“Both Ways Now: Dazai Osamu and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Writing the Female in Postwar Japan”

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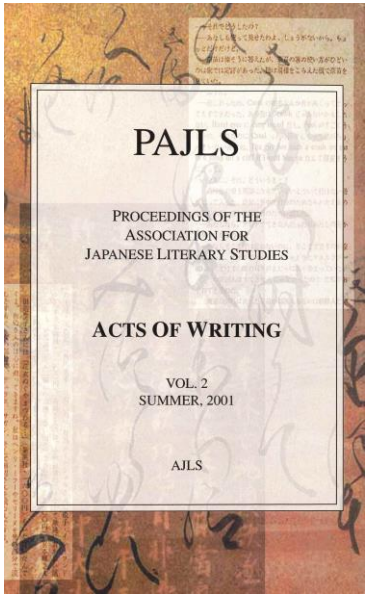

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BOTH WAYS NOW: DAZAI OSAMU AND TANIZAKI JUN'ICHIRÔ WRITING THE FEMALE IN POSTWAR JAPAN

LINDA H. CHANCE

Writing is fraught with secrets. Every novel unfolds a vast terrain of confidences known only to the writer's mind before we readers arrive on the scene. Detective stories and others contrive their plots by loosing characters nefarious and sundry to discover who did, or who knew, what at which juncture. Novels of interiority peel back the layers of a protagonist's mind, leading us into the fearful space of human (or monstrous) motivation. In the Japanese case, a mostly open secret governs the space between writer and reader: both understand that the *shishôsetsu* (私小説) form (sometimes translated as the I-novel, or confessional fiction) is a revelation of the author's life, only thinly disguised in a fictional persona. By the postwar period, Japanese audiences were used to daring exposure in prose fiction, and only too happy to unmask narrators and protagonists in all manner of presentations. The two authors under consideration here, Dazai Osamu (太宰治, 1909-1948) and Tanizaki Jun'ichirô (谷崎潤一郎, 1886-1965), are known for baring less-than-pretty obsessions to public scrutiny, but also for introducing complications of jest and parody. Both writers are slippery even when they are not taking furtiveness or dissimulation as themes; in the late works that I will address, where secrets rule and gender is a guise, the reader can expect quite a game to be afoot.

WHY PLAY THE DISTAFF GENDER?

Few would question the association of Dazai Osamu with the genre of autobiographical confession, nor doubt that when he writes in the first person, he gives us a kind of self-portrait, however distanced the character in a novel may be from his social self. Hence Kazuko (かず子), the heroine and narrator of *Shayô* (斜陽 [*The Setting Sun*], 1947), is seen by many critics as yet another of Dazai's *persona*-lities,

expressing aspects of his psyche and values that appear in other fictions under other names.[1] To analysts in this vein, the female identification primarily means that Dazai focused on feminine aspects of his own psychological make-up when he wrote Kazuko.

Tanizaki Jun'ichirô's oeuvre is less often associated with autobiographical style. This author creates females, frequently femmes fatales, whose strength eclipses the male who worships them even as they are creations of his desire.[2] Tanizaki himself is hardly effaced in the shuffle, nonetheless, and for all the difficulties, he like Dazai "is clearly an adept at the dance of revealing self-concealment," as Madeleine Kahn describes the pose of narrative transvestitism.[3] In his *Kagi* (鍵 [*The Key*]) of 1956, Tanizaki exploits the faux personal documents of two characters he forges through mutual acts of writing-into-being. Although this professor and his wife Ikuko (郁子), each of whom keeps a diary they claim is secret from the other, seem contrived in more ways than one, they tell us a good deal about the author's narrative fixations.

Volumes of criticism have examined these writers' written selves, and examined their textual females both as reflections of those selves and as portrayals of archetypal femininity. In Dazai's case the metaphorics of suicide, death and rebirth in Christian allegorical terms, decadence, etc., and in Tanizaki's case, desire, deceit, and masochism are established topics of investigation, already done to death, so to speak. My intention is to shift the focus somewhat to the specific effects of cross-gendered masquerade. In this line of inquiry, I hold out for the

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[1] For a survey of theories entertained by various scholars on the traces of Dazai's self in the novel, see Kamiya and Andô, 119.

