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The Saga of Dazai Osamu

A Critical Study with Translations



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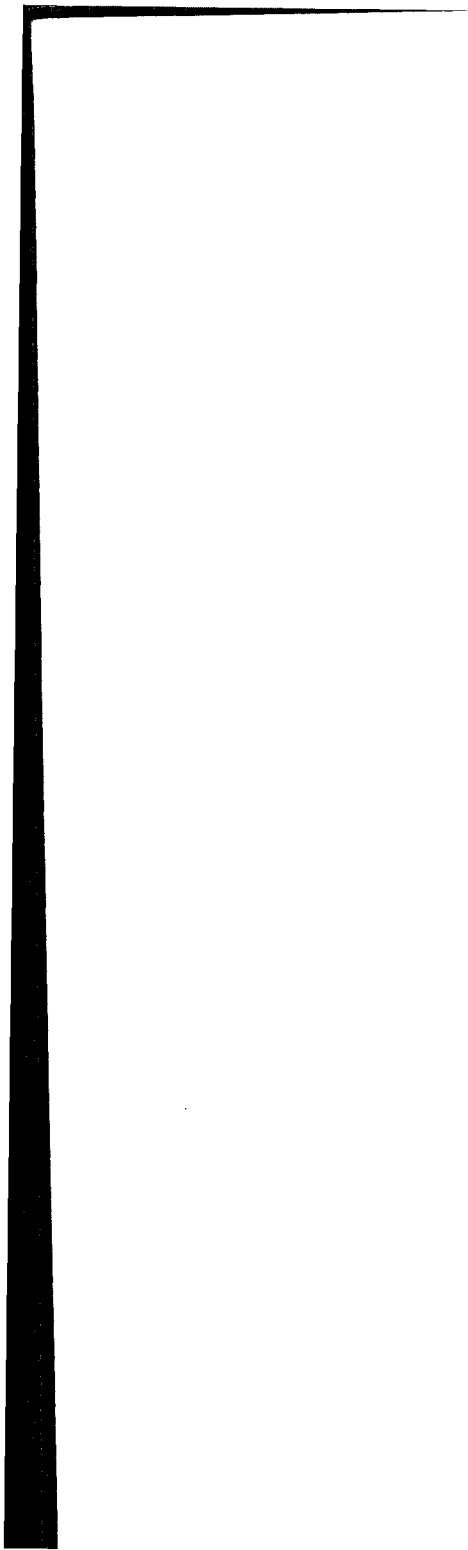
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For Peter and Joy



Preface

To the Japanese, Dazai Osamu is not just one of the most famous of all modern writers; he is a star. A number of his stories have achieved the status of classics; and his life—not to mention his legend, much of it created by Dazai himself in his stories—is as much a topic of general and critical interest as they are. Critical studies of his work abound in the literary journals, and even popular magazines regularly publish articles on his life with much the same tone as the latest revelations about Elvis Presley in this country. Six editions of his complete works, some in multiple printings, have been published since his death in 1948. Dazai is always included in anthologies of modern literature, his stories are published in popular editions by every major press, and most leading literary critics and even writers have at least one essay on his work. In 1968, when Japanese students like their fellows around the world were in a period of social and political ferment, a survey conducted by one of Japan's premier newspapers, the *Asahi Shimbun*, showed that students at four major Japanese universities placed Dazai's novel *No Longer Human* ninth on the list of books that had most influenced them, in company with Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Camus's *The Stranger*, and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Annually on the anniversary of his death, television crews go out to film the memorial services at his graveside as a human-interest feature for the evening news; they are still well attended, though it is over thirty years since he killed himself.

Yet Dazai is relatively unknown in the United States, even though two of his novels have been available in English for over twenty years. He was one of the first Japanese writers to be translated after the war, because in his short postwar career he spoke so strikingly of the condition of defeated Japan. Yet no new translations have made his work accessible to the general reader since the 1950's; what translations there are (a considerable number—see Appendix B) have been published mainly in specialist journals. Fame is alas fleeting; foreign writers tend to pass out of public attention if they do not do something unusual (for example, commit ritual suicide like Mishima Yukio or win the Nobel Prize like Kawabata Yasunari), or if they are not regularly reintroduced in new translations. That more of Dazai has not been made

readily available to Western readers is perhaps a result of the intensely personal and autobiographical nature of his most characteristic untranslated stories from his much longer prewar period. Such stories need no explanation to a Japanese audience, but may have daunted translators who preferred to deal purely with stories and not with context. This book presents both together; through it, Western readers may see the artistic strengths and personal weaknesses that are the reasons Japanese readers respond so strongly to Dazai.

Dazai's autobiographical stories can certainly stand by themselves, but they resonate most richly when read, as they are by Japanese readers, with a knowledge of the events that lie behind them. Most translators have been at pains to choose the most seemingly fictional of Dazai's stories, to treat each story in isolation and not in relation to other stories, or to downplay the relation of story to personal history. By contrast, this study directly addresses that relationship, and the translations that accompany it introduce some of the best and most intimate of Dazai's stories. Together, they provide a context for understanding why Dazai is so popular in Japan, and for seeing how Dazai, while a man like all other men of whatever society or culture, is at the same time specially and revealingly Japanese.

To read Dazai is to see Japan from the inside, not as a place of extreme and inexplicable relationships, but as the home of people with strong ties to each other and often as strongly conflicting needs. Unlike Kawabata and Mishima, probably the two Japanese writers best known to Western audiences, Dazai has no stories of ultranationalistic terrorists, lesbian princesses, insane monks who burn down temples, neurasthenic aesthetes dallying with geisha (when he does have such a plot, it is a touchingly familiar tale of an adolescent trying to be an adult and making a fool of himself), or old men who sleep with drugged girls. Dazai writes about real people (literally, often with their real names) trying to understand how they fit into the world, loving each other and yet often hurting each other. Ironically, it may be harder to export such familiar material from one culture to another without explanation than it is to transfer fanciful plots in which everything is equally exotic.

This book focuses on a number of issues raised by Dazai's writing: what is specifically Japanese about it; what are the cultural complications about which he writes; and why are these of interest (and so familiar) to us as well as to Japanese readers. Because Dazai was writing about the things he considered to be the most necessary and important to himself as a human being, what he says will ring true to any audience, especially when the base conditions are known. The translations in this book, of some of Dazai's most important stories, show the special character of his writing, which is far warmer and more engaged than the nihilistic postwar stories available so far would lead one to suspect.

Because the issues involved here are not just literary ones, there are in the Introduction brief discussions of the Japanese family as a social entity, and the role of suicide in Japanese culture, as well as Japanese literary history. Part I is both a chronological narrative history of Dazai's life and a closer look at some issues in his life—his psychological history, as it were. The chapters of Part II tell the story of Osamu, the literary character Dazai created of himself through the fifteen years of his literary career. It is what I call the Osamu Saga. Each chapter in this section takes form around one or more of the stories translated in the book, and shows how the stories relate to others that came before and after. The stories translated are five short stories and a “nonfiction novel” (to use Truman Capote's term) that is Dazai's clearly articulated attempt to explain his own soul in terms of the physical and psychological geography of his homeland. This sort-of-novel, *Tsugaru*, is also a guide to a beautiful part of Japan that is different from that usually seen by the traveler, Japanese or foreign.

Some technical notes on my practice in this book. I use the word “story” often in a wider sense than is covered by the genre category “short story.” Because the question of the relation of fact to fiction, autobiography to tale, is a basic one when dealing with Dazai's work, in my discussions “story” tends to include all forms of imaginative, as opposed to purely reportorial, writing; and so a story may be a novel, a short story, or a set of *pensées*. For the convenience of Western readers, I do use the conventional distinction between short story and novel when necessary, but please bear in mind that the difference is often more one of length than of form.

The translations are as faithful as I could make them and still have them comfortably readable. While Dazai's language is accessible and evocative, it is also idiosyncratic and sometimes oblique. I have chosen generally (although not rigidly) to follow his lead. When his sentences are long and meandering, when he repeats words and phrases from one sentence to another, when his paragraphs run on for a page or more, I have tended to do the same, instead of editing him to more common English shape. However, in order to reduce strangeness for the English reader, I have violated one of Dazai's frequently used stylistic devices: a mode of discourse between direct and indirect, that is, direct quoted statement without quotation marks. Since there is, in these spots, less of an author's presence standing, like a stage manager's, between reader and text-event, the effect in the Japanese is to make the text more permeable to the reader. I have generally added quotation marks, even where they do not exist in the original. I have, however, preserved another characteristic of Dazai's writing style: the shift of pronoun referent within a single paragraph. The Japanese language as a rule avoids where possible the use of pronouns when the context makes clear who is meant (leading at times to ambiguity, as any observer of Japanese conversations will notice). Dazai uses this option freely, to produce rapid

shifts in person that mirror the rapid flow of thoughts in a narrator's mind. Once again, the device provides a more open text from the reader's point of view, though the shape may at first seem strange to the syntactically orderly Western mind. I have also resorted, especially in the translation of *Tsugaru*, to the imperfect but useful device of footnotes, to explain why certain things are significant. Here again I was following Dazai's lead, for he had a few in his text; particularly in this work, he was introducing special and perhaps unfamiliar qualities of a region to the rest of the country. Slightly more explanation, then, will be useful for the non-Japanese reader.

Transliteration of Japanese names and words is based on the Hepburn system (hence, *shimbun*, not *shinbun*). Vowel sounds in Japanese are similar to Italian vowels, consonants are like those of English. Long syllables are marked with a macron. Japanese names offer special confusions for Westerners. Japanese name order is used—surname first (the reverse of English)—and a person is commonly referred to by his surname. Therefore, Ibuse Masuji is Mr. Ibuse. However, traditionally, when a name is a sobriquet or “literary name,” the artistic personal name has been used for address. For example, Natsume Sōseki is the pen name of Natsume Kinnosuke; hence, he is referred to as Sōseki. This is why, for another example, in Dazai's “Going Home,” Yagyū Jūbei is “Jūbei,” while Okubo Hikozaemon is “Okubo.”

This study began as a dissertation at the University of Chicago. My thanks go to Edwin McClellan, who insisted always on being told not just what was in the books, but what those things meant, and who taught me a body of impeccable selective prejudices from which to make judgments of my own. My early studies in Japan were guided by Hinotani Teruhiko of Keio University, who was more than commonly generous with his (and his family's) time. For more than a decade, since I have been working on Dazai, Sōma Shōichi (then teaching at Hirosaki High School, Dazai's alma mater, and now at Jōetsu Teachers College) has as a Dazai authority shared ideas and information from his own work in progress; he has also been extraordinarily kind in answering questions about special local lore essential to the translation of *Tsugaru*. I would like to thank his family for their hospitality during my several visits to Dazai territory. My thanks go also to the administrative and educational officials of Kanagi, Dazai's hometown, for the help and access to materials they gave me when I was there. Other teachers and friends in Japan and the United States have helped at various stages by discussion, patient review, elucidation, and response as this study developed: Harry Harootunian, Tetsuo Najita, Harrie Vanderstappen, Eric Gangloff, William Sibley, Fukuko and Takashi Masunari, Peter Lang, Janet Walker, Janet Underhill, Chieko Ariga, Robert Peterson, Manel Valdes-Cruz, and Hiroki Kato. Natalie Hector was an enthusiastic reader as well as typist. Mike Ed-

wards of Berkeley, California, was the best of editors, sensitive and sensible at the same time; I owe him much for both his close reading and sense of the whole. Keiko Alphs and the staff of the East Asian Library of the University of Chicago were always ready to answer questions.

I thank Mrs. Tsushima Michiko, Dazai's widow, for her permission to translate the six stories in this book, and the Mainichi Shimbun-sha for permission to use photographs from their volume *Shashinshū: Dazai Osamu no shōgai*. I am deeply grateful to the Japan–United States Friendship Commission and the Japan Society of New York for awarding me the 1983 Friendship Prize for the translations of the six stories, thereby reassuring me that the translations are worthy to represent Dazai to readers of English. Last of all, I would like to thank my parents for getting me to Japan in the first place; that's surely where it all started.

P.I.L.



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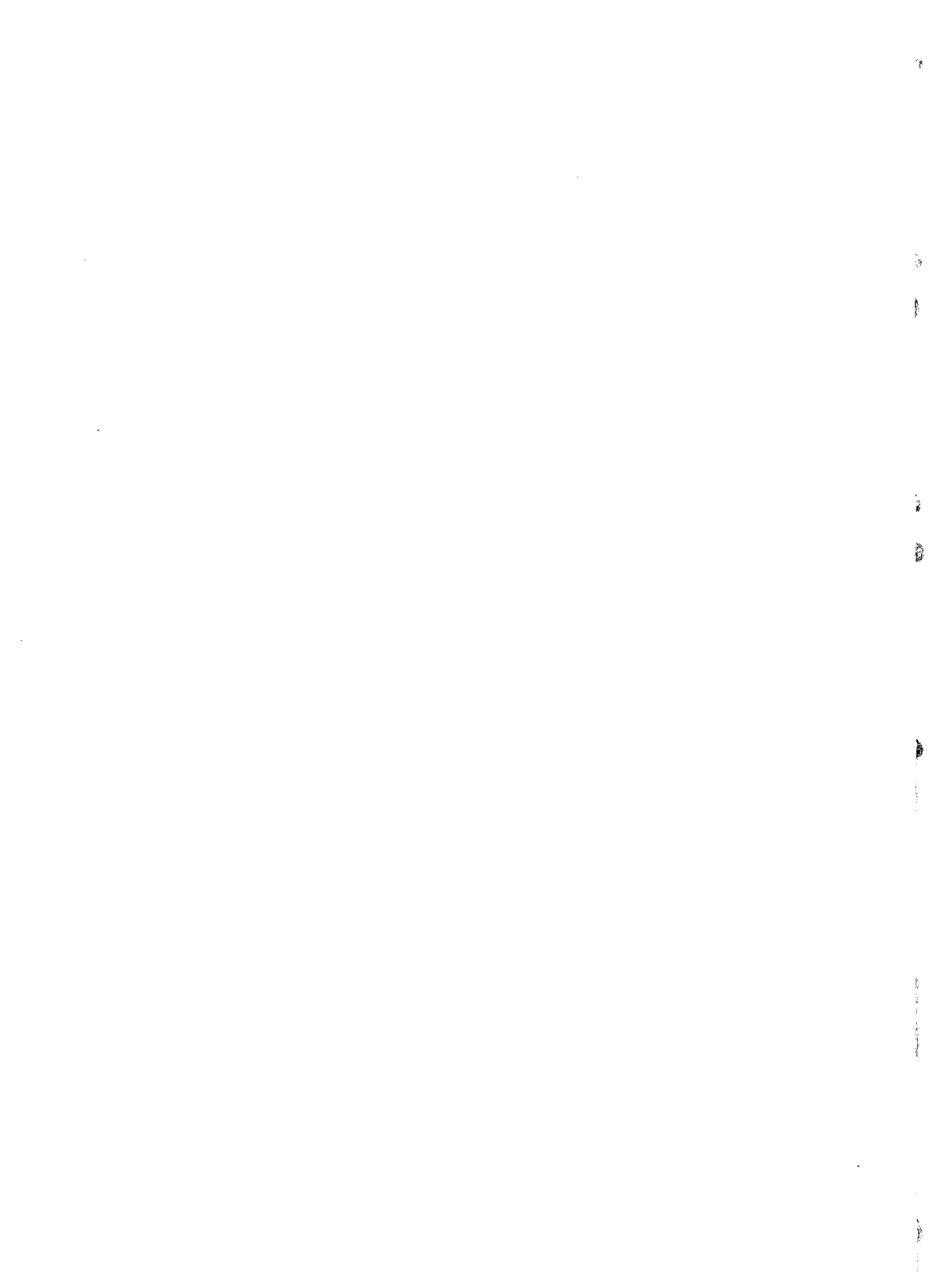
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The Saga of
Dazai Osamu



Introduction

You believe in my strength. You overestimate my abilities. And so you don't know about the great force of effort I have to make, my stupid, secret effort. You take an onion and peel it and peel it, right to the heart, and there's nothing there. There must be something, you believe, there must be—you take another onion and start peeling it, keep on peeling, at last, nothing. Do you understand the sadness of this monkey?

—Dazai Osamu, “A Record of the Autumn Wind”¹

Dazai Osamu's most famous novels, *Shayō* (The Setting Sun) and *Ningen shikkaku* (No Longer Human) were translated into English in the mid-1950's, within ten years of their publication in Japan, giving Western readers some of the earliest postwar literary views of a country that was still an enigma after years of conflict and occupation. For the Japanese, after an era of marching under the sign of the rising sun, *The Setting Sun* provided in its title alone a metaphor for their defeat, and the phrase entered into the popular vocabulary. *No Longer Human*, the story of a man who is unable himself to feel or understand the feelings of other human beings, domesticated that image to show the defeat of an individual removed from the large historical stage. Western audiences recognized in these novels a universal cry of loneliness and defeat; and the number of translated short stories that have appeared since then, also mostly from Dazai's postwar writings, have been selected—perhaps unconsciously—to reinforce the idea of Dazai as the poet of despair. But Japanese readers, who have access to the full range of his writing, have seen much more. While Dazai was indeed ultimately defeated by life, and while portions of his life were in fact confused enough to be called decadent, there are other qualities in his work that still give him, decades after his suicide, not just readers in Japan, but fans.

Dazai may be likened to F. Scott Fitzgerald or J. D. Salinger in tone as well as in the nature of his popularity. But unlike those two writers, whose names summon up particular moments in American cultural history, Dazai does

¹ *Dazai Osamu Zenshū* 2: 251. Hereafter, most references to this edition of Dazai's complete works in the text will be made parenthetically, by volume and page number, omitting the title. Works cited in abbreviated form in the notes will be found listed in full, with English translations of Japanese titles, in the Bibliography.

not speak for one particular historical generation, although in his postwar writings he vividly captured the atmosphere of defeat in the immediate aftermath of World War II. What Japanese readers respond to is exactly the timelessness of Dazai's stories, which speak to the situation of each individual as he attempts to find his way in his own time and place. Dazai is an autobiographical writer; he writes about himself, his own thoughts, his own problems. But he does this in such a way that he allows the reader to become actively involved in the process of following the most private of experiences, so that the process becomes in effect an investigation of the reader's life as well; and he does this often enough with a redeeming touch of humor—ironic, sad, bemused, and sharp, but humor nonetheless. Japanese readers feel that, whether he is writing of the 1920's, 1930's, or 1940's, he is speaking of their lives; Western readers as well are invited into his stories to feel what it is to be Japanese.

This book explores Dazai's most autobiographical stories, a number of them translated here for the first time. Although written separately, these stories fit into the structure of a much larger story, Dazai's narrative of the life journey of the literary character he made of himself. It is the totality of what I call the Osamu Saga that makes Dazai so intimate to the hearts of Japanese readers, and that will, I think, reveal the Japanese mind to Western readers in a way that few other Japanese works have done. Dazai was archetypally Japanese; a sociologist could use the behavior of characters in his stories as case histories of what might be called "the Japanese mentality." But he was also in part a stranger in his own land, an outsider in his family, and an alien whose involvement with the central culture was always self-conscious and difficult. Some of the reasons for this, to be discussed in the following chapters, were personal and idiosyncratic; others were accidents of geography and history. But they made his writing, while classically Japanese, open to all readers.

Dazai Osamu (the pen name of Tsushima Shūji) was born in 1909 to a wealthy landowning family in northern Japan. The distance of this region, known as Tsugaru, from the central Tokyo–Kyoto area was cultural as well as geographical. Tsugaru's traditional folkways, especially in the early years of the twentieth century, were distinctive, as was the local dialect which even today sometimes makes the language seem not quite Japanese. Had it not been for his father's wealth and status, Dazai would perhaps have been a regional artist; as it was, those same conditions, while a passport to the wider world, were also a source of many of his future troubles.

After a seemingly uneventful childhood, Dazai went away to high school and college. During those years of the 1920's, Japan as well as his own private world went through some significant changes. The Russian Revolution in 1917 caused ripples of response around the world; by the time Dazai was

in high school, in the late 1920's, he and his generation of educated young people were more than conversant with the issues of class conflict being felt even in Japan. It was the contradiction of his own position—a wealthy child of what Marxists called the exploitative class and a sympathizer with at least the rhetoric of the exploited class—and other personal confusions that led to his first suicide attempt in 1929. This was the beginning of more than a decade of chaos in his life: he attended university in Tokyo for years but never graduated; he attempted suicide again, this time with a woman, married a geisha, and was cut off by his family for this and for involvement in the leftist movement in the early 1930's. There was another suicide attempt, a year of narcotics addiction, a suicide attempt with his geisha wife, final separation from her, and emotional exhaustion. In the midst of it all, he attempted to carry on a commitment—first arrived at, he says in one of his stories, while he was in high school—to being a writer. The writing both sustained him and was a record of the catastrophes of his life.

From 1940 to 1946, the war years, he seemed to regain a sense of coherence in his life. He married again, acceptably this time, had one child, then a second and a third. He became a moderately well-known writer. During the war, he wrote fairy tales and his own versions of seventeenth-century stories; he also wrote a novel about the Chinese writer Lu Hsün, on commission from a government agency. He returned to Tsugaru to seek out the significance of his provincial origins, and wrote about the journey. But after the war, his own life mirrored Japan's state of prostration as it began once again to disintegrate, and his stories reflected the public and private despair. Still married, he became involved with another woman and used part of that experience to write *The Setting Sun* (the woman bore him a child). He became involved with yet another woman. Worn down by ill health, alcohol, and burdens of the spirit, he completed *No Longer Human*, which deals with a man's failure to find sustenance in life, and then committed suicide with this last woman in 1948. Right to the end, his stories chronicled the disasters, and frail successes, of his life.

Why would anyone want to read stories about the life of such a man, and why would he be popular, to boot? First of all, because there is a certain undeniable soap-opera excitement in just seeing the events unfold and in identifying with the man experiencing them. Nevertheless, in and of itself, the plot would not be sufficient to maintain reader loyalty; but Dazai at his best was a very good writer, and it is the way he told the story that holds the audience. There is no denying that not all his stories are of equally high quality; one of the things this study does is to guide the reader to some of the best among some fifty short stories and three novels.

Second, and the reason I call the stories in this book “the Osamu Saga,” Dazai created a unified, many-chaptered narrative out of the confused and

accidental events of his life and presented it as the life struggles of a strongly engaging character we can call “Osamu,” as he himself did in some stories. It is Osamu, the literary incarnation of the writer, that captivates the reader as Dazai himself professes to be captivated; and Dazai’s sympathy and fascination (and pity) communicate the vitality of Osamu’s existence to the reader. Osamu does terrible things, and terrible things happen to him, and as a result we come to care about what happens. Again, it is Dazai’s skill as a writer that makes our involvement possible. Osamu is rejected, Osamu longs to be forgiven, Osamu finds friends who have loved him all along, despite everything—and we are moved, for him and for ourselves, as Japanese readers have been.

