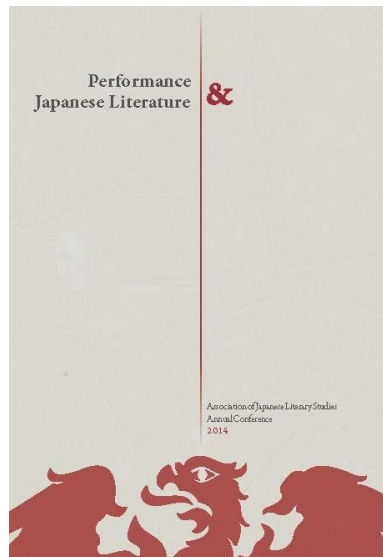


“The Gold Standard: Performing Genius in the
Early Fiction of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō”

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**The Gold Standard:
Performing Genius in the Early Fiction of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō**

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Writers, painters, and other artists are often the main focus in the early fiction of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965). His stories, however, are never straightforward paeans to the glory of artistic genius, but rather focus on the problematic position of the artist within the developing cultural marketplace of Taishō Japan. In this paper I will discuss the following pieces: “Konjiki no shi” (“A Golden Death,” *Tōkyō Asahi shinbun*, December 1914), “Kin to gin” (“Silver and Gold,” *Kokuchō*, May 1918; republished as “Futari no geijutsuka no hanashi” (“The Story of Two Artists”) in *Chūō kōron*, July 1918)¹ and “A to B no hanashi,” (“The Story of A and B,” *Kaizō*, August 1921). The dramatic tension in these stories is built around a matching pair of artists with very different positions in the cultural market. One is ignored by the public, as he builds his own private artistic world. The other, while successful and socially recognized, cannot shake off the feeling that his own worth as an artist is somehow less than the first, whom he considers to be a genius. Tanizaki’s stories focus on how the second artist responds to the gazes that acknowledge artistic value: one being the gaze from the mass audience, and the other his own gaze, both on himself and on his unrecognized friend. Exploring the conflicted position of the second artist, these pieces probe into the anxieties derived from the mismatch between the myth of genius and the practical demands of a professional artistic career.

In “Konjiki no shi,” the narrator tells the story of his friend Okamura, a young man obsessed with physical exercise and the beauty of the human body. The narrator, always at the top of his class, recognizes Okamura as an equal as far as his intelligence goes, but his friend has an instinctive dislike for number-based subjects that brings his scores in mathematics, physics and chemistry down, and with them his class ranking. Once out of school, while the narrator works slowly towards becoming a recognized writer, Okamura dedicates himself to developing his physique through a strenuous regime of exercise he calls “Greek training,” and leads a life of sensual indulgence. Okamura decides to acquire a plot of land on top of Mount Hakone and turn it into an “artistic paradise,” where naked men and women recreate classic works of sculpture. The narrator is shown through these compositions for several days until, on the tenth night, Okamura organizes a big party with youths dressed up as different *bodhisattva*

¹ Since *Kokuchō* stopped publication abruptly before their June 1918 issue came out, after just about a fourth of the story had been serialized, Tanizaki republished it the following month in the well-known special issue of *Chūō kōron* “Himitsu to kaihō,” that included a collection of “new artistic detective stories” by Tanizaki, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Satō Haruo and Satomi Ton.

and demons, and which he hosts covered completely in gold paint. The next morning, he appears dead from suffocation, as the paint has clogged his pores.

The plot is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim" (first published as "The Landscape Garden" in *Ladies' Companion*, October 1842), in which the narrator describes how his friend Ellison, a young aesthete, used his inherited fortune to build a private garden of perfect picturesque beauty.² Poe's story concludes with the description of the scenery, after his friend's death, but there is no indication that Ellison's passing had anything to do with his landscape garden. Tanizaki develops Poe's sketch by making Okamura an integral part of the private paradise he constructs, but also by fleshing out the psychology of the narrator and his attitude towards his friend's exploits. Most interpretations of "Konjiki no shi" usually focus on the significance of Okamura's aesthetic project of turning his body into a work of art, but I want to pay attention instead to the narrator's position in the story.³