[2] What Ken Ito has called "woman as the transformed object of male desire." Ito, 3.

[3] Kahn, 104.

possibility that it makes some difference to observe that the authors are not simply delineating female characters through narration of their acts and speech, but are impersonating (these) women, speaking in the first person feminine.[4] That difference is not, I suspect, based upon two of the most common explanations for cases in which Western male writers speak as women, namely displacement of the female voice and control of women's discourse. The English novel, for example, is said to virtually begin with a focus on female characters and readers, as in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*, yet Nancy K. Miller for one has pointed out that any apparent feminocentrism of these masquerading authors is itself a mask.[5] These male authors in fact have usurped the true voice of women by penning "authentic" versions of them. Their women are puppets who not only demonstrate all the qualities the patriarchy mandates for women—silence, decorum, fragility, prettiness, *ad nauseam*—but function as covers for men speaking to and about one another for homosocial or homoerotic effect. One extreme exemplar that Miller decodes, the *Memoirs of Fanny Hill*, ostensibly narrates a prostitute's life and thoughts, but her observations merely serve to mirror back to the male reader his own physical, emotional, spiritual, and every other type of perfection, while her life-in-the-flesh serves men in multiple ways, as she first desires him, and then desires his institution of marriage and legitimate children. The "happy ending" of such narratives guarantees patriarchal privileges.[6] Do we see the same in *The Setting Sun* and *The*

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[4] In making this argument, it is not my intention to discard the notion that all gender is constructed. In a real sense, every author must learn how to be and write in both his or her socially assigned gender and one that he or she adopts. Nonetheless, however much gender is a game, that game has real-life consequences for its participants. Thus a woman who chooses *not* to speak in what is held to be a feminine voice courts a different reaction than a man who chooses *to* speak in one. One need only compare the critical reception of "unfeminine" women writers (often reviled for their failure to be as they should be) with that of Dazai's work in female persona (often praised for being uncannily successful).

[5] See Miller, especially 49.

[6] *Ibid.*, 51-54.

Key? Not by a long shot. The women of these texts, Kazuko and Ikuko, are not good women, deserving of all good things. They are not even bad women, reformed at the end and restored to lives of virtue, as Defoe's Moll Flanders is. They operate on their own terms, overpowering the men around them and creating new roles for themselves that outstrip the conventional social order. These Japanese texts are not, in other words, male wish-fulfillment impersonation stories.

So are these simply novels in search of heightened realism? Aspects of the narrative structure of the two works seem typical enough of texts in the tradition of men writing as women. Both adopt the strategy of establishing the female personae through the use of presumably real first-person documents that provide a heightened sense of naturalness and intimacy. *The Setting Sun* contains numbers of Kazuko's letters, while *The Key* features Ikuko's diary, which is in an epistolary register, written, as it is, to be read by the husband. Yet it is hardly certain that these devices function to give readers an increased sense of closeness to the characters. In fact, given that we know the texts were produced by male authors (no attempt is made to hide the identities of either Dazai or Tanizaki), the effect may well be one of estrangement rather than a closing of the reality gap. We must look elsewhere to find the full answer to these authors' choice to write as women. Phyllis Lyons has suggested that in Dazai's case we see a sincere effort to cope with the problems of masculinity: "Having had it both ways, suffering as a man in physical life, and as a woman through his heroines in the last stories, Dazai came to the conclusion that there was no way out of his dilemma as a man."[7] What happens if we factor the effects of the postwar context into this male-versus-female question? Let me propose first the possibility that the females in these two works offer a new postwar alternative vision of a society whose gender values have been inverted. Kazuko and Ikuko, in this reading, inhabit an era in which the recently failed male script for their culture had been discredited.

