

Introduction¹: Baudelaire's early reception in Japan

In the middle of the 19th century, as it was opening to the West, in its frenetic quest for modernization, Japan was obliged to introduce aspects of Western cultural systems in almost all domains. Of course literature was not an exception. To express the new feelings and ideas resulting from the process of modernization, Japanese literature acutely felt the necessity to look for new modes of expression, outside tradition, in Western literature. In a somewhat chaotic situation, toward the end of the 19th century, some writers, who asserted the importance of frank descriptions of the truth of human life, formed a group that referred to itself as "Naturalist," which gradually increased their power in the Japanese literary world. But this Japanese Naturalism—Shizenshugi—completely lacked a scientific view of society, and was quite different from Zola's thought and European naturalism in general.² Strongly influenced by Tsubouchi Shôyô³ (1859-1935), the famous writer and professor of English literature at *Tokyo Senmon Gakko* (later Waseda University), the naturalist group, advocating art as mimesis, looked upon other literary streams with hostility, especially the Aesthetic movement directed by Mori Ôgai (1862-1922) and Ueda Bin (1874-1916). From this anti-naturalist group, distinguished modern writers such as Nagai Kafû (1879-1959), Tanizaki Junichirô (1886-1965) and Akutagawa Ryûnosuke (1892-1927) appeared. Under these conditions, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) appeared on the Japanese literary scene. Initially, Baudelaire was considered as a sign or a symbol of Aestheticism and attacked by the Naturalist group, because of its stereotyped images of being Satanic, morbid, decadent, focused on art-for-art's sake, etc. Following this early stage, some writers in the anti-naturalist stream, like Kafû⁴, Tanizaki, Akutagawa, and many Japanese poets began to interpret Baudelaire creatively from their own original points of view.

We would like to stress that Baudelaire's influence has never been limited to poetry nor only to serious literature but that it has changed with the times and been extended to various media, such as novels, film, detective stories, manga, anime, etc. In this paper, we will focus on Baudelaire's reception in Japan in relation to this point. Other papers in this issue will present more fully about the Japanese poets. We will discuss here two novelists, Kafû and Tanizaki; *Mothra*, a monster film made in 1961, of which the original story was partly written by an eminent researcher/translator of Baudelaire, Fukunaga Takehiko; a detective story written by Kasai Kiyoshi; and a manga titled *Aku no hana (The Flowers of Evil)* by Oshimi Shûzô.

The manga and the detective story will be treated in detail by Mr. Hirota and Ms. Ôshima. For these two cases, we will limit ourselves to clarifying their social and historical context.

1. Resistance to power: Nagai Kafû (1879-1959) and *Sangoshû (The Corals, 1913)*

After the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), the Japanese government, stirring up nationalist sentiments in the population, censored and suppressed thought and art that originated in the West. During this era, Nagai Kafû appeared, becoming the first writer to place Baudelaire in the center of his literary creation. His *Furansu monogatari (A Tale of France)*, a collection of anecdotal stories about his stay in France was banned by

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² See Shûichi Katô, *A History of Japanese Literature: From the Man'yôshû to Modern Times*, New Abridged Edition, translated & Edited by Don Sanderson, Japan Library, 1997, pp.270-271.

³ In this paper, the given names of Japanese writers are placed after their surnames to maintain consistency with Japanese naming conventions.

⁴ Nagai Kafû. Famous Japanese literary figures are often referred to by their given names, like Sôseki (Natsume Sôseki) or Ôgai (Mori Ôgai).

the censors in 1909. In spite of the threat of censure, in 1913 he published *Sangoshû* (*The Corals*). *Sangoshû* is now recognized as one of the most important anthologies of translated Western poems, but it is after the second edition in 1919 that *Sangoshû* became what we know today.