In the story, Tanizaki sets up an opposition between the narrator and Okamura in terms of their positions on aesthetics. While the narrator believes that "Thought outranks the body. Without great thought, there can be no great art," Okamura believes that "The most beautiful form of all is the human body. Thought alone, no matter how grand, is not something you can see and feel. Therefore it is impossible for beauty to exist in thought."⁴ Thought and learning (prioritized by the narrator) are thus set against Okamura's ideal art of physical expression—an art that cannot be reduced to anything but itself. The characters' contrasting opinions outline a familiar contrast between scholar and artist that Tanizaki uses repeatedly in early stories such as "Jōtarō" (*Chūō kōron*, September 1914), "Shindō" ("The Child Prodigy," *Chūō kōron*, January 1915) or "Zenkamono" ("The Criminal," *Yomiuri shinbun*, February-March 1918), among many others. What sets "Konjiki no shi" apart from these pieces, however, is that here the focus remains with the side that privileges scholarly knowledge (the narrator), instead of with the artist. It also highlights the anxiety that social recognition brings to the narrator, when faced with the image of his genius friend who remains overlooked by the public.

² The story was included in *Akaki shi no kamen* (Taiheikan shoten, 1913), the first comprehensive anthology of Poe's fiction in Japanese and translated by Tanizaki's younger brother, Seiji. Poe later wrote a sequel to the story with the title "Landor's Cottage" (*Flag of Our Union*, June 9, 1849).

³ Tanizaki famously disliked the story and considered it a failed work. "Konjiki no shi" is not included in the first two versions of *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* (Kaizōsha, 1930-31; Chūō kōronsha, 1958), which were overseen by the author himself. It was not until Tanizaki's death that it first appeared in an edition of his complete works (Chūō kōronsha, vol. 2, 1966). The story received renewed attention after Mishima Yukio wrote extensively about it in his "Kaisetsu" to *Shinchō Nihon bungaku 6 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō* (Shinchōsha, 1966). See *Mishima Yukio zenshū*, vol. 36 (Shinchōsha, 2003), 80-96.

⁴ The translations of "Konjiki no shi" are by James Lipson and Kyoko Kurita. "A Golden Death," in *Three-Dimensional Reading: Stories of Time and Space in Japanese Modernist Fiction, 1911-1932*, ed. Angela Yiu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 161-199. All other translations are mine.

Even as the narrator finds success as a writer, he cannot help but show nagging doubts about its meaning when comparing himself to Okamura:

As my own star began to blaze across the literary firmament, Okamura showed not the slightest jealousy or envy. Since, however, my efforts were completely meaningless from the point of view of his own conception of art, he was clearly not happy for me in the least. For my part, on the one hand I somewhat despised him, but on the other hand I also feared him. Simply seeing his face I became extremely troubled with regard to whatever I was working on at the time: I felt I was proceeding blindly. I could not help thinking, "He'll probably end his life without accomplishing anything great. And yet surely he is a genius."

While I worked ceaselessly, Okamura continued to play ceaselessly. His initial declaration, "I respect scholarship," he now repudiated. His extravagance and dissipation grew more profligate by the day; he attended school only rarely. In facial features, physique, and wardrobe, his erotic elegance and charm grew ever greater. One felt as though he glowed with an unapproachable aura. Frequently, as I was about to speak to him, I was so struck by his beauty that I fell silent.⁵

Okamura's existence fills the narrator with questions about the worth of his own art. For all his success in the literary scene, he never stops admiring and feeling inferior to his friend. Being silenced "by his beauty" appears equivalent to accepting that Okamura's project, expressed in his aesthetics of embodied beauty, is superior to his own. There is no resentment from Okamura's side, which paradoxically provokes the narrator's animosity. Okamura's disinterest in competing for a position in "the literary firmament" hints at the fact that his art does not depend on professional recognition to establish its value. Okamura seems to function as a contrasting image to the narrator's tale of professional advancement and success, casting doubt upon the true artistic value of his newly acquired position as a writer. It should be Okamura who envies the narrator for achieving social recognition as an artist, but it is instead the narrator who curses and fears his friend's existence as a reminder that, for all the adoration the public may bestow upon him, the source of artistic value may lie elsewhere.