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[7] Lyons, 161.

DAZAI OSAMU: INVERSIONS OF GENDER HIERARCHY

Dazai had already established a habit of speaking as a woman in what he termed "*onna no hitorigoto no keishiki*" (女の独り言の形式) or "*onna no dokuhaku no keishiki*" (女の独白の形式) ("the style of woman talking to herself" or "woman's monologue style") in nine previous, mostly shorter works.[8] Best known is "Joseito" (女生徒 ["The Schoolgirl"], 1939), runner-up for the Kitamura Tôkoku prize, seen as a marvel of style and the expression of all Dazai had to say at the time.[9] In 1947 he published three pieces that took this strategy further, the first the remarkable "Villon's Wife" (ヴィヨンの妻 ["Buiyon no tsuma"]).[10] The female narrator of that short story, Mrs. Ôtani (大谷の妻), is presented to us first in her role as wife and mother, an arena in which a woman has some authority.

> I was awakened by the sound of the front door being flung open, but I did not get out of bed. I knew it could only be my husband returning dead drunk in the middle of the night.
>
> He switched on the light in the next room and, breathing very heavily, began to rummage through the drawers of the table and the bookcase, searching for something. After a few minutes there was a noise that sounded as if he had flopped down on the floor. Then I could hear only his panting. Wondering what he might be up to, I called to him from where I lay. "Have you had supper yet? There's some cold rice in the cupboard."

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[8] Dazai gathers nine works together in the collection entitled *Josei* (女性 [*Women*]), published by Hakubunkan in June 1942. He speaks of the popularity of the style, which he labels in these two ways, in a brief afterword. See *Dazai Osamu zenshû*, vol. 10, 366.

[9] Watabe, 209-10.

[10] My discussion will not encompass the third, *Osan* (おさん), which draws inspiration from Chikamatsu Monzaemon (近松門左衛門, 1653-1724)'s play *Shinjû ten no Amijima* (心中天網島 [*Love Suicides at Amijima*], 1720), and focuses on a self-sacrificing wife.

"Thank you," he answered in an unwontedly gentle tone. "How is the boy? Does he still have a fever?"[11]

Mrs. Ôtani has a voice as a wife, but she is not capable of responding to her husband's attempts to treat her as a mother. Their son is physically underdeveloped, and the mother suspects he is an idiot to boot, so while she literally carries him throughout much of the story, it is unclear whether he contributes to her empowerment. What is more obvious is that she takes charge of the practical matters that enable her husband to go on writing (not to mention drinking). The husband has come home just in front of obstreperous creditors, whom he greets with fear, anger, and false bravado supported by a pen knife. Mrs. Ôtani, on the other hand, takes charge, displaying efficiency and control as she talks the creditors out of calling the police and then goes to work in their restaurant to pay off her husband's debt. When she says she will take care of things, she means it. Several details combine to keep this from being a story of purely feminine power and masculine defeat, however: Mr. Ôtani is, by other women's accounts, at least, a genius and fabulous poet, who retains an appearance of being superior in language. He is reduced to visiting the bar where his wife is working off his debts in a mask on Christmas eve, showing us a male subject in disguise if not in retreat. His wife is ultimately raped by one of the customers at the bar, though, so we can say she has not found a way out of the wartime predicament, and remains a victim of the men in her life.

By comparison, in *The Setting Sun*, the disintegration of the male characters is striking and thorough. Naoji (直治), the son of the fading aristocracy, started on his path to addiction "in imitation of a certain novelist," by whom we can understand Dazai or any of his fictional alter egos (Keene, 44-45; Dazai, 135). Naoji is a counterfeit of a wordsmith, but a genuine addict. Still, in his commentary on impersonation, he notes that he could convince people that he was precocious, an idler, a non-writer, a liar, a rich man, indifferent, virtually anything that mattered little to him, but he could not get the message across when he was truly in pain (Keene, 66-67; Dazai, 153). Indeed, he

[11] "Buiyon no tsuma," trans. Keene, 398; Dazai, 14.

is unable to sustain a discourse. His sister accidentally comes across his "Moonflower Journal" (夕顔日誌 [*Yûgao nisshi*]) (we could not read it without her, since he is dead), and its content is quite fragmented, including all manner of linguistic traces from philosophical musings to a lists of drugs (Keene, 62-69; Dazai, 150-56).

