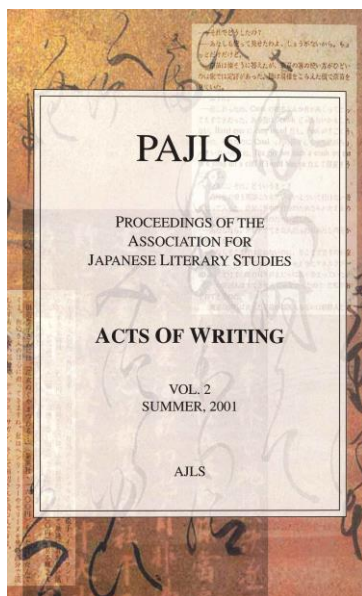


“Gender and Cultural Topography: the Figure of Woman in Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s Reflections on Japanese Language”

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# GENDER AND CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY: THE FIGURE OF WOMAN IN TANIZAKI JUNICHIRO'S REFLECTIONS ON JAPANESE LANGUAGE

TOMI SUZUKI

In the mid-1920s, when the modern standardized *genbun itchi tai* written style (言文一致体) had permeated Japanese writing through standardized education and mass journalism, a number of Japanese literary writers started to question and problematize the *genbun itchi* written language, largely under the impact of European literary modernism and in the context of rapidly expanding mass industrial society. Tanizaki Jun'ichirô (谷崎潤一郎, 1886-1965) participated in this problematization of the modern *genbun itchi* written language when he left his native city of Tokyo and moved to Kansai in the aftermath of the Great Kantô Earthquake in 1923. It was also the time when a wide-scale retrospection and reevaluation of the modernization process took place, including the reevaluation of the *genbun itchi* national language.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I would like to discuss Tanizaki's reflections in the late 1920s to the 1930s on the Japanese language both through his critical writings and narrative fiction. I will pay particular attention to the figure of the Osaka woman whose "exotic" speech provided the Tokyo-born Tanizaki with a new site of linguistic and cultural exoticism and induced him to talk about what he imagined as the unique possibilities of Japanese language and cultural tradition. I will consider the significance of gender and the cultural topographies as interrelated organizing metaphors in Tanizaki's modernist discussion of language and cultural tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Represented by the publication of the multi-volume *Meiji bunka zenshû* (明治文化全集, beginning in 1928). Volume twelve reprinted Mozume Takami (物集高見)'s short book *Genbun itchi* (言文一致, 1886), a once influential but long-forgotten work. See also the publication of the seven-volume *Waseda bungaku* (早稲田文学) retrospective on Meiji literature (published from 1925 to 1927). See Tomi Suzuki (鈴木登美), "Modanizumu to Osaka no onna: Tanizaki Jun'ichirô no Nihongo ron no jikûkan," 56-58.

## SPEECH AND "UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE"

In his 1929 essay entitled "On the Defects of the Modern Colloquial Written Style" ("Gendai kôgobun no ketten ni tsuite" [現代口語文の欠点について], Nov. 1929), Tanizaki proposed to improve the established *genbun itchi* style by reconsidering the "unique characteristics" of the Japanese language.

The so-called *genbun itchi* style [いはゆる言文一致体], the *kôgo* (colloquial written) style [口語体] that has evolved into its present state since the middle of the Meiji period, has almost been perfected. But for someone like me, who makes a living writing and who deals with this style all the time on a practical level, the various defects of this style are obvious. I cannot help but be keenly aware that this style still requires vast improvement....It seems to me that today's colloquial written style strangles the beauty and strength of our national language. (*Zenshû*, 20: 183)<sup>2</sup>

Taking up the example of the *no de aru* style (のである口調), referring to the standard sentence ending of the *genbun itchi* style, Tanizaki pointed out that it had not existed in the Tokyo dialect, on which standard Japanese was generally thought to be based, and that it was an artificial concoction, deriving from a *kanbun* ending created by people from Shikoku and Kyûshû, who, after acquiring political power in the new Meiji regime, used it to conceal their rural origins and to lend authority to their speech. Tanizaki pointed to the historical and ideological nature of standardized *genbun itchi*, which had, by this time, come to appear both neutral and natural. He stressed that it was in fact an artificial construction of a newly established regime interested in centralizing and homogenizing the nation. Tanizaki argued that this artificial written language was a "translation style" (*hon'yakutai*

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<sup>2</sup> All citations of Tanizaki's works are from the thirty-volume *Tanizaki Jun'ichirô zenshû* (谷崎潤一郎全集, Chûô kôronsha, 1981-1983), hereafter referred to as *Zenshû*, followed by the volume number and the page number. All translations are mine.