The ending of "Konjiki no shi" tackles the question of the relative value of genius. After witnessing the spectacular performance that cost Okamura his life, the narrator is certain of his friend's genius, but wonders if posterity will be able to recognize it as well:

⁵ Tanizaki Jun'ichirō *zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1981), 485

Okamura was certainly a fortunate man. I say that because he devoted all his strength, all his body, to his personal art. And furthermore because he achieved sufficient success. There are undoubtedly many people in the world with greater means than his, and many with greater learning. But it is fair to say that there is none who has, so earnestly and so single-mindedly, charged through to execute such personal art. He and I differed on many points, in our views about art; but ultimately, one must recognize that his work did indeed constitute great art. This art of his may have been a fleeting phantom – with his death, it has surely vanished from the earth. But he was a great genius, a great and indeed peerless artist. [...] But considering the life he led, will the world ever appreciate him as an artist?⁶

The narrator considers that Okamura had “succeeded” in his art, even though he had ignored the socially recognized path of academic and professional advancement that the narrator has followed. He is praised instead for having a unique vision and bringing it to life in his artistic paradise and, by extension, in his own life. His art disappeared with him, impossible to abstract into a thought or a teaching, irreducible to anything else but Okamura himself. Ultimately, the narrator’s angst in “Konjiki no shi” is not only about Okamura, but also about his own position as a writer. The narrator is indeed “appreciated as an artist” by “the world,” and he finds himself thus placed in an ambiguous pivotal position in the web of gazes that grant artistic value. Just as the public’s appreciation awards him his place in the literary scene, their ignorance of Okamura’s value gives the narrator the opportunity to participate in the myth of genius as an incomprehensible individual, as he is the only one who recognizes Okamura’s worth. The narrator does not need to give up his public position to admire Okamura and share in his genius, but the mismatch between both models of aesthetic worth create a nagging sense of unease in the narrator about his own worth as an artist throughout the piece.

Like in “Konjiki no shi,” the main plot of “Kin to gin” is driven again by the relationship between two artists, named Ōkawa and Aono. Ōkawa eventually becomes an established painter, but he is tormented by the feeling that Aono is the true artist of the two, even if nobody else seems to recognize his worth. Aono, a masochist loner described as “evil by nature,” cannot even afford painting supplies. Ōkawa lends him money and his own model Eiko so they can participate in an exhibition together. Once Ōkawa sees Aono’s painting, he recognizes that his friend’s work is far superior to his. Thinking that while Aono remains alive and producing better art, his own paintings will never surpass him, Ōkawa plots his murder. Aono eventually survives the attack, but is left

⁶ Ibid., 498.

psychologically damaged, and Ōkawa claims he has finally become a genius.

While the story does describe Aono's inner world and experience of painting Eiko's body, as well as his short masochistic relationship with her, most of the text is again devoted to Ōkawa, who here plays a role similar to that of the narrator in "Konjiki no shi." Ōkawa explains his very existence as a foil to Aono. Ōkawa's limited talent allows Aono's genius to shine, "just as one needs silver to understand the value of gold." Like in "Konjiki no shi," only Ōkawa is aware of his friend's worth, and he even acknowledges that he feels "a sort of pride in knowing that only he understood Aono's greatness." Again, being the only one who recognizes Aono's genius and the value of his unique vision marks Ōkawa too as somebody special, different from the "ordinary people" who are blind to Aono's worth.

Soon, however, "Kin to gin" takes a different turn as Ōkawa decides to go one step further and actually become a genius himself. Feeling that he has become "Aono's shadow figure," he reaches the conclusion that only one of them has the right to exist: "If there are two artists trying to express the same beauty, one of them is superfluous. Since art is the expression of one's individuality, these two artists would have to eliminate each other." Significantly, the fact that Ōkawa is both economically successful and socially acknowledged as an artist, while Aono is neither, does not seem to factor into Ōkawa's calculations. As in the previous story, social position and economic success appear again contrasted to artistic accomplishment, but the fact that Aono possesses the latter is enough for Ōkawa to be willing to forgo the former, as he understands art as the only source of meaning for his own life.