Kazuko, on the other hand, is the narrating voice from page one. Not only that, but she builds on her strength scene by scene, starting from her ability to make do and more with rationed soup. She writes:

> Oh, I would like to write everything down plainly and absolutely without concealment. I sometimes secretly think that the peace of this house in the mountains is nothing more than a lie and a sham. Even assuming that this has been a short period vouchsafed by God to my mother and myself, I can't escape the feeling that some threatening, dark shadow is already hovering closer to us. Mother pretends to be happy, but she grows thinner by the day. And in my breast a viper lodges which fattens by sacrificing Mother, which fattens however much I try to suppress it. (Keene, 27; Dazai, 119-120)

Kazuko burns a nest of snake eggs, admitting that this act reveals her hostility toward her mother (Keene, 11; Dazai, 105). She then schemes to become a mother by her own choice, without the encumbrance of a conventional father. Kazuko portrays acts that shorten her mother's life, and her involvement with the crude novelist Uehara (上原), whom she makes the father of her baby, as her secrets (secrets she shares with readers obsessively). Most remarkably, we read her letters—part confession, part testament, part trap, spaces in which she re-performs other people's dialogues. In contrast to her brother's collapse in the world of words, Kazuko tells it all. She even writes to Uehara about how she rejected a marriage proposal from an artist in his sixties. Her diction is clearly marked as lady-like with honorifics and feminine sentence endings, but what she says is not conventionally feminine. Instead of vaguely turning the artist down, she cites phrases from Nietzsche and Chekhov about a woman's desire to have a child, choosing her plan over ordinary married happiness (Keene, 85-86; Dazai, 169).

In the next chapter (five), Kazuko recalls a friend having accused her twelve years earlier of being like the girl in *Sarashina nikki* (更級日記 [*A Sarashina Diary*], mid-eleventh century), useless to talk with. Kazuko claims she has not progressed since then, but I would argue that she is demonstrating just how different she is by this invocation of the premodern traveling woman who was attached to her mother (Keene, 112-14; Dazai, 191-93.). In this same chapter Kazuko curls up in imitation of a pregnant snake, and shows her mother, "the last lady in Japan," a picture of the Emperor from the newspaper (Dazai, 201-04; Keene, 123-27). Of course it is here that Mother dies—happy, at least, but in some sense a victim of her daughter's will to nurture a new kind of life. The death of Uehara, the militaristic boor, is predicted before long, and Dazai himself is "killed" by this work, the response to which, in the form of the *shayôzoku* (斜陽族) phenomenon, was arguably so overwhelming that the author needed write no more. Readers identified with Mother, who was seen as emblematic of a "sundown" tribe (*zoku*) of prewar aristocratic Japanese, and invested this work with a reputation as *the* statement of the profound sense of loss felt in the wake of the war. It is possible to locate in his portrait Dazai's nostalgia for the prewar militarist regime, now embodied in the feminized Mother.[12] Given this particular inversion, it would be untenable to say that in *Shayô* Dazai becomes the female heroine solely in order to inhabit—even temporarily—a new, positive role as a powerful female who opposes prewar masculine prerogatives. Rather, this may be more a matter of the "almost visceral resistance to closure of any kind" in Dazai exposed by Alan Wolfe.[13]

TANIZAKI JUN'ICHIRÔ: INVERSION OF NARRATIVE CONTROL

Tanizaki's twist on the gender masquerade may be useful for comparison. *The Key* is a literary tour de force whose overt theme of

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[12] See Tôgô, 220-24.