[翻訳体]), a “half-breed” (*konketsuji* [混血児]) of Japanese and Western languages, consisting of the aggressive adoption of Western syntax as well as of new Chinese loan-words created for adapting Western words, and that this normative language strangled the beauty and unique characteristics of the Japanese language. This westernized normative language, Tanizaki said, might be better suited for clear, precise, and rational writings required for science or philosophy, but not necessarily for literature, for which the original Japanese language in fact had unique advantages. Tanizaki thus proposed that literary writers pay more attention to the possibilities of spoken Japanese, which, he claimed, still retained the unique characteristics of the original Japanese language.

Tanizaki’s attention to the spoken language, however, has little to do with the belief in the immediacy and directness of the voice or in the idea that speech more directly reflects one’s thoughts than the written language—the phonocentric ideology that underlay and promoted *genbun itchi*. Rather, Tanizaki’s notions of the unique advantages of the original Japanese language were concerned with the position of the speaking subject and the issue of identification. In the same essay, he wrote:

English sentences formally require a grammatical subject even when the subject is self-evident. In Japanese, by contrast, it was normal for sentences to forgo a grammatical subject, at least in poetry and the novel. That was true from the Heian through the Tokugawa period, before it became common practice to imitate the West. (*Zenshû*, 20: 195)

Honorifics are not just polite expressions. They play a significant grammatical role. I have heard that Latin sentences often do not have an explicit subject [*shukaku* (主格)], that they differentiate person by verbal conjugation. When honorifics are used in Japanese, the subject should also be left out. In fact, that is why honorifics exist. (*Zenshû*, 20: 197)

When I was a student, we were taught that the Japanese language had no gender distinction except for literal translations of European pronouns such as *kanojo* and *kanojora*. But in the past gender distinctions existed in pronouns such as *ware*,

*mimoto*, and *onmae*, even if they were not used with regularity. Even today, although individual Japanese words do not have the gender distinctions found in European languages, in actual practice we can easily differentiate between male and female speech, ... [mainly by the use of various sentence endings].... I believe that this [the fact that we can identify gender in conversation] is a unique characteristic possessed only by the Japanese language. (*Zenshû*, 20:198-99)

According to Tanizaki, the indefiniteness of the subject as well as vagueness in tense allow the reader to identify closely with the narrated characters and to experience an “eternal beauty” that transcends a specific personal or historical situation. At the same time, honorifics and various, usually gendered, pronouns and sentence endings effectively specify a speaking subject, indicating the specific personal, interpersonal, and social context of a particular enunciation without using the complex and redundant explanations required in Western novels. These complementary features of indefiniteness and specificity, particularly the gender specificity of the speaking subject, constitute what Tanizaki valued as the precious merits of the original Japanese language.<sup>3</sup> Tanizaki proposed that literary writers more actively adopt in their writing the actual spoken language, which still retained the unique characteristics of the original Japanese language, particularly the rich variety of sentence endings not found in the neutral endings of standard *genbun itchi* sentences.

Although we might expect this interest in the spoken language to be an interest in recovering local, social, or historical linguistic practices which were being erased by the standard written language, in fact not all spoken languages are important for Tanizaki. As he articulates in *Bunshô dokuhon* (文章読本 [Reading Written Styles], 1934):

I wonder why people in the great cities such as Tokyo and

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<sup>3</sup> I have previously examined the significance of Tanizaki's speaking subject in my *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, 176-86. I will focus on different issues in this paper.

Osaka speak a plain and nuanced language whereas people in rural areas use stiff, high-toned Chinese style words. (*Zenshû*, 21: 165)

In general, I don't feel it appropriate for people to use a provincial accent even in speech. Today, the standard language [*hyôjungo* (標準語)] is thought to be based on the Tokyo dialect, but the real Tokyoite of discretion speaks rather precisely and clearly even in everyday conversation.... Today's so-called modern boys and modern girls speak a rough, vulgar language that is much worse than that of craftsmen. And those who use such a rough language are not genuine Tokyoites but mostly country youths who attempt to imitate urbanites. Their language really sounds boorish to me. (*Zenshû*, 21: 231-32)

For Tanizaki, the actual spoken language has also been influenced by *genbun itchi* and does not necessarily retain the traces of the original Japanese more than does the artificial, standardized written language. As is revealed in the above quotations, the only valuable spoken language for Tanizaki was the speech of the "genuine Tokyoite" (*Tôkyôjin* [東京人]) and that of the Osaka people, or more precisely speaking, the speech of "genuine Tokyo men" like Tanizaki himself and that of Osaka women (*Ôsaka no onna* [大阪の女]). For Tanizaki, the speech of Osaka men, who were becoming increasingly Tokyo-oriented in the modern economic and cultural world, had already been assimilated by the standard *hyôjungo* while the speech of Osaka women still retained its local and historical roots.

#### CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY: OSAKA ASA UNIQUE TOPOS

It is noteworthy that Tanizaki developed his reflections on Japanese language from the late 1920s through the 30s while he was developing comparisons between the cultural climate of Kansai (関西) and that of Kantô (関東), particularly that between Tokyo and Osaka, comparing food, landscape, manners and customs, music, performing arts, etc. As with all his cultural topographies, Tanizaki's comparisons between Tokyo and Osaka came to be embodied by women, by the polar

contrast between the Osaka woman and the Tokyo woman. This contrast was epitomized particularly by their respective voice and speech, which were in turn represented by the tones of the respective samisen music. Tanizaki wrote in the 1932 essay “Watakushi no mita Ôsaka oyobi Ôsakajin” (私の見た大阪及び大阪人 [“My Views of Osaka and Osaka People”]):

The voice of the Tokyo woman is, for good and for bad, the tone of the *nagauta* [長唄] samisen and indeed matches it perfectly. It is pretty, but lacks range, depth, roundness, and most of all viscosity. Therefore, their conversation is clear, precise, and grammatically accurate, but lacks overtones and evocative quality. The voice of the Osaka woman, on the other hand, is like the *jôruri* [浄瑠璃] or the *jiuta* [地唄] samisen, having soft charm, rich luster, and warmth even in the highest pitch. (*Zenshû*, 20: 364)

The polar contrast that Tanizaki developed between the Tokyo woman and the Osaka woman clearly parallels the polar contrast that he established between the modern *genbun itchi* standard language and the “original Japanese language.”

But, why specifically the Osaka woman? Tanizaki notes, “Listening to the *koto* song sung by a Kansai woman with a beautiful voice, I can imagine how indeed a princess of old sang far behind a screen [*tamasudare* (玉簾)]; an image of a noble lady in a long overgarment is clearly evoked” (*Zenshû*, 20: 365). Why, then, does he specifically focus on the woman of the merchant city Osaka instead of a woman of the ancient capital Kyoto? Several years after he moved to Kansai in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake, Tanizaki mentioned that he found the traces of his lost home in downtown Tokyo in the old neighborhoods of Kyoto and Osaka. But then why did this special topos of the “home in exile” or “second home” settle on Osaka? To say that it was because he found his “eternal woman” in Nezu Matsuko, the wife in an old merchant house in the heart of old Osaka, is insufficient. We need to take into account Osaka as a privileged symbolic site of cultural production for Tanizaki.

First, for the urbanite Tanizaki, who held peculiar prejudice

against and a dislike toward the country (*inaka* [田舎]), Osaka was a big modern commercial city, the only city that was comparable to the metropolis Tokyo in its modern energy and vitality. Second, in Osaka, a living historical continuity was clearly discernible in everyday manners and customs. Tanizaki found the features of the bunraku puppets in the faces of the contemporary Osakans and found that the world represented in the puppet theatre was still firmly rooted in the living environment and living sentiments of contemporary Osaka. Third, as an old merchant city, Osaka was similar to Tanizaki's hometown, downtown Tokyo, the traces of which Tanizaki felt had been lost forever to the Earthquake and the subsequent reconstruction. At the same time, Tanizaki also found that Osaka "was a merchant city where wealthy merchants with a vitality and power comparable to those of daimyô had led lives of dignity and status comparable to those of daimyô" (*Zenshû*, 20: 370). Osaka, in other words, made Tanizaki imagine the powerful and wealthy merchant culture of Genroku and Keichô (early seventeenth century) in contrast to the more modest class status of Edo merchant culture. Fourth, because of the geographical proximity to Kyoto, Nara, and Kobe, each with specific historical and cultural associations, Osaka was linked to various historical periods and their cultural associations. For Tanizaki, Osaka developed into a unique site which induced a temporalization of geographical space as well as a spatialization of historical time through which Tanizaki could freely evoke, juxtapose, and traverse different past cultures, going from the present back to Genroku, Keichô, Muromachi, and Heian, and vice versa. The image of Heian court culture, which Tanizaki valued for what he called the "spirit of adoring women" (*josei sûhai no seishin* [女性崇拜の精神]) ("Ren'ai oyobi shikijô" [恋愛及び色情], 1931, *Zenshû*, 20: 250), was evoked side by side with the merchant culture of the Tokugawa period, which, Tanizaki lamented, resulted in the degradation of women by the military establishment.

