

THE THEME OF THE SELF IN MODERN JAPANESE
FICTION: STUDIES ON DAZAI, MISHIMA, ABÉ, AND KAWABATA

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

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THESIS



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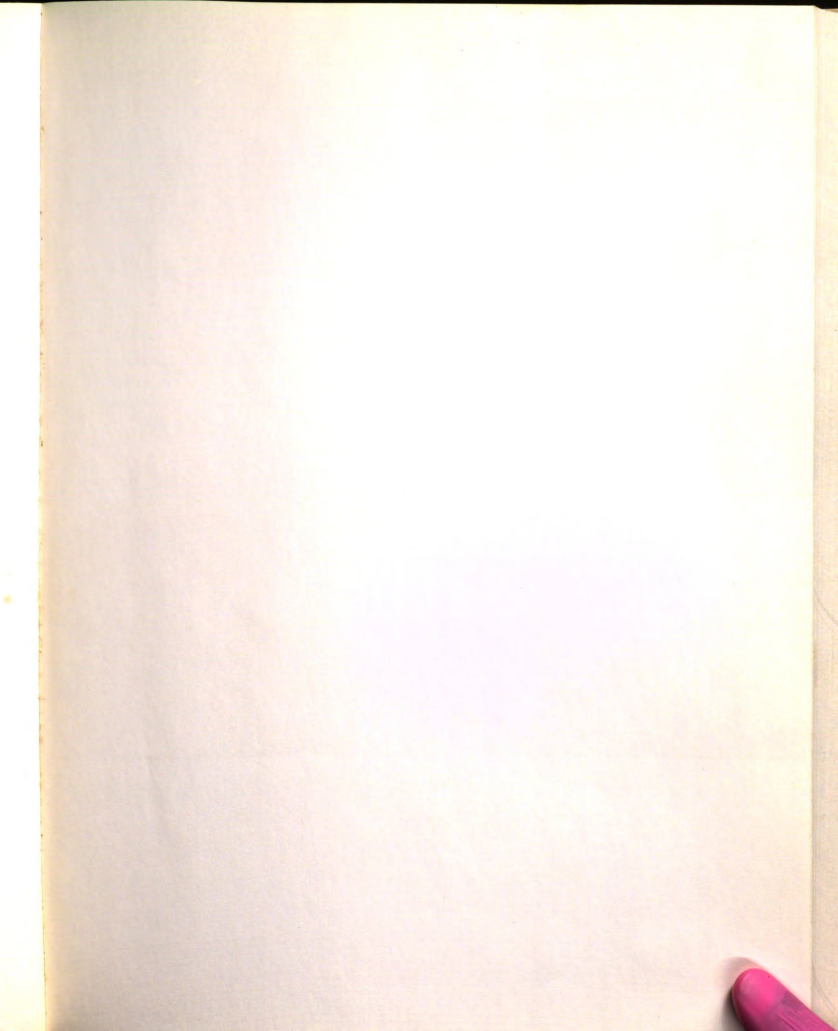
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ABSTRACT

THE THEME OF THE SELF IN MODERN JAPANESE FICTION: STUDIES ON DAZAI, MISHIMA, ABÉ, AND KAWABATA

By

Alyce H.K. Morishige

A predominant concern in the modern twentieth-century Japanese novel is the realistic psychological depiction of the self in a social, cultural, and individualistic context. This study examines the fictional portrayal of the self as a definable core of the individual, a psychological being who moves toward some type of fulfillment, and an entity determined and influenced by the social and cultural milieu in which it finds itself. These general criteria are applied to the works of four representative modern Japanese writers: Dazai Osamu, Mishima Yukio, Abé Kobo, and Kawabata Yasunari. The protagonists of these novelists are uncertain not only of their identification in their world, but also of their identities as selves. They wish to return to the elements of culture and tradition in which the self was once able to come to terms with its problems through identification with nature, meditative philosophy, traditional aesthetic practices, and viable social norms, but at the same time they find that these concerns do not suffice in themselves when they are ultimately faced with an encounter with the self.

The self in this study is seen from the point of view of humanistic psychology which visualizes the healthy individual as one who works toward self-actualization. The self-

actualizing individual puts into effect in his life, such qualities as creativity, growth motivation, acceptance of self, others, and nature, autonomy and freedom of will, ability to form non-destructive relationships with others, openness to experience, and a firm grounding in reality. The novels discussed in this study do not portray their main characters as positive, self-actualizing heroes. Rather, they are negative and pessimistic delineations of the self as anti-hero. These negative portrayals of the self are accompanied by ironic implications as the protagonists are presented as tragic victims of their self-concepts. These self-concepts fall into two major categories: the deceptive and the unaware. The self-deceptive individual feels that he has come to terms with life and himself when in actuality he has fallen short of his actual potentialities. The unaware individual feels that he has failed as a human being, but he has overlooked much in his life which could be considered as avenues to his self-actualization. There is also irony in the fact that the more the protagonists strive to have a self, the more they lose themselves in their strivings.

The protagonists of Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human and The Setting Sun fail to actualize themselves ostensibly because they are pitted unfairly against the rules of society. They seek self-destruction through drug-addiction, alcoholism, and suicide because they feel impotent in the face of a society that demands the wearing of masks instead of the real self. They are tragic and ironic figures who ultimately make themselves outcasts of their society, failing to realize that acceptance of their own

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gentleness and genuine feelings for others could have served as positive steps toward self-affirmation.

In Mishima Yukio's The Temple of the Golden Pavilion and Confessions of a Mask, the protagonists are destroyed by the very fantasies they have created to escape from what they feel is an intolerable and dangerous reality. Unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality, they are self-deceptive individuals who feel that they have achieved some mode of self-actualization when they have only become more firmly entrenched in their psychopathology.

Abé Kobo's The Woman in the Dunes and The Face of Another present central characters who seek values or standards outside of themselves. Their preoccupation with the scientific method ironically leads them away from life and reflects the tragedy of the alienated self.

Snow Country and Thousand Cranes by Kawabata Yasunari delineate the life styles of the aesthete-protagonist who takes flight from a meaningful existence and self into a world of heightened perceptions. Aesthetic values are substituted for real experiences, and the protagonists are victims of a world which is fated to remain as they see it.

Because all of the novels offer uniquely artistic treatments of the theme of the self, this study also attempts to determine from analyses of the structural and aesthetic elements of the works, how certain cultural determinants affect the literary presentation of the self and its actions.

The theme of the self in modern Japanese fiction revolves

Alyce H.K. Morishige

around the reasons why individuals fail to actualize themselves. It is a theme which is coupled with effective stylistic techniques, and therefore carries with it great dramatic urgency and literary impact.

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By

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1971

To Howard, who listens and cares,
in the good times and rough

With feeling
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the self has played an increasingly important part in modern Japanese literature since the flourishing of naturalism as a literary school in Japan between the years of the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905, and the end of the Meiji Era in 1912. There has been a lack of consensus as to what precisely constitutes naturalistic literature in Japan, but as W.F. Sibley points out, it has represented generally "a decisive orientation toward the realistic portrayal of the individual and his immediate surroundings."¹ The words "realistic" and "individual" must be emphasized here for although Japanese naturalism, like the Western, concerns the relationship of the individual to society as a conditioning force, this concern "seldom extends beyond the narrow scope of particular social institutions and conventions as they directly affect the characters."²

The modern twentieth-century Japanese novel has somehow

¹ W.F. Sibley, "Naturalism in Japanese Literature," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, (XXVIII:1968), p. 158.

² Ibid., pp. 158-159

gone beyond the limitations of post-Meiji naturalistic literature in that it has dealt more and more with the psychology of the individual who is not only estranged from his social environment, but who is also alienated from himself.³ The modern Japanese protagonist wishes to return to the elements of culture and tradition in which the self was once able to come to terms with its problems through identification with nature, meditative philosophy,⁴ traditional aesthetic practices, and viable social norms, but at the same time he finds that these concerns do not suffice in themselves when he is ultimately faced with an encounter with the self. He is then forced to see himself without the intermediary of certitudes, or even

³ An analysis of American critical reviews from 1956 to 1966 of the major novels of Dazai Osamu, Kawabata Yasunari, Abé Kobo, and Mishima Yukio shows two fundamental approaches: one approach emphasizes the universal theme of the psychological interest in the self, while the other approach implies that an understanding of the social and literary cultural traditions from which these novelists write is necessary for a full appreciation of the works.

⁴ Van Meter Ames, in his article "Aesthetics in Recent Japanese Novels," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, (XXIV: 1965), points out that Zenki, or the spirit of Zen in art, "the spontaneous naturalness of ordinary activity, free of form and flowing from the formless self," and the feeling of oneness with nature, found in Noh drama and other early Japanese literature, are "sadly absent" in "existential" Japanese novels such as Dazai's The Setting Sun and No Longer Human, Mishima's Confessions of a Mask, and Kawabata's Snow Country and Thousand Cranes. According to Ames, Zen and Existentialism differ in that one reflects a positive pre-industrial outlook on nature, while the other tries to cope with the insecurities of the industrial revolution which has "bulldozed" nature away.

of an "existential faith born of subjective immediacy,"⁵ the trust which he can place in his immediate sensory perceptions of the world. He strives to work out his identity, to say firmly, "I am," but he cannot say it with any spontaneous conviction because he is enmeshed in the psychological webs which have not only been spun out by himself, but which have also been largely predetermined by his culture.

This study, then, is concerned with the analyses of the theme of the self as it is treated in the novels of four representative modern Japanese novelists: Dazai Osamu,⁶ Mishima Yukio, Abé Kobo, and Kawabata Yasunari. These novelists all portray the Japanese anti-hero who is uncertain not only of his identification in his world, but also of his identity as a self. As one critic notes: "The philosophical problem of identity has deviled Western man for almost as long as we have a record of philosophical thought; but the treatment in Japanese fiction has the greater urgency and poignancy because the problem is not philosophical but national and immediate."⁷ The Japanese novelists write pessimistically of the self, the individual's conscious sense of who he is and what kinds of experiences he undergoes. Their pessimism is shown in the patterns of failure of the

⁵ Charles Glicksberg, The Self in Modern Literature (Pennsylvania:1963), p. xi.

⁶ All Japanese names of writers living in Japan used in this study will follow the conventional Japanese practice of giving the family name first; e.g., Abé Kobo instead of Kobo Abé.

⁷ James Korges, "Abé and Ooka: Identity and Mind-Body," Critique (X:1968), p. 132.

self. Irony is associated with pessimism as their protagonists become tragic victims of their self-concepts. These self-concepts fall into two categories: the deceptive and the unaware. The self-deceptive individual feels that he has come to terms with life and himself when in actuality he has fallen short of his potentialities. The unaware individual feels that he has failed as a human being, but he has overlooked much in his life which could be considered as avenues to his self-actualization. There is also irony in the fact that the more the protagonists strive to have a self, the more they lose themselves in their strivings.

In any discussion of the theme of the self, it would be misleading to omit or deny the importance of cultural influences. On the other hand, it would be equally fallacious to assert that the notion of self is entirely determined by cultural and social factors. Thus, the present study is essentially a two-fold attempt: first, it is interested in examining the fictional portrayal of the self as a definable core of the individual, a psychological entity which moves toward some type of fulfillment, and second, it tries to determine from analysis of the structural and aesthetic elements of the novels, how certain cultural determinants affect the literary presentation of the self and its actions.

Although many studies of cultural influences on personality have been undertaken, there is very little, at present, in Japanese psychology which formulates a non-cultural theory

of the self⁸ as comprehensively as the Western psychologist Abraham Maslow does in his conceptualizations of the self-actualizing individual. Maslow's major concern is the definition of the healthy self:

So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization (defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of mission (or call, fate, destiny, or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity,⁹ integration or synergy within the person).

In the ensuing chapters of this study, I shall examine the failure of the self in modern Japanese literature primarily in the light of a more descriptive and operational definition of Maslow's characteristics of the self-actualizing individual. The following outline, adapted from Heinz Ansbacher's chart on

⁸ Richard K. Beardsley, in "Personality Psychology," (1965) notes that the study of personality in culture had barely begun before World War II. Hence, Beardsley goes on, "it was something of a pioneering step to apply its concepts and techniques to the wartime analysis of Japan under the sponsorship of the United States government. Interest in Japan has continued to be keen among students of personality in postwar years, though actual research has been limited mostly to work done by a few persons qualified both in the Japanese language and in personality psychology. Thus, we are dealing with a field that is young in Japan and elsewhere and underpopulated with researchers. (p. 350)"

⁹ Abraham Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being (Princeton, 1962), p. 25.

Maslovian concepts, summarizes the major points in Maslow's theory of the actualizing self:

Object of Concern

Growth motivation

Self

Acceptance of self, others, nature.

Opinions of Others

Independence, autonomy, detachment.

Problems outside of Self

Focused on problems outside oneself.

Fellow Man

Effective interpersonal relationships and friendships; democratic rather than authoritarian character structure. Identification with mankind.

Mankind

Realities of Life

Comfortable relations with reality, efficient perceptions of it.

Universe

Oceanic feelings; cosmic experiences.

Ethics

Clarity in ethical norms and dealings, religious in social-behavioral way.

Esthetics

Freshness of appreciation of beauty, creativeness, spontaneity in inner life, thoughts, impulses.¹⁰

Maslow sees the self-actualizing person as one who is interested in growth and in life. Fulfillment of self is basically positive and life-enhancing. Living becomes a value in itself. The self-actualizing individual affirms life and the uniqueness of himself; he is not bound to a crippling dependence on the opinions of others, yet he is fully aware of the possibilities of meaningful interpersonal relationships with others. Not only is he free to experience the full range of

¹⁰ Heinz Ansbacher, "The Concept of Social Interest," Journal of Individual Psychology, (XXIV: 1968), p. 138.

his outer reality, but he is also able to come to terms with his own inner reality. His perceptions of reality are not pre-determined and distorted; they serve, instead, as creative and reliable modes of apprehending positive ethical, cosmic, and aesthetic experiences through his feelings.

Subjectively, says Maslow, one can confirm whether or not self-actualization or growth towards it takes place by examining one's feelings:

These are the feelings of zest in living, of happiness or euphoria, of serenity, of joy, of calmness, of responsibility, of confidence in one's ability to handle stresses, anxieties, and problems. The subjective signs of self-betrayal, of fixation, of regression, and of living by fear rather than by growth are such feelings as anxiety, despair, boredom, inability to enjoy, intrinsic guilt, intrinsic shame, aimlessness, feelings of emptiness, of lack of identity, etc.¹¹

Maslow's conceptualizations of the actualizing self bring into clearer relief the extent to which the self in contemporary Japanese literature is non-actualizing. The uncertain position of the individual in Japanese society, among other things, appears to give rise to what is a fundamentally negative element in Japanese thought. The philosopher Charles Moore calls attention to the fact that "the status of the individual in Japan is a problem that leaves one bewildered because of the widely varying interpretations available. The emphasis has always seemed to

¹¹ Maslow, op. cit., p. 157.

be on the group rather than on the individual, on duties rather than rights, on loyalty to group or hierarchical superior, and this emphasis has seemed to be stronger in Japan than in any other major tradition."¹² There are, Moore goes on, many indications of the concept of the absolute devotion to the unique social nexus of Japan:

There are many ... aspects or indications of this feature of Japanese culture: the hierarchical structure of society generally; the universal sense of social rank -- as evidenced even in language usage; the many-sided fact of and demand for discipline (inner and outer); and the over-all spirit and fact of authoritarianism (allegedly adopted from Confucianism but, if so, reaching an extreme degree that Confucianism would certainly have rejected) in all walks of life and in thought.¹³

Therefore, although there are philosophers like Nakamura Hajime¹⁴ who see the dominance of the individual over the group because of the Japanese emphasis on experience and the anti-intellectualistic rejection of concepts and universals, their arguments do not seem strong enough to override the basic problem of the individual in Japanese culture:

And yet, the groupism which unquestionably prevails from family to state and the monism which so many interpreters find in Japanese culture would seem to conflict seriously with individualism ... Part of the solution comes, perhaps, from the fact that, to the Japanese, the family is not a conceptual group or universal and that the state is not an institution or a universal comprehending all individuals as members,

¹² Charles Moore, "Editor's Supplement: The Enigmatic Japanese Mind," The Japanese Mind (Honolulu, 1967), p. 299.

¹³ Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁴ Nakamura Hajime, "Consciousness of the Individual and the Universal Among the Japanese," The Japanese Mind (Honolulu, 1967), pp. 179-200.

but an all-inclusive family in which the emperor is not a sovereign as such but a person, the head of the family of all the people -- and so superior, as one Japanese has said that the very problem of the relative status of the individual could not even arise. But the conflict between what seems to be the individualistic implications of these basic traits on one hand, and the tendencies or facts that are so anti-individualistic, on the other, remains and is seriously puzzling: just where does the individual stand?¹⁵

The ambiguity of the individual's position as a self in Japanese society has caused many literary personages to flee from a fundamentally uneasy situation and to resort even to the extreme of self-destruction. Itō Sei in a penetrating essay articulates this subjective reaction in Japanese thought, as well as another significantly pessimistic personality characteristic:

Self-destruction or flight and perceptions deriving from an awareness of death or emptiness seem to be two basic modes of Japanese thought, and they are similar in that both seek to apprehend life through a consciousness of death, but they pursue this objective in opposite directions. By this I mean that the former mode is a descent from real life in society, an escape from it, and seeks self-destruction as a means of experiencing life to the fullest. The latter mode, even where an invalid is concerned, involves an affirmation of life which may be likened to the desire to ascend from the murky depths of death to the sunlit surface of the sea of real life. This is the positive desire to go on living, to enjoy nature to the fullest, which derives from the knowledge that one is confronting death. Both modes, however, seek the ultimate sense of existence in the eternality of emptiness. Just as we feel insecure when our two feet are not firmly placed on the ground, danger makes us terribly anxious because we cannot be sure

¹⁵ Moore, op. cit., p. 300.

that our existence is linked to some absolute.¹⁶ The emphasis here is clear; the values of existence in contemporary Japanese thought appear not to come from a straightforward affirmation of life and the growth of the self in life, but rather are those which come from a pervading awareness of the evanescence of life and the imminence of death. The self, in this view, is less concerned with its actualization than with its destruction and with its flight from the contingencies of life. Insecurity and anxiety are "normal" states of the self because they reflect the human condition; affirmation of life comes only as a desperate reaction to the dark and ultimate negation of death.

Living with the idea of the imminence of death may be important existentially in that the self should not be deceived about the nature of all living things, that they must one day confront the reality of death. This is a position which Frederick Hoffman elaborates upon in his discussion of a major characteristic of literary existentialism:

Literary existentialism usually begins by denying that an appeal to religious forms can successfully explain the self; it begins with the naked fact of an isolated self. In these terms, the problem of the "absurd," which is after all what the violence of our century has given us, can be and must be considered. It is related to the defeat of rationalistic expectations, and it begins with the acceptance of such a defeat. In these circumstances, the entire

¹⁶ Itō Sei, "Modes of Thought in Contemporary Japan," Japan Quarterly (XII: 1965), pp. 510-511.

growth of the sensibility is seen with death as a terminus. At least for the purpose of present realization, there is nothing beyond death. It is important that there be nothing, because self-awareness ought not to be mitigated by promises or prior soothing knowledges. The terror of life which, at least in some of its manifestations, is consonant with the century's violent history. ... One endures, not because man is good and "will prevail," but because he exists, because he will die some time and meanwhile must live.¹⁷

But an abiding unconscious or conscious preoccupation with death and the emptiness of life is crippling to man. The self's perception of reality is predetermined and distorted by a predominantly negative and pessimistic preoccupation with the futility of a life which only recognizes death as an absolute. Not only is growth of the self difficult or even impossible in this view, but meaningful interrelationships with others in the world become burdensome and frightening. However, this is not to say that the process of self-actualization is entirely free from pain and the awareness of the negative aspects of life. As Maslow points out, the "loss of illusions and the discovery of identity, though painful at first, can be ultimately exhilarating and strengthening."¹⁸ A totally pessimistic approach to life can be criticized on the grounds that it is both incomplete and unrealistic, for "most people experience both tragedy and joy in varying proportion (and) any philosophy which leaves out either cannot be considered to be comprehensive."¹⁹

¹⁷ Frederick Hoffman, The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination (Princeton, 1964), p. 18.

¹⁸ Maslow, op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

The difference between the pessimistic and the optimistic approaches to life can be further clarified by Colin Wilson's thesis of the two "selves" of man which are continually at war with each other.²⁰ One of these selves, says Wilson, "is cautious, limited, materialistic, confined to the present." This self is also a "born slave and coward" and "only pain or inconvenience keep him on his feet." The other self is "geared entirely to purpose and evolution;" he

has glimpses of a joy that is beyond anything possible to the born coward: the ecstasy of power and freedom. He knows about the miseries and insecurities of human existence, about weakness and contingency. But he does not believe in them, since he is certain that freedom is an absolute power. He knows that man is only subject to pain and misery insofar as he allows himself to be dominated by the coward, and that most human misfortune is another name for stupidity and self-pity. Consequently, he is inclined to suspect that even death may be a disguised form of suicide, and that human contingency will prove to be an illusion in the light of ultimate freedom. In short, he is totally the optimist and the adventurer; he cannot believe that human reason, powered by the human will to freedom, can even encounter insurmountable obstacles.²¹

The underlying assumption of the present study is that the optimistic view of man, presented by Maslow and Wilson as a self which is capable of successfully controlling his existence and thereby finding positive values in living, is a

²⁰ Colin Wilson, Introduction to the New Existentialism (London, 1966), p. 180.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 180-181.

viable one and that the recurring pessimistic portrayals of the main characters in modern Japanese fiction are really delineations, consciously or unconsciously derived by the authors, of different patterns of the failure of the self.

Chapter Two analyzes two novels by Dazai Osamu, No Longer Human²² and The Setting Sun²³ in which the central characters fail to realize themselves ostensibly because they are pitted unfairly against the rules of society. Chapter Three is a discussion of the two protagonists in Mishima Yukio's novels, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion²⁴ and Confessions of a Mask,²⁵ who lose their selves in the fantasy existence of their own creation. Chapter Four is an explication of Abé Kobo's The Woman in the Dunes²⁶ and The Face of Another,²⁷ novels which view the self primarily via the nexus of scientific knowledge.

²² Dazai Osamu, No Longer Human (Norfolk, 1958).

²³ Dazai Osamu, The Setting Sun (Norfolk, 1956).

²⁴ Mishima Yukio, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (New York, 1959).

²⁵ Mishima Yukio, Confessions of a Mask (New York, 1968).

²⁶ Abé Kobo, The Woman in the Dunes (New York, 1965).

²⁷ Abé Kobo, The Face of Another (New York, 1966).

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Kawabata Yasunari's works Snow Country²⁸ and Thousand Cranes²⁹ which are about the self in the context of the Japanese aesthetic tradition, are analyzed in Chapter Five.

All of the novels studied offer uniquely artistic treatments of the theme of the self. This dissertation analyzes the novelists' use of aesthetic structure in the novels and lists the varied metaphors employed for the self. The use of Impressionism, whenever applicable, in the novels are discussed also, since the Japanese novel uses Impressionism as a major stylistic technique.

Finally, all of the works discussed here are from the vast field of translated literature from the Japanese. I am in agreement with G.L. Anderson's position that for a truly "unprovincial criticism," in the humanities, examples from Asian literature must be readily accessible for the Western reader.³⁰ Modern Japanese fiction is a rich field for the investigation of fiction theory and comparative fiction; the goal of the present study is to contribute a small, but important step not only to the understanding of a specialized area of fiction, but also to the broader appreciation of the complexities of literary art.

²⁸ Kawabata Yasunari, Snow Country (New York, 1968).

²⁹ Kawabata Yasunari, Thousand Cranes (New York, 1965).

³⁰ G.L. Anderson, "Asian Literature in Comparative Courses: Some Practical Problems," in Approaches to the Oriental Classics, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 224-225.

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CHAPTER TWO

"THE WORLD IS OUT OF JOINT": DAZAI

In 1947, Shayō,¹ Dazai Osamu's novel about a moribund aristocratic family, was published and received with great interest by the Japanese public.² The plot of Shayō, or The Setting Sun, revolves essentially around three former members of the aristocracy, Naoji, Kazuko, and their mother,³ who are unable to adjust to life in the post-war Japanese society. Naoji, the profligate son, is particularly portrayed with sympathy by the author and therefore can be considered as the protagonist of the novel. At a crucial point in the novel, Naoji's sister Kazuko, the central narrator of the story, discovers a journal written by Naoji, who is in a state of extreme narcotic addiction, in which he sums up what seem to be the reasons for the desperate direction of his life:

When I pretended to be precocious, people started the rumor that I was precocious. When I acted like

¹ Shayō, in Japanese, means "the setting sun." Whenever possible, I shall give the Japanese titles for the novels used in this thesis; however, textual references to the novels will always refer to the translated versions cited in my Introduction.

² The popularity of this novel made its title a tag phrase for Japan's post-war social and moral "twilight" conditions.

³ Kannishi Kiyoshi compares the structure of the society in the novel to a symphony by Mozart with the theme of dissolution

an idler, rumor had it I was an idler. When I pretended I couldn't write a novel, people said I couldn't write. When I acted like a liar, they called me a liar. When I acted like a rich man, they started the rumor I was rich. When I feigned indifference, they classed me as the indifferent type. But when I inadvertently groaned because I was really in pain, they started the rumor that I was faking suffering.

The world is out of joint.

Doesn't that mean in effect that I have no choice but suicide?⁴

Naoji commits suicide soon after the death of his mother who represents the last of the genuine aristocrats to her children; and Kazuko, a divorcee, sets about creating her own private social revolution by conceiving out of wedlock a child by Uehara, a dissolute writer friend of Naoji's.

Although stylistically different from The Setting Sun in that Ningen Shikkaku, or No Longer Human (1948), is written entirely in the form of a notebook confession, there are marked similarities in the male protagonists. Yozo, like Naoji, is addicted to drugs and attempts suicide on several occasions in order to escape from a "world that is out of joint." Yozo's notebooks contain the history of himself as a "social outcast":

People talk of "social outcasts." The words apparently denote the miserable losers of the world, the vicious ones, but I feel as though I have been a "social outcast" from

appearing on three levels, that of the displaced mother, the weak-strong daughter, and the completely helpless son, being interrelated into a fragile yet definite symphonic movement; see his article "Shayo no Mondai," in Dazai Kenkyu, ed. Okuno Takeo (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1963).

⁴ The Setting Sun, pp. 66-67.

the moment I was born. If ever I meet someone society had designated as an outcast, I invariably feel affection for him, an emotion which carries me away in melting tenderness.⁵

His notebooks end as he is released from a mental institution which he is committed to after his decision to give himself ten shots of morphine and to throw himself into a river is suspected. His thoughts upon his commitment are a shrill outcry against a world from which he finds himself inextricably separated:

I was no longer a criminal -- I was a lunatic. But no, I was definitely not mad. I have never been mad for even an instant. They say, I know, that most lunatics claim the same thing. What it amounts to is that people who get put into this asylum are crazy, and those who don't are normal.
 God, I ask you, is non-resistance a sin? I had wept at that incredibly beautiful smile Horiki showed me, and forgetting both prudence and resistance, I had got into the car that took me here. And now I had become a madman. Even if released, I would be forever branded on the forehead with the word "madman," or perhaps, "reject." Disqualified as a human being.
 I had now ceased utterly to be a human being.⁶

The theme of the failure of the individual in The Setting Sun and No Longer Human is linked closely with Dazai's interpretations of the Japanese social milieu in which Naoji and Yozo find themselves. Social life throughout Japan, as Richard Beardsley notes, is characterized by a strict adherence

⁵ No Longer Human, p. 67.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 166-167.

to the solidarity of group associations; to "be Japanese is to be involved in close, complex, and enduring relationships with one's family, one's neighbors, and other specific associates."⁷

In The Setting Sun, Naoji's intensity of feelings for his mother and his sister is apparent in the testament he leaves upon committing suicide:

I should have died sooner. But there was one thing: Mama's love. When I thought of that I couldn't die. It's true, as I have said, that just as man has the right to live as he chooses, he has the right to die when he pleases, and yet as long as my mother remained alive, I felt that the right to death would have to be left in abeyance, for to exercise it would have meant killing her too.

Now even if I die, no one will be so grieved as to do himself bodily harm. No, Kazuko, I know just how much sadness my death will cause you. Undoubtedly, you will weep when you learn the news -- apart, of course, from such ornamental sentimentality as you may indulge in -- but if you will please try to think of my joy at being liberated completely from the suffering of living and this hateful life itself, I believe that your sorrow will gradually dissolve.⁸

The measure of regard that Naoji has for his family is directly proportional to his painful awareness of his own inadequacies. He is unable even to have positive feelings about his love and concern for his mother and sister. Instead, he becomes increasingly self-punitive and despairing as he continues his confession

⁷ Richard K. Beardsley, "Personality Psychology," in Twelve Doors to Japan, ed. John Hall and R. Beardsley (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), pp. 361-362.

⁸ The Setting Sun, p. 158-159.

to Kazuko:

Kazuko, you are beautiful (I have always been proud of my beautiful mother and sister) and you are intelligent. I haven't any worries about you. I lack even the qualifications to worry. I can only blush -- like a robber who sympathizes with his victim! I feel sure that you will marry, have children,⁹ and manage to survive through your husband.

Like Naoji, Yozo's self exemplifies the influence of a Japanese social tradition which has stabilized group associations by its stern expectation of each member to "subordinate his personal wants to the requirements of the group."¹⁰ Yozo's deeply embedded negative self-image in part comes from his early perceptions of his relationships with his family. His interactions, too, with his family and servants are all involved in shaping his attitudes toward life, which comprise the crippling obsession to hide his true feelings and self from others:

As a child I had absolutely no notion of what others, even members of my own family, might be suffering or what they were thinking. I was aware only of my own unspeakable fears and embarrassments. Before anyone realized it, I had become an accomplished clown, a child who never spoke a single truthful word.

...

