

# The Rise and Fall of a 'New Woman': Arishima Takeo's *Aru Onna*

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In Japan discussion of the importance of the Arishima Takeo (1878-1923) often begins by quoting the quotation with which Honda Shūgo began his pioneer postwar study of Arishima. The quotation is attributed to a second-hand bookseller who remarked "Arishima's collected works . . . that's the cheapest there is. It's been that way since the war."

There is no doubt this was the case until the publication of Honda's study but since then and especially since the late sixties there has been a flood of publications on Arishima. It culminated in 1978 with the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of his birth. The very next year saw the start of the publication of the new collected works from the Chikuma Shobō, the first new collected works of Arishima to be published since World War II. In a sense the wheel has turned full circle, since, as Senuma Shigeki has remarked, the publication of Arishima's first collected works in 1917 heralded the birth of an Arishima "boom", which was admittedly only short-lived.<sup>2</sup> However, except for the unflagging popularity of what is recognised as his masterpiece *Aru Onna* (A Certain Woman) the enthusiasm of the critics does not seem to have been shared by the general public. At the same time there is no question that more interest is now being shown in Arishima both in Japan and the West than for a long time.

No doubt some of the attention now focused on him is due to his activities as a social critic and feminist sympathiser. This aspect of Arishima may well explain the continuing fascination that *Aru Onna* holds for Japanese readers. *Aru Onna* concerns itself, more than any other novel of his, with the issues of feminism and class and the implications that radical notions of female emancipation had for bourgeois society in early twentieth century Japan.

The first draft of the novel was serialised under the title of *Aru Onna no Gurinpusu* (A Glimpse of a Certain Woman) in the *Shirakaba* (White Birch) literary magazine from January 1911 to March 1913. The draft carries the story to a point approximately halfway through the complete *Aru Onna*.

Arishima revised *Aru Onna no Gurinpusu* and completed the novel between March and May 1919. The textual differences between the original *Aru Onna no Gurinpusu* and Arishima's revision of it are minimal but, some scholars argue, of great significance. A long and complex debate has developed about the whole issue which has at its centre the contention that *Aru Onna* is in reality two separate novels welded rather unskilfully together. It is important to note the gap of six years which exists between the first version (the first half of the novel) and the rewriting of the second half of the novel. The revised *Aru Onna* was first published in complete form in March and June 1919 as, respectively, volumes 8 and 9 of the *Chosakushū* (Works).

The novel begins with the clanging of a railway bell piercing the cloudy September air of Shinbashi, Tokyo, in the year 1901. The heroine, a beautiful and coquettish woman of 25, called Satsuki Yōko, is hurrying to the station in her rickshaw to meet a young man named Kotō Giichi. They intend to catch the train to Kawasaki where Yōko will book her passage on board a ship for Seattle. Yōko's fiancé, Kimura Sadaichi, is waiting for her there. Kotō is accompanying her to Kawasaki as one of Kimura's friends. Upon entering the train Yōko is shocked to catch sight of Kibe Kokyō, her former husband, sitting in the middle of the carriage. The sight of Kibe sets off a whole stream of memories that flood into Yōko's mind as she is sitting in the train. Her reminiscences act as a long extended flashback to describe her character and situation to the reader. The brilliance of Arishima's technique here in compressing so much into one fluid moment of reflection has often been noted.

We learn how Yōko's precocious beauty and wit blossomed against the incongruous background of a strict Christian upbringing. And when Yōko met Kibe, a brilliant young writer who had gained distinction through despatches from the front in the Sino-Japanese War, despite the fact her mother opposed the match, it seemed almost inevitable that they marry. But owing to Yōko's refusal to accept the traditional role of wifely subordination and also as a result of her sexual revulsion from Kibe, after only two months the marriage broke up when Yōko left home. Yōko is left, after the death of her parents, to look after her baby, Sadako, whom she has given for safekeeping into the hands of her wet nurse and her two younger sisters Aiko and Sadayo. Sadako's existence is subsequently hidden from Kibe. Kimura, a benefactor from the time when the family was in virtual exile in Sendai, was forced by her mother upon Yōko as a fiancé, a relationship to which Yōko is not really committed emotionally but from which she sees no means of escape in her present financial circumstances.