Finally and most importantly: Tanizaki's imagined figure of the wealthy merchant comparable to a daimyô was *not really* a daimyô, and Tanizaki's figure of an Osaka lady whose beautiful *koto* singing evoked a noble princess was *not really* a noble aristocrat. This layering of different cultural pasts, the manipulation of cultural and social identities, was the product of an active and playful imagination. In fact, Osaka came to constitute a privileged site for Tanizaki's cultural topography



precisely because it was regarded as an underdog to the cosmopolitan metropolis of Tokyo. The potential of this privileged site could be foregrounded and fully developed only through an active and playful imagination. Tanizaki suggested that the significance of this unique topos, all the powerful and positive qualities of which were embodied in the Osaka woman, had been overlooked by Osaka-born male writers, who fled to Tokyo or shamelessly became Tokyo-oriented. Indeed, in Tanizaki's Osaka, Osaka men existed primarily as a structurally necessary component (for Tanizaki's masochistic world) that highlighted the power of the Osaka woman. As a "genuine Tokyoite" who, as a stranger, "discovered" the special qualities of this unique cultural topos, Tanizaki appointed himself to explore its full significance in a series of works from the late 1920s through the 1930s, starting with *Manji* (卍, Swastika, 1928-1930, translated into English as *Quicksand*), including such works as *Ashikari* (芦刈 [Reed Cutter], 1932) and *Shunkinshô* (春琴抄 [A Portrait of Shunkin], 1933), and culminating most fully in *Sasameyuki* (細雪 [Light Snow], 1943-1948, translated into English as *The Makioka Sisters*), with continuous stylistic and narrational experiments that radically placed the standardized *genbun itchi* written style in a relative historical perspective.

#### MASCULINE WESTERN/KANBUN WRITING VERSUS FEMININE JAPANESE WRITING

The polar contrast between the modern standardized *genbun itchi* language and what Tanizaki called the original Japanese language was conceived as a contrast between a homogenized, artificial standard language—written and spoken by the majority of contemporary Japanese men and women—versus the speech of Osaka women and a disappearing community of genuine Tokyo men represented by Tanizaki himself. At the same time, Tanizaki also saw the contrast between the modern *genbun itchi* style and the original Japanese language in terms of a contrast between the mixture of Western and *kanbun* writing (*seiyôgo narabi ni kanbun* [西洋語ならびに漢文]) and Japanese writing (*wabun* [和文]). This contrast was most fully developed in the 1934 *Bunshô dokuhon*, in which Tanizaki classified the Japanese literature, both classical and modern, into two opposing types: the *wabun*-style

(*wabunchô/wabunkei* [和文調・和文系]) versus the *kanbun*-style (*kanbunchô/kanbunkei* [漢文調・漢文系]). Tanizaki describes these two contrasting types as the misty/dim type versus the lucent type (*môrôha to meisekiha* [朦朧派と明晰派]), the sluggish type versus the brisk type (*daradaraha to tekipakiha* [だらだら派とテキパキ派]), the flowing and elegant type versus the solid type (*ryûreiha to shitsujitsuha* [流麗派と質実派]), the feminine type versus the masculine type (*joseiha to danseiha* [女性派と男性派]), the emotional type versus the rational type (*jôchoha to riseiha* [情緒派と理性派]), saying that they could be summed up most simply as the *Genji monogatari*-type versus the non-*Genji monogatari*-type (*Genji monogatariha to hi-Genji monogatariha* [源氏物語派と非源氏物語派]). As examples of the non-*Genji* type, Tanizaki named, most notably among others, Natsume Sôseki (夏目漱石, 1867-1916) and Shiga Naoya (志賀直哉, 1883-1971)—the two writers whom Tanizaki continued to see as his most powerful rivals—and for the *Genji*-type, he named Izumi Kyôka (泉鏡花, 1873-1939), Ueda Bin (上田敏, 1874-1916), and Uno Kôji (宇野浩二, 1891-1961), among others, but most notably Tanizaki himself. Tanizaki noted that he had also been interested in *kanbun*-style in his younger years but that he had become increasingly drawn to the *wabun*-style. Although he presented these two types of writing as two kinds of predispositions, Tanizaki in fact urged the reader to “avoid the *kango/kanbun*-style writing and return to gentle, original Japanese writing” and advocated the reevaluation of the feminine *wabun*-style, which he believed was going out of fashion.