Aware that murdering Aono because of a picture would be madness, Ōkawa comes to see psychological derangement as a way to prove his commitment to his art: "I'd be grateful to go mad. Through madness, I could prove the sensitivity of my artistic conscience." Ōkawa's logic here follows loosely the ideas of nineteenth-century Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, whose medical discussions of genius as a form of neurosis were widely circulated and discussed in Japan after two different translations of his *The Man of Genius* were published in 1914.⁷ Lombroso's research, based on previous work on the "inborn criminal," popularized the notion that the exceptional development of the faculties needed for artistic genius will always be accompanied by a corresponding degenerative regression in other areas, causing unavoidable physical and psychological damage to the individual genius. Against the background of this model, madness becomes for Ōkawa "proof" of his "artistic conscience" to the point that it defines him as a genius.

⁷ Mori Magoichi, trans., *Tensai to Kyōjin* (Bunseisha, 1914), and Tsuji Jun, trans., *Tensairon* (Uetake shoin, 1914). The Tsuji translation went through twenty editions and was republished again five more times. The publishers were Sanyōdō shoten in 1916 (five editions), Sanseisha in 1920 (nine editions), Shunjūsha in 1926, and Kaizōsha (as Kaizō bunko) in 1930 and 1940. There had been a previous partial translation by Kuroyanagi Kunitarō in *Tensairon* (Fukyūsha, 1898).

Once Ōkawa decides that his willingness to sacrifice Aono's life and his own sanity for his art's sake will prove his own worth as an artist, there is only one course of action left to him:

It's either Aono dies, or I die. There is no alternative. If I die, Aono's art will grow. If Aono dies, my art will be saved. Killing Aono may be immoral, but isn't it more immoral to kill my own art? I must be true to myself, before I'm true to others. If my art survives, I will live for eternity. The will to live for eternity is the highest thing that a human being possesses. Any sacrifice is worth it, if it is for its benefit. It is precisely through the passion and courage to face that sacrifice that I will start to become a genius. If I do that, God will not abandon me. Even if people can't understand how serious, how great the motive is that pushed me to commit this crime, God will understand. In the past, was there any one person who murdered a person with as high a motive as mine? Someone who was as faithful to one's own art? Simply by that motive, I should be called a genius... Yes, if I wasn't a genius, how could I murder a person for art? I thought of this precisely because I am a genius. To kill Aono is to exercise the privilege granted only to a genius.⁸

Ōkawa comes to realize that it is only through murder that he can enter the space of genius that Aono occupies. His plan is not limited to ridding himself of an adversary so that his own work appears better against a diminished competition. It is by being willing to kill his own friend, here framed as a "sacrifice" demanded by his art, that he can "start to become a genius" and "live for eternity," since the horrible crime of killing such a close friend would be beyond the reach of a normal human being. That is, the mere fact that he is ready to become a murderer marks him as an exceptional individual, ready to toss social convention for the sake of his art's survival. To commit an immorality in the eyes of the world in order to obey the particular "morality" of helping his own art survive is, by his circular logic, both the path to genius and the proof that he has already attained it.

Earlier in the story, Aono had expressed similar ideas concerning the relationship between art and morality, confessing to being an immoral person and to having committed many evil acts during his life. As a reparation of sorts, he cannot offer anything but his "wonderful art." Both immorality and artistic creativity are presented as two sides of the same coin for the characters. While they may not cancel each other out in the eyes of society's moral judgment, they appear to be linked by a fatal destiny. For Ōkawa, the impulse that makes him commit murder stems from the same place as the urge that drives his artistic

⁸ *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, vol. 5, 427.

inspiration. Both become central points of the new identity of an artist he is constructing for himself, since they mark him as a unique individual that lives beyond society's moral norms.

The ending of the piece casts an ambiguous shadow on the question of whether Ōkawa's plan was successful. Psychologically damaged after the attack, Aono is indeed never going to compete with Ōkawa for social recognition as a painter. However, that was never a goal Aono pursued, since nobody had ever valued his work but Ōkawa. In the end, Aono's brain injury appears almost like a blessing since, by cutting off any interference from "this world," it allows him to live with even more intensity the artistic illusion of his own creation. Incidentally, according to Satō Haruo,⁹ the model for Aono's final state comes from the description of Baudelaire's last years by Gautier.¹⁰ The intertextual connection with the French poet can only reinforce the idea that Aono's identity as an artist is basically unaffected by the attack, even if he remains trapped in the artistic paradise of his own mind.

