasaka 2006, 146).

Finally, we should not overlook the complete lack of comments or analysis by the authorities on any of these entries. Except for the brief introduction at the beginning, no text is added by the editors. After the final entry authored by a 16-year-old girl, the volume concludes itself rather abruptly. This makes the collection even less reliable since it seems to neglect the aforementioned purpose of the volume to disseminate better understanding of leprosy and to improve the lives of the patients, but rather focuses on the paternalistic affection demonstrated by the government that protects the poor souls.

All in all, there is vast room for argument as to whether the "confessions" qualify as such. Confessions innately come from within; a "forced confession" would be an oxymoron. It seems, therefore, that we must wait for the arrival of more outward literary efforts by patients to be truly able to listen to their voices.

3. Hōjō Tamio: The troublesome writer

About a decade later, in May 1934, a 19-year-old who would be remembered as Hōjō Tamio (北條民雄, 1914–1937),[1] decided to hospitalize himself at Zensei hospital.

Born in Keijō (present-day Seoul) under Japanese occupation, Hōjō grew up in Tokushima and moved to Tokyo as a teenager to pursue education, while earning

[1] Hōjō's real name, Shichijō Teruji (七條晃司), was only disclosed in June 2014, 77 years after his death.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

his living as a pharmacy clerk. Soon, he became an avid reader of Kobayashi Takiji (小林多喜二, 1903–1933) and Hayama Yoshiki (葉山嘉樹, 1894–1945), both known for their radical leftism. We must bear in mind, however, that he was no black sheep; he merely followed the zeitgeist. Similarly, his obsession with the idea of becoming a writer is no oddity. In fact, aspiring to become a writer was one of the most mundane things one could do. There were, according to distinguished author Ibuse Masuji (井伏鱒二, 1898–1993), approximately 20 thousand literary enthusiasts, or *bungaku seinen* (文学青年), in Tokyo at the time (Ibuse 1987, 50).

His diagnosis with leprosy in 1932, however, separated Hōjō from most of the crowd. His trips to the doctor's did not improve his symptoms. He was a newlywed but – doomed with an incurable disease – had no choice but to divorce his wife. In short, Hōjō quickly became a nuisance to his family, and perhaps more so to himself. After contemplating suicide, he decided to be hospitalized and visited Zensei Hospital accompanied by his father.

It is from this moment on that we know about his life in more detail because he started keeping a diary.[2] Of course, with some luck he could live a full life under proper care, but there was also a possibility that his life would be curtailed. Understandably devastated by his fate, he wasted no time to realize his vocation as a writer. In one of the earlier entries in the diary, dated July 21, 1934, he states his determination:

> これだけの苦しみを受け、これだけの人間的な悲しみを味わされながら、このまま一生を無意味に過されるものか!
>
> With all this suffering and human sorrow, how could I live my life in vain! (Hōjō 1980, 147)

It was perhaps to his pleasant surprise that many of his fellow patients were also fond of literature. Each colony published an intramural magazine of its own. *Yamazakura* (山櫻) of Zensei Hospital was launched in April 1919. In response, many patients expressed themselves eagerly, especially in the traditional poetic forms of 17-syllable *haiku* and 31-syllable *tanka*, which demanded readers to "connect with the health issues and struggles" they have experienced (Ono 2017, 70).

Such tradition of rather meek and pessimistic self-expression went hand in hand with the view of the authorities. For example, Ishibashi Ihachi (石橋伊八), the superintendent of Zensei Hospital, contributed an article to the August 1934 issue of *Yamazakura*, in which he states:

> そうして我等はかりそめにも常軌を逸するが如きことなく、常に品性を陶冶し真心から出た、偽りのなき思想を紹介し、そうして自分を動かし、人を動かすだけの努

[2] A very rare heritage in itself, since virtually no diary of patients before the end of the Second World War survives to this day (Yamashita and Arai 2004, 1).

> 力をしたい、其処に文学の興味津々たるものがあり、又趣味を持つ人の生活として価値があると言へやう。
>
> Literature lets us stay within certain norms, and it allows us to introduce to the reader elegant and wholehearted thoughts, which would move their hearts along with ours. That is why literature is so intriguing, and that is why having a hobby is valuable. (Ishibashi 1934, 5–6)

In other words, Ishibashi merely treats creative writing as a character-building exercise or something that would help the patients vent. To say the least, he does not believe that patients are capable of producing works of art with intrinsic value.

There is little doubt that Hōjō, who had already contributed a short story on the July 1934 issue, read this article. And there is even less doubt that Hōjō did not like Ishibashi's tone at all. On August 27, 1934, Hōjō writes this in his diary:

> この雰囲気の内部では文学など糞喰えだ。だからこそ、こうこの院内の文学が断れ断れなんだろう。そして本気でやっているものは詩か歌の世界に遁れて、創作（小説の）世界に戦おうとする熱意は消失してしまっている。
>
> In this kind of atmosphere, literature should be fed to dogs! That is why literature at the hospital is so detached. And decent enthusiasts take refuge in the world of verse; they have lost the passion for struggling in the world of fiction (the novel). (Hōjō 1980, 154)

For a young literary enthusiast like Hōjō, fixed verses must have seemed out-of-date and insufficient as a means to express the true struggle of one's spirit in the age of prose. It is his contemporaries who would lead fruitful decades of memorable novel and short story writing, a period Donald Keene, a prominent Japanologist, would retrospectively call the "golden age" of Japanese literature (Keene 2015).