The first edition in 1913 contained not only 38 French poems in translation but also some translations of contemporary French prose and literary criticism accompanied by Kafû's concise notes. In order to understand this first edition in the context of Japanese society at the beginning of the Taishô era (1912-1926), it is necessary to analyze this book in its totality, including its paratexts (preface, illustrations, list of books already published, etc.) and we have to reveal the hidden messages slipped into it by the author. For example, an essential message is inserted in the preface that was deleted by Kafû himself in the second edition, perhaps out of fear of the censors. Here we can read a bitter irony into the rigorous control of thought and expression by the Japanese government: the author identifies the corals, precious treasures the importation of which was strictly forbidden by the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867), with the Western thought and art considered dangerous after the Meiji period. At the end of this preface, Kafû indicates the date of redaction with the following expression: "...the day when I finished the story of Ryûtei Tanehiko". Tanehiko (1783-1842), author of an Edo-period parody of *The Tale of Genji*, died in 1843 just after severe condemnation of his book for the corruption of public morals. At that time, Kafû had just finished a novel about Tanehiko's life and death.⁵ Inserting the name of Tanehiko in the preface, he identifies Tanehiko's destiny with his own and implicitly but severely criticizes the militarist government.

In *Sangoshû*, 38 poems follow the preface, with a self-portrait by Baudelaire and seven poems written by him at the forefront. 'Le Mort joyeux', 'Spleen (Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle)', 'Obsession', 'L'Ennemi', 'Chant d'automne', 'Une Charogne', and 'Tristesse de la lune'. The Japanese translation of these poems fortifies the theme of the fate of an artist suffocated and punished by society, but perpetually in search of the ideal, the achievement of his artistic creation. It is of no small coincidence that *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) was also condemned in 1857 by the government of Napoleon III. The picture of the self-portrait of Baudelaire placed at the top of the main text is obviously also the self-image of Kafû. Here he constructs a close link between Tanehiko, Baudelaire and himself. Through these intertextualities, we can see that the 38 poems symbolize the corals, treasures of Western literary aesthetics smuggled into Japan in the form of Kafû's book, always in danger of being recognized and suppressed.

During the Pacific War, Kafû never collaborated with the militarist government. He decided to look for his artistic inspiration in the charm of ancient Tokyo, the Edo that was gradually fading away. It is clear that his nostalgia for a Japan that was in the process of disappearing was intimately linked with his precious memory of his stay in France.

2. Idolization of women: Tanizaki Junichirô (1886-1965) and his translation of Baudelaire's poems in prose (1919-1920)

At the end of the Meiji era, in 1910, a brilliant young writer entered the literary world through the strong recommendation of Nagai Kafû. This was Tanizaki Junichirô. While Tanizaki is now considered as a writer who expressed in a very refined style the delicate atmosphere of Japanese traditional life, he was greatly influenced in his youth by Western writers like Wilde, Poe, and Baudelaire, although it has often been argued that the western influences on him were very slight and superficial. His literary debut was the short story, 'Shisei' (Tattoo, 1910) and other short stories, and after this Tanizaki

⁵ *The Death of a Popular Writer*, 1913.

wrote many Satanic and fantastic stories, most of them quite short. But at that time, short story writers were not given as much respect as novelists who wrote full-length works, like Nastume Sôseki (1867-1916). So Tanizaki made various attempts to become a novelist.

Through this struggle, he finally found in Baudelaire's works a frame that enabled the construction of the novel at which he aimed, one that featured the idolization of women, and a sense of kneeling down to them. Tanizaki noted this scheme especially in Baudelaire's prose poem, 'Le Fou et la Vénus' (The Fool and Venus). He referred to this poem in his novel, *Kôjin* (*Mermaid*, 1920), which was published just after Tanizaki had published a translation of Baudelaire's eight prose poems in a magazine. They were translated from an English translation⁶ of Baudelaire's originals. These poems were: 1) 'Enivrez-vous!' (Intoxication); 2) 'Les Bienfaits de la lune' (The Gifts of the Moon); 3) 'Le Fou et la Vénus' (The Fool and Venus); 4) 'Le Désir de peindre' (The Desire to Paint); 5) 'La Chambre double' (The Double Chamber); 6) 'L'Étranger' (The Stranger); 7) 'Chacun sa chimère' (Every Man his Chimaera); and 8) 'Déjà' (Already). In these eight poems, we can easily find Tanizaki's preferences and motives. Among them, the theme that an artist or fool kneeling before an idolized woman is an outstanding figure, a theme that was emphasized by his translation. Four years later, in 1924, he published his first long novel, *Chijin no ai* (*A Fool's Love*) the frame of which was the same. We could even say that Tanizaki's original interpretation of Baudelaire made him the great novelist that we know now.

