



Gérard Siary, Toshio Takemoto, Victor Vuilleumier et Yinde Zhang (dir.)

Le corps dans les littératures modernes d'Asie orientale : discours, représentation, intermédialité

Collège de France

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Ideal of Corporal Beauty: Social Construction and Personal Contribution

Damaso Ferreira Posse

DOI: 10.4000/books.cdf.12587

Publisher: Collège de France

Place of publication: Paris

Year of publication: 2022

Published on OpenEdition Books: February 7, 2022

Series: Institut des civilisations

Electronic EAN: 9782722605817



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

FERREIRO POSSE, Damaso. *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Ideal of Corporal Beauty: Social Construction and Personal Contribution* In: *Le corps dans les littératures modernes d'Asie orientale : discours, représentation, intermédialité* [online]. Paris: Collège de France, 2022 (generated 07 novembre 2023). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/cdf/12587>>. ISBN: 9782722605817. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.cdf.12587>.

This text was automatically generated on November 7, 2023.

The text only may be used under licence . All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Ideal of Corporal Beauty: Social Construction and Personal Contribution

Damaso Ferreira Posse

Introduction

- 1 One of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's 芥川龍之介 (1892-1927) last works, [Literary Too Literary] / 文芸的な、余りに文芸的な (1927), offers precious evidence of his latter's idea of corporal beauty. It is composed of 39 chapters among which two are especially significant: [The Call of the Wild] / 野性の呼び声 / *Yasei no yobigoe* and [The Call of the West] / 西洋の呼び声,¹ where he deals with the somatic question. If we wish to reach a general understanding of what a beautiful body means to Akutagawa, first of all it will be necessary to introduce the author's concept of corporal beauty, in relation to the current literary context of his time. An analysis of [Literary Too Literary] will then follow to bring out some key terms which express his own conception of the idea. The next step will consist in comparing Akutagawa's idea of corporal beauty with the one commonly accepted during his lifetime, while stressing why his case is unique in the field of modern Japanese literature. We will conclude with a final reflection on Akutagawa's two antagonistic ways of conceiving corporal beauty.
- 2 Before analyzing the concept of corporal beauty in Akutagawa's work [Literary Too Literary], it is necessary to consider the concept of beauty in Akutagawa's thinking in order to understand the importance it has in his poetry. As Yamashiki Kazuo 山敷和男 points out, Akutagawa's poetic conception is divided into three formative concepts that are interconnected to create an artistic masterpiece. These three concepts are beauty / 美, goodness / 善, and truth / 真. This way of understanding art is not exclusive to Akutagawa, rather it is very close to other Japanese and Western writers of the time. As

Paul De Man (1919-1983) argues, the constant presence of these three formative concepts may be due to the enormous influence the Neoplatonic ontology and theory of art exerted upon Western philosophy and art from the middle of the 18th century onwards. The main differences between theorists essentially lie in the way they understood, defined, and related those three elements to create their own systems. In this regard, Akutagawa's poetics is not an exception.

- 3 When analyzing Akutagawa's way of understanding literature and beauty, scholars must deal with the fact that, unlike other writers of his time such as Sōseki, he did not write any exposition of his theory of poetics, but instead just used his literary works as tools to transmit his ideas, thoughts, and opinions. Hence we face the necessity of reconstructing his poetics from the large amount of information scattered across his many works. Indeed, when Akutagawa talks about beauty, far from having an unique name for it, he employs many different terms such as beauty / 「美」 / *bi*, a merit / 「美点」 / *biten*, beauty / 「美しさ」, natural beauty / 「自然の美」, human beast's beauty / 「人間獣の美」, etc. Despite these difficulties, it is possible to show that, in a broad sense, for Akutagawa the idea of beauty is the most important formative concept of art and it is closely related to the term expression / 表現. In his own words, "(b)eauty starts with expression and ends with expression".² Moreover, this "beauty naturally appears in a literary work, and it can be noticed naturally by the reader",³ which means that creating beauty cannot be learned, but is something innate to the writer.⁴ However, due to their lack of goodness and truth, literary works only focused on beauty are probably not, Akutagawa argues, the best type of works. They nevertheless remain the purest expressions of art that may be created.⁵ Akutagawa mentions Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) as the perfect example of this type. This way of understanding the self-sufficiency of art, also known as *l'art pour l'art* / art for art's sake, a complicated debate which engaged artists and writers from the late Romantic period onward, occupies a position of importance in Akutagawa's thought and it seems to be intimately related with the subject of this paper: corporal beauty.