Again, I never once answered back anything said to me by my family. The least word of reproof struck me with the force of a thunderbolt and drove me almost out of my head. Answer back! Far from it, I felt convinced that their reprimands were without doubt voices of human truth speaking to me from eternities past; I was

⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁰ Beardsley, op. cit., p. 362.

obsessed with the idea that since I lacked the strength to act in accordance with this truth, I might already have been disqualified from living among human beings. This belief made me incapable of arguments or self-justification. Whenever anyone criticized me I felt certain that I had been living under the most dreadful misapprehension. I always accepted the attack in silence, though inwardly so terrified as almost to be out of my mind.¹¹

In the Japanese family, the individual's insecurity is further heightened by the authoritarian relationship which exists between father and child.¹² This relationship is especially noticeable in Yozo's recounting of an early childhood incident involving his father. Yozo is asked by his father, who is leaving for a short trip to Tokyo, what he would like as a gift. Unable to answer immediately, Yozo senses the extreme displeasure of his father and later furtively tries to "undo" his misdeed:

What a failure. Now I had angered my father and I could be sure that his revenge would be something fearful. That night as I lay shivering in bed I tried to think if there were still not some way of redressing the situation. I crept out of bed, tiptoed down to the parlor, and opened the drawer of the desk where my father had most likely put his notebook. I found the book and took it out. I rifled through the pages until I came to the place where he had jotted down our requests for presents. I licked the notebook pencil and wrote in big letters LION MASK. This accomplished I returned to my bed. I had not the faintest wish for a lion mask. In fact, I would actually have preferred a book. But it was obvious that Father wanted to buy me a mask, and my frantic desire to cater to his wishes and restore

¹¹ No Longer Human, p. 27.

¹² Mamoru Iga, "Cultural Factors in Suicide of Japanese Youth with Focus on Personality," Sociology and Social Research (XLVI:1961), p. 79.

his good humor had emboldened me to sneak into the parlor in the dead of night.

This desperate expedient was rewarded by the great success I had hoped for.¹³

The great emphasis and value which the Japanese place upon the achievement of approved behavior, especially on the successful accomplishment of acting correctly and honorably within the family and society may confer upon the "unsuccessful" self not only a sense of inadequacy but feelings of ineradicable guilt. Beardsley clarifies the position of guilt in the Japanese society as follows:

Before examining the link between guilt and achievement, we should note that early personality-in-culture studies included the Japanese among a group of cultures that were said to rely for social control entirely on shame (one's reaction to his image as measured in the eyes of others) and to lack any sanctions operating through a sense of guilt (self-judgment through internalized standards). Hence, to discover that guilt is also a means of social control (in addition to shame, which exists beyond any doubt) is a matter of more than passing theoretical interest, for it throws doubt on the validity of sweeping distinctions between shame cultures and guilt cultures, especially if guilt plays an important role. In accumulated Japanese psychological materials, feelings of remorse do, in fact, appear frequently and play a significant role. Hitherto, however, they have been difficult to identify because they are not linked to a universalist ethic using transcendent symbols comparable to Judeo-Christian concepts of sin and grace; Westerners accustomed to looking for such symbols and failing to find them in Japan have been unable to see that Japanese do suffer guilt or even to see that an ethical system exists.¹⁴

In the light of Beardsley's explanation of the general nature of

¹³ No Longer Human, p. 31.

¹⁴ Beardsley, op. cit., pp. 369-370.

guilt in Japanese culture,¹⁵ Naoji's and Yozo's association of their mother and father, respectively, with their feelings of remorse become understandable. "Mama's goodness," writes Naoji in his Journal, "is unsurpassed. Whenever I think of her, I want to cry. I will die by way of apology to Mama."¹⁶

¹⁵ A more specific explication of guilt in the Japanese and its effect upon the psyche of the individual may be seen from the standpoint of the following sociological, philosophical, and psychological studies. Sociologist James Moloney gives a succinct example of the Japanese social structure which is still extant in contemporary Japan in varying degrees ("Selections from Understanding the Japanese Mind," in Japanese Character and Culture, ed. B. Silberman / Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1962 /, pp. 379-380): "Let us recall the prescribed life pattern of an individual in Japan before the war: At birth he became nothing at all (mimpi). From infancy the Japanese child, especially the male, was taught and even forced to practice ko toward his father. Every Japanese had to preserve a carefully prescribed pattern of respect toward members of any higher caste than his own -- toward emperor, guild, employer; i.e., he was expected to perform jicho, or that which was expected of him. And he had, at all times, to perform giri; i.e., he had to show a sense of obligation toward family, society, and/or individuals." Nakamura Hajime presents a philosophical view which appears as a largely favorable social interpretation ("Consciousness of the Individual and the Universal Among the Japanese," p. 182): "The Japanese in general did not develop a clear-cut concept of the human individual qua individual as an objective unit like an inanimate thing, but the individual is always found existing in a network of human relationships. It means that the Japanese wanted to locate the individual in experience, not in the abstract. Largely because of the Japanese emphasis on concrete immediacy in experience, the individual was grasped as a living thing, and not as a bloodless, inanimate thing in the realm of the abstract. The living individual is always located in various kinds of human relationships." The psychological effects of living within the Japanese social structure, however, are not entirely conducive to developing a healthy self. William Caudill and Takeo Doi's studies ("Interrelations of Psychiatry, Culture and Emotion in Japan," in Man's Image in Medicine and Anthropology, ed. Iago Galdston / New York: International Universities Press, 1963 /, pp. 383-384) have shown that a predominant characteristic of patients undergoing psychotherapy in Japan is a pervading feeling of jibun ga nai, that is, of "not having a personal sense of self."

¹⁶ The Setting Sun, pp. 67-68.

... and the β parameter is estimated by the following equation:

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1033-1038.

Yozo, at the end of No Longer Human, learns from his brother who comes to release him from the asylum, that his father had died a month ago. Yozo's reaction to this information is one of unmistakable ambivalence; he feels both relief and intense guilt, and these feelings in turn result in a sense of an ultimate loss of his emotional integrity. Yozo's conscious and unconscious relationship with his father has been so intense that he feels part of himself draining away with his emotions when he learns about the death:

The news of my father's death eviscerated me. He was dead, that familiar, frightening presence who had never left my heart for a split second. I felt as though the vessel of my suffering had become empty, as if nothing could interest me now. I had lost even the ability to suffer.¹⁷

Guilt is always negative and crippling. That the particular social structure which Dazai's characters are in fosters guilt and prevents them from coping with their feelings of inadequacies and anxieties is a devastating social commentary. But what is more significantly tragic in Dazai's novels is that his protagonists have certain talents which they recognize as important parts of their selves, but which they do not cultivate because they have become cynical prisoners of their negative emotions.

Naoji is overly self-critical and self-conscious about his talent as a writer:

I can swear even before Goethe that I am a superbly gifted writer. Flawless construction,

¹⁷ No Longer Human, p. 168.

the proper leavening of humor, pathos to bring tears to the reader's eyes -- or else a distinguished novel, perfect of its kind, to be read aloud sonorously with the deference due it, this ... I claim I could write were I not ashamed. There's something fundamentally cheap about such awareness of genius.¹⁸

Yozo has confidence enough in his talent as an artist to be free from the opinions of others concerning his work:

Ever since elementary school days I enjoyed drawing and looking at pictures. But my pictures failed to win the reputation among my fellow students that my comic stories did. I have never had the least trust in the opinions of human beings, and my stories represented to me nothing more than the clown's gesture of greeting to his audience; they enraptured all of my teachers but for me they were devoid of the slightest interest. Only to my painting, to the depiction of the object ... did I devote any real efforts of my original though childish style.¹⁹

However, Yozo turns away from his interest in painting because of the threat which it represents to him; his real talents are capable of revealing too much of himself to others. He does some self-portraits and finds that

The pictures I drew were so heart-rending as to stupefy even myself. Here was the true self I had so desperately hidden. I had smiled cheerfully; I had made others laugh; but this was the harrowing reality. I secretly affirmed this self, was sure that there was no escape from it, but naturally I did not show my pictures to anyone except Takeichi. I disliked the thought that I might suddenly be subjected to their suspicious vigilance, when once the nightmarish

¹⁸ The Setting Sun, p. 63.

¹⁹ No Longer Human, p. 54.

reality under the clowning was detected. On the other hand, I was equally afraid that they might not recognize my true self when they saw it but imagine that it was just some new twist to my clowning -- occasion for additional snickers. This would have been the most painful of all. I therefore hid the pictures in the back of my cupboard.²⁰

The attitudes of Yozo and Naoji are ineluctably defeatist. They are all too aware of the ills of society, of other people; they are also all too conscious of their weaknesses and vulnerability, but too little cognizant of the possibility that their own weaknesses as well as those of others need to be more clearly examined and evaluated. Their egocentricity prevents them from expanding themselves, from becoming self-actualizing individuals. They live less in the "real world of nature" and more "in the verbalized world of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs and stereotypes that most people confuse with the real world."²¹

Naoji, for example, has not only completely convinced himself that he is a "victim" of the world, but he has also convinced his sister who goes as far as to defend her brother as a "beautiful" person because he is victimized: "In the present world," she writes to Uehara, "the most beautiful thing is a victim."²² But what Kazuko does not see is that Naoji's confession is one of confusing abstractions ("What is self-esteem? Self esteem! It is impossible for a human being --no,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

²¹ Abraham Maslow, op. cit., p. 137.

²² The Setting Sun, p. 174.

a man -- to go on living without thinking 'I am one of the elite,' 'I have my good points,' etc."), destructive expectations ("I detest people, am detested by them. Test of wits. Solemnity = feeling of idiocy."), and unshakeable cynicism ("Anyway, you can be sure of one thing, a man's got to fake just to stay alive.")²³ Naoji is a victim of a different sort, not of the world, but more of his own self-pity and paranoia:

I wonder if we are to blame, after all. Is it our fault that we were born aristocrats? Merely because we were born in such a family, we are condemned to spend our whole lives in humiliation, apologies, and abasement, like so many Jews.²⁴

He is also hopelessly entangled in the meshes of sentimentality and meaningless egocentric pride:

In the last analysis my death is a natural one -- man cannot live exclusively for principles. I have one request to make of you, which embarrasses me very much. You remember the hemp kimono of Mother's which you altered so that I could wear it next summer? Please put it in my coffin. I wanted to wear it.

...
Once more, good-bye.

Kazuko.

I am, after all, an aristocrat.²⁵

Yozo, also, lives in a world of abstractions and beliefs. He has the ability to "reason" with himself, to arrive at rational

²³ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 158.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

conclusions through analytical thinking. This ability is shown when he reacts to his friend Horiki's admonishment that he should stop "fooling around with women" because "society won't stand for more."

What, I wondered, did he mean by "society"? The plural of human beings? Where was the substance of this thing called "society"? I had spent my whole life thinking that society must certainly be something powerful, harsh and severe, but to hear Horiki talk made the words "Don't you mean yourself?" come to the tip of my tongue. But I held the words back, reluctant to anger him.

...

From then on, however, I came to hold, almost as a philosophical conviction, the belief: What is society but an individual?²⁶

Yozo's conception of society is arrived at rationally and this gives him a momentary sense of freedom from his fear of others:

Society. I felt as though even I were beginning at last to acquire some vague notion of what it meant. It is the struggle between one individual and another, a then-and-there struggle, in which the immediate triumph is everything. Human beings cannot conceive of any means of survival except in terms of a single then-and-there contest. They speak of duty to one's country and suchlike things, but the object of their efforts is invariably the individual, and, even once the individual's needs have been met, again the individual comes in. The incomprehensibility of society is the incomprehensibility of the individual. ... This was how I managed to gain a modicum of freedom from my terror at the illusion of the ocean called the world. I learned to behave rather aggressively, without the endless anxious worrying I knew before, responding as it were to the needs of the moment.²⁷

Yozo finds, too, that abstractions formed about the

²⁶ No Longer Human, pp. 119-120.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 124-125.

world release him from the frightening power of individual concrete things which, when encountered in immediate experiences, call forth feelings and sensations that are difficult to control:

This too I came to understand. I had been so terrorized by scientific statistics (if ten million people each leave over three grains of rice from their lunch, how many sacks of rice are wasted in one day; if ten million people each economize one paper handkerchief a day, how much pulp will be saved?) that whenever I left over a single grain of rice, whenever I blew my nose, I imagined that I was wasting mountains of rice, tons of paper, and I fell prey to a mood dark as if I had committed some terrible crime. ... I felt pity and contempt for the self which until yesterday had accepted such hypothetical situations as eminently factual scientific truths and was terrified by them. This shows the degree to which I had bit by bit arrived at a knowledge of what is called the world.²⁸

However, he realizes that all of his rationalizations and his ability to generalize about the "real nature of the world," had not changed anything within himself: "Having said that, I must now admit that I was still afraid of human beings, and before I could meet even the customers in the bar I had to fortify myself by gulping down a glass of liquor."²⁹

Naoji and Yozo are clearly aware of themselves as individual and social failures. As writers of their notebooks, they engage in an endless rhetoric of introspection, but their activity is nonetheless only rhetoric and affords them no true relief or insight into themselves. Their eloquence in describing their plight provides no illumination leading to positive solutions to

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

life, to an achievement of a healthy acceptance of self and living. Thus, Naoji's analogy of himself as a plant living in an inimical environment is a description without any constructive significance:

It is painful for the plant which is myself to live in the atmosphere and light of this world. Somewhere an element is lacking which would permit me to continue. I am wanting. It has been all I could do to stay alive up to now.³⁰

Having described his feelings and his assessment of his present state of existence, Naoji can go no further into an understanding of the element he lacks to survive in the world.

Yozo similarly recognizes that his unhappiness is due to his own actions, yet he unconditionally "accepts" himself as an entirely helpless being:

My unhappiness stemmed entirely from my own vices, and I had no way of fighting anybody. If I had ever attempted to voice anything in the nature of a protest, even a single mumbled word, the whole of society ... would undoubtedly have cried out flabbergasted, "Imagine the audacity of him talking like that!" Am I what they call an egoist? Or am I the opposite, a man of excessively weak spirit? I really don't know myself, but since I seem in either case to be a mass of vices, I drop steadily, inevitably, into unhappiness, and I have no specific plan to stave off my descent.³¹

Herbert Read provides an interesting insight in his chapter on "The Frontiers of the Self" as to what Dazai's protagonists may be involved in when presenting their notebook

³⁰ The Setting Sun, p. 154.

³¹ No Longer Human, pp. 157-158.

introspections. "The self," says Read, "is a fluctuating element" which cannot be focused at any point by an individual or by artistic media, such as portraiture or literary description. What individuals abstract at any moment as the "self" is merely a fixed point where their "attention forces certain images to converge and constitute a 'state of consciousness,' a moment of reflection." This state of consciousness, Read points out further, is "not a consciousness of a 'self,' but only of certain points on the frontiers of the self."

We therefore cannot know a self; we can only betray our self, and we do this, as the phrase indicates, fragmentarily and unconsciously. We betray ourselves in our gestures, in the accents of our speech, in our handwriting, and generally in all those forms or configurations (Gestalten) which automatically register the track of the stream of consciousness. All art is in this sense an unconscious self-betrayal, but it is not necessarily an awareness of the self betrayed.³²

Thus Read provides a possible explanation for the peculiar emptiness of Naoji and Yozo's confessions of themselves as failures. Their confessions are actually fragmentary self-conscious verbal posturings which are put on for the benefit of their readers. They are not only telling their readers that they have been putting on a "fake" self before everyone in their world, but they are also betraying to their audience that their confessions are parts of their false selves. Their real selves are still hidden from themselves and their readers; selves

³² Herbert Read, Icon and Idea (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 111.



do not automatically or necessarily appear with the protagonists' relating or "confessing" what has happened in their lives.

The confessions, then, in the notebooks of The Setting Sun and No Longer Human center around their writers' externalizations of their conscious selves. That is, Naoji and Yozo find a convenient scapegoat in a "world that is out of joint" to which they may attribute their loss of a personal sense of selfhood. Although they acknowledge that they have a role to play in creating their own unhappiness because of certain undefined "deficiencies" within themselves, they would prefer to project the blame onto a callous, unreasonable, and hostile society and view it as the major cause of their hateful lives. Society, and the protagonists do realize that individuals comprise this abstraction, inflicts unbearable suffering upon Naoji and Yozo. Society, writes Naoji, is capable of making an odious remark like "All men are alike." He evaluates this ambiguous phrase and judges it in terms of what it means to himself as an aristocrat:

All men are alike.

What a servile remark that is. An utterance that degrades itself at the same time that it degrades men, lacking in all pride, seeking to bring about the abandonment of all effort. Marxism proclaims the superiority of the workers. It does not say that they are all the same. Democracy proclaims the dignity of the individual. It does not say that they are all the same. Only the lout will assert, "Yes, no matter how much he puts on, he's just a human being, same as the rest of us."

Why does he say "same." Can't he say "superior"?
The vengeance of the slave mentality!

The statement is obscene and loathsome. I believe

that all of the so-called "anxiety of the age"-- men frightened by one another, every known principle violated, effort mocked, happiness denied, beauty defiled, honor dragged down -- originates in this one incredible expression.³³

Thus, by making himself a victim of philistine society, one which overlooks the human qualities of the individual and ignores the differences of levels of sensitivity in individual men, Naoji, although he admits that he "must be weak,"³⁴ that he would be "better off dead" because he lacks "the capacity to stay alive,"³⁵ is a creature of his imagination. His dramatic pronouncement "I am, after all, an aristocrat," shows that his true identity, the thing that is destroyed when he dies, is something outside of himself -- not a man, but a style of life and a kind of meaning.

Yozo imagines himself as part of a category of being that is outside of himself. He is always conscious of the fact that he is the son of a "rich man" and this consciousness comes at a time when one would expect a more dire concern with the meaning of his existence. Yozo and Tsuneko, "a lover of one night," both decide to commit double suicide. After they have a light meal, she asks him to pay for it and Yozo finds to his dismay that he has only three copper coins, less than a penny, in his wallet. Tsuneko asks him if that is all the money he has, and Yozo's reaction to her remark is one of profound and devas-

³³ The Setting Sun, pp. 156-157.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

tating humiliation:

Her voice was innocent, but it cut me to the quick. It was painful as only the voice of the first woman I had ever loved could be painful. "Is that all?" No, even that suggested more money than I had -- three copper coins don't count as money at all. This was a humiliation I could not live with. I suppose I had still not managed to extricate myself from the part of the rich man's son. It was then I myself determined, this time as a reality, to kill myself.³⁶

But like Naoji, Yozo though conscious of his extreme vulnerability to his "role" as a person who might be someone respectable in his society, nonetheless blames any unhappiness that his weaknesses engender unto the individuals who make up the world, on society:

One of my tragic flaws is the compulsion to add some sort of embellishment to every situation -- a quality which has made people call me at times a liar -- but I have almost never embellished in order to bring myself any advantage; it was rather that I had a strangulating fear of that cataclysmic change in the atmosphere the instant the flow of a conversation flagged, and even when I knew that it would later turn to my disadvantage, I frequently felt obliged to add, almost inadvertently, my word of embellishment, out of a desire to please born of my usual desperate mania for service. This may have been a twisted form of my weakness, an idiocy, but the habit it engendered was taken full advantage of by the so-called honest citizens of the world.³⁷

Dazai's protagonists know that there are ways to lead them out of their miserable existence, but these are all negative ways. They find that self-destruction is the fastest

³⁶ No Longer Human, p. 87.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 106-107.

recourse they are able to take and destruction comes in the form of drug addiction, alcoholism, and finally, suicide. Drug addiction, in particular, represents to Naoji and Yozo the prophetic quality of death-in-life. In Naoji's notebook, a short list of different types of drugs follows, in glaring juxtaposition, an original poem on the burgeoning of life:

(New Year's Poem)
 The years!
 Still quite blind
 The little stork-chicks
 Are growing up.
 Ah! how they fatten!

Morphine, atromol, narcopon, philipon, pantopon,
 pabinal, panopin, atropin.³⁸

Yozo plays a word game of "tragic and comic nouns" with a friend, and in a bantering way reveals his morbid concern with drugs and death:

I began the questioning. "Are you ready?
 What is tobacco?"
 "Tragic," Horiki answered promptly.
 "What about medicine?"
 "Powder or pills?"
 "Injection."
 "Tragic."
 "I wonder. Don't forget, there are hormone
 injections too."
 "No, there's no question but it's tragic.
 First of all, there's a needle -- what
 could be more tragic than a needle?"
 "You win. But, you know, medicines and doctors
 are, surprisingly enough comic. What about
 death?"³⁹

Alcoholism in Dazai's novels is less of a serious matter than

³⁸ The Setting Sun, p. 68.

³⁹ No Longer Human, p. 141.

drug addiction which leads to the ultimate destruction of the individual through suicide. Naoji's and Yozo's suicides fall in the first of the three "major types of suicide in modern literature," as categorized by Frederick Hoffman --⁴⁰ "To take one's own life because one cannot 'simplify' himself is to act from weakness in a sense, but primarily from an excessive awareness of weakness." But what is more relevant here is that their suicides constitute an act of passive rebellion.

As George De Vos notes, "in both China and Japan suicide was a means of protest against rigidities in the social system" and "it has been so used by women as well as men in situations in which no other form of rebellion seemed possible."⁴¹ But the nature of rebellion, like that of guilt, is "negative and

⁴⁰ Frederick Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), pp. 25-26. The second type of suicide, according to Hoffman, is that which is "an act of pure strength," to kill oneself to prove that one can do so; or "more than that, to defy the fear of death." The third type of suicide is the "underground man who retreats to the ultimate 'cave,' 'hole,' 'cellar,' from motives of the ultimate despair, or merely from a sense of the absurdity of continuing."

⁴¹ George De Vos, "Deviancy and Social Change: A Psycho-cultural Evaluation of Trends in Japanese Delinquency and Suicide," in Japanese Culture, ed. Robert J. Smith and Richard K. Beardsley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 162-163. De Vos also stresses that in Japan, "occupational achievement and success symbolically keep an individual bound to life" and lead to the internalization of guilt. "Failure, conversely, is construed by some as being cut off from a life purpose and leads to an empty, pointless life."

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destructive, whatever else it may prove to be."⁴² The act of suicide as rebellion is for Naoji and Yozo, the ultimate confession of their pessimism concerning the nature of life. They do not affirm any positive values in life. Theirs is a death which derives from their excessive awareness of themselves as failures in a world which they feel is stronger than they in its hostility and destructiveness.

Rollo May sees a close relationship between anxiety and death. Anxiety, as defined by May, is the "individual's apprehension at a threat to values which he identifies with his existence as a self." Since the ultimate threat causing anxiety is death itself, the "only way to meet the anxiety of death in the long run is to have values that are stronger than the fact of death."⁴³ The values of Dazai's protagonists are built on precarious foundations. They are fragile structures upon which inordinately heavy odds are placed.

Naoji's value is to qualify as a "friend of the people" at all costs. To achieve this goal, he resorts to liquor and

⁴² Philip Hallie, "Indirect Communication and Human Existence," in Restless Adventure: Essays on Contemporary Expressions of Existentialism, ed. Roger L. Shinn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 33. Hallie notes that a characteristic of literary and philosophical existentialism is the spirit of rebellion that pervades it.

⁴³ Rollo May, "Existentialism, Psychotherapy, and the Problems of Death," in Restless Adventure, ed. Roger L. Shinn (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 210-211.

drugs, and even to the sacrifice of his family feelings:

I had to forget my family. I had to oppose my father's blood. I had to reject my mother's gentleness. I had to be cold to my sister. I thought that otherwise I would not be able to secure an admission ticket for the rooms of the people.⁴⁴

But all of his attempts to be accepted by others fail and Naoji concludes that he is a "defective type," with no other recourse but to seek death:

It may be true that in any society defective types with low vitality like myself are doomed to perish, not because of what they think or anything else, but because of themselves. I have, however, some slight excuse to offer. I feel the overwhelming pressure of circumstances which make it extremely difficult for me to live.⁴⁵

Yozo's values are also like Naoji's in that he desires to be both liked and respected by others, but his conception of the respected individual is so negative that he recoils from the thought of having to pay the price for respect:

My definition of a "respected" man was one who had succeeded almost completely in hoodwinking people, but who was finally seen through by some omniscient, omnipotent person who ruined him and made him suffer a shame worse than death. Even supposing I could deceive most human beings into respecting me, one of them would know the truth, and sooner or later other human beings would learn from him. What would be the wrath and vengeance of those who realized how they had been tricked! That was a hair-raising thought.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The Setting Sun, p. 154.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 155.

⁴⁶ No Longer Human, p. 33

Paradoxically, however, Yozo's whole life is one of paying the price of not having the respect of himself. The "omniscient, omnipotent person" who sees through and ultimately ruins him, ironically, is Yozo himself.

Both Naoji and Yozo are blind to the psychological fact that "it is not impossible to be a man,"⁴⁷ and that it is not impossible to have a self. They cannot see behind the brutal forces of society and their helpless deterministic view of personal weaknesses, into a world of objective nature to which they might hopefully give themselves. Instead, they look to death as the solution to all that is intolerable in their lives.⁴⁸

The discussion of Naoji and Yozo thus far has been on the literal level; that is, the critical analysis has been primarily focused on their problems of selfhood from the points of view of psychology and sociology.⁴⁹ Naoji and Yozo as

⁴⁷ Wylie Sypher, Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 164-165.

⁴⁸ An autobiographical comment can be made here about Dazai's own suicide and his popularity as a writer. Yamagishi Gaishi in his chapter on "The Smiling Death Face" (Ningen Dazai Osamu / Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1962) mentions that in 1948, the year Dazai committed suicide with his mistress, many young people were grieved by the death of this modern author. Yamagishi surmises that it was this spectacular suicide which attracted many young readers to Dazai's works later on, particularly those who were caught up in the uncertainties and anxieties of the war-torn years of Japan. Yamagishi's premise is that they undoubtedly found in Dazai a spokesman for their own loss of identity as citizens of a nation suffering a shattering defeat in a war which they believed carried their pride and honor.

⁴⁹ The discussion of the selfhood of Naoji and Yozo thus far has centered around them as revealing their problems in their

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protagonists, however, do not merely hold the readers' interest as realistic portrayals of individuals who are particularized by their psychological and socio-cultural problems. They are more than individuals in that they hold dramatic significance as literary types that are a part of a larger tradition in modern literature. These protagonists fit into the literary tradition of the superfluous hero and the underground man, or the more general type of the anti-hero.

Modern literature has crystallized the creation of the superfluous man or the underground man to the extent that although he is not a stereotype exactly, he is capable of undergoing certain well-cut definitions. Marleigh Grayer Ryan, for example, uses the term "superfluous hero" in a sense that is restricted "to characters in fiction of the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present,"⁵⁰ although she notes the possibility of categorizing many earlier heroes of both European and Japanese literature as superfluous or positive.

Characters are classified as superfluous, says Miss Ryan, in that they are "failures in life." The superfluous hero is the man who lacks all the qualities of the positive

notebook confessional. It is of interest here to find that Edward Seidensticker posed the question of why "the Japanese should have put relatively so much more emphasis upon confession and lyricism and so much less upon meaty drama and narrative than we have" in his article "The Unshapen Ones," (Japan Quarterly /XI:1964/ p. 189). He suggests that the answer to this question can be supplied by sociologists and psychologists. Caudill and Doi (See supra, p.390) in their psychoanalytic study of Japanese patients have observed that the Japanese generally have a difficult time expressing their personal problems verbally and find it easier to write in notebooks.

⁵⁰ Marleigh Grayer Ryan, Japan's First Modern Novel (New York:

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hero who is "the man of action, assertion, and aggressiveness;" the positive hero is a conglomerate type who "sets a goal for himself -- economic, political, moral, or emotional --" and proceeds to move toward its successful attainment.⁵¹ In Maslow's psychology of being, the positive hero can be seen as one who moves toward self-actualization. The superfluous man, on the other hand, is blatantly non-actualizing in his dramatic portrayal. If he attempts to lead others, circumstances thwart his efforts; when he falls in love, there is little chance of fruition; when he thinks he has found a cause or philosophic system which he might believe in, he will eventually find it deficient or reject it completely.

The superfluous hero's personality is generally one of potential attractiveness, and he is usually both sensitive, intelligent, and artistic. However, his inevitable affinity for either material or spiritual failure may so cloud his outlook on life that he appears not only stupid and unsympathetic to others, but also even to himself. Miss Ryan gives a composite portrait of the superfluous hero in the following:

The superfluous hero has become a symbol of the sensitive, intellectual, or artistic man who lives outside the mainstream of modern life. He cannot find faith or philosophy or love in his world because the old beliefs have

Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 178. The term "superfluous hero" became widespread in Russian and world literature after Turgenev's story, "The Diary of a Superfluous Man," was published in 1850.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 179.

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proved mortal and the new ones are not yet acceptable. The faith he seeks may be religious, intellectual, or emotional. The love he needs will take him from his confined universe, that is, from himself, and bring him closer to other people or even to one other person. He must learn to give -- to a cause, to an ideal, or to a person. He must learn to sympathize, to see why the positive man wants what he wants. The superfluous man pictures all life as a reflection of himself, as if he were somehow looking at a distorted mirror in which his image filled every inch. As a consequence he cannot fully appreciate anyone else; in some cases he is led to reject everyone completely. Some superfluous heroes are merely quiet and ineffectual; others are completely mad, exhibiting the whole range of classic paranoiac symptoms favored by the literary world. Most are situated somewhere in between.⁵²

Apart from the more general qualities contained in the composite picture of the superfluous man are the more specific elements brought out in the description of the underground man. Charles Glicksberg's explication of the underground man⁵³ is that of a brooding intellectual who "dwells masochistically on his sense of inferiority, the injuries he has been made to suffer; he is a curious mixture of submissiveness and vindictiveness, humiliated impotence and assertive pride."⁵⁴ These qualities are especially noticeable in one of the principal manifestations of the underground man in modern literature: the clown image.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., p. 182.

⁵³ Charles I. Glicksberg, The Self in Modern Literature (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963). The underground man as a "literary type" is a descendant of the protagonist in Dostoevski's influential work, Notes from the Underground, published in 1864.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 182.

⁵⁵ Frederick Hoffman, Samuel Beckett, p. 40. The three

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The clown figure is predominant in Dazai's novels;⁵⁶ Naoji, for example, is a character with a compulsive masochism, which takes the form of a distorted sense of "affection" for others, that forces him to make a fool of himself no matter how painful this role is to him. His sense of inferiority reaches over into the one talent which he can claim to be genuine in himself:

I will write my novel clumsily, deliberately making a botch of it, just to see a smile of genuine pleasure on my friend's face -- to fall on my bottom and patter off scratching my head. Oh, to see my friend's happy face!