[13] Wolfe, 18.

perverse sexuality in middle age stirred such controversy that the work was censured in the National Diet, bastion of representative public morality, even before it was completed.[14] The obsessive rites of the novel's characters may still alienate the reader, as they did in 1956, but on balance they contribute less to the fascination of this work than has sometimes been held. Indeed, the subject matter of the story hardly seems to deserve mention when set against the richness of its narrative method. As Keiko McDonald has observed, "analysis of the rhetorical relationship of reader and work reveals the beauty of Tanizaki's sophisticated literary techniques."[15]

The author pieces together the diaries of two secretive people, a professor and his wife of twenty years. These accounts convey more than mere plot elements, to be sure. The entries are printed in contrasting scripts, the squared *katakana* syllabary for the husband and the cursive *hiragana* for the wife, so that the reader is aware whenever the narrator changes. Who is doing the telling thus becomes a central focus of attention. Each document claims to be an authentic transcription of occurrences, but where the diaries are oblique, incomplete, or contradictory, the reader must reconcile them, forming a conception of what "really" happened in their sexual relations. At the same time, we cannot overlook the diarists' interpretations of the sequence of events, which evince their conflicting attitudes. Tanizaki creates a suspenseful work told from two apparently different points of view. He requires us to sort out what the characters are actually doing and thinking from a continually alternating flow of narration.

Thanks to our prejudices about daily records as bearers of truth, Tanizaki suspends us so that, however strong our doubts through much of the book, we have to grant the possibility that the diaries are purely accurate records, manipulated only by the author. Although there is evidence to the contrary, we must at least provisionally honor the professor's contention that he is not reading his wife's diary, for example,

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[14] On May 10, 1956, at which point only the first two installments (through the end of the professor's entry for February 14) had been serialized in *Chûô kôron*, *Kagi* was attacked as pornography. Tsunabuchi, 234.

[15] McDonald, 203-04.

or said wife Ikuko's guarantees that she has not "crossed that last line" with her husband's young protégé Kimura (Hibbett, 105; Tanizaki 128). Whatever the diaries' relationship to the facts, we assume that they are sincere expressions of the writers' mental states, demonstrating, as in Lionel Trilling's definition of sincerity, "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling."[16] In equal measure, however, Tanizaki forces us to question our acceptance of this written version of reality, for if we believe everything in the diaries, we cannot make much sense out of events that seem to be taking place.

In the end the wife admits that prior to the professor's stroke she filled her diary with trickery and statements that directly contradicted her intentions. At times she purports to have been a victim of self-deception, but only for short periods, which she does not give much weight. She does not doubt that her husband earnestly loved her, but it is plain that he hid his real motives and actions behind a screen of disavowal as well. The diaries, then, have served to depict neither the objective truth of the narrative nor the sincerity of the speakers.

If this is the case, why does Tanizaki concentrate on how the diaries came into being? These are twisted documents at best, utter fictions at worst. There is little reason to manipulate us into trusting the texts—save the ironical upset of our expectations when Ikuko at last pulls the rug out from under us—unless there is more at stake than the truth or falsity of the revelations therein. As devices for the representation of reality they seem unnecessarily elaborate. The author not only challenges us to identify what is real and what is not in these two points of view; he sets us an additional task: we must also follow the conduct of two parallel acts of narrating. Questions regarding the characters' motives in the execution of their tangled sex life supply only part of the suspense; we become just as anxious over the purpose behind their writing about these incidents. The content of the narrations quickly becomes subordinated in importance to the manner in which it is presented. Even as we try to discover the reality of what had happened in the recent past about which a diarist speaks, our gaze is directed toward

[16] Trilling, 2.

the figure of the writer performing the act of transcription in the immediate present of the novel.