While the story of Osamu is not the only thing Dazai wrote, it is the tale closest to him, and his best writing went into it. Dazai put life and art together in such a creative blend that fictionality itself is at question. Some critics have taken his stories as gospel truth, some have devoted lifetimes to identifying breaches in the factual record where elements of fiction have leaked in, and yet others have studied Dazai’s life as if *it* were the story. Before I address this issue, a few preliminary comments on Dazai’s literary context and some other issues, such as family and suicide, that played major roles in his life, might help clarify what, in his life and art, is an identifiable result of Japanese culture and what is distinctively “individual.”

Dazai’s Literary World

Dazai belonged to what might be called the third generation of modern Japanese writers. The first generation made a giant leap in meeting the challenge of new literary subjects, new storytelling techniques, and a new attitude of seriousness toward the art of fiction, after Western ideas entered Japan at the end of the nineteenth century. In early modern Japan, “Western” was the model of “modern,” and some of the first understandings of Western thought came from the writers of this generation. In the 1880’s, writers and critics like Tsubouchi Shōyō and Futabatei Shimei were still forging a new literary language to meet and also create the needs and demands of the modern man of the day. Within a short time, a number of writers had had actual experience of living abroad, and literary modernity was being not just translated but lived. Mori Ōgai studied in Germany in the mid-1880’s; Natsume Sōseki was in England from 1901 to 1903; Nagai Kafū lived in the United States and then France from 1903 to 1907. These and other writers focused attention on a new kind of literary character, one who was not a grandiose hero, but a man like other men, often lonely, often perplexed, often misunderstood—and, as a result, all the more believable.

Literature came quickly to reflect a fascination with what the West called

the “self,” the mind and psychology of the man lurking within the frame of the social being. The world in which readers and characters lived was different from that of their parents, and the literature revealed those differences. By the time of the second literary generation in the 1910’s and 1920’s, modernization was accepted as having already happened. Comparisons between East and West were still made in Japanese novels, but the people making them saw themselves as modern people; the past of their own culture had receded with what they sometimes themselves saw as alarming speed. The concern of romanticism with the discovery and nourishing of the individual soul; the preoccupation of naturalism with the individual’s increasingly isolated position in society; the desire of several schools more devoted to art for art’s sake to, variously, recover the style and even the matter of premodern writers or fight the depressing self-preoccupation of some naturalist writers—all were now part of the modern heritage of this second generation. Its leading figures included writers of the so-called White Birch school such as Shiga Naoya and Arishima Takeo; Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Satō Haruo, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke; and later, the “Neo-impressionists” Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari. Of course these writers do not constitute a generation in any tidy chronological sense. Tanizaki, after all, started publishing in 1910, only four years or so after Sōseki began, and wrote until his death in 1965; Mori Ōgai began a whole new conservative direction in his writing in 1912; the White Birch writers were publishing at the same time as Sōseki, and Arishima Takeo was in the United States (at Haverford College and Harvard) and Europe about the time Sōseki was in England. Nevertheless, they tended to see themselves and to be seen by others as members of a new generation—as makers, in fact, of the modern Japanese literary tradition.

When Dazai was growing up in the 1920’s and early 1930’s many of these second-generation writers were already famous, and in fact under pressure themselves from the strong but short-lived proletarian literature movement, which was as much a social perspective as a school. Proletarian literature, at its height in the late 1920’s when he began writing, was Dazai’s first personal literary challenge, as the leftist movement was his first political involvement. Kobayashi Takiji’s famous indictment of oppressive landowners, “Fuzai jinushi” (The Absentee Landlord) appeared in a major intellectual magazine the month before Dazai’s first suicide attempt in 1929. Although Dazai may never have read this particular story, he was clearly conscious of and exquisitely sensitive to its sort of social message, which was in direct opposition to the apolitical literature of the preceding era. The rightist politics and censorship of the 1930’s put a stop to the social exhortations and agitation of the proletarian movement, political as well as literary, by the middle of the dec-

ade. Dazai by then had himself moved away from involvement in politics of any stripe, but the movement left its mark on him.

Dazai was a child of the modern world, and not just in his college politics; his vocabulary of writers was eclectic. A large number of Western names appear in his stories: Ibsen, Strindberg, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky. They float through, often without explanation or with only allusive reference, as if on the assumption that the audience too will be familiar with them. What is noteworthy about this list is that it is totally conventional; any reasonably educated reader would know the names. Like the writing of one of his favorite writers, Akutagawa, Dazai's early writing fairly bristles with ample sprinklings of the names of these writers. Yet it is difficult to say how much Dazai knew about them or their work. In other words, it is more useful here to speak of their "stimulus" than of their "influence." Dazai himself never seriously discussed any of them in his writing, nor does he ever give the impression that he grappled at any serious level with them. When he uses the Bible, his references are only of the most obvious kind, such as any high school graduate would have known by the 1930's: the story of Abraham and Isaac, for example, or the parable of the prodigal son.² Dazai's acquaintance with premodern Japanese literature as reflected in his writings seems to have been limited to the major writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Aside from his problems with left-wing politics, Dazai found that, like many Japanese writers before him, he had political difficulties of another sort. In Japan still, all roads lead to Tokyo. From the time he started his literary career, Dazai was labeled "educated provincial come to the big city." The literary world was and is dominated by a fictive entity called the *bundan* (here translated "the literary establishment"), a self-contained institution that produces, supports, and controls both writers and their publishing opportunities, and even makes moral judgments about its "members." Writers tended to belong to literary schools, or at least to be classified by association. All such schools, even those in conflict with each other, were parts of the larger whole. A new voice had essentially to be sponsored by one of the established writers, even if the sponsorship was only formal; opposition by a major figure could end even a relatively well-known writer's career, as happened when Kawabata turned against Ryūtanji Yū in the 1930's and "buried" him for having attacked the cliquishness of the *bundan*.³ There were several sponsor figures in Dazai's career, including Ibuse Masuji and Satō Haruo, with whom Dazai had continuing though troubled relation-

²Compulsory education went only through elementary school, so high school graduates were the lower rank of the educated elite.

³So, at any rate, contends Usui Yoshimi in "Kawabata Yasunari seijika-setsu no haikai," *Bungei Shunjū* 58, no. 8 (1977): 260-76.

ships; but the sometimes censorious judgments of major powers like Kawabata and Shiga (whom Dazai called both seriously and ironically, *rōtaika*, “venerable great writers”) caused him more than passing difficulties, personally and in the literary world. Dazai never belonged more than briefly to any literary school; for a man who sought to find connections, both concrete and abstract, during his lifetime, and who collected an audience of devoted supporters, readers, and publishers, he remained a lone wolf professionally. Some of his closest friends were writers, but his relations with the *bundan* were distant.

The I-Novel and Dazai’s Sincerity

While Dazai never really belonged to any literary movement, his autobiographical stories lie within a recognized genre, the *watakushi shōsetsu* (or *shishōsetsu*), literally, “I-novel.” Not exactly a movement, but a dominant mode in modern Japanese literature ever since Tayama Katai’s “Futon” (The Quilt) in 1907, it refers to stories in which the first-person narrator or the third-person narrative perspective is clearly identifiable with the author. The events are the events of the author’s life; the conflicts are the author’s; the observing mind in the story is the author’s mind. The weaknesses inherent in such a narrative program are obvious: “it tends to be narcissistic, self-satisfying dialogue with oneself or an exhibitionistic exposure of oneself.”⁴ Masao Miyoshi succinctly points out the reader’s dilemma: “If he is inclined to feel friendly toward the ‘I,’ he will like the story; if not, he will be bored by it.”⁵ The I-novel always partakes of the confessional; the author may be expressing anger or resistance, or he may be begging forgiveness, or simply investigating his state of mind, but always he is speaking of and for himself. Accordingly, the reader is expected to factor into his judgments of the story’s merits the question of whether or not the writer is sincere in his self-revelation. Thus critics were morally outraged at Shimazaki Tōson’s behavior when his novel *Shinsei* (A New Life) began appearing serially from 1918 to 1919, as it chronicled his incestuous relationship with his niece, but they nevertheless found it sincere in its depictions of the protagonist’s moral struggles. Whatever the murky ulterior motives of Tōson the man in his actions and in writing the novel, the novel of Tōson the writer was judged to be a moving document of pain, even though, according to one critic, it “abounds in obfuscations.”⁶

Although contemporary critics sometimes saw Dazai’s stories as self-indulgent, in the balance he too was felt to be writing sincerely in his medita-

⁴Lippit, “Aspects of the I-novel,” in *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature*, 16.

⁵Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, 126.

⁶McClellan, *Two Japanese Novelists*, 125.

tions upon himself. And he made a special contribution to the genre, a contribution through which he exploited its possibilities more thoroughly than any writer before him: the note of mordant humor that he injected into what had been a pretty dismal business. His ironic step back from himself produces what the critic Gotō Meisei even calls a “parody” of the I-novel; it is as if there were a “fourth-person” narrator observing the writer observing the character.⁷ Paradoxically, it is this distance that allows the reader space through which to enter more intimately into Dazai’s struggles with himself than is usual in such stories.

Dazai and Family

In Dazai’s life and writings, “family” always meant the Tsushima family in Tsugaru, with Dazai’s eldest brother, the head of that family, as its embodiment. Part of Dazai’s difficulties in the adult world came from his inability to transfer his concept of himself as a child of the Tsushima family to a credible sense of himself as head of his own family, husband to his wife and father to his children.

In some ways, the Japanese family is and was little different from, say, an especially close-knit American or European family. The group exists for the support and nurturance of the individual; the individual learns the ways of the group, tending to internalize the goals and mores of the society in which the family exists, and (so hope the parents) acts in a way that builds solidarity within the group and pride and a sense of integrity as the group faces the rest of society. These are of course cold and heavy words to describe the relations of parents and children: the love, caring, need, and mutual dependency, and the array of negative emotions that are the other face of love. But especially before World War II, the Japanese family has also played a more formal part in the social structure, clearly revealing its function as a legal entity. It has had kinds of power over its individual members that are not purely emotional, but nevertheless produce their own set of potential emotional supports and complications for family members. The prewar Japanese family was legally an even larger unit than the current nuclear family. Its legal locus was in the *koseki*, or family register, kept in the home village of the family’s main branch. If a family member left the homestead, for example to go from the country to the big city, he might be set up in a branch family (*bunke*), thereby becoming the head of a new family, and a new family register could be established. Ultimately, however, record keeping was referred back to the *honseki* (“main register”) in the original village. Thus, even today, a person’s legal residence and his main register may not be in the same place. All official

⁷Gotō, *Shōsetsu—ikani yomi, ikani kaku ka*, 189. Gotō attributes the term “fourth-person” to Yokomitsu Riichi.

information concerning the individual's formal relationship to the family was entered into the family register: birth, marriage, adoption, establishment of branch family, divorce, disinheritance, death.⁸

Dazai is sometimes spoken of as having been "disinherited" by his family, but his problems had nothing to do with the inheritance of property; Dazai received none on the death of his father. They involved emotional rather than legal sanctions. Dazai was in fact set up as a branch family head; he was not removed from the family. But legal solutions do not end emotional conflicts. Dazai's removal to a branch family, rather than giving him a sense of independence, only heightened the state of isolation and dependency he had already found himself in and would exhibit for the rest of his life. In effect shoved out of the nest before he was ready to fly (in a society that oriented itself to the group), he spent the rest of his life trying in his own perverse and contradictory way to climb back in.

The position of family head, which Dazai's oldest brother inherited upon the death of their father, was potentially a very powerful and (as Dazai came to realize) lonely one. If there were no male heir in a family (and the heir did not even have to be the eldest son), or if for any of a number of reasons male heirs were disqualified, a daughter could and frequently did inherit the family headship.⁹ Often, to maintain the preferred strategy of male inheritance, this woman's husband was then adopted into the family as the new family head. Such was the case with Dazai's own father and mother, and Dazai shows other examples in his stories. The family head was responsible, in both senses of the word, for the welfare and behavior of the family members. Japanese society at large replicates the family system of responsibility: thus the director of the national railways may resign (or even commit suicide) following a major accident. Therefore, Dazai's behavior, even after he was officially set up in a branch family (as a partial result of an unacceptable marriage), was a concern to and reflection on his family in Tsugaru; and his relationship with his eldest brother shifted from that of younger brother to elder brother to that of black-sheep son to necessarily authoritarian father when their own father died. Very human feelings of love and genuine concern continued to temper the rigidities of legal responsibility; if Dazai's brother did apply considerable pressure to end Dazai's leftist activities and for years forbade Dazai entry to the house, he also continued to support Dazai long after Dazai had any legal right to expect it. The emotional nature of the strong but troubled ties between Dazai and his family is particularly evident

⁸There are some differences in the kinds and degrees of information entered in family registers. See Toshiyuki Yanase, "The Koseki as a Source for the Scholar of Japan," in *Studies in Asian Genealogy*, ed. S. J. Palmer (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 117.

⁹See Jane M. Bachnik, "Recruitment Strategies for Household Succession: Rethinking Japanese Household Organization," *Man* 18, no. 1 (March 1983): 178-79.

from the stories discussed in Chapter 5. His writings show that his emotional needs were greater than the ability of the family, and his parents and brother in particular, to provide. That was perhaps more Dazai's personal problem than a result of the pressures of the Japanese family system.

Suicide

The Japanese probably have as many words for suicide as the Eskimo have for snow. Suicide in Japan takes many forms. The kamikaze pilots in World War II were honored to know they were sacrifices for their country. A guard at a European art exhibit in Tokyo in the late 1960's committed suicide to accept personal responsibility when one of the paintings was stolen. An alarming number of aspiring college students commit suicide when they fail to gain admission to the university of their choice. The samurai in pre-modern Japan was prepared to die by his own hand for any of a multitude of reasons. Mishima Yukio, a modern Japanese novelist frequently mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize, committed *seppuku*, or ritual suicide, in 1970. Kawabata Yasunari, who won the Nobel Prize in 1968, committed suicide in 1972. These suicides are obviously not of the same kind, but should we understand Dazai's five suicide attempts as part of the national fascination with self-immolation, or was his impulse toward death a private compulsion?

The answer to this question will emerge in the following pages, but some things can be said at the beginning. Suicide in the Western European Christian tradition has had strong religious and social sanctions against it. Even though it was morally taboo, a certain fascination with some kinds of self-destruction has existed—witness, to mention only one example, the persistence of the Romeo and Juliet theme. But in Japan, in a society that has been since the 1300's dominated by a warrior mentality, there have not been even any religious impediments to suicide; paradoxically, it has even been seen as the best way out of certain situations. The warrior who chooses or is allowed to choose suicide in preference to the dishonor (and possible torture) of capture or execution is one such case. The samurai who follows his lord in death, the wife who will not live without her husband, the man who dies in reparation for a wrong, or because he has been shamed and will not live with the stain (or because he has no other redress but to turn the shame back on the man who caused it), are others. The anthropologist Takie Lebra identifies three motivations for (or functions of) suicide in Japan that cover these cases and more: the desire for communication, the urge to seal social cohesion, and overinvolvement in what she calls "status-role commitment."¹⁰ Lebra sees Mishima Yukio's suicide as an example of the first, that is, as an act

¹⁰Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, 190-200.

intended to communicate his peculiar personal beliefs about the moral laxity of contemporary Japan. Included in this category are suicides or suicide threats intended to cause guilt in a specific target. Dazai was on occasion accused of this form of emotional blackmail, he says in several of his stories.

The samurai emphasis on death as a course of honor or freedom has had its effect on the society at large. And so suicide may be a demonstration of social cohesion in such traditional forms as *junshi*, or following one's lord in death, and *shinjū*, or dying with another person, usually one's lover.¹¹ Three of Dazai's attempts were at least externally of the *shinjū* type, that is, they involved a woman (the element of "love" is questionable). In the first case the woman died, in the second she survived, and in the third both Dazai and his partner died. While ideally such suicide is an expression of feelings of inseparability, sometimes it is the case that "someone in despair but unable to commit suicide alone may acquire the courage to take his life when he finds a suicidal companion."¹² According to Dazai's testimony, this was at least partly true of his first two attempts at *shinjū*; critics have seen it (especially since Dazai had been unsuccessful four times already) in the third as well. Lebra's third type of suicide, committed through compulsive identification with a role or guilt over failure in role performance, is exemplified by the suicides of young people who kill themselves for failing or even fearing to fail college or job applications. This was a factor in at least two of Dazai's attempts, and Lebra sees Kawabata's suicide in this light, as resulting from his inability to bear the burden of world acclaim. While currently the Japanese suicide rate is well within the range for other major industrialized nations, there is no denying that suicide looms exceptionally large in Japanese culture. To explain the suicides of Mishima and Kawabata by the above schema would of course be simplistic, but it is true that modern Japanese writers have been a high-risk group. Dazai had, in addition to a personal neurotic compulsion toward suicide, a tradition that seemed to authenticate his actions.¹³

Dazai's Style

To Japanese readers, Dazai Osamu is one of the most accessible and intimate of modern authors, both in subject matter and in style. More than most Japanese writers, Dazai reveals what it is like to be a Japanese—and to be having difficulty being one. This picture emerges not necessarily from the things the characters do in his stories (for sometimes they do strange things indeed), but from the way his narrators think, what they think about, and

¹¹Now also used to cover cases where a parent kills his family and himself.

¹²Lebra, 196.

¹³One of Dazai's disciples, the writer Tanaka Hidemitsu, committed suicide at Dazai's graveside the year following his death. Was this *junshi*?

how they show the process of their thoughts. The effect is reinforced by his rich, idiosyncratic, and many-layered prose style, and by the obsessive concerns and elegiac tone of the matter of the stories.

Because the stories are close to the life and the mind of the writer, they tend to deal more with emotions and perceptions than with events. As a result, plot and characterization tend to have lower priority than sincerity of revelation, whether of actual or fictional events. The passions evoked are generally not on a grand scale, but are the very intimate human emotions of shame, loneliness, love, envy, and anger toward family and friends. These emotions produce stories obviously shading toward depression and feelings of rejection, but they also open possibilities of humor of a very tender kind. The stories' protagonists take the same chances and make the same mistakes we all make. By falling on their faces for us, they show us how foolish but also how worthy and in need of cherishing we all are. Sometimes they even absolve us. For we may be right, it may indeed be the world that is "out of joint." Some works, like "Fugaku hyakkei" (One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji) and *Otogizōshi* (Fairy Tales) are openly humorous and, in scenes, even comic. But many of the autobiographical stories have a tone of irony, sharp, self-directed, yet humane, that often turns sadness into something warm and forgiving.

Dazai's most distinctive writing—the writing in which he is at his most Dazaiesque—has a special strength, in that Dazai seems to speak the reader's own thoughts for him. Its weakness is that some readers may have grown tired of those thoughts, or may be unwilling to see some of the strange situations in Dazai's stories as extreme cases of common agonies. Therefore, Dazai's Japanese readership exhibits an interesting characteristic: it is constantly augmented by new crops of sixteen-year-olds who are struggling for the first time with some of the problems of self-definition that Dazai writes about; but it tends to lose numbers of twenty-three-year-olds who believe they are finished with that business, who have either made their peace and solved their problems, or have given up thinking about irresolubles. Such a large number, however, continue to be faithful readers that since his death at least three editions of his collected works have been published, most recently in 1977. And for these readers, the favorite works tend to be not the most publicly famous ones, but the autobiographical stories that are the focus of this study.

Japanese, then, read Dazai as if monitoring the flow of their own thoughts. Although, in a given passage, connections are sometimes illogical, antecedents ambiguous, or allusions mysterious—endemic difficulties in Dazai's stories—the stories as a whole are not obscure or abstractly metaphorical, and the reader never has to wonder about what is happening in them. There is a self-evident quality to Dazai's prose, something that makes

questions unnecessary. Even when Dazai's narrator is quoting Western fiction or the Bible, while the content may be unfamiliar to the Japanese reader, the way it is integrated in the narrative makes it seem totally familiar. It is this almost metalinguistic aspect of the writer and his writing that is the hardest to convey in translation, for it resides not in the words but in the cultural milieu in which the words are embedded. But at the same time, perhaps because Dazai grew up speaking a nonstandard dialect of Japanese, he is also fascinated with language itself, and his own diction exploits fully the rhetorical, grammatical, and even orthographic possibilities of the language, in both its modern and its classical forms—as, for example, when he integrates the writings of an eighteenth-century doctor into his book about Tsugaru.

In some ways, these emotional and formal elements make Dazai as much a *sensei*, or teacher, as a writer. He was a most unlikely candidate for teacherhood, a self-proclaimed misfit. "I had nothing to be proud of, no learning, no talent; my body was falling apart, my spirit was weak." But there was a sense in which he too could see himself as a model: "I had passed through enough pain." (2: 159.) His autobiographical stories are devoted to revealing the grounds for his authority, in a rich mix of language that admits the reader into the process of revelation.

Accordingly, this is not a conventional "life and works," although it has many features of such a study. It treats in extenso mainly the autobiographical works of the Osamu Saga, which comprise about one-third of Dazai's total oeuvre, although of course many other works are discussed too. It goes into detail on Dazai's philosophy of literature (such as it is) largely as that has bearing on the progressive telling of the tale of Osamu's life. But in addition, since I hope here to draw readers into a more intimate relationship with Dazai, they will find themselves being guided closely through a number of the major stories. As Dazai repeatedly quoted his own works in later stories, so too will readers of this study see certain significant passages from Dazai's writings appear more than once. Even the uninitiated will notice that the stories in this book fit together; but readers who know who N and T and H are, or how Osamu, Shūji, and Ōba Yōzō are related to Dazai the author, will experience the writings more closely. This is my attempt to reconstitute for English-speaking readers the feeling, as I understand it, of reading Dazai with the shared cultural experience of being Japanese.

The Structure of the Osamu Saga

Dazai Osamu's one great novel is not *The Setting Sun* or *No Longer Human*. Nor is it to be found between any two covers. It is a story that extends the entire length of his writing career, told in pieces, with doublings back,

false trails, and fresh starts. Dazai never directly spoke of the pieces as all part of a single narrative, but from 1933 until his suicide in 1948 his artist's instinct kept him engaged in writing the story of Osamu—the story of his life. The hero of each story is not always named Osamu, but the Osamu character—the literary incarnation of the writer—is always recognizable. Between the many “chapters” of this story were dozens of other stories and novels (his collected works fill eleven volumes), many of them quite good in and of themselves; but Dazai never lost sight of the central focus of his literary attention. While he never isolated the parts of the story, its structure is apparent to the reader. The writing of it measured Dazai's maturation both as a man and as a writer; but while the story gave form to his life, the process of bringing order out of confusion was a movement toward death instead of richer life.

