“Reconsidering Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s ‘Love and Eroticism’: *Iro* tradition and modern *ren’ai* in Japanese literary history”

Saeki Junko

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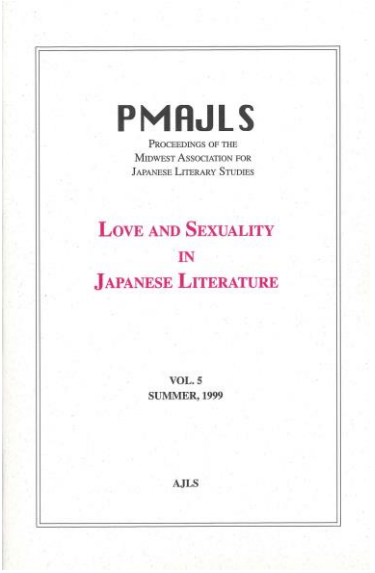

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RECONSIDERING TANIZAKI JUN'ICHIRŌ'S "LOVE AND EROTICISM": *IRO* TRADITION AND MODERN *REN'AI* IN JAPANESE LITERARY HISTORY

Saeki Junko
Tezukayama Gakuin University

In his essay "Love and Eroticism" ("Ren'ai oyobi Shikijō," 1931), Tanizaki Jun'ichirō stated that Japanese people learned the freedom of love and sexuality from Western Civilization.[1] He said that "Because our culture has traditionally looked down upon the issue of *ren'ai*, relationships between men and women have not been able to become the central focus of Japanese literature."[2] But is this conclusion valid? I will try to demonstrate that it is not.

Even though Tanizaki had a great talent for erotic writing, his argument in "Love and Eroticism" almost completely misinterprets the history of Japanese love and sexuality. His basic error was to apply the term *ren'ai*, the modern Japanese translation of the English word love, as a blanket term covering each and every one of the erotic relationships throughout Japanese literary history.

The problem with this is that the absence of *ren'ai* does not equate to the absence of the erotic. The term *ren'ai* does not appear in Japan before the Meiji period,[3] but this is because other words served in its place. Instead of *ren'ai*, pre-Meiji Japanese literature employed the words *iro* or *koi* to indicate erotic attraction between two human beings, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual. When we look at *iro*, we see at once that the history of Japanese love and sexuality differs radically from Tanizaki's conceptions. I would thus like to discuss the differences between the classical *iro* and the modern *ren'ai*, and reevaluate Tanisaki's discussion within a broader historical context.

THE *IRO* TRADITION IN HEIAN COURT LITERATURE

In spite of what Tanizaki has maintained, Japanese literature has a rich tradition of stories about love, or more precicely stories about *iro* as

[1] TJZ 17, 202.
[2] TJZ 17, 192-5.
[3] Itō 1973, Matsushita 1982, and Akiyama 1987.

part of the mainstream of literary development. Beginning with Heian court literature, we encounter two representative heroes, Hikaru Genji and Ariwara-no-Narihira who are both praised for their talent in lovemaking, *iro-gonomi*. At that time, though, *iro-gonomi* had a far broader meaning than the modern English word "lovemaking" usually carries: it meant not only skill at erotic relationships, but also the artistic sensitivity needed to compose the poems (waka) which were indispensable to communication with person one was attracted to.[4] Thus, *iro-gonomi* became a supreme aesthetic ideal guiding the lives of Japanese aristocrats of ancient times and the middle ages. As Yoshida Kenkō maintains in his famous essay *Tsurzuregusa*,

> A man may excel at everything else, but if he has no taste for lovemaking, one feels something terribly inadequate about him, as if he were a valuable winecup without a bottom.[5]

Again, translating *iro-gonomi* as "lovemaking" is to make the best of bad situation—another English version of this passage renders it as "the female beauty."[6] However rendered, we must understand it as indicating not only the relationship between men and women, but also the artistic sensitivity which lies at the heart of all creativity.