Granted that there are many plausible motives for the practice of keeping a daily journal, perhaps the least likely is that diaries might be kept so that strangers can read them. Or is it? A common motivation is to organize thoughts and memorialize experiences in a personal vein. While private, this is an inherently selective process that may produce a harmless document, full of things that could be read by other parties. The average writer may even nurture a hope that his account will be read, or be worth reading. Of course, Tanizaki plays on this usually submerged desire. The therapeutic diary, in which one writes down everything, good and bad, in order to come to an objective grasp of the self, will more often than not be read by a confidant or counselor. The "privacy" of a diary, then, is a less universal feature than we may suppose.[17]

There is a kind of diary, however, which must seek to negate a readership as a matter of course. We can call it the "sinister diary." It contains the sort of shameful thoughts and heinous actions that the writer cannot admit to anyone else. Although there may be an intense need for communication, the only reader the diarist dares trust (outside of the self) is the diary per se. Naturally, the writing must occur in isolated, guarded circumstances; the written product must be carefully protected. The professor of *Kagi* begins a sinister diary on January first, vowing to include things he has previously hesitated to record for fear his wife might read it. The text is ostensibly a private one, created by an individual in order to dissect the delicate issue of marital relations. His intention to take up such matters at length, along with the unflattering characterization of his wife as a sneaky, prudish, weak-willed female, reinforce the impression that this is intended only for his eyes. And yet, there are clues to the contrary. For one thing, as readers we have already violated the presumption of secrecy. We cannot blame the fictional

[17] This is particularly so in the Japanese tradition. Factual diaries have always been treated as public, historical documents, while such seeming anomalies as poetic and fictional diaries, written for specific audiences, constitute a significant proportion of the classical canon.

diarist for putting us in this position, of course, so we could continue to accept his as a good faith effort. But the writer himself subverts the privacy of his diary again and again. Of the likelihood his wife might read it he asks, "If now, for the first time, my diary becomes chiefly concerned with our sexual life, will she be able to resist the temptation?" (Hibbett, 4; Tanizaki, 2) There can be no temptation if the content of the diary is not communicated to her. The implication is that she has been reading his notebooks, or will soon begin.

In discussing how he can make Ikuko both read and believe his diary, the professor comes up with the notion that only a cloistered diary can be an authentic vehicle of truth. His decisions, both to leave the key casually lying about as an invitation to his wife to read, and to address her directly in the text, make it difficult for anyone to trust his pronouncements of secrecy. Once the writer admits that he anticipates his wife will read the account, no amount of declaiming his sincerity can remove all suspicion that he is tailoring it to her. Hence the diary is thrown back upon its own resources. Lacking any other avenue of proof, the professor announces, "The diary itself will bear witness to its own truth" (Hibbett, 5; Tanizaki, 4). This can only occur if what is written in the diary comes true within it, that is, if it is self-realizing.

Ikuko, stimulated by the sight of the key, which reminds her of her husband's writing and dares her to read it, reacts as though to defy his silent request. Claiming total independence of what he might think or write, she launches into a private, sinister diary of her own, with one major difference—she will not allow him knowledge that such a text exists. It soon becomes apparent, however, that she is treating many of the same points he has mentioned, from reflections on her traditional morals to comments about her sexual appetite (Hibbett, 18; Tanizaki, 22). The power of the professor's text has thus already been made manifest: its very existence has forced his wife into a compensatory act of writing. Despite her denials, it is plain that she is imagining his diary and writing herself what is likely to be written there. Her diary never exists independently of his; it is always a response. The tandem diaries that constitute the novel are thus produced in collaboration. In a way, they form a single diary. Each time Ikuko replies to something in the opening portions of the text, whether by confirming or protesting it, she helps the professor's diary bear witness to itself. She makes its influence

felt within the pages of her production, and hence in the joint diary they are writing.