The *Osamu Saga* is Dazai's investigation of his own past; in it he attempts to come to terms with, if not understand, what has made him the man he is. At the same time, it is a study of the persistence of the past, of its interaction with the present. It is a story with a foregone conclusion: the hero is to die, the accomplishment of his search is to be death. It is a suicide note, a farewell to the world, that took fifteen years to write. Writing it was the motivating force of Dazai's life, and completing it meant long-overdue release from the pain of existing.

In 1933, a twenty-four-year-old Dazai Osamu published a story entitled “*Omoide*” (Recollections). He had already been writing, in school magazines and little family journals, for nearly ten years; but 1933 saw the beginning of his public reputation and the adoption of the pen name by which he is known. Writing, he said in “*Recollections*,” had early become a way of populating his loneliness, of helping him sort out which of the masks he wore was his real self. By 1933 he had already attempted suicide twice; “*Recollections*” was to be a literary testament in farewell to the world before he tried again. Many years would pass, with three more suicide attempts, before he would fulfill that promise to himself.

“*Recollections*” introduces Osamu, the narrator. Of some indeterminate adult age, he relates the story of his life from infancy through high school. The story was supposed to show why Dazai was going to die, he explained eight years later; but what it shows instead is that Dazai had fallen in love with his Osamu. This character was too attractive, and too useful, to die. Dazai would not die until Osamu did; and Osamu would not die until Dazai had succeeded in telling the story of his life to his own artistic satisfaction. However damaged the man was, the writer had clear standards of literary judgment that had to be met, and although the man was ready to die, “*Recollections*” did not meet the writer's purposes. “*Recollections*” answered no

questions; instead, it gave the writer inspiration to go on writing, which meant living. In Dazai's case, he literally lived to write.

All this is explained in "Tokyo hakkei" (Eight Views of Tokyo), which did not appear until 1941. In between were years of pain and horror for Dazai. "HUMAN LOST"¹⁴ and "Nijisseiki kishu" (Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century), both from 1937, indicated allusively that something terrible had been happening to Osamu since the story had left him at the end of high school; but what that was did not become clear until "Eight Views of Tokyo." Its narrator is an older Osamu, weary, emerging from a kind of emotional shell shock, and recuperating in a new life, with a new wife and a new, serious commitment to a career as a writer. It is as much about Dazai's emergence as a writer as "Recollections" was about his development as a child. Now thirty-one, in "Eight Views of Tokyo" Dazai makes a discovery whose implications are wider than even he realizes: he does not simply draw inspiration from his life to create art; art is himself. Although Dazai did not fully know it, he was now well embarked on the Osamu Saga, his own life journey and his protagonist's. The search and its depiction are both equally artistic creations.

At the same time that Dazai was treating, for the first but not the last time, the events of the preceding few years, with their implications of a wider fate determined from birth, he was opening up another avenue of speculation concerning Osamu. This one approached that birth and fate directly. It was a return to Osamu's primitive base; through it, Dazai explored not the life of an intellectual in Tokyo, but the origins of a country boy in northeast Japan. Tsugaru was the region he came from, and parallel to the story of Osamu in Tokyo (as the writer Dazai) is that of Osamu in Tsugaru (in the persona of Shūji, his real name). "Zenzō o omou" (Thinking of Zenzō) in 1939 introduces the emotional response that from here on characterizes all references to the narrator's home: intense longing for a return to a fantasized paradisaical past, a desire to belong, guilt for misdeeds, and resentment at insensitivity toward his needs. "Aomori" and "Goshogawara" (the names of towns) in 1940 pin down, through memories of Osamu/Shūji's childhood, some of the actual names and places on which "Recollections" was modeled. "Kikyōrai" (Going Home) in 1942 describes the uneasy visit of the thirty-three-year-old Shūji to his home after a ten-year absence—a tentative bridging of the split between him and his family that had been occasioned by the misbehavior depicted in "Eight Views of Tokyo." "Kokyō" (Hometown) the next year brings Shūji and his wife and infant daughter home to see his critically ill mother. It marks a true, if unhappy, reconciliation of the family, in which Osamu/Shūji finally realizes that he can never really go home again.

¹⁴The title is Dazai's own, and he spelled it in capital letters. Since he knew the rules for capitalization in English, he must have wanted the title to stand out strongly, like a public notice.

In all of these Tsugaru stories three characters, in a paradoxical way all equally real and equally fictional, exist simultaneously superimposed: the Tokyo writer Dazai, the Tsugaru son Shūji, and a very young, emotionally unstable Osamu. The pure literary creation, this “Osamu” is the repository of all the unmet needs, demands, and hopes of the actual man. Although his names change—to Dazai, to Shūji, finally in *No Longer Human* to Ōba Yōzō—it is recognizably the same Osamu character that forms the equation between Dazai the writer and his literary works. The climax of that character’s story, after which it is a downhill trip to artistic maturity and personal extinction, came in 1944 with *Tsugaru*. This novel recounts the travels of the thirty-five-year-old Shūji through Tsugaru, in a journey that settles the problem of home and deep past once and for all. There are no crises, no confrontations in this story; in fact, it is a wonderfully calm and reflective account, told with much warm humor. But the moving visits to old friends and old places, and the recreation of old times, gradually make clear to the narrator that there is indeed no place for him in this world. Something went wrong from the start; what he can have, he does not need, and what he needs, he will never get. His heart’s longings will never be met. With this realization, Osamu has completed his Tsugaru journey.

Back in Tokyo, Osamu the professional writer continued to explore his world. In 1942 and 1943 a number of short pieces, not included in this book, repeated and reworked from different perspectives some of the experiences of Osamu already chronicled in other stories. The Pacific War interrupted the autobiographical flow from Tokyo, but after the war “Kunō no nenkan” (An Almanac of Pain) and “Jūgonenkan” (Fifteen Years), both from 1946, brought the account of Tokyo Osamu up to date. The Osamu Saga was almost complete. *The Setting Sun* in 1947 was almost an explosion of fear, a hesitation before the final chapter. In this short novel, two of the characters, Uehara and Naoji, are recognizable personae of Dazai and incarnations of different aspects of Osamu; but the experience of the central character, the girl Kazuko, is fictional to the writer. Yet the identification between author and heroine is strong and significant: it is as if, for a moment, Dazai hoped desperately there might be some other way out for him than death. In the end, though, Kazuko triumphs just because she is a woman, while the men are discarded and shattered.

No Longer Human in 1948 marked Dazai’s success as a writer and his release from servitude. Now almost thirty-nine, he created a wholly new incarnation of Osamu in the novel’s protagonist, Ōba Yōzō. Yōzō’s story is totally familiar in outline, for it has been told in “Recollections” and “Eight Views of Tokyo” and everywhere else, and yet it is totally fictionalized. At long last, Dazai found the perfect way to tell his story. He, who had for so long attempted to tell the story from the inside, as he had lived it, in the end

discovered a more abstractly literary vessel to contain it better than any so far. All the other Osamu stories plunge us *in medias res*. Their narrators are intimate actors who sound as Dazai must have sounded. But in *No Longer Human* the narrator is “a writer” who is given some notebooks of someone he has never known; and then the notebooks of Ōba Yōzō speak for themselves. Dazai Osamu, that most intrusive of authors, does not appear in this novel. The writer gives his limited testimony, and Ōba Yōzō gives his, and *No Longer Human* is their novel.

That *No Longer Human* represents Dazai’s coming of age as a novelist is clear from the work’s internal consistency and completeness. But it also is evidence that Dazai was prepared to die. By the end of the book Yōzō is either dead or crazy, but in any case the concluding words indicate a hope that he rests in peace. And sure enough, Dazai never lived to see the entire novel published. Like Confucius who, in a legend referred to at the end of *Tsugaru*, put down his pen and stopped writing; or perhaps more like Proust, who is said to have died upon writing the last words of his Marcel Saga, Dazai finished the last chapters of *No Longer Human*, thereby completing his own *Remembrance of Things Past*, sent them to his editor, and went off to die. What he had learned, what the Osamu Saga recounts, were hard-won insights into the limitations of love.

Such is the outline of the Osamu Saga. The many other stories that flesh it out show the integrative process whereby a writer becomes dedicated to the production and elaboration of a single literary creation formed of history and imagination—in this case, himself. Dazai conveys to readers a sense of conviction that he is giving them a true and sincere exploration of human passions. He did have his novelistically weak moments, of course—at certain periods in his life they were lamentably frequent—in which his storytelling becomes a kind of special pleading for the reader’s sympathy. But when his artistic judgment is at work, and that is much of the time, he tells with both humor and sorrow a story that Western readers as well as Japanese recognize as their own story, an archetypal yet distinctively Japanese version of the human comedy. It may be from this that the continuing appeal of Dazai’s work derives. It took Dazai a lifetime to write the saga, and the writing of it determined the span of his life; but more than any one single work he wrote, it is the totality of the story of Osamu that makes up Dazai’s contribution to Japanese and world literature.

Part I, which follows, discusses the facts of Dazai’s life in detail, and investigates some of the childhood and family factors that, as Dazai testifies in his stories, continued to haunt him for his entire life. Part II is the story of Osamu’s life as Dazai chronicled it in the Osamu Saga; it is the section of this study that comes closest to pure literary criticism. The stories translated in this book are six installments of the saga, one of novel length, beginning with

“Recollections,” the story Dazai said started it all. Although the stories are generally in chronological order, *Tsugaru* is out of order, in part because it is the longest, but also because structurally it serves as a benediction for this set of stories—a loving summation of Osamu’s life. The reader may of course skip directly to the stories and then return for the biographical and critical background, but my hope is that the experience of reading them will be richer if the background is absorbed first.

DAZAI'S LIFE
AND THE OSAMU SAGA





I. The Journey Outward

More than anything, he liked to bring people pleasure.

—Dazai Osamu, *Righteousness and Smiles*¹

Dazai Osamu was born Tsushima Shūji on June 19, 1909, the tenth child of Tsushima Gen'emon, a wealthy landowner in northern Japan. At the time of his birth there were some thirty people living in the huge, newly completed Tsushima mansion: his great-grandmother, maternal grandmother, father, mother, a widowed maternal aunt and her four young daughters, seven older Tsushima children (three boys and four girls), and numerous servants. The oldest two male children had already died, so young Dazai was counted as the sixth son.

The Tsushima family had risen in three generations from obscure peasant origins in the village of Kanagi to social prominence throughout the region. It was Dazai's great-grandfather "Kanagi Village Sōsuke" who had built up considerable wealth through moneylending and the family fortune was increased by Sōsuke's son Sōgorō. Sōgorō had only girl children, so in 1888 the family adopted Matsuki Eizaburō, aged sixteen,² a younger son of an important family in nearby Kizukuri, to marry the eldest daughter Tane, aged fourteen. They were Dazai's parents. Sōgorō, who was in ill health, died the year following Eizaburō's adoption. Sōsuke retained family headship. When he retired in 1900, family succession passed directly to the son-in-law, Eizaburō, now renamed Gen'emon. The patriarch Sōsuke died at the age of seventy in 1905, but the various widows lived on many years longer, and their matriarchal presence continued to be felt in the family.

Gen'emon, an able man, soon became politically active. As one of the four wealthiest landowners in Aomori Prefecture he was elected to the national Diet, where he served from 1912 until his death in 1923; accordingly, he was absent in Tokyo during much of Dazai's early childhood. Gen'emon's wealth was recognized in 1922 when he was selected on that basis for the Upper

¹*Zenshū* 5: 188.

²Ages are by Western count, as can best be ascertained. When Dazai refers in his writing to himself or his family, ages may be a year or more higher, since Japanese traditionally count a child as one year old at birth.

House of Peers. He died three months later, in March 1923. The eldest son Bunji, just graduated from Waseda University and recently married, succeeded as head of the family. The tradition of public service begun by the father was continued with the other surviving sons, except for Dazai. Bunji, for example, was mayor of Kanagi, governor of Aomori Prefecture, and a longtime representative in the Diet. Dazai, however, was to define his own "service" differently.

One of Gen'emom's major family tasks was the rebuilding of the Tsushima house into a form commensurate with the family's risen status. From what had been a barracks-like, rambling structure distinguished from its neighbors only by its extent, the new Tsushima mansion soared high above substantial surrounding brick walls, rivaling the local temple in grandeur. Even today, when the mansion has been converted to an inn, its roof is still one of the major landmarks, together with the temple, the concrete town hall, and a small office building, that stand out as one approaches the town across the Tsugaru Plain.

It was not just this family background, but the nature of the area itself in which his family acquired social importance and he grew to young adulthood, that had its effect on the man Dazai was to become. Aomori is the northernmost of the six prefectures that make up Tōhoku, the Northeast Region. And the Tsugaru Peninsula, a part of Aomori, projects yet farther northward from the mainland, at the very end of the island of Honshū. Hokkaidō lies just eighteen kilometers away, across the Tsugaru Strait from Cape Tappi; on a clear day the mountains of southern Hokkaidō lie low along the horizon across the swiftly moving waters. But history—economic, political and literary—flew straight from Tokyo to Hokkaidō, as the airlines do today, without stopping at this little backwater. At the turn of the century, young literary romantics had their fling at Emersonian self-reliance in Hokkaidō, and economic exploiters toyed there with various schemes. Hokkaidō, for all its distance from the capital, had about it the aura of Wild West freedom. But only today is the central government turning its attention to the development of northern Tōhoku, which has occupied in Japan a place similar to that of Appalachia in the United States. It is important to remember that Dazai Osamu, the Tokyo litterateur and would-be decadent, came from such an area, a region whose folkways and social fabric were distinctly different from those of the central region.

Tradition has it that the inhabitants of this culturally and economically backward Tōhoku region are naturally taciturn. It is widely repeated in Japan that the peculiar Tōhoku accent known familiarly as *zū-zū ben* (because the *su* sound of standard Japanese emerges as *zu*) results from climatic conditions: it is very cold up there, and people have to keep their mouths fairly well closed to conserve heat. This kind of crude anthropologizing is amus-

ing, perhaps; but very real is the agony still today confessed by natives of Tōhoku when they move to Tokyo and find they must “remedy” their speech so as not to be laughed at. And if *zū-zū ben* is a peculiar dialect, within it the Tsugaru *ben* (“dialect”) is very nearly a separate language. Superstition aside, to be a native of Tsugaru seems to have been, and is still, somewhat of a handicap in Japan. The natives of Tsugaru are not to be dismissed as “naturally taciturn,” however. They speak volubly and with much evident humor in their own backyards; it is when they make the leap to Tokyo that a sense of inferiority bred of their peculiarities dries up the wells of spontaneity, perhaps in personality as well as in language. Some have laid this conviction of backwardness to northern Tōhoku’s nonparticipation in the politics of the modernizing Meiji period, during which a new national educational system first began propagating throughout Japan a standard speech based on dialects of the central region. Whatever the source, Tōhoku people are still self-conscious about their speech.

Dazai Osamu, who captivated audiences of friends with unforgettable conversation, had to rid himself of a backwoods twang. Despite the contacts his wealthy and prominent family enjoyed with Tokyo, his high school copy-books show in their spelling that as a child he spoke the nonstandard local dialect. He himself relates that his sister teased him about these discrepancies when he wrote to her at school. Occasionally in his writings he mentions his “muddy Tsugaru dialect,” and he reveals that his mentor, Ibuse Masuji, “fixed up” his early writings. Already saddled with a well-developed sense of being an outsider, he was no doubt hindered in his adjustment to Tokyo by the stigma of speech.

In this sense, Tsugaru was always with him. To him, that meant that his family was also always with him. Although Dazai left Tsugaru at the relatively advanced age of twenty-one, almost never to return, even in Tokyo he was scarcely free of ties to the family that stayed behind. Whether they were supporting him financially or interfering in his first marriage or disinheriting him or forgiving him, for years they were a constant force in his life. And, his writings reveal, he would not have had it otherwise. In fact, there is an undercurrent of lament that he could never fully go home again once he had left.

Nevertheless, Dazai’s feelings toward his family were ambivalent. He himself considered early childhood significant in producing in him a sense of not belonging to anyone or anything. His mother was a semi-invalid. The infant Dazai was soon put to a succession of wet nurses and substitute mothers. His aunt Kiye apparently gave the child some of the affection he craved; Dazai’s memories of her in his writings are for the most part warm and grateful. But when he was six, her own daughter married, and she left the Tsushima house to live in a somewhat distant town with the young couple. Apart from a few significant visits, Dazai felt he had lost her.

A fourteen-year-old girl named Take, who was one of Dazai's aunt's maids, became his nursemaid when he was two. Her influence on his development was profound. In "Recollections," at the beginning of his writing career, and *Tsugaru*, near the end, are his memories of Take and what she taught him; indeed, *Tsugaru* is so organized that the reunion with her, after nearly thirty years, is both the justification for and the dramatic climax of the trip. Take taught him to read, he said in his stories; she taught him his first lessons in morality, those first lessons that strike so deep.

She would take me with her to the temple and explain all the picture scrolls of heaven and hell. They were horrible: arsonists were being forced to carry baskets on their backs with red flames shooting out from them; men who had had mistresses were being crushed by blue snakes with two heads; there was the lake of blood, and the mountain of needles, and the bottomless pit with white smoke coming from it; and everywhere, pale, emaciated people, their tiny mouths open, were crying and screaming. Once she told me, "If you tell lies, you'll go to hell, and your tongue will be pulled out like this by devils." I burst out crying in terror. [1: 24.]

Suddenly, when Dazai was six, Take disappeared, having gone to a distant town to get married. She left without a word of explanation at the time, Dazai wrote in "Recollections"; perhaps, he speculated, it was feared he would follow her if he knew where she was going. This "desertion," following hard on his aunt's, left its mark on the child.

Dazai's eldest sister died when he was two; the last child of the family, a boy, was born later the same year, when Dazai was three. Dazai seems to have done exceptionally well in the local elementary school, better than the other Tsushima children.

Steps Toward the Outside World

The death of his father in 1923, when Dazai was thirteen, seems to have impressed him largely because of the length of the funeral cortege and the fact that it was mentioned in the Aomori newspapers (with, of course, his own name included in the list of survivors).³ The next month Dazai entered Aomori High School, the first time he had been away from home and family.⁴

³Such, at least, is Osamu's testimony in "Recollections." But in Dazai's final novel, *No Longer Human*, the response of the protagonist to his father's death suggests that, even years later, the author was still reacting to the death of his own father.

⁴In the prewar educational system, the first six years, called lower or elementary school, were compulsory. Following that were various options: middle school (here translated "high school," to which it most closely corresponds), lasting four or five years; higher or upper school (here "college"), lasting three years; and university. In addition, Dazai attended an upper elementary school for a year before middle school. Since relatively few students went beyond middle school, by the time Dazai was in Hirosaki College, he was a member of a would-be sophisticated elite.

Instead of living in the dormitory with the other boys, he boarded at the home of a distant relative, Toyoda Tazaemon, who appears somewhat to have taken the place of his father during the years Dazai lived in Aomori. Years later, when he wrote about Toyoda, he used the Tsugaru dialect word for "father," *odosu*, to indicate that he wanted to think of himself as one of the children of that family. If only "father" could have lived another five or ten years! Then he would have written something good and made him happy. "When I think of 'father' now, I remember all the wonderful things about him, and I feel such a loss." (IO: 209.)

The Tsushima brothers shared literary and artistic interests; here the chief influence was probably Bunji, who had been the first to enter university in Tokyo. Dazai speaks of the amateur theatricals they used to write and produce for the amusement of the family when all the children were home for the summer; they also published little literary magazines, with such names as *Seiza* (Constellation), to which they were the main contributors. One of Dazai's earliest dramatic efforts appeared in *Seiza* in the summer of 1925. That autumn the brothers started the journal *Shinkirō* (Mirage), which enjoyed a regular publishing life for more than a year; during the same period Dazai also began having stories printed in the Aomori High School literary magazine. Another of the family magazines was *Aonbo* (roughly translatable as "Big Boy Blue"), which was edited by Keiji, Dazai's next older brother, now an aspiring sculptor. There was six years' difference between them, eleven between Bunji and Dazai.⁵ But the family games came to an end gradually, as responsibilities began to fall on the older brothers. Bunji was elected mayor of Kanagi in October 1925, at the age of twenty-seven, two years after assuming family headship; the second brother, Eiji, had married the previous August.

In April 1927 Dazai started at Hirosaki College. Once again instead of living in the school dormitory he boarded at the home of family friends. He did well, placing sixth in his class, and received special praise for his English compositions. But that summer, his eighteenth, he began to change. Already secretly aspiring to be a writer, he was stunned by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's suicide in July. Perhaps with that stimulus, though more likely because of internal dynamics long since set in motion, his style of life took on a more self-consciously artistic coloration. Already while Dazai was in middle school, Bunji had expressed doubt and disapproval of his continuing literary interests, fearing they would interfere with his studies. At that time Dazai had reassured him that they were helping him study all the harder; but now

⁵Japanese has separate words to indicate the relative birth order of children in the family. In Dazai's stories about his family there are three older brothers: Keiji (deceased by the time the stories were written), Eiji, and Bunji. These will be referred to (in ascending order of age) as follows: next older (Keiji), next oldest (Eiji), and oldest (Bunji).

he began to turn away from academic pursuits. Always, he had hated school, he wrote; now that feeling began to affect his behavior. Impressed by the castle-town atmosphere that still survived in Hirosaki, he began to take lessons in *gidayū*, a traditional musical art form; his apparel was calculated to produce certain stylish effects; and he started to frequent the restaurants and teahouses of Aomori and the nearby hot spring town of Asamushi. That autumn, at the home of his *gidayū* teacher, he met a young geisha, Oyama Hatsuyo. She was his first love, and their ten-year affair set the tone for the mutual disappointment and destruction that characterized his relations with women.

Hatsuyo did not become an important issue in his life until 1930, however, when he went to Tokyo to enter Tokyo Imperial University (now Tokyo University). In the meantime, he was writing more and getting involved in the literary scenes of Hirosaki and Aomori; and his political conscience was awakening. He had tried out some of those new ideas earlier, to little effect.

When I was in fourth or fifth grade, I heard about “democracy” from my next older brother. Even my mother knew the word, and I would hear her going on to guests about how taxes were soaring because of “democracy” and how nearly all the rice crop was being taken by taxes; and the whole concept confused and made me uneasy. Still, I would help the servants in summer cut the grass in the garden, or in winter lend a hand in sweeping snow from the roof of the house, and while I worked, I would teach them about this “democracy.” But in the end, I realized that the servants were not especially pleased to have my help. It turned out that they would have to go over and redo my “help.” [1: 42.]

