NARRATION AS A PERFORMANCE: BETWEEN DAZAI OSAMU'S MULTILAYERED NARRATOR AND *RAKUGO*

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Almost three-quarters of a century after Dazai Osamu's (1909–1948) passing, his words continue to captivate readers globally. Itō Hiromi succinctly captures the power of Dazai's storytelling that resonates with many, including herself, stating:

> When rereading Dazai, I find that it is no longer a novel in the traditional sense, but rather a narrative, closer to oral literature than written literature. (Itō, 16)[2]

Dazai's narratives possess a distinctive power, transporting readers beyond the confines of conventional "narration" and immersing them in the enchanting realm of "storytelling." This allure can be attributed to Dazai's profound connection with Japanese oral literature or orature. The question that arises is, which specific form of orature influenced Dazai's narrative style, emphasizing storytelling over conventional narration, and how did this influence shape his writing?

Dazai's profound association with Japanese orature can be traced back to his initiation to *gidayū* 義太夫, a subset of *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 (a traditional Japanese narrative music form) that he delved into at the age of eighteen for a year. However, Dan Kazuo goes on to highlight another artistic form, *rakugo* 落語, which captured Dazai's interest, stating:

> Dazai's favorite books, if I had to mention it again, would be Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa*, a collection of 10 *sen* antiquarian books that he usually bought at night stalls. Well, among the Japanese classics, he probably read *Makura no sōshi* and *Tsurezuregusa* repeatedly. However, his reading was not a mere hobby, but rather something that could be applied and transformed everywhere. Then there are the complete works of Enchō. Critics of the future should be very careful regarding this, as they shouldn't overlook the evident influence of *rakugo* on Dazai's entire literary career, from his early years to his later ones. It must

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[2] All translations are done by the author unless otherwise attributed.

> not be forgotten that the basis of Dazai's writing is mainly governed by the transposition of *rakugo*. While attending *rakugo* shows was not a hobby for him, he picked up on getting *rakugo* books from the street market and indulging in reading them whether they were Kōdansha's complete collection of *rakugo* or ten-*sen rakugo* booklets sold by the roadside. (Dan, 44; emphasis added)

Dan was not the only one to highlight Dazai's appreciation for *rakugo*, for Yoshimoto Takaaki also commented on the influence of *Rakugo* on Dazai's writings remarking:

> There are two things that can be said to have had a great influence on Dazai Osamu's short stories in various ways. One is *rakugo*. The tradition of modern *rakugo* began with San'yūtei Enchō, and I think that the influence of *rakugo* is significant. That influence of *rakugo* can be seen in the way that Dazai had used *rakugo*'s *ochi* オチ (punchline) in his short stories. I think that Dazai had properly read *rakugo* with his utmost effort as well as "speaking" it. (Yoshimoto, 20)

Recognition of the influence of Japanese orature on Dazai's narratives is present; however, it is worth noting that this impact is frequently undervalued. This paper, despite the importance of a comprehensive exploration of this influence for a better understanding of Dazai's works, will primarily concentrate on revealing the parallels between *rakugo* and Dazai's writings.

The parallels between *rakugo* and Dazai's works extend beyond Yoshimoto's observation of *ochi* and encompass elements such as stories, themes, storytelling techniques, narrative structures, and characters. For instance, in works like *Dōke no hana* 道化の華 (The Flowers of Buffoonery, 1935), *Kyōgen no kami* 狂言の神 (The God of Farce, 1936), *Ubasute* 姥捨 (Abandonment, 1938), *Tōkyō hakkei* 東京八景 (Eight Scenes of Tokyo, 1941), Dazai explores the theme of *Shinjū* 心中(double suicide), echoing similarities with the *rakugo* story *Shinagawa shinjū* 品川心中 (Shinagawa double suicide). These narratives depict protagonists reminiscent of *Rakugo's Yotarō* 与太郎 (a *rakugo* character representing a foolish man who often gets into absurd situations due to his naivety) and *Kumakōhachikō* 熊公八公, portraying them in an ironic and buffoonery-like manner (Nagashino, 31).