As a matter of fact, *iro-gonomi* has still broader implications, since it was deeply infused with religious sentiment. It was believed that the richer one's erotic experience, the closer one would be to spiritual awakening, since love is one of the best gateways to understanding the nature of human feelings. *Iro-gonomi* was believed to be the foundation for *mono-no-aware*,[7] the sense of the fragility of human existence, for love was a mental and physical exercise that awakend people to the nature of life itself. The evanescence and uncertainty of this world was mirrored in the uncertain and fluctuating course of romance.

This is the reason why *Komachi Zōshi* and *Izumi Shikibu*, the stories of Ono-no-Komachi and Izumi-Shikibu, who embodied *iro-gonomi* at the Heian court and were admired as talented composers of waka, tell us that both women renounced the world in their later years. *Iro-gonomi* persons, especially females, often ended in the cloister or temple. They were worshipped as incarnations of Buddhist saints like Kannon, as is the case

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[4] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Teruoka 1958.
[5] Trans. by Donald Keene; Yoshida 1967, 5.
[6] Trans. by W. N. Porter; Yoshida 1914,
[7] In *Shunshoku Umegoyomi*, Tamenaga Shunsui wrote that "*iro-gonomi* is the source of *mono-no-aware*." Tamenaga 1962, 61.

with Ono-no-Komachi and Ariwara-no-Narihira who appear as *Nyoirin-kannon* and *Juichimen-kannon* respectively at the end of *Komachi Zōshi.* This underlines the spiritual essence of *iro-gonomi*, in that its most successful practitioners are able to use it as a bridge to the devine.[8]

To those from a Christian background, it might seem odd, if not deviant, that the erotic and the religious are identified so closely in the Japanese *iro* tradition. We need to remember that *iro* has never built a barrier between sex and love, and it comes from a context entirely free from the Western dichotomy of body and soul. The ideal of "Platonic Love" which was popularized by Meiji intellectuals influenced by Western civilization was a complete novelty.[9] In contrast to the hierarchy of body and soul in Western philosophy, with "body" very definitely the inferior, *iro* is not used to distinguish spiritual love from that of physical. Sacred meaning thus resides not only in spiritual love but also in erotic relationships.

Another reason for the sacredness of the erotic is the idea of divine marriage, developed by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough.* He maintains that sexual intercourse was believed to be a divine act in antiquity, in that it was considered the source of fertility and life.[10] Therefore, the intercourse of gods and goddesses is often depicted as "sacred marriage" in the myth of many ancient societies.

Similar to the many examples of "sacred marriage" found in *The Golden Bough*, Japanese myth tells of the divine marriage of Izanagi and Izanami. Their marital intercourse called "*mito-no-maguwai,*" performed around the great heavenly pillar was credited with the birth of the nation itself. Even though Buddhist asceticism, which looked down on any physical attraction in a very Western fashion, had a certain influence in Japanese literary discourse during the middle ages, this did not diminish the belief in the divinity of sexual intercourse as performed by the ancestral god and goddess, whose marriage is often referred to as the origin of *iro-gonomi.* A typical reference is found in one of the chapters of the *Kokon Chomonjū*, entitled "*kōshoku.*" At the beginning of the chapter, the writer mentions the sacred marriage of Izanami and Izanagi as the model for human erotic behavior.

> The god Izanagi and goddess Izanami descended to Onokoro Island and became husband and wife. . . . It is said that they

[8] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1987.
[9] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1998.
[10] Frazer 1963.

> learned how to make love from the birds' copulation. From that time on, concepts of the marital relationship had developed in our nation.[11]

As this passage indicates, the marriage of Izanagi and Izanami was considered the origin of human erotic relationships, the primal and paradigmatic lovemaking that was passed down as a model for all time. In contrast with the Christian tradition and the Buddhist ascetic, Japanese native religion considered sexuality to be sacred as did many other ancient religions.