The problem of ideology became intermingled with that preexisting concern, truthfulness:

But then, when I did tell the truth in my [school] compositions, I was sure to get into trouble. . . . Once, we were given the title “If War Were to Break Out,” . . . I wrote that . . . first of all I would run and hide in the mountains, and then I would invite my teachers to join me; teachers were human, and I was human, and surely we were all equally afraid of war. This time, the principal and the assistant headmaster were the committee of two that interrogated me. They asked me in what spirit I had written; I evaded them flippantly, saying, “Mostly for fun.” The assistant entered “He did it out of curiosity” in his notebook. Then he and I started a little debate. He opened: “You wrote, ‘Teachers are human and I’m human,’ but are all men equal?” I muttered that I thought so. I was becoming hopelessly tongue-tied. “Well then,” he asked me, “if the principal and I are both equal, why are our salaries different?” I thought a while and answered, “Well, isn’t it because your work is different?” Putting on his steel-rimmed glasses, the thin-faced assistant immediately wrote my answer in his notebook. Until then, I had liked this teacher. Then he posed a final question to me: “Are we your father’s equals?” I was on the spot, and couldn’t answer anything. [1: 27.]

Then it had been a child's problem. But now it was an adult concern. The late 1920's was a time of great political agitation. The nationwide roundup of leftist activists on March 15, 1928, had a deep impact on young people.⁶ The students of Hirosaki College were no exception. They demonstrated their political consciousness in February 1929 when they held a week-long strike to protest misappropriation of school funds by the college's principal, Suzuki Shintarō; Dazai was a member of the strike organizing committee. Furthermore, Dazai writes in "Kunō no nenkan" (An Almanac of Pain), he was deeply tormented by his position as son of one of the wealthiest landowners in Aomori. "I approved of armed insurrection. A revolution without the guillotine is meaningless. However, I was not of the common people. I was of the class that was to be sent to the guillotine." (8: 208.) In "Shūfūki" (A Record of the Autumn Wind), published in 1939, he describes the evil of the middle class to which he belongs in emotional terms, not economic. The middle class lives only in recollections of guilt, he feels. "This 'bourgeois,' is it a bad thing?" asks the young woman. The narrator answers: "At least I think so. Unhappiness, suffering, gratitude—all dabbled at with a dilettante's zest. They're self-satisfied, utterly complacent. They live only for their own pride." (2: 257.) But in 1929 he felt the inequity with sharp and direct pain.

The precedent had already been set for Dazai's solution to the conflict. In 1923, the writer Arishima Takeo had committed suicide, ostensibly for love. But he had had a long connection with humanitarian movements, and the year before his suicide he published his manifesto "Sengen hitotsu" (A Declaration): he was a member of the bourgeoisie, an aristocrat; there was nothing he could do to help the oppressed lower classes. Sympathy was not enough, but he was disqualified by birth from acting in concert with the laboring masses. Renewal and liberation would have to come from within their ranks; one could not impose freedom from oppression from the outside. He divided his extensive landholdings in Hokkaidō among the tenant farmers who worked them—the same farmers whose plight he had depicted in his 1917 novella *Kain no matsuei* (The Descendants of Cain). A year later he was dead.

Young Dazai shared his dilemma. Dazai's writings of that period show the proletarian movement's influence, but he was not of the proletariat. While, strictly speaking, he was not of the aristocratic class either (the distinction between pedigree and social circumstance was to cause him conflict in later years), his family was one of the premier families of the region, albeit through newly created wealth. He had as yet done nothing to alienate himself from his family; he still identified strongly with their definition of social

⁶Proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji memorialized the roundup in a story, "Senkyūhyaku-nijūhachinen sangatsu jūgonichi" (March 15, 1928).

class, and was conscious of even such differences as his living in a private home instead of a dormitory like the other students. The monthly allowance Dazai's family was sending him at the time was about 150 yen a month, or the equivalent of a college professor's salary.⁷ In "An Almanac of Pain" Dazai stresses his political confusion and guilt as the source of his first suicide attempt with an overdose of sleeping pills when he was nineteen. Dazai was in fact vague in dating the attempt, and chronologies compiled by early critics who relied only on Dazai's testimony have a number of different dates. More recent research by critics such as Sōma Shōichi, who have done much to separate fact from Dazai's fiction, not only fixes the date at December 10, 1929, but suggests that more than ideological confusion and class guilt were troubling Dazai at the time. Sōma points out that this was the night before second-semester final examinations at Hirosaki College. Dazai had entered college near the top of his class; by the end of the first year he had fallen to thirty-one out of thirty-five. At the time of the suicide attempt, as a result of his extracurricular activities in writing and entertainment, he would quite likely not have been able to complete seven out of his eleven courses. That the suicide attempt, however serious in intention, might have been a way of escaping other unpleasant consequences, is not unlikely. Dazai himself owns up to a similar sort of subterfuge in "Recollections" when he describes using his father's death as an excuse for getting a waiver of the high school entrance examination. Sōma does not doubt the suicide attempt, but gives less weight to Dazai's political consternation than to the potentially disastrous effect on his pride of flunking school. Both factors combined would have amounted to considerable cause for upset.⁸

At the same time, Dazai was continuing his literary associations. In April 1928 he began publishing the journal *Saibō Bungei* (Cell Literature) with some of his schoolmates. They solicited and received a contribution from Ibuse Masuji, then beginning to be known in Tokyo literary circles, which was published in May. Dazai himself contributed to every issue, under various pseudonyms. He spent his summer vacation in Tokyo, hoping to meet Ibuse then, but did not succeed on this trip. Later, Ibuse was to become his literary *sensei* and personal mentor. During his three Hirosaki years, from 1927 to 1930, Dazai was busy writing for all the local sources open to him.

⁷Kitagaki, *Dazai Osamu no seishin bunseki*, 56 (hereafter cited as Kitagaki).

⁸Sōma, *Wakaki hi no Dazai Osamu*, 196–97. Close investigation of Dazai's childhood and youth, as well as his family history, relies to a great extent on this and other works of Sōma Shōichi, a writer from Dazai's native prefecture of Aomori. It is a peculiarity of Dazai criticism that it required an Aomori critic to deal with the primary materials (school records, family registers, etc.) of Dazai's early life. Most Tokyo critics, for nearly twenty years after Dazai's death, touched on this life only in the most general and stereotyped ways, drawing from Dazai's works for their evidence; since then, they have tended to rely on Sōma's work for Aomori material.

He was on the literary staff of the school paper; he published in the Aomori literary magazine *Zahyō* (Coordinates) and the local newspapers.

On January 5, 1929, Dazai's younger brother Reiji died at the age of sixteen of blood poisoning. Reiji was closest to him in age, the only child in the family younger than himself, and had followed him in school to Aomori and Hirosaki. But this was not the only death he had to face then. The next year in June his older brother Keiji died in Tokyo at the age of twenty-seven, of what is reported to have been tubercular urinary tract inflammation. (Tuberculosis was the family illness: their father had died similarly, as had several older sisters; Dazai's mother had repeated bouts with it and Dazai himself was plagued off and on throughout his life with the same condition.) Dazai had just entered Tokyo Imperial University and was living at a boarding house near Keiji's house when Keiji became suddenly ill and died shortly thereafter. "So many of my relatives have died," Dazai was to write almost a decade later. "My eldest sister died at twenty-six. Father died at fifty-three. Youngest brother at sixteen. Third brother at twenty-seven. This year my next older sister died, thirty-four. A nephew, twenty-five, a younger cousin, twenty-one. They were both close to me, but they died anyway, one right after the other this year." (2: 248.) In years past, he recollected, relations with these two brothers had not been good. He had been jealous as a child of the attention Reiji had received, and he envied the good looks he felt that those brothers shared and that he did not. But as they grew older, the brothers had grown closer together. Dazai led the way in fashion for Reiji, and in turn modeled himself on the elegant Keiji, whom he felt to be an extraordinarily promising sculptor. Within a year, he was bereft of those supports, just as he was beginning his university career.

Arrivals in Tokyo

In April 1930, Dazai entered the Department of French Literature at Tokyo Imperial University, Japan's premier institution of higher education. "I didn't know a word of French, but I wanted to hear the lectures on French literature," he says in "Recollections"; a much-repeated story has it that he chose that department because he had heard they had few applicants and no entrance examination. In fact, Dazai was dismayed to discover, there was an examination, a portion of which was in French. He had to report his total incapacity to Professor Tatsuno Yutaka, a famous translator of French poetry mentioned in "Recollections" as being a man Dazai "faintly revered"; Tatsuno is said to have been so entertained at Dazai's cheek that he admitted him despite his lack of qualifications.⁹

Shortly after, Dazai finally met Ibuse Masuji at Ibuse's office in a publish-

⁹Kitagaki, 65.

ing house in Kanda. This was the beginning of Ibuse's lifelong role as his mentor. But Dazai's literary efforts for the moment seem to have been limited to continuing previous commitments in Aomori. *Jinushi ichidai* (A Landlord's Life) was being serialized in *Zabyō*; it eventually remained incomplete because, explained a note in a later issue of the magazine, there were "certain external circumstances beyond the author's control."¹⁰ This was the last of Dazai's pre-Tokyo writings and, for the time being, he slowly abandoned literature as his personal life grew more confused. In the autumn of 1930, the affair of the geisha Oyama Hatsuyo reached a crisis point. Before Dazai had even left for Tokyo, there had been talk that Hatsuyo's contract would be bought out by one of her patrons who would then set her up as his mistress. This threat to their easy dalliance apparently drew Dazai and Hatsuyo even closer together; when he left, he promised to take care of her in some unspecified way. But the pain and confusion of Keiji's illness and death so soon after distracted him, and as time passed, his correspondence with Hatsuyo lapsed. Fearful that she would have to go with her new patron, Hatsuyo contacted a mutual friend to have him tell Dazai she was fleeing her contract house. With Dazai's connivance, she managed to make her way to Tokyo. Toyoda Tazaemon, at whose house Dazai had boarded during the high school years in Aomori, was sent to Tokyo to try to head her off, but had to return empty-handed.¹¹

Bunji, as family head, came to Tokyo immediately to attempt to dissuade Dazai from what everyone thought was, and later turned out to be, folly. When Dazai proved adamant about keeping her with him, Bunji made an alternate proposal: he would be allowed to marry Hatsuyo, but would be set up as head of a branch family, being removed thereby from the main Tsushima family register. There were two conditions: he would not be given the property settlement that was customary with the establishment of branch houses, but instead would receive a monthly stipend of 120 yen while he was at university; and he would not be allowed into the family home.¹² Dazai accepted. Bunji was allowed to take Hatsuyo back to Aomori until he could buy her contract from her house.

Because the effects on Dazai of this extreme solution were so devastating emotionally and psychologically, as well as legally, it might be more appropriate to speak of it not as disinheritance but as excommunication. Up to that point, Dazai had apparently not planned to marry Hatsuyo but only to enjoy her favors, in imitation of the tastes of the elegant traditional artists he

¹⁰The circumstances were never explained, but it is known that this story of a villainous and degenerate landowner, based on a tenant farmers' revolt that had taken place in Akita, had displeased Dazai's brother Bunji by its resemblance in details to the Tsushima family situation. Sanekata, *Dazai Osamu jiten*, 49.

¹¹Sōma, "Dazai Osamu," pt. 1, 136.

¹²*Ibid.*, 138.

had started to model himself on during his college days in Hirosaki. But events carried him beyond his ability to control them. This was a case where the cure was worse than the disease: a little over a week after the Hatsuyo arrangements were agreed upon, Dazai, cast out (as he saw it) by his family and without Hatsuyo, attempted suicide with a bar hostess he had just met.

Tanabe Shimeko, aged nineteen, worked at the Hollywood Café, on Tokyo's main commercial thoroughfare, the Ginza. Separated from her husband, who was an unsuccessful painter, she apparently shared Dazai's prostration in the face of life's complications.¹³ (Shimeko's husband was only the first of several painters who came to hold special meaning for Dazai. Hatsuyo's lover several years later was also one. Painters are often disguised writers in Dazai's writing. Dazai chose the persona of a painter in *No Longer Human*; and Naoji in *The Setting Sun*, in order to protect the reputation of the woman he loves, pretends in his suicide note to his sister that her husband, the writer Uehara, is a painter.) Dazai and Shimeko spent two days drinking and wandering around Tokyo, went out to the seaside resort of Kamakura on November 29, and threw themselves into the sea off Tamotogaura, supposedly a point on the small nearby island of Enoshima. Passing fishing boats pulled Dazai out in time, but Shimeko was dead when they finally retrieved her. So goes Dazai's version, and early critics took him at his word and refer to this incident as the "attempted death by drowning"; but the research of Nagashino Kōichirō and others suggests that Dazai and Shimeko took sleeping pills on shore at Koyurugigazaki, a point on the mainland across from Enoshima (Tamotogaura is a local designation for part of Koyurugigazaki), and that their bodies were found there, on shore. In one fictionalization of the incident, "Hi no tori" (The Firebird), Dazai in fact makes no mention of drowning.

Taken to a rest home named Keifūen in Kamakura, Dazai was later charged as an accomplice to the woman's suicide. The charges were dropped when Bunji applied some political pressure. This double suicide attempt is one of the first and deepest events in Dazai's literary iconography of guilt and betrayal. Here, by not dying, he deserted the woman, as he was to desert his communist party comrades.

Dazai and Hatsuyo: Early Married Life

In January 1931, Dazai was taken by his next oldest brother Eiji to Ikari-gaseki, a hot spring town near Aomori, to recuperate, and there the twenty-one-year-old Dazai and nineteen-year-old Hatsuyo exchanged vows in his

¹³The name of Dazai's first suicide partner has never been fully established. Her family name has been spelled with a number of different characters; her first name has been reported variously as Shimeko, Atsumi, Junko, and several others, although Shimeko does seem to have been her official name. Kitagaki, 73.

mother's presence. The couple began their married life in a small apartment in Gotanda, but, as Dazai relapsed into political activities, moved often during that year and the next to escape police surveillance. Dazai describes his early married life as follows:

Gotanda was our crazy period. I had no will at all. I had not the slightest hope of a fresh start. I lived, simply reflecting the moods of friends who dropped by. Far from being ashamed of my disgraceful crime [the Enoshima incident], I was even faintly proud. It was truly a shameless, imbecilic time. I scarcely showed up at school at all, of course. I abhorred all effort, and spent my time lying around watching H[atsumyo] indifferently. It was crazy. I did nothing. I slipped back into that [political] work, but this time there was no passion. The nihilism of the idle. [4: 55.]

Older classmates from Hirosaki and Aomori days were already deep in leftist activities (“that work”) by the time Dazai entered university in 1930. By 1931 he had been drawn in to assume a definite, but passive, role in the movement. He gave shelter in successive apartments to fugitive comrades, kept leaflets and posters when various secret headquarters were raided, and most important, provided funds from the money his brother was sending him. Although still formally enrolled at Tokyo University (a condition for his receiving the stipend from Bunji), he attended virtually no classes, and did almost no writing, except to dabble a bit in haiku circles.

In September 1931 the Japanese army took over in Manchuria—the celebrated Manchurian Incident that heralded Japanese military expansion on the Asian continent. Suppression of leftist elements on the home front became increasingly harsh. In July of the following year, 1932, Dazai was called back to Aomori by the civil authorities for questioning on his political activities, of which something was known; again through Bunji's intervention, he was released. He was called back for further questioning in December, but by then he had already dropped his leftist connections. We can only speculate on what, during the summer and autumn, happened between Dazai and his brother—or within Dazai himself—to make him abandon the political movement to which he had so far been loyal despite the conflict it caused him. Dazai makes only oblique reference to the events in his writings. Bunji was rising in the political world, and clearly applied pressure to have Dazai drop associations that were more than an embarrassment. In the 1930's, affairs with geisha and attempted suicides were one thing; political sedition was another. After the 1930 suicide attempt, while Eiji went to the rest home to see Dazai, other family friends had gone to his rooming house to destroy any incriminating papers. In fact, consideration of Dazai's politics had entered into the conditions Bunji set when Dazai married Hatsuyo: he already knew of Dazai's financial involvement in the leftist cause, and he

realized that, if he limited Dazai's income so that the two would have to live on less than Dazai had been receiving as a single college student in Hirosaki, there would be less Tsushima money to go to Dazai's comrades.¹⁴ Now he cut off support for two months, and when he resumed sending the monthly stipend in June, the amount was reduced from 120 yen to 90 yen. Dazai himself is silent about the reasoning process, but he wrote of the effect on him of this second "betrayal" (the Enoshima affair having been the first): "Soon the youth betrayed even the leftist cause. He himself pressed the burning brand to his own forehead, leaving the label 'coward'." (3: 51.)

At this time, Dazai says, he received a shock from Hatsuyo, which no doubt played its part in the process of his political "conversion" by increasing his general confusion. She revealed that she was not the pure creature he had thought her, that she had had experience of men before him. The effect of this revelation can only be gauged in relation to the kind of naiveté he must have had to have believed her "pure" in spite of the life she had previously led as a geisha; and it also makes clearer how much without substance had been his pose of sophistication as he had traveled around the tea houses in his college days. For, he wrote in "Eight Views of Tokyo," he had not "known" her until the night before Bunji took her back to Aomori in the autumn of 1930. It was against this background of personal disaster that political pressure, added to the burden of guilt and sense of isolation from standing against familial authority, had its effect.

Dazai and Hatsuyo went away for the month of August to Numazu, a hot spring resort town on the Izu Peninsula, to recoup their scattered strength. They returned to Tokyo in September, and Dazai began to write the story that emerged the next year as "Recollections." It was as if separation from political activities had released some kind of desperate energy in the young writer; he was beginning to write his last will and testament. "Recollections" was the first of the autobiographical logs of his life to date that were to appear periodically throughout his career. Later that year they moved into a room in the home of a young couple in Tokyo who came from Dazai's home region. The husband, Tobishima Sadashiro, who had been a classmate of Dazai's older brother Keiji at Hirosaki College, worked for Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun-sha, a newspaper publisher. To some extent, the slightly older man probably replaced for Dazai the family ties he had lost. He and Hatsuyo lived with the Tobishimas for four years, moving with them when they got a new house in 1933.¹⁵

¹⁴Sōma, "Dazai Osamu," pt. 1, 139.

¹⁵Here is another of those points on which Dazai and his critics differ chronologically. "Eight Views of Tokyo" states that it was spring 1934; Besshō Naoki (*Dazai Osamu kenkyū*, 131) says it was in May 1933; and Okuno Takeo (*Dazai Osamu ron*, 198) says Dazai misremembered, and that it was September 1933.

One thing to bear in mind about this troubled period between the appearance of Oyama Hatsuyo in 1930 and Dazai's more conventional marriage in 1939, is that although he was officially on worse and worse terms with his family in Tsugaru, he seems never to have sought to break away from them psychologically, and in fact sought replacements for the nexuses that seemed to be disintegrating. Bunji, strung on by lies Dazai told to cover up his non-attendance at classes, continued to send money for his schooling until 1935. He was still sending some monthly support (via Ibuse Masuji) as late as 1940, when Dazai reported to him that his income from writing was now sufficient for the amount to be cut. As if to demonstrate that he was still peripherally in contact with family, Dazai planned a magazine in 1932 with his elder sister's brother-in-law and Hatsuyo's uncle, but it never reached the publishing stage. Even after 1935, as his life became increasingly erratic, still ties were maintained by two close friends of the Tsushima family who had helped out after the 1930 suicide attempt, Kita Yoshishirō in Tokyo and Nakabata Keikichi in Tsugaru, who, rather in the position of loyal family retainers, ran liaison errands and served as family representatives, to save Bunji from having to be personally involved. In the large feudalistic family, the presence of the family head in any negotiations would have involved too much hierarchic weight, rather as if the Queen of England were to deal personally with the schoolmasters when one of her children (the youngest one, at that) got into a scrape at school. Kita particularly was the imperial equerry, and he seems to have been genuinely fond of and concerned about Dazai. It was he who went to the Keifūen rest home after the suicide attempt at Enoshima; he had Dazai rest at his house a few days before he went on with Eiji to Ikarigaseki; he was Dazai's guarantor after a police questioning episode in 1932; and he was one of the family representatives at the 1939 wedding.

Early in 1933, under the critic Kon Kan'ichi's sponsorship, Dazai was introduced into the circle of young writers who were publishing the literary journal *Kaihyō* (The Sea Lion). This was the first connection of Dazai's that was to prove immediately fruitful. Through the group, he met Dan Kazuo and Yamagishi Gaishi, who became among his closest friends, and he began attracting public attention with the stories that appeared in *Kaihyō*. He was beginning to find his way in the Tokyo literary world; but his Aomori background continued to be important. In February 1933 the Aomori newspaper *Tōō Nippō* (Northeastern Daily News) sponsored a literary competition in its Sunday supplement. The story that won, "Ressha" (The Train), was by a young writer named Dazai Osamu. Tsushima Shūji, after trying on and discarding a number of pen names, had finally found the one that pleased him, and he used it from this point on. He explained in "Kojiki gakusei" (Beggar Student), published in 1940, that "somehow or other, I was ashamed to use

my [real] name, and precisely because I was so paltry, I chose this vigorous, pugnacious name, 'Dazai.' ” (3: 305.) While the narrator of “Beggar Student” seems to explain the provenance of the name “Dazai,” he is in fact not named Tsushima Shūji, Dazai’s real name, but Kimura Takeo; so his testimony may be no more reliable than any other. Perhaps it was the hallowed associations attached to the word *dazai* as a title of office and a seat of government that caused him finally to settle on it as his name. There are other explanations, but none is conclusive. Among them is the account the actress Seki Chieko says Dazai gave her in 1948: friends had first suggested, in their love of classicism, “Kakinomoto Shūji,” after the famed poet of the eighth-century *Manyōshū* poetry collection, Kakinomoto Hitomaro. “Kakinomoto” was too pretentious even for Dazai; but when talk continued on the subject of the Manyō poets, and the poet-governor of Dazaifu was mentioned, a connection was made between that gentleman’s love of drinking and Shūji’s, so “Dazai” it became. The “Osamu” came about because both the “Shū” and “ji” of his real name mean the same, so there seemed no reason not to use just one—“ji,” also read as “Osamu.” This was his story, but Sōma Shōichi observes, from the evidence that none of his intimate friends say that they know where his name came from, that this version may also have been invented by the author himself.¹⁶

The following month, Dazai published “Gyofukuki” (Metamorphosis) in *Kaihyō*; this was the first of his stories to achieve favorable critical notice from the Tokyo establishment. But Ibuse Masuji kept him from being swept off his feet:

In 1933, when I was [twenty-three], an eighteen-page short story titled “Metamorphosis” . . . became the jump-off point of my writing career. But because of the unexpectedly positive response it drew, Mr. Ibuse, who until then had carefully corrected my writing, muddled by my Tsugaru diction, was surprised. He warned me, looking truly disturbed: “There’s no reason for it to have caused such a stir. Don’t get too excited—there may be some mistake.”

