



THE UNFOLDING OF JAPANESE LITERATURE AS A NIETZSCHEAN ADVENTURE

Dr. Damian Flanagan

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LECTURE

It's remarkably little known in Japan just how transforming the great German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche was to some of the nation's greatest writers—particularly Soseki Natsume, Ryunosuke Akutagawa and Yukio Mishima.

In Soseki's private library no book contains as much marginalia as his copy of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", a book whose ideas we can see transformed and given a comic twist throughout Soseki's landmark novel, "I am a Cat".

While Soseki mulled Nietzsche's ideas, the translator Choko Ikuta appeared in 1909 on his doorstep begging for his help in the gargantuan task of translating Zarathustra into Japanese. Soon Soseki was depicting Ikuta in his novel "And Then" and loading his subsequent novel "The Gate" with profoundly Nietzschean philosophic concepts, closely linked to Zen. But, by this time, Soseki and Ikuta had already bitterly fallen out and Ikuta had gone to Ogai Mori instead, inspiring Soseki's great literary rival to also start deeply contemplating Nietzsche.

The young literary prodigy Ryunosuke Akutagawa meanwhile was so besotted with Nietzsche that despite being in the habit of selling books as he read them so that he could buy others, when he encountered his own copy of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in a bookshop, he couldn't stop himself buying it back again.

In the post-war era, Yukio Mishima loved Nietzsche so much that after his spectacular death in 1970, his mother left a copy of Nietzsche on his altar to read for all eternity. Mishima's great works "Confessions of a Mask", "The Temple of the Golden Pavilion" and "Kyoko's House" and many others were all underpinned in different ways by Nietzschean concepts.

This talk will tell the epic story of this meeting of Japan's greatest literary minds with Nietzsche's revolutionary ideas.



ORGANIZERS:

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No fee / No registration

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