Why then, did Tanizaki attempt to promote the “feminine *wabun*-style” at this particular time? Reflecting the discourse of the time, which rapidly became nationalistic after the Manchurian Incident in 1931 and the collapse of the Marxist socialist movement in 1933, and in a tone prefiguring the (in)famous 1942 symposium “*Kindai no chôkoku*” (“Overcoming the Modern”), Tanizaki wrote in his 1934 *Bunshô dokuhon* that “we, the Japanese, have thus far absorbed and digested all the central ideas, technologies, and scholarships of the West, and today, when we have surpassed advanced Western countries and are about to take the lead in certain fields, we should start creating our own cultural forms, those that best suit our national character and history” (*Zenshû*,

21: 129-130).<sup>4</sup> Tanizaki's initial interest in and motivation for exploring the possibilities of *wabun*, however, were more directly expressed in the 1929 essay "On the Defects of the Modern Colloquial Written Style." In this essay, Tanizaki expressed his stylistic interest in the recent writings by George Moore (1852-1933), observing that the fusion of dialogue and descriptive prose—without quotation marks or indentations—and the continuous dialogue without narrational intrusions (such as "he said") created a fresh narrative style reminiscent of traditional Japanese prose fiction. He also added: "Recently, unconventional writers such as James Joyce have appeared in the West. Perhaps Western writers might start writing subjectless sentences before we do!" (*Zenshû*, 21: 209).

Tanizaki started to express stylistic interest in George Moore's fiction in the 1927 serial essay *Jôzetsuroku* (饒舌録 [Record of Verbosity]), and he expressed his strong interest in the stream of consciousness technique that was being introduced around this time. Apparently having been inspired by stylistic, syntactic, and narrational features of recent Western modernist fiction, which had radically challenged the novelistic practices of nineteenth-century realist fiction, Tanizaki embarked on a series of stylistic and narrational experiments, starting with *Manji* (1928-1930), *Yoshinokuzu* (吉野葛 [Arrowroot of Yoshino], 1931), *Mômoku monogatari* (盲目物語 [A Blind Man's Tale], 1931), *Ashikari* (1932), and *Shunkinshô* (1933), all of which were set in or around the privileged topos of Osaka and featured the interplay between the indefiniteness and specificity of the speaking

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<sup>4</sup> The five years which separated Tanizaki's 1929 essay "On the Defects of Modern Colloquial Written Style" and his 1934 *Bunshô dokuhon* constituted a period of great political upheaval, from the intellectual dominance of Marxism in the late 1920s to the complete collapse of the Marxist socialist movement following the government's aggressive suppression of the movement in 1932 and the party leaders' public renunciation of "foreign communism" in 1933. However, the new emphasis on the centrality of national literary tradition—supported by a conspicuous sense of achievement in modernization—is clearly discernible since the mid-1920s, as represented, for example, by the 1926 opening statement on the radio lecture series on Japanese literature in which Fujimura Tsukuru, a professor of Japanese literature at Tokyo Imperial University, addressed the public in a tone very similar to this phrase by Tanizaki. See Suzuki, "Genre and Gender: Modern Literary Histories and Women's Diary Literature," 86-87.

subject—malleable identifications and identities—through layers of voices, subtle interweaving of citations and literary allusions, evocation of multiple historical pasts, as well as various visual and auditory effects of writing (manipulating the use of *kanji*, *kana*, punctuation, and sentence divisions). Tanizaki, in short, found in older Japanese written styles fresh possibilities for exploring new modernist fictional practices. It is noteworthy that while he defined what he called the original Japanese language as *wabun*, the written styles that Tanizaki explored and experimented in these texts were not a monolithic, homogenized style but heterogeneous written styles associated with various historical and cultural pasts. The multiplicity of past linguistic practices that Tanizaki explored radically challenged and historicized the authority of the *genbun itchi* written language as well as the standard notion of the modern Japanese novel as constituted by the *genbun itchi* conception of language and subjectivity.

#### MODERNISM AND THE FEMINIZATION OF WRITING

But why then did Tanizaki stress that the *wabun*-style “original Japanese” was feminine? In urging the readers to utilize the unique merits of the original Japanese language, particularly the rich stylistic functions of honorifics and range of sentence endings, Tanizaki emphasized (both in his 1929 article “On the Defects of the Modern Colloquial Written Style” and in his 1934 *Bunshō dokuhon*) that at least women should reactivate the feminine *wabun* style, traces of which he said were still alive in women’s speech. Tanizaki wrote in *Bunshō dokuhon*:

Since the equality of men and women does not mean making women into men and since Japanese language is equipped with the means to distinguish the gender of the writer, I wish women’s writings to show feminine grace.... I suggest that women write in a feminine style appropriate for women when it comes to practical writing and essays or even academic articles and creative writing, not to mention personal letters and diaries. Although *The Tale of Genji* is a kind of realistic novel, the author uses honorifics even in the descriptive prose (*ji no*

*bun* [地の文]) to describe the upper ranks. The author does not necessarily have the objective detachment of an scientist, but this does not reduce the artistic value of the work. On the contrary, it creates a graceful atmosphere exquisitely appropriate to women's writings. (*Zenshû*, 21: 237)