What is this affection which would make me blow the toy bugle of bad prose and bad character to proclaim, "Here is the greatest fool in Japan! Compared to me, you're all right -- be of good health!"⁵⁷

For Yozo, the role of the clown is related to his egocentricity:

I am convinced that human life is filled with many pure, happy, serene examples of insincerity,

principal literary metaphors of the marginal self, says Hoffman, are the Christ figure, the underground man, and the clown, a general image which also includes the poet, the artist, the acrobat, and the juggler.

⁵⁶ An example of the autobiographical criticism common in Japanese literary analysis is Nojima Hidekatsu's article "Dazai Bungaku no Eikyo" (Dazai Kenkyu, ed. Okuno Takeo) which mentions Dazai's own need to please people as a direct influence on his utilization of the artificial poses and burlesques which his characters assume in his novels. Dazai's obsession with the artistic personality in his works, according to Nojima, was a manifestation of his attempts to seek out his personal salvation through his created acts. In this sense, Nojima compares Dazai to Jean-Paul Sartre who also sought "redemption" through the artistic mode.

⁵⁷ The Setting Sun, p. 63.

truly splendid of their kind -- of people deceiving one another without (strangely enough) any wounds being inflicted, of people who seem unaware even that they are deceiving one another. But I have no special interest in instances of mutual deception. I myself spent the whole day long deceiving human beings with my clowning.⁵⁸

The contrast between the positive hero and the underground man is seen most strikingly in their respective physical appearances. One can point to the example of Prince Genji of the twelfth-century novel, The Tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. Genji, the epitome of the positive Japanese literary hero, is renown for his physical attractiveness. In the novel, Genji's command "over his world is symbolized by his charismatic beauty, a 'radiance' illuminating every person and everything it encounters."⁵⁹

On the other hand, the description of Yozo by the unnamed novelist who "edits" Yozo's notebooks is that of Yozo's childhood photograph showing a child of incredible physical repulsiveness;

It is a monkey. A grinning monkey-face. The smile is nothing more than a puckering of ugly wrinkles. The photograph reproduces an expression so freakish, and at the same time so unclean and even nauseating, that your impulse is to say, "What a wizened, hideous little boy!"⁶⁰

⁵⁸ No Longer Human, p. 37.

⁵⁹ Earl Miner, "Some Thematic and Structural Features of Genji Monogatari," Monumenta Nipponica (XXIV:1969), p. 6.

⁶⁰ No Longer Human, p. 14.

A second photograph reveals Yozo as a youth who is "extraordinarily handsome," but whose expression produces "an unpleasant sensation of complete artificiality," an impression of one not "belonging to a living human being." The viewer concludes: "I have never seen a young man whose good looks were so baffling."⁶¹

Besides his masochism and his lack of physical appeal, the underground man is, in Glicksberg's words, a "bitter out-cast, a denizen of the universe of the absurd, unable to make any sense of the world in which he lives."⁶² He is pathetically out of touch with reality, a man who feels left out of the circle of ordinary human discourse. Yozo is an instance of one who lives in "hell" because he feels that there is a secret key, forever hidden from him by others or by circumstances, to surviving in the world:

I find it difficult to understand the kind of human being who lives, or who is sure he can live, purely, happily, serenely while engaged in deceit. Human beings never did teach me that abstruse secret. If I had only known that one thing I should never have had to dread human beings so, nor should I have opposed myself to human life, nor tasted such torments of hell every night.⁶³

The "universe of the absurd," the world which Dazai's protagonists conceive of as being "out of joint" is only partly the real world; it is also partly a world which they, as self-

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶² Glicksberg, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁶³ No Longer Human, pp. 37-38.



conscious creatures of imagination, fashion. Hoffman cogently explains what happens in the "soul" of the underground man:

In effect, the underground of the narrator is his soul, the quality and character of his soul; it is the extreme of ugly introspection. Instead of projecting beyond it, he has introjected, finding in consciousness, in sensitivity, a value in itself, and thus welcoming the "disease" an over-reaching consciousness stimulates.⁶⁴

Language plays a large part in the underground man's world of extreme self-consciousness. For the underground man, "the quality of the self is contained within the language it uses."⁶⁵ The inability to verbalize a simple phrase may be a portent of "hell," as it is for Naoji:

A sensation of burning to death. And excruciating though it is, I cannot pronounce even the simple words "it hurts." Do not try to shrug off this portent of a hell unparalleled, unique in the history of man, bottomless!⁶⁶

Naoji mistakenly equates strength with coarseness in language usage and soon discovers that others are offended by his condescending affectation:⁶⁷

I wanted to become coarse, to be strong -- no, brutal. I thought that was the only way

⁶⁴ Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁶ The Setting Sun, p. 62.

⁶⁷ Yasuoka Shotaro, another autobiographical critic, relates Dazai's own concern with language and its effect on his literary style in the article "Mijika na Kotoba" (Dazai Kenkyu, ed. Okuno Takeo): "In order to avoid an exaggerated style, Dazai sought to write novels using the language of the self. This fact makes one

I could qualify myself as a "friend of the people."

I became coarse. I learned to use coarse language. But it was half -- no, sixty percent -- a wretched imposture, an odd form of petty trickery. As far as the "people" were concerned, I was a stuck up prig who put them all on edge with my affected airs.⁶⁸

Yozo's use of language comes in the form of a game played with his friend, in which they are to categorize accurately whether certain nouns are tragic or comic. The success of the game hinges upon the understanding that the players alone possess the insight necessary to grasp the transcendent significance of words:

We began a guessing game of tragic and comic nouns. This game, which I myself had invented, was based on the proposition that just as nouns could be divided into masculine, feminine and neuter, so there was a distinction between tragic and comic nouns. For example, this system decreed that steamship and steam engine were both tragic nouns, while

doubt if Dazai's language usage is really the prose of a novel and not merely the language of Dazai's self. As soon as one becomes overly conscious of using language, no matter how moderately or reservedly this language is used, it comes through as the grossest of exaggerations. It is precisely for this reason that Dazai's style is weak and comical. Dazai himself probably retained many doubts and uncertainties as to what type of language he should use, and it is this uncertainty and insecurity Dazai had as a writer that seems most embarrassing to me." (My translation.)

⁶⁸ The Setting Sun, pp. 154-155.

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streetcar and bus were comic. Persons who failed to see why this was true were obviously unqualified to discuss art, and a playwright who included even a single tragic noun in a comedy showed himself a failure if for no other reason. The same held equally true of comic nouns in tragedies.⁶⁹

The ambiguously esoteric and stringent rules of the game have the effect of excluding others from playing it. Yozo, as the originator of the game is put into the position of judging whether people are qualified or unqualified as artists or even as human beings, by their ability to use words. It is clear that the game affords Yozo the opportunity to vindicate his feelings of not being qualified as a human being on the world's terms.

The superfluous hero, or the underground man, is notable for his passivity as an individual. From the point of view of the stylistic analysis of literature, the portrayal of the passive protagonist is a characteristic feature of the impressionistic or lyrical style in fiction.⁷⁰

Naoji and Yozo as non-actualizing individuals unable to act positively in their own interests are unquestionably the passive protagonists of the impressionistic novel. Dazai's use of the notebook form to present the inner life of his main

⁶⁹ No Longer Human, p. 141.

⁷⁰ I have found that the term lyrical novel can be used interchangeably with the impressionistic novel. Many of the elements of the lyrical novel discussed by Ralph Freedman in The Lyrical Novel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957) can be used to describe the mode of Impressionism in fiction. The major characteristics are: the presentation of the passive protagonist's self in a "self-reflexive" method, inclusion of subconscious and conscious imagery, a crystallized point of view of a

characters is also a feature of the impressionistic style; it is an aesthetically effective device in that the notebooks contain the protagonists' rhetoric of subjectivism, a rhetoric which carries with it an hypnotic power on its user. That is, the protagonists come to believe ineluctably in their impotence, their inability to find joy in their lives, even as they write about it. The mode of presenting the protagonists as self-defeating individuals through their own writings about themselves increases the credibility of the novels' thematic structure of the failure of the self.

The notebook style not only illustrates the Impressionism in The Setting Sun and No Longer Human, but it also serves as a convenient stylistic vehicle for the two types of irony present in these novels: the irony of the protagonist and the irony of the reliable and unreliable narrators.

The protagonist in the ironic mode is best defined by Northrop Frye:

If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the ironic mode. This is still true when the reader feels that he is or might be in the same situation, as the situation is being judged by the norms of a greater freedom.⁷¹

sensitive protagonist who perceives his immediate surroundings in a pattern of images or symbols corresponding to his inner moods, and monologues. The impressionistic or lyrical novel differs from straight narrative fiction in that the "inner" and the "outer" worlds of the protagonist are reconciled in some way, and fulfill adequately the aesthetic exigencies of literary art.

⁷¹ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 34.

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The portrayal of Naoji and Yozo in Dazai's novels is ironic in that they are caught up in the dilemma of the self in society. C. David Mead⁷² points out that Naoji represents the ironic contemporary image of a man who is able to survive and come away from the war but who cannot live in a peace time situation. Naoji feels, too, that it is a disgrace to belong to the upper class, but he cannot successfully meld himself with the common people. Yozo, Mead continues, is the ironic character of the contemporary novel who rebels against the culture of his time. He can find only distorted or no values in society; and he believes that man's fate lies only in increasing his insecurity and extending his directionlessness.

The desires and beliefs of the ironic protagonists are made to appear larger than the reality they are actually found in. They speak of living in a terrifying, salvationless hell in life. Their eyes turn to self-induced death as the only solution to their miseries, which may be as petty as Naoji's inability to "quarrel with people over money,"⁷³ or Yozo's humiliation over his three copper coins. The slightest offense takes on tragic proportions. Frye notes that this phenomenon in literature is part of tragic irony which views life from below, "from the moral and realistic perspective of the state of experience"; tragic irony also

stresses the humanity of its heroes, minimizes
the sense of ritual inevitability in tragedy,

⁷² C. David Mead, "Dazai to Aironi Keishiki," Gengo to Bungei, (V:1963).

⁷³ The Setting Sun, p. 159.

supplies social and psychological explanations for catastrophe, and makes as much as possible of human misery seem, in Thoreau's phrase, "superfluous and evitable."

Such tragic irony differs from satire in that there is no attempt to make fun of the character, but only to bring out clearly the "all too human" as distinct from the heroic, aspects of tragedy.⁷⁴

Yozo and Naoji, whatever their faults as individuals may be, are far from being non-human; in fact, they carry certain virtues as human beings to such excesses that they become ineffectual. In No Longer Human, the madam of the Kyobashi bar, who knew Yozo and was entrusted with his notebooks, makes a telling statement about Yozo's excessive and defective humanity: "When human beings get that way, they're no good for anything."⁷⁵ The qualities of awareness, sensitivity, and gentleness are no longer positive traits for Naoji and Yozo; they are ultimately destroyed by these traits instead of being able to use them to grow as healthy selves.

Dazai's use of the convention of the person or persons entrusted with the notebooks of the deceased protagonist-writer brings us to the problem of the subjective outsider who comments or narrates ironically on what he has found in the writings. In order to clarify the problem in part, we might refer to Wayne Booth's definition of the reliable and unreliable narrators in fiction:

For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts

⁷⁴ Frye, op. cit., p. 237.

⁷⁵ No Longer Human, p. 176.

in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not.⁷⁶

In order to judge, then, whether Kazuko, the narrator of Naoji's notebooks, and the unnamed writer and the madam of the Kyobashi bar, narrators of Yozo's notebooks, are reliable or unreliable narrators, we must try to determine what the norms of The Setting Sun and No Longer Human are. We have seen that there are no objective norms in the notebooks in both novels; that they contain solely intensely subjective observations of the outer and inner worlds of their writers. The manner in which the narrators react to the protagonists, therefore, becomes the criteria by which we must judge their reliability or unreliability.

Kazuko in The Setting Sun is a complexly ironic reliable narrator. She is totally sympathetic to Naoji's plight as a failure and a victim in the world; in fact, she might rightly be called the feminine alter ego of Naoji. In explaining to Uehara her plans for a private revolution of love in a cold and untrustworthy world, Kazuko discloses the extent to which she identifies with Naoji:

I am convinced that those people whom the world considers good and respects are all liars and fakes. I do not trust the world. My only ally is the tagged dissolute. The tagged dissolute. That is the only cross on which I wish to be crucified. Though ten thousand people criticize me, I can throw in their teeth my challenge: Are you not all

⁷⁶ Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 158-159.

the more dangerous for being without tags?
 Do you understand?
 There is no reason in love, and I have gone
 rather too far in offering you these rational-
 seeming arguments. I feel as if I am merely
 parroting my brother.⁷⁷

The only ostensible difference between Kazuko and Naoji is that Kazuko has the ability to focus on a goal in her life; she says, "This I want to believe implicitly: Man was born for love and revolution."⁷⁸ However, her desire to realize love and revolution in her life is accompanied by a strangely disturbing emotional resolution; she, like Naoji, does not really come to terms with her self and her world. Instead, Kazuko feels that she must plunge herself into the role of a calculating revolutionist:

Call it low-minded of me, if you will, I must survive and struggle with the world in order to accomplish my desires. Now that it was clear that Mother would soon die, my romanticism and sentimentality were gradually vanishing, and I felt as though I were turning into a calculating, unprincipled creature.⁷⁹

Ironically, Kazuko at the end of the novel is far from becoming "a calculating, unprincipled creature"; she remains a highly emotional and sentimental individual, incapable of thinking clearly about the many contradictions which her resolution encompasses. In her letter to Uehara explaining why she will bear his child, there is a confusing array of sentimentality and

⁷⁷ The Setting Sun, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

condescension towards a man she claims to love unconditionally:

Recently I have come to understand why such things as war, peace, unions, trade, politics exist in the world. I don't suppose you know. That's why you will always be unhappy. I'll tell you why -- it is so that women will give birth to healthy babies.

From the first I never set much stock by your character or your sense of responsibility. The only thing in my mind was to succeed in the adventure of my wholehearted love. Now that my desire has been fulfilled, there is in my heart the stillness of a marsh in a forest.

I think I have won.

Even if Mary gives birth to a child who is not her husband's, if she has a shining pride, they become a holy mother and child.⁸⁰

Kazuko, like Naoji, is a creature of her romantic imagination. She seeks an identity outside of herself; and fundamentally the accomplishment of her "moral revolution," to give birth to the child of the man she loves, is a negative act. It is her private rebellion against external forces which she cannot control, a rebellion which mirrors her insecurity and her bitterness towards her frustrations in life.

The unnamed writer who gains access to Yozo's notebooks from the madam in No Longer Human is an ironic unreliable narrator. He merely reacts subjectively to Yozo, to the pictures of him which have a "genuinely chilling, foreboding quality" about them; his reactions are to the negative aspects of Yozo as a physical being. He says of a photograph: "it rubs against me the wrong way, and makes me feel so uncomfortable that in

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

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the end I want to avert my eyes."⁸¹ At the conclusion of the novel, he tells the madam, "If everything written in these notebooks is true, I probably would have wanted to put him in an insane asylum myself if I were his friend."⁸² The narrator's completely unsympathetic attitude to Yozo as a human being prompts one to doubt the absolute validity of his judgment of character.

The madam of the Kyobashi bar frequented by Yozo is probably the most reliable narrator of all. Her disarmingly succinct but penetrating double view of Yozo as a failure in life because of his excessive self-consciousness ("when human beings get that way, they're no good for anything") and as an individual with potentialities for living with himself and others ("he was a good boy, an angel") is the truest picture the reader can get of Yozo. However, she is still an ironic narrator in that she places the entire blame for Yozo's failure on his father ("It's his father's fault") when, in fact, as Donald Keene observes correctly⁸³ there is not sufficient evidence in the novel to place the source of Yozo's condition totally upon his relationship with his father.

The irony of the protagonist and the irony of the reliable and unreliable narrators in Dazai's novels transform the confessions into an intricate work of fictional art. Psychological realism, in the form of the immediate notebook rendering

⁸¹ No Longer Human, p. 16.

⁸² Ibid., p. 177.

⁸³ Donald Keene, "The Artistry of Dazai Osamu," East-West Review, (I:1965), p. 252.

of the protagonists' feelings and perceptions, is combined with a problematic view of life through the narrators' reactions and commentary. The Setting Sun and No Longer Human do not contain well-defined norms as such; rather they are novels of experiences which the readers must be willing to share subjectively at first, and later to evaluate from as objective a position as possible.

An objective approach to the novel may involve the analysis of the author's use of symbolism. The Setting Sun and No Longer Human contain a number of symbols which might be analyzed in the light of Dazai's successful or unsuccessful use of aesthetic structure in his novels. It is helpful to first make a distinction between the symbol in the realistic novel (the realistic symbol) and the symbol in the symbolic novel (the traditional symbol). Ursula Brumm shows the difference in the two types:

[The realistic novel] seeks meaning in actual experience and is content to be taught by it; [the symbolic novel] imposes a particular meaning on reality. Correspondingly, the symbol in the realistic novel is always causally related to its meaning -- the symbol always represents the hidden cause; whereas in the symbolic novel it is a transcendent embodiment of the intended meaning: for example, a lamb can stand for an innocent victim or a bird with a broken wing for a frustrated longing.⁸⁴

Symbolism, according to Miss Brumm, becomes questionable when it is imposed upon a novel which treats themes concerning

⁸⁴ Ursula Brumm, "Symbolism and the Novel," in The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 359.

contemporary man and his dilemma in a world of facts and real problems; when this happens, there is a "discrepancy between theme and technique."⁸⁵

Probably the most questionable technique in Dazai's novels is his use of Christianity as an all-dominating symbol as we see in The Setting Sun.⁸⁶ The concrete and direct references to Christian symbols are used by Kazuko the narrator. The snake in the garden of Kazuko's home is undoubtedly the snake in the garden of Eden. Her mother dies soon after she dreams of the snake whose eggs Kazuko had once destroyed. Kazuko's mother's expression in death reminds her of Mary in a Pieta.⁸⁷ Kazuko herself tries to relate the meaning of her own life to the teachings of Jesus:

I cannot go on living unless now I cling
with all my force to love. The words of
teaching spoken by Jesus to his twelve
disciples, when he was about to send them
forth to expose the hypocrisies of the
scribes and Pharisees and the men of authority
of this world and to proclaim to all

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 366.

⁸⁶ Donald Keene (op. cit., p. 248) makes an interesting translator's observation on Dazai's use of Christianity: "In The Setting Sun ... there is such excessive quotation of the Bible that this was the one place where I felt it necessary to abridge in making a translation. The quotations and frequent references to Christianity at no point suggest sincere belief or even the desire to believe. Dazai is intrigued by Christianity, and he is delighted to discover appropriate passages to insert in his books, but whatever degree of faith he may have attained in private life, in his writings Christianity is a disconcerting and not very important factor. It failed to give his works the additional depth he sought."

⁸⁷ The Setting Sun, p. 128.

men without the least hesitation the true love of God, are not entirely inappropriate in my case as well.⁸⁸

The snake as a symbol of evil and death, the mother as a figure of purity and goodness, and Kazuko as a contemporary disciple of the teachings of Jesus all appear as forced and unconvincing symbolism in a novel which has its roots in the realistic portrayal of the self and society. What leads to this conclusion is the idea that if Kazuko and her mother are to be linked in the transcendent sense as Christian figures, then Naoji, who is in the eyes of Kazuko a beautiful "little victim,"⁸⁹ too must be included; the implication is that Naoji is a type of Christ figure, "crucified" by the society he lived in.⁹⁰ However, this logical conclusion is impossible to accept, for the Naoji of the notebooks is far from Christ-like; he is only too real as a victim of his own defective humanity.

Dazai is much more successful when he uses symbols in the realistic sense. The mask is an example of such a use. Upon learning that his mother's tongue hurts her, Naoji tells

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 175-176.

⁹⁰ Sako Junichiro in his article on "Dazai to Kirisutokyo" (Kindai Bungaku Kansho Koza, Vol. 19, ed. Kamei Katsuichiro [Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1959]) suggests that Dazai's intense preoccupation with Christianity came from a deeply personal consciousness of guilt and sin. Sako speculates that deep down in Dazai was a desire to encounter Christ and possibly to incorporate the Christ-figure in his protagonists. However, Sako concludes, Dazai was ultimately unable to realize this encounter both in his personal life and in his art.

her that he is sure the pain is "psychological" and prescribes a gauze mask soaked in a Rivanol solution for her to wear. Kazuko is offended by Naoji's suggestion and demands to know what sort of treatment the mask is. Naoji replies, "It's called the aesthetic treatment."⁹¹ As a realistic symbol, the mask is cogently used for it makes a significant comment on what Naoji has been using in his own life: an aesthetic mask worn in the presence of others to cover up his "psychological" disorder.

No Longer Human contains several successful realistic symbols, two of which will be discussed briefly here. Paintings, for Yozo, represent two symbolic approaches to life. They are either the vehicle through which the "frightening ghosts" of the true self can be seen, or they become modes by which one can hide himself in innocuous conventional portrayals of objects:

There are some people whose dread of human beings is so morbid that they reach a point where they yearn to see with their own eyes monsters of ever more horrible shapes. Painters who have had this mentality, after repeated wounds and intimidations at the hands of the apparitions called human beings, have often come to believe in phantasms -- they plainly saw monsters in broad daylight, in the midst of nature. And they did not fob people off with clowning; they did their best to depict these monsters just as they had appeared.⁹²

In school drawing classes I also kept secret my "ghost-style" techniques and continued to paint as before in the conventional idiom of pretty things.⁹³

Besides paintings, the symbol of the toad is used realistically

⁹¹ The Setting Sun, p. 60.

⁹² No Longer Human, pp. 53-54.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 56.

in showing how the animal's lowliness illustrates the measure of Yozo's self-contempt. After reading a poem by Guy-Charles Cros in which the image of a toad appears, Yozo says:

The toad.
 (That is what I was -- a toad. It was not a question of whether or not society tolerated me, whether or not it ostracized me. I was an animal lower than a dog, lower than a cat. A toad. I sluggishly moved -- that's all.)⁹⁴

The image here is relevant and illuminating. As one of the metaphors for Yozo's conception of his disturbed selfhood, the toad successfully relates theme to artistic technique.

My intention here was not to analyze all of the symbols in Dazai's two novels; instead I attempted to show how Dazai's interest in aesthetic structure in his works amplified or diminished his artistic presentation of the theme of failure in his protagonists, Naoji and Yozo.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MOBIUS STRIP: MISHIMA

Richard von Krafft-Ebing, in the preface to his classic study of sexual psychopathology, makes an intriguing statement about the literary artist as a psychologist:

The poet is the better psychologist, for he is swayed rather by sentiment than by reason, and always treats his subject in a partial fashion.¹

This statement is especially relevant in our consideration of Mishima Yukio's novel, Kamen no Kokuhaku (Confessions of a Mask), written in 1949, which is told from the point of view of a homosexual in Japanese society. The protagonist is a nameless first person narrator who is both intelligent and articulate, with the ability to describe with absolute candor his sexual dilemma and its relationship to his selfhood. Halfway through the novel, which is entirely an "autobiographical" narrative, the protagonist engages in a lengthy analysis of his feelings which accompany his varied sexual fantasies and daydreams. He concludes his

¹ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Psychopathia Sexualis (New York: 1965), p. xiii.

self-disquisition with what appears to be an unremittingly rational understanding of self:

And yet my powers of self-analysis were constructed in a way that defied definition, like one of those hoops made by giving a single twist to a strip of paper and then pasting the ends together. What appeared to be the inside was the outside, and what appeared the outside was the inside. Although in later years my self-analysis traversed the rim of the hoop more slowly, when I was twenty it was doing nothing but spin blindfolded through the orbit of my emotions, and lashed on by the excitement attending the war's final disastrous stages, the speed of the revolutions had become enough to make me all but completely lose my sense of balance. There was no time for a careful consideration of causes and effects, no time for either contradictions or correlations. So the contradictions spun on through the orbit just as they were rubbing together with a speed that no eye could comprehend.²

This penetrating use of the Mobius Strip as a metaphor for his mode of insight into the nature of his self is deceptive, however, for at the end of the novel, the protagonist is seen as an irrevocable captive of his homosexual tendencies. He has literally given up any attempt at self-understanding, and has become completely immersed in the feelings and emotions engendered by his fantasy world.

The second novel by Mishima which we shall treat here, also deals with the psychopathology of an individual caught up in an existence of fantasy and distorted perceptions of reality.

² Confessions of a Mask, pp. 177-178.

Kinkakuji, or The Temple of the Golden Pavilion,³ was written in 1959 after an incident which horrified the Japanese nation. In 1950, a young Zen Buddhist acolyte, frustrated by his physical ugliness and obsessed with a pathological envy of the beauty of the ancient structure, set fire to the five-hundred-year-old Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, a monument which had been designated as a historical and religious National Treasure by the Japanese Government. The novelistic form of Golden Pavilion is similar to that of Confessions of a Mask; Mizoguchi, the acolyte, narrates his own story and presents a portrait of himself as an individual capable of rational self-analysis:

As can easily be imagined, a youth like myself came to entertain two opposing forms of power wishes. In history I enjoyed the descriptions of tyrants. I saw myself as a stuttering taciturn tyrant; my retainers would hang on every expression that passed over my face and would live both day and night in fear and trembling of me. There is no need to justify my cruelty in clear, smooth words. My taciturnity alone was sufficient to justify every manner of cruelty. On the one hand I enjoyed imagining how one by one I would wreck punishment on my teachers and schoolmates who daily tormented me; on the other hand, I fancied myself as a great artist, endowed with the clearest vision -- a veritable sovereign of the inner world. My outer appearance was poor, but in this way my inner world became richer than anyone else's. Was it not natural that a young boy who suffered from an indelible drawback like

³ The translated title The Temple of the Golden Pavilion will hereinafter be designated as Golden Pavilion, which is not only a more economical form, but in some ways a more accurate one; the Japanese term Kinkakuji literally means "Golden Pavilion Temple." Hence, in the text of the novel, Kinkakuji is translated either as "golden temple," or simply "temple."

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mine should have come to think that he was a secretly chosen being? I felt as though somewhere in this world a mission awaited me of which I myself still knew nothing.⁴

This passage illustrates the lucidity of Mizoguchi's explanation of his retreat into fantasy as a compensation for his physical unattractiveness and his fundamentally passive character. Like the narrator in Confessions of a Mask, the limits of Mizoguchi's self-analysis and his power to overcome his personal deficiencies in a realistic way are defined by his emotional commitment to his belief that something outside of himself holds the secret of his life and selfhood.

The reasons that the protagonists give for their reliance on fantasy comprise an important part of both novels. The incipient psychopathology in their family backgrounds is manifested in the narrators' explication of their early life patterns. The isolated and pampered childhood of the narrator of Confessions of a Mask is associated with his fascination for fairy tales and gaudy theatrical entertainment. He is, from the very beginning, remotely indifferent to the world of objective occurrences, from "the eruption of a volcano" or "the insurrection of an army," to his grandmother's fits of illness and the quarrels of his family:

I could not believe that the world was any more complicated than a structure of building

⁴ Golden Pavilion, p. 6.

blocks, nor that the so-called "social community," which I must presently enter, could be more dazzling than the world of fairy tales. Thus, without my being aware of it, one of the determinants of my life had come into operation. And because of my struggles against it, from the beginning my every fantasy was tinged with despair, strangely complete and in itself resembling passionate desire.⁵

Forbidden by his grandmother to play with the neighborhood boys because of his frail health, surrounded by indulgent but at the same time restrictive women servants, he learns how to find pleasure in his isolation, in reading and drawings, activities which soon nurture the arousal and expression of his sexuality in the form of onanism and daydreams of inversion. Later, as an adolescent, he makes a plangent observation concerning his homosexual tendencies and his unsuccessful attempts to establish heterosexual interests:

In time my obsession with the idea of kissing /a woman/ became fixed upon a single pair of lips. Even here I was probably inspired by nothing more than a desire to give my dreams pretensions to a nobler pedigree. As I have ... neither desire nor any other emotion in regard to those lips, I nevertheless tried desperately to convince myself that I did desire them. In short, I was mistaking as primary desire something that actually was only the irrational and secondary desire of wanting to believe I desired them. I was mistaking the fierce, impossible desire of not wanting to be myself for the sexual desire of a man of the world, for the desire that arises from his being himself.⁶

⁵ Confessions of a Mask, p. 15.

⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

His efforts to convince himself of his love for the sister of a classmate contain a desperation which leads to a fatiguing conflict within himself and leads him further into the practice of onanism and a subsequent sense of extreme self-deception:

Between the intervals of these mental efforts I was making toward artificiality I would sometimes be overwhelmed with a paralyzing emptiness and, in order to escape, would turn shamelessly to a different sort of daydream. Then immediately I would become quick with life, would become myself, and would blaze toward strange images. Moreover, the flame thus created would remain in my mind as an abstract feeling, divorced from the reality of the image that had caused it, and I would distort my interpretation of the feeling until I believed it to be evidence of passion inspired by the girl herself. ... Thus once again I deceived myself.⁷

Unable to resolve the contradiction in himself, the narrator moreover cannot accept the fact that he is capable of holding both genuine and superficial feelings. The escapist tendency, seen in his immediate recourse to physical self-satisfaction, becomes a characteristic gesture for him in times of stress. He is unable to come to terms with an "internal locus of evaluation" of self, to use a phrase of psychologist Carl Rogers, for his choice of action. Rogers explains that an important part of the process of "becoming a person" relates "to the source or locus of choices and decisions, or evaluative judgments":

The individual increasingly comes to feel that this locus of evaluation lies within himself. Less and less does he look to others for approval or disapproval; for standards to live by;

⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

for decisions and choices. He recognizes that it rests within himself to choose; that the only question which matters is, "Am I living in a way which is deeply satisfying to me, and which truly expresses me?"⁸

Throughout his confessions, the narrator shows that his locus of evaluation is far from an internal one; he is constantly under the unconscious pressure of the belief that he is an abnormality, not only in the eyes of his society, but also in his own stringent judgment of self. His introspection leads him nowhere: "my tenacious uneasiness," he says, "concerning what I called the basic condition of being a human being, concerning what I called the positive human psychology, did nothing but lead me around in endless circles of introspection."⁹ Convinced of his abnormality, then, he is doomed to lead a life of unhappiness:

How would I feel if I were another boy? How would I feel if I were a normal person? These questions obsessed me. They tortured me, instantly and utterly destroying even the one splinter of happiness I had thought I possessed for sure.¹⁰

Tormented by self-doubts and trapped by a rationality which is divorced from his emotions, the narrator cannot act outside of his sexual fantasies. A psychological pattern observed by William Caudill in the Japanese family of the emphasis on non-

⁸ Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: 1961), p. 119.