Body and literature

- 4 Our first task is to analyze what a physical representation of body means in literature. Body in reference to literature or literature in reference to body is a very controversial concept which requires a multidimensional, multilayered and interdisciplinary approach. When analyzing "bodies" in literature, one can understand some factors merely by focusing on the text, its vocabulary and expressions. However, we must consider that the number of expressions related to physical descriptions is often very limited and it obliges us to take into account to other elements such as inner descriptions. The overall conclusion is that it is very difficult to put a limit on the physical representation of characters in literature, what the author really means or what we, as researchers can deduce from it.⁶ According to Andrew Bennett,

in Body Studies, the hard problem is the question of how language relates to the body, of how any system of representation may be said to be or to interact with what Judith Butler terms the body's *mute facticity*. [...] there is an intimate and ineluctable paradox at the heart, as we say, of the discourse of the body, because any representation of the body *endeavors to make the body present*. But this making-present is always, necessarily, marked by its absence, since it is a law of language, of

representation, that the use of the linguistic sign implies the absence of the thing for which it stands.⁷

- 5 Furthermore, discussing the question of the body in literature raises not only the problem of its linguistic representation, but also a cultural problem. With only a few exceptions (Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault), Western philosophy has tended to hide questions related to the concept of “body” in its own metaphysical and ontological structures. In essence, the body was seen as a minor substance in comparison with the soul. Philosophers were accordingly reluctant to analyze all of its basest instincts and impulses (desire, insecurity, variability, sexuality, disease, etc.).⁸
- 6 The concept of body has always been present in literature but it retained the attention of intellectuals only after the so-called “discovery of the modern ego”. According to this discovery, the concept of body can be defined as the division between the “self” and the “other”, two elements mutually connected through a subjective relationship established by each one. Furthermore, both elements are also linked to two more dimensions: the private and the public.⁹ This philosophical way of understanding the body will be the one followed in this study: the difference between the “self” and the “other” may lead us to a broader context once these concepts are substituted by “own nation” and “foreign nation”. In other words, we will mainly analyze the body in Akutagawa’s essays as a social and cultural construction, paying attention to its sexual content and taking into account two main issues: the transnationalization of Western classics and the process of geographical and communicational deterritorialization of the Japanese body. Both issues go beyond the scope of nation and are closely bound up with the phenomenon of globalization.

The ideal of corporal beauty in Akutagawa

- 7 Somatic beauty in Akutagawa is a troubling and disruptive concept. The clearest text to analyze the concept of corporal beauty is [The Call of the West], published in Akutagawa’s last year of life (1927) as part of the larger work [Literary Too Literary], in which he describes not only his ideal of corporal beauty, but also its relation with Western classics. One important feature of this text is that, in contrast to others, Akutagawa refers to the concept of corporal beauty beyond gender; this may probably be understood as an attempt to make his own ideal universal. Quoting Ishibashi, there are two ways of approaching the concept of corporal representation; the first one is from a personal perspective, individualizing the body through a description of a particular character. The second one is from a wider perspective, with an absence of personalized descriptions and a clear universalization of the concept.¹⁰ Without indications of masculinity or femininity, it is possible to assume that Akutagawa intended here to promote a certain ideal of somatic beauty beyond gender.
- 8 Right from the outset, Akutagawa establishes a clear separation between his own interest for Western culture and that of his contemporaries:

The ‘calling of the West’ I feel is probably different from the one Tanizaki feels¹¹
 しかし僕の『西洋の呼び声』と云ふのは或は谷崎氏の『西洋の呼び声』とは多少異なつてゐるかも知れない。¹²
- 9 He then insists on the fact that in his case, his interest is merely artistic or aesthetic:

The West is always calling me from the perspective of the plastic arts. (...) And that calling coming from the plastic arts is probably not a coincidence.

『西洋』の僕に呼びかけるのはいつも造形美術の中からである。(中略)西洋の僕に呼びかけるのに造形美術を通してゐるのは必ずしも偶然ではないかもしれない。¹³

- 10 He concludes that the attraction he feels is not merely his interest for Western artistic expressions but for what lies behind that: the influence of the “mysterious Greece”:

That thing that is deeply rooted at the bottom of the West is always the mysterious Greece.

この『西洋』の底に根を張つてゐるものはいつも不可思議なギリシャである。¹⁴

- 11 This “mysterious Greece”, Akutagawa continues, is accessible to us under its still existent artistic works, such as pottery and (primarily) sculpture, and achieves its maximal expression of corporal beauty when representing its gods:

If I would have to explain the Greece I have closest to me, I would recommend taking a look at some Greek pottery works we have in Japan. Or I would even recommend taking a look at photographs of Greek sculptures contained in some books. The beauty existent in those works of art is the beauty of the own Greek gods.