But as long as Hōjō created inside the walls, it was obvious he could not bring about much change. While it was the patients who played a major role in the editing of the magazine, the process was thoroughly overseen by staff members. Like Ishibashi, many of them also contributed articles about their views toward leprosy. Some doctors, who were casual poets, served as judges; many of the poems published in these magazines were, in fact, hand-picked by the doctors (Tanaka 2013, 205).

It was, therefore, only natural for Hōjō to aim for success in the mainstream literary establishment, where he could break away from the scrutiny and peer pressure, and meet tens of thousands of potential readers. As a first step, he wrote to the future Nobel laureate in literature Kawabata Yasunari (川端康成, 1899–1972) on August 13, 1934, begging him to take a look at his story. Kawabata was already in his prime years. Besides writing his own works, he managed and edited several literary magazines. He was also an influential critic who was enthusiastic

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

about discovering new talents to quench the public thirst for more things to read (Kawakatsu 2015, 252). In short, well-connected and resourceful, Kawabata was an ideal person to contact.

It seems that his expectations were reciprocated. In the eyes of Kawabata, Hōjō was a promising young writer *in the sense that* he suffered from leprosy. Indeed, Hōjō himself proclaimed in his letter that he writes "about what is going on in the hospital" where nobody is "taking a serious look at leprosy" (Hōjō 1980, 316). Such an author is unprecedented and would call for public attention with or without a masterpiece. On October 12, 1934, Kawabata urges him to finish the work and send it over.

With a greenlight from his new mentor, Hōjō continued to work on his stories and made his nation-wide debut in October 1935 with the story "Maki rōjin" (間木老人, "Old Maki"). It was published in the magazine *Bungakukai* (文學界), managed by Kawabata and several other writers. While this meant his career as a professional writer had set sail, and he had now become a public figure, we can see that he was not exactly happy if we take a look at the entry written in his diary on December 20 of that year:

> 「間木老人」が発表された喜びも、その他先生から戴いたお手紙の数々の中に記されてあった喜びも、束の間の喜びに過ぎぬ。時間が経って平常な気持に還れば、またしても病気の重苦しさがどっと我が身を包んでしまう。(中略) 文壇なんて、なんという幸福な連中ばかりなんだろう。何しろあの人達の体は腐って行かないのだからなあ。今の俺にとって、それは確かに一つの驚異だ。俺の体が少しずつ腐って行くのに、あの人達はちっとも腐らないのだ。
>
> The joy of publishing "Maki rōjin," and the joys I found in the many letters from Sensei [Kawabata], are all ephemeral. Once I am my usual self again, I am crushed by the heaviness of my gruesome illness. [...] These people of the literary establishment are such a happy bunch. I mean, they are not going to rot. This is really amazing to me. While I rot away, these people do not. (Hōjō 1980, 223)

Here we see that Hōjō has cut himself off from the establishment, to which he no doubt longed to belong, and it is his physical condition that thwarts Hōjō from sympathizing with his fellow writers. This is obviously because he feels that what one writes is inseparable from the world one lives in; since he lives in the world of illness, he assumes that there is no way that he can associate himself with healthy writers. A feeling of contempt in his entry must also be noted. Hōjō, at least to some extent, ranked himself above other writers *because* he was ill.

This sort of anger was not nurtured overnight. At least, he was fully aware of the distance between himself and the "society" as early as July 4, 1935, according to his diary:

> 先ず第一に僕達の生活に社会性がないということ。従ってそこから生れ出る作品に社会性がない。社会は僕達の作品を必要とするだろうか？　よし必要とするにしても、どういう意味に於てであろうか。僕は考える。先ず、第一に「癩」ということの特異さが彼らの興味を惹くだろう。
>
> Most importantly, our lives here have no sociality. Therefore, our works, written in such an environment, also lack sociality. Does society even need our works? Even if it did, on what terms? This is what I think: people will be interested because of the peculiarity of "leprosy," before anything else. (Hōjō 1980, 206)

Now that he suffered from an incurable disease, the only way for him to stay connected with the world outside the hospital was to become a successful writer. To do so, however, he had to make full use of his unique experience. The problem was, the more he demonstrated his version of reality, the more he drifts away from the "ordinary" people. And what is more, he could even become isolated in his own "society."

"Maki rōjin," for example, made Kawabata worry that it might raise a red flag in the small community of the colony. The sad and ominous story revolves around the titular character and concludes with his suicide. A reader would never know which parts of it are inspired by true events, but it is very easy to assume that everything is real. A letter from Kawabata dated May 14, 1935, shows that perhaps he, too, felt that way: "Are you sure your position in the village [colony] would still be secure after publishing this kind of story? Please confirm. Is it alright we moved forward?" (Hōjō 1980, 321).

Moreover, Hōjō's arrogance and hatred seen in the entry above may have been triggered by his completion of "Inochi no shoya" (いのちの初夜, "The First Night of Life"), which would become his best-known work. The story is in many ways similar to "Maki rōjin," but is much more personal since it centers around a young man named Oda, who hospitalizes himself to a leprosarium on the outskirts of Tokyo. There, Oda is shocked by the desperate state of helpless patients and indifference on the part of the hospital staff. In a fitful manner, he attempts suicide on the first night to no avail. However, after spending a sleepless night with his roommate Saeki, who tells him that life does go on even in such circumstances, he decides to give life another chance.