In the period from the mid-1920s to the 1930s, a shift in gender roles became widely discernible as more women joined the urban work force, a shift epitomized in such cultural figures as Modern Girls (モダンガール) and Modern Boys (モダンボーイ). The number of women readers and writers vastly expanded, and the notion of *joryû bungaku* (女流文学) or "women's literature" emerged as a distinct journalistic category.<sup>5</sup> A number of women writers were associated with contemporary socialist, anarchist, and feminist social and literary movements.<sup>6</sup> This gender shift also triggered a conservative call for a return to the "natural" distinction between men and women.<sup>7</sup> Tanizaki's call for women to recover the feminine-style of writing, however, does not mean that he simply joined this conservative faction. It was, after all, Tanizaki himself who first published the brilliant representation of the Modern Girl in *Chijin no ai* (痴人の愛 [A Fool's Love], 1924-25, translated as *Naomi*) and continued to be deeply interested in such figures, for example, as Sonoko and Mitsuko in *Manji* and Taeko in *Sasameyuki*. Indeed, all the central female figures in Tanizaki's fictional world in this period were magnetic and powerful women, as most exemplified by the Osaka woman Shunkin in *Shunkinshô*.

Significantly, however, Tanizaki did not refer to any contemporary women writers in his reflections on Japanese language. The only woman writer to whom he referred was the author of *The Tale of Genji*. In *Bunshô dokuhon*, he translated a passage from the "Suma"

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<sup>5</sup> For the emergence of the concept of "women's literature" in the 1920s, see Ericson. For the issues of gender and genre in modern Japanese literary history, see Suzuki, "Gender and Genre: Modern Literary Histories and Women's Diary Literature."

<sup>6</sup> See Ogata.

<sup>7</sup> See Roden.

chapter of *The Tale of Genji* into modern Japanese by “trying to maintain the elegant tone of the original” (*Zenshû*, 21: 172) and in the following year, 1935, he would start a complete modern translation of the entire *Tale of Genji*, which was published four years later in January of 1939. Tanizaki must have been conscious of Yosano Akiko (与謝野晶子, 1878-1942)’s earlier modern translation (新訳源氏物語, published 1912-1913)—Yosano Akiko, in fact, published her revised translation around the same time as Tanizaki, in 1938-1939. Tanizaki must have been conscious that it was he, rather than Akiko, who would truly resurrect the “graceful atmosphere exquisitely appropriate to women’s writings.”

In talking about voice (*koe* [声]) in language, Tanizaki stated in *Bunshô dokuhon*:

Today, we have lost the practice of reading aloud. But, it is impossible to read without imagining a voice. Then, do we imagine a male voice or a female voice? I don’t know about women readers, but we male readers imagine a male voice, usually our own voice, regardless of the writer’s gender. But what if all texts showed the gender of the author? I believe we would hear a male voice in men’s writings and a female voice in women’s writings. (*Zenshû*, 21: 194)

What then would happen to men’s writings written in a feminine style? What kind of voice did Tanizaki hear or expect us to hear in his modern translation of Murasaki Shikibu’s *Tale of Genji*? *Bunshô dokuhon* makes a clear distinction between speech and writing, emphasizing that “the art of speech and the art of writing belong to different talents; those who speak well cannot necessarily write well” (*Zenshû*, 21: 94). *Manji* dramatizes this distinction by exoticizing the distinct speech of an Osaka woman—who says that she herself tried to write down her story in a novelistic form but failed—by juxtaposing her long oral monologue with the standardized written language of the male listener/writer, who claims to be a genuine Tokyoite novelist (evoking the image of the author Tanizaki).<sup>8</sup> But in the case of Tanizaki’s modern

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<sup>8</sup> *Manji* also dramatizes, if partially, the contrasting “feminine-style” writing (the school-girl-like letters exchanged between Sonoko and Mitsuko) and

translation of *The Tale of Genji*, did he imagine that his male identity would merge with the feminine voice of Murasaki Shikibu? Or did he imagine that Murasaki Shikibu's feminine voice would truly reveal itself in the "feminized" writing of the "male" writer Tanizaki? The answer remains open, but Tanizaki's interest in gendered writing would continue into the postwar period, as is most clearly dramatized by *Kagi* (鍵 [The Key], 1956), in which the masochistic husband achieves a death of supreme bliss through a complicit exchange of "private" diaries with his wife. The husband's diary is kept in a *katakana*-based "masculine" style while the wife's diary is written in a *hiragana*-based "feminine" style. The more clearly differentiated a "masculine" style and a "feminine" style are, the stronger and more dramatic the play of gendered writing or stylistic cross-dressing becomes.