If Tanizaki has managed to involve both diarists in this collaboration, he has not neglected to provide roles for the readers of the novel as well. On the one hand, we are left to reconstruct the events that may have occurred between January first and the fourth, narrating for ourselves such significant moments as the old New Year's custom, consummated on the second. This implicates us in the creative process itself, for we must generate "text" where there is none. In addition, readers are under the influence of the key and all it stands for. Even if the professor has given his wife tacit permission to read his diary, we can hardly claim that these privileges extend to us. Yet there we are, sneakily devouring these non-public documents. Before long we will become thoroughly suspicious of the couple's motives, not to mention voyeuristic as we watch their bedroom activities. Tanizaki has turned us into participants at both levels of action in the novel—events and their narration. In our detachment a sense of superiority to these misguided individuals may develop, but there can be no doubt that the author has uncovered urges that we have in common with them.

Until the entries of January seven, it would seem that the husband is the controlling force in the development of events. He uses his diary to manipulate Ikuko, writing in a way that will direct her actions, especially her encounters with the James Stewart look-alike Kimura (Hibbett, 15; Tanizaki 19). At the same time, this means that her potential reading and rewriting of the professor's text regulates his composition at the point of origin. Starting from this non-overt, even negative, form of narrative control, Ikuko will gradually gain power, until finally she has total say over how the diary will be written and what will be done. Beginning with an admission of her attraction to Kimura, she expounds on the impossibility of her husband rivaling her fantasies of the guest, ridicules twenty years of marital embraces, refuses to give her spouse credit for successfully meeting her needs, and finally expresses her desire to see Kimura naked, even while denying the sight of her body to her husband (Hibbett, 36-39; Tanizaki, 44-50). From our position as readers, we can see that Ikuko is forcing the narrative forward, encouraging future developments by such comments. Whether the

professor actually reads her entries or only intuits their substance, he acts and writes in accordance with what she has said.

Once Ikuko comes into physical contact with Kimura, she asserts her control of the writing process. Timidly at first, she says she cannot turn against her husband, and is willing only to look at the two men as one. But even this admission is diabolical, alluding as it does to the professor's recognition of March nineteenth that when he feels this union with Kimura, the power of the moment is sufficient to kill him. The professor has identified this sensation as reality, however (Hibbett, 81; Tanizaki, 99). He submits to this state, no longer able or required to write his fantasies. Now it is Ikuko who composes the forceful parts of the text. From April second she begins to go out daily, noting only that fact in her diary, and forcing her readers to supply the direst possible readings in the negative space she creates. Then, in mock imitation of the professor's hesitant tone of March tenth, she tells the story of her deteriorating health (Hibbett, 111-12; Tanizaki, 135-38). It is a rewriting of his text, but it has no basis in "actual fact." Or perhaps it has every basis in the authentic reality of her motive, which is to kill her husband. Although she deceives him, there is no self-deception in her choice. Now it is the professor who must deceive himself, setting himself up for the fatal shock. The diary conditions him for this process, even as it is performed. Ikuko's text will bear witness to its own authenticity as well; it will come true within itself, but only by silencing its co-creator.

When we reach the end of the novel, it is revealed to us that none of the participants, ourselves included, can be trusted. Unless we have been following carefully enough to ascertain that the pair were reading each others' diaries all along, denials to the contrary notwithstanding, Tanizaki tells us that our own reading was faulty. He forces us to re-read with what is no longer a suspicion but a knowledge of the extended intercourse between the texts. Yet we can scarcely ignore the fact that this is all information gained from a self-confessed liar. In short, it is impossible for us to judge with certainty what actually happened, especially as regards Kimura and Toshiko, the daughter. So long as Ikuko is writing for an audience—or writing at all, for that matter—we must suspect a slant.

When the text first took shape in the mind of the professor, it existed contingent upon the reading that he expected his wife to provide.

Her revisions of the text determined the way he wrote succeeding entries, which then influenced her continuations, and so on, in a chain effect. Thus, even as each was writing his or her own diary, he or she was writing the other party's. In the process, they contrived to completely transform one another. The hierarchy of conventional morality was broken, and finally inverted, the male becoming a willing victim of his mate's erotic domination. There is no doubt that here as in Dazai we see the triumph of a powerful feminine figure, but does the postwar context enable it? The unleashing of such hidden natures is a theme utterly familiar in Tanizaki, from his maiden work "Shisei" (刺青 ["Tattoo"], 1910) on. Tanizaki's adoption of the female first-person seems merely a further step in a path he has long traveled. From that vantage point, the defeat of the male project that was the war has nothing to do with the victory of this postwar woman. Hers is not, after all, even a very credible portrait of a living being; she functions rather better as another in Tanizaki's gallery of parodic femmes fatales.