The novel proceeds along two different timestreams: external or actual time which tells of Yōko's sensual, comic encounter with Kotō in an inn at Kawasaki where she attempts to seduce him. Then it tells of her purchase of the ticket to the U.S. and describes 25 September, the day before Yōko leaves for America on the Ejima Maru from Yokohama harbour. At this point internal time, the time of memory which represents Yōko's unconscious, takes over and sketches the history of Yōko's struggle to achieve independence as a woman: independence that does not compromise her desire to hold together the family of her sisters and baby from whom she is

separated. The struggle also has ethical dimensions; her Christianity as transmitted by her childhood friend, the great evangelist Uchida, is opposed to her sensual uninhibited nature. These two timeflows, one rich in symbol, the other rich in wit and narrative skill, remain bound together to the end of the novel.

On board ship other characters emerge, like the snobbish Dr. Tagawa and his wife, puritanical prigs of the ilk of Mrs. Isogawa, the President of the League of Christian Women: they represent the forces of society in their attempt to shackle Yōko to conventional morality. The most important character is Kuraji Sankichi, the ship's purser, a coarse and earthy man who with a combination of brutal aggression and blunt directness overpowers Yōko both sexually and emotionally. Rape is hinted at but not made explicit as the possibility of Yōko's complicity is always held before us. Yōko is torn between her loyalty to her fiancé Kimura, who promises stability and security, and her passion for Kuraji. Over all is laid the patina of Yōko's hopes for America; her dream of a life in which she as a woman can be truly free. At the same time beneath the brittle wit that Yōko displays with great relish in her verbal jousting with Mrs. Tagawa, her shipboard rival, there lies a dark undercurrent of tragedy. This is expressed in symbolic terms by Arishima in an image of the sea crying out in the voice of death, a cold bell tolling in the deep.

A climactic scene occurs on the morning of the day the ship docks at Seattle. Yōko, it seems, is violently seduced, perhaps even raped, by Kuraji. She views this initially as her victory, but repulsed by his seeming indifference to their passion and jealous after learning of the existence of his wife and family, she is thrown into complete confusion over her future with him. But Kuraji, in a fit of drunken remorse, bursts into Yōko's cabin and confesses his love for her. Satisfied, Yōko makes her decision.

A plan is evolved whereby Yōko feigns illness in order to satisfy Kimura as to why she cannot leave the vessel which is now moored in Seattle harbour. The scheme also works to allay suspicion of Yōko and Kuraji's true relationship. Around this time Yōko actually begins to suffer from the recurrence of a uterine complaint that had bothered her for some time. Despite attempts to humiliate and torment him Kimura still holds a wavering belief in Yōko's fidelity and the first part of the novel (*Aru Onna no Gurinpusu* revised) ends with Yōko about to return to Japan on the grounds of ill-health after thirteen days in Seattle.

On her return from Seattle, Yōko, who is staying at an inn in Yokohama with Kuraji discovers an article in a newspaper controlled by Dr. Tagawa describing the shipboard incident and attacking her as immoral. Yōko realises how far she has moved away from the standards of respectable society but her unease is quelled by Kuraji. Nevertheless from that time on, pressure begins to mount on all sides—from Kotō, Mrs. Isogawa and the rest—for Yōko to declare her intentions with regard to Kimura. Yōko's own doubts about Kuraji begin to surface as well and she is reluctant to break the connection with Kimura and leave herself without any safeguards. There is an idyllic interlude in Tokyo at a small house in a mountainous area surrounded by cedars and pines where Yōko and Kuraji manage to achieve a harmony and simplicity in their relationship hitherto lacking, but tensions

continue to intrude upon their happiness. The Tagawas begin what is almost a vendetta against Yōko in their newspaper. Aiko—Yōko's sister who is just beginning to blossom into womanhood—resumes her old antagonism towards Yōko. By New Year's Eve 1901, Yōko is once more facing the need to make a decision about Kimura. She postpones it yet again deciding only to borrow from Kimura to enable her to find a way out of her present financial hardship. The first year of the story draws to a close with the sound of a temple bell resounding throughout the cold of a winter night. Directly following is the crowing of a cock, a prophetic tocsin of mortality.

Two events occur which herald the tragedy of Yōko's agonising descent into madness. Yōko learns that Kuraji has been working as a spy for certain foreign powers and her health begins a dramatic decline. Yōko's physical dissipation is linked to her sexual hunger which comes to dominate her whole being. Her sexuality and the *fin-de-siècle* decadence of her time seem to fall together into a sinister pattern through Arishima's orchestration of her internal monologues. The growing gap between Yōko and Kuraji, fed on Yōko's side by jealousy and suspicion, is illustrated in an incident in which Yōko and Kuraji go to spend a weekend at an inn in Kamakura and while strolling along the beach meet a poor and somewhat down-at-heel Kibe. The sudden regret at the path she has been taking and her fears for the future that she experiences at the sight of Kibe are symbolised or stimulated by the voice of the sea which she hears but Kuraji does not.