僕は最も手短にギリシャを説明するとすれば、日本にもあるギリシャ陶器の幾つかを見ることを勧めるであらう。或は又ギリシャ彫刻の写真を見ることを勧めるであらう。それ等の作品の美しさはギリシャの神々の美しさである¹⁵

- 12 According to Akutagawa, the highest form of artistic representation was achieved in Greece, and the ideal of corporal beauty in Greek masterpieces can be considered as the ideal of corporal beauty of humankind itself. Akutagawa went beneath the surface of the West to rediscover a Greek ideal still alive, somehow still valid in present times and in places which are geographically and culturally very far away from its epicenter.

- 13 After reaching the previous conclusion, Akutagawa defines what the Greek ideal of corporal beauty means for him and why he feels attracted to it: Greek beauty is always a “sensual and voluptuous beauty, from which emerges a supernatural attraction”. It is a physical beauty inexistent in the East, very close to the concept of pornography,

a kind of infinite, sensual or carnal beauty which contains a supernatural attraction. This kind of mysterious beauty, similar to a stone in which the incense has deeply permeated, can be found inside poems too. (...) And it has a filiation different from our Eastern one. The most remarkable example can be found in pornography. Our sense of elegance is far from the concept of sensuality.

飽くまでも官能的な一言はば肉感的な美しさの中に何か超自然と言ふ外はない魅力を含んだ美しさである。この石に滲みこんだ麝香が何かの匂いのやうに得体の知れない美しさは詩の中にもやはりないことはない。(中略)何か僕等の東洋と異なった血脈を持つてゐる。その最も著しい例は或はポルノグラフィにあるかも知れない。僕等は肉感そのものさへ僕等と趣を異にしてゐる¹⁶

- 14 If we take into account all the words Akutagawa uses for describing Greek beauty, we can see that they all have a very strong sexual connotation. Greece appears to Akutagawa as a world based upon an open and limitless sexuality, far from the social constructions of the East, and lacking in moral religious precepts. This sexuality, as he asserts in another text of the same essay, [The Call of the Wild], is very close to the wild world lost in modern times and, because it is far from modernity, produces fear and some inner resistance at first:

I wish I could close my eyes to the “calling of the West”. The problem is that closing the eyes is not something I can always do voluntarily.

僕は若し目をつぶれるとすれば、かう云ふ『西洋の呼び声』には目をつぶりたいと思つてゐる。しかし目をつぶることは必しも僕の自由にはならない。¹⁷

The ideal of corporal beauty during the Taishō period: Nietzsche's influence on Akutagawa

- 15 Whether in Japan or in the Western world, the development of the concept of body is recent. However, in almost any piece of modern literature, the presence of the body is visible at every turn, either as a metaphor or as a real protagonist. As for Japan, Kawamura situates the discovery of the modern body at the beginning of the 20th century. He argues that this modern body, even if largely influenced by the West, was still different and autonomous because of the survival of some aspects of the Japanese tradition.¹⁸ However, over a period of almost 10 years, from 1920 until 1927-1928, the so-called “period of the sexualization of the society”, the Japanese conception of body became very close to the Western ideal.¹⁹
- 16 By that time, adherence to Western patterns permeated not only literature and painting, but also turned the pattern of Western corporal beauty into the main reference in Japanese society. The number of women-oriented books and magazines proliferated and they showed how to exercise the body, to have wider hips or to use make-up to westernize one's face. In the illustrations, along with Western actresses, many photographs of old Greek sculptures appeared on their pages; the would-be icon of the time was none other but the *Venus de Milo*, deemed an ideal of health as well as of sensual beauty.²⁰
- 17 Furthermore, we cannot dismiss the fact that the 1920s were known as the so-called “period of sexualization”. The word “sexual desire” / 性欲 / *seiyoku* began to be widely used and even became the keyword of the whole period.²¹ However, the word *seiyoku* had a double meaning by that time. On the one hand, it was identified with the principle of life ensuring the survival of humankind, the basis of the self-preservation instinct. On the other hand, it was also deemed something amoral which belongs to the realm of animals, a vision that ended up being the one most widely accepted.
- 18 Kawamura's description of the Taishō period makes possible to link Akutagawa's ideal of corporal beauty with the general ideal widely spread during his lifetime. The imitation of the Western classical body by the Japanese society of the time probably had a big impact on Akutagawa's own vision. Indeed, shared assumptions on the human body are nothing but assumptions rationalized and adopted by a society which perceives a given concrete model of body as natural. This image of a “natural body” may change, and in fact it does, geographically and temporally. For instance, Western culture has shown itself for centuries to be sympathetic to the conception of the physical body as a prison in which soul is encased, a paradigm of guilt and sin. This conception was not assumed by other cultures of the same time, nor is even assumed nowadays in Western culture itself. That said, the adoption of the Greek body as a model of beauty and perfection by Akutagawa inexorably leads us to consider the question of the classical body in modern Western culture as well.
- 19 It is in the production of body representations that the classical world provided a fertile soil for modern Western culture. The first real attempt in modern times to reconstitute the Greek ideal body in art was made by the art historian and archeologist Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768) for whom,
- in theory, the Greek ideal should appear entirely whole and centered, its harmoniously poised body the very model of a similarly constituted ideal subjectivity. (...) By establishing a duality between the high and the beautiful,