Concerning narrative structures, works such as *Randa no karuta* 懶惰の歌留多 (Lazy Karuta, 1939) and *Otogizōshi* お伽草紙 (1945) display a pattern reminiscent of *rakugo*. The former begins with an introduction akin to *rakugo*'s *makura* 枕 (prologue), featuring the narrator initiating the narration with small and humorous anecdotes. The latter showcases fairytales being narrated and altered by the narrator as the story unfolds. While these two works warrant further analysis, the primary focus of this paper is on the narration and *ochi* in Dazai's 1934 novelette, *Sarumenkanja* 猿面冠者 (Monkey-Masked Youth). The immersive storytelling in this piece closely echoes the captivating style of *rakugo*'s storytelling, impacting the reader or audience and making the narration in this novelette *rakugo*-like.

Sarumenkanja is the ninth story in Dazai's collection *Bannen* 晩年 (The Final Years) and is presented in the third person perspective. The narrative of the primary level begins with an omniscient narrator recounting the protagonist, referred to as the "Man," deciding to revise a previously written short story titled *Tsūshin* 通信 (Correspondence) into a novel, renaming it *Kaze no tayori* 風の便り ("News from the Wind" or "Rumors"). On the second level, the "Man's" novel, *Kaze no Tayori,* depicts the journey and ultimate failure of a novice writer known as "He," with the novel within the novel titled *Tsuru* 鶴 (A Crane) constituting the third level, featuring a protagonist also named the "Man." The story on the primary level then ends with the protagonist "Man," the writer of *Kaze no tayori*, changing the title to *Sarumenkanja*. In essence, *Sarumenkanja* demonstrates a three-layered metafictional structure, with the primary narrator/writer recounting the "Man's" struggles in creating *Kaze no tayori*, while the "Man" narrates the departure and downfall of "He" as a writer through his work *Tsuru.* However, it is important to note that the consistent use of similar pronouns throughout the story can make it challenging at times to discern the narrative level.

Scholars have previously delved into the narrative structure of this text, highlighting Dazai's self-awareness and the utilization of two prominent narration styles: "self-conscious narration,"[3] where the narrator portrays themselves negatively, as seen with the "Man" on the second level, and "potential second person narration," [4] where the narrator

[3] Andō first introduced and underscored the prevalence of the "self-conscious narration" style, particularly noticeable in Dazai's early works.
[4] Okuno introduced this narrative style, using Dazai's 1935 novella *Dōke no hana* 道化の華 (The flowers of buffoonery) as an example.

addresses the readers, present on both the first and second levels of *Sarumenkanja*. However, in my analysis of how this narration constructs a narrative akin to *rakugo* in its effects on the reader, I propose the identification of a new narrative style termed "self-othering narration" distinct from those previously introduced.

> **There was an arrogant man** who regardless of the novel he was asked to read, would dismiss with a contemptuous smirk and abandon it unfinished, seemingly convinced that he had already unraveled the entire plot only from the first few lines (...) who regretted that he had read too many poems and novels. This man seems to always choose his words even when he is pondering. **In his mind, he calls himself "*He*".** (...) **If such a man, with no literary talent whatsoever, were to attempt to write a novel, what kind of work could he produce? The most likely answer is that he would be incapable of composing a novel. He would write a line and then erase it, or perhaps he would not even be able to write that line.** (*Sarumenkanja,*211; emphasis added)

> どんな小説を読ませても、はじめの二三行をはしり読みしたばかりで、もうその小説の楽屋裏を見抜いてしまったかのように、鼻で笑って巻を閉じる**傲岸不遜の男がいた。**（中略）この男は、自分では、すこし詩やら小説やらを読みすぎたと思って悔いている。この男は、思案するときにでも言葉をえらんで考えるのだそうである。**心のなかで自分のことを、彼、と呼んでいる**。(中略) そのような文学の糞から生れたような男が、もし小説を書いたとしたなら、いったいどんなものができるだろう。だいいちに考えられることは、**その男は、きっと小説を書けないだろうと言うことである。一行書いては消し、いや、その一行も書けぬだろう。**