THE REMINISCENCE OF "SACRED MARRIAGE" IN EARLY MODERN JAPANESE LITERATURE

The belief in "sacred marriage" still persisted in early modern Japanese literature. The authors of Kana zōshi and Wikiyo zōshi did not forget to refer to their ancestral god and goddess Izanagi and Izanami as the founding father and mother of *iro-gonomi* in the opening passages of the kōshoku stories which flourished in early modern Japan. One representative example is found at the beginning of *Tsuyudono monogatari*, written in the 1620's. Here, the author traces the origin of human love affairs to the myth of Izanagi and Izanami.

> In the beginning of the world, the god Izanagi and the goddess Izanami had marital intercourse at the court of Takamagahara. From that time on, love between men and women has developed in this world. . . . This is the reason why courtesans appeared in this world—for the purpose of love affairs. They are so attractive that they can even entertain terrible demons or violent samurai. . . . Therefore, houses of *iro-gonomi* automatically became wealthy. The ascetics of *iro-gonomi* has thus had a long historical tradition, and that tradition leads us to play with courtesans to get the most enjoyment out of our lives.[12]

As the latter half of this passage indicates, prostitution was not criticized as immoral, but legitimized, or rather, encouraged in the cause of

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[11] Kokon chomonjū 251 (my translation).

[12] *Kanazōshi shū/Ukiyozōshi shū*, 49-50 (my translation). "Houses of *iro-gonomi*" means houses of courtesans. On the whole, this passage is a parody of the prologue of *Kokin Waka shū*, and indicates that *iro* aesthetics are the successor of *iro-gonomi* in Heian court literature.

iro-gonomi, since it was considered a re-enactment of the sacred marriage of the Japanese ancestral couple. This is one of the reasons why *kōshoku* literature focuses on the affairs of the pleasure quarter. Because of the frequency of erotic relationships there, it was idealized as the best place in this world to imitate the divinity of the primal sexual relationship.

Thus, in *kōshoku* stories, courtesans often appear as idealized heroines. The *Tsuyudono monogatari* provides us with a representative example. The male protagonist, Tsuyudono, falls in love with one of the most popular courtesans in the Yoshiwara. His affair in the pleasure quarter is depicted not only as sensual enjoyment, but also as a highly aesthetic experience accompanied by dancing and singing performed by courtesans. Just like *iro-gonomi* in Heian court literature, *kōshoku* in early modern Japan was still regarded as a way of leading aesthetic life with the aid of a variety of artistic activities, such as composing *waka*, singing and dancing—arts which have a religious origin in the celebration of gods and goddesses. This is why courtesans used to be not only prostitutes but also singers and dancers throughout Japanese cultural history.[13]

In "Love and Eroticism," Tanizaki asserted that "Unlike Western literature, Japanese literature has never had sacred promiscuous heroines."[14] We have seen that this is not the case. In spite of their low social status in real society, Japanese literary traditions enthrones courtesans as goddesses of both love and performance. Their strong will to consummate their affairs often leads them to death, the ultimate expression of love, and their passionate attitudes towards their lovers often culminates in double suicides. Ohatsu, who is depicted as the incarnation of *Kannon* in the prologue of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki Shinjū*, 1703), is one example of the sanctification of courtesan heroines in early modern Japanese literature.

> Descending from heaven, *Kanzeon* blesses all of us. . . . Getting off of a palanquin, a beautiful lady who seems to be eighteen or so begins her pilgrimage through the thirty-three temples in the central Osaka.[15]

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[13] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1987.
[14] TJZ 17, 204-5.
[15] Chikamatsu 1972, 57 (my translation).

In this opening passage, which is omitted in the English trasnlation,[16] the image of *Kanzeon* descending from heaven is superimposed upon the figure of the heroine, who is making a pilgrimage through the thirty-three temples in Osaka. Although this prelude is usually omitted in the modern performance, it is an indispensable part of the story: the key to the true nature of the heroine. The courtesan heroine, making her progress through a series of sacred sites, illustrates the deep connection between the erotic and the sacred in *iro-gonomi* which is practiced by courtesans at that time.