Winckelmann opened up irreducible division within the Greek ideal. This division not only registered the formal impossibility of ever realizing a stable fusion of idea and body in one single image. It also articulated a complex play of fantasy, oscillating between the projection and disavowal of desire, between the assertion and denial, even annihilation.²²

- 20 Winckelmann's view of the classical body may look very similar to the one described by Akutagawa, as both of them characterize the classical somatic ideal as a duality. However, the duality proposed by Winckelmann is based on a sexual dialectic between a masculine body (the high and erotic) and a feminine body (the beautiful and pure), two poles which are impossible ever to join. In Akutagawa's case, the "pure and sensual" are two faces of the same coin, *i.e.* classical beauty. Moreover, although Akutagawa specifically talks of the female prototype he feels attracted by in the chapter [The Call of Wild], when analyzing the ideal corporal beauty that Western classics represent in [The Call of the West] it becomes clear that he avoids any concrete mention of gender. He even rejects any mention when bringing to the fore the erotic dimension of the Western corporal ideal, which might be understood in some way as a subliminal message: as pointed out before, this might mean this erotic dimension may be found in both male and female representations.
- 21 According to Blanshard, the preference for wild, sensual and dark bodies arising from Greek classics such as Medea, Clytemnestra or Cleopatra is constant in the Western tradition from the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th: Jane Ellen Harrison, Delphine de Girardin, Martha Graham or Amy Levy are just some examples of scholars or artists who felt this attraction.²³ However, the first philosopher who was finally able to combine the two dimensions of the physical representation of bodies in Greek art together with the question of sexuality was Friedrich Nietzsche. As he was extremely popular in Japan during the Meiji and Taishō periods,²⁴ it is not unreasonable to think that his conception of sexuality, body and eroticism exerted a deep influence on Akutagawa, who often mentions him.
- 22 The somatic conception in Nietzsche's philosophy is very complex and evolving, mostly studied on the basis of the *Übermensch-Theorie*. We will focus on Nietzsche's approach to sexuality and eroticism in his early years, with special attention to *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* / *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Here Nietzsche already expresses most of his future concerns, among which is to be found the couple Apollo-Dionysos, drawn from Greek mythology and profusely used in German thought:
- Apollo, Dionysos, Socrates, (...) are all characters in a drama of ideas, an art form of the intellect that is neither mere allegory nor systematic philosophy. (...) They are not merely mythic or historical portmanteaux, but ideas-come-to-life. Through the creation of such figures, Nietzsche illustrates his belief in the emotional foundation of all ideas.²⁵
- 23 This famous dichotomy, far from the ideal of perfect forms inherited from the Renaissance and Neoclassic periods, emphasizes the irrational part of Greek culture as the most rewarding for human and spiritual development. Nietzsche first described these two concepts aesthetically, and some years later also ontologically and metaphysically, assuming that the fusion of Dionysian and Apollonian artistic impulses / *Kunsttriebe* produced the best artistic expression possible: nothing other than Greek tragedy. According to Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy* (sections 13 and 14), the critical distance which separates men from their closest emotions, brought by the Socratic dialectic, gave birth to Apollonian ideals. Since these ideals set human beings

apart from their essential connections with the self,²⁶ Nietzsche attempts to recuperate it and proposes in *Attempt at Self-Criticism* (section 5) a closer link with the chaotic nature of the world represented by Dionysos, usually defined as wild, sensual, and releasing.²⁷ If one wants to reestablish a good connection between individuals and the surrounding world, as well as to get rid of the existential pain induced by modernity, sensuality and eroticism are to be accepted always as an indivisible part of existence. And Nietzsche, in *Attempt at Self-Criticism*, turns existing in Greek culture's sensuality and eroticism into something not only positive but even advantageous and desirable. This positive approach was rejected by the so-called Socratic rational thinking revolution²⁸ and, later, by Christian morality.

24 As will be the case for Akutagawa some years later, moral attributions dictated by Christians which made men embrace hatred towards impurity were something meaningless for Nietzsche²⁹ in his *Attempt at Self-Criticism*. He argues that such attributions should be substituted by a quest for beauty, sensuality, chaos, contradictions, etc. Although Nietzsche's works did not reach a wide readership during his lifetime,³⁰ they were widely read during the Taishō period (if not widely understood – some critics doubt this), and not only the *Übermensch-Theorie*, but also the Apollonian and Dionysian theory, did exert a deep impact on several Japanese writers including Akutagawa.