Ōkawa claims to feel satisfied with his art and tells himself that he has finally become a genius, surpassing Aono, but the last paragraph of the story undermines this interpretation. Thanks to the wide success of Ōkawa's painting, Eiko's acting career picks up and the public fills her performances, too fascinated by her "body overflowing with venomous charm" to realize her technical shortcomings as a performer. The story closes with the question: "But, except for Aono the idiot, who would know that she wasn't more than the imperfect shadow of the queen of the eternal kingdom [of Beauty]?" Both Ōkawa's and Eiko's economic successes remain under the shadow of Aono's vision, and the true artistic beauty that only he was able to grasp through painting Eiko's body.

Throughout the story, there are numerous hints to the possibility of reading both characters as manifestations of the same person. While Ōkawa ponders his relationship to his friend, he sees themselves as "two persons who came out of the same soul," and claims to feel towards Aono "the same menace that William Wilson felt, when he was tormented by his *Doppelgänger*."¹¹ These observations are limited to Ōkawa's internal monologue, and the narrator's descriptions of the characters make clear that Aono is Ōkawa's double only in the delusional mind of the latter. But they are useful to emphasize the central position of Ōkawa's anxieties as artist in the story. "Kin to gin" is less the story of a rivalry between two painters than the story of an artist who struggles between

⁹ Satō Haruo, "Jun'ichirō. Hito oyobi geijutsu," in *Kaizō* (March 1927), and reprinted in *Satō Haruo zenshū*, vol. 20 (Rinsen shoten, 1999), 26.

¹⁰ "Brought back from Brussels by his family and friends, he lived some months, unable to speak, unable to write, as paralysis had broken the connecting thread between thought and speech. Thought lived in him always - one could see that from the expression of his eyes; but it was a prisoner, and dumb, without any means of communication, in the dungeon of clay which would only open in the tomb." Théophile Gautier, "The Life and Intimate Memoirs of Charles Baudelaire," in *Charles Baudelaire: His Life* (New York: Brentano's, 1915), 85.

¹¹ "William Wilson" was also included in the 1913 anthology *Akaki shi no kamen*.

the need to establish himself (socially and economically) and the symbolic power of the myth of the artist as mad genius. Murdering Aono becomes for Ōkawa a way to try to reconcile these contradictory demands, even if the ending of the story seems to cast serious doubts on the actual success of his program to become a genius.

The last story I want to touch upon is “A to B no hanashi,” which uses a different plot structure but has many thematic contact points with the previous two texts. In this piece, A and B are two cousins with polar opposite personalities. While A is a fervent humanist who has faith in the power of literature to do good, B believes that only evil can produce good literature. A becomes a recognized writer, but B fails in his artistic endeavors and ends up in jail because of his criminal activities. Once out of jail, B proposes to A the following idea: all literary works produced by A will be signed under B’s name henceforth, so that B can be “saved” by A’s art. This deal must remain a secret even to A’s wife, S-ko. A agrees to the plan and stops publishing under his real name, becoming a ghostwriter for B, who supplements the works that A provides him with confessional pieces and diaries from his time in prison. B becomes a *bundan* sensation, while A fades into obscurity. In his deathbed, B gives A the option to take his works back, but A refuses to break their agreement and ends up being entrusted with the publication of B’s *Complete Works*, which will include pieces from both his “diabolist” era and his “humanist” era. Several years after B’s death, A finally reveals the truth to his wife, but he never writes again and all his literary talent lies buried in B’s *Complete Works*.