The prologue of *Sarumenkanja* establishes a limited omniscient narrator who introduces the protagonist referred to as the "Man." Two notable aspects become evident at the outset. Firstly, the author, doubling as the narrator, consistently interjects personal assessments of this character, labeling him as "arrogant." This subjective portrayal by the narrator shapes the reader's perception of the "Man" throughout the narrative. Secondly, the author introduces the intriguing dynamic that the "Man" refers to himself as "He." and the narrator adopts the same pronoun, thereby intentionally blending their identities. This deliberate blending of identities serves as the initial technique contributing to the immersive

nature of the narrative, characterized as "self-othering narration." While the "Man's" use of distinct pronouns for self-reference introduces a layer of self-reflection and internal conflict, particularly as the "Man" is also a writer, it brings about ambiguity about the source of this narrative perspective. This ambiguity challenges readers to discern whether it originates from the protagonist "Man" or the narrator. As a result, readers find themselves in a complex position within the "narration scene."[5] This "self-othering narration" strategy is a distinctive feature in Dazai's storytelling, particularly evident when the narrator or protagonist is an author/writer.

The complexity of the "narration scene" intensifies as the author delves into the challenges the "Man" encounters during the rewriting process of his work with unexpected interjections arising within the descriptive (narrative) sections, adding to the intricacy of the narrative as it transitions seamlessly from third person to first person and then back to third person as follows:

> **This "Man"** was determined to take advantage of the opportunity and turned to his manuscript paper, but as soon as **he** did so, he was unable to write. **Oh, if only it had been three days earlier**. Or perhaps **he** might have written ten or twenty pages in a dream, ranting and raving in his overflowing passion. Night after night, visions of his masterpieces would thrill his flimsy heart, but when he tried to write, they would all vanish in vain. (*Sarumenkanja*, 213; emphasis added)

> **この男もまた、**この機を逃さず、とばかりに原稿用紙に向った、とたんに**彼**は書けなくなっていたという。**ああ、もう三日、早かったならば。或いは彼も、あふれる情熱にわななきつつ十枚二十枚を夢のうちに書き飛ばしたかも知れぬ。**毎夜、毎夜、傑

[5] Takatsuka Miyabi initially introduced the concept of the "*Katari no ba*" 語りの場 (the narration scene), defining it as a collaborative setting where the narrator and the recipient of the narration interact, mutually influencing each other and impacting the formation of the narrated event. He emphasizes that readers, despite direct addresses from the narrator, are not considered participants in the "narration scene," insisting that only characters within the story world can truly be part of it. However, acknowledging the challenge of completely excluding readers from the "narration scene" due to their active participation and the storyteller's consideration of the audience, this paper employs the "narration scene" as the conceptual space where the interaction between the narrator and the recipients, encompassing both characters and readers/audience, takes place. This interaction has the potential to shape and influence the unfolding events or story.

> 作の幻影が**彼**のうすっぺらな胸を騒がせては呉れるのであったが、書こうとすれば、みんなはかなく消えうせた。

The interjection "Oh," observed in this context, is attributed to the "Man" himself and falls into the category of monologue, specifically free direct speech. However, following this interjection, the pronoun shifts back to the third person, referring to the protagonist as "He," which can be classified as free indirect speech. It is important to note that such interjections are not confined to the primary level of the novel but also occur within the secondary level, centered around the story within *Kaze no tayori*, as exemplified by the following passage:

> **He** slowly bit into his cutlet and turned his attention to the evening paper. The word "crane" caught his eye. **Ah. The stinging horror of hearing about one's first novel for the first time**. Still, **he** did not rush to pick up the evening paper. (*Sarumenkanja,* 226; emphasis added)

> **彼**はカツレツをゆっくり噛み返しつつ、その夕刊へぼんやり眼を転じた。「鶴」という一字が彼の眼を射た。**ああ。おのれの処女作の評判をはじめて聞く、このつきさされるようなおののき。彼**は、それでも、あわててその夕刊を手にとるようなことはしなかった。

These interjections serve as a means through which the reader, previously perceiving the story from a third person perspective, gains closer access to the protagonist's personal worldview and voice. This phenomenon effectively reduces the distance between the reader and the "Man" on the primary level and between the reader and the writer on the secondary level. However, this shift is temporary, as the bridging narrator promptly returns to a third person narration.

The narration does not only fluctuate between the first and third person but also transitions into the second person as the narrator engages the reader further within the "narration scene" by directly addressing them.