25 Even if both artistic impulses are embodied by male gods, Apollo and Dionysos, Nietzsche makes no distinction between sexes when considering the sensual or erotic part of human beings – nor does Akutagawa. Furthermore, Apollonian pureness and Dionysian eroticism coexist within the same dialectic game, thus bringing Greek tragedy to life. It is exactly the same with Akutagawa's conception of Greek beauty. However, this ontological and epistemological development, achieved by Nietzsche and reproduced by Akutagawa, would have not been possible without the rise of sciences “that sought to establish precarious truths about racialized and gendered bodies whose past and anticipated future were at the core of anxious theorizing about progress and civilization”.³¹ This question of sexuality regarding the body which is raised by the sciences should not be understood simply as a negative representation, but

at a time when the boundaries of different European states expanded, collapsed and competed in its violent struggles that accompanied the formation of modern nations and their aggressive colonial expansion, scientific investigations of sex – understood to mean both gender and sexual acts – became central to the way in which the nineteenth century articulated its norms and ideals and sought to control transgression and deviation.³²

26 Bauer then quotes Michel Foucault, according to whom sexuality emerged as the correlative of that slowly developed discursive practice which constitutes the *scientia sexualis*, marking a profound shift in the production of the subject, a shift which turned the sexual body into the focus of scientific enquiry and made it central to the deployment of power in the West.³³ One more consideration should be added to Bauer's words: not only in the West but in Japan as well there are several literary works related to the sexual dimension of men written from a scientific and philosophical point of view. For example, in *Vita sexualis* / エタ・セクスアリス (1909), Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922) draws attention to the sexual experiences of the protagonist. However, in spite of conspicuous attempts to normalize sexual issues in Japan and in spite of the disruption caused by the ancient model of corporal beauty, it nonetheless remained

commonly true that neither sexuality nor eroticism were openly accepted by Japanese society.

Akutagawa's body: social construction and personal contribution

- 27 Regarding the issue of accepting a foreign corporal model as one's own, stimulating the appropriation of Western classical imagery was one of the issues the Japanese had to go through to gain access to Western culture after the so-called Meiji Restoration. Traditionally, classical learning in Japan was represented by Chinese classics. However, during the 20th century, along with the decline of this Chinese classical tradition in Japan, the Western classical past and the turn toward Western antiquity was profusely used in Japanese literature not only by Akutagawa, but by some other writers such as Dazai Osamu 太宰治 (1909-1948), Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970), Kita Morio 北杜夫 (1927-2011), Yoshioka Minoru 吉岡実 (1919-1990) or Takahashi Mutsuo 高橋睦郎 (1937-). During this period, some authors like Homer, Aesop or Plato and figures from antiquity such as Caesar or Alexander were reclaimed as an indispensable part of world literature and common cultural heritage, thus expanding the limits of the Western classical world beyond its geographic bounds.
- 28 This phenomenon may be due to two fundamental reasons. According to Salvatore Settis, "we are thus faced with a paradox, whose significance we need to emphasize and interpret as the sole and unequivocal root of all Western civilization, and the depository of its highest and unfailing values".³⁴
- 29 As a result of it, we tend to use a profusion of quotations taken from classical antiquity to legitimize our own argument, creating a corpus of random and unconnected elements of fragments from the classical tradition "ready to use".³⁵ More serious is another feature of this process: we tend to project the classical world "onto a universal plane" and claim Western civilization's superiority over other civilizations. These reflections on the nature of the classical are very relevant to understanding the transnationalization not only of Western antiquity but also of the classical model of corporal beauty as well. As Settis points out, we created a corpus that is easy to use whatever the occasion may be, and we endowed this corpus with a false sense of authority, putting our own tradition on an unreachable pedestal unconnected from its real idiosyncrasy. Both reasons made the classical tradition not only easy to "recycle" by Western countries but also easy to assimilate by many others. Even by those that, like Japan, are geographically very far from its epicenter. The final consequence of this phenomenon which occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries is the transnationalization and universalization of Western antiquity, making it appear as a common model that provides universal validity and prestige to those who adopt it and use it.
- 30 This process of transnationalization of the Western classical world and the adoption of Western culture as a model had an important impact on how Japanese understood themselves. In other words, it produced a sort of "colonization" of the mind which, at the same time, implied a deterritorialization of the "Japanese body". The term "colonization of the mind" is widely used in the field of colonial studies and is defined as a form of "epistemic violence" regardless of whether it occurs in socio-political

situations literally defined as “colonial”.³⁶ According to Dascal, this phenomenon has the following characteristics:

the intervention of an external source – the ‘colonizer’ – in the mental sphere of a subject or group of subjects – the ‘colonized’; this intervention affects central aspects of the mind’s structure, mode of operation, and contents; its effects are long-lasting and not easily removable; there is a marked asymmetry of power between the parties involved; the parties can be aware or unaware of their role of colonizer or colonized; and both can participate in the process voluntarily or involuntarily.³⁷