And from then on, he remained in suspense that there might indeed have been some mistake. The two people who probably remained forever uneasy about my writing were Mr. Ibuse and my eldest brother back in our family home in Tsugaru. [8: 216.]

From April to July, “Recollections” appeared in three installments. By the end of the year Dazai was a regular member of the literary circle that included Dan Kazuo, Ima Harube, Nakamura Jibei, Kitamura Kenjirō, Kon Kan’ichi, and Yamagishi Gaishi. Yamagishi, Dan, and Dazai were to form a lifelong triumvirate of close friends.

¹⁶Sōma, “Dazi Osamu,” pt. 2, 122–23. Ibuse Masuji’s theory is that Dazai’s Tsugaru accent was immediately obvious when he pronounced “Tsushima Shūji,” while the syllables of “Dazai Osamu” would not have revealed it. Sōma, *Dazai Osamu to Ibuse Masuji*, 26.

Starting as a Writer

The Japanese literary scene has historically been like a tidal pool, a fertile breeding ground for little journals that form with one insweeping current, break apart with the ebb, and form new combinations with the next tide. Most of these journals last less than a year, but there have always been new ones forming, and they have offered a forum for new writers. In this rich environment, Dazai swam well. Dan Kazuo was one of the editors of the quarterly *Ban* (Moorhen); Dazai's "Ha" (Leaves) appeared in its first issue, in April 1934, and his "Sarumen kaja" (Monkey-Faced Youth) in the second issue. In *Seiki* (Century), the magazine of Tonomura Shigeru, Nakatani Takao, and Ozaki Kazuo, he published "Kare wa mukashi no kare narazu" (He Is Not the Man He Used to Be). And in December, he joined Yamagishi, Dan, Ima, Kon, Kitamura, and the poet and critic Nakahara Chūya in putting out the journal *Aoi Hana* (Blue Flower), which presented Dazai's "Romanesuku" (Romanesque) in the first and only issue. The next year, the *Aoi Hana* group merged with *Nihon Roman-ha* (Japanese Romantic School), the journal of Yasuda Yojūrō, which was self-consciously dedicated to a "rediscovery" of the spirit of Japan. It was to number among its members the critic Kamei Katsuchirō, the novelist Satō Haruo, and the poet Hagiwara Sakutarō. Dazai wrote some pieces for it for a year, and then dropped out of the group.

The year 1935 was a pivotal one for Dazai. The process of disintegration evident in his personal life—a process reflected in his writing, but not yet impairing his pace of publication—here took a sharp downward plunge and solidified at that state, partly through external chance and partly as the inevitable outcome of character weaknesses he had already evidenced. The year began with mixed omens, however. In February, part of the ominously titled "Gyakkō" (Losing Ground) appeared in *Bungei*. This could actually have been a promising sign, for it was the first story to come out in a noncoterie magazine. In other words, Dazai was gaining an audience outside his own immediate group. But around this time, he was finally forced to admit that he would never graduate from Tokyo University. Early in March, probably under Tobishima Sadashiro's urging, he took the entrance examination for the newspaper *Miyako Shimibun* (Capital News). He failed it. On March 15, taking the entire stipend, now reduced to ninety yen, his brother Bunji was still sending him every month, he invited a friend, Kodate Zenshirō (the brother-in-law of one of his older sisters), to go carousing with him. In a familiar pattern, they spent the day and night wandering from Shinjuku to the Ginza and Asakusa; and finally Dazai parted from Kodate in Yokohama. He went on alone to Kamakura, and on the sixteenth he tried to hang himself in the wooded hills behind Hachiman Shrine. Unsuccessful in this third

halfhearted attempt at suicide, Dazai returned to Tokyo on the seventeenth in the middle of the night, "with the rope marks still around my neck." (4: 62.) In "Eight Views of Tokyo" he saw this as a failure to settle his own fate by himself.

In April he was suddenly stricken with an attack of appendicitis, rushed to the hospital, and operated upon. However, peritonitis developed, and he also began coughing blood, as the chronic lung ailment flared up again. To assuage the pain of these aggravated complications, the doctor prescribed a narcotic. This proved to be just the escape his dependent and shattered psyche needed. By the time he left the Fujiwara Hospital in Asagaya, he was addicted. He spent the next two months at the Kyōdō Hospital in Setagaya. The hospital director was a friend of his elder brother, and he was treated well—unfortunately, for that meant his access to drugs was not limited.

In July he left the hospital and went to Funabashi to recuperate. He bought a house and lived there with Hatsuyo for over a year, still supported by his brother's stipend. He said he loved that house; it was the first he had ever owned. He received friends there at first, and gradually emerged for visits to Tokyo. On one of those excursions he went with Yamagishi Gaishi to see the poet and novelist, Satō Haruo, and Satō, like Ibuse, became one of his mentors. That spring, the journal *Bungei Shunjū* (Literary Seasons) had announced that it was establishing a literary prize competition for new authors. The first Akutagawa Prize (from that time on, the most prestigious award a young writer could receive) was granted in August. Dazai had of course entered a story in the competition, both at Ibuse's and Satō's urging and because he wanted to, for winning it would not only mean following in the footsteps of his early idol, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, and proving to his family that he was a respectable and publicly acclaimed writer; it would also vastly improve his financial situation, which was perilous. In Funabashi he had found a pharmacist foolish enough to sell him drugs on credit, but his bill was rising astronomically. There was a cash award for the Akutagawa Prize; additionally, it would bring him requests for manuscripts from other journals, and raise the prices he could command.

Dazai submitted the completed "Losing Ground"—and lost to Ishikawa Tatsuzō. He had been quite confident of winning; what made the defeat doubly bitter was the moral censure clearly stated in Kawabata Yasunari's published opinion as one of the judges. Kawabata by the 1930's had already achieved the position of preeminence in Japanese letters that he was to occupy until his suicide in 1972. Therefore, his comments carried perhaps the heaviest weight of any of the judges'. In his stunned and bitter response, "Kawabata Yasunari e" (To Kawabata Yasunari), which appeared in the November issue of a minor Tokyo publication, *Bungei Tsūshin* (Literary Notes), Dazai quoted from Kawabata's statement: "Indeed, [his writing] is

filled with the author's views on life and literature, but as I see it, there is an unfortunate cloud over his life at present, which regrettably prevents his talent from emerging straightforwardly.' "(IO: 26.) Dazai had had no warning of such an attack (as he saw it); he had simply come across it by accident, when he picked up the magazine at a shop counter. "According to this," he expostulated, "one might think that you alone decide the Akutagawa Prize." (IO: 26.) In turn, he attacked what he called Kawabata's hypocrisy: "To spend your time raising birds and going to dance concerts—is this such a splendid life?" (IO: 28).¹⁷

Nevertheless, the Akutagawa Prize competition did have some positive effect for Dazai: along with the other three runners-up, he was commissioned to write a story for *Bungei Shunjū*. The result, "Dasu gemaine" (The Common Herd), appeared in October, but he spent the entire income from it in one night's carousing that started in Tokyo and ended at the Izu hot spring town of Yugawara. He was accompanied by Dan Kazuo, Yamagishi Gaishi, and Kodate Zenshirō, the friend who had been with him the night before his March suicide attempt.

Dazai and Hatsuyo: Collapse and End

Dazai was now twenty-six years old. He was still receiving money from his brother. He had failed to gain family approval for his marriage; he had failed to graduate from university; he had failed in his sole attempt to gain reasonably conventional employment; he had failed to achieve sufficient critical acclaim for his literary talents. He had a drug habit, and a lung condition that showed no signs of abating. Not for another three years was he to make, even to himself, a final and deep commitment to writing as a career. In 1935 he was still ambivalent, wanting to be a success at it but not willing or able to expend the energy required to be a successful writer. From late 1935 to mid-1938 his life was a shambles. Many of his most moving works deal at least in part with that period. That is, they are moving when read singly. In the aggregate, however, their tone of droning misery, of unrelieved self-pity and self-indulgence, presents a rather unattractive picture. During this period his friends and family were inundated with importunate requests for money. Dazai borrowed from everyone—from his brother, from friends, from his mentors Ibuse Masuji and Satō Haruo. He solicited advances on manuscripts not even requested by publishers. And always the form was the same: breast-beating for past failures, apologies for present chaotic scenes, and fanatic promises of reform in the future. Typical is a letter he wrote to Satō Haruo on February 5, 1936:

¹⁷Kawabata perhaps indicated an answer to Dazai's rhetorical question with his own suicide years later.

Not one word of what I say is a lie or exaggeration.

The pain of life piles up—piles up—all I think of is death.

You, Mr. Satō, are my sole support. I know my responsibility to you. I have written something excellent. From now on, I can write more and more splendid stories. I have been trying to live these ten years. I am a good human being. I am serious, but my luck has been bad so far, and now I'm just a step short of death. If I win the Akutagawa Prize, I will weep at the sympathy shown me, I'm sure. And then I will be able to fight any kind of pain, and go on living. My strength will grow. Do not laugh; help me, please. You can help me.

Please don't hate me. I will pay you back, for sure.

Should I visit you? If you tell me what day and time, I will come running, despite snow or rain. I pray you earnestly.

Homeless Swallow¹⁸

Dazai was looking for Satō's support for the third Akutagawa Prize; Satō's response to the letter was to urge Dazai to enter Saiseikai Hospital, in Tokyo, where Satō's younger brother was working.

His own friends rallied to him. In November 1935, at Dan Kazuo's instigation, the publishing house Sunagoya Shobō agreed to publish Dazai's first collection of short stories. It was a selection from the stories he had been writing since 1932. He chose the title *Bannen* (The Final Years), meaning that his life was drawing to a close, and intending the collection as his last will and testament. The book came out on June 25, 1936, right after Dazai's twenty-seventh birthday. On July 11 his friends held a celebration banquet at the famous Sei-yōken restaurant in Ueno. But, witnesses to the event recalled, the guest of honor was a sorry sight. The state of his mental and physical health was all too visible. Satō Haruo had induced him to enter Saiseikai Hospital in February to treat the drug addiction, but he left only two weeks later, still uncured. He wandered around for the next few months in almost total disorder. In August he went to Tanigawa hot spring, in another halfhearted and unsuccessful attempt to break the addiction. While there, he learned that he had failed in the third Akutagawa Prize competition. In letters to Ibuse, Satō Haruo, and other friends, he spoke variously of suicide, and of plans to spend two years in a TB sanatorium.

Finally, on October 13, Ibuse and the family representative Kita Yoshi-shirō prevailed and, with Hatsuyo's help, took him to the Musashino Hospital in Egota. Too sick to ask questions, Dazai was nonetheless stunned to discover, once he was an admitted patient, that it was a mental hospital. That, at least, is the interpretation that has traditionally been put on Dazai's reaction to the hospitalization: that he was the victim of a well-meaning plot. But investigation of correspondence between Ibuse and Satō more than sug-

¹⁸*Shashinshū: Dazai Osamu no shōgai*, 155. This letter was written while Dazai was living in Funabashi to Satō in Tokyo.

gests that Dazai was fully cognizant (or as aware as his condition permitted) of what was being done to and for him, and that the admitting physician had made amply clear to Dazai at the interview the regimen he would be expected to keep.¹⁹ Therefore, the sense of betrayal Dazai claims to have felt over this incident was far more conditional and subjective than external facts might seem to indicate. Nevertheless, the alleged treachery of his friends, with the regimen of the hospital, had the desired effect not only of shocking him into reality, but also of curing the addiction and arresting the lung condition. But it broke his spirit. The night he left the hospital, November 12, he began "HUMAN LOST," and soon after, "Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century." But that was almost all the new writing he did for over a year.

While he was in the Musashino Hospital, Hatsuyo had sold the house in Funabashi and moved to an apartment in the Sugunami section of Tokyo. They moved again days after he left the hospital; and then again Hatsuyo was left alone when he went to Atami to recover and write. One day early in 1937 he learned that Hatsuyo had had an affair with a painter friend of his while he was in the hospital. Dazai had considered this cousin-by-marriage, five years his junior, a special and cherished friend. Hatsuyo's friendship with him had grown while Dazai was forbidden visitors, as she visited him in another hospital (where, curiously enough, he was recuperating from a suicide attempt of his own).²⁰ This was the final betrayal Dazai would suffer at Hatsuyo's hands. In March he persuaded her to go with him to Minakami hot spring, and there they attempted suicide together. "Ubasute" (Discarding the Old Woman), published in 1938, deals with that unsuccessful episode. They returned to Tokyo. Her uncle took her back to Aomori, and by April had arranged a final separation.

Little is known of Hatsuyo after this. There are various accounts of her end: that she went to Hokkaidō with an elderly patron; that she went to Manchuria with a military patron; that she returned to Tokyo briefly and visited the Ibuse house; that Dazai sent her money several times during an illness, perhaps the facial neuralgia said to have given her a "laughing, crying expression" in a final photograph; that she died in Aomori or (most probably) in Tsingtao in Shantung Province, in 1944. She died alone at the age of thirty-four, with nothing beside her but her handbag, it is said.²¹ Surely Dazai must have played some part in shortening her life, if his testimony in stories to the insecurity and hardship he caused her during their years together can be trusted. Yet, also as he portrayed her, she was little interested in many things important to him, and not much of a companion. In "Eight Views of Tokyo," Hatsuyo seems to have been emotionally shallow and intellectually

¹⁹Sōma, *Dazai Osamu to Ibuse Masuji*, 144-45.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 54.

²¹Kitagaki, 105-6.

uncurious, and she betrayed his expectations and trust. Still, Dazai's expectations may have been unrealistic, and her life with him could scarcely have been pleasant, with the frequent moving and penury of their years together, and the knowledge that his family would under no circumstances accept her. Indeed, ultimately Dazai seems to have seen her more as a victim than as an aggressor. Other women in his life also resemble the ones in his stories—the much-abused wives and lovers who suffer in silence—but Hatsuyo was the model for them longer than anyone else, and her ghost seems to have haunted Dazai as he continued in his stories to draw portraits based on her until the end of his life. When in *No Longer Human*, his last important work, love proves insufficient to save two people who truly love each other, Dazai seems to be trying still to understand what happened to himself and Hatsuyo. What he shows is a man unable to open himself to emotional commitment, even for someone he loves, and even though he seems to demand it of her and of himself.²² At least in that novel Dazai seems not to blame the woman for her inability to live up to his expectations. The affair of Dazai and Hatsuyo does seem to have been a case of tragic mismatching.

New Marriage, New Start

In July 1937 Japan entered war with China. During the year, Dazai had two books published, *Kyokō no hōkō* (Wanderings in Falsehood) and “Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century,” both collections of stories he had written and even published earlier. He did some traveling with friends, but he is generally silent about most of 1937 and the first half of 1938; it seems to have been the silence that accompanies recovery from (or at least adjustment to) a great shock. This was the end of almost ten years of confusion that had mounted to a near rout.

Early in the summer of 1938, at the age of twenty-nine (thirty, by Japanese count), Dazai at last decided irrevocably that he was going to make his career as a writer, and started writing again. In July he began “Discarding the Old Woman,” which in effect marked the end of the Hatsuyo affair. It was published in the journal *Shinchō* (New Currents) in September; with the proceeds he went to join Ibuse Masuji at Misaka Pass, in the foothills of Mount Fuji. Ibuse, who had been finishing up a manuscript, returned to Tokyo soon after, and Dazai remained alone there until mid-November. The Tsushima family representative, Kita Yoshishirō, had meanwhile contacted Ibuse, and had asked him to find Dazai a wife. Ultimately, a *miai* (“arranged meeting”) took place between Dazai and the fourth daughter of a Kōfu geologist. She was Ishihara Michiko, twenty-six, well-educated—and teaching at an upper school for girls in Kōfu, at the base of Misaka Pass. Two months later they

²²Kitagaki agrees with this analysis. See his pp. 341–42.

were engaged, and Dazai left Misaka to take a room in Kōfu. On January 8, 1939, they were married at Ibuse's house in Suginami. Michiko's family was represented by her elder sister and brother-in-law, and Dazai's by the faithful Kita and that other Tsushima family retainer, Nakabata Keikichi.

The young couple rented a house in Kōfu, and Dazai began writing. In March, "Ōgon fūkei" (Golden Landscape) won a fifty-yen prize in the Tokyo newspaper *Kokumin Shimbun* (Nation's News), a not inconsiderable sum for them, as their rent was six yen fifty sen a month. Dazai's stories were now being published with great regularity. He seems to have been at pains to reassure his wife and her family, who of course knew of his checkered past. He traveled with Michiko to the resort town of Kamisuwa in May, and again in June took her, her mother and younger sister to visit the hot spring towns of the Izu Peninsula. In July, he and Michiko moved to Mitaka, just outside Tokyo, where they were to live until his death, except for a period at the end of the war when they evacuated to Tsugaru as refugees from the air raids in Tokyo. In the autumn of the year they were married, Dazai received the Kitamura Tōkoku Award for "Joseito" (Schoolgirl). In short, he settled into married life, and behaved like a typical young husband, getting to know his wife and her family, working hard and piling up a steady stream of small successes in the form of stories and books published.

The next few years, in spite of the deepening war, saw a continuation of those successes. In 1940 Dazai traveled a great deal, alone and with friends, sometimes for pleasure and sometimes to hole up and write; on one of those trips Michiko joined him. He was invited to lecture at Niigata College in November, and used the opportunity to visit Sado Island (he later wrote a sketch, "Sado," about the trip). He lectured at Tokyo Commercial University, on "The Illness of Modernity." He did a major part of the organizing for a party to celebrate the publication of Yamagishi Gaishi's literary biography *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*, perhaps to pay back his friends for their similar gesture to him four years earlier. He wrote a radio script. And the stream of writing continued.

"Kakekomi uttae" (I Accuse), his version of Judas's betrayal of Jesus, appeared in the important critical journal *Chūō Kōron* in 1940. In July he went to Izu to write "Eight Views of Tokyo," recapitulating the Hatsuyo period, and it was published in 1941. In February 1941 he went to Shizuoka to begin writing *Shin Hamuretto* (A New 'Hamlet'), his first full-length novel; in April he joined his wife in Kōfu, to which she had returned in order to await the birth of their first child. On June 7 a daughter, Sonoko, was born. And in July the Bungei Shunjū Press published *A New 'Hamlet.'*

Dazai resumed physical ties with his family in August, when at Kita Yoshishirō's urging he returned briefly to Kanagi after a ten-year absence, to visit his ailing mother. A year later, in October 1942, he brought his wife and

daughter for their first visit, to meet his mother who was then in critical condition. "Going Home" and "Hometown" deal with those visits.

The Writer Established

In November 1941, as Japan mobilized for war, Dazai was called up for the "writers' draft" (special journalistic service in lieu of military service), but was exempted because of his weak lungs. The next month Ibuse left for Southeast Asia, where he remained with the army as a correspondent for a year. On December 8 (December 7 on the American side of the international date line) Japan entered war with the United States. Dazai never said much about the war, except to indicate a sense that he had a moral obligation to be as responsible a citizen as possible, a role that both provided structure for his life and imposed an almost unbearable burden. "Shinrō" (The Bridegroom) and "Jūnigatsu Yōka" (December 8), both written right after Pearl Harbor, have that dual tone of dedication and desperation, of the hope of a reformed sinner and the self-directed irony of a man without faith. Before wartime rationing of printing materials became severe, in January 1942, Dazai personally supervised the printing of a limited, luxury edition of "I Accuse." This year he spent more time around Kōfu, as his wife visited her family with the new baby. In February he was at a hot spring outside Kōfu writing his second novel, *Seigi to bishō* (Righteousness and Smiles), a novel in diary form about a young man's intellectual and moral growth. The title and the content reflect Dazai's seriousness at the time: the youth will act out of a sense of right, but not with a pinched and self-righteous attitude (the source, quoted in the novel, is Matthew 6:16, "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance . . ."). War preparedness was stepping up, with increased air raid drills and the like. In October he had his first brush with censorship: "Hanabi" (Fireworks), which had gotten past the censors initially, appeared in *Bungei* (Literary Art), but the magazine was removed from the stands when the authorities decided the story was "inappropriate to the emergency situation." Republished after the war as "Hinode mae" (Before the Dawn), it deals with a wastrel son's abuse of his family, and implies that the father drowned him to free themselves of him.

Dazai was heading for Shizuoka to begin writing his next major novel, *Udaijin Sanetomo* (Sanetomo, Minister of the Right), about the thirteenth-century shogun,²³ when he received news that his mother was dying. He arrived in Kanagi in time; she died on December 10 at the age of seventy, a mother who had little understood her youngest surviving child, but who had suffered over him.

²³Shoguns also held court rank; central ranks were highest, followed by those of the left and right (in that order).

By 1943, Dazai could be said to have fully come of age as a responsible family man and as a writer. "Fugaku hyakkei" (One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji), dating from 1939, was selected for a series, *Shōwa meisaku senshū* (The Best of Shōwa Period Literature), published by the major house of Shinchōsha. He returned to Kanagi with wife and child for his mother's memorial service, conducted according to Buddhist practice on the thirty-fifth day after her death. And in April he served as master of ceremonies at the wedding of a friend. But while he was encountering success in his personal life, increasingly the censors were interfering with his work. A completed novel, *Hibari no koe* (Voice of the Lark), was about to be published by Koyama Shoten; it was based on a diary kept by one of Dazai's readers (whom he had never met) while the man was hospitalized for tuberculosis. There was enough ambiguity in the censors' response (although they did not absolutely refuse it) to make Dazai and the publishers, who feared a repetition of the "Fireworks" incident, agree not to go through with it at that time. *Sanetomo, Minister of the Right*, finished in March at the hot spring near Kōfu, was published in September. Dazai recalls in "Fifteen Years," published in 1946, that some superpatriot made a flap about it, reading Sanetomo's title *udaijin* as *yudayajin* ("Jew"), and claiming Dazai was mocking the shogun by making him a Jew.

The problem of collaboration with the authorities during the war was one that much troubled the Japanese literary world once the war was over. The heavy suppression of leftist literature, of which the death of Kobayashi Takiji in 1933 after police torture during questioning was only one notorious example, led to mass ideological conversions (*tenkō*) to the official right-wing government line by many writers, and involved sharp scrutiny by censors of whatever continued to be published. Some major writers, able to weather the period through royalties and private sources of income, responded to such attempts at thought control with silence for the duration. And some few, like Dazai, trod a thin line between freedom of creative expression and tacit acquiescence in the status quo. Once the war was over, he did not rush, like so many others, to deny that he had had any willing part in the war effort. In fact, quite to the contrary, he made clear that his loyalties were then and still were to Japan, that he had acted then in a way consonant with his belief in what was needed, and would continue to do so. In 1946, he wrote:

Japan made its unconditional surrender. All I felt was shame. I was so ashamed, I could say nothing.