Yōko's anxieties about her own future are aggravated by the romance between Aiko and Oka, a young man whom Yōko met on the Ejima Maru. At this stage Yōko is incapable of anything but bitter envy. Yōko's fears about the imminent rupture in her relationship with Kuraji reach a crescendo on a hot summer's night in Tokyo when, her despair inflamed by wild fantasies, Yōko attempts suicide with Kuraji's revolver but the hammer falls on an empty chamber. From that point on the novel is dominated by nightmare images streaming from Yōko's delirious mind.

The final chapters of the novel are set in a progression of darkened hospital rooms as tragedy after tragedy befalls Yōko. Her youngest sister Sadayo falls desperately ill with typhoid. Kuraji, now exposed as a charlatan and whore-keeper, Kotō and finally Aiko all appear to desert her. After suffering a relapse in her illness which is identified for us as massive uterine inflammation caused by retroversion of the womb, Yōko in her madness attempts to strangle Sadayo. She wanders in the realms of fantasy, of paranoia. Emaciated, driven by sexual cravings until the last, Yōko lies on her hospital bed, seemingly near death, moaning. . .

"The pain, the pain, oh the pain . . .!" forgetting all else, the sad whimper of her voice as if her very soul was being wrung out continued to cry out piteously, plunging into chaos the air, clear after heavy rain, of the summer morning. (IV, 453)<sup>3</sup>

The origins of the story lie in an actual incident that occurred in 1901. Mori Hiroshi, a school friend from Arishima's years at the Sapporo Agricultural College, became engaged to Sasaki Nobuko (1878-1949), the divorced wife of Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908), the celebrated novelist. In 1901 Nobuko

boarded a ship at Yokohama to go to the U.S. to meet and presumably to marry Mori. But on board ship she fell in love with the purser, one Takei Kanzaburō, and eventually returned to Yokohama without setting foot on shore. She and Takei then settled down as husband and wife. Arishima heard of the story first-hand from Mori when he met him in Chicago in September 1903. Nobuko is clearly the model for Yōko, Takei for Kuraji, Mori for Kimura, Doppo for Kibe and so on. One other model worth mentioning is Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930), the famous evangelist who was one of Arishima's chief mentors, on whom Arishima based the character of Uchida. Nobuko's life after this incident has no relation whatever to the description of Yōko's fate in the latter half of the novel; it is purely a product of Arishima's imagination.

Doppo too wrote a number of stories about Nobuko. His attitude towards her can be judged from epithets like "a high-class prostitute" and "a champion of lust" which he applied to her in some of these works.<sup>4</sup> One of the most interesting of his writings on Nobuko is the story *Kamakura Fujin* (The Lady of Kamakura), first published in the magazine *Taiheiyō* (The Pacific) in 1902, which is built around a meeting Doppo had with Nobuko at a bridge over the Nameri River in Kamakura. The incident is described by Arishima in chapter 37 of *Aru Onna*, in the scene where Yōko and Kuraji meet the down-at-heel Kibe along the Zaimokuza Road near the beach. In Doppo's version the narrator, Kashiwada Tsutomu, is fishing underneath this bridge when a couple appears before it. He discovers the couple consists of his former wife Aiko and her lover Kakei. A dialogue ensues and a later meeting is arranged. The target of the story is Aiko whose depraved nature is revealed in her later attempted seduction of Kashiwada. Arishima later expanded the incident into a play entitled *Dankyō* (Broken Bridge) which he wrote in 1923.

Although *Aru Onna* is now considered to be Arishima's masterpiece critical recognition was originally a little tardy. Contemporary critics gave the novel a mixed reception. Miyajima Shinzaburō (1892-1934), usually a critic quick to discern Arishima's strength, was markedly hostile in his review in *Shinshōsetsu* (The New Novel) in December 1918. The balance was redressed somewhat in 1927 when Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962) published an article on *Aru Onna* in the 25 July edition of the morning *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper. Hakuchō says that compared to such famous authors as Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) and Ozaki Kōyō (1867-1903), Arishima is a more realistic, more penetrating writer. Rebutting Tayama Katai's (1871-1930) remarks that *Aru Onna* was written by a man who had not studied women carefully, Hakuchō says that no one since the beginning of the Meiji era had understood young women as well as Arishima. He is full of praise for the structure, and critics like Hirotsu Kazuo (1891-1968) and Odagiri Hideo (1916- ) have identified the achievement of Arishima in *Aru Onna* as being the creation of a Japanese realism, a realism more sophisticated and highly developed than had hitherto been seen in those writings associated with the Naturalist movement. By 1955 recognition of the novel had grown to the point where, in a survey conducted by the popular literary magazine *Gunzō* (Group), a distinguished panel of some 70 authors and critics named *Aru Onna* as a Japanese literary work on

love second only to *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji).<sup>6</sup> In 1980, two years after the hundredth anniversary of Arishima's birth, the well known literary critic Kōno Toshirō (1922- ) edited a book of essays specifically devoted to *Aru Onna*.