- 31 In other words, this “colonization of the mind may take place through the transmission of mental habits and contents by means of social systems other than the colonial structure. For example, via the family, traditions, cultural practices, religion, science, language, fashion, ideology, political regimentation, the media, education, etc”.³⁸ As we can see, body image in Japan during the Meiji and Taishō periods cannot escape the epistemic colonization of the West. Physical differences between Western and Eastern bodies (such as hips, eyes or breasts) were all quickly assimilated by Japanese society; this new trend imposed an ideal model that depicted people, mainly women, as they should be rather than as they really were. As Blanshard asserts, through its domination of canons of beauty, the Western classical tradition has played a decisive role in controlling the appearance of and in pathologizing male and female bodies³⁹ regardless of their geographical origin. The preeminence of classical models of beauty in Japanese society redefined notions of corporal beauty and encouraged the “imitation” of foreign models, based on the false assumption that the Western canon is the only one that contains a “universal truth” beyond time, space and causality.
- 32 The immediate consequence of this process is the deterritorialization of the traditional Japanese body, or to put it another way, the traditional Japanese conception of corporal beauty looked at the West and, attracted by a new universal model, ceded its place not only to a new way of understanding beauty but to a series of ethical paradigms as well: the *Venus de Milo* became the icon of Taishō period. As we have previously pointed out, Akutagawa’s description of corporal beauty, “the sensual beauty of the own Greek gods”,⁴⁰ is very similar to what Kawamura argued was the main trend during the late Meiji and Taishō periods. In this sense we can affirm that Akutagawa’s conception of corporal beauty is, broadly speaking, a continuation of the conception that prevailed during his lifetime, which implies that he could not escape the process of colonization of the mind discussed above. The content of his text derives directly from the social trend of the time and, from that point of view, Akutagawa can be seen as mere receiver and repeater of that socially accepted model.
- 33 However, if we take into account the variety of images Akutagawa employs in connection with the concept of “classical Greek beauty”, such as a voluptuousness close to pornography (seen as something positive), and moreover if we take into account not only [The Call of the West] but also the preceding essay, [The Call of the Wild], where he talks about a wild and instinctive corporal beauty, it is absolutely clear that Akutagawa’s conception somehow differs from that characterized by Kawamura as typical of the period. In other words, the previous explanation of Akutagawa as a mere receiver and repeater is not enough to understand the depth of the question itself. Quite the opposite, in fact. When analyzing the text in detail, we arrive at the conclusion that Akutagawa must be seen as a renovator of the concept in Japan, since he assimilated the current social trend and went further, including his very personal

and unique understanding of the term along with the influence of some other scholars or philosophers like Nietzsche, as mentioned previously. The connection between wildness, sexuality, freedom, eroticism, pureness and the Greek classics was not new in the Western world but it was definitely innovative in Japan.

Conclusions

34 We can conclude that although the ideal of corporal beauty which Akutagawa presented in the year of his suicide might appear to have been very revolutionary at the moment it was published, it is not completely original. Its development comes largely from the concept of beauty existing in Western countries, on the one hand, and in Japan on the other. However, Akutagawa's conception goes beyond what was socially accepted in his country at that time and ignores some aspects such as immorality or social acceptance in the same way Nietzsche did with his concept of "Dionysian". To sum up, we must admit that the question of the body and physical beauty in Akutagawa is constructed through the intersection of multiple discourses, including: the canonical Western influence of the time which, as Kawamura points out, followed Western corporal beauty patterns; the Nietzschean tradition which picked up the issue where it had been left off, mainly by Winckelmann and Hegel; and his own personal perspective on beauty.

35 Furthermore, despite the conceptual indeterminacy that shadows the somatic question in Akutagawa's literature, there is another factor that cannot be dismissed: its connection with the wild. While the explanation of the desired body is understood as something non-gendered but with a high sexual content, the relation with the wild, suggested in the essay titled [The Call of the Wild], is always seen from a perspective of female beauty. For Akutagawa, indeed, the difference between a refined beauty (represented by Renoir's paintings) and a wild beauty (represented by Gauguin's paintings) is the difference between a type of socio-cultural commodity and a truly free and instinctive desire. Even if he admits that as an educated man he marvels at the subtle genius of Renoir and his painting technique, he observes that:

Gauguin, at least the Gauguin I have seen, is giving form to the human beast that exists inside the orange women (Tahitians). And he is doing that in a more acute way than any painter of the School of Realism. (...) These female and orange human beasts attract me. I wonder if I am the only one who can feel inside this calling of the wild.