The story was published in the January 1936 issue of *Bungakukai*, and in the next month, Hōjō was awarded the Bungakukai Prize (文學界賞).[3] With permission from the hospital, he visited the publisher to receive the award and also made a stop at Kamakura to meet Kawabata in person. After such a momentous event,

[3] The magazine is the same as the one published today but was owned by a different publisher. The prize, too, remains today, but now it is an annual prize with somewhat greater influence.

DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

we might expect him to spare a few pages of his diary on the matter; but there is no word about meeting his mentor.

As a matter of fact, he writes less and less in his diary, and when he does, he is almost exclusively angry. The following entry from April 3, 1937, would be a typical example:

> 創元社からも川端さんからも返事なし。果して向うに着いているのかどうか疑わしい。そう考えると腹が立って来て仕事をやめてしまう。事務所を呪ひたくなる。この原稿だって武藤、永井、林の輩に見せなくちゃならんのだ。俺が全身をぶち込んだ作を、彼等はまるで卑俗な品物のように取扱うのだ。そして勝手に赤線など引いて返すのだ。しかもあの頭脳低劣なる、文学のブの字も判らぬ連中なのだ。ああ屈辱の日々よ。
>
> Nothing so far from Sōgensha [the publisher] and Mr. Kawabata. Did they really get my manuscript? Such a thought maddens me, and I stop working. This manuscript too should be shared with people such as Mutō, Nagai, and Hayashi. To them, my work, the fruit of my painstaking effort, is nothing more than a vulgar object. They would draw red lines all over it. And these people are mere imbeciles, who have no idea whatsoever what literature is all about. Ah, my days of disgrace. (Hōjō 1980, 277)[4]

Up until the end of the Second World War, especially from the 1930s, a decade of increasing political unrest with coups and assassinations becoming almost pervasive, censorship was wholly enforced both inside and outside the colonies (Arai 2011, 103). Any negative sentiment against the government, especially ideas even remotely related to communism or socialism, were to be eradicated from the text. While much of the troubles with government-led censorship could be avoided with simple editing and prior arrangements with the officials (Maki 2014, chap. 2), that was not the case inside the colony.

Even though Hōjō was quickly becoming a notable young talent in the eye of the public, it did not boost his status inside the walls. Quite on the contrary, Hōjō could have been considered dangerous since he had become the first patient to express himself through mainstream media. Stressing that all patients are legally bound by the Leprosy Prevention Law, the colony staff urged Hōjō to turn his manuscripts over to the censorship office, and, as a result, a number of his works were declined. For example, stories "Seishun no tenkeibyōshatachi" (青春の天刑病者達, "The Young Patients of Karma") and "Rai o yamu seinentachi" (癩を病む青年達, "The Young Lepers") were banned from publication. The former contained depictions of a penitentiary "maximum security cell," and the latter discussed how abortion was enforced on female patients.

[4] Some proper nouns have been expunged from the entries reprinted in Hōjō (1980); they could be restored by consulting Yamashita and Arai (2004).

It is also noteworthy that Hōjō was not entirely popular among fellow patients, especially outside the circle of his literary friends. In terms of symptoms, his condition was far from serious, and, in the eyes of veteran patients, it was ridiculous that a young man like Hōjō would treat himself as a model patient (Matsumoto 1979, 129).

It is tragic, then, that Hōjō did not live long enough to become a veteran. On December 5, 1937, Hōjō died from tuberculosis in the intestines and lungs. Perhaps his deterioration was accelerated by the nervous breakdown he was going through in his final months. Although Hōjō's life was a short one of 23 years, at least he became what he wished to be. But what sort of impact did he have outside the walls of the hospital? Was Hōjō able to acquire an unmuzzled voice? Did anyone follow in his footsteps, immersed in the echoes of his voice?

4. The birth of leprosy literature

The February 1936 issue of *Bungakukai* was, to some extent, dedicated to Hōjō. Besides publishing "Inochi no shoya," Kawabata allocated several pages of his "Zoku shishōsetsuteki bungei hihyō" (続私小説的文芸批評, "Literary Criticism in the Style of an I-novel, Continued"), a serialized critique, exclusively for Hōjō. There he clarifies that the author of "Inochi no shoya" is no other than the author of "Maki rōjin,"[5] and declares: "I must be disqualified as an editor of a literary magazine if I should hesitate to publish this kind of work" (Kawabata 1936a, 117). He further points to the fact that Hōjō lives in an "unworldly place" that is so different from "where we live" (Kawabata 1936a, 117). We can safely say that Kawabata was not entirely impartial. Proud of his serendipity, Kawabata boasted about his new protégé. He did not forget, of course, to stress the scandalous nature of his physical condition.

Then, on the following March issue, it was announced that the participants of *Bungakukai* have agreed to award Hōjō the monthly Bungakukai Prize. Here again, Kawabata focuses on the author's character rather than the work:

> 世間と隔絶した療養所にいる、二十四五歳の北條君を、今回の受賞がいかに慰め、力づけるかは、私達の想像以上であらうが、また入院費一箇月十円に足りぬ生活では、百円の賞金が実際に役立つことも非常なものであらう。(中略)共同生活であり、狂病者の附添夫になつたりして、つまり作家といふ特別な生活は許されてゐないので、書くことは困難である一方、貴重であるらしい。
>
> It is beyond my imagination how this prize would comfort and encourage Mr. Hōjō, who is in his mid-twenties, and lives in a secluded colony. Also, the prize money of 100 yen should come in very handy, given he

[5] Hōjō used another nom de plume, Chichibu Gōichi, for "Maki rōjin."

