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| Yokomitsu, Riichi (1898-1947) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Riichi Yokomitsu was a Japanese novelist who, as one of the founders of Shinkankaku-ha [New Sensation School], helped introduce European avant-garde literature into Japan during the interwar period and opened the door to Japanese modernist style. His stylistic innovation, opposition to the proletarian literature favoured by Korehito Kurahara, and theory of the novel opened up Japanese fiction to possibilities other than realism and the I-novel.  Yokomitsu was born Toshikazu Yokomitsu in Fukushima prefecture in 1898. After attending — and later being expelled from — Waseda University, Yokomitsu started a magazine, *Bungei Jidai* [Literary Age] in 1924 with Yasunari Kawabata, Teppei Kataoka, Yoichi Nakagawa, Toko Kon, and others. *Bungei Jidai*, which became the major vehicle for the New Sensation School, marked the beginning of the Showa period in literature, along with the proletarian writers’ *Bungei Sensen* [Literary Frontier], which was launched in the same year. |
| Riichi Yokomitsu was a Japanese novelist who, as one of the founders of Shinkankaku-ha (New Sensation School), helped introduce European avant-garde literature into Japan during the interwar period and opened the door to Japanese modernist style. His stylistic innovation, opposition to the proletarian literature favoured by Korehito Kurahara, and theory of the novel opened up Japanese fiction to possibilities other than realism and the I-novel.    Yokomitsu was born Toshikazu Yokomitsu in Fukushima prefecture in 1898. After attending — and later being expelled from — Waseda University, Yokomitsu started a magazine, *Bungei Jidai* [Literary Age] in 1924 with Yasunari Kawabata, Teppei Kataoka, Yoichi Nakagawa, Toko Kon, and others. *Bungei Jidai*, which became the major vehicle for the New Sensation School, marked the beginning of the Showa period in literature, along with the proletarian writers’ *Bungei Sensen* [Literary Frontier], which was launched in the same year.  The aesthetic sources of the New Sensation School can be traced back to Dadaism, Futurism, and Expressionism, although its most direct inspirations were Georg Kaiser’s play, *Die Bürger von Calais* [The Burghers of Calais] (1914), the German Expressionist film, *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* [The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari] (1919), and Paul Morand’s novel, *Ouvert la Nuit* [Open All Night] (1922).  Alongside these aesthetic influences came a more material one: the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, which killed more than 140,000 people and destroyed seventy per cent of the structures in Tokyo. This massive destruction of human culture and achievement produced a nihilistic and aestheticising turn among the Japanese avant-garde, an impact not dissimilar to the effect of World War I on such European modernists as T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound.  Yokomitsu’s story, ‘Atama Narabini Hara’ [‘Heads and Bellies’], published in the first issue of Bungei Jidai, and eventually considered the archetype of the New Sensation School style, illustrates the movement’s commitment to aestheticism over materialism — form over content. In this story, Yokomitsu describes the main character’s subjective experience of the material reality in which he is located instead of reporting the facts of the situation; in so doing, he attempts to grasp experience directly. The aesthetic and stylistic project of the New Sensation School developed in opposition to proletarian literature. In 1928, Yokomitsu found fault with proletarian critics such as Kurahara and Hatsunosuke Hirabayashi, who had insisted that content determined form, and evoked what is now commonly known as ‘Keishiki-shugi Ronso’ [‘Formalism Controversy’].  After his first novel, *Shanhai* [*Shanghai*] (1928-31), the focus of Yokomitsu’s writing shifted from sensation to psychology. He wrote a story, ‘Kikai’ [‘The Machine’] (1930), by adopting the technique of stream of consciousness; it was appreciated by contemporary critics as one of the first attempts by Japanese writers to experiment with the forms primarily associated with Proust and Joyce. After the success of *Shin’en* [The Garden of Sleep] (1930) and two other novels, Yukomitsu provoked yet another controversy with his essay, ‘Junsui shosetsu ron’ [‘Theory of the Pure Novel’] (1935). In this essay Yokomitsu argued for the blending of popular and highbrow novels. This theory was put into practice later in *Kazoku Kaigi* [*The Family Council*] (1935).  During a trip to Europe in 1936, Yokomitsu conceived the concept of his last novel, *Ryoshu* [*Travel Sadness*], but his death in 1947 left the novel incomplete. With Yokomitsu seen as its figurehead, the New Sensation School has often been regarded as a failed literary project, and indeed none of his style or theory survived World War II. It should not be forgotten, however, that his work brought Taisho literature to an end and liberated Japanese fiction from the dominance of realism and the I-novel. |
| Further reading:  (Golley)  (Keene)  (Lippit)  (Yokimitsu)  (Yokimitsu, Shanhai)  (Yokimitsu, Kikai [The Machine])  (Yokimitsu, Shin’en [The Garden of Sleep] )  (Yokimitsu, Kazoku Kaigi [The Family Council] )  (Yokimitsu, Ryoshu [Travel Sadness] )  (Yokomitsu)  (Yokomitsu, 'Love' and Other Stories of Yokomitsu Riichi)  (Yokomitsu, Shanghai: A Novel) |