The last words of the prologue again demonstrate the connection between eroticism and sacredness, and again they evoke the name of Kannon.

> Leading us by the force of *iro*, teaching us through her deep affection, Kanzeon makes a bridge of love towards heaven. How great her blessing is![17]

In the above passage, *iro* is clearly indicated as the source of Kanzeon's blessings. The heroine, Ohatsu, is going to teach us what love really is, since she is nothing less than the incarnation of Kanzeon herself.

Although Tanizaki asserted that the courtesan heroines of early modern Japanese literature were no more than harlots despised by their male customers,[18] courtesans usually take the initiative in their love affairs. As goddesses of love, or, more precisely, of *iro* they can lead their partners to an erotic ultimate. Dedicated to absolutes, despising the bondage of time, the natural end of their affairs was double suicide regarded as the ultimate expression of love.

In contrast with the independence and subjectivity of the female heroines when expressing their love towards their lovers, the male protagonists in double suicides tragedies, such as Tokubei in *The Double Suicides at Sonezaki*, or Jihei in *The Double Suicides at Amijima* (*Shinjū Ten no Amijima*, 1721) seem much weaker and much more dependent. With never enough money for their pleasures, they commonly lack any and all survival instinct, and can do nothing but depend on their courtesan lovers until the end of their lives. They are commonly immature and shortsighted, as is the case with Chūbei in *The Courier for Hell* (*Meido*

[16] Chikamatsu 1961, 40.
[17] Chikamatsu 1972, 60–61 (my translation).
[18] TJZ 17, 200.

no Hikyaku, 1711), who violates the law by breaking the seal on someone else's money to release his lover Umegawa from the pleasure quarter. Contrary to Tanizaki's argument, the courtesan heroines in the *iro* tradition are usually more powerful and reliable than their male lovers, and fiercely defend their subjectivity.

Tanizaki also maintained that there has been no "women worshippers" in the Japanese literary tradition.[19] Here, he has certainly exaggerated his own uniqueness. Any survey of love stories in early modern Japan will uncover men who knelt before female heroines. One example is a famous scene from *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*, in which the male protagonist Tokubei is found clinging to the bare foot of Ohatsu, perhaps the best-known courtesan heroine in Osaka Jōruri performances. This is a clear demonstration of woman worship in a form that Tanizaki, of all men, should have appreciated. Deceived by his friend, Tokubei has lost his way in life, and so he has come to the house of his lover Ohatsu, seeking salvation in her devotion. It is clear that Tokubei is utterly dependent on his lover, both emotionally and physically as is depicted in the following passage.

> She taps with her foot, and Tokubei, weeping, takes it in his hands and reverently touches it to his forehead. He embraces her knees and sheds tears of love. She too can hardly conceal her emotions. Though no word is spoken, answering each other heart to heart, they silently weep.[20]

The visual image—Ohatsu sitting on the porch and Tokubei beneath her, protected by her kimono—reveals the true structure of their relationship (fig.1).

Ohatsu's counterpart in Edo kabuki is found in *Sukeroku* (*Sukeroku Yukari no Edo-zakura, 1713*) as the heroine Agemaki. She is a first-class courtesan in Yoshiwara pleasure quarter, who strikes a pose protecting her lover Sukeroku with her kimono sleeve (fig.2). Although Sukeroku, a typical kabuki hero of Eastern Japan, uses his temper to emphasize his masculinity in contrast to the weakness of the male protagonists in the Kabuki and Jōruri of Kansai. Nevertheless, he is just as dependent on his courtesan lover both emotionally and physically: he is protected by her kimono sleeves in the latter part of the performance. Although he never actually kneels before her, he needs her protection just much as the others

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[19] TJZ 17, 199.
[20] Chikamatsu 1961, 50.