3. Baudelairian themes in a monster film: Fukunaga Takehiko (1918-79) and *Mothra* (1961)

Fukunaga Takehiko was a scholar and a writer. As a scholar, he was a specialist of Baudelaire, and one of the editors of Baudelaire's full-scale complete works in Japan (1963-64), translating all the poetical works of Baudelaire into Japanese. On the other hand, Fukunaga was sincerely involved in the field of creative literature, writing poetry, novels, literary criticism, doing translation work, etc. The most important literary genre for him was the novel, where Baudelaire's influence appears in several places. For example the titles of his novels are sometimes very Baudelairian: *Meifu* (*Les Limbes, Limbo*), *Shin-en* (*Le Gouffre, The Abyss*), and *Bôkyaku no kawa* (*Le Léthé, Lethe*). Throughout his works, we can find themes that have a close similarity with Baudelaire, for example, the "return to childhood" or the "voyage to paradise", and the "voyage toward death". They emerge in his various writings, and are also reflected in the monster movie *Mothra*, released in 1961. Though *Mothra* is now generally viewed as simple entertainment, its original story was written by three famous writers who had studied French literature: Nakamura Shinichirô (1918-1997), Hotta Yoshie (1918-1998), and Fukunaga Takehiko.

The story begins with the return of shipwrecked survivors who were cast-aways on the shore of a dead island. This island was originally named "Infant Island", but it was believed to have been completely destroyed and fatally contaminated with radioactivity by the nuclear test of a major power whose name was originally to be Roshirika—a coined blending of "Roshia (Russia)" and "Amerika (America)". But this name was changed to Rorishika in the movie, perhaps with the purpose of moderating or obscuring the direct reference to the two nuclear powers. Next, an exploration party, including not only the film's two heroes (a scientist and a journalist), but also a villain, is dispatched to the deserted island, finding a green paradise and two fairies deep in its recesses. The opportunist antagonist secretly brings these fairies to Japan, and plots to make money by showing them in public. Responding to a song that calls Mothra which the fairies sing from the stage, the monster—in caterpillar form—hatches from a large

⁶ Frank Pearce Sturm, *Poems of Charles Baudelaire*, Canterbury Poets Series, London, 1906.

egg on the island, swims across the sea to Tokyo, and—in the original script—turns into a chrysalis on the top of the Diet Building. But the location of this scene was eventually changed to Tokyo Tower, because of worries about possible connotations related to the large and violent demonstrations around the Diet Building against the Japan-US Security Treaty of 1960. Finally, Mothra grows wings and flies to New-Wagon-City (perhaps an allusion to New York City) to regain the fairies, who had been brought to Rorishika.

Since this story is a collaboration between three writers, it is very difficult to point out clearly which parts might belong to Fukunaga. But we can say with a high probability that the setting of the voyage to Infant Island at the beginning, which is given the double meaning of paradise and hell, or of life and death, is reminiscent of Fukunaga's characteristic interpretation in his *Bôdorêru no sekai (The World of Baudelaire, 1949)*. In this essay, he remarks on the importance of the theme of the voyage and divides it into two patterns: the voyage to childhood or paradise, and the voyage toward death. For the latter, he cites 'Le voyage à Cythère' (A Voyage to Cythera) and 'Le Voyage' (The Voyage), while for the former citing, 'L'invitation au voyage' (Invitation to the Voyage). These two types of voyage are often used as framing devices in his novels. In fact, Fukunaga's most important work—written in his later years—was titled *Shi no shima (The Island of Death, 1971)*. In this novel, the island starts out as Hiroshima, which has been destroyed by an atomic bomb, but becomes at the same time Arnold Böcklin's painting *Isle of the Dead*⁷, the Tahiti of Paul Gauguin, and Bikini Atoll where a nuclear test was carried out and a Japanese fishing boat was exposed to radiation. It is needless to say that this accident in 1954 gave birth to another monster—*Godzilla*, whose first appearance is in 1954. In this sense, Mothra can be viewed as a direct descendent of *Godzilla*.