⁹ Confessions of a Mask, p. 152.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

sexual satisfactions and an avoidance of sexual references and physical displays of affection as a rule¹¹ suggests that such cultural restrictions have an adverse effect on the emotional and social attitudes of Japanese youths. The narrator of Confessions of a Mask is thus partly a product of his cultural taboos. This realization, however, which might help him break out of his "endless circle of introspection" about his "abnormality," is closed off to him, a fact which illustrates the degree of pessimism which Mishima holds regarding the potential growth in the protagonist.

The explication which Mizoguchi, in Golden Pavilion, gives regarding his obsessive relationship to the Golden Temple as an object of his fantasies reveals both conscious and unconscious understanding of the processes involved in his entanglement. It is his father, "a simple country priest, deficient in vocabulary,"¹² who nevertheless eloquently conveys to Mizoguchi his feelings about the beauty of the temple. Shortly before the father dies, he takes Mizoguchi to entrust him to the care of the Head Superior of the temple. Mizoguchi's first view of the temple disappoints him, and it is not until much later that the temple becomes firmly established as an object of his fantasy:

After my return to Yasuoka, the Golden Temple, which had disappointed me so greatly at first sight, began to revivify its beauty within me

¹¹ William Caudill, "Patterns of Emotion in Modern Japan," in Japanese Culture, ed. R. Smith and R. Beardsley (Chicago:1962), p. 130.

¹² Golden Pavilion, p. 21.

day after day, until in the end it became a more beautiful Golden Temple than it had been before I saw it. I could not say wherein this beauty lay. It seemed that what had been nurtured in my dreams had become real and could now, in turn, serve as an impulse for further dreams.¹³

The inchoate merging of dream with reality is accompanied by Mizoguchi's growing sense of being divorced from his own emotions; he feels no sorrow, for example, at his father's death. He finds, too, that sadness is completely unrelated to a specific event or motive: "When I am sad, sorrow attacks me suddenly and without reason: it is connected with no particular event and with no motive."¹⁴ Life is seen not in terms of his human, inner relationship to it, but in the dreams and sensations of exaggerated powers and external occurrences:

As I have already said, I was hopelessly weak in human feeling. Father's death and Mother's poverty hardly affected my inner life at all. What I dreamed of was something like a huge heavenly compressor that would bring down disasters, cataclysms and superhuman tragedies, that would crush beneath it all human beings and all objects, irrespective of their ugliness or their beauty. Sometimes the unusual brilliance of the early spring sky appeared to me like the light of the cool blade of some huge axe that was large enough to cover the entire earth. Then I just waited for the axe to fall -- for it to fall with a speed that would not even given one time to think.¹⁵

Mizoguchi reveals later in the novel that his mother had committed an adulterous and incestuous act in the presence of Mizoguchi

¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

and his father, who literally attempted to shield his son from this fact.¹⁶ It is ostensibly this early exposure to the ugliness of life that leads Mizoguchi to reject his emotions and past and to view the beauty of the Golden Temple as the only "reality" acceptable to him, as a model of order and harmony which would, at a point of time in the future, help to eliminate the chaos and meaninglessness of his existence:

I felt no intimacy with anything in the world except the Golden Temple; indeed, I was not even on intimate terms with my own past experiences. Yet one thing I knew was that among all these experiences certain small elements -- elements that were not swallowed up in the dark sea of time, elements that did not subside into meaningless and interminable repetition -- would be linked together and would come to form a certain sinister and disagreeable picture.

Which, then, were these particular elements? I thought about it on and off. Yet these scattered, shining, fragments of experience were even more lacking in order and meaning than the shining pieces of a broken beer bottle that one sees by the roadside. I was unable to believe that these fragments were the shattered pieces of what had been in the past shaped as a thing of perfect beauty. For, in their meaninglessness, in their complete lack of order, in their peculiar unsightliness, each of these discarded fragments still seemed to be dreaming of the future. Yes, mere fragments though they were, each lay there, fearlessly, uncannily, quietly, dreaming of the

¹⁶ Louise Duus suggests that a subsidiary theme of Golden Pavilion concerns the relationship between Mizoguchi and his father; see her footnote to her study, "The Novel as Koan: Mishima Yukio's The Temple of the Golden Pavilion," Critique (X:1968), p. 129. Miss Duus says that the act of Mizoguchi's father turns "the boy's vision inward into darkness, but he does not know whether his father has acted out of compassion or shame."

future! Of a future that would never be cured or restored, that could never be touched, of a truly unprecedented future!

Indistinct reflections of this type sometimes gave me a kind of lyrical excitement that I could not help finding unsuitable for myself. On such occasions, if by good chance there happened to be a moon, I would take my flute and play it next to the Golden Temple.¹⁷

But Mizoguchi is also able to particularize to some degree the feelings of repulsion he has towards the ugliness in his life. This is seen when he acknowledges the physical ugliness of his mother and of the quality of life which she represents to him:

As I gazed at her soft sash, which hung down in the back, I wondered what it was that made Mother so particularly ugly. Then I understood. What made her ugly was -- hope. Incurable hope like an obstinate case of scabies, which lodges, damp and reddish, in the infected skin, producing a constant itching, and refusing to yield to any outer force.¹⁸

The protagonists of Confessions of a Mask and Golden Pavilion, then, are capable of narrating the beginnings of their fantasy life and even of expressing how this life becomes their way of escaping an unbearable reality. But their articulations of their past experiences and of where they are in the present do not in any way help them to become self-actualizing individuals; instead, they are shown as creatures increasingly driven by their need to maintain the ideals of their fantasy, ideals which are also associated with their images of themselves. Psychologist

¹⁷ Golden Pavilion, p. 156.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 200.

Karen Horney gives a useful summary of the insidious inter-workings of fantasy and reality and the constant efforts which are exerted by the individual to increase this psychopathology:

But daydreams, while important and revealing when they occur, are not the most injurious work of imagination. For a person is mostly aware of the fact that he is daydreaming, i.e., imagining things which have not occurred or are not likely to occur in the way he is experiencing them in fantasy. At least it is not too difficult for him to become aware of the existence and the unrealistic character of the daydreams. The more injurious work of imagination concerns the subtle and comprehensive distortions of reality which he is not aware of fabricating. The idealized self is not completed in a single act of creation: once produced, it needs continuing attention. For its actualization the person must put in an incessant labor by way of falsifying reality.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that the objects of the protagonists' fantasies take the form of ideal images of grace which serve to relate them to a world or culture from which they are otherwise alienated. I am using the term "grace" in the sense that Frederick Hoffman does when he refers to "the essence of a culture," that may take the form of "the architecture, the gardens, the visible forms of a cultural that inspired."²⁰ Hoffman adds that grace influences "the relationship of human life to the ideal of immortality;" for example,

¹⁹ Karen Horney, Neurosis and Human Growth (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 33.

²⁰ Frederick Hoffman, The Mortal No: Death and the Modern Imagination, p. 7.

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the cathedral and the abbey are symbols of tradition, forms of immortality; when they are destroyed, man is reduced to despair. The culture is linked to goodness, to virtue, to a spiritual world that is otherwise not clearly seen.²¹

Mizoguchi's fantasies of the Golden Temple is based upon his awareness that it is a National Treasure, an architectural embodiment of beauty for his culture, and that, in a war time situation, it was in danger of complete annihilation. The degree of his psychopathological desire to be completely identified with the cultural and aesthetic grace which the temple possessed is seen as Mizoguchi contemplates the fact that it has survived the holocausts of the war:

"The bond between the Golden Temple and myself has been cut," I thought. "Now my vision that the Golden Temple and I were living in the same world has broken down. Now I shall return to my previous condition, but it will be even more hopeless than before. A condition in which I exist on one side and beauty on the other. A condition that will never improve so long as this world endures."²²

While Mizoguchi desires to be identified with the temple as a symbol of the grace which is missing in his life, he is also consumed with envy at the thought of its objective claim to immortality, a thought which can only increase his sense of inferiority and his realization of the fundamental meaninglessness of his own existence.

²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

²² Golden Pavilion, p. 64.

The grace which the main character in Confessions of a Mask seeks takes the form of his desire to experience normal heterosexual love for Sonoko, the eighteen-year-old girl who appears as the personification of pure Japanese womanhood. He describes her beauty in the highest idealistic sense: "In all my life my heart had never before been so touched by the sight of beauty in a woman. My breast throbbed; I felt purified."²³

Sonoko's beauty, is not only physical; she also arouses a spiritual response from the narrator which forces him to "recognize a different quality" in her. In an almost mystical way, his feelings for Sonoko serve as a reminder of the nature of his existence:

To my perplexity, my instinct was forced to recognize a different quality in Sonoko alone. This gave me a profound, bashful feeling of being unworthy of Sonoko, and yet it was not a feeling of servile inferiority. Each second while I watched Sonoko approach, I was attacked by unendurable grief. It was a feeling such as I had never had before. Grief seemed to undermine and set tottering the foundations of my existence. Until this moment the feeling with which I had regarded women had been an artificial mixture of childlike curiosity and feigned sexual desire. My heart had never before been swayed, and at first glance, by such a deep and unexplainable grief, a grief moreover that was not part of my masquerade.²⁴

The grace which Mishima's protagonists seek is never realized in their lives. Grace, by its very nature, is a

²³ Confessions of a Mask, p. 142.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

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positive quality, a state of life which enhances its pleasurable-ness; it affirms life by making it beautiful. Mishima's protagonists do not achieve grace; Mizoguchi fails to be inspired by the objective beauty of the temple, to recognize its value as art which embodies the humanistic ideals of a cultural past. Instead, Mizoguchi feels compelled to destroy it because it has become, through his fantasies, merely a subjective extension of his desire to impose meaning upon his life via an external source:

Thus my thoughts led me to recognize more and more clearly that there was a complete contrast between the existence of the Golden Temple and that of human beings. On the one hand, a phantasm of immortality emerged from the apparently destructible aspect of human beings; on the other, the apparently indestructible beauty of the Golden Temple gave rise to the possibility of destroying it. Mortal things like human beings cannot be eradicated; indestructible things like the Golden Temple can be destroyed. Why had no one realized this? There was no doubting the originality of my conclusion. If I were to set fire to the Golden Temple, which had been designated as a National Treasure in 1897, I should be committing an act of pure destruction, of irreparable ruin, an act which would truly decrease the volume of beauty that human beings had created in this world.

As I continued thinking on these lines, I was even overcome by a humorous mood. If I burn down the Golden Temple, I told myself, I shall be doing something that will have great educational value. For it will teach people that it is meaningless to infer indestructibility by analogy. They will learn that the mere fact of the Golden Temple's having continued to exist, of its having continued to stand for five hundred and fifty years by the Kyoko Pond, confers no guaranty upon it whatsoever. They will be imbued with a sense of uneasiness as they realize that the self-evident axiom which our survival has predicated on the temple can collapse from one day to another.²⁵

²⁵ Golden Pavilion, pp. 194-195.

Like Mizoguchi, the protagonist of Confessions of a Mask alienates himself from grace by his destructive behavior. He refuses to confront his positive feelings for Sonoko and to seek out, even experimentally, a meaningful relationship with her. He chooses, instead, to deny his real feelings and to assume the role of a romantic libertine:

Even though my heart was filled with uneasiness and unspeakable grief, I put a brazen, cynical smile upon my lips. I told myself that all I had to do was clear one small hurdle. All I had to do was to regard all the past few months as absurd; to decide that from the beginning I'd never been in love with a girl called Sonoko, not with such a chit of a girl; to believe that I'd been prompted by a trifling passion (liar!) and had deceived her. Then there'd be no reason why I couldn't refuse her. Surely a mere kiss didn't obligate me! ...

I was elated with the conclusion to which my thoughts had brought me: "I'm not in love with Sonoko."

What a splendid thing! I've become a man who can entice a woman without even loving her, and then, when love blazes up in her, abandon her without thinking twice about it. How far I am from being the upright and virtuous honor student I appear to be And yet I could not have been ignorant of the fact that there is no such thing as a libertine who abandons a woman without first achieving his purpose. But I ignored any such thoughts. I had acquired the habit of closing my ears completely, like an obstinate old woman, to anything I did not want to hear.²⁶

Although Mishima's main characters do not achieve grace in *their* lives, they exhibit very clearly, the need of the individual to be engaged in some form of creativity. Grace is a

²⁶ Confessions of a Mask, p. 212.

concomitant of the positive or constructive creative act, but creativity itself is not restricted to any particular content. The explanation which Carl Rogers gives concerning the general nature of creativity will be referred to here. According to Rogers, "there is no fundamental difference in the creative process as it is evidenced in painting a picture, composing a symphony, devising new instruments of killing, developing a scientific theory, discovering new procedures in human relationships, or creating new formings of one's personality in psychotherapy." Rogers defines the creative process as the "emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other."²⁷

Rogers sees the creative impulse as existing in everyone, as a tendency which is similar to man's tendency to become a self-actualizing individual, to become his potentialities. The position of Rogers on the self-actualizing individual is very similar to that of Abraham Maslow; like Maslow, Rogers sees that there is a directional trend evident in human life, "the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature -- the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, or the self." This tendency, however, is subjected to various psychological obstacles put out by the individual himself who

²⁷ Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 350.

may bury it under a heavy layer of psychological defenses or hide it under elaborate facades which deny its existence.²⁸

In order to evaluate the actions of Mishima's protagonists as beings engaged in the creative process, we must consider the question of how constructive creativity differs from destructive creativity. Rogers cites three inner conditions of constructive creativity: openness to experience, an internal locus of evaluation, and the ability to toy with elements and concepts.²⁹ Openness to experience entails a lack of rigidity in the individual's concepts, beliefs, and perceptions; it also means that he is tolerant of ambiguity where ambiguity exists, and is sensitively aware of all phases of experience. An internal locus of evaluation signifies that the individual is not dependent on others to know what is totally satisfying to himself; it does not mean that he is oblivious to the feelings of others, but rather he is able to appraise his own production as being a true actualization of his own potentialities. Finally, the constructively creative person is able to "play" spontaneously with ideas, objects, and relationships and translate them into new and significant forms which are of positive value. Rogers stresses the point that the individual who creates constructively behaves in a harmonious, integrated fashion only if he can be aware of his hostile impulses and at the same time accept his

²⁸ Ibid., p. 351.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 351.

desire for friendship and acceptance, be aware of the expectations of his culture yet equally aware of his own purposes, and be aware of his selfish desires and also aware of his concern for another. In other words, positive creativity tends in the direction of constructive social living only if the individual can come to terms with the negative feelings which all beings possess at one time or another.

Creativity which is essentially destructive, says Rogers, comes about when the individual closes himself to large areas of his experience and awareness. The differentiation between constructive and destructive creativity may be put briefly as follows:

To the extent that the individual is denying to awareness (or repressing, ...) large areas of his experience, then his creative formings may be pathological, or socially evil, or both. To the degree that the individual is open to all aspects of his experience, and has available to his awareness all the varied sensings and perceivings which are going on within his organism, then the novel products of his interaction with his environment will tend to be constructive both for himself and others. To illustrate, an individual with paranoid tendencies may creatively develop a most novel theory of the relationship between himself and his environment, seeing evidence for his theory in all sorts of minute clues. His theory has little social value, perhaps because there is an enormous range of experience which³⁰ this individual cannot permit in his awareness.

The Protagonist of Confessions of a Mask engages in destructive creativity because he has closed himself to a large portion of his experience as a self which might possibly rid itself of

³⁰ Ibid., p. 352.

its paralyzing dependence on fantasies of inversion by establishing a satisfying and meaningful relationship with Sonoko. Instead, he views himself as a romantic personality who must resort to "that immoral action called daydreaming" because of his "subtle mistrust of intellectualism."³¹ He is capable of intellectually comprehending his dilemma, but he resists this understanding and chooses to remain in a state of self-defeating emotionality:

But this does not mean that my emotional life was set to rights by my intellectual understanding of these scientific theories. It was difficult for inversion to become an actuality in my case simply because in me the impulse went no further than being a dark impulse crying out in vain, struggling helplessly, blindly. Even the excitement aroused in me by an attractive ephebe stopped short at mere sexual desire. To give a superficial explanation, my soul still belonged to Sonoko. Although it does not mean that I accept the concept outright, I can conveniently use the medieval diagram of the struggle between soul and body to make my meaning clear; in me there was a cleavage, pure and simple, between spirit and flesh. To me Sonoko appeared the incarnation of my love of normality itself, my love of things of the spirit, my love of everlasting things.

But such a simple explanation does not dispose of the problem. The emotions have no liking for fixed order. Instead, like tiny particles in the ether, they fly about freely, float haphazardly, and prefer to be forever wavering...³²

Unwilling to create a viable union between Sonoko and himself which would enable him to fulfill his spiritual needs and live with his sexuality, the protagonist's thoughts turn to death as

³¹ Confessions of a Mask, p. 192.

³² Ibid., p. 192.

the only alternative out of his dilemma:

I seriously contemplated suicide for the first time in my life. But as I thought about it, the idea became exceedingly tiresome, and I finally decided it would be a ludicrous business. I had an inherent dislike of admitting defeat. Moreover, I told myself, there's no need for me to take such decisive action myself, not when I'm surrounded by such a bountiful harvest of so many types of death -- death in an air raid, death at one's post of duty, death in the military service, death on the battlefield, death from being run over, death from disease -- surely my name has already been entered in the list for one of these: a criminal who has been sentenced to death does not commit suicide.³³

The meaning of death for the protagonist in this passage deserves a few comments because it represents a crucial turning point in his life. The main character refuses to take any responsibility for his life and even his death; he relinquishes his control over any reality which might be imposed upon him. In this sense, he is the true passive anti-hero, the individual who cannot act because he wills not to. His reflections on death, however, are not as devastating as his unconscious committal to death-in-life, a fact which is represented by the final scene in the novel. He is seen with Sonoko, but his presence is merely a physical one, for he is psychologically far removed from the reality of their meeting. He has withdrawn himself completely from life into the world of his fantasies as his characteristic inversion daydream shows:

I had forgotten Sonoko's existence. I was thinking of but one thing: Of his going out

³³ Ibid., p. 208.

onto the streets of high summer just as he was, half-naked, and getting into a fight with a rival gang. Of a sharp dagger cutting through that belly-band, piercing that torso. Of that soiled belly-band beautifully dyed with blood. Of his gory corpse being put on an improvised stretcher, made of a window shutter, and brought back here.³⁴

Sonoko's voice brings him back briefly to the present moment, and it is at this time, in an instantaneous flash of insight that his condition of non-being, of the total lack of his selfhood comes to him:

At this instant something inside of me was torn in two with brutal force. It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen and cleaved asunder a living tree. I heard the structure, which I had been building piece by piece with all my might up to now, collapse miserably to the ground. I felt as though I had witnessed the instant in which my existence had been turned into some sort of fearful non-being.³⁵

Destructive creativity is also manifest in Mizoguchi when he decides to burn the Golden Temple. His decision is based upon his creating an original theory which fulfills both his need to carry out the details of his obsessional fantasies and to relate in some fashion to the larger world outside of himself:

At the beginning of the Tsukumogami-ki, a medieval book of fairy tales, we find the following passage: "It is written in the Miscellany on the cosmic forces, Ying and Yang, that, after a hundred years have passed and objects have been transformed into

³⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 252-253.

spirits, the hearts of men are deceived; and this is given the name of Tsukumogami, the year of the mournful spirit. It is the custom of the world to remove one's old household utensils each year before the advent of Spring and to throw them into the alley; and this is known as the house-sweeping. In the same way, every hundred years men must undergo the disasters of the Tsukumogami."

Thus my deed would open the eyes of men to the disasters of the Tsukumogami and save them from those disasters. By my deed I should thrust the world in which the Golden Temple existed into a world where it did not exist. The meaning of the world would surely change.³⁶

The Tsukumogami-ki which Mizoguchi refers to as the rationale for his "mission" in burning the Temple is a "book of fairy tales"; he acknowledges this fact yet acts as though he believed in the truth and validity of the ideas in this ancient work. It appears necessary for him to believe in a "fairy tale" which articulates a part of his obsession with the "dark forces" compelling him to his destructive act: "Yes, I must burn the Golden Temple after all. Only then could a new life begin that was made specially to order for myself."³⁷ His role as the fulfiller of the Tsukumogami-ki mandate is made to justify his need to have a "new life," a life which he has envisioned as an escape from all of his frustrations and inadequacies as a self.

The culmination of Mizoguchi's "theory," the actual sociopathic act of arson, affords him an illusory sense of renewed life. His intention to kill himself after the destruction

³⁶ Golden Pavilion, pp. 195-196.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

of the temple is immediately abandoned and the novel ends on a note of pathological optimism:

I looked in my pocket and extracted the bottle of arsenic, wrapped it in my handkerchief, and the knife. I threw them down the ravine.

Then I noticed the pack of cigarettes in my other pocket. I took one out and started smoking. I felt like a man who settles down for a smoke after finishing a job of work. I wanted to live.³⁸

I have tried to show how the need to be engaged in the creative process is presented in Mishima's main characters as essentially destructive and non-actualizing. Mizoguchi and the narrator of Confessions of a Mask are individuals of high intelligence and capabilities. However, they choose, to their own loss as selves, to close themselves off from certain phases of their experiences. It is not that they are unaware of the possibilities open to them for a constructive way of life, as Mizoguchi shows in his weighing of the alternative to his act. This happens when he sees a young station official whose actions show an evident enjoyment of and absorption in life:

For a moment I felt that I was on the verge of being caught up once more in the charm of life or in an envy for life. It was still possible for me to refrain from setting fire to the temple; I could leave the temple for good, give up the priesthood and bury myself in life like this young fellow.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., p. 262.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

Rather than confronting their selves in the light of their real experiences and their actual feelings, the protagonists choose to be entangled in the contorted Mobius Strip of their imagination and fantasy where their inner and outer worlds are made deliberately indistinguishable. Engagement in fantasy makes them so distrustful of their own powers to lead a life of positive action that they literally become the fantasy creatures they have used for defenses against their frustrations. This confusion of the real and imagined self is epitomized in Confessions of a Mask when the narrator skillfully "teases" himself out of the reality of accepting the fact that there are contradictions between his intellectual views and his emotions, and thus arms himself with more reasons for taking refuge into a life of fantasy:

I was made to distrust both my will and my character, or at least, so far as my will was concerned, I could not believe it was anything but a fake. On the other hand, this way of thinking that placed such emphasis upon the will was in itself an exaggeration amounting almost to fantasy. Even a normal person cannot govern his behavior by will alone. No matter how normal I might have been, there certainly might have been a reason somewhere for doubting whether Sonoko and I were perfectly matched at every point for a happy married life, some reason that would have justified even that normal me in answering "H'm, perhaps so." But I had deliberately acquired the habit of closing my eyes even to such obvious assumptions, just as though I did not want to miss a single opportunity for tormenting myself. ... This is a trite device, often adopted by persons who, cut off from all other means of escape, retreat into the safe haven of regarding themselves as objects of tragedy.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Confessions of a Mask, pp. 203-204.

Mizoguchi and the narrator in Confessions of a Mask as literary types are underground men in that although they have been given in Hoffman's terms, "the present of a will," they will not "subscribe either to rational schemes which advocate a brilliant new social future or to the disciplines of stoic moral containment."⁴¹ Furthermore, they fit precisely the description given by Hoffman of the underground man's renunciation of reality for the endless cycles of introspection:

In a curious and even distorted way, the underground man renounces both the real world (of which he is nevertheless a victim) and the prospects of a world as it 'reasonably should be,' in favor of what amounts to a perverse interest in tortured self-analysis.⁴²

A symbol of this condition of "tortured self-analysis" in the underground man is the double, or the individual who represents an aspect of the protagonist which has been suppressed to some degree, but which is nonetheless recognizable in another person.

For the narrator of Confessions of a Mask, two friends serve as a double; they represent purity, strength, and sexual normality. As a fourteen-year-old, the protagonist "falls in love" with the physically appealing Omi:

My blind adoration of Omi was devoid of any element of conscious criticism, and still less did I have anything like a moral viewpoint where he

p. 7. ⁴¹ Frederick Hoffman, Samuel Beckett (Carbondale, 1962),

⁴² Ibid., p. 7.

was concerned. Whenever I tried to capture the amorphous mass of my adoration within the confines of analysis, it would already have disappeared. If there be such a thing as love that has neither duration nor progress, this was precisely my emotion. The eyes through which I saw Omi were always those of a "first glance" or, if I may say so, of the "primeval glance." It was purely an unconscious attitude on my part, a ceaseless effort to protect my fourteen-year-old purity from the process of erosion.⁴³

Later in his life, the protagonist finds himself on intimate terms with Nukada, a youth who is completely the opposite of Omi in many respects:

Nukada's friendship contained something that appealed to this weak point of mine -- because he was the object of much jealousy on the part of the "tough boys" in our school; because through him I caught faint echoes of communications from the world of women, in exactly the same way that one communicates with the spirit world through a medium.

Omi had been the first medium between me and the the world of women. But at that time I had been more my natural self, and so had been content to count his special qualifications as a medium as but a part of his beauty. Nukada's role as a medium, however, became the supernatural framework for my curiosity. This was probably due, at least in part, to the fact that Nukada was not at all beautiful.⁴⁴

Omi and Nukada, as doubles, serve a functional purpose for the narrator. By identifying with them and using them as convenient media through which the world can be viewed and approached, the narrator avoids a direct and immediate

⁴³ Confessions of a Mask, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

confrontation with life. He can thus escape the responsibility of living, of facing an unmediated vision of reality which frightens and overwhelms him.

Three persons function as Mizoguchi's double; they are Tsurukawa, Kashiwagi, and Father Zenkai. Tsurukawa represents the "positive picture"⁴⁵ of Mizoguchi; when he dies, Mizoguchi feels that "the one and only thread that connected [him] with the bright world of daylight" is severed.⁴⁶ The crippled Kashiwagi signifies for Mizoguchi an "agreement" with the conditions of darkness and perversity in which he finds himself.⁴⁷ Father Zenkai is a much more complex figure than either Tsurukawa or Kashiwagi; he represents the potentialities which Mizoguchi may realize if he were to accept himself as a self-actualizing individual instead of a creature of his obsessions and distorted self-analysis:

Father Zenkai was devoid of vanity. High-ranking prelates, who are constantly being asked to judge everything from human character to paintings and antiques, are apt to fall into the sin of never giving a positive judgment on anything for fear of being laughed at later in case they have been wrong. Then, of course, there is the type of Zen priest who will instantly hand down his arbitrary decision on anything that is discussed, but who will be careful to phrase his reply in such a way that it can be taken to mean two opposite things. Father Zenkai was not like that. I was well aware that he spoke just as he saw and just as he felt. He did not go out of his way

⁴⁵ Golden Pavilion, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 91.

to search for any special meaning in the things that were reflected in his strong, pure eyes.⁴⁸

Mizoguchi lacks the complete honesty and acceptance of things and self which Father Zenkai possesses; but instead of realizing this lack, and seeking to rediscover himself, Mizoguchi uses Father Zenkai's insight into his personality as a condoning of his preconceived plans to destroy the temple. When Father Zenkai answers Mizoguchi's plea to "Please see into my heart," with the reply, "There's no need to see into you. One can see everything on your face," Mizoguchi says:

I felt that I had been completely understood down to the deepest recess of my being. For the first time in my life I had become utterly blank. Just like water soaking into this blankness, courage to commit the deed gushed up in me afresh.⁴⁹

The fact that Mizoguchi's encounter with Father Zenkai does not serve any active positive purpose in his life illustrates the relationship of the double to the underground man. The interaction between the double and the underground man dramatizes the inner conflicts of the positive and negative qualities in the main character. But the underground man learns nothing, or at least chooses not to learn from the encounter. There is no affirmation of life in the underground man's scheme of things. The negative picture of life is the only one which registers in his soul.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 245-246.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 247.

The double serves, in the words of Hoffman, as an "ever-present reminder of the sins of self-omission,"⁵⁰ of the sacrifice of completeness for the transitory satisfaction or relief at escaping the efforts of self-actualization. The use of the double in Mishima's two novels brings out in sharp perspective, the deficiencies of his protagonists and their failure to come to grips with the contradictory elements of their selfhood.

The aesthetic interest in the structure of Mishima's two novels is defined by the contents of the protagonists' daydreams and fantasies. The psychopathologically sexual daydreams of the narrator in Confessions of a Mask, and the temple as a palpable entity and an object of fantasy for Mizoguchi in Golden Pavilion, function as realistic symbols, for these daydreams and fantasies are actual components of the protagonists' lives. As realistic symbols they are not manipulated by the author to convey a transcendent meaning beyond what is actually being related in the novels themselves. As Ursula Brumm indicates, the author who uses realistic symbols desires "to see the phenomena of this world in their objectivity, and he sees them in all their characteristic configuration and multiplicity, for their particular configuration is precisely what holds at least a partial meaning for him."⁵¹ Thus we see why Mishima's narrator in Confessions of a Mask relates in vivid detail his numerous fantasies. By des-

⁵⁰ Hoffman, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵¹ Brumm, op. cit., p. 360.

cribing his daydreams, he concretizes the meaning which sadism, pain, and homosexual attraction have for him; we are led by his descriptions to an "existential" understanding of his psychological dilemma. We begin to see why his fantasies afford him satisfaction when he can overcome his guilt feelings about them. They represent an aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual order which he cannot realize in his "endless circle of introspection" upon his life in the world of empirical reality. In his fantasy existence, he is able to act, and to choose without any hesitation, how he and those in his dream world should act:

There, in my murder theater, young Roman gladiators offered up their lives for my amusement; and all the deaths that took place there not only had to overflow with blood but also had to be performed with all due ceremony. I delighted in all forms of capital punishment and all implements of execution. But I would allow no torture devices nor gallows, as they would not have provided a spectacle of outpouring blood. Nor did I like explosive weapons, such as pistols or guns. So far as possible I chose primitive and savage weapons -- arrows, daggers, spears. And in order to prolong the agony, it was the belly that must be aimed at. The sacrificial victim must send up long-drawn-out, mournful, pathetic cries, making the hearer feel the unutterable loneliness of existence. Thereupon my joy of life, blazing up from some secret place deep within me, would finally give its own shout of exultation, answering the victim cry for cry. Was this not exactly similar to the joy ancient man found in the hunt?⁵²

⁵² Confessions of a Mask, pp. 92-93.