did. The fact that Sukeroku appears on the stage with the violet headband which signals sickness suggests his hidden weakness, although this headband is usually interpreted as no more than an ornament which makes the hero more fascinating. Courtesans were thus worshipped as central symbols of love in early modern Japanese literature, which was governed by *iro* aesthetics. Men could only surrender to the power of the love they embodied. Thus, there was indeed a "courtesan worship" phenomena in early modern Japanese literature, in the *iro* tradition. Consequently, the men of that time enjoyed sensual relationships with courtesans without a sense of sin or immorality. It is true that Confucian distaste for erotic relationships between men and women had a certain influence on the lives of contemporary men of comparatively high social status, such as *samurai* or wealthy merchants. However, due to the *iro* tradition, the overall repression of sexuality was not as strong as Tanizaki has argued. Free from the Christian tradition, which considers human sexuality as the source of sin, the Japanese people celebrated sensual relationships as correlates of the devine marriage of Izanagi and Izanami. As a result, *iro-gonomi* heroes and heroines appear as ideal figures, first in Heian court writings, and later in the *kōshoku* literature which flourished in early modern Japan, characterized by "courtesan worship."

Nowadays, the religious celebration which correspond to the *iro* tradition still survive in some shrine festivals, such as that of Tagata jinja in Aichi prefecture, where people enshrine male and female genitalia as sacred objects. Such festivals often evoke an exotic fascination in Western audiences,[21] but they can easily be interpreted as replaying the sacred marriage of the ancestral god and goddess on another level. Contrary to what Tanizaki has written, the Japanese people used to enjoy love and sexuality in their own way within the *iro* tradition, both in literature and in real life, even before the introduction of Western concept of freedom of love and sexuality.[22]

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[21] Tanaka 1996.

[22] We should be aware that it was mostly men who enjoyed love in the *iro* aesthetic in early modern Japan, whereas courtesans who were praised as *iro-gonomi* heroines in literature led miserable lives in reality, contrary to their literary images. Female subjectivity which existed in ancient *iro-gonomi* female poets such as Ono-no-Komachi and Izumi-Shikibu, had disappeared in early modern Japan, due to the development of patriarchal social system. However, the male centered characteristics of the *iro* aesthetic in early modern Japan have been reformed by a female point of view in modern Japanese literary works, such as Tanizaki Junichirō's *Naomi*, as I will argue in the following chapter.

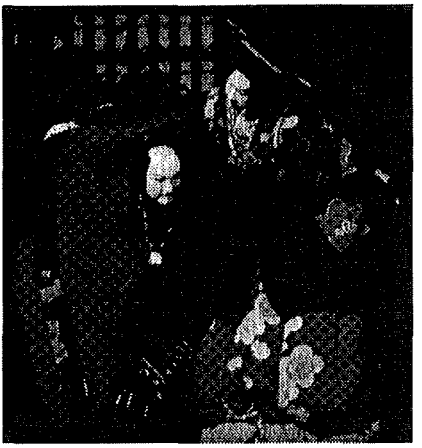

FIGURE 1

FIGURE 2

MODERN REN'AI AS THE REPLACEMENT FOR IRO TRADITION

Despite this, at the time of the Meiji Restoration, Japanese intellectuals tried to deny the whole tradition of *iro* aesthetics, since they saw it as an obstacle to modernizing and Westernizing Japanese society. To catch

up with Modern Western civilization, they coined the new word, "*ren'ai*" to translate the English word "love," and energetically promoted it as a replacement for the older "*iro*."[23] For them, *iro* aesthetics were no more than leftover scraps of the crudity of old Japan; for one thing, in old Japan, prostitution was legitimized as I have already mentioned.