4. Revolt in 1848 and 1968 : Kasai Kiyoshi (1948-) and *The Demon of the Crowd: The Fourth Case of Dupin* (1996)

Kasai Kiyoshi is a mystery writer and at the same time, has been making bold remarks about our modern society and current thoughts. He belongs to the generation of 68. It is well known that 1968 marks a period characterized by worldwide, violent revolts brought about mostly by young students protesting for liberty and democratization in their universities and societies. In Japan, the entrance examination of Tokyo University, symbolizing Japanese higher education and its system, was unavoidably cancelled in 1969 due to the fierce protest of these students. Kasai was a leader amongst them. But the movement soon came to an end for various reasons, including strong police intervention, and during the last stage, the extremist violence and murder. Kasai, deeply shocked by this incident, left Japan and went to France in 1972. After his stay in France, he began his career as a writer with his first detective novel *Bye-bye, Angel* (published in 1979). In this story, a mysterious, young Japanese man Yabuki Kakeru, coming to France after 1968, resolves a difficult case occurred in Paris, via his own original method called, "phenomenological intuition". It is evident that Yabuki assumes here the author's personality. At that time, Kasai was also writing an essay *Teroru no genshōgaku (Phenomenology of Terrorism)* in which he talked about his bitter experience in 1968 and declared that his profound despair of it had been the motive of writing his first novel.

In another of his novels, *Gunshū no akuma (The Demon of the Crowd)* published in 1996, young Baudelaire appears as an assistant of Dupin, the first detective created by Poe and the hero of this novel. The story, set at the February Revolution of France in 1848, ends with a scene in which the lost ideal of the revolution and the resolution of revolt against the Second Empire are handed over to Baudelaire by Dupin. The two

⁷ Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), *Die Toteninsel*, 1880.

Takashi Kitamura, “Perspective on Baudelaire’s Reception in Japan”, *AmeriQuests* 13.1 (2017)

revolts in 1848 and in 1968 are closely related in Kasai’s work.

5. Escape from the sea of shit-bugs: Oshimi Shûzô (1981-) and his manga *The Flowers of Evil* (2009-2014)

Oshimi Shûzô’s manga, *Aku no hana (The Flowers of Evil)*, appeared serially in a boy’s manga magazine before it was published as an eleven-volume book. It is said that more than 200,000 copies of each volume have been sold. They have also been translated into English⁸ and been adapted into an animation film (2013). Why does this manga remain so influential amongst its young readers? In approaching this question, we would like to give some clues from a social and historical point of view.

Oshimi’s generation is mainly composed of the children of the 68 generation. Although the attempt of the 68 generation toward liberty and democratization was checked, they could at least participate in the revolt, a sort of orgy. But for Oshimi’s generation, there was nothing that could excite them. Instead, they experienced the Great Hanshin Earthquake centered in Osaka and Kobe, and the terrorism enacted by Oum cult, both occurring in 1995—almost two decades before the Earthquake Disaster of East-Japan and Fukushima in 2011. The inevitable result would be a sense of social collapse, visible in Oshimi’s work. Little is known about Oshimi’s background. Nonetheless, through this autobiographic work, we can see that he was born and lived in a provincial small city surrounded by mountains and that his life space was filled with people like “shit-bugs”, including his parents, especially his father. By both Oshimi and his hero, Baudelaire is regarded as the unique opportunity that enables them to escape from a closed world.

Toward a conclusion

It was around the beginning of the 20th century that Baudelaire and his work were introduced in Japan. Their influence was at first limited to the literary world, but gradually it spread among various Japanese cultural domains. Especially after the Pacific War, Baudelaire infiltrated into Japanese popular cultural scenes such as novels, film, detective stories, even manga and anime. Now a new generation, who knows Baudelaire’s name and his work by manga, has emerged in Japan.

⁸ *The Flowers of Evil*, vols.1-11, Vertical, 2012-2014.