However the novel has had its detractors. The most famous of these is the novelist Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951) who threw down the feminist gauntlet in an article published in the *Bungei* (Arts and Letters) magazine in October 1936, where she said that Arishima was unable to grasp the cause of Yōko's misfortune. She accused him of not understanding that all of a woman's life is three-dimensional (*rittaiteki*), and directly attacked the adequacy of Yōko's characterisation. She continues with "the author did not succeed in probing Yōko's surrender to the feudal morality within her, which confused her even more and brought about her fall into unreason."<sup>7</sup> Here, Miyamoto takes Arishima to task for not investigating deeply enough the psychological relationship between Yōko and the society of Taishō Japan in which she lived. It is a double-barrelled attack on Arishima's lack of understanding of both society and women. However, it is well to remember that the Japan of 1936 was in many ways a different world from that of a quarter of a century earlier when Arishima began to work on the first draft of *Aru Onna*.

One point often overlooked in discussion is that the novel was subject to  **censorship**. Arishima points this out himself in the postscript to the first volume of the novel published as volume 8 of his *Chosakushū*:

As there were in the first half of *Aru Onna* passages which could have caused problems under the heading of a danger to public morals, I sought beforehand the opinion of Mr. Yokoyama, the head of the literature section of the Ministry of Home Affairs. He kindly gave the work a close inspection and advised me that because of certain passages problems would arise if the work was submitted to the censor, thus regrettably I had to omit the offending passages altogether. . . .<sup>8</sup>

This is of importance in assessing the "imbalance" that some critics allege exists between the first and second halves of *Aru Onna*. It also suggests that the novel might have been even more explicit, sexually or otherwise, than the version finally published. Arishima's portrait of Yōko would in this case be directly affected.

A number of scholars have found traces of influences from Western literary heroines on Arishima's portrayal of Yōko. The two that spring most readily to mind are Hedda Gabler and Anna Karenina. I will discuss the influence of Hedda Gabler later in the essay but as Anna Karenina is often considered by Japanese critics to be the more significant of the two I will deal with this question here in a brief excursus.

From his diary we know that Arishima first read *Anna Karenina* in March 1907 on the boat journey back to Japan from Europe. His initial impressions of the novel, as transmitted by the diary, are quite favourable. He saw it primarily as a psychological study. Tolstoy's occasional digressions into economics and politics bored him. The contrast between Kitty and Anna especially appealed to him; Anna's plight, her "most

tragic paradox", represented Tolstoy's supreme achievement.<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt that the paradox of Anna provided a stimulus and perhaps even a model for Yōko. The affinities between the two works begin with plot: the Yōko-Kimura-Kuraji triangle is paralleled by that of Anna-Karenin-Vronsky. Extending beyond this, however, we find that Yōko's mental breakdown in the latter half of the novel corresponds quite closely to Anna's descent into jealous paranoia. The element which the two characters have most in common is that sense of hysteria, of obsession, of delusional anxiety that seems to overwhelm both of them at the end. The contrast between the confident, arrogant beauties that appear at the beginning of each novel and the pathetic, distraught creatures that they eventually become is fundamental to both novels. Of course there is much in which they differ. Tolstoy's double-plot structure is the most notable example of difference but in as much as they can be said to be cut from the same cloth both Anna and Yōko assert their independence, their freedom to love whom they wish in the face of all the opposition that bourgeois society can bring to bear.

Walt Whitman is the third element in the great triad which exercised such influence over Arishima. However Whitman's significance lies not in any direct borrowing of ideas but rather in the role he assumed as a sage or visionary who through the force of his own ego managed to unite the "two paths" (the flesh and the spirit) that Arishima always perceived as conflicting within himself. Arishima often prefaced his fiction with quotes from Whitman that in some way attempt to embody the "spirit" of the work. *Aru Onna* was no exception; the novel begins with a quotation from Whitman's poem "To A Common Prostitute":

Not till the sun excludes you, do I exclude you; Not till the  
waters refuse to glisten for you, and the leaves to rustle for you,  
do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you (IV, 4).