Prostitution was a particular sore point with the Meiji reformers, who were determined to abolish the pleasure quarters as soon as possible, a determination only strengthened by the so-called Maria Louise incident. When the Japanese government demanded the release of a Chinese bonded servants working on the English ship Maria Louise, the English government retaliated by requesting the emancipation of prostitutes in Japan, labeling the attitude of the Japanese government uncivilized. Thus, the abolition of official prostitution came to seem an absolute prerequisite before Japan could be reformed into a modern nation-state that could compete with civilized Western countries. To abolish prostitution, it was considered necessary to distinguish spiritual love from physical, and so the idea of "Platonic Love" unknown before that point, suddenly became the new official ideal.

The Christian tradition, which saw the erotic as the source of sin, and the Western dichotomy of body and soul, worked hand in hand to help establish "Platonic love." This is why most of the leading Meiji intellectuals who contributed to popularizing the new ideal of "*ren'ai*," such as Iwamoto Yoshiharu and Kitamura Tōkoku, were believers in Christianity. Tōkoku, who propagated the idea of *ren'ai* in his famous essay "Women and the Pessimistic Poet" ("Ensei-shika to Josei," 1892) , consistently asserts that real love can be realized only within the love of Christian God who teaches us the eternity of the soul. He wrote;

> Our literature traditionally lacks the concept of true love due to the lack of the notion of God. . . . The Japanese way of thinking is always confined to this word and ignores the spiritual world. Therefore, sensual love has always preceded that of the spiritual.[24]

In his essay "My View of Meiji Literature" ("Meiji Bungaku Kanken," 1893), Tōkoku also maintains that according to the Christian dichotomy of body and soul, erotic love is inferior to spiritual because of the mortality of the human body.

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[23] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1998.
[24] Kitamura 1974, 62 (my translation).

> Our physical lives are mortal. However, our spirits are immortal. Our lives consist of these two opposite elements: body and soul.[25]

The above passage, in which Tōkoku gives the English word "spirit" ("supiritto") as a gloss for the Chinese characters "seishin," clearly shows the Western Christian influence. For him and many other Christian intellectuals, spiritual love derived from the immortality of the soul was superior to sensual love, which we have in common with animals without souls.[26]

Pioneering novelists of modern Japanese literature such as Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei carefully followed this ideal of spiritual love, although they themselves did not believe in Christianity. *Lives of Meiji Young Students* (*Tōsei shosei katagi*, 1885-6), which is praised as the first modern Japanese novel, introduced the new concept of love by means of the relationship between a young student, shosei, and a girl whom he had known from each other's childhood. The word "rabu shiteru," or "in love with you,"[27] which were used in this work to express the heroine's affection toward the male protagonist, demonstrates the author's attempt to popularize this new Western ideal of love.

Love between a couple who have been friends since their childhood—the type depicted in *Lives of Meiji Young Students*—became a favorite of Meiji literature, for Meiji intellectuals considered that friendship between children would exclude the sensual, in contrast with the affairs of the pleasure quarter. Such friendships were considered one of the best ways to realize the new ideal of "Platonic love." Although the author of *Lives of Meiji Young Students* married a courtesan from the Nezu pleasure quarter in real life, in his work he constantly criticizes official prostitution in Japan, hoping thus to contribute to the "civilization" of Japanese society.

Futabatei Shimei's *Floating Clouds* (*Ukigumo*, 1887), another famous early work of modern Japanese literature, provides another example of this new "civilized" love. The male protagonist, Bunzō, who has lived with his cousin, Osei, since their childhood, falls in love with her when he grows up. He tells her about the new ideal of love between men and women when he teaches her English. Here, English, the language of the

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[25] Kitamura 1974, 160 (my translation).
[26] Meiji intellectuals often wrote that human sensual desire was the equivalent of "animal instinct." For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1998.
[27] Tshubouchi 1969, 63.

"civilized" West for contemporary Japanese intellectuals, becomes a medium to transmit the Western ideal of "love."