In the secondary level of the story, the narrator of *Kaze no tayori* calls upon the reader as follows:

> Do you not enjoy receiving letters? When you stand at the crossroads of your life and weep, would you not enjoy getting a letter that comes fluttering to your desk with the wind and throw some light on your path ahead, from some unknown source? *He*

> is a lucky man. Three times now, *he* has received such letters. The first was on the first day of the New Year morning when he was 19 years old. The second was in early spring when *he* was 25 years old. The last one *he* just received last winter. Ah. You know this strange pleasure of envy mixed with compassion when talking about the happiness of others? Let me start the story by telling you about that first day of the New Year when *he* was nineteen years old. (*Sarumenkanja,* 215; emphasis added)

> **諸君は音信をきらいであろうか。諸君が人生の岐路に立ち**、哭泣すれば、どこか知らないところから風とともにひらひら机上へ舞い来って、**諸君の前途**に何か光を投げて呉れる、そんな音信をきらいであろうか。彼は仕合せものである。いままで三度も、そのような胸のときめく風の便りを受けとった。いちどは十九歳の元旦。いちどは二十五歳の早春。いまいちどは、つい昨年の冬。ああ。ひとの幸福を語るときの、ねたみといつくしみの交錯したこの不思議なよろこびを、**君よ知るや。**十九歳の元旦のできごとから物語ろう。

While there may be arguments against the notion that the use of "you" by a narrator directly addresses the reader, this perspective acknowledges the reader's existence beyond the confines of the story's world. As highlighted by Monika Fludernik, the defining characteristic of the narrative "you" or a second-person narrative is its proximity to both the general reader and the reader as a self-referential entity. Initially, second-person narration might create a sense of detachment in the reader, prompting them to question whether they are the intended recipient of the narrative or merely an observer of a fictional character's experiences. However, this initial distance can ultimately evolve into a heightened sense of empathy, especially when the narrative employs the present tense. In such instances, the reader can become fully absorbed in the experience of the figurative "you," fostering a strong identification with the story's protagonist. The shifts between these different narratives and perspectives in turn contribute to further immersing the reader within the "narration scene" and maintaining them within a liminal space, situated between the story's world "that" and their present world "this."[6]

[6] "Liminality" signifies a transitional state marked by ambiguity, uncertainty, and the suspension of normal boundaries: an anthropological concept widely applied in various disciplines to describe the transformative threshold phase in rites of passage. In this paper, "liminal" specifically refers to storytelling liminality, as outlined by Colin Turnbull's theory, interconnecting liminality, storytelling, and

The fluidity in the narrative extends beyond this point. In the second tier of the story, *Kaze no tayori*, the narrator proceeds to introduce letters received by the protagonist from a woman. During this, the narrative undergoes a shift to adopt the woman's perspective, accompanied by a change in pronouns to align with *Onnakotoba* 女言葉 (feminine words/way of speaking). The narration now assumes the viewpoint of the female character.

Despite the scarcity of dialogue, the substantial narrative shift, accompanied by changes in pronouns, mirrors a performance involving all narrators across various levels, particularly in the first tier, immersing the audience not only in the introduction of different characters but also in their thoughts and emotions as the narrative seamlessly transitions from the third person to the first, providing diverse perspectives. This dynamic reflects the narrator's ability to don various masks and embody different characters, akin to the title of the novella itself. In a sense, the title encapsulates the multilayers of the narrator. The first component, *Sarumen* 猿面 (Monkey's mask), alludes to one of the masks used in *kyōgen*, a form of traditional Japanese comic theater. The second part, *Kanja* 冠者, translates to youth and could signify a monkey-masked youth, symbolizing the masks that this young narrator continuously assumes.

These narrative shifts reveal a resemblance to *rakugo*, reflecting its storytelling techniques. This is marked by the structured format and the narrator's adept transitions between narrative, performance, and character portrayal, resulting in a profoundly immersive storytelling experience that immerses the audience in a liminal state.