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

> pays 10 yen or so for the hospital every month. [...] He lives in a small community, where he sometimes has to take care of the insane. The privileged life of a writer is not at his disposal; because of this, writing is difficult, but also very precious for him. (Kawabata 1936b, 252)

It is noteworthy that two of the esteemed literary prizes, the Akutagawa Prize and the Naoki Prize, were just established in 1935. The idea was to set up respectable awards comparable to Prix Goncourt of France, or even the Nobel Prize (Umeda 1977, 124). The establishment was now venturing on a new business model where prizes were manipulated as publicity tools to boost the career of writers, usually younger talents, in order to stimulate the entire market. In short, it was Hōjō's turn to enjoy his fifteen minutes of fame.

The members of *Bungakukai* reacted in several ways. Yokomitsu Riichi (横光利一, 1898–1947), an old friend of Kawabata, was quite discreet. Putting aside the physical condition of the author, he urges the young writer to be more calculating:

> 最悪の境遇にゐる場合の作者の心理といふものは、畳み包んでおくことのために作者の以後書く全作の根抵に蔓延する。作者の最悪の場合の心理は誰にでもあるものだが、それもそのまま飛びついて書くといふことは、科学にならず感傷になる。
>
> The psychological state of the author, who is at the rock bottom of his life, may provide the roots for all of his future works if he could preserve it. Of course, we all experience the rock bottom; but if you just pounce on it and write about it, that would be a work of sentimentalism, not of science. (Yokomitsu 1936, 124)

Yokomitsu, obviously, is too demanding, since leprosy is not a phase that one could break through. If the patient waited long enough, it is highly likely that he may never write again. On the other hand, though, Yokomitsu is being much fairer than Kawabata in the sense that he focuses on the work instead of the author.

Another member of *Bungakukai*, the critic Kobayashi Hideo (小林秀雄, 1902–1983), approaches the issue more abstractly. He claims that the story, which is "oddly simple," reminds the reader of "fairy tales of sorts" (Kobayashi 1936a, 151). He then compares the story with "Rai" (癩, "Leprosy"), a work by Shimaki Kensaku (島木健作, 1903–1945), which was published on *Bungaku hyōron* (文学評論, *Literary Critique*) in April 1934, just before Hōjō was hospitalized. "Rai," as the title blatantly suggests, is a story about a political prisoner who meets an indomitable comrade who does not let leprosy hinder his beliefs.

Hōjō, too, was aware of this piece, as he comments on it in his diary entry of June 7, 1935. There he claims that the story suffers from the "lack of reality," an understandable sentiment coming from an aspiring writer who, unlike Shimaki, actually fights the disease (Hōjō 1980, 191). But again, if we are to focus on the work rather than the author, Kobayashi is in the right to make a comparison between

two works that revolve around the same leitmotif. By doing so, at least, Kobayashi gives Hōjō a little spot in the timeline of Japanese literature.

The magazine also featured a slight expression of doubt. Takami Jun (高見順, 1907–1965), a prolific writer often categorized as belonging to *buraiha* (無頼派, "the decadent school"), starts off by approving the power of Hōjō's writing by saying, "my hangover just evaporated" (Takami 1936, 198). This does not mean, however, that Takami agrees with Kawabata from start to finish: "That being said, I am not sure if this work of literature is as wonderful as Mr. Kawabata claims it to be. It is a great documentary, no doubt, but is it a great tale, a *great literature*?" (Takami 1936, 198). In other words, Takami suggests that it lacks prowess, and there is still room for improvement.

No matter how the opinions contradict each other, it is almost surprising that a good portion of the issue is dedicated to discussing the work of a novice writer. The exchange also reverberated outside the magazine. For example, on January 24, 1936, Kobayashi had already shared his view in *Yomiuri Shinbun*:

> 雑誌に以前同じ作家の作品（間木老人）が発表された時、その号の編集後記に、作者は癩病患者であるといふ文句があるのを見咎めて、ある人が、実に失敬だなぞと憤慨してゐたが、さういふ人も、この第二作を読めば、僕等は、お互に、実に失敬だなぞと憤慨する結構な社会に生きてゐる事を納得するだらう。
>
> When a story (Maki rōjin) by the same author was published in the magazine, someone I know was upset because the editor declared that the author was in fact a leprosy patient. But this person, and not to mention me, too, shall realize after reading the second story, how lucky we are to be able to be irked by mere rudeness. (Kobayashi 1936b)

It seems as if Kobayashi is trying to overcome the aporia of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1977) here. Apparently, unlike most stories, those written by Hōjō constantly reminded readers of the author's physical condition. Educated readers know, on the one hand, that who the author is should not have an overbearing effect on the interpretation of the text. But they also know by experience, on the other hand, that readers do read in the shadow of the author. A single text may yield a myriad of evaluations depending on *who* has written it. Putting aside the heritage of the Naturalism movement and the tradition of I-novels,[6] works of Hōjō would not have attracted a similar scale of attention if the author boasted flawless health.