Whitman's sentiments are individualised by Arishima in the novel: it is above all the tale of one woman, Satsuki Yōko. The world of the novel is almost totally her world. At the end even the world itself dissolves into the dark and shadowy vagaries of Yōko's mind; the novel ends on the final note of her voice echoing across the heavens. The cry of Yōko's voice echoes and re-echoes the voices of the sea and the sky which she, and only she, hears throughout the novel; we are reminded of impermanence, of mortality, yet in the fleeting fire of Yōko's life Arishima illuminates more than the sublimity of individual passion. For Yōko is not merely one individual coming to birth in a hostile society, she is a woman faced with the overwhelming fact that her femininity is oppressed, as Arishima would have it, by suffocating convention, by bourgeois society.

Society and its morality appear as Yōko's antagonists directly from the beginning of the novel, although the antagonism is complex and changing. This is evident in the opening scene where past and future are telescoped into a railway carriage, linked only by the thread of Yōko's fate. As she is presented sitting opposite her deserted husband Kibe, Yōko is wilful, egotistic, arrogant:

Yōko waited for Kotō to use his strength to slide open the glass-panelled carriage door and was about to enter when, having cast a lightning glance at the passengers who were occupying most of the seats on both sides of the carriage, her eyes fell upon a thin middle-aged man seated towards the middle on the left reading a newspaper. She started with shock, unable to move. But before it had even time to register the shock had vanished from her features and Yōko calmly, naturally, a faint hint of a smile on her right cheek as if she were a confident actress on the stage of a comedy, followed Kotō in and lowered herself into a seat on the right near the door. Looking back coquettishly at Kotō she smoothed into place a wisp of stray hair with the little finger of her left hand bent in the most exquisite fashion and touched ever so lightly a simple black ribbon in her hair. (IV, 9)

As we can see, the object of Yōko's passions, the enemy at whom her rebelliousness is directed is social restriction in its most powerful form: man.

It seemed as if everyone, and in particular men, could be penetrated to their innermost depths by Yōko's eyes. Yōko had, until then, allowed many men to approach her even to the point of intimacy and had then refused them at the penultimate step. Knowing as if by intuition that at the beginning of a love affair women are always raised onto a pedestal, and are then suddenly trampled underfoot by men who take advantage of the climax of the affair, Yōko perceived clearly, no matter who the man was, where the peak of her relationship with him lay and when it came to that point would without pity or mercy discard him. (IV, 12)

From the beginning Yōko's personality is linked directly to the social background of her time. This is true even when she expresses no interest in the women's movement after arriving back in Japan from the U.S. The image of the oppressed woman, forced by her biology to fight, to love and to hate man, reflects, Janus-like, onto the figure of the "rebellious woman", the new woman of the Meiji era. This interweaving of theme is made explicit in chapter 6 where feminine ego and strength assume an ideological dimension as seen in the following soliloquy:

The women who taught a feeling for poetry to the high-spirited, romantic young men who attempted to bring about a new intellectual movement at about that time by launching the magazines *Kokumin Bungaku* (Mass Literature) and *Bungakkai* (The World of Literature) were in many cases those young women who had drawn their lifeblood from Yōko. Moralists, educationalists, the lords of the household and their like from that time onwards began to observe the world of young women with eyes wide open with suspicion. Yōko's sensitive heart started to tremble to no clear purpose, moved by an impulse that could almost be called revolutionary and of which she herself was not even aware. While she laughed at others Yōko held herself in contempt; dragged along by a massive black force she had wandered unconsciously onto a

strange path and in the end had begun to run impetuously forward. There was no one to guide Yōko along the road that she was to journey, nor any one to teach her another better path. On the rare occasions when there was someone calling her in a loud voice to stop, it was only a transparent attempt to trick her into being a woman of the past. Yōko came to feel from then on that it would have been better for her to be born in a foreign country. . . Oh the lives of those who seem free, the lives of women who are able to stand equal beside men and go out and support themselves! (IV, 42)

Hence in the first half of the novel the twin poles of Yōko's rebellion and the issue of society merge into one another: the tragedy of Yōko becomes the tragedy of Meiji woman.