B’s conception of the artist follows the main motifs of the idea of genius discussed in “Kin to gin.” He considers himself “somebody with rather unique character and talent,” similar in many ways to a common criminal, but in possession of a strong conviction in his acts that remains “beyond common criminals” and only available to “privileged artists like him.” He formulates his mission as bringing to life “evil in his art as much as he could.” B’s motivation to become an artist is explained in the following way:

To you [good people] Evil may look like a bunch of lies, but it is the only Truth we [evil people] know. I wanted to show it to you good people in my art. I wanted you to see this incomprehensible sadness. But you don’t understand my real intentions. My works have been praised by readers and critics, but that hasn’t brought me any pleasure. They have called me “discoverer of a sick beauty,” and “glorifier of sensual pleasures,” and “ironic dissector of psychology,” but that’s not what I am aiming for. I have never said anything ironically. I have always been straightforward and honest, but nobody wants to see my true intentions. Those who pretend to be evil among the good people have looked at the surface

and enjoyed themselves. I bet if they could see my real nature they'd be horrified and flee.¹²

Again, B expresses the same anxiety about public recognition that was present in the previous stories. He has established himself in the literary scene, but still feels uneasy about what that says about his art. He rationalizes his success as a misreading on the part of the public, in order to maintain his own self-image, in which his devotion to evil marks him as a unique genius, essentially different and incomprehensible for the common reader. The praise of readers and critics is paradoxically proof of his uniqueness, because it comes from a misunderstanding projected on him by the superficial reading of the mass audience. It is because he gives up on the possibility of sharing with the public his “art of Evil,” his genius, that B decides to propose to publish A’s works under his name. Once A becomes his ghostwriter, B chooses to perform for his audience the kind of reformed writer that he knows they will readily accept and consume, and adds to A’s writings his own “confessional” pieces, aware that pseudo-documentary narratives about the writer’s private life will also feed into the public appreciation of his work.

Interestingly, B’s embracing of his persona as a public writer also brings an evolution in A’s character and art. It is only once B starts publishing A’s works under his name and, in a way, takes over the position he occupied as a recognized “humanist” writer, that A can produce his best work: “A’s art shone even more brightly. Once rid of all earthly glory, A finally experienced the pain and pleasure of somebody who truly attempts to become eternal. At that time, the literary world had already started forgetting his name.” By giving up his public position and allowing B to take over the role of legal author of his works, A moves into a space of solitary and unique creation that ironically is not too far from what B had been attempting to create for himself all along. At B’s deathbed, A confesses that it was B’s evil that motivated him to produce his best work. In a paradoxical twist, it is B’s evil that gives A the drive to reach his full potential as an artist, once he is freed from the constraints of the position as a “humanist” writer he had created for himself within the literary market. The fact that A stops writing completely after B’s death shows that, without B’s presence, A finds it impossible to go back to his previous persona.

Like most Tanizaki stories, “A to B no hanashi” provides no clear-cut resolution. The question that closes the story, “Did A win or did B win?” seems genuine, as the text offers no privileged explanation of the actual nature of the changes in each writer or the real cause of their different modes of artistic success. Throughout the piece there is an ambiguous tension between the writer’s social persona and the artistic quality of his work. Although A produces his best writing once he is out of the public eye, at the same time it is

¹² Tanizaki Jun’ichirō *zenshū*, 7:452.

questionable whether B's final success is exclusively due to A's writing, or to his own performance as a "reformed humanist."

Tanizaki's ancillary writings from the 1910s and early 1920s show his concern with these topics and his ambivalent attitude towards the various public activities that the development of his career as a professional writer entailed. As Yamamoto Yoshiaki's research has shown, the emergence of monthly magazines such *Kaizō* and *Kaihō* in 1919 brought a sharp growth in manuscript prices for fiction, opening up a "literary market" that offered an unprecedented number of authors a real chance to earn a living from their writings: "By 1919, Tsubouchi Shōyō's words [on the imprudence of trying to make a career out of one's literary writing] have lost their basis. A "literary market" was taking shape that featured an excess of demand. For writers, it meant indeed the arrival of an "age of prosperity for culture and a golden age for the *bundan*" (Kanō Sakujirō)."¹³ Tanizaki, who did not enjoy the support of a family stipend and had to rely exclusively on the money he could make selling his work, was keenly aware of the gap between his aesthetic ideals and the demands of the developing literary industry.