In short, as soon as Hōjō escaped the echo chamber of the colony, he was now trapped in another. In the colony, he was merely ill, but in the literary establishment, he *ought* to be ill.

[6] I-novels are often considered to be the fruit of the Japanese writers' effort to adapt the French Naturalism movement in the first two decades of the 20th century (Suzuki 1996).

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

5. Discussion

Writers have, in the past, discussed their illness in many ways. The act itself is a far cry from uncommon; for example, modern Japanese literature is known for its proneness of recounting tuberculosis (Johnston 1995, 124–159). But leprosy opens up a whole new sphere. No author with leprosy had documented his illness through a work of fiction and distributed it through channels of mainstream media. Let us remember that a diagnosis with leprosy in 1930s Japan (or elsewhere) was practically a death sentence, and thanks to the Leprosy Prevention Law, *de facto* illegal. Each period has its disease to signify demise and decay (Sontag 1990), and as for the 1930s, leprosy was in the limelight. It is easy to imagine this, of course, because we know for a fact that 2020s will be remembered as the age of coronavirus.

That being said, it must be pointed out that studies on Japanese, or the entirety of leprosy literature for that matter, are scarce. The paper by Susan Burns is one of the few treatises written in English that thoroughly provides the background to the development of this "distinct genre" (Burns 2004, 192). But the very idea of "genre" is what Hōjō despised and repeatedly denied towards the end of his life:

> 癩文学というものがあるかないか私は知らぬが、しかしよしんば癩文学というものがあるものとしても、私はそのようなものは書きたいとは思わない。私にとって文学はただ一つしかないものである。癩文学、肺文学、プロ文学、ブル文学、或は行動主義、浪漫主義など、文学の名目は色々と多いようであるが、しかし文学そのものが一つ以上あるとはどうしても思われぬ。文学が手段化した時に文学はもう堕落の一歩を踏み出しているのだ。
>
> I don't know if there is such a thing as leprosy literature, but if there is, I do not wish to write something like that. For me, there is only a single kind of literature. There seems to be an awful lot of labels on literature: leprosy literature, lung literature, proletariat literature, bourgeois literature, or activism, and romanticism. I find it hard to believe, however, that there is more than one kind. When literature is mobilized for a certain objective, it is already beginning to fall from grace. (Hōjō 1980, 114)

In this manuscript of an uncompleted essay, Hōjō provides a keen insight into how readers of the time treated his works. No matter how lethal his condition is, essentially it makes no difference to the reader. After all, the reader ravishes the end product and not its production process.

It seems Hōjō could not stress this point enough. In another essay "Keijitsu zakki" (頃日雑記, "Notes of Recent Days"), published posthumously in the March 1938 issue of the magazine *Kagaku pen* (科学ペン, *Science Pen*), he says that he wishes "only to write about human beings," no matter how people describe "what *we* write" (Hōjō 1980, 122; my emphasis). It is important to notice that Hōjō chose a plural pronoun.

While refusing to be consumed as a "leper writer," he segregates himself and his fellow patients from the rest of the authors, just like he did in the diary entry of December 20, 1935. He also claims, in another unpublished essay, that people should regard magazines published inside the colonies as "just *plain literary magazine*, without putting nouns like colony and leprosy in front" (Hōjō 1980, 136).

But apparently, nobody took him seriously. On the contrary, people who were supposed to be his mentors and protectors were the ones who constantly reminded him that leprosy was his greatest asset.

The exchange between Hōjō and Kawabata concerning the Akutagawa prize is a blatant example. Not surprisingly, it was announced in August 1936 that "Inochi no shoya" was shortlisted for the third Akutagawa prize. Very soon afterwards, however, Kawabata warned Hōjō in his letter dated August 7, 1936, that "it would be difficult for you to receive the prize" (Hōjō 1980, 371). It can be easily surmised that Kawabata, a member of the Akutagawa Prize committee, already had a very good idea about who the recipients will be: Tsuruta Tomoya (鶴田知也, 1902–1988) and Oda Takeo (小田嶽夫, 1900–1979).

Like most awards and prizes, Akutagawa Prize, too, is far from transparent. It is ultimately impossible to know why a certain author or work was chosen over others. In the case of Hōjō, however, Kawabata is quite clear on why he was *not* chosen. Here is his comment published on the November 1936 issue of *Bungei shunjū*, where the winners were announced:

> 発表当時既に或る程度酬いられ、また特異な作家として印象も強いゆえ、入賞せずとも注目されると思う。
>
> I am sure people will follow him even without the prize. His work was already rewarded to some extent when it was first published. Moreover, he is known to be quite peculiar as an author. (Kawabata 1936c, 349)

Here Kawabata honestly acknowledges the fact that Akutagawa Prize may be manipulated to boost the sales of certain works. And, from a business point of view, he is in the right; Hōjō's first collection of stories, also titled *Inochi no shoya*, sold well when it was published in December 1936. More than 6,000 copies were sold during the first two weeks (Hōjō 1980, 402), and this is a very good number when contemporary works of fiction typically garnered sales of about 1,000 copies (Itō 2006, 102).