According to the new ideal of spiritual love, men and women should keep their love affairs pure, and at any rate, outside the pleasure quarter. The words of the heroine, Osei, "We, women of the new era of Meiji, are not like courtesans"[28] clearly demonstrates an intention to differentiate herself from courtesans, and indicates her rejection of the *iro* tradition nurtured in the pleasure quarters. The idea of sacred sexuality and marriage of Izanagi and Izanami, which had long supported the *iro* tradition, no longer had any persuasive force for Meiji intellectuals. For them, in their eagerness to catch up with the civilized West, the Western ideals could not be propagated too strongly, nor the native *iro* tradition denounced too savagely.

We can now see that Tanizaki's negative view of Japanese love and sexuality in the past, argued in his above mentioned essay, is rooted in the denial of the *iro* tradition which took place during the Meiji restoration. He was not alone in this error. Many other modern intellectuals and scholars such as Abe Jirō, the author of *The Arts and the Society of Tokugawa Period* (*Tokugawa Jidai no Geijutsu to Shakai*, 1931), shared Tanizaki's approaches. The work of Abe, which is still today highly valued as a classical piece of research on the culture of Tokugawa Japan, maintains that Tokugawa literature is "harmful" for Japanese because it idealizes the immoral love affairs in the pleasure quarters. Just like Tanizaki, he completely negates, in his discussion of Tokugawa literature, the traditional *iro* aesthetics from the standpoint that exclusively respects the value inspired by the modern term *ren'ai*.

In order to be free from these errors, any discussion of love and sexuality in premodern Japanese literature must constantly emphasize the strength of the *iro* aesthetics and underline the fact that the *iro* ideals were totally different from the modern *ren'ai*'s ideal. The failure to realize this is the fundamental weakness of Tanizaki's "Love and Eroticism."

Since, on the surface, Tanizaki's essay criticizes the repression of love and sexuality in modern Japanese literature, an additional line of thought might have led him to the reevaluation of the old *iro* tradition. However, because he never realizes that that tradition existed, he speaks as if intolerance toward love and sexuality went all the way back to the literature of the Heian court. In fact, this intolerance can be traced no further back than the time of Meiji restoration—a century or so, com-

[28] Futabatei 1964, 139. (My translation).

to the thousand years during which the *iro* aesthetics has exerted an influence.

In this sense, Tanizaki's works, which seem to make consistent efforts for freedom in love and sexuality, can be reevaluated as nothing but a protest against the modern repression of love and sexuality deriving from the Meiji Restoration. If we take account of the long *iro* tradition, Tanizaki's attempt to challenge modern morality by audaciously depicting human eroticism and sexuality does not really transgress the traditional norm of love and sexuality. His rebellion against the past was in fact an attack on the present displaying itself in the aura of the past.

TANIZAKI'S WORKS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MODERN *REN'AI*

Even on the level of his fiction, Tanizaki did not succeed in freeing himself from his times. His fiction often faithfully follows the modern moral framework of love which Was propagated by the authors of early meiji. The relationship between Jōji and Naomi described in *Naomi* (*Chijin no Ai*, 1924) is a representative example.

The fact that Jōji brings up Naomi since she was fifteen reminds us of the friendship from childhood romances which we often encounter in Meiji love stories. Although Jōji is already an adult when he takes Naomi in, his attitude in terms of living with the girl whom he is strongly attracted to resembles those of the male protagonists in such Meiji fiction as *Lives of Meiji Young Students*, *Floating Clouds*, and *The Golden Demon* (Konjiki yasha, 1897-1902): in all of these, the protagonist and his partner starts to know each other as foster brother and sister. By living together as family members from childhood, these couples establish an intimate relationship with no sexual advances and thus realize the ideal of "Platonic love" outside the pleasure quarter setting.[29]

Jōji's effort to avoid a sexual relationship with Naomi at the beginning of their cohabitation clearly indicates his intention to actualize the modern ideal of spiritual love, which is considered appropriate for modern intellectual like himself. His words, "I don't want to make the first move frivolously, or in a way that might hurt her"[30] indicate that he considers female virginity very important, as was the case with many other male intellectuals at that time: they considered it indispensable for the realization of the new spiritual love.[31]