It is important to point out that in his fantasies, the narrator deludes himself into thinking that he has some measure of freedom and control over his life. What is patently ironical here is that the main character is unaware of the fact that it is the fantasy which controls him in its sameness of content, and the inevitability of the outcome of each imaginative sexual foray.

However, it is not only in the narrator's fantasies that his psychopathology emerges. His ultimate desire to escape from realizing a self in the real world is also made clear in his impressionistic perceptions of nature and objects. At a point in the novel when he has reached a form of emotional crisis, he observes that

The blossoms seemed usually lovely this year. There were none of the scarlet-and-white-striped curtains that one has come to think of them as the attire of cherry blossoms; there were no bustling tea-stalls, no holiday crowds of flower-viewers, no one hawking balloons and toy wind-mills; instead there were only the cherry trees blossoming undisturbed among the evergreens, making one feel as though he were seeing the naked bodies of the blossoms. Nature's free bounty and useless extravagance had never appeared so fantastically beautiful as it did this spring. I had an uncomfortable suspicion that Nature had come to reconquer the earth for herself. Certainly there was something unusual about this spring's brilliance. The yellow of the rape blossoms, the green of the young grass, the fresh-looking black trunks of the cherry trees, the canopy of heavy blossoms that bent the branches low -- all these were reflected in my eyes as vivid colors tinged with malevolence. It seemed to be a conflagration of colors.⁵³

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 178-179.

This short passage illustrates how the narrator's subjective state of mind is mirrored in the objective reality of nature, and how this relationship between his emotions and his outer world somehow implicitly justifies why he is unable to resolve the myriad confusions of his selfhood. There is malevolence even in the beauty of flowers. There is also an anthropomorphic purpose attached to Nature -- "she" is suspiciously viewed as an entity "come to reconquer the earth for herself." Instead of seeing the generosity of nature's display of beauty, the narrator views her display as a "useless extravagance." In other words, the impressionistic descriptions given by the narrator of his surroundings reflect a growing inability to relate rationally to external events and objects. Toward the close of the novel, he sits in a dance hall with Sonoko and finds himself uncontrollably fantasizing a sado-sexual scene with the males in a group he sees there. The final scene is one of unforgettable irony. As the narrator stands up to leave the hall, he glances at the spot where the group of youths had been sitting and finds only a vignette of empty desolation:

It was time. As I got up, I stole one more glance toward those chairs in the sun. The group had apparently gone to dance, and the chairs stood empty in the blazing sunshine. Some sort of beverage had been spilled on the table top and was throwing back glittering, threatening reflections.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 254.

His attempt to seek out the real objects of his fantasies is futile and abortive. All he sees are "threatening reflections" which graphically symbolize his unconscious abandonment of his search for selfhood.

In Golden Pavilion, the impressionistic perception of objects and nature by Mizoguchi is not so much an unconscious phenomenon on his part as it is deliberate and willed as an exercise of his powers of imagination. As the passage below indicates, Mizoguchi has literally staked his life on his ability to fantasize the beauty of the temple:

Whatever happened, it was essential that the Golden Temple be beautiful. I therefore staked everything not so much on the objective beauty of the temple itself as on my own power to imagine its beauty.⁵⁵

Unlike the protagonist in Confessions of a Mask who sees his emotional states unconditionally and automatically in the nature which surrounds him, Mizoguchi perceives consciously and conditionally. He is firmly convinced that by articulating his perceptions of things, he is able to achieve a mode of benign relationship with his environment. This self-deceptive attitude is seen in two impressionistically rendered passages -- one which deals with nature and the other with the temple:

"Why doesn't the snow stutter?" I wondered. Sometimes when the snow brushed against the leaves of the yatsude, it fell to the ground as if it were in fact stuttering. But when I felt myself bathed in the snow as it descended mildly from the sky without any interruption, I forgot the kinks in my heart, and seemed

⁵⁵ Golden Pavilion, p. 19.

to return to some more gentle spiritual rhythm, as if I were being bathed in music.

Thanks to the snow, the three-dimensional Golden Temple had truly become a plane figure, a figure within a picture, and no longer did it bid defiance to what existed outside itself.⁵⁶

The snow represents, to Mizoguchi, an element of nature which not only transforms objects into something which they were not before, but also into a higher level of existence. Thus, when Mizoguchi asks the strange question, "Why doesn't the snow stutter?" it is because he is undergoing a self-conceived process of elevation -- as a self-conscious stutterer he wills that his physical defect be the part of nature which is represented by the snow. He perceives of the snow as "stuttering," but in an objective fashion, as it brushes against the leaves of a tree in the yard. It is after he has established the snow as "stuttering" in its own way, that he feels himself transformed by the falling snow into a state of almost mystical well-being, as though he were "being bathed in music." The highest stage of transformation comes about when the snow changes the Golden Temple into what can only be called a scenic metamorphosis -- it becomes a "plane figure, a figure within a picture" -- something which Mizoguchi can look upon without feeling threatened or inadequate. Indeed, the temple, transformed by the snow, becomes a controllable object of beauty.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

In the following passage, Mizoguchi's perception of the Golden Temple appears as a frightening psychopathic occurrence:

At first it was as small as a miniature painting, but in an instant it grew larger, until it completely buried the world that surrounded me and filled every nook and cranny of this world, just as in that delicate model which I had once seen the Golden Temple had been so huge that it had encompassed everything else. It filled the world like some tremendous music, and this music itself became sufficient to occupy the entire meaning of the world. The Golden Temple, which sometimes seemed to be so utterly indifferent to me and to tower into the air outside myself, had now completely engulfed me and had allowed me to be situated within its structure.⁵⁷

The Golden Temple which Mizoguchi fantasizes is a realistic symbol of the unknown which lies within himself. He tries desperately to attach meaning to it, to fantasize its powers as a thing of beauty, with transcendent significance known only to himself. But Mizoguchi cannot understand that ultimately the temple is what it is and nothing more. His deliberate attempts to make it stand for more than what it is, to give it complete subjective significance, ends in failure, for what the Golden Temple symbolizes for him is the potentiality for beauty which he refuses to realize in himself. Thus, when he sets fire to the temple, he has symbolically destroyed the burden of actualizing himself.⁵⁸ As he waits

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 125.

⁵⁸ Carl Rogers makes a very interesting note of the complete freedom of symbolic expression in the creative process (On Becoming a Person, p. 359). "To express in behavior," says

for the moment when he will actually commit the act of arson, he feels a deceptive optimism. His final act, in his analysis, will be an act of liberation:

The rusty key that opened the door between the outer world and my inner world would turn smoothly in its lock. My world would be ventilated as the breeze blew freely between it and the outer world. The well bucket would rise, swaying lightly in the wind and everything would open up before me in the form of a vast field and the secret room would be destroyed. ... Now it is before my eyes and my hands are just about to stretch out and reach it 59

In destroying the Golden Temple, Mizoguchi destroys a symbol of himself. Hence, he feels no guilt over his act; on the contrary, he states that by accomplishing this act he "felt like a man" who has finished a "job of work" and that this act creates in him the desire to live. We can only interpret Mizoguchi's feelings as the sense of relief he has at being free of the awful burden of being responsible for the creation of a self.

Although the psychopathologies in Confessions of a Mask and Golden Pavilion differ radically in their nature and consequences for the main characters, Mishima has presented in both

Rogers, "all feelings, impulses, and formings may not in all instances be freeing. Behavior may in some instances be limited by society, and this is as it should be. But symbolic expression need not be limited. Thus to destroy a hated object (whether one's mother or a rococo building) by destroying a symbol of it, is freeing. To attack it in reality may create guilt and narrow the psychological freedom which is experienced." In the light of what Rogers says about symbolic destruction, Mizoguchi has avoided the painful alternative of attacking the hated elements of his own personality. Mizoguchi's pathology lies also in the fact that he never feels guilty about his actions; in his case, guilt would be necessary to prevent him from his sociopathic act.

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novels a consistently dramatic and pessimistic view of his protagonists' abilities to cope with their inner and outer worlds. He has created works which treat the problem of pathological deviancy and selfhood with powerful literary and subjective intensity.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE STANDARD OF VALUE": ABÉ

The values of individuals living in the twentieth-century are in many ways inextricably related to the pressures which are exerted upon them to expand and rely on the scientific knowledge of an industrialized society. The impact of the contemporary scientific emphasis on Japanese culture has had notable effects in the fields of philosophy and literature. In 1938, the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro succinctly summarized the prevailing tenor of modern thought in a rapidly developing Japanese nation. In a series of lectures entitled "The Problem of Japanese Culture" (Nihon Bunka no Mondai), Nishida called for the necessity of incorporating the scientific spirit in Japanese culture:

The saying that "Oriental culture is doctrinal in character, occidental culture scientific" would seem to apply quite well to Chinese culture [but not to Japanese] Japan, it is true, has been called a country where people "'following the way of gods implicitly' are not argumentative." But this means only that argument is not indulged in for argument's sake and concepts are not bandied about for their own sake. As Motoori Norinaga explained in Naobi no mitama, "It [the Way of the Gods] is nothing but the way of going to things," which should be taken in the sense of going straight to the true facts of things. Going to the true facts, however, does

not mean following tradition out of the mere force of custom or acting in direct response to subjective emotions. To go to the true fact of things must also involve what we call a scientific spirit. It should mean following the true facts of things at the expense of self. "Not to be argumentative" should be understood as not to be self-assertive, but to bend one's head low before the true facts. It ought not to be a mere cessation of thinking or readiness to compromise; to penetrate to the very source of fact is to exhaust one's self and to become objective.¹

What Nishida has interpreted in a philosophical and optimistic vein, Abé Kobo has treated artistically and pessimistically in his novels. Abé, as one of the modern Japanese writers interested in the larger world of political and social change as opposed to the relatively closed world of the family,² reflects the increasing emphasis on science and objective thought in his works. He shows how the influence of science, specifically the implicit trust placed upon the scientific method as a norm for rational living, determines precariously the course and outcome of individuals living in modern society. Abé's protagonists may be

¹ Nishida Kitaro, "The Problem of Japanese Culture," in Sources of the Japanese Tradition, comp. Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene (New York, 1958), pp. 858-859.

² Howard Hibbett, "Tradition and Trauma in the Contemporary Japanese Novel," in Fiction in Several Languages, ed. Henri Peyre (Boston, 1968), p. 45. Hibbett notes that contemporary Japanese writers like Abé do not limit themselves to the changing conditions of family life in Japan, an area which reflects most noticeably the confrontation of modern values with traditional ties and the ensuing traumatic results for the individual. However, Hibbett goes on, there appears to be a stylistic shortcoming in novels by these writers in that while they portray journeys into the interior world of the self that are "rapid, purposeful, and comparatively well-organized," these are made "perhaps at the sacrifice of random insight as well as of leisurely grace," qualities which characterize the literature of the old Japan.

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called prototypical figures of the contemporary age as they seek answers to their probing questions about the nature of selfhood and the fate of men from the context of science.

In Suna no Onna, or The Woman in the Dunes, written in 1960, Abé establishes the atmosphere of scientific interest through the character of Niki Jumpei, a school-teacher who is a semi-professional entomologist, a thoroughly "dedicated collector" of insects. Niki's enthusiasm for and commitment to his scientific endeavors take the ideal form of a "true entomologist" whose real pleasure is the simple and direct one of "discovering a new type." The reason behind this pleasure, however, is more complex, for through scientific discovery, Niki hopes to put in his claim to immortality:

When this [discovery of a new type] happens, the discoverer's name appears in the illustrated encyclopedias of entomology appended to the technical Latin name of the newly found insect; and there, perhaps, it is preserved for something less than eternity. His efforts are crowned with success if his name is perpetuated in the memory of his fellow men by being associated with an insect.³

The value attached to the self here is that which is determined by the norms of scientific knowledge. Niki's apprehension of a subjective self is invested in the amount of objective information he has in his possession about things outside of himself. It is clear, for example, that Niki's absorption in his entomological quest is neither patent nor dilettantish. He is systematic and conscientious in his undertakings; he takes into care-

³ The Woman in the Dunes, p. 11.

ful consideration the environmental variations and degree of adaptability among the various types of flies which he seeks. His methodical approach, at one point, leads him to make a hypothetical extrapolation of the scientific knowledge which he possesses about the flies he collects:

He had best begin by observing environment. That there were many environmental variations simply indicated a high degree of adaptability among flies, didn't it? At this discovery he jumped with joy. His concept might not be altogether bad. The fact that the fly showed great adaptability meant that it could be at home even in unfavorable environments in which other insects could not live -- for example, a desert where all other living things perished.⁴

The implications of this passage are far-reaching in that Niki's concept about the adaptability among flies will be applicable to his own situation as a captive in the strange village. His capture by the inhabitants of the seashore village where he goes on his entomological quest, will show how he himself will be able to adapt to an unfavorable environment.

Niki's will to escape from his imprisonment with the woman in her sand pit dwelling is at first motivated by his sense of his identification as a member of human society in the city; later this sense is forcibly transformed into a sheer struggle for survival at all costs. When Niki is faced with the responsibility of helping the woman clear her hut of the sand which threatens daily to cover it up, he is at first adamantly resistant to the idea. The reason for this, we learn, is that his

⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

interest in sand and his involvement with "insect collecting were, after all, simply ways to escape, however temporarily, from his obligations and the inactivity of his life."⁵ He has no interest in encountering his "avocations" in terms of the mundane necessities of life.

However, as the novel unfolds, we see Niki's conceptual grasp of the world increasingly coming about from his constant application of objective scientific information and theory to the contingencies of existence. Not only is he absorbed in the details of entomological information, but his interest in the physical properties of sand take on encyclopedic proportions. Fascinated by the minuteness of the individual grains of sand, he attempts to grasp the larger significance which lies behind the existence of sand. His scientific curiosity goes beyond technical analysis into the metaphysical contemplation of the physical nature of the universe. He ponders, for example, the fact that "sand is sand wherever it is; strangely enough, there is almost no difference in the size of the grains whether they come from the Gobi Desert or from the beach at Enoshima."⁶ Later, as he surveys the terrain of the beach where he searches for his flies, he observes that there is "no escaping the law of the sand."⁷ This rather casual statement takes on ironic significance

⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

if we view it in the light of Niki's concept of himself. He is proud of the store of knowledge that he, as a scientific man, has about the "law of the sand." Thus, when the woman informs him that sand rots, he answers rudely, "Impossible!" and feels that "his own personal concept of sand had been defiled by her ignorance."⁸ However, he discovers later that the woman was right, that the house in the sand is "half dead," "its insides ... half eaten away by tentacles of ceaselessly flowing sand."⁹ Faced with this astonishing and unexpected revelation, Niki concludes to his own satisfaction that the reason behind the phenomenon is a metaphysical one:

Sand, which didn't even have a form of its own -- other than the mean 1/8 mm. diameter. Yet not a single thing could stand against this shapeless, destructive power. The very fact that it had no form was doubtless the highest manifestation of its strength, was it not?¹⁰

In a moment of associative reflection, Niki recalls that the destructive qualities of sand have always been intertwined scientifically and historically: "the sabulation" of the Roman Empire, "the village of something or other, which Omar Khayyam wrote of, the cities of antiquity, whose immobility no one doubted; ... yet, after all, they too were unable to resist the law of the

⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

flowing 1/8 mm. sands."¹¹

Niki's need to refer constantly to life in terms of a scientific nexus has the quality of what Horney calls a neurotic attachment to the ideal of the intellect.¹² The world, and life in the world, in Niki's view, must be made apprehensible through his knowledge of its physical propensities and limitations. He feels compelled to comprehend things intellectually. He is most comfortable when he is able to reduce natural phenomena into general hypotheses, to articulate with scientific precision, the unwieldy quality of things as they are experienced. A telling illustration of this tendency is shown when he summarily pronounces that his "own viewpoint in considering the sand to be a rejection of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 41.

¹² Karen Horney, op. cit., pp. 182-183. Horney explains that one of the general measures of the neurotic is his belief in the supremacy of the mind. She notes that "while feelings -- because unruly -- are suspects to be controlled, the mind -- imagination and reason -- expands like a genie from a bottle. Thus ..[a] dualism is created. It is no longer mind and feelings but mind versus feelings; no longer mind and body but mind versus body; no longer mind and self but mind versus self." Horney concludes that this belief, like other fragmentations of neurotic solutions to life, "serves to release tensions, to cover up [inner] conflicts, and to establish a semblance of unity" of the self.

the stationary state was not madness ... a 1/8 mm. flow ... a world where existence was a series of states."¹³ By the same token, abstractions must be made tangible and referable to concret things; "Hope" is a "trap to catch crows."¹⁴ Hope as an abstract quality of human aspiration, has meaning for Niki only when it is defined as a "state of existence." This is evident when Niki discovers that the structure of his crow trap has accidentally functioned as a device for collecting water from the sand. This discovery is a revolutionary one in the sense that with its occurrence, "hope" has literally and figuratively taken on a new form, and Niki feels that the entire nature of his captivity has changed into a different "state of existence":

The fact that he was still just as much at the bottom of the hole as ever had not changed, but he felt quite as if he had climbed to the top of a high tower. Perhaps the world had been turned upside down and its projections and depressions reversed. Anyway, he had discovered water in this sand. As long as he had his device the villagers would not be able to interfere with him so easily. No matter how much they cut off his supply, he would be able to get along very well. Again laughter welled up in him at the very thought of the outcry the villagers would make. He was still in the hole, but it seemed as if he were already outside. Turning around, he could see the whole scene. You can't really judge a mosaic if you don't look at it from a distance. If you really get close to it you get lost in detail only to get caught in another. Perhaps

¹³ The Woman in the Dunes, p. 120.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 138.

what he had been seeing up to now was not the sand but grains of sand.¹⁵

Niki makes, moreover, a correlation between his discovery of a scientific phenomenon with his notion of discovering a "new self":

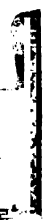
The change in the sand corresponded to a change in himself. Perhaps, along with the water in the sand, he had found a new self.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that Niki sees himself as gaining a renewed sense of selfhood because he has made an amazing objective discovery which will ensure his physical survival in what is for him an extremely hostile environment. In other words, what Niki is blatantly equating here is psychological value with scientific fact. The standard of value for his life lies outside of himself; therefore, what Niki imagines to be a "new self" is a self which has meaning only in terms of external phenomena.¹⁷ Another way of viewing Niki's illusory sense of self is to look at the primary metaphor of his "salvation" as a self. "Hope" in the form of Niki's crow trap is a failure, and what is substituted for "hope" is scientific discovery.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁷ Several critics have interpreted the novel's ending as an optimistic commentary of the protagonist's self. One critic, Beth Schultz, argues that Niki's discovery is the source of his success as a self (The East-West Review /II:1965/). She interprets Niki's conscious realization that he had not understood the sand as a whole as the awareness he has that he had not always understood himself and the other wholly; "in the knowledge of himself. in the sense of responsibility to the woman, in the possibility for sharing his discovery and for making new discoveries, there is security without fear and resignation; there is reason for being, room for creativity, and joy."



Hence, what keeps Niki at the bottom of the sand pit at the end of the novel is not hope, but scientific preoccupation. He attempts to find meaning in work, but as Colin Wilson notes, "to work without hope is almost a contradiction in terms, for work without hope is work without real drive, without motivation."¹⁸

It may be argued that scientific discovery acts for Niki as a kind of Joycean epiphany of selfhood. However, the language of the novel's conclusion reveals a curiously uneasy protagonist:

Something moved at the bottom of the hole. It was his own shadow. Just near it stood the water trap. One part of the framework had come loose. Perhaps someone had accidentally stepped on it when they had come to take the woman out. He hastened back down the ladder to repair it. The water, as his calculations had led him to expect, had risen to the fourth mark. The damage did not appear to be too great. In the house, someone was singing in a rasping voice on the radio. He tried to stifle the sobbing that seemed about to burst from him; he plunged his hands into the bucket. The water was piercingly cold. He sank down on his knees and remained inert, his hands still in the water. There was no particular need to hurry about escaping. On the two-way ticket he held in his hand now, the destination and time of departure were blanks for him to fill in as he wished. In addition, he realized that he was burning with a desire to talk to someone about the water trap. And if he wanted to talk about it, there wouldn't be better listeners than the villagers. He would end by telling someone -- if not today, then tomorrow.

He might as well put off his escape until some-time after that.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wilson, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁹ The Woman in the Dunes, p. 156.

The protagonist feels that he has a choice now, to escape whenever he desires, but the choice is put into the limited alternatives of the existential situation. As Philip Hallie phrases it, the "greatest weakness in existentialism is that it is not faithful enough to the phenomena of choice."²⁰

Choice and escape are significant when they are made in terms of the conditions of the self, when one can find avenues to free oneself from the shackles of the limited consciousness. Niki has not found a self, but has instead found a way to avoid self-knowledge by readily and uncritically accepting the limitations of his life. He chooses to stay in the sand pit hut for an indefinite period of time, a choice which reflects what Hoffman calls the action of the contracting self.

²⁰ Philip Hallie, op. cit., p. 51. The Woman in the Dunes can be called a novel with an existential theme, which I define here as a theme which concerns the individual who is cut off from the traditional sources of meaning, power, and purpose. Such an individual is determined to live according to the "values" of day to day existence. These values include the belief in the integrity of an individual's subjective perceptions of the objective world, and the belief that the mood of pessimism is closest to the real nature of existence. The shortcomings of Existentialism are those of its strengths -- that is, because the individual has postulated himself as the beginning and end of all of his actions, he is in constant danger of succumbing to a crippling egocentricity which fails to recognize any possibility of an objective value system.

The literary presentation of the contracting self, says Hoffman,

is frequently described in terms of the circumstances of escape, of hiding from a formidable authority, or of withdrawal into impenetrable securities of fantasy, dream, and madness. Not only do the images of "cave," "cellar," "cage," "shell" increase. Since the self has become a refuge from the non-self, from an inexplicable, a domineering "father," it assumes the several roles of the scurrying animal or insect, hiding both itself from the view of the outside and its own view from itself. Ultimately this reductive process re-creates the entire, extensive scope of problems concerning self-knowledge. In its extreme cases, the reduced self suffers the complex and confusing responsibility of self-determination on the most primitive and most unsophisticated levels of insight and outlook.²¹

The contraction of Niki's self is seen as he remains at the bottom of the sand pit to which he, like a fly, has adapted. His superior intellect has shown him how to adapt, but it is an intellect focused only on the concrete and tangible elements of experience. Niki's is not the "visionary intellect"²² which gives man purpose and authenticity as a self; it is rather the intellect limited by the dictates of the here and now.

Niki's reliance upon the externalities of existence to "inform" himself of the nature of the universe and of man

²¹ Hoffman, Samuel Beckett, pp. 43-44.

²² Wilson, op. cit., p. 128. Man, says Wilson, is "in-authentic without purpose" which must be "grasped by the visionary intellect."

takes a heavy toll not only upon his development as a self, but also upon his relationships with other individuals. The following analysis is an attempt to show that the novel portrays Niki's relationships with the "other" as fundamentally negative experiences.

When Niki first encounters a villager, he still retains the manners of his past social behavior in which he reacts to the surfaces of things:

"I should be very grateful if you would. Of course, I will expect to show my appreciation ... I am particularly fond of staying in village houses."²³

But it is not long before his external "good manners" are stripped away like the facade of a mask. In his initial interaction with the woman in the dunes, we see his indifference to her as a person, and the possibility of using her as a sexual object occurs to him:

He was not particularly interested in what she had to say, but her words had warmth in them that made him think of the body concealed beneath the coarse work trousers.²⁴

He is impatient of what he considers to be the woman's "blind adherence" to her fate: "Why must you cling so to such a village? I really don't understand. This sand is not a trifling matter. You're greatly mistaken if you think you can set yourself up against it with such methods. It's preposterous! I give up. I really give up. I have absolutely no sympathy for you."²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

His superior attitude and passionately exhibited indifference, however, soon turn to a nagging fear that the silent, seemingly docile woman has had a part in his imprisonment:

The ladder had probably been removed with her knowledge, and doubtless with her full consent. Unmistakably she was an accomplice. Of course her posture had nothing to do with embarrassment; it was the posture of a sacrificial victim, of a criminal willing to accept any punishment. He had been lured by the beetle into a desert from which there was no escape -- like some famished mouse.²⁶

In his continual anger at being duped by a seemingly ignorant and worthless woman, he is put into a struggle against the lure of the woman as a sexual object and his need not to be controlled either by his emotions or by another person. Thus, when he tells her "Stop looking so stupid!" we learn what he is undergoing emotionally:

He was angry; he wanted to make her admit her guilt even if he had to force it out of her. At the very thought his hair bristled and his skin felt scratchy like dry paper. "Skin" seemed to establish an association of ideas with the word "force." Suddenly she became a silhouette cut out from its background. A man of 20 is sexually aroused by a thought. ... But for a man of 30 a woman who is only a silhouette is the most dangerous. He could embrace it as easily as embracing himself, couldn't he? But behind her there were a million eyes. She was only a puppet controlled by threads of vision. If he were to embrace her, he would be the next to be controlled.²⁷

The threat of being an object himself comes from the powerful

²⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 60.

forces of sexuality which are capable of making him lose the tense control which he tries to maintain over himself. In a monologue, he articulates his deep need: "Saying you want to become a writer is no more than egotism; you want to distinguish between yourself and the puppets by making yourself a puppeteer."²⁸ The struggle to keep one's self intact from the invasion of others, is also the struggle to cling to some vestige of protection from the awful task of facing one's self -- the self which is reduced to its lowest common denominator, to its most existential mode when masks, roles, manners, and other accoutrements of society are no longer available. The luxury of rational self-consciousness, of mirroring one's self and the other in a "game" which one plays is no longer possible for Niki. This idea is brought out most forcefully as he compares the sexual encounter he has had with his mistress to that of the physical debacle with the woman in the dunes:

On that bed -- with the other one -- they had been a feeling man and woman, a watching man and woman; they had been a man who watched himself experiencing and a woman who had watched herself experiencing; they had been a woman who watched a man watching himself and a man watching a woman watching herself ... all reflected in counter-mirrors ... the limitless consciousness of the sexual act.²⁹

The sex which he experiences in his new situation lacks the

²⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

dissolute sophistication and self-consciousness of the past encounters, and literally sweeps him into a chasm of primitive urges. The intensity of Niki's sexual experiences with the woman in the dunes has the effect of momentarily restoring him to the source of power and strength within him. But, like the liaison he has had with his former mistress, he has failed to establish any warm or meaningfully intimate relationship with the woman. Their sexual union significantly results in a miscarriage of its issue.³⁰

The irony of Niki's situation lies in the fact that although he attempts desperately to control the other, the entirely new conditions of life with the woman call forth unexpectedly humane results. As he lives and struggles for survival with the strange woman, he comes to a point of feeling a pure and simple generosity which he lacked in his former life:

"You're really a great help," she had said. ...
And someday, maybe I'll be able to buy a radio
or a mirror or something."
(Radio and mirror ... radio and mirror ...) As if all
of human life could be expressed in those two things
alone. Radios and mirrors do have a point in common:
both can connect one person with another. Maybe they
reflect cravings that touch the core of our existence.
All right, when he got home he would buy a radio right
away and send it off to her.³¹

³⁰ In his study "Abé and Ooka: Identity and Mind-Body,"
(Critique /X: 1968/, p. 135), James Korges interprets the mis-
carriage as ultimately favorable: "At the end of the novel, the
woman is taken to the hospital, to finish a miscarriage. The sex-
ual relationship of the two has ended in a dead thing; but during
the nine months the action of the novel covers, the man has him-
self reconceived himself, redefined himself. The moment of the mis-
carriage is the moment of his rebirth."

³¹ The Woman in the Dunes, p. 123.

Even the jeering, obscene request of the villagers to have Niki perform a debasing sexual exhibition with the woman becomes not a source of frustration and anger, but rather a means for comprehension:

The man stood numbly, as if someone were strangling him, but slowly he began to understand exactly what they meant. And he began to understand that he understood. Once he had comprehended, their proposal didn't seem particularly surprising.³²

His feelings of generosity and his new grasp of comprehending the "humanness" of the villager's cruel request help him to locate emotions in himself which join him to a common humanity. In a sense, Niki has obtained with these feelings an insight of what it means to be, a form of epiphany of a larger, unlimited freedom which transcends his narrow ego-centric vision of his own needs and desires.

In his "new" world, Niki's old view of life is constantly called into question. He begins to discover that the present is significant, that the moment or the instant takes on new dimensions and importance:

The idea had come to him rather suddenly. But it was not necessarily true that only a time-tested plan would be successful. Such sudden inspiration had sufficient basis in itself, even though the process of its emergence had been unconscious. The chances of success were better in spontaneous cases than with plans that had been fussed over.³³

³² Ibid., p. 149.

³³ Ibid., p. 107.

The woman, whom he first regards as "animal-like," "thinking only in terms of today ... no yesterday, no tomorrow ... with a dot for a heart,"³⁴ also makes him realize gradually that her menial tasks can be important:

There was an importance about the dancing needle that made him feel it was the center of the world. Her repetitious movements gave color to the present and feeling of actuality.³⁵

Earlier, Niki reads the headlines of some outdated newspapers that are brought into the hut by the villagers, and is struck by the meaninglessness of what he sees. He then equates the headlines with life, and comes up with a statement of existential significance:

But everyday life was exactly like the headlines. And so everybody knowing the meaninglessness of existence, sets the center of his compass at his own home.³⁶

At the center of all of Niki's experiences is the realization that the task of Sisyphus, the "infernal punishment precisely because nothing happens,"³⁷ is really a fitting analogy of life. Niki's need to exist and survive no matter what happens is basic to its extreme: "What was the use of individuality when one was on the point of death? He wanted to go on

³⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

living under any circumstances, even if his life had no more individuality than a pea in a pod."³⁸ And his subsequent actions make him think of various ways by which he may exist:

He adjusted himself to the life of the hole, as if it were a kind of hibernation, concentrating his efforts on making the villagers relax their vigilance. Repetition of the same patterns, they say, provides an effective form of protective coloring. If he were to melt into a life of simple repetition, there might possibly come a time when they could be quite unconscious of him.³⁹

He also realizes that the essence of loneliness is an "unsatisfied thirst for illusion."⁴⁰ The inference that can be made from this statement is that without illusion, or the need for illusion, one ceases to be lonely. Relationships with others on a meaningful level do not exist in reality, and the sooner one comes to the conclusion that this is so, the sooner he is able to live with himself. The self that one lives with in this novel, however, is not the self that is fulfilled; it is rather a self that sees no real need for communication with others except "to talk to someone about the water trap."⁴¹ Thus, it is a curiously uneasy and empty peace that Niki finds at the end of the novel. Wilson states that one of the chief characteristic of the human being is that his interest extends far

³⁸ Ibid., p. 133.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 156.

beyond mere survival and comfort.⁴² The ending of The Woman in the Dunes demonstrates that the protagonist does not go beyond his need for survival and comfort -- his acceptance of his limited freedom makes him a captive of his circumstances and his needs.