But at the same time, Kawabata was determined that Hōjō's "peculiarity" was on the verge of expiring. Simply put, his leprosy no longer shocked the readers. If Hōjō were to survive and prosper in the establishment, he ought to come up with a new theme or style. "Why don't you consider writing about something else than leprosy?" Kawabata demanded straightforwardly in his letter of November 30, 1936, as *Inochi no shoya* was being printed (Hōjō 1980, 395). Kawabata, an able

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

producer and fixer, wasted no time. One thing he did forget, perhaps, was that Hōjō was only 22 and was gravely ill.

We already know that Hōjō was not fond of his status as "the leprosy writer" and was eager to expand his horizons. But in reality, he merely had a single year of experience as a professional and was not at all confident with his skill set. His reply to Kawabata's suggestion above, dated December 3, 1936, is almost self-mocking:

> 癩以外のことはいずれ書こうと念願しておりますけれど、まだその用意が出来ておりません。これは癩を書くよりもずっと難しいことですし、それに誰も書いておりますので(後略)。
>
> I have been wanting to write about something other than leprosy, but I am not ready. This is something much more difficult, and what's more, everyone is doing it [...]. (Hōjō1980, 396)

And he never ventured to do so, for he passed away a year later. His death sealed his reputation as it is. Since he was never going to produce new works, nothing stopped the establishment from using Hōjō as a monument of leprosy literature.

Let us take a look at a few obituaries published in newspapers. Critic Kawakami Tetsutarō (河上徹太郎, 1902–1980) praised the improvement Hōjō demonstrated in such a short career, stating that his later works teach "us healthy writers" a lesson or two (Kawakami 1937, 7). Another reviewer with the sobriquet Ryū Tōtarō (龍燈太郎), writes that the essence of Hōjō's works is "to immortalize oneself through literature while physically locked up in the prison cell of illness" (Ryū 1937, 4). And finally, a few months later, philosopher Tanikawa Tetsuzō (谷川徹三, 1895–1989) pointed out that while "it is no wonder the works written by a man secluded from the society because of his karmic disease are mesmerizing," this does not explain "the depth of heart and maturity" of his literature (Tanikawa 1938, 7).

Compared to the exchange between members of *Bungakukai*, the posthumous evaluation on Hōjō seems to be less diverse. We can confirm this on an advertisement of *Hōjō Tamio zenshū* (北條民雄全集, *Complete works of Hōjō Tamio*), which circulated in major papers. Here is an example from *Yomiuri Shinbun* on May 18, 1938:

> 世界に類のない『癩文学』の傑作を数々遺して、廿四歳で、奇蹟的な生涯を閉ぢた此の天才の文學ぐらゐ、切実で単純で、いのちそのものの真の姿を見せた不滅文学はない。蓋し、小説と云はず、随筆、感想、日記等の片々たる小篇の中にも、過去二千年の悲惨な歴史を持ち、今日の医学では治癒の道なく、社会の片隅に放棄され、侮蔑と排斥を浴びつつある癩患者の生活が、素朴な筆致と、老熟した手法をもつて、遺憾なく活写されてゐるからである。
>
> No literature is a better manifesto of life itself; a literature that is serious, simple, and immortal, produced by a genius who lived his miraculous life of 24 years, studded with unprecedented masterpieces of "leprosy

> literature." All of his unaffected, mature works of varying scale including stories, essays, notes, and diary, are vivid reflections of the life of a leper, who, amidst contempt and segregation, lives with his incurable disease in a dead-end of the society, reminiscing on two thousand years of hardship.

In the end, Hōjō himself won over his works. Almost every comment on him is either based on his medical peculiarity, or on the belief that his physical condition should not affect the evaluation of his works. The outcome is surprisingly similar in both cases. Most, if not all, contemporary comments are made about Hōjō himself rather than his works; and this, to a large extent, still holds true today.

Although Hōjō was an overt "leader" of the movement concerning leprosy literature, it is important to recognize that he was not alone in it. Two artists, Akashi Kaijin (明石海人, 1901–1939) and Ogawa Masako (小川正子, 1902–1943), quickly come to mind.

Akashi Kaijin rose to fame in 1937, when 11 of his leprosy-themed, autobiographical *tanka* were chosen to be included in *Shin Manyōshū* (新万葉集, *New Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*), a "modern" version of the classical poetry collection *Manyōshū* (万葉集, *Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*), commissioned by the publisher Kaizōsha. A couple of years later, his own collection *Shironeko* (白猫, *White cat*) caused an even larger sensation with the sale of an astonishing 250,000 copies – possibly an erroneous figure announced by the publisher, may it be unintentional or deliberate (Murai 2012, 266).

It was not only the patients who carried the fad forward. In 1938, Ogawa Masako published her memoir *Kojima no haru* (小島の春, *Springtime in the Isle*), which recounts the mission of a young female doctor to enlighten and protect the patients of leprosy residing in small villages in and around Kōchi prefecture. The book was a best-seller and was made into a propaganda-laden film in 1940, which in turn was highly praised (Arai 1996, 92).

The three artists have much in common. Kaizōsha, the publisher that worked with Hōjō on several occasions, was very much aware of the market value of "leprosy literature." It is tempting, therefore, to surmise that the poems by Kaijin had an extra charm for the editors of *Shin Manyōshu* due to the poet's medical condition. Kaijin's mentor was Uchida Mamoru (内田守, 1900–1982), a doctor in residence at the colony Nagashima Aiseien, who further advised Kaijin to publish *Shironeko*. And it was also Uchida who convinced Ogawa, his colleague, to publish her memoir. It is telling that one of the scenes in the film features Kaijin's verse (Murai 2012, 267).