「ゴオガンは、一少なくとも僕の見たゴオガンは橙色の女の中に人間獣の一匹を表現してみた。しかも写真派の画家たちよりも更に痛切に表現してみた。

(中略) 橙色の人間獣の牝は何か僕を引き寄せようとしてゐる。かう云ふ『野性の呼び声』を僕等の中に感ずるものは僕一人に限つてゐるであらうか？」

41

36 This predilection towards savage and primitive beauty, almost understood as a supreme extra-linguistic feature, is not in contradiction with what we have seen until this point (a pure, sensual and sexual beauty). On the contrary, it is a complementarity beauty which can be drawn upon Nietzsche's previously mentioned work and his idea of Dionysos.⁴² This connection between the wild and Dionysos is visible in another work, [Smile of Gods] / 神々の微笑⁴³ (1922), where Akutagawa describes a "Bacchanalia" performed by Japanese shintoist gods.

- 37 The connection between wildness and classics is not emphasized solely by Nietzsche. There is a long list of writers and philosophers, mainly belonging to the group of German classical scholars, who tended to do the same. However, in Akutagawa's case, if we pay attention to the number of quotations and the frequency of appearances in his works, it is easy to surmise that he was influenced primarily by two writers: Heine and Nietzsche. Indeed, both are mentioned, directly or indirectly, in the brief essay we are analyzing in this paper.⁴⁴
- 38 Moreover, the debate about these two ways of understanding corporal beauty in Japan, a soft and socially well-accepted one and a wild and socially rejected one, is probably not exclusive to Akutagawa. However, as he often admits, the preference for the second type of beauty is probably not very common during his lifetime: "The calling of the West I feel is probably different from the one Tanizaki feels (...) I wonder if I am the only one who can feel inside this calling of the wild?".⁴⁵ At this point, we can affirm that Akutagawa's conception of corporal beauty is heavily influenced by Western ideals, in a way that is probably much stronger than any other writer of his time. He himself admits this: "Am I the only one who is always easily influenced by others?"
- 39 The concept of corporal beauty is a recurrent feature of the literary world, and it varies and changes as its frequency allows. Akutagawa's case is a good example of it. It is not something mechanical with a fixed identity at all but, as Blanshard suggests, it is the result "of a cultural conversation carried across time, place, and gender. Each part of the societal fabric has contributed to this discussion. Different moments brought different aspects into focus. Each contribution has often raised more problems than it solved"⁴⁶.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, [Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke] / *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke Zenshū*, YASUE Ryōsuke (ed.), Tokyo, Iwanami, 1996, vols. 5, 12, 15, 16.

BACARLETT PÉREZ María Luisa, *Friedrich Nietzsche. La vida, el cuerpo y la enfermedad*, México, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 2006.

BAUER Heike, "Literary Sexualities", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, HILLMAN David and MAUDE Ulrika (ed.), New York, Cambridge U. P., 2015, p. 101-115.

BENNETT Andrew, "Language and the Body" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, HILLMAN David and MAUDE Ulrika (ed.), New York, Cambridge U. P., 2015.

BLANSHARD Alain, "Gender and Sexuality", in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, KALLENDORF Craig (ed.), Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

DASCAL Marcelo, "Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds", in *Papers of the 2007 World Philosophy Day*, KUÇURADI Ioanna (ed.), Ankara, Philosophical Society of Turkey, 2009, p. 308-332.

DE MAN Paul, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins U. P., 1996.

ISHIBASHI Masataka 石橋正孝, ["A Consideration of the Possibilities and Limits of the Body's Representation in Literature"] / *Bungaku ni okerushintai.hyōshō no kanōsei to genkai ni tsuite no kōsatsu*, in *Teikyō Daigaku sōgō kyōiku sentā ronshū*, vol. I, 2010, p. 71-85.

KAWAMURA Kunimitsu 川村邦光, [The Maiden's Modern Body and Sexuality] / 乙女の身体・女の近代のセクシュアリティー / *Otome noshintai: onna no kindai to sekushuariti*, Kinokuniya Shoten, 1994.

LENSON David, *The Birth of Tragedy. A Commentary*, Boston, Twayne's Masterwork Studies, 1987.

POTTS Alex, *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, New Haven, Yale U. P., 2000.

SETTIS Salvatore, *The Future of the "Classical"* / [Futuro del classico, 2004], CAMERON Allan (trans.), Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006.

SILK Michael and STERN Joseph, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, New York, Cambridge U. P., 2016.

SUGITA Hiroko, [Sōseki's Cat and Nietzsche. Modern Japanese Intellectuals Upset by the Modern Philosopher] / *Sōseki no neko to niche - kindai no tetsugakusha ni shinkanshita kindai.nihon no chiseitachi*, Tokyo, Hakusuisha, 2010.