DAZAI AND TANIZAKI AS FEMALE: SUBVERTING GENDER BOUNDARIES

In closing, I would like to propose that Dazai and Tanizaki, just when they seem to be creating individual female characters who speak directly, without so much as the mediation of being spoken about, are in fact delivering us from the entire fiction of the two-gender system. Notice that these are not new breeds of women who can, or even should, shoulder the burdens of postwar Japan. Their capacities involve the violence of survival at all costs, and the fate of their accomplishments is left in doubt. Will Kazuko's baby restore the sunlight? Will Ikuko retain her young lover? Given that both women are so relentlessly created by and mired in text, a text that is co-produced with men at that, it seems hard to imagine such hope as the message. As Wolfe reminds us of Dazai's heroine, "In the end it may be that Kazuko's 'revolution'...remains a purely subjective personalized nonconformist

morality. It is no coincidence that Kazuko's ideas and inspiration for revolution come from books."[18]

There is, moreover, some comfort in the fact that these works do not reify a feminine, if we recall that femininity is, as Alan Tansman among others has argued, the trope used to resist the rational West in a more or less militant fashion.[19] If we had here a true Japanese male-becoming-female, he might be attempting to make himself more national, to rewrite the feminine as dominant, and to sneak certain militarized values in through the back door, if you will. The neither-male-nor-female is much preferable. We may even go so far as to say that Dazai and Tanizaki were engaging in the production of a complexly transformative merger of male and female voice, "never composed entirely of only one or the other but moving back and forth along a continuum between the two persons," in a manner similar to that which Lynne Miyake argues occurs in the pages of *Tosa nikki* (土佐日記 [*A Tosa Diary*], ca. 935).[20]

Why embark on such a transformation of gender divisions? The authors cross-dress to implicate readers in the interpenetrability of male and female consciousness. They reject certain easy formulations of the difference between the sexes. Take the case of secrets. In both works we note that the female has a special penchant for accusing herself of maintaining secrets. Kazuko, whose soon-to-be-revealed secret is the life she carries in her womb, and Ikuko, whose secrets are invisible even to the fluorescent lamp and camera eye of her husband, remind us of Dazai's "Schoolgirl," who confesses "I have gradually become a bad girl. I have come to have many secrets that only I know about."[21] But Naoji is a welter of secrets himself (even though the depredations of addiction cause them to be written on his body just as surely as pregnancy will be on his sister's). Kazuko hopes one day to say "Naoji secretly had this child

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[18] Wolfe, 206.

[19] Tansman, 6-9.

[20] Miyake, 56.

[21] "Joseito," trans. Lane, 19; Dazai, 209.

from a certain woman" (Hibbett, 174; Dazai 241). *The Key*'s professor would rule his home by subterfuge. In the matter of hiding and deception (not to mention interested exposure), men are the equal of women. It is especially striking when we remember that Ôta Shizuko (太田静子, b. 1913), whose *Shayô nikki* (斜陽日記 [*Setting Sun Diary*]) was supposedly Dazai's source, spoke of the information withheld from the Japanese populace by the wartime leadership, but claims her own inability to pen a confession.[22] Dazai makes the point about the leaders (although his characters are unable to recall anything having happened during the war, hidden or otherwise), and enables Kazuko, through her complex negotiations with others, to both hide and reveal. The field is leveled; the lines are down. Perhaps this is a meaning of "both ways" now—neither male nor female gender performance is independent, let alone above suspicion or available for lionization as a symbol of the essential character of the Japanese.

[22] Ôta, 5.

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