The theme of the alienation of self in the novel is reinforced by the setting of the action.⁴³ The landscape plays a vital role in the novel in defining the tone of hostility and violence that accompanies the protagonist's stay in the strange village. The relation of landscape to theme is explained below:

The history of violence in the twentieth century (and in its literature) follows somewhat along these lines, in terms of the character of the assailant: the assailant as human being, as instrument, as machine, as landscape. In this last case, the assailant is neither human nor mechanical but the entire environment, the land itself, or the world or the solar system: whatever extent of space the instrument of the assailant has put at his disposal. Many of the literary expressions of this circumstances have been given in terms of vast landscapes of desert, or ice-bound images of terror, or mountain perspectives; they are the reverse of the spiritual metaphors I have already discussed. They have the double function of separating man from time and eliminating most associations with ordinary reality. The strategy of adjustment to this kind of violence usually takes the form of making the generalizations defining it as vast, unreal, unavailable to rational explanation as the circumstance itself. The natural reaction to them is to trust nothing that is 44
vague, abstract, not associated with immediate experiences.

⁴² Wilson, op. cit., p. 80.

⁴³ Harry Levin, "Thematics and Criticism," in The Disciplines of Criticism, ed. P. Demetz, et. al. (New Haven, 1968), p. 134. Levin lists varied ways in which thematics is related to concrete representations in literature -- one of these is the setting in some works taking on a thematic aspect.

⁴⁴ Hoffman, The Mortal No, p. 14.

The landscape Niki finds himself in is impressionistically rendered. The beach, first of all, is presented as a kind of lunar landscape which is inimical to human life:

The landscape was a mixture of hillocks and hollows, ... in the direction of the seashore the soil gradually became whitish and dry. ... Now and again clumps of dry grass cast shadows in hollows in the sand. As if by mistake, there was occasionally a meager plot of eggplants, the size of a straw mat. But of human shadows there was not a trace. The sea, toward which he was headed, lay beyond.⁴⁵

When he finds himself inextricably caught in this landscape, several bizarre states take place within him. The "omniscient face" of the sand cliff tells him of the "meaninglessness of resistance,"⁴⁶ and a feeling of overwhelming impotence paralyzes his entire body. He wishes to believe in his ability to maintain control over his environment, but he cannot do so with conviction:

Certain types of insects and spiders, when unexpectedly attacked, fall into a paralytic state, a kind of epileptic seizure .. an airport whose control tower has been seized by lunatics .. a fragmented picture. He wanted to believe that his own lack of movement had stopped all movement in the world, the way a hibernating frog abolishes winter.⁴⁷

The landscape is portrayed as a detached entity which defies all human attempts to control it. For a moment, Niki futilely toys with the idea of using the landscape, to capitalize on its inimical qualities by changing it into a commercial asset:

There was something strangely tense in the

⁴⁵ The Woman in the Dunes, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

spatial composition, and he shuddered with an uncanny loneliness for people. (Yes, this certainly is a romantic landscape ... A setting like this would be a great attraction for young tourists these days. Precious, gilt-edged stock it is I can guarantee its future development as someone who's experienced in this profession. But if you're going to develop it, first you've got to advertise! Even flies won't come if you don't advertise.)⁴⁸

He admits, however, that the idea is actually thought up "in a fit of spleen," and he changes his viewpoint by formulating a theory of nature and beauty: "Beautiful scenery need not be sympathetic to man." He pictures this scenery as one of violence, "the beauty of sand ... belonged to death" and "it was the beauty of death that ran through the magnificence of its ruins and its great power of destruction."⁴⁹

The landscape of violence also becomes the scene of cosmic beauty and significance. In a poetically moving episode, Niki looks upon an awesome display of natural phenomenon and finds himself pleading to it as to a universal Judge:

A milky mist billowed and swirled above the cliff. Spaces of shadow, speckled with the remains of night... spaces that sparkled as if with glowing wire ... spaces flowing with particles of shining vapor. The combination of shadows was filled with fantasies and stirred limitless reveries in him. He would never tire of looking at the sight. Every moment overflowed with new discoveries. Everything was there, actual shapes confounded with fantastic forms he had never seen before.

He turned toward the swirling mass and appealed to it involuntarily.

--Your Honor, I request to be told the substance of the prosecution. I request to be told the reason for

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 119-120.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 120.

my sentence. You see the defendant before you, awaiting your pleasure.⁵⁰

It is not only the landscape which is rendered impressionistically and which effectively defines Niki's emotional and perceptual states. We see also that the protagonist's consciousness of his own being and of abstract, metaphysical concepts, such as time, is portrayed with vivid impressionistic detail. He sees others and himself as chromatic objects: "He sank into an unbearable self-aversion with the thought that among the glum and gray people other than he had colors other than gray -- red, blue, green."⁵¹ When Niki is exhausted, "his fatigued senses become like wet paper,"⁵² or "his fatigue spread out into a sluggish circle, like India ink dropped in water -- it was a jellyfish, a scent bag, a diagram of an atomic nucleus."⁵³

His sensations after the scene of sexual humiliation before the villagers are equally vivid: "It seemed that what remained of him had turned into a liquid and melted into her body,"⁵⁴ and, "It was as if his stomach were being tickled by a paper balloon filled with some special light gas; he felt

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵² Ibid., p. 83.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

that the hand he held to his face was floating free in the air."⁵⁵

Not only are his senses aroused to a preternatural degree, but he also finds very early that his new existence throws him into a surreal, dreamlike state, a condition which renders him helpless to control his immediate situation and which recalls him startingly to his absurd condition:

His memory had completely stopped functioning. Then it had gotten confused with a long, oppressive dream. In the dream he was astride an old, used chopstick, floating down some unknown street. It was not bad on the chopstick, rather like riding a scooter, but when he relaxed his attention he suddenly lost his buoyance. ... At the end of the deal, the dealer suddenly gave him the last card and cried out. He took the card involuntarily and looked at it; it was not a card at all, but a letter. The letter had a strange, soft feel to it. When he exerted pressure with his fingers, blood came spurting up. He had screamed and awoke.⁵⁶

Niki's senses also perceive time graphically; time is a tangible object "folded in endless, deep, bellows-like pleats,"⁵⁵ a sensation associated with a specific action: "Time cannot be spurred on like a horse. But it is not quite so slow as a pushcart. Gradually the morning temperature attained its usual intensity; his eyeballs and brain began to seethe; the heat pierced his innards; his lungs burned;"⁵⁸ -- time is also a state of being: "You can't spend time vertically. It's an accepted fact that time really goes horizontally. -- What happens if you try spending it vertically? -- You're a mummy

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 83-84.

if you do!"⁵⁹ The protagonist's concern with time here is associated with the concern over an inevitable human condition. John Cohen in his article "Subjective Time," defines the condition as follows: "Thought of time brings to mind the ideas of corruption and decay, the knowledge of inexorable and irreversible aging and death."⁶⁰ The examples given above illustrate the fact that the presentation of the theme of the self in The Woman in the Dunes is intricately related to the varied metaphors of landscape and time, and to the threads of impressionistic descriptions which run through the fabric of the action. Clearly, there is a satisfying and functional aesthetic pattern underlying this novel.

Aesthetic patterning is also present although in different degrees and form in Abe's second novel, Tanin no Kao, or The Face of Another (1964), which treats the theme of the self and an individual's quest for human values from the standards of scientific knowledge. The novel's basic structure is in the form of notebooks which are kept by a nameless chemist whose face has been totally disfigured in a laboratory accident. The novel is comprised of three notebooks, supplemented by marginalia, added bits of notes called "excursus," and a letter. The notebooks are kept with the intention of having

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

⁶⁰ John Cohen, "Subjective Time," in The Voices of Time, ed. J.T. Fraser (New York, 1966), p. 275.

the protagonist's wife read and understand the innermost feelings and motivations of the writer who has found himself suddenly a physical and spiritual outcast in society. The "plot" of the novel is not so much the confessions of an individual tortured by self-doubts as a complicated seduction of the "significant other" in the person of the protagonist's wife. The theme of the novel resides in the examination of the scientific, social, moral, psychological, metaphysical, and aesthetic definitions of a face and its relevance to the self. The Face of Another is a novel demonstrating the idea that questions raised about the self do not call forth facile answers and that the choice of a convenient answer or one made in desperation may have tragic consequences for the chooser.

The tone of the novel is set in the following passage:

Finally, I tired of this soliloquy about a face, this soliloquy that made no progress. But there was no particular reason, either, to abandon the plans that I had been at pains to begin. I began to devote close attention to technical observations.⁶¹

The protagonist, after leaving the hospital where he is treated for his facial wounds, feels that while his wife still lives with him, she has ceased to think of him as a husband, and perhaps even as a person. Faced with the loss of her regard, the protagonist embarks on his plans "to put the stopper for the

⁶¹ The Face of Another, p. 32.

hole" in his face.⁶² The task looms before him with a formidable range of possibilities and implications. His thoughts about his projected mask threaten to overwhelm him. Thus, his decision to "pay close attention to technical details" is a way of determining how to bring order out of the chaos of his seemingly endless "soliloquizing." His efforts to search out standards of values through the use of scientific method and knowledge comprise a wish to control phenomena which actually defy control. It is a control which is essentially dehumanizing because it reduces personal relationships and selfhood to an equation. The following marginal note exemplifies how the protagonist achieves a theoretical victory in his efforts to objectify his self, but it is a victory gained at the risk of dehumanization:

It would be a mistake to settle this whole thing with vague standards. Rather I should doubtless take into consideration my inner impulse to reject standards. Choosing a standard, in other words, is to commit oneself to others. However, at the same time, men have the opposite desire of trying to distinguish themselves from others. Perhaps the two could be related thus:

$$\frac{A}{B} = f\left(\frac{1}{N}\right)$$

A = the factor of commitment to others; B = the factor of resistance to others; n = age; f = one's degree of viscosity / its decrease is the hardening of the self and at the same time the forming of the self; generally it stands in inverse proportion to age, but in a locus curve one can observe a number of individual differences among people according to

⁶² Ibid., p. 19.

sex, personality, work, etc.⁷ In short, with age the degree of my viscosity was decreasing very much, and I felt strong opposition to changing faces at this late date.⁶³

Although the protagonist formulates with numerical precision the concept that his age has "formed" his self to an irreversible point, he nonetheless decides to change his face in accordance with a "standard for faces." His efforts lead him to an unexpected and anxiety-provoking dialectic:

If I did not come to some decision about what sort of face to make, I could not advance a step further. But no matter how much I thought about it, my head, like a museum storeroom, was in utter confusion with a thousand sample faces. Yet, if I kept shrinking from making a choice, I would never come to any decision. I borrowed a warehouse storage list, deciding there was no other course open to me except to gather my courage and check the faces off one by one. However, on the first page of the list appeared some unexpectedly obliging instructions, "rules for classification," which I read with pounding heart:

1. The standard of value for faces is definitely objective. If one is involved in personal feelings, one makes the error of being taken in by imitations.
2. There is no such thing as a standard of value for faces. There are only pleasure and displeasure, and the standard of selection is continually cultivated through refinement of taste.⁶⁴

This dialectic is grounded in the idea that life constantly eludes efforts to standardize it. But the protagonist ignores this idea, to his consequent distorted comprehension of the nature of existence. He is, for example, unable to appreciate

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

the beauty of life's infinite opposites.

As long as the protagonist harbors the illusion that life must, and can be unremittingly subjected to controls, he cannot abandon his search for a tenable scientific paradigm. His efforts to draw up a list of human facial expressions reflect this strenuous and ultimately futile search:

Concerning the content and distribution of the expressions, I drew up the following tentative list as ratios of 100 percent.

1. Concentration of interest	16 percent
2. Curiosity	07 percent
3. Assent	10 percent
4. Satisfaction	12 percent
5. Laughter	13 percent
6. Denial	06 percent
7. Dissatisfaction	07 percent
8. Abhorrence	06 percent
9. Doubt	05 percent
10. Perplexity	06 percent
11. Concern	03 percent
12. Anger	09 percent

It cannot be considered satisfactory to analyze such a complicated and delicate thing as expression into these few components. However, by combining just this many elements on my palette, I should be able to get almost any shade. The percentages, needless to say, indicate the frequency of occurrence of each item. In brief, I postulated a type of man who expressed his emotions in approximately such ratios. I should be hard pressed for a ready answer if I were asked what the standard of judgment was. I weighed these expressions one by one on the scales of my intuition, placing myself in the position of a seducer and imagining the scene when I would confront you who were the symbol of "the others."⁶⁵

The fact that he admits to the difficulty of adhering to strict objectivity in explaining his "standard of judgment" and that

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

he relies on the "scales of [his] intuition," however, does not mitigate the protagonist's essential preoccupation with scientific norms. The list of expressions he draws up indicates a certain amount of trust which he has in his intuitive powers, but this trust is secondary to his major concern which is the application of his ratiocinative ability.

It is evident that the protagonist places his confidence in science because of his belief that it is an instrument for revealing man's freedom. The lesson that science teaches man is that he is an evolutionary, not a static creature. Man is capable of changing his environment through knowledge, and by his actions the quality of life need not be as it is found. However, this view of science creates a potentially dangerous situation in that man's ability to control and manipulate matter becomes his sole avenue to freedom. The danger arises when he is faced with this freedom and discovers that there are no certain ways to carry it through to a logical conclusion.

The protagonist in The Face of Another is clearly aware of what his use of scientific research in creating a mask means in terms of the result which he desires to accomplish -- namely, a reunion with his estranged wife, -- but he is not prepared to deal with the freedom which his research also entails:

"The goal does not lie in the results of research, the very process of research is itself the goal."

Yes ... words that any researcher would utter as a matter of course. While at first blush they seemed unrelated to my case, I could not help but feel that I was after all saying the same thing as they. The process of research, in short, was merely the expenditure of freedom upon matter. The results of research, on the contrary, by being calculated in terms of value, encourage the preservation of freedom. The point of the words was to warn against the tendency to overemphasize only results and to confuse means and ends. I thought this was a much more enlightened logic, but on reflection what I had put forth was quite like the alcoholic babblings of the mask. I was not at all satisfied with the explanation. Was it not simply that, although I had intended to control the mask, I had actually found it to be unmanageable? Or was freedom like some powerful medicine which, though beneficial in small quantities, produces ill effects as soon as one exceeds the given dosage? ...

Well, now, how shall I deal with this excessive freedom?⁶⁶

As the ending of the novel shows, the protagonist finally decides on how he should "deal with this excessive freedom."

It is a decision, first of all, which is qualified by his explanation of what freedom signifies for him:

But however tedious, I think it best to tell you what the grounds were: that the purest expenditure of freedom is actually the satisfaction of sexual desires. The expenditure of freedom, however pure, has no value in itself; value is rather in the production of freedom.⁶⁷

It is clear what the protagonist is trying to say here. If value is in the "production of freedom," then the goals of science, specifically those of research, are uppermost in all of his discourse. Scientific research, however, is not used by the protagonist to derive findings which would give evidence

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

to the belief in objective values. Rather, it is a process manipulated by his obsessive needs, and which is used to confirm what he has already subjectively experienced. We are able to see why his decision in the final notes is one made in despair and fraught with violence and pessimism. Since the expenditure of freedom has "no value in itself," there is nothing to bar the protagonist from pursuing any action, moral or immoral, that he desires.⁶⁸ His final choice is an immoral one, to destroy "the other" who he feels has betrayed him and driven to desperation by her rejection of his efforts to communicate with her:

There are two indications that your sniping
at me was fatal. One is the cruel revelation
that while you had seen through the real character
of the mask, you had nonetheless gone on

⁶⁸ The immoral and non-self-actualizing nature of the protagonist's decision is a characteristic of the ethical direction inherent in existential fiction. Frederick Karl and Leo Hamalian in their Introduction to The Existential Imagination (New York, 1963), p. 17, explain this direction as follows: "Paradoxically, for a movement so concerned with ethics, existential fiction has provided little of an ethical theory or guide. Existentialism frequently becomes trapped by its own virtues: for if everyone is motivated ethically by his own subjectivity, then there is not only chaos, but potential immorality. If all objective values are rejected, then one's personal behavior can be arbitrarily immoral, even though one wishes to set others free. And the latter is really the transcendent aim of existentialism. Existentialism would seem, then, to work well only for those who have a personal ethic derived from the existing legal or religious codes. It would work least well for those who have wrong responses, or bad faith, and who would simply perpetuate their subjectivity along immoral lines."

pretending to be deceived. The other is the merciless chastisement of claiming that I tediously talked on and on about alibis, anonymity, pure goals, and the destroying of taboos. In actual fact I did not perform a single real act but simply went around in circles writing these notes.⁶⁹

The standards of value of his wife, he concludes, are no better than those of the rest of the world; they concentrate on the face, on outer appearances rather than "on life itself."⁷⁰

The irony of the protagonist's efforts is that he himself adopts these standards and because of this, becomes both the victim and assailant of people like his wife. In the following entries, we see the line of ethical and metaphysical reasoning which leads him into such an ironical situation. He appears to want to believe that inherent moral worth lies in the self and its creative activity rather than in outward appearances:

I can hardly believe that the face is so important to a man's existence. A man's worth should be gauged by the content of his work; possibly the convolutions of the surface of the brain have something to do with it, but his face certainly does not. If the loss of a face can cause conspicuous changes in the scale of evaluation, it may well be owing to a fundamental emptiness of content.⁷¹

Moreover, he notes that the mask is essentially "a serious act of violence against the custom of the world." He gives this point additional force by stating the mask's destructiveness

⁶⁹ The Face of Another, p. 227.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 232.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

in theoretical and hypothetical terms:

In the first place, the mask was itself a serious act of violence against the custom of the world. Whether arson and murder would be more destructive than a mask could not be answered with pure common sense. To put it succinctly, it would be best to begin mass production of an elaborate mask, like the one used for myself, and presuppose a public opinion that in time would be favorable. In all likelihood, masks would attain fantastic popularity, my factory would grow larger and larger, and even working full time it would be unable to meet the demand. Some people would suddenly vanish. Others would be broken up into two or three people. Personal identification would be pointless, police photographs ineffective, and pictures of prospective marriage partners torn up and thrown away. Strangers would be confused with acquaintances, and the very idea of an alibi would collapse. Unable to suspect others, unable to believe in others, one would have to live in a suspended state, a state of bankrupt human relations, as if one were looking into a mirror that reflects nothing.⁷²

The protagonist's hypothetical projection, however, is transformed abruptly into a metaphysical "reality" in which he sees the "nation," or society, as an enormous and destructive mask. By reasoning that the anarchist becomes in his metaphysical "reality," the "most harmless thing in the world," he is able to justify and validate his final act:

Does the nation consider the mask something evil and subversive? I wonder whether the nation itself is not an enormous mask intolerant of the rivalry of individual masks. Then the most harmless thing in the world must be an anarchist. ... I have proved that a mask by its very existence is basically destructive. Equivalent to premeditated murder, the mask can stand shoulder to shoulder, with no feeling of inferiority, with arson or banditry. It was not surprising that the mask, which

⁷² Ibid., pp. 161-162.

itself was a form of destruction, was not inspired to such crimes as arson and murder, although it was in the act of walking now through the ruins of human relationships destroyed by its existence. Despite the throbbing cancer of its cravings, it was satisfied simply to be.⁷³

Psychologically, the protagonist's inability to come to terms with the significant "other" and with himself arises from the conflict between the feelings and attitudes he holds about the necessity of creating a mask for himself. He is fully cognizant of the fact that the major "function" of a face is the support it lends to one's concept of self; hence, his proclamation -- "to accustom others to my face was the best short cut to getting used to it myself,"⁷⁴ and "a face is not something to show off to others, but something that serves one's self!"⁷⁵ But he is never able to realize this function in himself. His mask ultimately fails to serve his self. Instead, he is completely occupied in carrying out the secondary function of the mask as an object which can be used to seduce his wife into an intimate relationship. He stakes his entire efforts upon his wife, for she symbolizes the precious, but illusory as he discovers later, contact which he hopes to establish with the "world":

For me, whatever you may say, you are the most important "other person." No, I do not mean it

⁷³ Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 59.

in a negative sense. I mean that the one who must first restore the roadway, the one whose name I had to write on the first letter, was first on my list of "others." (Under any circumstances, I simply did not want to lose you. To lose you would be symbolic of losing the world.)⁷⁶

It is because the protagonist largely ignores himself and focuses on external relationships that he is caught up in such things as the "Jungian analysis" of the four basic facial types listed in Henri Boulan's Le Visage:

1. Concave type, bony: strong projection of the flesh in forehead, cheeks, and chin.
2. Concave type, fatty: slight swelling of the fatty tissue in forehead, cheeks, and chin.
3. Convex type, bony: sharply pointed face, centering around the nose.
4. Convex type, fatty: slight frontal projection, centering around the nose.

...

A Jungian analysis of the four basic facial types would suggest that the first two types are introversial, and the second two are extroversial. Also, numbers one and three tend to be antagonistic to the outside world, while numbers two and four tend to be conciliatory. It is possible to make up a personality combining the two odds and the two evens.⁷⁷

The significance of the protagonist's prolonged attention to what one critic calls the "surfaces of life"⁷⁸ lies in the character's repressive behavior. He attempts to dam the flow of deep feelings and the effort of encountering them directly by channeling his interests into complicated and time-consuming

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁸ Howard Hibbett, "Tradition and Trauma in the Contemporary Japanese Novel," p. 41.

disquisitions on the external aspects of life.

The protagonist confesses that his psychic conflicts arise from two sources -- first, his inexplicable ambivalence toward his wife:

I wanted to get close to you, and at the same time to stay away from you. I wanted to know you, and at the same time I resisted that knowing. I wanted to look at you and at the same time felt ashamed to look. My state of suspension was such that the crevice between us grew deeper and deeper, and holding the broken glass together with my two hands, I barely preserved its form.⁷⁹

and second, feelings of debilitating anxiety over the responsibility he must assume for his real self:

No matter how different I might be from my real face, I was still myself. Since I was not under the influence of hypnotism or drugs, whatever the acts of the mask -- even the concealing of an air pistol in my pocket -- it was the real I who would have to assume the ultimate responsibility. The personality of the mask was certainly not something that, rabbit-like, popped out of a magician's hat; it must really be a part of me that had come into being without my being aware of it, because the gatekeeper, my real face, had been so severely forbidden access. And while I theoretically understood this to be so, nevertheless, it was as if I were suffering from amnesia; I could not conjure up the whole of the personality. Imagine my irritation at not being able to provide a content consonant with this abstract self.⁸⁰

There is no attempt on his part, however, to resolve his conflicts so that he may live with the "other" and himself. His

⁷⁹ The Face of Another, p. 93.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

insights remain fragmented and separated from his real self; he treats them as though they have no relevance for his future actions because he does not know where he is in the present. The self is in a state of uneasy divisiveness.

Undoubtedly, the protagonist is in anguish over his divided self. An important clue to this torment resides in the fact that his self-image is basically a negative one. He is convinced, for instance, of his worthlessness as a self:

--You understand, I suppose ... I'm no one. Since I have had to undergo the anguish of being someone up till now, I shall deliberately take this opportunity to withdraw again from becoming someone. Even you don't really think you would like to make someone of me, do you? As a matter of fact it would be impossible even if you did, so shouldn't we let things go as they are?⁸¹

Because he cannot be sure of himself, he cannot be sure of "the other." Furthermore, his feelings of impotence and desolation in the presence of "the other" are constant and painful reminders of his weaknesses:

I had begun to feel an intolerable desolation at the great cleavage between the mask and myself. Perhaps I was already anticipating the catastrophe that was to come. The mask, as the name implied, would forever be my false face; and although my true nature could never be controlled by such a thing, once it had seen you it would fly off somewhere far beyond my control, and I could only watch it go in helpless, blank amazement. Thus, contrary to my purpose in making a mask, I had ended by recognizing the victory of the face. In order to consolidate myself into one personality, I must bring this masked play

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 128.

to an end by tearing off the mask.

But as I expected, the mask was not so stubborn. As soon as it perceived my determination, it retreated in haste, smiling bitterly, and I stopped my empty musings there. I inflicted no further chastisement on it.⁸²

The protagonist's negative self-image is largely responsible for his turning bitterly against "the other" who has refused to cooperate with him in his venture. He does not recognize his wife as "the other" who is an individual, with a right to her own thoughts and private motives. He points, instead, an accusing finger at her, and holds her responsible for the violent and destructive act which he feels compelled to carry out:

For you did not cooperate with me as much as the boy did with his sister. Even though you recognized the necessity of the mask, it was only a domesticated mask that would never transgress the taboo. So, this time, you had better be careful. The mask that descends on you this time will be a wild animal. Since you have seen through it already, the mask will concentrate on its lawlessness, unweakened and unblinded by jealousy. You have dug your own grave by yourself. I have never had the experience of having anything in writing produce such results as these notes did.⁸³

The protagonist's decision to commit himself to an act of violence against the other has an underlying note of tragedy. For it is a decision which is made in the face of severe disenchantment with the possibility of ever establishing human relationships.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 142-143.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 236-237.

All of his experiences with others are painful reminders that rejection or acceptance hinges upon the outer appearance of the individual. It is especially painful for him to read rejection, even in the simple reactions of children:

When some young boys who were playing catch in a narrow lane saw me, they changed color and pressed away from me against the fence. Their faces looked as though they were dangling by their ears on clothespins. If I took off the bandage and showed them the real thing, they'd be a lot more surprised!⁸⁴

The only human being who can apparently accept him is a mentally retarded girl; but his interaction with her is no less filled with anxiety and conflicting feelings:

All at once I felt like laughing out loud. I was relieved and at the same time wanted to tease her some more. There was also something that worried me, and I was not altogether trifling with the girl, who once before had shrieked at my bandage disguise. In spite of her low IQ, the girl had the charm of a misshapen sprite. If things went well, the situation could go far in helping me recover some little power over the mask, which was beginning to become dangerous.⁸⁵

It appears at first that the protagonist has real cause for anguish and bitter feelings when he learns of his wife's rejection in her letter:

The contents of your letter far exceeded any of my expectations and took me completely by surprise. No matter how much I had been afraid, perplexed, worried, distressed, and upset, such feelings meant nothing now. With a dash of the pen, as in a puzzle where a flea is transformed into an elephant, the outcome had been changed into something different from what I had planned.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

The mask's determination, its thoughts, its struggle with my real face, and the petition to you that I had tried to get across through the notes -- all had been made into an absurd burlesque. It was a terrible thing. Who could imagine that one could be so ridiculed, so humiliated by oneself.⁸⁶

However, his wife's assessment of his motives and intentions behind his efforts to communicate with her is too penetratingly accurate to be dismissed as the comments of a selfish and insensitive woman. Like the retarded "girl with the yoyo," she sees through the protagonist completely, into his damaging pride and self-defeating egocentricity:

It was not the mask that died among the boots, but you. The girl with the yoyo was not the only one to know about your masked play. From the very first instant, when, elated with pride, you talked about the distortion of the magnetic field, I too saw through you completely.⁸⁷

She cuts into the heart of the matter by summarizing his actions:

At first you were apparently trying to get your own self back by means of the mask, but before you knew it you had come to think of it only as your magician's cloak for escaping from yourself. So it was not a mask, but somewhat the same as another real face, wasn't it? You finally revealed your true colors. It was not the mask but you yourself.⁸⁸

Not only does she remind him of his failure to realize himself, she also points out his real inability to relate with others:

While you spoke of the face as being some kind of roadway between fellow human beings, you were like a snail that thinks only of its own

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 222.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

doorway. You were showing off. Even though you had forced me into a compound where I had already been, you set up a fuss as if I had scaled a prison wall, as if I had absconded with money. And so, when you began to focus on my face you were flustered and confused, and without a word you at once nailed up the door of the mask. Indeed, as you said, perhaps death filled the world. I wonder if scattering the seeds of death is not the deed of men who think only of themselves, as you do.⁸⁹

The theme of the disintegration of the self in The Face of Another is reiterated in its structure with unequivocal pessimism. The protagonist's observations on the self and the meanings of a mask lead to despair and the final desire to annihilate the self through the destruction of the "other." The protagonist is able to intellectualize with skill, the myriad possibilities of being, but he cannot identify emotionally with a single one; the only response that he can make to life is the bitter and negative one of revenge. The pessimistic quality of the protagonist's responses confirms an important psychological concept which Glicksberg observes as underlying twentieth-century literary portrayals of the individual -- that "the reality of the self is not to be grasped by rigid concepts, the abstractions of science."⁹⁰

The "truth" of the protagonist's character⁹¹ in The Face of Another resides in his descriptions of experiences

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

⁹⁰ Glicksberg, op. cit., p. xvii.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. xvii. Although Glicksberg does not define it as such, the "truth" of an individual derives from his uncon-

which have been registered in the repository of his unconscious. These are experiences which invalidate the idea that rational man lives in a rational universe. From a subjective and experiential point of view, scientific laws turn into mere high order probabilities, and the necessary turns into the contingent. The world that the protagonist inhabits becomes extremely unstable, and what is impressed upon him, consciously or unconsciously, is that scientific knowledge can hardly serve as a short-cut to self-knowledge. It is the unconscious life of the protagonist, revealed through his dreams, hallucinations, visual images, free associations, and uncontrollable feelings, which comprise an authentic portrait of his inner self.