Demonstrating how "leprosy literature" was received by an average reader could be a difficult task; but Takamine Hideko (高峰秀子, 1924–2010), one of the great actors of the Showa period (1926–1989), remembers the shock she experi-

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

enced from reading Hōjō's story for the first time (Takamine 1998, 131). She also states that it was the performance of Sugimura Haruko (杉浦春子, 1906–1997), who starred in the film version of *Kojima no haru*, that fueled her passion for acting (Murai 2012, 267). It is noteworthy, too, that Takamine mentions these works alongside Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and the verses of Ishikawa Takuboku (石川啄木, 1886–1912), a poet who died in poverty after suffering from tuberculosis. Perhaps for a typical young reader of the time, "leprosy literature" was accepted as a documentation of courageous challenges against the hardships of the world.

6. Conclusion

"Leprosy literature" did not merely offer a stimulating experience for readers who are intrinsically drawn upon secrets and taboo, but new opportunities to relevant parties. For Kawabata, the discovery of Hōjō constituted a merit in his career. Not only was he able to introduce a new genre, but his connection with a patient with a lethal disease could also easily be manipulated into proof of his philanthropic nature. He quickly became one of the protectors of "leprosy literature," and apparently, he now agrees with Hōjō's view that a writer should not be judged by his medical condition:

> 癩院を描く作家はまだ北條君一人しか世に現れていなかったためにこれが癩者の真相であるという面ばかりが強く受け取られ、これは北條民雄なる一作家の文学であるという一面が、広い読者には忘れられ勝ちでなかったかと疑われる。
>
> Since Mr. Hōjō was the only writer who writes about the leprosarium, it seems that readers, in general, disregarded the fact that his works are the result of an effort by an author named Hōjō Tamio, and that they were not exclusively written to recount the truth about leprosy. (Kawabata 1980, 421)

And again, when the volume *Bōkyōka* (望郷歌, *Songs of Nostalgia*), a collection of stories and essays written by patients of leprosy, combined with contributions by writers, scholars, and medical practitioners, was published in 1939, Kawabata concurred with Hōjō in his essay that there is no such thing as "leprosy literature." Obviously, this is something Hōjō would have appreciated to hear during his lifetime. Kawabata's logic, however, seems a little shaky:

> ここに癩文学の本が特に出されるといふのも、北條君の出現が与って力あることだらうが、彼の遺稿にも見える通り、彼は「癩文学者」と言はれるのを嫌ってゐた。当然である。しかし人々が言ふのも、癩者が書いた文学とか、癩を書いた文学とか、ただそれだけの軽い意味であらう。「癩文学」といふ特殊なものがあるわけはない。

> A volume on leprosy literature such as this would not have been published without the emergence of Mr. Hōjō. We know from his posthumous manuscripts, though, that he never liked being called a "leprosy writer." Of course he didn't. But when people talk about it, they simply mean that the work was written by a leper, or that the work is about leprosy; nothing more. There is no distinct genre called "leprosy literature." (Kawabata 1939, 315)

There is little doubt that Kawabata is trying to advocate the view Hōjō manifested in his unpublished manuscripts that have been quoted earlier. But it is doubtful whether Kawabata truly understood them. People's simple talk about works "written by a leper" and "about leprosy" is exactly what made Hōjō insecure. He rather wanted people to forget about leprosy and look beyond.

Instead, it seems that Kawabata built a monument of Hōjō and engraved "leprosy literature" on it. Kawabata's short story, "Kanpū" (寒風, "Cold Wind"), a slice-of--life piece about himself visiting a leprosarium for the funeral of a young patient, was serialized in the magazine *Nihon hyōron* (日本評論, *Japan Critique*) between 1941–1942. There, he reminisces of a troublesome youngster who "must have acted in a shockingly arrogant manner after being awarded the prize at a young age of 22 or 23. He was obviously a 'bat in a bird-less village,' and could not help it" (Kawabata 2015, 199).[7] But now that he is gone, the protagonist is purely awe-stricken by patients striving to create amidst their suffering.

How did the protagonist, or Kawabata, relate to them? At least this is what he believes:

> 私達はなんの話をしたのか、今は全く覚えていない。故人の遺稿は日記や手紙なども整理して送ってほしいと、事務的に依頼したことだけが纏まった話であったようだ。ただ私は、若い癩作家を世に出した男、また一人の作家、つまり文学というものの一つの形として、この青年達の前に坐っていたわけになるだろう。私は無言のうちになにかが通じ合っているように思えて、謙虚であった。
>
> I have no recollection of the conversation I had with them. One thing is for sure. In a businesslike manner, I asked them to make sure they'll file the manuscripts, diaries, and letters of the deceased, and send them over to me. I think I was sitting in front of those young men as the one who produced a young leprosy writer. Or, in a way, I sat there as an example of a writer; a form of literature if you would. Sensing that something connected us without even uttering a word, I felt modest. (Kawabata 2015, 211)

[7] The proverb "bat in a bird-less village" suggests someone with moderate qualities who gets to pretend to be superior in a place full of incompetent people.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

"Kanpū" is a work of fiction, and it does not aim to reconstruct Kawabata's experience with Hōjō.[8] But there is little doubt that Kawabata sums this up in his work and paints himself as the advocate of sickly artists. He did try to live up to his standards, too. In 1958, when he was invited to Okinawa via the local Pen Club, he made a detour to visit the Airakuen colony to meet patients of leprosy (Nishimura 2016, 3). A couple of days before his visit on June 8, he telephoned the staff and asked them to send over essays written by children of the colony for their school assignments (Koyano and Fukasawa 2016, 487). He then used them as a source of inspiration for his speech, with an expectation that essays written by children should reflect their emotions and feelings in an untinged manner.