In America where it appears women are thought of differently to Japan I will try to see what position I, a woman, can assume. I was born into an age in which I cannot possibly live, into a place where I cannot possibly survive. Elsewhere lies the place and time where I can live. There I would possess a strength which would make me worthy to sit on the throne of a queen. I want to seek this place out while there is still life left in me. . . While women remain obedient men show them courtesy but if they try even in the smallest degree to rise to their feet men undergo a complete change and suddenly become fearsome tyrants of violence. . . All the experience that Yōko had tasted made her conscious above all of the danger of being placed in chains by men. . . At the same time Yōko had grown unable to be separated from men by even a second. Like a patient who had taken an overdose of arsenic and though fully aware of the potency of its poison cannot live without its strength, Yōko had fallen into the dilemma of desiring the source of the joy of life in that creature called man who would gnaw, if things turned against her, even at her life itself . . . (IV, 129-130)

Arishima's concern with this central issue, the issue of female sexuality and its implications for society, betray, in some measure, his own personal doubts and fears. These doubts evolve essentially from the conflict that he perceived existing between man's instincts and his ideals. Arishima characterised this conflict as the clash between "the flesh" and "the spirit"; he was personally affected by it. He constantly wrote of the pressures to which he was subject in trying to reconcile the demands of his own rather puritanical variety of Quakerist Christianity to his sexual needs. He eventually came to view Christian marriage with its ban on pre-marital sexual relations and its stern, utilitarian approach to sex as quite unrealistic and even hypocritical. Of the many references to this conflict that he made in his writings one of the most uncompromising is to be found in his long philosophic-literary treatise *Oshiminaku Ai wa Ubau* (Love, the Generous Plunderer, June 1920). In this essay Arishima attempted to extend his personal experience to society at large. The following quotation from the essay is clearly relevant to *Aru Onna*.

When people truly feel the need that behaviour be a pleasure and not a duty then the way in which their lives should progress from that time on will be made known to them. The social life of mankind, based as it is on an insistence that society must be built on a morality that needs to oppress our instincts, contains a lie which cannot be passed over. (VIII, 190)

Just as Yōko's rebelliousness can be seen to reflect Arishima's personal frustrations it can also be seen to operate against a larger canvas: it cannot be fundamentally separated from the issue of sexual oppression. He made his views on this issue plain in a number of essays and articles written between 1920 and 1923. In "Honnō o Ubawareta Josei", (Women Who Have Been Deprived of Their Instincts) published in the magazine *Fujo Sekai* (Women's World) in January 1920, he argued that just as labourers who have sold their right to live are slaves, so are women, who have sold their instincts to men. When they marry they are trapped in a well of jealousies, divided, mother-in-law, sister-in-law against the bride. Oppressed and tyrannised, women have only their sexuality left to them. (VIII, 511-513) Two years later, after Arishima had handed his inherited estates in Hokkaidō over to the peasant farmers and publicly adopted a pro-socialist stance, his ideas had developed to an even more radical stage. He claimed in an interview, "Ai no Junshin to Josei no Dokuritsu" (The Purity of Love and Women's Independence), published in February 1923 by the *ShinJosei* (New Women) magazine that under a capitalist system all women are essentially prostitutes in that they "sell" themselves by marriage to men of position or wealth. (IX, 359) This article only amplifies ideas that had been present from many years earlier. In *Oshiminaku Ai wa Ubau*, for instance, we find:

Because men had to live their lives bearing responsibility for women the burdens of life weighed painfully upon their shoulders. Men then began to require women to provide some compensation for the frustrations arising from these worries. Women, however, at this time completely lost the ability to offer to men something produced by their labour. They had nothing but their flesh. So from this prostitution began. Women were compelled to offer their bodies to men, submitting in spite of themselves. They finally became the slaves of men. (VIII, 210)

The relation between Arishima's views on sexual oppression and the theme of *Aru Onna* is made explicit in a statement of intent that Arishima made about the novel in a letter to Ishizaka Yōhei (dated 19 October 1919). The relevant passage from the letter reads as follows:

Won't you recognise the fact that women are the slaves of men? . . . In order for their existence to be recognised by men, women who have had everything stolen from them by men, had to sell their uniquely precious chastity. They had to tie men to them with sexual allure over and above what is biologically necessary. How can this unnatural compromise prevent a hatred of men from developing within their own feminine instincts? The war between men and women arises from this. At the same time women are unable to abandon their

fundamental instincts. Thus they possess a true affection for men. The rivalry between these two contradictory instincts gives rise to the sad fate of women today. When I see this my heart agonises. So *Aru Onna* was born.<sup>10</sup>

To many observers the problem of society, so carefully integrated into the framework of the first half of the novel, seems in the latter half to recede into the background as Arishima focuses our attention on Yōko's journey to destruction, although this is not to say that the social context is entirely ignored. The void that is left is, we read in Arishima's diary for 28 March 1916, filled by Havelock Ellis' (1897-1928) *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. In his diary note Arishima wrote that he learned much about female sexual psychology and "the relation between hysteria and sexual instinct" from Ellis. This information he says he will apply to his rewriting of *Aru Onna*.<sup>11</sup> Ellis' understanding of hysteria derived from his analysis of the concept he called auto-erotism. Auto-erotism, defined by Ellis as "the phenomena of spontaneous sexual emotion generated in the absence of an internal stimulus proceeding . . . from another person", is basic to Arishima's creation of Yōko.<sup>12</sup>