As is well known, Tanizaki started his literary career under the influence of *fin-de-siecle* decadent, early modernist writers such as Poe, Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. For many of these male modernist artists and intellectuals an imaginary identification with the feminine emerged as a key stratagem in the literary avant-garde's subversion of sexual and textual norms. As Rita Felski observes, "This resistance to bourgeois models of masculinity took the form of a self-conscious textualism which defined itself in opposition to the prevailing conventions of realist representation, turning toward a decadent aesthetic of surface, style, and parody that was explicitly coded as both 'feminine' and 'modern.' Loosening itself from the body of woman, femininity was to become a governing metaphor in the fin-de-siecle crisis of literary representation, linked to an aesthetic definition of modernity that emphasized, with Nietzsche, the undecidability and opacity of language and the omnipresence of desire."<sup>9</sup>

As we have seen, in his reflections on Japanese language Tanizaki classified two types of Japanese writings: 1) hegemonic, standardized *genbun itchi* writing, whose clear, precise, and rational style is suited to science and philosophy, and 2) the disappearing original

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(pseudo) "masculine-style" writing (the pseudo-legal documents written by the Osaka man Watanuki).

<sup>9</sup> Felski, 91.

Japanese language, whose overtones and evocative quality are better suited for literature and whose main concern is emotion and beauty. Defining the hegemonic writing as masculine and the "original Japanese language" as feminine, Tanizaki appointed himself the leader of feminine writing. Tanizaki's self-conscious stylistic gender identification is similar to that of the fin-de-siècle European decadent modernists who appropriated and performed a codified textual femininity in order to create an oppositional identity as part of a counter-discourse vis-à-vis dominant bourgeois cultural norms represented by rationalism, positivism, and progress ideology. It has also been observed that these European decadent modernist male writers regarded their consciously-adopted artificial femininity as a sophisticated, self-conscious, and ironical performance as opposed to that of "raw" and "natural" women, thus reinscribing the hierarchical gender and social distinctions they ostensibly contested. Through their free-floating gender mobility and aesthetic sophistication, these male modernists attempted to differentiate themselves from mainstream bourgeois masculinity as well as from women and the growing masses, the "twin symbols of the democratizing mediocrity of modern life, embodying a murky threat to the precarious status and identity of the artist."<sup>10</sup> The distinction that Tanizaki made between standardized *genbun itchi* and so-called original Japanese language, and his association of this so-called original language with Osaka women and the feminine are more than a difference between Tokyo and Osaka, of *kanbun*-style versus *wabun*-style, of past and present. Instead, it was a symbolic means by which Tanizaki placed himself in a unique modernist position vis-a-vis the hegemonic standardized language, a state-oriented bourgeois industrial society, and male and female writers of modern Japanese literature. By criticizing the standardized *genbun itchi* language as the epitome of the hegemonic ideology of a centralized modern nation-state and as the foundation of mainstream modern Japanese literature—with its emphasis on mimesis and private interiority—Tanizaki in effect suggested the complicity of the two. At the same time, in defining himself as belonging to the "feminine-style" writers as opposed to the "masculine-style" writers, Tanizaki had Sôseki represent the modern intellectual orthodoxy while

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. See also Huyssen.



Shiga became the central figure of the "I-novel" (*watakushi shôsetsu*), which had since the mid-1920s become the quintessential national literary form in contemporary literary discourse. Tanizaki thus attempted to define his literary position in opposition to mainstream modern literary orthodoxy.

Quite ironically and paradoxically, however, Tanizaki's oppositional discourse on Japanese language and cultural tradition echoes the orthodox discourse on Japanese national literature since the 1880s. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> the notion of "Japanese literature" first emerged in the late 1880s, when the institution of *kokubungaku* was established as part of the modern nation-state building process. National literature was considered essential for establishing the identity of a modern nation-state. Echoing Hippolyte Taine's representation of the character of the English and the French, the first modern Japanese literary histories published in 1890 characterized Japanese literature and mentality as "elegant and graceful" (*yûbi* [優美]) in contrast to the "heroic and grand" (*yûsô* [雄壯] or *gôitsu* [豪逸]) character of Chinese literature or the "precise, detailed, and exhaustive" (*seichi* [精緻]) nature of Western literature. Japanese male intellectuals sought to present literature as essential to the nation-state and a modern bourgeois industrial society founded on scientific principles, rationalism, and a competitive spirit, all attributes strongly associated with masculinity. But in identifying national literature with a phonocentric notion of national language, they had to turn to *kana*-based writing, which had been strongly associated with femininity, and reject texts written in classical Chinese, which had been the core of knowledge and associated with rationalism and masculinity. In fact, in Europe from the second half of the nineteenth century, literature had become increasingly associated with femininity as the notion of literature shifted from a broader notion that encompassed both the rational and the emotional to one that was increasingly bound to the private and the emotional. The result was that it was impossible for Japanese male intellectuals to disassociate Japanese literature and national character from the notion of femininity even while they privileged rationalism and science as the fundamental attributes of