*

The number of people who had bad things to say about the Emperor increased dramatically. But when I saw what was happening, I realized how deeply I had come to love the Emperor. I professed myself a conservative to my friends. [8: 212.]

He had made his uneasy political peace years earlier, when he had left the political world and retreated to a preoccupation with personal affairs. Now that he was finding his personal voice in his writing, it was only one more step to retreat to a world divorced from the harsh realities of wartime Japan. The major works of this period show a remoteness, not just in terms of fictionalization or time, but of distance from the author's direct experience. *Sanetomo, Minister of the Right* is set in the thirteenth century and is taken from the *Azuma kagami* (Mirror of the East), a historical document of that time. *Shinshaku shokoku banashi* (New "Tales of the Provinces") was Dazai's remaking of several stories by the seventeenth-century writer Ihara Saikaku. *Otogizōshi* (Fairy Tales) is a collection of four well-known and beloved national folk tales in Dazai-style retellings. *Righteousness and Smiles* was based on the diary of the brother of a friend. *Sekibetsu* (Regretful Parting), commissioned by a government agency in January 1944 and intended to foster friendship between the partners of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, was about the early years as a medical student in Sendai of the Chinese revolutionary writer Lu Hsün (who, however, is remembered as having participated in the Chinese national revolt against Japanese imperialism). The character of Dazai can be recognized in the heroes of these novels, but it was just this highly personal flavor that made them politically safe. For the rest, his commentaries on current events have an ambiguous note of "how I wish I could raise loud hurrahs, but my poor weak voice just gets lost in the general tumult." He did his war service by taking his turn as neighborhood civil defense leader. But it is difficult to ascertain whether or not his tone is ironical when, for instance, he calls wartime Japan a "good country" in which "even if there is no bread, if the sake starts running out, at least there are flowers—yes, right in front of every flower shop masses of blooms. . . ." On a patriotic note, he concludes: "Japan: bear the pride of this beauty before all the world!" (5: 11.)

Totally dependent on income from his current publications to support his family, he could not afford to either antagonize or ignore the authorities. But, proving that every man, even one known for moral weakness, takes a stand on the point he deems important, Dazai remained true to his aesthetic ideals. His work of the wartime period can be considered propaganda only insofar as he too saw it his duty to attempt to bring some cheer into the increasingly bleak lives of his fellow countrymen. "The beauty of art is, after all, service to the people," he had said as early as "Leaves." (1: 11.)

Consider in terms of morale building the prologue to *Fairy Tales*, for example. Written in 1945 during the worst of almost continuous air raids, it could not have helped but bring a smile to people who must have felt they were living much of their lives underground. By the time he finished the

book, Dazai's Mitaka house had been destroyed in raids, and his little family had taken refuge in Kōfu, soon also to be burned out. <

"Oops, there they go!" The father lays aside his pen and stands up. Not one to jump up for mere warning sirens, he stops work when the antiaircraft guns begin to sound, dresses his five-year-old daughter in protective clothing, gathers her up in his arms, and heads for the air-raid shelter dug in the garden. Already the mother is crouching at the back of the hole, their two-year-old son on her back.

"That sounds pretty close."

"Yes. This hole is cramped, you know."

"That may be," the father allows irritably, "but still, it's just about the right size. If it were any deeper, we might be buried alive."

"Yes . . . but it could've been a little wider, don't you think?"

"Um, well, you might be right, but the soil is frozen hard now, and it'd be nearly impossible to dig it out. Sometime soon. . . ." He silences the mother with ambiguities, and turns his ear to air-raid reports on the radio.

When the mother's discomfort has been soothed, now it's the turn of the five-year-old daughter to start insisting that they leave the hole. The only way to placate her is with picture books. Momotarō, Kachikachiyama, Shitakiri suzume, Kobutori, Urashima-san,²⁴ and all the rest—the father reads them to his child.

The father is poorly dressed, and he looks maybe a little stupid, but deep down he is quite a considerable person. This man has within him the truly extraordinary gift of creating tales.

ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO . . .

Even as he starts reading the picture book in a peculiar droning voice, at the same time in his heart an entirely different tale begins bubbling up spontaneously. [7: 272-73.]

In January 1944, Dazai received an inquiry from the Tōhō film producer Yamashita Ryōzō about filming his story "Kajitsu" (Happy Day), a humorous first-person account of one friend's inept arrangements for another friend's wedding. The same month, as previously recounted, he was commissioned by a government agency to write a novel dramatizing one of the Five Great Principles of Greater East Asia, which this year was to be "Friendship Between Peoples." Since Dazai had always planned to write something about Lu Hsün, he said, he sought the commission and took this opportunity to begin research on the subject later in the year. The novel emerged the following year, immediately after the end of the war, as *Regretful Parting*. But he spent some of January in Atami, preparing a script for the Tōhō film. Starring Takamine Hideko and Fujita Susumu, both well-known, it was released in September as "Yottsuo no kekkon" (Four Marriages).

In 1944 Koyama Shoten, a publishing house that was managed by a friend of Dazai's, Koyama Kiyoshi, and was bringing out a series of *fudoki*, or

²⁴Short titles of traditional fairy tales and names of characters in them. All but Momotarō appear in Dazai's collection.

regional studies, commissioned Dazai to write one about Tsugaru. The trip Dazai took between May 12 and June 5 as preparation was probably the most significant event in his life for making clear to him how deep the roots of Tsugaru and family reached into his soul. *Tsugaru*, published in November, may well be the most mature and thoughtful work he wrote. It is deeply touched with humor, sensitive to its author's weaknesses but without self-pity, and full of open expressions of love for the people who had been significant in his early life—and who showed that their concern had outlasted the test of time and separation. The trip offered Dazai a chance to research his origins. "I have felt uneasy with myself as a city man, and so I have hoped to grasp what I am as a man of Tsugaru," he wrote. (7: 37.) An emotional refrain runs throughout the work: "My study is not Tsugaru; it is what men call, provisionally, love. What links one heart to another." (7: 23.) He traveled with a friend from high school days who had remained in Tsugaru, Nakamura Teijirō (the "N" of *Tsugaru*) to parts he had never seen as a child; he visited Nakabata Keikichi, one of those who had kept a concerned eye on him during the earlier Tokyo years; he spent some time with his family in Kanagi. But the work is so structured that the emotional climax comes near the end, with the reunion with his nursemaid Take after nearly thirty years.

Shortly after his return from Tsugaru, Dazai sent his family to Kōfu to await the birth of their second child. He commuted between Tokyo and Kōfu several times, until a son, Masaki, was born on August 10; and he brought them all back to Tokyo in September. In November he finished *New "Tales of the Provinces"*; *Tsugaru* was published; and the withdrawn *Voice of the Lark* was typeset and ready to be printed at the Koyama plant. Early in December, however, a sudden night air raid totally destroyed the plant and the book with it. Fortunately, Tōhō's Yamashita Ryōzō had a galley proof, as he was planning to film this novel too, and so the book itself was not lost. It was published in 1945, after the war was over, as *Pandora no hako* (Pandora's Box), but doubtless Dazai needed the income in 1944. This was his first direct physical loss of the war.

Evacuation to Tsugaru

As the war turned desperate even on the home islands, Dazai's pace speeded up. In January, *New "Tales of the Provinces"* was published; he completed *Regretful Parting* in February and began *Fairy Tales* in March. By the end of March, air raids were so continuous that he took his family up to Kōfu. Shortly after he returned to Tokyo, at dawn on April 2, the Mitaka house was hit during a raid. Because of the danger of delayed time bombs, he took refuge temporarily with an old friend and literary colleague, the critic Kamei Katsuichirō, in nearby Kichijōji; then, leaving Koyama Kiyoshi to

look after the house, he went to join his family in Kōfu. Ibuse Masuji and other literary friends had also evacuated to the Kōfu area, and there was some visiting back and forth until it was evident that Kōfu too had become a target city. Dazai completed the manuscript of *Fairy Tales* in June and then moved his library and some household goods to a small village outside the city—and on July 7 the Kōfu house was destroyed in a predawn air raid.

Koyama came up to see how Dazai and his family were. At the time, they were sheltering at the home of a local college professor. Dazai handed over to him the manuscript of *Fairy Tales*, which he transmitted to the publisher Chikuma Shobō. Dazai left Kōfu with his family on July 28 and headed for Tsugaru via Tokyo. They arrived in Kanagi three grueling days later, after what was ordinarily a one-day trip, having had to change trains four times to avoid the air raids that were now ripping up Japan's internal transportation system. How traumatic the trip was to Dazai can be seen from the frequent mention of it in his stories during the next couple of years. Nearby Aomori was the major rail center for northern Japan, and was also soon to be bombed; Kanagi already felt the effects of raids, and Dazai arrived in time to help dig air-raid shelters. "Since I was to die anyway, then less trouble to die at home," he wrote in "Tazunebito" (I'm Looking for Someone), published in 1946. But the end of the war came swiftly, and it brought Dazai a rush of publications. Within two weeks of Japan's surrender to the Allies on August 15, 1945, *Regretful Parting* was published by the Asahi Shimbunsha. In October, serialization of *Pandora's Box* began; on October 25, Chikuma Shobō published *Fairy Tales*.

Dazai's elder sister died on November 14, at the age of forty. Dazai remained at the family home in Tsugaru until November 1946. In the more than a year he spent away from Tokyo, he remained highly active in the literary world. He lectured at his alma mater, Aomori High School; he participated in local literary gatherings; he received constant visits from young aspiring writers and students in the area. And he sent manuscripts to Tokyo and published in local newspapers. But it was not easy for him to be living in Kanagi. "Shin'yū kōkan" (The Courtesy Call) caricatures the trials he suffered as a minor celebrity-in-residence. Additionally, he and his family were refugees. "Yannuru kana" (Hoist with His Own Petard) hints at the hostility they and all evacuees must have had to face from some quarters. Hardest of all, he was once again dependent on his elder brother's charity. In "Niwa" (The Garden), he speaks of himself as a "parasite," with no rights or expectations and in the uncomfortable position of having to listen passively to his brother's opinions on everything from how to get on in the world to who are good novelists (Nagai Kafū and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō).

"An Almanac of Pain," an autobiographical piece again summarizing the years of confusion, this time from a political perspective, appeared in March

1946 in *Shinbungei* (New Literary Art), and the next month the similar "Fifteen Years" came out in *Bunka Tembō* (Cultural Outlook). These two works marked the end of Dazai's outward-looking phase and heralded a return to the autobiographical mode that, in its several guises, was to last until his death. In April, Bunji was elected to the national Diet in the first election held after the end of the war; and Take came from Kodomari to see Dazai again. The previous month, Dazai had written his first play, *Fuyu no hanabi* (Fireworks in Winter). It was to be staged in December, but the Occupation authorities closed it in rehearsal, probably for the "immorality" expressed by its heroine Kazue. A year later, Kazuko in *The Setting Sun* was to carry these revolutionary ideas of personal moral liberation to a much farther extreme. Akutagawa Hiroshi, the actor son of Dazai's literary hero Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, visited him in May to discuss the possibility of having *A New Hamlet*' staged by the troupe that he and the playwright Katō Michio had formed. We can only guess how Dazai must have been moved by Akutagawa's two-day visit; having failed twice at the Akutagawa Prize, at a time in his life when critical recognition would have been like a lifeline thrown to a drowning man, Dazai was now being consulted by Akutagawa's son. Nevertheless, Dazai's career as a playwright was very limited, and despite some interest from the theater world at the time, his plays are remembered more as printed texts than as working scripts. *Fireworks in Winter*, though banned from the stage, was published in June, as was *Pandora's Box*. In July, Dazai's grandmother Ishi died, at the age of ninety. She was the last of his directly antecedent relatives; she had outlasted her parents, her daughter and son-in-law, and most of her grandchildren. In September, *Haru no kareha* (Dry Leaves in Spring), Dazai's second and last play, was published in *Ningen* (Humankind).

On December 15 he returned to his house in Mitaka after an absence of one year and seven months. He celebrated his return to direct involvement in the Tokyo literary scene by participating in a round-table discussion with the writers Sakaguchi Ango and Oda Sakunosuke who, with Dazai, have been lumped together as the *Buraiha*, the "school of irresponsibility and decadence," after the characters they wrote about. The first discussion, sponsored by the journal *Kaizō* (Reform), never got beyond galley proofs, although it appeared later in *Bungei's Dazai dokuhon* (A Dazai Reader) in 1956. A second try in December, on the subject "Speaking of the Modern Novel," was chaired by the critic Hirano Ken, and published in the April 1947 issue of *Bungaku Kikan* (Literature Quarterly). A month after this second panel, Oda Sakunosuke was dead of a lung hemorrhage. Dazai was present at his funeral, and published a eulogy that might have been his own:

Oda wanted to die. . . . I, above all other men, felt and understood deeply the sadness of Oda.

The first time I met him on the Ginza, I thought, "God, what an unhappy man," and I could scarcely bear the pain. He gave the vivid impression that there was across his path nothing but the wall of death.

He wanted to die. But there was nothing I could do. A big-brotherly warning—what hateful hypocrisy. There was nothing to do but watch.

The "adults" of the world will probably criticize him smugly, saying he didn't have enough self-respect. But how dare they think they have the right!

Yesterday I found recorded in Mr. Tatsuno [Yutaka]'s introductory essay on Senancour the following words:

"People say it is a sin to flee by throwing life away. However, these same sophists who forbid me death often expose me to the presence of death, force me to proceed toward death. The various innovations they think up increase the opportunities for death around me, their preaching leads me toward death, and the laws they establish present me with death."

You are the ones who killed Oda, aren't you?

His recent sudden death was a poem of his final, sorry resistance.

Oda! You did well. [10: 276-77.]

"Tokatonton" (A Sound of Hammering) and "Merri Kurisumasu" (Merry Christmas) had appeared earlier that year. They both reflect an intensification of the tone of defeat and nihilism already noted.

Final Novels, Final Women

In February 1947 Dazai's literary work became more than ever an extension of his rapidly disintegrating personal life. He went to Shimo Soga in Izu to spend a week with Ōta Shizuko, a young woman whom he had known for several years, and who had been corresponding with him while he was in Tsugaru. Shizuko had first become interested in Dazai while she was suffering intense guilt feelings over the death of her infant daughter; the child had died, Shizuko was certain, because she no longer loved her husband. According to her daughter, writing years later, Shizuko had been trying to write out her feelings, to "confess."²⁵ Now divorced, she had been ecstatic when she read "Dōke no hana" (The "Flower" of Buffoonery)—he had said it all! As camouflage Shizuko enlisted two of her women friends who were also interested in literature and went to visit Dazai in 1941; their intimate friendship had dated from that time. In succeeding years, she had remained in touch with him, and corresponded under an assumed name with him while he was in Kanagi after the war. He had visited her briefly in January 1944, while he was nearby doing the film script for "Four Marriages," and now he stayed with her at the summer home to which she had evacuated during the war.

While at Shimo Soga, Dazai began to write the first of his great postwar novels, *The Setting Sun*. Shizuko is the general model for Kazuko, the hero-

²⁵ Ōta Haruko, "Shuki" (Memoirs), in *Shinchō*, April 1965, 146-97.

ine. She herself later published the diary that she had been keeping—and that, when Dazai stayed with her, she had urged him to use—under the title *Shayō nikki* (A *Shayō* Diary). But the events of this diary cover mainly the events of the first half of Dazai's novel, and he had already been planning to write something of the sort soon after the end of the war, while he was still in Kanagi. He may have had Shizuko in mind when he portrayed Kazue in *Fireworks in Winter*, but the characters Naoji and Uehara come from his own experience and imagination. The fall of his family's fortune, as a result of rural land reform under the Occupation, had struck responsive chords; he said he saw *The Setting Sun*, in its attempt to deal with the downfall of an aristocratic family, as a kind of Japanese *Cherry Orchard*.

Dazai left Shimo Soga and went on alone to spend another week at an inn in nearby Shizuoka, where he wrote the first two chapters of *The Setting Sun*. He returned to Tokyo on March 8, wrote and published "Viyon no tsuma" (Villon's Wife) the same month, and continued writing the novel in the small workroom he had rented above a restaurant near Mitaka Station. It was here, about the same time, that he met a beautician, Yamazaki Tomie, the next and fatally last woman in his life. Although Dazai's wife gave birth to their second daughter and third child, Satoko, on March 30, he remained involved with, first, Shizuko and Tomie together, and then, as she seemed to tighten her hold on his life, Tomie alone. Tomie's husband had been sent to the Philippines by his company. After less than two weeks of marriage, he had been drafted from there. Since 1943 he had been missing in action. Tomie was already seeing Dazai at her apartment when, in July 1947, she received notice that her husband's death had been confirmed. Within a week, she had written her first suicide note (which she kept; the one she ultimately left behind was her third) and had chosen the photograph she wanted to be her memorial picture. Her relationship with Dazai seems, from the evidence of her diary, to have been aimed toward death right from the start. A friend recalls that Dazai told him in July 1947 that he had had to promise "a certain woman" that he would die with her within a year.²⁶ In fact, her personality, suggests Kitagaki Ryōichi, had a kind of fierce, obsessive drive, and may have been the model for Kazuko in the latter parts of *The Setting Sun*, just as the circumstances of Shizuko's life were for the first parts.²⁷ Tomie was in the last year of Dazai's life his frequent companion in his workroom and at the neighborhood bars, his adoring disciple, and, as Kitagaki christens her for her unrelenting urge toward suicide, his "angel of death."²⁸

At the end of May, the play *Dry Leaves in Spring* was broadcast on radio in an adaptation by Dazai's old friend, the writer Ima Harube. *The Setting*

²⁶Kitagaki, 507.

²⁷Ibid., 264–65.

²⁸Ibid., 144.

Sun was completed in June. There is evidence that it was to end in eight chapters with Naoji's suicide note as the conclusion, but Shizuko was now pregnant with Dazai's child, and this may have inspired him to substitute a more defiant ending. On May 24, Shizuko went to see Dazai with her younger brother to discuss her pregnancy, but Dazai avoided the opportunity to see her alone, and took them with a number of friends to a nearby drinking place; there, Shizuko met "a woman with glasses," Yamazaki Tomie. Shizuko left, close to tears, and that was the last time she saw Dazai.²⁹ *The Setting Sun* began to appear in *Shinchō* in four installments between July and October; it came out in book form in December, and was an immediate best-seller. Shizuko's daughter Haruko was born on November 12. Although Dazai never entered the child into his family, he did name her at Shizuko's request, and wrote a statement recognizing her as his own.³⁰

In summer of 1947, discussions began between Chikuma Shobō's owner Furuta Akira, Ibuse Masuji, and Dazai on publication of Ibuse's collected works. The first meetings took place at the apartment of Yamazaki Tomie.

Dazai took editorial responsibility for Chikuma Shobō's recognition of his mentor Ibuse's place in Japanese letters. That autumn, Dazai himself received inquiries from two publishers for his collected works; he decided on the well-known Yakumo Shoten, and began preparation for that, too. By this time, the pressures of meeting so many deadlines and his own internal state had produced a noticeable deterioration in Dazai's physical and mental condition. He was drinking heavily, his face was visibly swollen, and he was having lung hemorrhages (both signs of TB), as well as suffering from insomnia. Tomie, trained during the war as a paramedic, gave him frequent injections; critics and friends alike differ on whether they were vitamin supplements or narcotics.³¹ In December, he spent five days in bed as a result of an accidental overdose of sleeping pills—how accidental, one can only guess.

In February 1948 the study group of the Haiyūza theater company, famous for staging contemporary works, chose *Dry Leaves in Spring* as its first production. That same month, the younger sister of Dazai's wife Michiko died in Tokyo. While his wife was out attending to funeral details, Dazai brought Tomie to the house; his older daughter told her mother about the visit. Tomie wrote in her diary that Dazai was "frightened" that his wife now knew everything.³² In addition to the extreme pressures of his health and the complications of his personal life, throughout the spring of 1948 Dazai was frantic with publishing deadlines. He began his second great novel, *No*

²⁹Ibid., 136.

³⁰The characters of Haruko's name can be read to mean "Osamu's child." The statement was written at Tomie's apartment. Kitagaki, 143.

³¹Ibid., 507.

³²Ibid., 155.

Longer Human, finishing the Second Notebook (about half the book) in Atami, where he was staying on an advance from the publisher Chikuma Shobō. He also published the first part of “Nyoze gamon” (Thus Have I Heard) in *Shinchō*. This was his bitter retort to irresponsible (and probably lightly intended) criticism from the venerable writer Shiga Naoya. Shiga, as eminent in the literary establishment as Kawabata Yasunari, had indicated that he was not fond of Dazai’s writing, although he confessed he had read almost nothing of it. In fact, Dazai was much more sensitive to Shiga than Shiga was even aware of Dazai. In *Tsugaru*, Dazai had revealed a certain envy and resultant deprecation of Shiga’s reputation; now Shiga, probably unaware of anything Dazai had said, had made some offhand comments during an interview, and the press leaped at the possibility of a literary feud. Dazai, physically and mentally exhausted and now coughing blood regularly, had responded virulently.

No Longer Human was completed by mid-May. Dazai had already begun a serial novel entitled *Guddo-bai* (Good-bye) for the newspaper *Asahi*; by the end of the month he had drafted ten installments. Parts two and three of “Thus Have I Heard” were finished. Early in June the first part of *No Longer Human* appeared in *Tembō*. On June 3, Dazai called Nohira Ken’ichi, a *Shinchō* editor, to keep him company all night while he finished the last part of “Thus Have I Heard.” On June 9 he called Nohira back again for final consultations on the essay.

On the night of June 13 Dazai disappeared, leaving behind in his workroom the corrected galley proofs for parts one through ten of *Good-bye*, an outline of parts eleven to thirteen, several notes to friends and family, and, for his old friend Ima Harube, a calligraphy in his own hand, a poem by Itō Sachio: “The pond is muddied, muddied / No reflections of wisteria waves / The rain keeps falling.” The police dragged the nearby Tamagawa Canal, which Dazai, in “Beggars Student,” had called “the man-eating river.” The rainy season had started, and there was a steady rain as the search continued in the swollen waterway. The bodies of Dazai Osamu and Yamazaki Tomie were recovered on the morning of June 19, 1948, on what would have been Dazai’s fortieth birthday by Japanese count.

Some critics have claimed, on various physical evidence, that Dazai was already dead, or at least unconscious, when he entered the water. They point to Yamazaki Tomie’s determination to die with him, voiced in her diary nearly a year earlier, shortly after she met him. They hint darkly that she may have made sure he would not escape this time as he had so many times before, as he had “deserted” his female companion at Enoshima eighteen years earlier. But I think it is obvious that Dazai, having reached the end of his already tenuous strength, was ready to give up. Even if he did not exactly want to kill himself, he seemed at a point where he would not fight an urgent suggestion.