The concept was discussed in the first volume of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* and represents an important contribution to the debate on sexuality that was beginning at about that time. Ellis worked parallel to but in relative isolation from Freud and his application of auto-erotism to hysteria which led him to a consideration of repressed sexual activity endorsed some of Freud's conclusions in *Studien Über Hysterie* (1895) and anticipated others. Ellis concluded that:

They (Freud and Breuer) have further served to show that hysteria may be definitely regarded as, in very many cases at least, a manifestation of the sexual emotions and their lesions; in other words, a transformation of auto-erotism.<sup>13</sup>

Ellis then added:

. . . a condition of true hysteria is linked on to almost healthy states and especially to a condition which may be described as one of sex hunger.<sup>14</sup>

Yōko's behaviour in the second half of *Aru Onna* demonstrates quite unambiguously the connection between hysteria and suppressed libido. We have a complete explanation for the hysteria and sexual cravings that come to dominate Yōko's thinking. Arishima adapts these ideas to Yōko's chronic stomach complaint which we are first told of in chapter 18 when the Ejima Maru docked at Victoria harbour. After Yōko returns from the U.S. the pain increases:

The feeling of well-being, as if she had no vulnerable areas, which had been with Yōko at the beginning of her ocean voyage, did not return afterwards. As the weather grew colder Yōko began to feel not only a dull pain in her lower abdomen but also a heaviness as if a cold stone was hanging down behind

her back, weighing her down. Again, after returning to Japan, she became aware of a coldness in her feet. (IV, 281)

This complaint which we are told in chapter 38 is a combination of retroversion of the uterus and endometritis recurs directly after her association with Kuraji begins. From that time on the symptoms multiply and Yōko's condition worsens, as does her hysteria. In an important chapter (chapter 36) Arishima, characterising himself as a *miru daisansha* (a third person, observing), describes Yōko's illness as symbolising the social and cultural spirit of the time. Her extreme sensuality is equated with the Nietzschean "superman" in the following way:

Using her tiny powers of seduction, which made one think of the pitiful glow that parasitical bacteria exude, seen only in geisha who are past their prime, Yōko hastened with almost indecent speed to enslave Kuraji.

That was how she sadly perceived it. Yōko, who had been endowed with beauty and health in all their fullness, now saw herself in those terms yet someone else looking at her for the first time would probably discover within Yōko's powers of attraction—at the peak of her coruscatingly brilliant womanhood—the classic coquette not to be seen anywhere else in Japan. . . . At that time dark signs, as if to presage a storm began to appear. . . . However at the same time people felt free of the burdens of war, even to the extent of being able to look upon the Sino-Japanese War as being appropriate to the distant past, and began to show an increasing interest in the finer things of life under the influence of an economic situation that had gradually begun to work. Naturalism became the basis of intellectual life, Takayama Chōryū, who enjoyed the reputation of a sick genius, and his group advocated the ideas of Nietzsche and clamoured for a revival in thought with wild and daring essays like "The Aesthetic Life" and "The Kiyomori Thesis". While arguments on such issues as the "problem" of morality or the extravagant dress of women were being brought forth with a great fanfare by the conservatives, ideas of the opposite persuasion flew about in all directions like poppy-seeds broken open from their shells. The figure of Yōko must have glittered like a divine revelation in the eyes of young people who waited in eager anticipation for the appearance of these things that had not existed in Japan before. On the highways of that era where there were no genuine cafes or actresses Yōko's presence was dazzling. Whoever saw her, whether man or woman, could not help but look twice at her. (IV, 330-331)

And in the final agonies of her insanity Yōko's sexual appetite is at its most insatiable. What does this suggest? That Yōko's sexuality, her insanity is a double-edged blade: that it is the source of her strength. Yōko's blind wilfulness is no more clearly seen than in her attack on Sadayo for refusing to drink the soup that Yōko offers. The egomania depicted here is shown to be naked hysteria. So it becomes possible to read Yōko's hysteria

(which Arishima seems to link to her uterine retroversion) as a symbolic representation of her oppressed ego. The social dimension is not, as some critics state, expunged, but merely changes form. The external oppression is driven within Yōko's psyche, a conclusion completely consonant with Ellis' views.