In the preface to his short-story collection *Konjiki no shi*,¹⁴ Tanizaki reflects on the Oscar Wilde quote "It is easy to be popular," saying "since it is easy to be popular and it is certainly not bad for a writer, popularity is something we must fear. If one is not careful, one can be poisoned by popularity." Remembering the public discussion sparked by "Osai to Minosuke" ("Osai and Minosuke," *Chūō kōron*, September 1915), he confesses how he "felt rather an antipathy towards its unreasonable popularity, but nevertheless I couldn't help but feel happy."¹⁵ In the brief "Yomu koto sura kirai" ("I Hate Even to Read Them"), a response to the survey "Geppyō zehi no mondai ni tsuite" ("On the Issue of Monthly Reviews," *Shinchō*, January 1922), Tanizaki claims to only read newspapers that do not publish literary columns. He confesses to being unable to repress a reaction whenever he reads a misdirected critique of his work. He admits that he prefers to receive praise rather than not, but claims that even this is of no importance to him.¹⁶ In pieces like these, Tanizaki seems genuinely conflicted about his growing success as a writer, wavering between the satisfaction of seeing his work discussed and praised, and the fear that his increasing popularity may be dangerous for his work as an artist.

"Seishun monogatari" ("Tales of My Youth"), although serialized later (*Chūō kōron*, September 1932 to March 1933), is another rich source for the struggles of the young Tanizaki to reconcile his own idealization of the artist

¹³ Yamamoto Yoshiaki, "Keizai katsudō to shite no 'bungaku,'" in *Bungakusha wa tsukurareru* (Hitsuji shobō, 2000), 209.

¹⁴ The collection was the second volume of the collection *Meika kinsaku sōsho* (*Library of Famous Modern Works*, Nittōdō, June 1916), and included, besides the title story, the pieces "Sōzō" ("Creation") and "Dokutan" ("The German Spy").

¹⁵ Tanizaki *Jun'ichirō zenshū*, 23:18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

and the reality of professional development. A particular anecdote connected to being publicly acknowledged by Nagai Kafū (1879-1959) seems especially relevant in this regard. Tanizaki recalls how, upon reading “Tanizaki Jun’ichirō-shi no sakuhin” (“The Works of Mr. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō,” *Mita bungaku*, November 1911), in which Kafū praised his work extensively and effectively launched his literary career, he finds himself again wavering between the joy of public recognition and the fear of extra-artistic motivations creeping into his own work.

When that piece came out in *Mita bungaku*, I agonized quite a while over whether to go give my thanks to master Kafū or not. It goes without saying that master Kafū had not written his piece in order to receive my gratitude. No doubt he had written it out of pure motivation as an artist. However, considering that I had received some worldly benefits from it, it would be a lack of manners not to say anything.¹⁷

It is very significant how Tanizaki turns the occasion into a conflict between the “pure motivation as an artist” that he assumes from Kafū, and the economic motivation he fears will be assumed from his act of giving thanks, since the review provided him with “worldly benefits” in the form of an important boost to his professional career as a writer. It is as if, for Tanizaki, the presence of those “worldly benefits” would taint the pure artistic relationship he imagines he has with his “artistic kinsman” and model. The fact that he agonized in this way over whether to thank Kafū for his genuine gesture shows how deeply seated in the young Tanizaki was this anxiety about professional and economic concerns tainting the identity of artist he was trying to build for himself.

Tanizaki’s stories show a series of artists acutely aware of the demands of the growing cultural market, an awareness they struggle to reconcile with a mythology of genius that emphasizes artistic value as the product of a unique vision of the world, irreducible to institutional or economic value, and beyond the reach of the public’s undeveloped taste. Far from being used exclusively for their shock value, motifs of evil and psychological abnormality are actively deployed by the characters to fashion their personae as artists against the background of Lombroso’s model, since they offer a source of artistic value beyond the dictates of the market. They are performing this personae as much for themselves and other fellow artists, as for the public. Tanizaki’s focus on the theatricality of these operations and their ambiguous results shows his awareness of his own construction of an artistic identity within the developing literary market, and emphasizes the anxiety and contradictions of the professionalizing writer in Taishō Japan.

¹⁷ Tanizaki Jun’ichirō *zenshū*, vol. 13, 383-84.