Perhaps, had Tomie not been so set on it, he might have survived yet another attempt; perhaps too Dazai, ever the hapless victim in his semiautobiographical stories, had finally met a woman who would make up his mind for him.

Dazai never returned to Tsugaru. His ashes were laid to rest at Zenrinji Temple near his home in Mitaka, in a tomb facing that of another writer he had admired, Mori Ōgai. A year later, a commemorative assembly was held at Zenrinji. These still well-attended annual meetings have come to be called Ōtōki, or Cherry Memorials, after one of Dazai's last stories, "Ōtō" (Cherries).

In October 1953 a memorial was dedicated at Misaka Pass overlooking Mount Fuji, where Dazai had recuperated and started his writing career afresh, with a quotation from *Righteousness and Smiles* carved in Satō Haruo's hand on a rock. Mount Kanran, commemorated in *Tsugaru*, was the site of another memorial in 1956. *Tembō*, the journal that had been publishing *No Longer Human* at the time of his death, established the annual Dazai Osamu Prize in 1965. And also in 1965 Dazai's hometown, Kanagi, officially recognized him. Far more mindful of the elder Tsushimas who had given such meritorious service to their neighbors, the town finally set up a memorial to the reprobate who had made it known throughout Japan. On one side is a line from Verlaine's *Sagesse* in the original French, on the other Dazai's epigrammatic translation of it that had opened *The Final Years*:

The ecstasy and terror
Of having been chosen—
Both are within me.³³

³³"J'ai l'extase et j'ai la terreur d'être choisi." Verlaine, *Sagesse*, bk. 2, no. 8, line 9.

2. The Journey Inward

Forgive me for having been born.

—Dazai Osamu, “Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century”¹

Dazai Osamu's stories give the reader the sense of watching a man gaze at his own image in a mirror. School friends remember him talking constantly about himself and his family; the critic Sako Jun'ichirō doubts he ever loved even Hatsuyo, and Kitagaki Ryōichi thinks she was a fantasized image he himself created.² Dazai almost says as much in “Oshare dōji” (The Stylish Child): “It wasn't women he saw; rather, he was fascinated with his own romantic figure.” (3: 51.) In Japan, as in the West, it is no surprise to see delighted and even morbid self-preoccupation in a youth involved in that process of discovery we call adolescence. In Dazai's case, however, the condition lasted his whole life. The way he describes himself directly in his writings, and the alter egos easily identifiable in the antiheroes, victims, and villains that people his stories, clearly exhibit the author's fascination with himself. Japanese readers were already familiar with pictures of intelligent, sensitive, literary young men discovering their inner and outer worlds.³ But explorations of the individual self can take very different rhetorical directions, from philosophical abstraction to self-indulgent sentimentality. Dazai's journey was expressed in concrete and personal terms; and his readers seem to read him as illustrating overextended adolescence rather than developing maturity. The social evidence lies in his continued popularity among young Japanese of high school and college age, who often exhibit a falling away of interest as they grow up and themselves face the limiting realities of adult life.

And yet the true measure of Dazai's artistic gift lies precisely in the personalness of his writing. He universalizes his experience by refusing to project it onto some ill-understood and wholly fictional protagonist. With his own special mixture of irony and vulnerability, he draws portraits of the charac-

¹ *Zenshū* 2: 72.

² Kitagaki, 60.

³ See Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism*, especially chap. 3.

ter he knows best—himself. And he does it in a way that draws a feeling of recognition from the reader. The young boy, ashamed of his complexion and dumb in the presence of girls, who in “Recollections” carves on the desk in his solitary room a pair of lips that he solemnly kisses, is paying homage to an ineffable image, the perfect lover of which self or other is only a pale reflection. The man in “Hakumei” (Faint Light) who feels, as he carries his ill daughter through a bombed-out town, that in some obscure way his sins have blinded his child, is bowing to the presence of crushing fate. Human beings have always felt themselves brutish and limited; they have always sought to identify, if only by contrast, with power and perfection. By drawing small, intimate portraits, Dazai has sketched every man’s plight in his own lines. The reader who believes those problems are solved or irrelevant to his own life grows bored with Dazai’s writing; the reader who feels that the struggles must be made anew each day is moved and entertained, as Dazai intended.

In the preceding account of Dazai’s life we find a story that is dramatic enough in its bare events, even without reference to the protagonist’s response to them. A privileged childhood, a death-plagued adolescence, traumatic separation from home and family over a youthful folly, desperation, suicide attempts, critical illness, drug addiction, war, air raids, national prostration over defeat, disintegration—such was the trajectory of his career. What this outline does not show, however, is the extent to which the adult’s sense of alienation, characterized by doubt, guilt, and fear, which resulted in protracted self-destruction, were present in the child. The seemingly privileged childhood, in a bucolic and sheltered setting, was where the process started, obviously. And most of the literary journey of Dazai Osamu was an attempt to express and expel the early pain. Therefore, at this point a deeper look into certain aspects of Dazai’s life will help make clear the personal meaning to him of such works as “Recollections” and *No Longer Human*, and show how they exemplify his literary method.

Parents

Dazai had little opportunity to be close to his mother Tane because of her weak health and because she was away in Tokyo for long periods once his father was elected to the national legislature. She was a gentle and retiring woman, worn down, by the time Dazai came along, by the effort of bearing and raising nine children. She was easily intimidated, and her own mother Ishi often called her incompetent. Already she was showing signs of the lung complications, most probably tuberculosis, that plagued the whole family. She was thirty-six when Dazai was born, and lived to age seventy, but she spent a good portion of the intervening years convalescing at—or retreating

to—hot springs. With her own mother and even her grandmother still alive and hale, her household duties could be split; apparently, though, her continuing chores as wife and occasional mother took their toll. Within the previous six years, Tane had given birth to three children; her grandfather, the patriarch Sōsuke, had died; and she had suffered the major upheaval of a move into the new family mansion. Tane seems to have been prostrated by her tenth child's birth, and Dazai was immediately handed over to a wet nurse. This practice was not uncommon, but in Dazai's case it was terminated unusually early when the nurse, a young widow, left to remarry. From this point on, Dazai had reason to be unclear for several years—and perhaps eternally—as to which of the women around him was actually his mother. Here, right at the beginning, he was separated from the person who had given him sustenance for the first year of his life. Emotionally, this separation had its effect, and it was not the only separation he had to face.

Dazai was next taken in hand by his aunt Kiye. Despite considerable hardship in her own life, including divorce from Dazai's father's alcoholic brother, and the death of her second husband (which left her with four young daughters), she seems to have been a woman of strong spirit who had love enough to spare for her semi-orphaned nephew. During his college days Dazai wrote a story, "Mugen naraku" (Bottomless Hell), dealing with the problem of morally poisoned bloodlines. In it he described the father of the hero as being more attracted to his lively sister-in-law who bore her widowhood well than to his wife who did nothing but lie in bed weeping after the birth of her child. This picture may be built upon the three-year-old Dazai's faintly remembered apperceptions of the family situation after the birth of his youngest brother, Reiji, amplified through the years by partially hidden insecurity over his own parentage. Suspicions about the relationship between his father and his aunt, and therefore insecurities about who was his real mother, continued to haunt Dazai throughout his life.

This same year Dazai's father was elected to the Diet and Tane went with him to Tokyo where, except for visits back home, they spent a major part of their time for the next eleven years. The infant Reiji was, like Dazai, cared for by a wet nurse, but she stayed with Reiji for a suitably stable period of time. By the time Dazai entered school, there was even more evidence of difference in treatment of the brothers. As was her practice, when Tane was away from Tokyo she spent more of the time at hot springs for her health than at the Kanagi homestead. At such times, Dazai's sisters would stay there with her, with their baby brother Reiji; Dazai had to go to school. In "Recollections" Dazai says only that he did not know his mother and father very well, and in fact an essay entitled "Boku no yōji" (My Childhood), written when he was thirteen, contains scarcely a mention of his mother, the focus being on Kiye and Take. Even if Dazai did not feel envy that his little brother

was being taken to see their mother, strong feelings must have gathered over the fact that he was being left behind, and also at a time when he had only recently lost both his aunt and Take.

Kiye *was* the mother in the early years. He slept in her bed, she entertained him, she punished him when he was naughty. Take was his playmate, guardian, and tutor. The two of them complemented and filled his world. He knew that Take was a maid, that Kiye, whom he called "Gacha," was his aunt, and that Tane, whom everyone called "Ogasa," was his mother. But for the young Dazai these seem to have been only intellectual distinctions, not matched by an emotional security about which woman, Tane or Kiye, was truly his mother. When Kiye left the Tsushima home to join her daughter and adopted son-in-law in the next town (for her branch of the family had otherwise no male heir), the six-year-old Dazai went with her for the first three months. The description of the scene of their departure in "Recollections" shows Dazai being teased by his older brother about being the "bridegroom," and only hints at the shock the child received when he had to return to Kanagi. "I had thought my aunt was taking me, but when it came time to enter school, I was returned to my home," he says. According to Kiye's daughter, the situation was quite traumatic. At the time, he seemed to believe himself Kiye's child, and she allowed him to think so. By the time he returned to the Tsushima house, Take was gone as well; from this time on, all intimate connections with the women who had brought him up, sustained him, and loved him were essentially ended. The early essay "My Childhood" reveals only warm memories. It ends: "Even now when I think of my aunt and Take, I love them so much I can hardly bear it." But the confusion of maternal figures remained in the adult Dazai, and there is evidence that the damage wrought by these childhood shifts kept him stopped at a point of being unable to trust the permanence of what should have been the pillars of his existence. Years later, "Recollections" begins and ends with thoughts of his aunt. *Tsugaru* is illuminated with expressions of his love for Take. But no matter how deeply felt the love, traces of the pain of confusion and desertion remain in even these stories. A dream in which his aunt, in her role as mother, casts him away and tells him she hates him occupies a significant position at the beginning of "Recollections." In the reunion with Take after thirty years that provided the source for the much-romanticized conclusion to *Tsugaru*, Dazai is reported to have had only two questions to ask of her: Was he truly one of the Tsushima brothers? and, Was he truly not the child of his aunt? When Take resignedly assured him that, true enough, his aunt had brought him up, but he was without a doubt his mother's child, he seemed, she says, only to half accept her word.⁴

⁴Sōma, *Wakaki hi no Dazai Osamu*, 59.

The destructive rage that is barely contained in Dazai's adult life, self-directed and turned toward the women who get into his hands, both as live companions and as his fictive creations, must surely derive in part from the pain of the bewildered child. Now, such "lending out" of children was not rare in the Tsushima family, nor, for that matter, in Japanese society at large. Dazai's eldest sister lived in the house annex with their grandmother, spending so much time there that Dazai said he thought for some time that she was the grandmother's child. That the system of adoption and flexible family identification must nevertheless cause at least some emotional dislocation, especially when young children are involved, can be surmised by the way it appears in Japanese literature. To the cases of Dazai, where it occurs within the family, and of Shiga, who uses it symbolically in *An'ya kōro* (A Dark Night's Passing), can be added those of Sōseki, whose adoption and subsequent repossession are discussed in his novel *Michikusa* (Grass on the Wayside), and Mishima, who was victim of perhaps the most pathological of such situations.⁵ "Betrayal" Dazai calls it, when he "leaves" Shimeko to die alone in Enoshima, when he "leaves" the communist party. "Betrayal" he calls it when Hatsuyo turns out not to have been a sexual innocent. The betrayed child betrays and is betrayed yet again. And in revenge he punishes himself and them. The sick paralysis of Yōzō in *No Longer Human* when he observes his wife being raped perfectly symbolizes the irresolvable conflict of the child Dazai, who could not vent his rage against the ones he loved and trusted the most, and who betrayed him—except by venting it upon himself.

Father. In "My Childhood" Dazai writes that the one he feared most in the family was his father. "For that reason, I was usually good in his presence. Even though I feared him so much, there were times I really liked him a lot. That was because he often gave me shiny coins or pretty books."⁶ That is the total of what he says. Later, in "Recollections," he emphasizes how little he knew of his father, and how intimidating he was. There, the ominous image of his father, a dark figure standing backlighted in the doorway of the storehouse, and scolding Dazai and his little brother who were playing there, measures vividly for the reader how that figure haunted Dazai's memory. In "Aware ga" (Poor Mosquito), first written in 1929 and later included as part of the short story "Leaves," the young child sees his father "wrestling" with a geisha in a dark corridor, and wonders innocently what she has done to merit such punishment. Seldom in Dazai's writing do we see the child in direct interaction with the father, and yet there is more than a trace of antagonism. Torn from the mother-figure Kiyē and returned to the Tsushima house, where from time to time appeared a powerful male figure unapproachable and capricious, it is no wonder that Dazai, brought up sur-

⁵ See John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974), chap. 1.

⁶ Sōma, *Wakaki hi*, 62.

rounded by women who themselves were to him confusing and insecurely identified sources of support, for the rest of his life found it difficult to identify with a role of nurturance and responsibility. Significantly, Dazai's characterizations of his father largely leave out the traits he seems most to have shared with him: Gen'emon is remembered as expansive, fond of drinking and entertaining, a jokester who liked to make people laugh, extravagant, stubborn, resistant to authority, imaginative, and vain.⁷

In the adolescent "Bottomless Hell," Dazai attempted to deal with these early conflicts and his own developing sexuality. The work is incomplete, consisting only of a fifty-page introduction entitled "The Father's Mistress's House." The hero, Kanji, is seventeen, close to Dazai's age at the time. He is, like Dazai, in the third year of high school, and his problem is that in him flows his father's "degenerate, dissipated, slimy blood." By this time fully aware of his father's roving appetites, which were common knowledge;⁸ driven by his own desires, which fluctuated between pure romantic infatuation and masturbation ("that 'massaging,' " he calls it in "Recollections"); and assailed by the only partly buried childhood conflicts, Dazai could find release by exorcising these evil influences in literature. And the ambivalences toward his father remained in his writing throughout his life. Consider these two passages:

My father was a very busy man and he was not home very often. Even when he was at home, he didn't spend time with us children. I was afraid of him. I wanted his fountain pen, but I couldn't tell him, and I spent a lot of time fretting by myself what to do about it. Finally one night as I lay in bed with my eyes closed, I pretended to be talking in my sleep. I called out low, "Fountain pen . . . the fountain pen," to my father who was in the next room with guests, but of course neither his ears nor his heart seemed to hear. [1: 28.]

Once, the night before he was to leave for Tokyo, he summoned all the children to the parlor and smilingly asked us what present we would like this time, carefully noting each child's reply in a little book. It was most unusual for Father to behave so affectionately with the children.

"How about you, Yōzō?" he asked, but I could only stammer uncertainly. . . .

I remained silent, fidgeting. My father lost a little of his good humor.

"Will it be a book for you? Or how about a mask for the New Year lion dance? . . ."

"A book would be best, I suppose," my brother said seriously.

"Oh?" The pleasure drained from my father's face. He snapped his notebook shut without writing anything.

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

⁷Sōma, *Dazai Osamu to Ibuse Masuji*, 166.

⁸Among the arrangements that had had to be made after Gen'emon's death some four or five years earlier had been the disposition of several mistresses.

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. . . . It was obvious that Father wanted to buy me a mask, and my frantic desire to cater to his wishes and restore his good humor had emboldened me to sneak into the parlor in the dead of night. [9: 372–73; tr. Keene 1958, 29–31.]

The first is from “Recollections,” published in 1933, and the second from *No Longer Human*, published in 1948. The father in each case is unapproachable; if anything, he is even more terrible, vengeful, and capricious in the year of Dazai’s death than he had ever been.

Yet the thinking part of Dazai, as opposed to the feeling part, was fully capable of sympathizing with this stranger father. Even the previously censorious Kanji, in “Bottomless Hell,” learns something about his father after his death:

He found two or three thick Western books on the bookshelf, and he recalled how pompous his father had been, and laughed. Again, he appreciated with some wonder the large number of books about tuberculosis in the bookcase. Kanji remembered that his father’s brothers, younger and older, had all died of TB before him. He was deeply moved when he thought of how constantly his father must have felt that fierce uneasiness, and how he too had died spitting blood.

Now on the second floor of the unpleasantly clammy storehouse hidden in the overgrown garden far from the main house, he read feverishly in the books his father had collected, just as they came to hand. Glancing through one of them, he saw immediately that his father’s painful stubborn persistence in smoking had been meant as a prevention against the TB. [12: 179.]

Nearly twenty years later, Dazai went to Kizukuri to see where his father had grown up. He discovered that the physical layout of the Matsuki house was very similar to that of the Tsushima house in Kanagi that Gen’emon had rebuilt. The incident is recounted in *Tsugaru*, where the son feels a rush of sympathy for his father, adopted as an adult into another family, his old identity as Matsuki Eizaburō erased even in his new name, Tsushima Gen’emon. The man, Dazai realizes, had recreated his childhood home for his new family—and he feels he has “touched on the ‘humanness’ ” of his dead father. In the reflective warmth and gentleness of *Tsugaru*, Dazai seems to come to terms with this unknown and unknowable man. This understanding seems to carry over into Dazai’s final novel, *No Longer Human*. Although at the beginning of the novel the father is a fearsome figure, at the end the son is prostrate with desolation at the father’s death.

What ultimately remained of the confusing emotional relationships Da-

zai experienced as a young child was that questioning of his own parentage. In an essay written on his thirty-first birthday, he wrote:

There was a time in my childhood that I felt I was being unfairly treated, and I got the idea into my head that I was not actually the child of my parents. I felt that I alone, of all my brothers, was being neglected. . . . I pored through various documents in the storehouse, but I could discover nothing. Then I went around secretly asking people who had been with my family for years. They laughed. Everyone knew quite clearly the events of the day I was born at home. It had been in the evening. It had happened in that little room. You were born under the mosquito netting. It was a very easy birth. You were born very quickly. You were a big-nosed baby. They filled me in on various details, and there was nothing I could do but abandon my doubts. [10: 181.]

But doubts this vivid do not fade simply because there is no evidence to support them. After questioning Take in 1944 and getting her reassurances that things were as they seemed, he still resisted. In *Tsugaru* he describes how, as he walked down the road with a child he had never met before, Take's daughter, he felt that "there was now no longer the slightest remains of strangeness between us. How blessed, I thought. I am Take's child. A servant's child—none of that matters. I can say it out loud: I am Take's child. I don't care if my brothers sneer at me. I am this little girl's brother." (7: 149.) On the one hand, he could identify with the directness of emotional expression Take represented: "In touch with her way of expressing love strongly and unreservedly, I thought, Ah, how much like Take I am." On the other, he had to acknowledge that by his own standards, he was a barbarian: "I realized that the reason I alone, of all my brothers and sisters, had a coarse and cruel element within me was the influence of this sad parent who had brought me up. Now for the first time I was made aware clearly of the true nature of my upbringing. I am assuredly not a man of gentle rearing." (7: 154.) The idea that he did not belong in his family was at the same time a comfort and a constant reproach.

The Chosen One

It is a common fantasy of children everywhere that they are stepchildren, or changelings—a fantasy that provides an easy solution to the problem that parental love and attention are neither exclusive nor unlimited. In Dazai's case, there were actually concrete events that clouded the issue, and allowed the fantasy to persist half-believed into adulthood. Deprivation was not the only problem; he was also given certain advantages that, however, only emphasized his feeling of separateness or differentness.

One example is the year Dazai spent at Meiji Upper Elementary School. All the Tsushima boys had gone to grammar school in the village of Kanagi

where, not unexpectedly, given the local prominence of the family, they all did exceptionally well. The eldest continued a solid record, but the next two both quit within two years of starting Hirosaki College. Meiji School was run cooperatively by three other villages plus Kanagi; only the best students went, and there the effect of being a Tsushima child could be diluted. Dazai writes in "Recollections" that he was kept back a year from middle school because of poor health, but his school records show virtually no absences. In fact, Dazai, who had shown much more academic promise than the other children, was probably being given additional preparation for competing in a big-city school. When the time came for college, there were family discussions about whether to send him to Hirosaki, like his brothers, or to Gaku-shūin, the Peers' School in Tokyo, which his father had apparently favored before his death, and where such preparation would have helped him. The resolution to have him go to Hirosaki was based on several factors, among them that he had already been infatuated with a family servant, Miyakoshi Toki, the "Miyō" of "Recollections."⁹ Although that romance had come to nothing, it was decided that his behavior could be better monitored and he could be given more support and guidance if he were closer to home. But after having been singled out to go to Meiji Upper Elementary School, going on to Hirosaki meant, in effect, that he was returning to the family tradition.

From the experience of being different, or separate, from the rest of the family, Dazai gradually developed a concept of his being chosen for a special fate—again, an ambivalent feeling. Favor and punishment, approval and censure, were the two sides of his coin. Early, he felt the awful and inexorable power of fate. A scene in "Recollections" shows him desperately trying as a child to turn aside intimations of damnation, as he plays a divining game Take has taught him; no matter how many times he tries, the outcome seems to destine him for hell. Again, Dazai describes the terror of the first semester at Aomori High School, when it seemed possible that he might fail school. In class, "a hundred invisible enemies" surround him, and he dares not relax. Here, too, he plays at divination. "Every morning before I went to school, I would deal out cards on my desk to divine my fate for the day. Hearts were best, diamonds next, clubs were ominous, and spades meant total disaster. And day after day, only spades came up." (1: 38–39.)

On the negative side were these ominous signs, lent weight by family treatment that made him feel that he was what the hero of *Pandora's Box* calls himself, *yokei mono* ("the extra, unnecessary child"). There was the

⁹Dazai apparently had in mind that he would go to school in Tokyo and she would come secretly to live with him. She rejected the idea and left the family employ, and he went to Hirosaki. See Sōma, *Wakaki hi*, 74–78. Later, Dazai was to carry out the identical plan with Oyama Hatsuho.

recognition, probably first opened to him by the taunts of envious playmates, that his family, no matter how seemingly blessed, was of base peasant origins; its wealth had been built on lending money at high interest rates to unfortunate peasants just like themselves.¹⁰ Out of this predisposition to feel himself unaccountably in the wrong, there grew, during the politically conscious years at Hirosaki College, an idea of the evil of the bourgeoisie—of whom he was inescapably one. And the death of Shimeko at Enoshima, his “desertion” of the communist party, and Hatsuyo’s betrayal finally confirmed to him that he had been chosen for special torment and was worthy of punishment. The decline of his family, starting before the war with charges of voter fraud when his eldest brother ran for the Diet, and continuing after it with the land reform that broke up the base of their wealth, must have made Dazai feel as if his own private infection had now passed to his family.