The recounting of the dream of his father's hats provides a revealing glimpse into the origins of the protagonist's psychological conflicts:

I recalled a dream of a day when summer had come to an end and autumn had just begun. It was a dream like some old silent movie that began with a most peaceful scene, in which my father, back from his work, was taking off his shoes in the vestibule and I -- I was perhaps not quite ten -- was at his side absently watching him. But suddenly the peace was broken. Another father came back from work. This one, curiously enough, was identical to the first; the only thing

scious processes such as memories, dreams, impressions, and spontaneous imagery. Glicksberg points out that the inner life of the individual is totally different from his socially prescribed roles. The fictional mode which conveys the individual's inner life is Impressionism, which Glicksberg trenchantly defines as the "experiments with the refraction of experience through the spectrum of a given sensibility."

different was the hat he wore on his head. In contrast to the straw hat that my first father was wearing, the second wore a creased soft felt. When the father with the soft hat saw the one with the straw hat, he looked clearly contemptuous and gave an exaggerated shudder in rebuke for such evident bad form. Whereupon the one in the straw hat smiled mournfully in quite unbecoming confusion and left as if he were furtively escaping, the shoe he had removed dangling in his hand. The child that I was looked heartbrokenly after the retreating figure of my straw hat father

... I wonder whether it would be possible after several decades for the memory of such an insignificant incident to remain so vivid. I can't believe it. The two hats I saw were surely something quite different. Something, for example, like symbols for the unforgivable lies that exist in human relationships. Yes, I can say only one thing for sure: the trust I had had in my father up to then was completely betrayed by the exchange of hats. Perhaps, since then, I have continued to suffer shame in my father's place.⁹²

In a hallucination of the mask as a growing object, there is evidence of his cowardice:

The mask was growing thicker and thicker. It had grown at last into a concrete fortress that enveloped me; and I crept out into the night streets wrapped in concrete armor, feeling like a member of a heavily equipped hunting party. Through the peepholes, the streets looked like the haunts of deformed stray cats. There they loitered, their noses suspiciously in the air, looking greedy, seeking their own tattered tails and ears. I hid beneath my mask, which had neither name nor status nor age, elated at the security guaranteed me alone.⁹³

When the protagonist engages in spontaneous visual imagery,

⁹² The Face of Another, pp. 97-98.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 152-153.

this activity is not creative or fertile. It is rather an indication of the degree of alienation which he feels toward the world of things. In an essay which treats the literary presentation of alienation, W.J. Harvey notes that the effects of a character's breakdown are "discernible in every aspect of life, including man's relation to the world of things." One of the forms which this alienation or breakdown takes, says Harvey, is the common Romantic nightmare in which the material world is seen through a creative mind which "fails in its seminal function; a universe of little things, dry, disconnected, dead."⁹⁴ The protagonist in The Face of Another is indeed in this tradition as he images the following:

Closing my eyes, I conjured up meaningless fragments of scenes one by one, starting with the rain-drenched window: a blade of grass sprouting from a crack in the pavement; a splotch on the wall in the shape of an animal; the bump on the old, scarred trunk of a tree; a spider's web on the point of breaking under the weight of dew-drops. It was my ritual at times when I could not fall asleep.

But now it didn't work. Indeed, for no reason my restlessness grew more and more intense. Suddenly I thought how good it would be if the fog outside were poison gas. Or else, how nice if war erupted, or a volcano exploded, all the world were asphyxiated, the realities of life smashed to pieces.⁹⁵

His "free," or immediate and spontaneous association of ideas and objects in the following passage indicates how much of

⁹⁴ W. J. Harvey, "Character and the Context of Things," in The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. R.M. Davis (New Jersey, 1969), p. 133.

⁹⁵ The Face of Another, p. 120

a prisoner he is of his obsessions. His perceptions all lead to a single focal point which is that of the mask and its functions:

I happened on a curious photograph of a mask in the morning paper. It was a mask used by a primitive people. Over the whole surface, traces of impressed rope formed a geometric pattern, and a centipede-like nose began in the middle of the face and rose above the head, while from the jaw were suspended a number of oddly shaped, meaningless objects. The image was not clear, but I stared at it in fascination for a long time. The face of a tattooed man imposed itself over the picture, and then the veiled heads of Arabian girls; I was reminded of the story I once heard of the women in The Tale of Genji who thought that revealing the face was the same as exposing the privates. I did not hear it from just anybody, I heard it from you. The mask had got the story from you at one or another of our meetings. What was your purpose, for heaven's sake, in telling such a tale? They thought their hair was the only thing to show men, and they covered their faces with their sleeves in death. I mused about those women who hid with their faces, trying to penetrate your design, and this faceless period of history was unexpectedly brought home to me, unrolled like a picture scroll.⁹⁶

Finally, the protagonist's feelings of uncontrollable and passive panic are an index of how much he is out of touch with his own reality. In an entry already mentioned above, he shows this psychic aberration:

The mask, as the name implied, would forever be my false face; and although my true nature could never be controlled by such a thing, once it had seen you it would fly off somewhere far beyond my control, and I could only watch it go in helpless, blank amazement.⁹⁷

The theme of the self and the aesthetic structure rein-

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

forcing this theme with detailed precision in Abé Kobo's two novels are cogent arguments against the scientific tendency to calibrate or standardize all manner of things, not the least of which is the individual. As the powerful and pessimistic conclusion to The Face of Another illustrates, one can seek distraction in the world of facts but cannot avoid indefinitely the confrontation with one's self, for in the avoidance lies the seeds of incipient madness and self-destruction:

But think a minute. I wonder if I shall become a swan with an act like this. Can I make people feel guilty for me? It is useless to think. What is amply clear, at least, is that I shall be lonely and isolated, that I shall only become a lecher. There will be no other reward outside of being freed from the crime of being ridiculous. Perhaps that's the difference between movies and actuality. Anyway, I shall have to go through with this, for doing so is the only way to conquer the face. Of course, I do know that the responsibility is not the mask's alone, and that the problem lies rather in me. Yet it is not only in me, but in everybody; I am not alone in this problem. True, indeed, but let's not shift the blame. I shall hate people. I shall never admit the necessity of justifying myself to anyone!

The footsteps are coming closer.

So nothing will ever be written down again. Perhaps the act of writing is necessary only when nothing happens.⁹⁸

Abé's novels are essentially about what one philosopher calls the "existentialist's sharp break between subjectivity and objectivity" which "obscures and ignores human experience as much as it illumines this experience."⁹⁹ Abé's main characters are unable to resolve effectively their need for objective calculation and subjective passion in their lives. And the

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 237.

⁹⁹ Hallie, op. cit., p. 52.

result of this inability is the abandonment of the understanding of the self.

CHAPTER FIVE

"IN THE WORLD AS IT IS": KAWABATA

The Japanese emphasis on the aesthetic point of view has been discussed by countless artists, historians, and literary critics, but it may be helpful by way of introduction to the present study of Kawabata Yasunari's two novels, to refer to Charles Moore's trenchant overview of this cultural trait:

So important is the aesthetic in Japanese culture that it has been accepted by many students of Japan as the outstanding positive characteristic of Japanese culture as a whole -- as of the very essence of Japanese life. In comparison with other cultures, the aesthetic has been considered to be the essentially unique expression of spirituality in Japan, as is ethic in China, religion in Indian, and possibly, reason in the West. Their love of beauty; their extreme and seemingly universal love of Nature; their attempt to express beauty in all aspects of life (the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, gardens, etc.); the spirit and fact (or, at least, ideal) of harmony in philosophy, in religion, and in the social and political order; their obvious emphasis upon feeling and emotion; their almost all-pervading romanticism; and possibly, the "feminine" characterization that is so often cited -- these are all well known and accepted as characteristic.¹

The first of Kawabata's novel to be discussed here is Yukiguni, or Snow Country, a work written in 1948 and which

¹ Charles Moore, "Editor's Supplement: The Enigmatic Japanese Mind," pp. 296-297.

poses an intriguing critical problem because of its aesthetic structure which recalls the essence of Japanese culture. More specifically, the novel's structure resembles the classic Japanese poetic form, the seventeen-syllable haiku, in its concise presentation of nature and its evocation of feelings and thoughts in the sensitive individual.² The protagonist of Snow Country, Shimamura, is an aesthete who appears to be committed totally to the aesthetic values of the haiku vision; however, this commitment actually tells us very little about the total significance of Kawabata's literary creation. As Wayne Booth reminds us, the total form of an artistic work, the "intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole" expresses the "chief value" to which the implied author is committed, regardless of what the creator "belongs to in real life."³ There are works, however, and Snow Country is one of these, which because they lack a readily comprehensible literary structure pose a specific difficulty in criticism.⁴ Bernard Paris points out that "in a work that lacks organic unity, but

² James Araki's article, "Kawabata and His Snow Country" (Centennial Review, XIII:1969, pp. 319-323), is the best study in English of Kawabata's use of traditional haiku imagery.

³ Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1968), pp. 73-74. Booth uses the term "implied author" to refer to the created "second self" in the frame of the novel as distinguished from the creator or the biographical author.

⁴ Edward Seidensticker ("The Unshapen Ones," Japan Quarterly XI:1964, p. 68) observes that the Japanese, "whatever genre they have thought themselves to be writing in, with the possible exception of the drama, have not been as interested in form as certain other peoples have."

has a coherent thematic structure, thematic analysis can reveal the implied author's interpretation of experience, but it cannot produce apprehension of the work's total form."⁵ If a work tells us one thing in its aesthetic structure and another thing in its thematic structure, as I have found Snow Country to do, one can anticipate obvious critical difficulties in attempting to resolve the work's conflicting structural affirmations.

The thematic assertions in Snow Country appear to be at odds with the aesthetic values brought out in the implied author's choice of the central artistic structure which is in the form of the haiku vision. But these conflicts do not necessarily imply a nugatory literary work.⁶ It will be seen in the ensuing discussion that the thematic and aesthetic conflicts in the structure of Snow Country may be resolved through the use of psychological analysis of the protagonist's selfhood.

A major idea in Snow Country is that of the vulnerability

⁵ Bernard Paris, "The Psychic Structure of 'Vanity Fair,'" Victorian Studies (X:1967), p. 390.

⁶ I am operating on the premise that while Snow Country is a work almost completely concerned with the main character's immediate subjective responses, there are ideas or themes definitely in evidence. Newton Stallknecht's persuasive essay "Ideas and Literature," in Comparative Literature (ed. N. Stallknecht and H. Frenz /Carbondale, 1961, pp. 117-118) defines idea as a term which "refers to our reflective or thoughtful consciousness as opposed to the immediacies of sensuousness or emotional experiences." I have found that an author's structuring of a protagonist's subjective experiences call forth the shape of the ideas in a work. I feel it necessary to make this distinction because I am also in agreement with

of man to the painful contingencies of life which include separation, death, loneliness, and a sense of human futility.

It is the fate of man to live and love through a "thin, smooth skin;"⁷ there is nothing that can protect man, albeit physically, like the "tough, hairy hide" of an animal, from being hurt and pained in his efforts to live from day to day.

Shimamura and the geisha Komako,⁸ with whom Shimamura forms a tenuous alliance, represent two different solutions in coping with the necessity to exist with the fundamental vulnerability of man to loneliness. Komako uses her existential situation, her "very loneliness" to "beat down sorrow and [to foster] a wild strength of will."⁹ Shimamura, on the other hand, tries to exempt himself from the necessity of coping with life. He takes refuge in a "sentimental longing for the human skin"¹⁰ by devoting himself to the aesthetic contemplation of life. His values are ostensibly those of the haiku vision which celebrates

Stallknecht's critical tenet that while the presence of ideas in a work does not in itself enhance the value of an author's contribution, without some reference to "the ideas expressed in a poem or novel we can hardly speak intelligently of its value" (op. cit., p. 152).

⁷ Snow Country, p. 28.

⁸ Because I am limited in time and space in this chapter, I am dealing mainly with the analysis of Shimamura's character. Analysis of Komako will therefore be confined to those of a comparative nature. It is interesting to note here that one critic, Francis Mathy ("Kawabata Yasunari: Bridge Builder to the West," Monumenta Nipponica [XXIV:1969], p. 217), indirectly points to the theme of the failure of the self in Shimamura by his observation that it is primarily through the portrayal of Komako and Yoko that affirmation of humanity is seen in Snow Country.

⁹ Snow Country, p. 63.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

a refinement of one's perceptual and conceptual powers. The ideal of the haiku vision is to concern oneself "entirely with the simple, trivial, usually overlooked material of everyday life; with things which, however insignificant on the surface, are nonetheless 'precious treasures and inexhaustible riches' to anyone who has learned not only to look but to see."¹¹ In the narrative or aesthetic structure of Snow Country, which patterns itself after the brevity and economy of expression with the perceptual richness of the haiku vision, Shimamura functions as the central consciousness who perceives keenly nature and human relationships.¹² Since Shimamura is the predominant reflector and interpreter of experiences in the novel, it is evidently important to determine what his system of values consists of. That is, what kinds of things seem to Shimamura to be worth living for? Shimamura's role in life, his life work, so to speak, is that of a critic of the arts; he is both a scholar

¹¹ Nancy Wilson Ross, The World of Zen (New York, 1960), p. 112.

¹² The character of Shimamura is also in the tradition of the central "I" figure in the Japanese shi-shosetsu, or "I-novel." Howard Hibbett in his study, "The Portrait of the Artist in Japanese Fiction" (The Far Eastern Quarterly [XVI:1955], p. 352) presents a good elaboration of this fictive tradition: "In many shi-shosetsu a zuihitsu-like [essay] sketch of some slight experience -- a walk in the snow, sitting at home on an autumn afternoon, going boating with friends on a tranquil lake at evening -- is deepened by the implication of the narrator's harmony with the surroundings which he contemplates. The "I," the central figure, is here only a sensitive recorder of these delicate moods and impressions, but it is this poetic sensitivity, in the tradition of the haiku poet and the writer who "knows mono-no-aware," [the poignancy of things] that gives the sketch its value."

and a researcher. But Shimamura is also an "idler who had inherited his money,"¹³ a privileged member of the upper class who lives in a world separated by economic and social, as well as psychological, distance from the arena of the working class. He is seen in direct contrast to Komako, the geisha who must work for a living.

Shimamura the rich idler lives by the code of fūryu,¹⁴ the ideal of Japanese aesthetic life which celebrates all that is elegant, tasteful, and refined, particularly in poetic accomplishments. The hero-prince Genji, in Lady Murasaki's The Tale of Genji, is the classic literary prototype of Shimamura. The men and women of the Heian Court which is the setting of The Tale of Genji, spend their days in a socio-economic order which allows for and indeed encourages the cultivation of the ability to write polished verses, to dance with graceful ease, and to converse wittily in an atmosphere of quiet music and scented flowers. The legacy of this Heian aesthetic past is carried on in Shimamura who is the modern representative of the classical ideals of fūryu. In his role as a man devoted to aesthetic dilettantism, then, Shimamura is a literary type, an illustrative character, which

¹³ Snow Country, p. 108.

¹⁴ Jinichi Konishi's article, "Fūryu: An Ideal of Japanese Esthetic Life," (The Japanese Image / Tokyo, 1965 /, pp. 271-278) is an excellent explication of the literary and historical implications of this aesthetic concept.

can be traced back to Japanese cultural and artistic history.

But Shimamura's characterization in Snow Country is primarily a mimetic portrayal of the psychological dimensions of an individual with inner conflicts. For despite Shimamura's acceptance of himself as an aesthete, he is constantly seen engaging in self-criticism. This self-criticism suggests an inner conflict over his choice of a way of life and his vague dissatisfaction with the "values" of a passive aesthetic life which is essentially inimical to complete psychic satisfaction. Thus, for example, the implied author tells us that Shimamura pampers "himself with the somewhat whimsical pleasure of sneering at himself through his work;" and he also laughs "at himself and his work."¹⁵ When he sees himself in relationship to others, he is often placed in a negative light: his desire for Komako makes him view himself as "rather repulsive;"¹⁶ Komako's vigorous way of pursuing relationships with him makes him "wonder what was lacking in him, what kept him from living as completely,"¹⁷ and he is filled with "nagging, hopeless impotence" at the strong emotional reaction of Komako to a simple misunderstanding. The thought that the nameless, diligent weavers of Chijimi cloth produce "playthings" for men "like

¹⁵ Snow Country, p. 108.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 27. An indication of how negative Shimamura's self-concept is, can be seen in R. Beardsley's findings in "Personality Psychology," that for the Japanese, "sensuality is more ego-syntonic or consciously acceptable to the ego" than to the Western mind, and so does not need repression in Japanese culture.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

him" strikes him as "remarkable."¹⁸ One may ask at this point whether Shimamura is totally convinced that his mode of life as a highly sensitive aesthete is the most enriching experience he is capable of attaining. The answer is patently negative. A partial understanding of the implications of Shimamura's self-criticism can be gained by looking at him from a socio-economic point of view. Shimamura's life style as it is portrayed in this twentieth-century novel is curiously anachronistic. His way of life, his devotion to the aesthetic ideals of fūryū seem to be more appropriate to an earlier age in which social and economic goals tolerated and encouraged such practices. If we place Shimamura as a citizen of a modern economic age, one which stresses an active striving for the material improvement of one's lot, and active involvement in social and cultural activities --, Shimamura is a misfit, an individual who might very well judge himself harshly for his empty way of life.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁹ Shimamura's attitude toward his "work," is closest to the widespread idea in Japan since the Meiji Era that the foundation and development of self may be accomplished only through art. Itō Sei in "Modes of Thought in Contemporary Japan," (Japan Quarterly /XII: 1965/ pp. 501-514), extends this idea to its social end when he relates self-salvation through art to reclusive and self-destructive thought. Henri Peyre in his Introduction to Fiction in Several Languages (Boston, 1968), p. xxi, presents an interesting reinforcement of this idea from a Westerner's point of view in the following: "Cultivation of aloofness from the circumambient world, and of purity in art is sometimes a confession of defeat. Writers abdicate from the momentous crises lived by their readers."

But it is evident that the implied author does not only show Shimamura in the negative view suggested above, but that he also associates positive qualities with Shimamura. A cogent reason for this view is that Kawabata the implied author uses the haiku vision not only to define Snow Country's aesthetic structure, but also to define Shimamura's mode of perception. The natural imagery of the haiku not only renders the foreground of the novel with vivid clarity, but it also provides, in the words of Hibbett, "a symbolic relevance to the human situation that goes beyond fragmentary visual metaphor to compose a harmonious world in which nature is neither adversary nor merely the setting for an unrelated drama."²⁰ The mode of perception which operates in the haiku moment, that is, the immediate, intuitive and sensuous response to people, objects, and places, defines the central character's point of view in Snow Country. Inner conflicts, moods, fleeting thoughts, immediate and direct impressions of people, places, and objects, are all represented by the haiku vision which is the way of mirroring the interior world of the individual through natural scenes. A night scene in the novel, for example, is described as coming "together in a clear tranquil harmony;"²¹ Shimamura sees the pale green color of a moth as being "oddly like the color of

²⁰ Howard Hibbett, "Tradition and Trauma in the Contemporary Japanese Novel," p. 43.

²¹ Snow Country, p. 42.

death;"²² a view of a mountain, silver in the autumn sunlight, makes "something in Shimamura" call out, "Ah, I am here."²³

While the aesthetic structure in Snow Country "offers a striking example of severe reduction in fictional paraphernalia, of poetic economy which increases the value of every glimpse into the interior world of a character,"²⁴ it also increases the difficulty of determining precisely what this "interior world" of the character is supposed to represent.

But before one can understand what the inner world of Shimamura is like, it is necessary to be informed of his apprehension of his outer world. The perceptual mode of Shimamura gives us a picture of the direction in which his value system operates. The dominant impulse of Shimamura's personality is to keep as emotionally detached as possible from people and objects, while at the same time keeping himself open to varied perceptual experiences. We see that in the novel Shimamura perceives both intuitively, or unconsciously, and intellectually, or consciously. Nature, as shown in the constant references to landscape, is the predominant medium of the protagonist's intuitive perceptions, while his social community, that is, his relationships with people, and the relationships among people around him, comprise the major part of his intellectual

²² Ibid., p. 77.

²³ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴ Hibbett, op. cit., p. 45.

perceptions. It is important to note that the conscious and unconscious processes of his perceptual modes are not mutually exclusive; rather, they show in many places areas of overlap. For example, when Shimamura observes the sick young man and his companion on the train, the implied author tells us that the sight of the two figures conveys to Shimamura "none of the pain that the sight of something truly sad can bring;" it has, instead, the quality of a tableau in a dream,"²⁵ a phrase which captures beautifully the unique characteristics of the dream perception, one which allows the viewer to be simultaneously emotionally and perceptually involved, yet detached.

Shimamura perceives nature primarily in three ways:

(a) as an aesthetic "object" which gratifies and satisfies his refined sense of beauty, his sensibility as an aesthetic hero who acts as a highly selective filter of the physical world around him; (b) as a means by which he gains intuitive insight into the meaning of his way of living or his life, to the degree that his keen awareness of nature may be said to be the only reason for him to live; and (c) as a reflector, and at times, an influencer of his psychological and emotional states.

Shimamura's perceptions of social and individual relationships, that is, his own relationships with others and the relationships among people around him, are characterized by an ego-

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

centric view of human relationships. First, he sees people as objects of great intellectual interest; they are objects lending themselves to engrossing intellectual scrutiny. Second, in his relationships with others, he tends to use people to suit his particular psychological and emotional needs. It must be added that his manipulation of others is largely an unconscious act, and one which takes the form of his capitalizing on the weaknesses and needs of others in order to enhance or complement his own psychological needs. Third, people around Shimamura serve as reflectors of his own psychological condition; they are often a means by which he gains some insight, however transitory, into his own self.

The foregoing schematization of Shimamura's perceptual modes suggest that for some reason, he has a great need to systematize and structure his world. I feel that his reason is closely related to the central theme of the novel. Earlier it was said that Snow Country was a novel about man's fundamental vulnerability to the anguish of living in the face of death, separation, loneliness, and a pervading sense of futility. It is through a "thin, smooth Skin" that man lives and loves. The human condition is such that man must somehow cope with a "sense of the false and empty" in life; man tries to live with the awareness that all strivings may be a "wasted effort."²⁶ But at the same time that man is aware of the basic futility of life, he has an inexplicable attraction to it.

²⁶ Snow Country, p. 63.

This sense of the paradox of man's condition is brought out in the well-known haiku by Issa (1762-1862) which captures the evanescence of life and the poignancy of human attachment to it:

This Dewdrop World
Is a dewdrop world,
And yet, and yet ...²⁷

Shimamura is both attracted and repelled by the human condition. His attraction takes the form, however, only of the passive "sentimental longing for the human skin," a feeling which has merely an ephemeral, sighing, and dream-like quality about it. His revulsion is manifested in the elaborate aesthetic measures which he takes to avoid confronting the dreadful "transparent emptiness deep in his entrails."²⁸ He adopts the value of artistic detachment which is so prized in the haiku vision, and turns it into neurotic detachment which is a psychological solution used by the individual to deal with his inner conflicts.

Horney's analyses²⁹ of the major characteristics of the neurotic personality can help us to understand the dynamics of the fundamental detachment of the neurotic from life. She points out that neurotic solutions to life do not really work for the individual; -- at best they serve as temporary maneuvers for the individual to avoid grappling with his inner

²⁷ This is my translation of the original which reads:
Tsuyu-no-yo-/wa-/tsuyu-no-yo-/nagara-/sari-/nagara.

²⁸ Snow Country, pp. 62-63.

²⁹ Horney, op. cit., pp. 182-185.

conflicts.

In her chapter on "General Measures to Relieve Tension," Horney traces the processes by which the neurotic individual separates mind and self, thus increasingly becoming alienated from his real self, a self which is different from his idealized self and his despised self. In the neurotic personality, says Horney, "the mind ... is always detached -- as if looking at a stranger with whom it has been accidentally thrown together."³⁰ Thus, the neurotic may be extremely interested, even to the extent of being totally engrossed, in self-observations, but his "interest in them is rather a delight in the astuteness of his observations or in the mechanics with which they operate, much in the manner that an entomologist may be fascinated by the functioning of an insect ...; [he] is quite uninterested in the meaning his findings have for his life."³¹ The neurotic has successfully separated himself from the painful necessity of looking at his inner struggles and his problems. He may also be very astute in observing others and their problems but he always does so in the same detached, unrelated way that he does in looking at himself. Horney adds that "this detached interest may also be openly fault-finding, gleeful, sadistic. In these instances it is often externalized, both in an active and in a passive way."³²

³⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

³¹ Ibid., p. 183.

³² Ibid., p. 183.

The neurotic individual puts his trust in the supremacy of the mind because feelings are unruly and are "suspects to be controlled."³³ The mind, the arena of imagination and reason, creates for the neurotic personality "a semblance of unity"³⁴ which can "release tensions [and] cover up conflicts."³⁵ But the paradox of the neurotic's trust in pure intellect is that the more he tries to function solely upon the ideals of the mind, the more difficult it becomes for him to "acknowledge the existence of unconscious factors" in himself. When unconscious factors do unavoidably intrude, says Horney, they make him extremely anxious, and he subsequently tries to disavow them or reason them away. There may come a moment when the neurotic is forced to face the conflict in himself with a flash of clarity. When this happens, and he realizes that he "cannot make incompatibles compatible," he may experience a suffocating feeling of being trapped and may respond with great fright.³⁶

The characteristic pattern of Shimamura's life clearly shows the neurotic's detachment from life as described by Horney. The rationale, for instance, of Shimamura's trip to the mountains near the hot-spring village of the snow country

³³ Ibid., p. 182.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 185.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 185.

is plain to him: "Shimamura, who lived a life of idleness, found that he tended to lose his honesty with himself, and he frequently went out alone into the mountains to recover something of it."³⁷ Throughout the novel, Shimamura displays his immense capability for looking at himself with detachment. Thus, while he is aware of himself as "an idler who might well spend his time in the mountains as anywhere, he looked upon mountain climbing as almost a model of wasted effort;" but it is for "that very reason [that] it pulled at him with the attraction of the unreal."³⁸ The striking aspect of Shimamura's self-observations is that his findings, although astute, really have no significance for his life. The Shimamura we meet at the beginning of the novel is fundamentally unchanged from the Shimamura we see at the end of the book.

Nothing that Shimamura does contains a sense of urgency or necessity, or even of vitality. What he does is always carefully calculated to preserve a sense of equilibrium. When he "sneers at himself through his work," it is a sneer which only pampers himself with a "somewhat whimsical pleasure."³⁹ Moreover, the implied author tells us that "it may well have been from such a pleasure that his sad little

³⁷ Snow Country, p. 21.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

dream world sprang."⁴⁰ On his trip to the snow country, Shimamura feels absolutely "no need to hurry himself;"⁴¹ this is an appropriate statement from an idler who has inherited his money, but it also shows how this "idler" has created a life where unruly feelings have been meticulously compartmentalized and put under control.

The life which Shimamura has constructed for himself is decidedly a comfortable one, free from all painful introspection -- a world which he creates from an armchair, with books, pictures, and imagination. His approach to his work contains all of the elements of the neurotic's removal from the realities of living:

Nothing could be more comfortable than writing about the ballet from books. A ballet he had never seen was an art in another world. It was an unrivaled armchair reverie, a lyric from some paradise. He called his work research, but it was actually free, uncontrolled fantasy. He preferred not to savor the ballet in the flesh; rather he savored the phantasms of his own dancing imagination, called up by Western books and pictures. It was like being in love with someone he had never seen.⁴²

Life, for Shimamura, has no appeal in its harsh and untouched frankness. It is something to be approached through the mind's eye, to be called forth from the depths of one's imagination, to be observed through a carefully controlled reason.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 27.

Shimamura's neurotic need to have his environment controlled by his mental acuity does not interfere with his ability to observe sharply others and their problems. He is quick to criticize others, as shown in his telling Komako that her cataloguing of the literature she has read is a "complete waste of effort."⁴³ He even goes so far as to recognize that what he deplores in Komako's attitude towards literature is really a passive externalization of what he deplores in his own attitudes toward art:

Her manner was as though she were talking of a distant foreign literature. There was something lonely, something sad in it, something that rather suggested a beggar who has lost all desire. It occurred to Shimamura that his own distant fantasy on the occidental ballet, built up from words and photographs in foreign books, was not in its way dissimilar.⁴⁴

However, what Shimamura does not realize is that not only is his work on the occidental ballet a distant fantasy, but that his whole way of life is a fantasy. Shimamura is aware that he and Komako share the same human fate, that of having to cope with unbearable existential loneliness by creating a world of fantasy to act as a buffer against despair; but his realization is purely an intellectual exercise. Shimamura does not allow himself to be caught up in the intensity of feeling and commitment which Komako has invested in her life. Komako has come to terms with the "note of wasted effort"⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., p. 40

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

in her life; Shimamura, on the other hand, feels that "were he to give himself quite up to that consciousness of wasted effort, ... he would be drawn into a remote emotionalism that would make his own life a waste."⁴⁶ In order to protect himself from becoming a victim of his emotions, Shimamura takes refuge into a life of the mind, where aesthetic perceptions and an intellectual and detached appreciation of them can serve as semblances of unity in his life and thus release him from confronting himself.

But it is apparent that the more Shimamura tries to rely on his capacity to function solely from his intellectual powers of reason and imagination, the more difficult it becomes for him to cope with the existence of unconscious conflicts in himself. Thus, when he is forced to acknowledge such conflicts in unexpected moments of clarity, he reacts with mild panic, fear, and even self-revulsion. This is shown in two places in the novel, both involving his relationship with Komako. The first occurs as he listens to Komako's highly affective concentration upon and devotion to her music:

And in spite of the fact she was in a small room, was she not slamming away at the instrument as though she were on the stage? He was being carried away by his own mountain emotionalism. Komako purposely read the words in a monotone, now slowing down and now jumping over a passage that was too much trouble; but gradually she seemed to fall into a spell. As her voice rose higher, Shimamura began to feel

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

a little frightened. How far would that strong, sure touch take him? He rolled over and pillowed his head on an arm, as if in bored indifference.

The end of the song released him. Ah, this woman is in love with me -- but he was annoyed with himself for the thought.⁴⁷

The second "incident" occurs when Komako explains to him the social risks she is taking in continuing her relationship with him:

"And I can't complain. After all, only women are able really to love." She flushed a little and looked at the floor.

...

"In the world as it is," he murmured, chilled at the sterility of the words even as he spoke.⁴⁸

Shimamura's feelings of fear, however mild, and his coldness in these passages are evidences of his underlying uneasiness about having to face the thought that there is something lacking in his detached approach to life and his persistent strivings to keep himself from being emotionally involved in his relationships with people and with nature. He is unable to let himself go, so to speak, and to enter into a satisfying and meaningful relationship with others. His neurotic need to keep himself distant from people takes on obsessional dimensions.