We can see, in this respect, how the example of Hedda Gabler provided Arishima with a particular insight, an insight that he put to use in his own way. Hedda, in contrast to Yōko, externalises her conflict—her desire to be free from society represented by Judge Brack—by throwing it onto Eilert Lovborg. But like Yōko, Hedda is driven into a crisis: should she abandon her independence or not? Although for Yōko the crisis is, paradoxically, whether to abandon her dependence (and thus instinctual freedom) or Kuraji. The end result is the same: both women choose freedom in death.

That hysteria should become such a potent emblem of sexual suppression, of female oppression, is hardly surprising in view of the long history of association that connects female sexuality to a specifically female complaint of hysteria. After all, even as late as the nineteenth century many physicians still held that the womb was the seat of female hysteria.<sup>15</sup> Ellis denied these beliefs but it would seem that such associations left some impression on Arishima, despite what appears to be his overall acceptance of the purely psychic causes of hysteria. One recent commentator, Paul Anderer, sees Yōko's hysteria as characteristic of an obsession that permeates all his fiction: "the almost obsessive wish to escape bourgeois life and to create a world that is otherwise".<sup>16</sup> Arishima's revulsion at the stifling bourgeois values that oppress Yōko, Anderer argues, is not primarily political but a "literary, stylistic apprehension" that reflects inner forces within the novelist himself; forces that he hints may well be "suicidal".<sup>17</sup> Yet even if we admit this possibility there is no reason to exclude a more overtly political reading of the novel from consideration.

As any extended study of his political and theoretical writings will show, Arishima rarely made clear-cut distinctions between political, social and cultural phenomena: all his categories overlapped and all were rooted in a deeply personal view of the public role of the intellectual. The despair he felt over the impossibility of bourgeois intellectuals such as himself playing any significant role in a revolution of the proletariat was expressed in a number of articles he wrote from 1922 onwards. Indeed, one can argue that his suicide in 1923 was motivated as much by this dilemma as by the unhappy love-affair that was the apparent cause. *Aru Onna* was written before his thinking had entered upon this last tragic and explicitly political phase but the concern with female emancipation had existed from long before and the link between oppression and hysteria, demonstrated so convincingly in the novel, was a public expression of something that was surely more than a purely private obsession.

## Notes

- 1 Honda Shūgo, "*Shirakaba*"-*Ha no Bungaku* (Tokyo, 1974) p. 192. This essay follows the Japanese practice of recording the Japanese surname first then the given names.
- 2 Senuma Shigeki, *Hon no Hyakunen Shi* (Tokoyo, 1965) pp. 145-148.
- 3 References to the definitive Chikuma Shobō *Arishima Takeo Zenshū* (Complete Works: Tokyo, 1979- ) is incorporated into the text. First comes the volume number in roman numerals, then the page numbers. The projected fifteen volume series is expected to be completed by early 1983. Occasional reference is made to other works when the reference is not yet available in the Chikuma set. An excellent English translation of *Aru Onna* by Kenneth Strong (*A Certain Woman*, Tokyo, 1978) has been published but all translations in the text are my own. The words "Meiji" and "Taishō" which occur in the text refer to the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) eras.
- 4 Quoted in Yamada Akio, *Arishima Takeo: Shisei to Kiseki* (Tokyo, 1973) pp. 100-103. For details of Nobuko's life see *ibid.*, pp. 255-278.
- 5 The story is reprinted in the *Teihon Kunikida Doppo Zenshū* (Works: Tokyo, 1978) Vol. 2, pp. 509-522.
- 6 Details of the critics' reactions are quoted in Yamada, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-114.
- 7 *Miyamoto Yuriko Zenshū* (Works: Tokyo, 1952) Vol. 8, pp. 110-112.
- 8 *Chosakushū Aru Onna* (Facsimile edition: Tokyo, 1974) Vol. 8, p. 2.
- 9 Diary entry 23/3/07. See the Sōbunkaku *Arishima Takeo Zenshū* (Works: Tokyo, 1924-1925) Vol. 12, p. 1065.
- 10 *Shinchōsha Arishima Takeo Zenshū* (Works: Tokyo, 1929-1930) Vol. 8, pp. 373-374.
- 11 Sōbunkaku *Arishima Takeo Zenshū*, Vol. 12, p. 1230.
- 12 Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia, 1904) Vol. 1, p. 110.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 15 For a discussion of the problems see Ilza Veith, *Hysteria: The History of a Disease* (Chicago, 1965).
- 16 Paul Anderer, *Other Worlds: A Study of Arishima Takeo*, Yale Univ. Ph.D. Dissertation 1979 (Michigan Univ. Microfilms Int., 1980) p. 121.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 140