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<sup>11</sup> Suzuki, "Gender and Genre: Modern Literary Histories and Women's Diary Literature."

modern civilization. Beginning in the mid-1900s, particularly from the mid-1920s onward, Japanese literary writers and intellectuals increasingly emphasized the importance of a lyrical, self-exploratory tradition—with stress on love and nature—as the quintessence of literature, and claimed that this tradition was critical to the development of the modern self and nation in the face of a rapidly expanding industrial mass society.

Indeed, modern orthodox discourse on modern Japanese literature assimilated the discourse of literary modernism—with its emphasis on anti-utilitarian aestheticism as well as its ambivalent literary gender association—from the beginning of the twentieth century. In Japan, like in many other non-Western countries, the discourse of modernism—which in Europe emerged as a counter-discourse to the dominant bourgeois industrial modernity in the face of an expanding mass industrial society—in fact actively contributed to the articulation of national cultural identity vis-à-vis Western modernity. This was epitomized in the literary sphere by the notion of the “I-novel” (*watakushi shōsetsu*), which emerged in the mid-1920s and soon became a dominant literary category. The critical discourse on the I-novel contrasted the Japanese I-novel—with its stress on private interiority and the immediacy of expression—in opposition to the nineteenth-century European realist novel, and designated the I-novel as a quintessential national form rooted in a long indigenous literary tradition. (It is also noteworthy that despite its stress on the lyrical and the private—which tended to be associated with “femininity”—the notion of the “I-novel,” which defined itself as “pure literature” in opposition to the emergent presence of mass culture, usually excluded women writers.) From the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, under the influence of contemporary European avant-garde experimental modernism (represented by futurism, Dadaism, expressionism, and surrealism), a younger generation of modernist writers such as Yokomitsu Riichi (横光利一, 1898-1947) and Kawabata Yasunari (川端康成, 1899-1972) started their literary careers by radically questioning the prevailing conventions of realist representation as well as the notion of the I-novel. From the mid-1930s, however, the works of these modernist writers would take a rapid nationalistic turn. In 1935, a younger generation of literary modernists such as Yasuda Yojūrō (保田与重郎, 1910-1981) and Kamei Katsuichirō

(亀井勝一郎, 1907-1966) established a journal called *Nihon rōmanha* (日本浪漫派 [The Japan Romantic School]) and espoused the “anti-progressive” (*han-shinposhugi* [反進歩主義]), ironical aestheticism and self-consciously constructed nationalistic classicism. As is most clearly revealed in Hori Tatsuo (堀辰雄, 1904-1953)’s interest in adapting the Heian women’s diaries such as *The Kagerō Diary* (蜻蛉日記) and *The Sarashina Diary* (更級日記), and Dazai Osamu (太宰治, 1900-1948)’s series of stories narrated in a woman’s voice, modernist male writers’ interest in feminine writing became a noticeable phenomenon from the late 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

Tanizaki’s reflections on and experimental practices of Japanese language that he developed from the late 1920s prefigured all these later currents. In this sense, Tanizaki’s oppositional modernist stance turned out to merge, if not actively participate in, the 1930s cultural discourse on the Japanese tradition. As Kōno Taeko (河野多恵子, b. 1926) has appropriately pointed out, Tanizaki’s oppositional stance toward the mainstream current often appeared as “half-sided opposition” (*katamen dake no hanzoku* [片面だけの反俗]).<sup>13</sup> But as evident in the diversity and heterogeneity of his stylistic experiments—which also evoked the multiplicity of past linguistic practices and which were never reduced to an essentialized notion of the “original language,” Tanizaki’s “half-sided opposition” never completely merged with the mainstream nationalist discourse of the time. Tanizaki’s literary activity thus fully embodies the complex relationship between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in modern Japanese literary and cultural discourse, which was deeply informed by literary modernism.

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<sup>12</sup> See Hori Tatsuo, “Kagerō no nikki” (かげろふの日記, 1937), “Obasute” (姨捨, 1940), and “Arano” (曠野, 1941), all included in *Kagerō no nikki/Arano* (かげろふの日記・曠野); Dazai Osamu, “Joseito” (女性徒, 1939), “Chiyojo” (千代女, 1941), and other stories included in *Joseito* (女性徒), as well as “Villon no tsuma” (ヴィヨンの妻, 1947) and *Shayō* (斜陽, 1947).

<sup>13</sup> Kōno, 202-234.

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