YAMASHIKI Kazuo 山敷和男, [Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Theories on Art] / 芥川龍之介の芸術論 / *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no geijutsuron*, Tokyo, Gendai Shichō Shinsha, 2000.

NOTES

1. AKUTAGAWA Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, ["Literary Too Literary"], in [Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke] / *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke Zenshū*, YASUE Ryōsuke (ed.), Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, vol. 15, 1996, p. 201-208.
2. AKUTAGAWA, ["Art and Others"], in [Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke], *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 167.
3. AKUTAGAWA, ["Poe's Shadow"], in [Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke], *op. cit.*, vol. 12, p. 274.
4. AKUTAGAWA, ["Dwarf's Words"], in [Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke], *op. cit.*, vol. 16, p. 40.
5. AKUTAGAWA, ["Literary Too Literary"], *op. cit.*, p. 148.
6. ISHIBASHI Masataka 石橋正孝, ["A Consideration of the Possibilities and Limits of the Body's Representation in Literature"], in *Teikyō Daigaku sōgō kyōiku sentā ronshū*, vol. I, 2010, p. 76.
7. BENNETT Andrew, "Language and the Body" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, HILLMAN David and MAUDE Ulrika (ed.), New York, Cambridge U. P., 2015, p. 73.
8. BACARLETT PÉREZ María Luisa, *Friedrich Nietzsche. La vida, el cuerpo y la enfermedad*, México, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 2006, p. 18, 19.
9. ISHIBASHI, ["A Consideration of the Possibilities and Limits..."], *op. cit.*, p. 76.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
11. All English translations are my own.
12. AKUTAGAWA, ["Literary Too Literary"], *op. cit.*, p. 204.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 206, 207.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

18. KAWAMURA Kunimitsu 川村邦光, [Sexuality in Modern Times] / オトメの行方—近代女性の表象と闘い, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 1996, p. 48.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
22. POTTS Alex, *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, New Haven, Yale U. P., 2000, p. 145.
23. BLANSHARD Alain, "Gender and Sexuality", in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, KALLENDORF Craig (ed.), Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 333, 334.
24. SUGITA Hiroko 杉田弘子, [Sōseki's Cat and Nietzsche. Modern Japanese Intellectuals Upset by the Modern Philosopher], Tokyo, Hakusuisha, 2010, p. 13.
25. LENSEN David, *The Birth of Tragedy. A Commentary*, Boston, Twayne's Masterwork Studies, 1987, p. 8, 9.
26. NIETZSCHE Friedrich, [Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik] / *El nacimiento de la tragedia*, SÁNCHEZ Andrés (trans.), Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 2004 [1872], p. 120-130.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. LENSEN, *The Birth of Tragedy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 13, 14.
31. BAUER Heike, "Literary Sexualities", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, HILLMAN David and MAUDE Ulrika (ed.), New York, Cambridge U. P., 2015, p. 101.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. SETTIS Salvatore, *The Future of the "Classical"* / [Futuro del classico, 2004], CAMERON Allan (trans.), Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006, p. 2.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
36. DASCAL Marcelo, "Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds", in *Papers of the 2007 World Philosophy Day*, KUÇURADI Ioanna (ed.), Ankara, Philosophical Society of Turkey, 2009, p. 308.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 309.
38. *Ibid.*
39. BLANSHARD, "Gender and Sexuality", *op. cit.*, p. 334.
40. See above the footnote on Akutagawa.
41. AKUTAGAWA, ["Literary Too Literary"], *op. cit.*, p. 202.
42. SILK Michael, STERN Joseph, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, New York, Cambridge U. P., 2016, p. 297.
43. AKUTAGAWA, ["Smile of Gods"], *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 188-204.
44. HEINE Heinrich, in AKUTAGAWA, ["Literary Too Literary"], vol. 15, 1996, p. 207. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, p. 208.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
46. BLANSHARD, "Gender and Sexuality", *op. cit.*, p. 329.

AUTHOR

DAMASO FERREIRO POSSE

Hiroshima University. Damaso Ferreiro Posse is a specialist of Compared Literature and Modern and Contemporary Japanese Literature. He has published 赤い鳥事典編集委員会 (2018) 『赤い鳥事典』 柏書房。 フェレイロ、ダマソ (2018) 「芥川龍之介の「芸術作品完成品論」における〈美〉〈善〉〈真〉—新プラトン主義の視点から」 『第12号芥川龍之介研究』 国際芥川龍之介学会。 Ferreiro Posse, Dámaso (2020) “El papel de la tauroflamencología en el universo mishimiano: España y su tradición cultural como ejemplo de resistencia a la homogeneidad occidental” *Mirai. Estudios Japoneses*, vol. 4.