Rakugo's structured format, beginning with the *makura*, followed by the *honpen* 本編 (actual story), and concluding with the *ochi*, is instrumental in crafting the liminal "narration Scene." The *makura* serves as a gateway, introducing relevant material, connecting with the *honpen*, gauging audience reactions, and establishing rapport. It invites the audience into the "narration scene," marking their initial step into the

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performance. This storytelling liminality, inherent in authentic storytelling, reshapes audience perception, blurring boundaries between present reality "this-ness" and the narrative world "that-ness." It enables the narrative's inner world to occasionally become more vivid and tangible "that" to "this." Conversely, moments arise where the external world perceived through physical senses takes on heightened reality (this) to (that) during storytelling and listening. This transformative process spans subjective physical, cultural, and social levels, facilitating the restructuring, application, and assimilation of cognitive elements like schemas and scripts. Importantly, this phenomenon is not restricted to a particular storytelling genre but manifests in diverse forms: contemporary, traditional, professional, or commercial.

liminal state, transitioning from their current world "this" to the story realm "that." Engaging the audience in the liminal "narration scene," the storyteller, known as a *hanashika* 噺家 or *rakugoka* 落語家 seamlessly transitions between characters, maintaining the "storyteller" persona. This continues as the *rakugoka* navigates between characters within the story's world "that" and the "storyteller" in the audience's present world "this" as shown in Figure 1. The *ochi*, serving as the punchline, offers resolution through twists, wordplay, or unexpected humor, punctuating the narrative and influencing the overall impact in the "narration scene." Notably, its effectiveness lies in surprising, amusing, or provoking thought, creating a memorable experience that leaves the audience contemplating the journey and connecting "this" and "that."

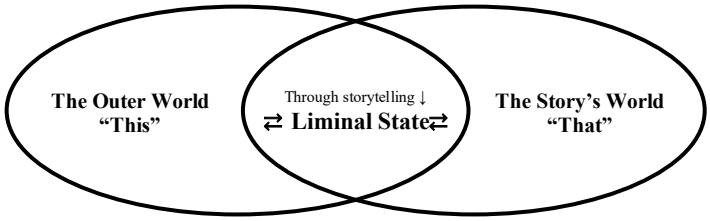

Figure 1: Liminality in storytelling[7]

As mentioned earlier, *Sarumenkanja* concludes with the "Man," the author of *Kaze no tayori*, changing the title to *Sarumenkanja*, establishing a paradoxical loop akin to the famous *Mawariochi* まわりオチ, where the story concludes by returning to its initial point. This leaves readers in a situation where they might have been reading *Sarumenkanja*, initially intended to be *Kaze no tayori.*

As we delve into an examination of the narrative techniques employed in *Sarumenkanja*, a distinctive pattern emerges. Both on the primary narrative level and within its secondary levels, the narrator skillfully orchestrates the reader's inclusion within the "narration scene." This deliberate strategy serves as an invitation, coaxing the reader to step beyond the threshold into the intricate realm of *Sarumenkanja*. The narrative achieves this by seamlessly weaving together the narrator's perspectives on the "Man," the unfolding narration itself, and the "Man's" ambitious endeavor to rewrite *Tsūshin.*

[7] All figures are created by the author unless otherwise attributed.