This brief psychological analysis of Shimamura demonstrates how much he fits the description of the neurotic

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

individual who is alienated from his real self because of his refusal to acknowledge his inner conflicts. His conflicts, the war between his need for human relationships and his need to preserve an isolated sense of individuality, remain irresolvable because he continues to detach himself emotionally from people and experiences. His aesthetic defenses, the construction of an elaborate system of perceptual modes which resembles the haiku vision, do not really work for him. His way of life has meaning only in that the values of aesthetic detachment -- perceptual and conceptual astuteness which create the illusion of self-unity -- function as a convenient means of escape from having to find the painful answers to the questions of who and what he really is. He structures, through the haiku vision, the world and himself in the hopes of avoiding the separation of himself from nature and from others. The result is a life which is perceptually rich but emotionally sterile.

The thematic structure of Snow Country suggests that perhaps the neurotic detachment of Shimamura, which is really a defense against man's helplessness and vulnerability to loneliness, death, and separation, is necessary in order for him to live in the world. For if Shimamura were to know more than what he undertakes to structure, he takes the awful risk of being split, and of being overwhelmed by the uncertainties of existence. Hence, in order to avoid falling completely

into the chasm of existential uncertainty symbolized in the novel by the image of the Milky Way⁴⁹ flowing down inside of Shimamura "with a roar,"⁵⁰ he structures himself and the world.

The ending of Snow Country is an effective metaphor for the dramatic confrontation that could occur within an individual coming face to face with the fact of his existence and experiencing its complete emptiness and futility. It is a vision of Shimamura's situation as a man forced to see his fate without the intervening medium of the aesthetic point of view.

Snow Country is a novel which says many things: it is a celebration of the aesthetic values of the haiku vision, as well as a highly convincing because psychologically realistic portrait of the neurotic detached personality. It is also a novel about man's existential dilemma, treating the question

⁴⁹ T.W. Swann's critique, "Yukiguni: One View" (East-West Review / II:1965-1966 / , p. 172) is an astute analysis of the ending in particular. Swann mentions that the Milky Way also stands as a "master symbol for abstract beauty of a pure and other-worldly quality," and that when Shimamura becomes entranced with it, it "becomes a vivid representation of Shimamura's break with Komako and his final devotion to beauty."

⁵⁰ Snow Country, p. 142.

of how one might live with a sense of emptiness and hopelessness. Psychological analysis of the novel makes us aware of the extent to which the neurotic detached personality is chained to his own solution to life, to the point where he is kept from realizing his self. Thematic analysis shows us the reasons why an individual may find it necessary to adopt such a self-alienating solution. The fine aesthetic perceptions in the narrative structure of the novel, conveyed by the language and imagery of the haiku, give us a unique view of the beauty of the natural surroundings which the protagonist, albeit neurotic, interprets for us.

Sembazuru, or Thousand Cranes, written in 1952 by Kawabata is a brief novel which treats essentially the same problem of the failure of the protagonist to actualize himself because of his need to detach himself from the world. The predominant literary technique in Thousand Cranes is the impressionistic creation of the decadent aesthetic ambiance surrounding the main characters.⁵¹ Kawabata uses the tea ceremony, a highly respected cultural tradition in Japan, as the setting for a negative and pessimistic portrayal of the protagonist.

⁵¹ In an interview conducted by Ivan Morris ("Fiction in Japan Today: An Exchange of Views," Japan Quarterly / IV:1957, p. 167), a well-known Japanese literary critic, Yoshida Kenichi, states that on the whole, Kawabata's characterization is weak and his plots "uniformly uninteresting." I feel that this criticism of Kawabata's craftsmanship is refuted and explained away by Edwin McClellan's provocative critique ("The Impressionistic tendency in Some Modern Japanese Writers," Chicago Review / XVII: 1965, pp. 57-58) on the use of Impressionism by the Japanese

In an essay, Kawabata gives his personal interpretation of his use of the tea ceremony:

I may say in passing that to see my novel Thousand Cranes as an evocation of the formal and spiritual beauty of the tea ceremony is a misreading. It is a negative work, an expression of doubt about and a warning against the vulgarity into which the tea ceremony has fallen.⁵²

However, despite Kawabata's explanation of his professed use of the tea ceremony, it is still the self of the protagonist Kikuji, who rejects not only the corruption of those who engage in the ceremony but also the ceremony itself, which is delineated in negative terms. For the plot of the novel revolves around Kikuji, a young unmarried office worker, who is not only haunted by memories of his dead father, who in life was a successful businessman and an avid connoisseur and practitioner of the art of the tea, but who is also involved in unhealthy relation-

novelist: "To say that the Japanese novelist returns time and time again to impressionism because he cannot be completely happy in a world which is opposed to it, a world which requires sharp delineation and a sustained creative imagination, may seem too sweeping a generalization. Yet, when a Japanese writer tries to connect everything his characters do in his novel so that it has a place in some overall scheme, so that it is meaningful in the sense that it lends significance to their final acts -- that is, when he concerns himself with plot and characterization -- he begins to seem arbitrary, even melodramatic. And this is so, one suspects, because he does not at the bottom quite believe in all that is implied by our assumption that plot is a valid, indeed a necessary, part of the novelist's attempt to imitate reality."

⁵² Kawabata Yasunari, Japan the Beautiful and Myself, trans. Edward Seidensticker (Tokyo, 1969), pp. 67-68.

ships with the women who knew his father.⁵³ The two women are Chikako Kurimoto, an instructor of the tea ceremony, and Mrs. Ota, a widow with a grown daughter; both Chikako and Mrs. Ota are former mistresses of Kikuji's father. The novel opens as Kikuji goes to a tea ceremony to which he has been invited by Chikako, ostensibly to meet a young lady protege of hers. On the way to the ceremony, Kikuji recalls how, as a child of eight or nine, he accidentally caught a glimpse of Chikako's birthmark on her left breast, on a visit to her home with his father. It is a scene which has never left Kikuji, and the birthmark comes to symbolize for him both the repulsiveness of Chikako's domineering, "sexless" personality and her alliance with his father:

Kikuji never forgot the mark. He could sometimes imagine even that his own destinies were enmeshed in it.

...

When he received the note saying that Chikako meant to make the tea ceremony her excuse for introducing him to a young lady, the birthmark once more floated before him; and, since the introduction would be made by Chikako, he wondered if the young lady herself would have a perfect skin, a skin unmarred by so much as a dot.

Had his father occasionally squeezed the birthmark between his fingers? Had he even bitten at it? Such were Kikuji's fantasies.⁵⁴

⁵³ James Araki, in a brief critique of Thousand Cranes in his essay, "Kawabata: Achievements of the Nobel Laureate" (Books Abroad /XLIII: 1969/, p. 321) implies that Kikuji's relationships with the women are unhealthy primarily because of their incestuous overtones. I am, of course, using the concept of health in terms of the individual's ability to maintain self-enhancing and non-manipulative relationships with others.

⁵⁴ Thousand Cranes, p. 14.

The young lady he meets is the "Inamura girl," a girl who comes to the ceremony carrying a "thousand-crane kerchief;" and he finds to his quiet surprise that she is exactly the opposite of Chikako in her pure beauty and freshness:

The light was really too bright for a tea cottage, but it made the girl's youth glow. The tea napkin, as became a young girl, was red, and it impressed one less with its softness than with its freshness, as if the girl's hand were bringing a red flower into bloom. And one saw a thousand cranes, small and white, start up in flight around her.⁵⁵

Throughout the novel, the "Inamura girl" stands for all that is pure and unsullied, the ideal of womanhood which Kikuji is attracted to but which he cannot come close to in his life because of his crippling passivity and detachment. As the following passage suggests, the sensations or perceptions he has of immaculate beauty whenever he thinks about the girl are fated to remain an "illusion" for him:

He had the illusion that the Inamura girl was walking in the shade of the trees, the pink kerchief and its thousand white cranes under her arm. He could see the cranes and the kerchief vividly. He sensed something fresh and clean.⁵⁶

The Inamura girl is the woman who "will always be far away"⁵⁷ for Kikuji, for despite his initial attraction to her at the tea ceremony, he is to enter into a physical liaison with Mrs. Ota, a relationship which sets off a chain of events which

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

foreshadows his failure, and loss, of self at the end of the novel.

Although it has been four years since he last saw Mrs. Ota at the funeral of his father, Kikuji finds that she maintains a youthful, and unconsciously seductive appearance, and that her looks contrast sharply with the serious mien of her daughter:

She had hardly changed in four years.

The white neck, rather long, was as it had been, and the full shoulders that strangely matched the slender neck -- it was a figure young for her years. The mouth and nose were small in proportion to the eyes. The little nose, if one bothered to notice, was cleanly modeled and most engaging. When she spoke, her lower lip was thrust forward a little, as if in a pout. The daughter had inherited the long neck and the full shoulders. Her mouth was larger, however, and tightly closed. There was something almost funny about the mother's tiny lips beside the daughter's.

Sadness clouded the girl's eyes, darker than her mother's.⁵⁸

The careful observations and detailed distinctions which Kikuji makes between mother and daughter not only reflect his characteristically keen perceptions, but also serve as reasons for his growing feelings of sensuality and justification for his physical attraction to his father's former mistress. We see that Kikuji puts a great deal of faith in his feelings,⁵⁹ but it is a faith which is ultimately misused, for feelings alone and not self-actualizing actions considered in terms of thoughts and emotions, will govern his life.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

⁵⁹ Earl Miner (An Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry [Stanford, 1968], p. 9) notes that "Faith in human feeling -- belief in its integrity and truth -- is probably the most consistent feature of Japanese literature from the earliest to contemporary times."

Kawabata relates technique and theme in an irrevocable manner. He accounts, for example, for every use of dialogue as well as description. For instance, conversation in Thousand Cranes is always underplayed, and the purpose of it appears to be what Laurent Le Sage observes in the French new novel, that "conversation occurs as something floating on the surface of consciousness, trivial or inoffensive in appearance but indicative of mysterious activity beneath."⁶⁰ In the scene quoted below, conversation is used not so much to advance story or to create a lifelike atmosphere to setting and character, as to convey the innermost psychological motives of the participants:

Chikako poked at the embers in the hearth.
 "Miss Inamura, suppose you make tea for Mr. Mitani.
 I don't believe you've had your turn yet."
 The girl of the thousand cranes stood up.
 Kikuji had noticed her beside Mrs. Ota. He
 had avoided looking at her, however, once
 he had seen Mrs. Ota and the daughter.
 Chikako was of course showing the girl off for
 his inspection.
 When she had taken her place at the hearth, she
 turned to Chikako.
 "And which bowl shal I use?"
 "Let me see. The Oribe should do," Chikako answered.
 "It belonged to Mr. Mitani's father. He was very
 fond of it, and he gave it to me."⁶¹

Chikako's manipulative behavior is foremost in this passage. Her motive in introducing Kikuji to the girl is so that she can assert her control over him. She reads his character well,

⁶⁰ Laurent Le Sage, The French New Novel (Pennsylvania, 1962), p. 39.

⁶¹ Thousand Cranes, p. 23.

for she knows that he is passive and unable to act out his hostilities, even in extreme anger. She knows also how Kikuji feels towards her, as a repulsive person, that he is resentful of her brief affair with his father and the meaning that affair held for his mother. Chikako's vindictiveness, too, toward Mrs. Ota is evident here. We learn that the Oribe bowl is originally that of Mrs. Ota's husband, which his wife gives to Kikuji's father, and which is subsequently passed on to Chikako.

The use of the Oribe bowl in the foregoing passage has interesting implications in that tea objects in the novel are given significances which go beyond their "thingness." This idea is perhaps best stated by Van Meter Ames:

Tea things glow again in Kawabata's Thousand Cranes. Though the ceremony is falling into desuetude, respect clings to its formality and especially to the bowls. When taken from elegant boxes, the rich tints are admired with a powerful sense of the presence of a mother, a father, and a mistress who had used them. Faults and sins are purified by association with the bowls. Persons are blended with beauty cherished for centuries, through vicissitudes subduing the transgressions of a mere lifetime to insignificance.

Chosisme, the focus on objects by Robbe-Grillet and others in the nouveau roman, is different. There an ashtray on a dusty table may take on importance, a bit of string, anything. No art qualities need to be appreciated. An accidental highlight of attention will do, regardless of the sensuous, formal, or associational values which have belonged to beauty in the West and still count aesthetically in Japan. Japanese tea bowls demand connoisseurship, because made by master potters and used by a succession of tea masters before being sold by impoverished old families to collectors. One should know whether a

piece is authentic, the best work of its kind and time, inferior, or an imitation, and its story, though only the knowing can know.⁶²

However, what Ames says about the associational values of the tea bowls is only partially true. While there is definitely a positive aesthetic connotation given to the tea things, their associations are not always pleasant for Kikuji. It is true that Kikuji tries to "forget" the unpleasantness surrounding the Oribe bowl, for example, by focussing on its venerable aspects as a historical artifact, but his attempt is virtually futile because he cannot avoid its "weird" career:

"But what difference does it make that my father owned it for a little while? It's four hundred years old, after all -- its history goes back to Momoyama and Rikyu himself. Tea masters have looked after it and passed it down through the centuries. My father is of very little importance." So Kikuji tried to forget the associations the bowl called up. It had passed from Ota to his wife, from the wife to Kikuji's father to Chikako; and the two men, Ota and Kikuji's father, were dead, and here were the two women. There was something almost weird about the bowl's career.⁶³

The tea bowl bears the mark of the corruption of its "owners." We see this idea in another form, in the very complicated, yet highly suggestive gesture of Kikuji's to retrieve the pieces of a tea bowl which Fumiko has smashed to bits at his home because of the associations of her mother which the bowl calls up:

The evening before, Fumiko had flung the Shino against the basin before he could stop her.

⁶² Van Meter Ames, op. cit., p. 34.

⁶³ Thousand Cranes, p. 25.

He had cried out.

But he had not looked for the pieces in the shadows among the stones. He had rather put his arm around Fumiko, supporting her. As she fell forward in the act of throwing the Shino, she seemed herself about to collapse against the basin.

"There is much better Shino," she murmured. Was she still sad at the thought of having Kikuji compare it with better Shino?

He lay sleepless, and an echo of her words came to him, more poignantly clean in remembrance.

Waiting for daylight, he went out to look for the pieces. Then, seeing the star, he threw them down again.

And looking up, he cried out.

There was no star. In the brief moment when his eyes were on the discarded pieces, the morning star had disappeared in the clouds.

He gazed at the eastern sky for a time, as if to retrieve something stolen.

The clouds would not be heavy; but he could not tell where the star was. The clouds broke near the horizon. The faint red deepened where they touched the roofs of houses.

"I can't just leave it," he said aloud. He picked up the pieces again, and put them in the sleeve of his night kimono.⁶⁴

This is a passage rich with implications. Fumiko's act of breaking the bowl comes after she and Kikuji have spent the night together, and is symbolic of her desire to break away from the hold which her mother's life has had upon her. It is an act which has positive overtones, for Kikuji's and Fumiko's relationship only begins in the wake of Mrs. Ota's death, a probable suicide precipitated by an intolerable guilt feelings about her liaison with Kikuji and an inability to live in the present. As for Kikuji, however, the fact that he picks

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 140-141.

up the pieces after Fumiko is indicative of his weakness and inability to act as she has done. Kikuji's act is a negative one, that of clinging to unhealthy relationships with others because he cannot keep his gaze upon the "morning star," a symbol of idealism and hope ushering in a new day. The strongest statement Kikuji makes concerning his distaste for what is occurring around him is the following verbal "mockery" and repudiation of the tea ceremony when Chikako proposes to hold a ceremony commemorating the fifth anniversary of his father's death:

"I suppose so. It would be fun to invite all sorts of connoisseurs and use imitation pieces from beginning to end."

...
 "This cottage always smells of some mouldy poison, and a really false ceremony might drive the poison away. Have it in memory of Father, and make it my farewell to tea. Of course I severed relations with tea long ago."⁶⁵

Kikuji's remark about the poison in the cottage, we see, is merely a pointed, but passive aggressive, rebuke at Chikako. Were his suggestion carried out by him, there might be a possibility that Kikuji's self would be different; but Kikuji remains a passive person, utilizing his aggressiveness in a way that is both futile and self-defeating. The pattern of his life, the pattern which he will not break away from, has been merely to feel intensely his unhappiness and his

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

anger at the life which goes on around him, but to leave it essentially as it is.

The conclusion of Thousand Cranes is ironic in two readily discernible ways. It comes after Kikuji has searched for Fumiko and discovers that she has left him without telling him of her destination:

She had said that death was at her feet. Kikuji's own feet were suddenly cold. He wiped his face with his handkerchief. The blood seemed to leave as he wiped, and he wiped more violently. The handkerchief was wet and dark. He felt a cold sweat at his back. "She has no reason to die," he muttered. There was no reason for Fumiko to die, Fumiko who had brought him to life. But had the simple directness of the evening before been the directness of death? Was she, like her mother, guilt-ridden, afraid of the directness? "And only Kurimoto is left." As if spitting out all the accumulated venom on the woman he took for his enemy, Kikuji hurried into the shade of the park.⁶⁶

The first ironical implication in this passage is Kikuji's misinterpretation of Fumiko's leaving. It is not guilt which underlies Fumiko's departure, but rather her intuition that only destructiveness can come out of her relationship with Kikuji; rather than continue the vicious cycle of ruined lives, she even considers death. The crowning irony, however, is Kikuji's self-deceived attitude toward Chikako -- he needs "the woman he [takes] for his enemy" in a pathological way. For Kikuji's need for Chikako, like his need for

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

Mrs. Ota, and later her daughter, is one that is defined by amae, a trait which psychologist Doi sees as characteristic of most Japanese psychiatric patients. Doi explains amae, and its non-actualizing qualities:

Amae is the noun form of "amaeru," an intransitive verb that means "to depend and presume upon another's benevolence" (Doi, 1956). This word has the same root as amai, an adjective that means "sweet." Thus amaeru has a distinct feeling of sweetness and is generally used to describe a child's attitude or behavior toward his parents, particularly his mother. But it can also be used to describe the relationship between two adults, such as the relationship between a husband and a wife or a master and a subordinate. I believe that there is no single word in English equivalent to amaeru, though this does not mean that the psychology of amae is totally alien to the people of English-speaking countries.

...
At first I felt that if the patient became fully aware of his amae, he would thereupon be able to get rid of his neurosis. But I was wrong in this assumption and came to observe another set of clinical phenomena following the patient's recognition of his amae. ... Many patients confessed that they were then awakened to the fact that they had not "possessed their self," had not previously appreciated the importance of their existence, and had been really nothing apart from their all-important desire to amaeru. I took this as a step toward the emergence of a new consciousness of self, inasmuch as the patient could then at least realize his previous state of "no self."⁶⁷

Seen in terms of Kikuji's attitude toward Mrs. Ota and Fumiko, amae is the damaging, ego-consuming dependence upon these women to have them love him. Kikuji's amae is also a form

⁶⁷ L. Takeo Doi, "Amae: A Key Concept for Understanding Japanese Personality Structure," in Japanese Culture, ed. R.J. Smith and R. Beardsley (Chicago, 1962), pp. 132-133.

of detachment, for it ignores the separateness and individuality of the other. It is not what Kikuji can give the other that is important to him, but what the other can or do give him. His grief at losing Fumiko, for example, is phrased in egocentric terms: "There was no reason for Fumiko to die, Fumiko who had brought him to life."

Kikuji's amae is mingled with helpless anger, especially at his father. We see that Kikuji's unhealthy need for Chikako is somehow related to the deep anger and resentment against his father which he cannot express:

It was perhaps because of her [the Inamura girl] that the meeting with two of his father's women had upset him no more than it had. The two women were still here to talk of his father, and his mother was dead. He felt a surge of something like anger. The ugly birthmark came to him again.⁶⁸

Also, Kikuji deals with his anger and his desire to amaeru in devious ways. An outstanding example is given below in his relationship with Mrs. Ota where he is seen drifting into his father's role and identifying with his fantasies of his father:

If Kikuji had regretted the encounter, he would have had the usual sense of defilement. Quite aside from the question of the miai [arranged meeting with a prospective marriage partner -- for Kikuji the Inamura girl], she was his father's woman. But he had until then felt neither regret nor revulsion. He did not understand how it had happened so naturally. Perhaps she was apologizing for having seduced him, and yet she had

⁶⁸ Thousand Cranes, p. 29.

probably not meant to seduce him, nor did Kikuji feel that he had been seduced. There had been no suggestion of resistance, on his part or the woman's. There had been no qualms, he might have said.

They had gone to an inn on the hill opposite the Engakuji, and they had had dinner, because she was still talking of Kikuji's father. Kikuji did not have to listen. Indeed it was in a sense strange that he had listened so quietly; but Mrs. Ota, evidently with no thought for the strangeness seemed to plead her yearning for the past. Listening, Kikuji felt expansively benevolent. A soft affection enveloped him. It came to him that his father had been happy.⁶⁹

However, Kikuji's metamorphosis into his father is not wholly unaccompanied by disgust and anger. Although he verbalizes his dislike for Chikako and his desire to keep away from her "poison," (he tells the Inamura girl: "I have bad memories of Kurimoto" ... "I don't want that woman's destinies to touch me at any point."⁷⁰) his feeling is not the simple one of disgust with Chikako, the schemer and defiler of relationships. It involves also disgust at himself who, in a moment of clarity, he envisions as being exactly like his father:

The dirtiness was not only in Chikako, who had introduced them. It was in Kikuji too. He could see his father biting at her birthmark with dirty teeth. The figure of his father became the figure of Kikuji himself.⁷¹

By the same token, Kikuji's anger at Mrs. Ota for failing to see the difference between himself and his father is really anger at himself for his inability to work out his own identity and thus sharing in his father's guilt and impurity:

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 57.

He shook her roughly.
 As if to strangle her, he grasped her with
 both hands between throat and collarbone.
 The collarbone stood out sharply.
 "Can't you see the difference between my father
 and me?"

...
 Kikuji had spoken less to her than to his own dis-
 quieted heart.
 He had been led easily into the other world.
 He could only think of it as another world, in
 which there was no distinction between his father
 and himself. So strong was the sense of the other
 world that afterward this disquietude came over
 him.
 He could ask himself if she was human. If she was
 pre-human, or again if she was the last woman in
 the human race.
 He could imagine her in this other world, making no
 distinction between her dead husband and Kikuji's
 father and Kikuji.
 "You think of my father, don't you, and my father
 and I become one person?"⁷²

The idea of "ghosts" of dead people haunting the main
 characters is an important sub-theme in Thousand Cranes. Two
 striking examples, one which evokes poetically, the reality of
 this idea, and the other which is a realistic depiction, are
 given below. Chikako, while visiting Kikuji, notices fire-
 flies in his home:

"Fireflies? At this time of the year?" She thrust
 her head forward. "It's almost fall. There are still
 fireflies, are there? Like ghosts."
 The maid bought them."
 "That's the sort of things maids do. If you were study-
 ing tea, now, you wouldn't put up with it. You may not
 know, but in Japan we are very conscious of the seasons."
 There was something indeed ghostly about the fireflies.
 Kikuji remembered that autumn insects had been humming
 on the shores of Lake Nojiri. Very strange fireflies,
 alive even now.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., pp. 64-65.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 119.

This provocative scene not only conveys the Japanese meticulousness about observing things in season and the related superstitious, but widely held notion, that doing things out-of-season, either by way of decor, food, or clothing is unnatural and bodes ill for the doer. But it also evokes the atmosphere, totally congruent though inexpressible, of something which has been violated and which is therefore unnatural and strange, pervading the theme of the self's failure in the novel.

The other example occurs when Fumiko and Kikuji, after Mrs. Ota's funeral, display the tea bowls used by Mrs. Ota and Kikuji's father:

Kikuji could not bring himself to say that the Shino bowl was like her mother. But the two bowls before them were like the souls of his father and her mother. The tea bowls, three or four hundred years old, were sound and healthy, and they called up no morbid thoughts. Life seemed to stretch taut over them, however, in a way that was almost sensual. Seeing his father and Fumiko's mother in the bowls, Kikuji felt that they had raised two beautiful ghosts and placed them side by side.⁷⁴

Indeed, ghosts more painful and destructive than beautiful, are raised in Fumiko's and Kikuji's life. Fumiko is haunted by her mother's death and guilt; and literal death is also at the doorsteps of Fumiko's life:

"Death, waiting at your feet, I'm frightened.
I've tried so many things. I've tried thinking

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 137.

that with death itself at my feet I can't
be forever held by Mother's death."

And Kikuji's answer to Fumiko is one which is wrenched from the depths of his heart, a disturbingly true commentary on the nature of his own existence: "When you're held by the dead, you begin to feel that you aren't in this world yourself."⁷⁵

The self which Kikuji fails to realize is his sense of identity which is smothered by his father's past. Kikuji never fully realizes the fact that he is reliving, in essence and actuality, his father's life in his involvement with Mrs. Ota and Chikako. Kikuji's portrait is that of a weak and passive man who cannot extricate himself from a hated and destructive life. Kikuji's behavior is a lesson in pessimism because he is the epitome of a man who denies himself the freedom to create a self and to assert his individuality.

It appears in the novel that the only hope for Kikuji's salvation is his perceptions of the purity and individuality of the two young women, Fumiko and the Inamura girl. However, because of his psychological enslavement, Kikuji's perceptions of the pure and beautiful war unevenly with those of the impure and unsightly -- it is the latter which overwhelm and defeat his potentiality for living with the beauty and dignity of self.

Thousand Cranes, like Snow Country, is a novel of the keen perceptions but limited approach to experience of the central character. Kikuji's openness to experience is limited

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

to his sensitive discrimination of his own feelings and moods; because he fails to resolve the crisis of his present identity, he cannot live meaningfully or completely with himself. His character is an example of the unadmirable aspect of aru ga mama,⁷⁶ the Japanese tendency to accept things as they are. Because Kikuji does not resist or reject, in a constructive, self-actualizing manner, those things which he despises, he is as much a violator of human relationships as are his father and Chikako. Weakness of self in Thousand Cranes is presented as a tragic element in man because it taints everyone and everything around the individual who denies himself his potential to be strong.

⁷⁶ William Caudill and L. Takeo Doi ("Interrelations of Psychiatry, Culture and Emotion in Japan," in Man's Image in Medicine and Anthropology, ed. Iago Galdston [New York, 1963]), refer to aru ga mama as an unfavorable psychological trait in the Japanese which carries the passivity of an individual to pathological extremes. I have found a philosophical equivalent to this psychological trait in Nakamura Hajime's "Time in Indian and Japanese Thought" (The Voices of Time, ed. J. T. Fraser [New York, 1966], p. 85) in which he elaborates on the Japanese reaction to "accept, even to welcome, the impermanence and fluidity of the phenomenal world."

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

A prevailing concern in the contemporary Japanese novel has been the plight of modern man who attempts to work out the meaning of his existence. The works of the four novelists studied in the preceding chapters show this plight specifically as the difficulties which their protagonists encounter in their efforts to actualize their selves. Actualization of one's self involves the individual's putting into effect such traits as creativity, growth motivation, acceptance of self, others, and nature, realizing one's autonomy and freedom, forming constructive relationships with others, being open to experience, and having a firm grounding in reality. The novels discussed here, however, do not give positive portrayals of their main characters according to the criteria listed above. Instead, they present negative and pessimistic delineations of the self.

In Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human and The Setting Sun, the central characters choose self-destruction through drug addiction and suicide after discovering that they cannot cope with a society which they feel demands that they wear "masks" over their real selves, and assume artificial "poses" in the

presence of others. They long for a security which they cannot realize because this security means that they must ultimately compromise themselves, to become the masks and poses they put on in the presence of other people. They are tragic and ironic figures who feel that because they are outcasts of their society, they have failed to actualize themselves. However, they are blind to the fact that their gentleness and genuine feelings for people in a world that is "out of joint" could have been positive steps toward self-affirmation and realization.

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion and Confessions of a Mask by Mishima Yukio are about an arsonist and a homosexual, respectively, who try desperately to take flight from an intolerable reality and their selves through their psychopathic fantasies. Ironically for them, fantasy and reality become virtually indistinguishable, and the symbol of their powers of self-analysis takes on the form of the contorted Mobius Strip -- "what [appears] to be the inside [is] the outside and what [appears] to be the outside is the inside." They are self-deceptive individuals who feel, at the end of the novels, that they have achieved some mode of self-actualization when they have only become more firmly entrenched as victims of their psychopathology.

In Abé Kobo's The Woman in the Dunes and The Face of Another, the main characters pride themselves on their intelligence and their ability to see things scientifically. The protagonists are an entomologist and a scientist who are governed

by the need to find external "standards of values," rather than their selves. They are products of the twentieth-century preoccupation with scientific method, yet at the same time, they are hopeless victims of their own perceptions which arise from a heightened awareness of the emptiness of their lives. Their experiences and observations of life lead them ultimately to an uneasy and unstable compromise which reflect the fact that they have accepted neither themselves nor others.

Kawabata Yasunari's works, Snow Country and Thousand Cranes, concern themselves with protagonists who take flight from life and self into a world of sharp aesthetic perceptions. Both are aesthetes who are convinced that life is a wasted effort, and this view distorts their perceptions of their experiences. Openness to experience for them only means escape from knowing themselves and from becoming committed to healthy relationships with others. Ironically, they are passive self-made prisoners "in the world as it is," a world which is fated to remain as they see it.

The theme of the self in modern Japanese fiction revolves around the reasons why individuals fail to realize themselves. It is a theme which is coupled with effective stylistic techniques, and therefore carries with it great dramatic urgency and literary impact. We often find that the modern Japanese novel is difficult to read, not only because of the cultural gap it implies for the Western reader, but also because the

reader is forced to engage in an intensely private experience. In order to get at the full value of the literary work, the reader must attempt to understand completely the inner and outer world of another person, to enter his private self, as it were, and see the way life appears to him without the novelist's direct evaluative interpretations. These novels, to use a phrase by Erich Auerbach, give one an unmediated "problematic-existential representation" of life.* In reading these novels, the reader runs the risk of being changed or becoming lost in the world of the protagonist, but he is also accorded a vision of life which not only transcends cultural time and space, but which, when taken by itself, makes a significant commentary about the human condition.

* Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (New York, 1957), p. 433. An example of "problematic-existential representation" in fiction is Flaubert's style which Auerbach calls "a systematic and objective seriousness, from which things themselves speak, and, according to their value, classify themselves before the reader as tragic or comic, or in most cases quite unobtrusively as both."

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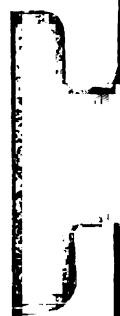
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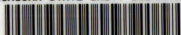
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