We must bear in mind that soon after Hōjō's death, from 1939, Kawabata became deeply involved in the so-called *seikatsu tsuzurikata undō* (生活綴方運動, "the movement of daily life writing"). Originally, *tsuzurikata* was simply a writing class on the timetable at a typical school, urging students to write freely of their experiences and thoughts. However, the sense of "freedom" is malleable. With an overall inclination towards militarism, school assignments were quickly manipulated into an educational program that would raise children in ways that would profit the government; school teachers were able to instruct children on "correct" ways to feel and think by marking and commenting on their essays. Kawabata, who too believed in the quality of "self-salvation" through writing, outspokenly advocated education administered by the Japanese government, especially in foreign territories such as Manchuria, because he believed that children could be liberated and be equipped for the future by learning how to write in Japanese (Wei 2014, 107). Perhaps it was his conversations with Hōjō that inspired Kawabata how mentoring aspiring writers, who are often meek because of their humble social background, could help him gain merit and authority.

Kawabata, of course, was not alone in such a venture. People with power who participated in the swell of leprosy literature, namely writers and medical practitioners, often enjoyed such imbalance. One example would be Shikiba Ryūzaburō (式場隆三郎, 1898–1965). A psychiatrist and a critic, he most likely took an interest in Hōjō and leprosy literature through his brother Shikiba Toshizō (式場俊三), who was among the editorial staff of *Bungakukai*. By January 1936, Shikiba was already taking part in *Yamazakura* magazine as one of the "outside authorities" of colony literature and made comments on the works of patients. In a closing remark of an essay, he claims:

> 癩者の文学ばかりでなく、病者の文学は、その材料の特異さと経験の深さによつて、職業的文人の及ばない傑作が生れるものである。(中略)私は文芸のみならず、もつと多方面な知的作物が癩者の中々からも続々生れるやうに希望する。

[8] Igarashi (1996) points out numerous "factual errors" if the story were to convey true events.

> Not only works of leprosy patients, but also those of people with health issues in general, tend to become masterpieces that surpass the works of professional writers, because of their peculiar material and rich experience. [...] I truly hope to see many more intellectual achievements, even those outside the realm of creative writing, among leprosy patients. (Shikiba 1937, 67)

Although his statement can be viewed as empowering for the writers deprived of freedom and connection with the outside world, we must note well his bias against the patients. It is very much possible to interpret his words as a suppressing voice of authority. That is to say, he sees value in the writings of the patients only because they *are* ill. In other words, Shikiba might not have found their works intriguing if they were written in such a manner that no reader could associate them with leprosy.

This view could be substantiated by the fact that Shikiba soon turned his attention to visual artists with mental challenges. The most renowned of his protégé is by far Yamashita Kiyoshi (山下清, 1922–1971), the artist known for his brilliant collage of colored paper. During the early 1940s and again in the 1950s the media often covered him as a model savant; Yamashita was among the early examples of Japanese "outsider artists." In a way, then, leprosy literature could be deemed as a starting point of outsider art in Japan (Ono 2020).

Generally speaking, it was only after the end of the Second World War that leprosy could be critically represented through literature. With new drugs such as Promin, leprosy was now curable, or at least fully suppressible. Although most patients stayed in colonies rather than to start their lives anew, they could now hope for a long and full life. It was also after the War that patients began to stand up for their rights; they deemed the Leprosy Prevention Law to be unwholesome and discriminatory, and demanded the government to abolish it. This battle would end only in 2001, with the total annulment of the law in 1996 and the subsequent lawsuit that resulted in the victory of the patients. But the Leprosy Prevention Law is only one of the many laws that allowed the government to carry out inhumane "treatments," especially sterilization, on the voiceless patients who "failed" in the eyes of eugenics.

Was Hōjō a hero who, ahead of his time, rebutted the policies of the government that deprived the patients of their freedom and basic human rights? One could easily argue so. Paradoxically, however, his works were also often manipulated to prove the nation's perseverance, not to mention the diversity of the literary establishment. Leprosy literature is not unique to Japan, nor was it the first of its kind. Mrs. Piilani Koolau, a resident of Hawaii, shared her account as early as 1906 (Frazier 2001). Manuel Ortiz Guerrero, a popular poet from Paraguay, died in 1933 from the disease. A North Carolina native John Early quarantined himself for 28 years and published a narrative on it in 1935 (Kalisch 1972). In Japan, however, it evolved into a move-

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

ment exceeding personal accounts, where numerous patients were able to share their voice in multiple media channels. Whether they enjoyed full freedom of speech is a different question. The movement was, through its rise and fall, controlled by participants who were healthy and powerful. Perhaps it is not overly pessimistic to state that the voice given to writers with leprosy was always an echo; it only proves that the voice was once there, but is never heard directly.

DOI: 10.5507/ff.23.24462691.13

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