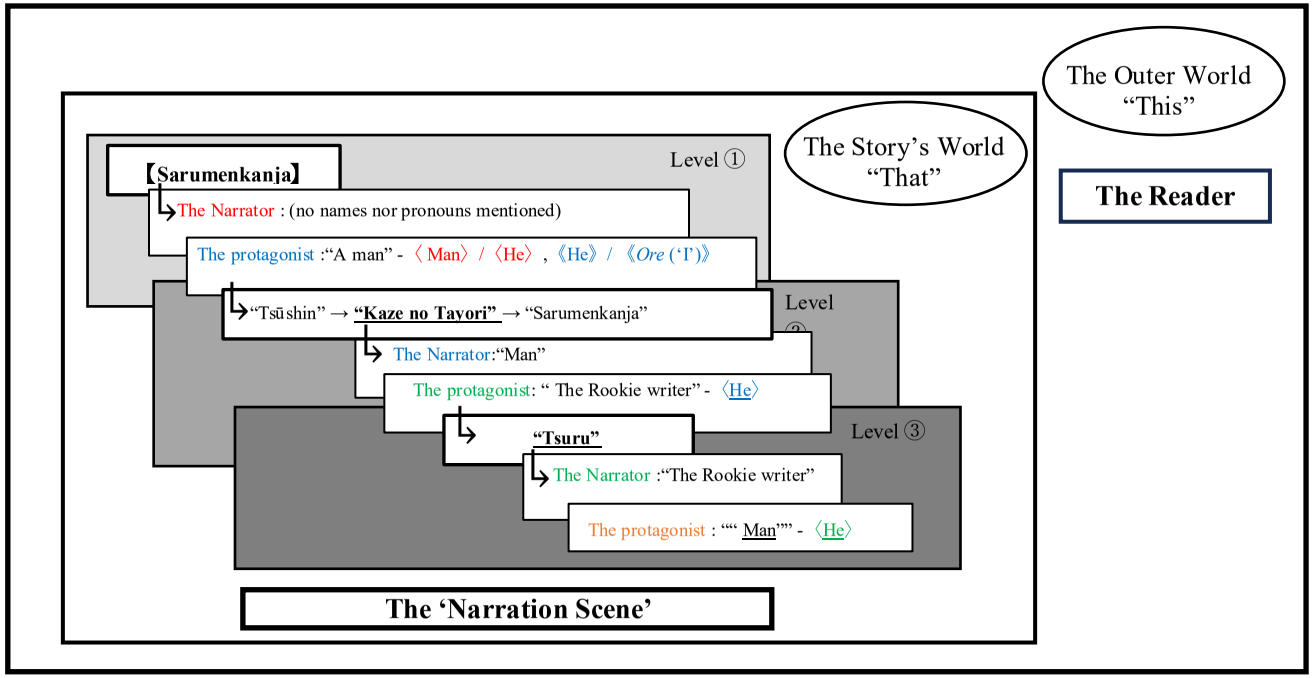

Figure 2 Inside and outside the 'Narration Scene' within *Sarumenkanja.*
"" : Represents the names of protagonists/characters.
〈〉 : Indicates the pronouns used by the narrator when describing/narrating the protagonist.
《》 : Indicates the pronouns used by the protagonist when self-referencing.

These skillful shifts in perspective serve to propel the reader even further into a liminal "narration scene," where the boundary between "this-ness" and "that-ness" becomes increasingly fluid and nuanced. The narrative intricacies, reminiscent of *rakugo*, allow for a dynamic engagement with the storyline, drawing the reader into the layers of the narrative and the layers of the multilayered narrator.

CONCLUSION

Rakugo skillfully immerses its audience in what can be labeled as the "Narration Scene," a space crafted through the seamless interplay of two elements: the *rakugoka*'s impeccable performance, skillfully navigating between characters while maintaining the narrator in the background, and the *makura*, seamlessly drawing the audience into the world of the story. This encounter transcends the mere involvement of visual and intellectual faculties, extending into the domain of imagination. The capability of *rakugo* to achieve this lies in the harmonious blend of words and visuals, culminating in a captivating performance.

On the flip side, Dazai achieves a comparable immersive effect solely through the medium of words. This is clear in *Sarumenkanja* as examining it reveals that the narrator employs various narrative techniques reminiscent of *rakugo*, enticing readers into the "narration scene." Firstly, the narrator utilizes potential second-person narratives, creating an inviting atmosphere that beckons readers into the world of the story. Secondly, by dynamically shifting perspectives from first person to third person, the narrator offers readers diverse views into the protagonist's character. As mentioned earlier, these factors position readers in a liminal state between "this" (the world they inhabit) and "that" (the story's world).

The presence of such fluid and multilayered narrators in Dazai's works consistently captivates readers, immersing them in the narrative world and providing more than just the ability to visualize the story's setting. These narrative styles offer readers the unique experience of actively participating in the narrator's journey. There are moments when readers feel as though they are transported into the narrator's personal space, as if the narrator is delicately sharing the tale directly into their ears. Simultaneously, these narrative techniques bring readers closer to the protagonist, granting access to multiple perspectives within a single narrative scene. As a result, Dazai's narratives possess a distinctive capability to transport readers into a world of immersive storytelling, embarking on a literary journey that surpasses the conventional boundaries of narration.

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