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[29] For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1998.
[30] Tanizaki 1986, 32.
[31] The concept of female virginity developed in Meiji Japan is discussed in

Jōji's effort to teach Naomi to be a "fine, respectable woman"[32] reminds us of the effort made by Bunzō in *Floating Clouds*, in which he tries to make his cousin, Osei, an intellectual by teaching her English and discussing social issues with her. Just like Osei, who does her best to be an obedient student at the beginning, Naomi studies English and other subjects in such a way as to comply with Jōji's expectations. However, in both cases, the heroines finally betray their lovers and begin to seek their own way of living. This might reflect the female protest against the norm of spirituality imposed by male intellectuals.

In this respect, Naomi, the heroine of a novel written forty-five years after *Floating Clouds*, goes further than Osei by enjoying many affairs with men other than her husband. Her promiscuity registers a strong protest against the norm of female chastity, which married women at that time were usually required to respect. Insofar as Naomi's attitude seems to claim freedom of love and sexuality from a female standpoint, this narrative goes beyond the convention of Meiji love stories.

However, Naomi still remains inside the framework of Meiji literature in the sense that the male protagonist, Jōji, insists on the existence of love between husband and wife even after his wife's betrayal. Contrary to the heroes of the *iro* tradition such as Hikaru Genji and Ariwara no Narihira who enjoyed polygamous relationships without a sense of sin, Jōji believes that monogamy is the ideal system of marriage, and the only one appropriate for modern civilized society. Unlike heroes with reputations as *iro-gonomi* in classical Japanese literature, Jōji consistently tries to be faithful to his wife, and thus strains to realize the modern ideal of monogamy introduced to Japan along with the new ideal of Western love.[33] In this sense, Jōji might be called an ideal "modern male," seeking a way to guarantee love between husband and wife. Unlike the "*iro*" aesthetic which tended to idealize affairs outside the marital relationship,

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Kawamura 1996.

[32] Tanizaki 1986, 40.

[33] In this respect, the title of the narrative could never been "Chijin no Iro," but "Chijin no Ai." The male protagonist in *The Key* also tries to seek love and eroticism within the marital relationship. His words, "Above all, I want to say I love her"(Tanizaki 1984:5) clearly indicate how important he thinks love between husband and wife is in his life. Thus, the absence of love and eroticism within the marital relationship must inevitably lead to divorce, as is depicted in *Some Prefer Nettles* (*Tade Kuu Mushi*, 1928). Through his own divorce and marriage, Tanizaki himself seems to believe in love between husband and wife which is accompanied by the modern ideal of monogamy. For a detailed discussion about the idealization of the marital relationship in Meiji literature, see Saeki 1998.

Jōji finds his one and only love inside the marital relationship, as a faithful husband for his unfaithful wife.

I do not intend to maintain that Tanizaki's writings become unattractive or meaningless when compared with the long tradition of *iro* aesthetics of Japanese literature. Part of the fascination of his literature comes from his attempts to transcend the modern repression of love and sexuality by the uninhibited expression of human erotic desire. In this respect, his works might be seen as a revival of the *iro* tradition, without his being conscious of it.[34] And it is his assault on sexual repression that makes his literature attractive to modern readers not only inside Japan, but also to those of other cultural backgrounds.

Then is *iro* better than *ren'ai*? It is impossible to say. It depends on the individual's view of life. In this essay, my only intention is to remind us all that when we discuss these issues, we should not forget the *iro* tradition and aesthetic which existed long before the emergence of the modern Japanese concept of love and sexuality.

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[34] Tanizaki's works do not always praise the love between husband and wife. The male protagonist in *Ashikari* (1932) seeks love outside the marital relationship due to his adoration of the heroine, Oyū. The lack of sexual intercourse between the married couple in *Ashikari* apparently follows the *iro* aesthetics which praises the erotic relationship outside the marital relationship. For a detailed discussion of this point, see Saeki 1998.

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