On the positive side, there was throughout Dazai’s childhood and adolescence the security of his family’s undeniably favored position. There was the political and social prominence of his father, underlined by the exciting and gratifying public response to that father’s death, a response that included special editions of the newspaper, a funeral cortege numbering over a thousand, and a day of mourning in the legislature. There was the special attention, not always welcome, that the children received in school; there were special connections. In defense, Dazai made of his feeling of being apart from the other children something positive: he was different, and that was a good thing. “There was nothing I could do but abandon my doubts,” he concluded in the previously quoted birthday essay. But he continued: “Somehow or other, I was depressed. I was dissatisfied with my ordinariness.” (10: 181.) He continued to fight the idea of ordinariness. And women too threatened to drag him down, he decided in mock despair in “Recollections”:

That night, after I went to bed on the second floor, I thought dismal thoughts. I was tormented by the notion of mediocrity. Ever since the matter of Miyo had come up, I’d been getting crazier and stupider, hadn’t I? Anyone could moon over a woman. But my love was different—how, I couldn’t quite say, but it *was* different. . . . Yet, didn’t every man in love think the same? But—I persisted, suffocating in the smoke of my own cigarettes—in my case, there was a Philosophy! [1: 56.]

And so, pleas to the Fates. Let me become a writer. I must be great. “I had thought that soon I would become distinguished and famous.” (1: 30.) “I believed that I was one of the exempted ones.” (1: 46.) And, perhaps from

¹⁰In that sense, the Tsushima house into which Gen’emon married was less distinguished than his own Matsuki family, which had some pedigree in the area. However, in its exceedingly feudalistic tradition, the Matsuki had no room for male children other than the eldest, the heir. From that perspective, Gen’emon had no future but to marry into another family like the Tsushima that had no male heir.

the same resistance to the threat of mediocrity, the perverse attempts to "settle my own fate" through suicide.

The brothers. But how different was Dazai from his brothers, actually? He himself gives a great deal of evidence that relations between the brothers were quite normal, even close at times. Bunji was eleven years older than Dazai, Eiji eight, Keiji six; and Reiji was three years younger. When their father died, Dazai writes, the twenty-four-year-old Bunji took over like a father. Serious and responsible, Bunji had studied drama at Waseda and had fostered an adolescent interest in literature among his younger brothers; but clearly, he considered this something to be set aside when they reached adulthood. Dazai seems to have reacted to him as to a more accessible father than Gen'emon had been, and even to have taken advantage of Bunji's sense of responsibility toward his brothers. Bunji did do his best to meet the demands of the "wastrel son" during the years Dazai was in and out of university, and also during his illness, addiction, and hospitalization. After that, however, relations between the brothers, as between the family head and the youngest surviving son who has brought shame to the family, were totally severed for a number of years. When, in later years, Dazai again resumed contact with Bunji, it was in a very gingerly fashion. For the year he and his family were evacuees at the Tsugaru homestead, Dazai was conscious as never before of imposing on his brother.

Ibuse Masuji was about the same age as Bunji. In comparing these two adults who expended such effort on the "child" who taxed them so, Dazai reveals the ambivalence he felt about having to be grateful to people who, in some way unknown to himself, had let him down. Both, he said, were "stern taskmasters," and "quite alike in character, too." Nevertheless, he adds, "I was brought up by them. If they were to die, I would surely weep." (8: 216.) Just as Kanji in "Bottomless Hell" begins to feel sympathy for his licentious father, and Dazai in *Tsugaru* attempts to apologize to his father for his lack of memories, so he recognizes the isolation and loneliness of Bunji, left with the responsibility of the whole clan at such an early age. In *Tsugaru*, he realizes that they can never be friends, but at last he silently sympathizes with him over the burden he has had to carry. Bunji was an able man but not, it appears, one blessed with much warmth. Nevertheless, Dazai was shaken to recall him "starting to sob wildly" as he composed a telegram from Tokyo to Kanagi "to tell them at home that Keiji had died at four that morning." (3: 109.)

Eiji apparently complemented his elder brother. As sturdy and outgoing as Bunji was withdrawn, he was his loyal second in command and helped spread his burden when their father died. Dazai felt closer to Eiji, he said, responding to the latter's openness. A recurrent theme in "Recollections" is Dazai's concern about his own ugliness as compared to Keiji and Reiji, the

brothers who bracketed him in age. Eiji is seen as a fellow sufferer in this smoke screen Dazai spread to cover, perhaps even from himself, the deeper insecurity he felt about his position in the family:

He too was abused by the family. I heard my mother and grandmother saying that I was the ugliest boy and he was next, and I thought that maybe he was unpopular because he was unattractive. I remember how he'd mutter to me, in his joking, half-teasing way, "Hey, Osamu, we don't need anything; we only wanted to be born manly." But I never felt that my brother was not good-looking. I also believe he was one of the more intelligent among us brothers. Almost every day he would drink and argue with our grandmother. Each time, I would secretly hate her. [1: 33.]

If he was being rejected (he felt) because he was ugly, then perhaps he could let go of some fears; yet he wanted reassurance that he was not really ugly, after all—and that only reawakened the fears. Dazai reveals his confusion in imputing to Eiji an unattractiveness he does not believe Eiji has. Whatever the reason for Eiji's "unpopularity," it made him an ally, the child felt.

Keiji was a problem. The only "baby boy" (there were two younger girls) until Dazai's birth, he was no doubt put out by the arrival of the new boy. And he was old enough to have his power actually felt by the younger child. Later, however, reconciliation grew between the brothers, aided surely by absence when first Keiji and then Dazai went away to school. Keiji was an attractive boy, and it was this that first aroused Dazai's envy. Later, when he went on to art school in Tokyo, Keiji became almost a model for him. In fact, when Dazai was hesitating over college, Keiji urged him to come to Tokyo to get experience, if he wanted to be a writer. With Bunji's admonition in his ears that he should settle down and study, and Keiji's suggestion that Tokyo was the environment for a writer, Dazai must have been sorely tempted to choose Tokyo. Though he went to college in Hirosaki instead, Dazai did spend vacations in Tokyo with his brother. From vignettes of those days, and of Dazai's first few months in Tokyo, we can imagine what Keiji's influence on Dazai must have been.

Nothing is written about Keiji's childhood experiences, but from the evidence of Dazai's life certain things seem likely. The year after Keiji was born, Tane bore a daughter. Two years later another girl was born and reconstruction of the house begun. It seems unlikely that Tane had any more time or energy for Keiji than she would later have for Dazai. Kiyé's second husband did not die until Keiji was three, and she was probably not well settled in the Tsushima household for another year, so it would appear that there was no such mother-substitute for Keiji as Dazai was to have in their aunt. Then Keiji was going to school; he suffered the indignity of having to withdraw from high school because his grades were inadequate. The portrait of the

Tokyo Keiji that Dazai presents in "Anitachi" (*My Older Brothers*), published in 1940, is one of prolonged adolescence, a sensitive, artistic youth, foppish and emotional—in short, a person very like what Dazai would become, and in this story Dazai indicates, perhaps unconsciously, how much he owed Keiji for the development of his own style. In Keiji there appears to have been none of the political consciousness that exacerbated Dazai's already overloaded condition; moreover, as far as women were concerned, Dazai portrays Keiji as still living more in the realm of fantasy than he was. Whether Dazai would have been the only black sheep in the family, or if the two would have helped each other to weather the storms of their artistically oriented careers, are moot points, because Keiji died suddenly only three months after Dazai began attending university in Tokyo. As Dazai took his place as the family artist, so too he may have lived out Keiji's promise as the family delinquent.

Like Keiji, Reiji was a good-looking child. "I had an unbearable feeling," Dazai wrote in "Recollections," "as if I were being crushed from above and below by the two of them." (1: 33.) As might be expected in a child displaced from the position of youngest by yet another baby, Dazai felt considerable conflict about Reiji. On the one hand, he was Dazai's playmate, the one closest in age—and subject to his power; on the other, he seemed more favored by the family. Not until the two of them were away from home together at school in Aomori did there seem to be a rapprochement. Even then, Dazai says, he prayed at first that Reiji would fail the entrance examination. Although Dazai did not say so directly, Reiji seems to have been a very self-contained child, or at least was perceived as one by Dazai. The scenes between them in "Recollections" show mainly a distracted Dazai and a withdrawn Reiji. And only in "Recollections" did Dazai really deal with him. Elsewhere, in fact, Reiji is conspicuous by his absence. For example, "My Older Brothers" could just as easily have been a story of "Brothers," had Dazai wanted to include Reiji. When he died, a year earlier than Keiji, it was almost as if Dazai could now give vent to what must have been the three-year-old's feelings, and imagine that his younger brother had never existed. He paid his debt to Reiji in "Recollections" for the limited help and comfort he had been in Aomori, and then erased him.

"My Older Brothers" was written in relative tranquility, during the first year of Dazai's marriage to Michiko. Seven years after "Recollections" Dazai had fought a hurricane and had passed through, so it seemed, to the other side. That it was only the eye of the storm, and that he was going to have to fight the winds again and lose, Dazai could not know. All that was sure was that the hellish period in which "Recollections" had been written was over. In that work he had written of events long past, but from the perspective of a recent and current pain. Reiji and Keiji had both died in the recent past,

Dazai's excommunication from the family was still recent history, the Eno-shima suicide attempt was fresh in everyone's memory, his "betrayal" of the communist cause had just occurred, he was still pretending he would graduate (while living in dread that his fraud would be discovered), he was still trying to make a life with Hatsuyo. In short, it is not surprising that "Recollections" is filled with memories of shame and neglect, and even momentary echoes of terror, and that his memories of his brothers are so conflictful, as full of estrangement as reconciliation. Now, seven years later, he was married respectably and was making a modest living with moderate success; he had finally paid off his debts and had started accumulating a tiny but definite margin, the margin he speaks of in "Eight Views of Tokyo" as giving him breathing space. Accordingly, "My Older Brothers" has a gently nostalgic, elegiac tone. Its theme is the pitiableness of brothers fated to be abandoned through their father's death. The author recalls now that his brothers all indulged him and forgave him any insolence. He recognizes in his own blithe existence (though "Recollections" suggests it was anything but blithe) the struggles his brothers must have gone through to preserve their father's political and economic legacy. He is proud that his eldest brother Bunji was town mayor at age twenty-five,¹¹ and youngest legislator in the country by thirty-one. And he is moved by this brother's dark, sad character. He sees him as abused by fate: he wanted to be a playwright, not a politician, and seemed happy only when reading his own plays, with their themes of the sadness of fate, to his younger brothers. Until he entered the prefectural legislature, Bunji was still trying to maintain the literary ties he had had; he was thirty, Dazai says, when he started the journal *Aonbo*, to which all the brothers contributed.

One scene in "My Older Brothers," in which Bunji dictates a story to Dazai, then in high school, calls to mind the loneliness and isolation of Osamu in "Recollections," only now these emotions are ascribed to Bunji:

I remember even now. His hands clasped behind his back, my brother paced slowly up and down the Western-style room on the second floor, looking at the ceiling.

"All right, ready? I'm starting."

"I'm ready."

. . . I was still in high school, but as I took down my brother's reminiscences, I found him terribly sad. No matter what a politically precocious and splendid public figure he cut, no one knew his true loneliness, I thought. [3: 101-2.]

Eiji does not receive in this work the intimate attention Dazai gives him in "Recollections." He emerges simply as Bunji's companion and aide, the "uncle" to Bunji's "father." He and Bunji are given life, however, when Dazai

¹¹In fact, Bunji was twenty-eight or twenty-nine at that point.

remembers them, often drunk after dinner, declaiming together famous passages from their favorite plays. It is Keiji, rather, who occupies the center of attention, as befits his position in Dazai's mind as the man of infinite promise cut off in the full flush of life. Generally an oppressive character in "Recollections," with his attractive bearing and personality an affront to Dazai, Keiji in "My Older Brothers" is a tragic figure, forgiven to the extent that Dazai says he felt pleasure, not jealousy, in looking at his beautiful face. He was a serious person who covered his seriousness with burlesque. He never joined Bunji and Eiji in their drinking, sneered at their recitations, and pretended contempt for Bunji's literary efforts even though, Dazai felt, he understood Bunji's loneliness. Yet Keiji's own writing was not impressive, Dazai says; he wrote strange, languid poetry that seemed to reflect his weak health. He affected a pen name, and was so fond of identifying with French intellectuals that he told whimsical lies to Dazai when the latter came to visit him in Tokyo, pointing out celebrities who weren't and indulging in other games of mystification favored by French *précieux*.¹² Keiji's tone gradually became darker as, Dazai suspects, he began to feel intimations of his approaching death. He developed a foppish practice of Buddhism. He began to work with intensity. He revealed to Dazai one night that he was giving up his affected pseudonym and was going to try to make a success of himself under his own name. Keiji was so serious and intense, Dazai recalls, that he felt like crying. But when Keiji dies, Dazai downplays his own sorrow in order to portray Bunji's reaction as he sends the telegram home.

The impact of "My Older Brothers" lies, naturally, not just in its being a moving account of family relationships, but in what it reveals about Dazai. He balanced and expanded the portraits of his older brothers first drawn in "Recollections." In the course of this task he indicated, perhaps unconsciously, how much he owed Keiji for the development of his own style, and he hinted at the role his surviving brothers continued to play in his life. Touching as his recognition of Bunji's sorrow may be, it is finally Dazai's mourning for a dead past that remains with the reader:

Our eldest brother was already married, and at the time, his little daughter had just been born. When summer vacation came, all the young aunts and uncles came home from their various schools, from Tokyo, from A[omori], from H[irosaki]. We all gathered in one room and made a commotion over our tiny niece, competing with "Here, send her over to her Tokyo uncle," "Pass her to her A[omori] aunt." My older brother [Keiji] would stand a little apart and make fun of our tiny newborn niece: "What's all the fuss—she's still all red. How creepy!" And then, as if he couldn't help it, he would stretch out his arms a little and say, "Come on over to your French uncle." [3: 103-4.]

¹²This calls to mind the games Dazai says in "Recollections" he played on his high school classmates. (1: 49.)

What Dazai lost when, through his own willful actions, he was forbidden access to the Tsushima family, was this vision of family life as an earthly paradise. No matter that the facts may have been different from the story, that the time was over and some of the players were gone; in "My Older Brothers" Dazai reveals that, subjectively, he lived the rest of his life barred from the Garden. Whatever his private concept of the Original Sin he had committed, it kept him indissolubly tied to home, in his mind, lurking about the gates.

A Way Out

Although there is admittedly much that is tentative or speculative in the foregoing description of Dazai's feelings in his early life, the adult author's *literary* reaction to the things he experienced can be known from his works. As suggested in relation to Keiji, perhaps, had his older brother lived, Dazai might not have been the only family catastrophe or there might not have been any catastrophes. It is enough to know that family dynamics and politics in the Japan of the 1920's and 1930's were sufficiently complex to produce disruption in the personality of a child, and man, sensitive to them. Dazai was sensitive enough.

"I discovered a miserable outlet: writing." (4: 45.) Presumably, between 1925, when he first started writing seriously, and 1938, when he made his final, irrevocable commitment to writing as a career, Dazai was trying to find other ways to handle the business of being alive. He did not have much luck. He entered university, a kind of cover-all preparation for—what? Bunji's intention was for Dazai to be prepared for a life similar to Bunji's own: politics, bureaucratic officialdom. But once his left-wing flirtation was past him, Dazai had no interest in politics. He halfheartedly tried to get a job with a newspaper, and failed. It was creative writing that he wanted to do, and, for that matter, that he needed to do. He competed for the Akutagawa Prize—and failed again.¹³ But in the long run he won out. He succeeded as a writer.

Writing eventually came to serve a respectable public function for Dazai. When, he tells us in "Eight Views of Tokyo," he was able to inscribe "Occupation: Writer" in a hotel register, it was a sign that he was a person, an adult, a member of society. He supported his family, he closed his ears to the doubters and mockers or held them off defiantly. For there were critics, of considerably less stature than the Kawabatas and Shigas, who saw his work time and again more as personal indulgence than as serious artistic creation.

¹³In July 1972 Dazai's second daughter, Satoko (today a well-known writer under her pen name Tsushima Yūko), was one of the runners-up for the sixty-seventh Akutagawa Prize with her story "Kitsune o haramu" (Pregnant with a Fox). Perhaps, noted one weekly, she was avenging her father in the final scene of "The Cruel Tale of the Akutagawa Prize."

He opened himself to such attack, for like Christ, to whom he often unashamedly likened himself, he felt it his duty to give of himself to others, perhaps as payment for sins unnamed. That this might even have been a rationalization for an imperative need, personal or artistic, that was beyond his power to deny is beside the point. Dazai knew how to write "fiction"; if he chose to write so much "autobiography," there was a reason.

The hint comes in "Eight Views of Tokyo," in which he explains that he began to write "Recollections" in order to free himself of the weight of the past. The only way to freedom seemed to be death, and "Recollections" was to be his suicide note. But the past was not so simply summed up, and he could not get around to dying for quite some time. Then each succeeding day and week and year added new episodes in that past. With his writing he tried to fix fluid memory, to bring order and form to flowing time; he innocently seemed to believe there was a single, discoverable meaning to all he had experienced and was continuing to feel. Like Cuchulain, hearing in his ear "delusions magical," for years Dazai "fought with the invulnerable tide."¹⁴ And then, in *No Longer Human*, he finally said it all, in such crashing tones that it could never come back to haunt him. But the silence of understanding left after the conclusion of *No Longer Human*—that there were no meanings, only hopelessness—left Dazai nothing more to say. The suicide note was finally done.

After *No Longer Human* there was strength left in him only to begin *Good-bye*, the story of a man's plan to rid himself of the numerous women who had encumbered his life for too long. The strength was gone because the need for exorcism was gone. And the women were too strong, anyway.

The course of the thread that traced through Dazai's writing career, until it ran out in *No Longer Human*, starts with "Recollections," in which he began to discover his life's work.

¹⁴William Butler Yeats, "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea."



Tsushima Gen'emon, Dazai's father.



Tane, Dazai's mother.



The Tsushima house, no longer in the family, is now operated as an inn, the Shayōkan ("The Inn of the Setting Sun").



The Tsushima brothers, about 1926. From left: Keiji, Reiji, Bunji, Shūji (Dazai), Eiji.



High school days (see “Recollections”). From left: Dazai, Reiji, Nakamura Teijirō (the “N” of *Tsugaru*).



Dazai seated with Hatsuyo, recuperating at Numazu in 1932 after he learned the truth of her geisha years. See p. 33. (Standing figure unidentified.)



Wedding portrait, January 8, 1939. Front row, from left: Mrs. Ibuse, Michiko, Dazai, Ibuse Masuji. Back row, center and far right: Nakabata Keikichi, Kita Yoshishirō.



Koshino Take at the Dragon King Shrine in Kodomari. See the conclusion of *Tsugaru*.



Dazai at about the time of writing *The Setting Sun*, 1947.

PART II: THE OSAMU SAGA

3. Childhood and Adolescence

Truly, the joy of being together fades quickly; the grief of parting is deep. It's not too much to say that we generally live in the sentiment of parting.

—Dazai Osamu, Notes on *Good-bye*¹

Why Dazai Osamu wrote is one problem. What he wrote is another. There are fictional novels and stories, such as *Regretful Parting* and “I Accuse,” that are about people and places separate from the author—or so it appears. There is *Tsugaru*, a travelogue with a twist, combining historical documents, anecdotes of the traveler’s experiences, memories of the author’s past, and some creatively embellished if not actually invented episodes, to evoke the total effect that makes *Tsugaru* a special part of Japan. There is *The Setting Sun*, a novel that is clearly fictional, and just as clearly built on the author’s experience; it is also based, at least in part, on a diary kept by the woman on whom the heroine is modeled. And *No Longer Human*, also clearly a novel, is even more closely tied in with the author’s life history.

Still more resistant to classification are several dozen pieces of varying length that seem so close to actual experience that they might almost be autobiography or personal essay, except that they are obviously telling a story—with all the potential deliberate rearranging or distortion of fact that storytelling implies. All of these, from the novel-length *Tsugaru* to the three-page “Goshogawara,” make up what is called here his “autobiographical fiction,” the Osamu Saga. These stories seem to have been closest to his heart; they speak, he says, the deepest truth. Some, like “Recollections,” were so important to him that he quoted them in other pieces, time and time again.

The effect of such blending of facts and their fictional enhancement is to produce a text that seems open to the reader, in the sense that it draws one not into a fictional world, but into the real world of Dazai’s mind, which nevertheless turns out to be not an alien, separate space, but something quite familiar. That is, in reading Dazai one is able, as it were, to write one’s own experience in his mind-space, not simply out of empathy (for often his expe-

¹*Zenshū* 10: 377.

rience is strange and even, on the surface, repellent), but because the boundary of the author's mind is somehow not a barrier. The reader gets to know not just Dazai himself, but what it feels like to be Dazai.² Writing that induces such an effect is not easily classified as fiction or nonfiction.³

Dazai himself did not worry over what genre of fiction he was working in, although he did indicate, in "Fifteen Years," a certain formal understanding (which he never defined) that the short story was a distinct literary type with a long history of its own. To him, in practice, all his stories were simply either *tampen* ("short pieces") or *chōhen* ("long pieces"). Sometimes he added *shōsetsu* ("story" or "novel"). He did, however, draw for himself a firm distinction between fiction and nonfiction, which he called *zuihitsu* ("essay"). Writing of any kind was always painful to him, but writing essays was excruciating.

. . . my mind is not yet in good order, and writing essays is not my line. How impossible . . . to write, "Yesterday I planted a morning glory, ah, what a feeling!" To have each word picked out by a typesetter, edited by an editor . . . to have it come out on a store counter and say over and over for a full month, morning to night, in a corner of the magazine, "I planted a morning glory, I planted a morning glory"—that's totally unbearable. A newspaper lasts only a day, so that's some help. And if it's a story, one has said just what one has wanted to say, so that even if it cries out from the counter for a whole month, one can make the best of it. But I don't have the courage to go on muttering for a month about the feeling of having planted a morning glory. [10: 169–70.]

This says as much about what is in fact demanded of a writer when he is requested to write an essay as it does about the difficulty Dazai had in fulfilling the request. But additionally, he felt compelled to make terribly embarrassing and downright silly revelations in essays—for instance, that he had to "use the dictionary two or three times a page" because his spelling was weak. (10: 188.) To have to make some aesthetic or literary or social or political judgment or expression, as if one knew which side was up and had the power to legislate it, or worse, to have to criticize oneself nakedly without the protection of a story—this was not to his taste. He knew that he lived behind masks, as every man does to some extent, but he also lived in terror of some sort of punishment for the "lies" he lived. His only escape was through the truth; and the only way he could tell the truth was through his *tampen* and *chōhen*. In "Recollections" he discovered the voice; the rest was a matter of developing the vocabulary.

²See my article "'Art Is Me': Dazai Osamu's Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41: 1.

³Mas'ud Zavarzadeh suggests the term "nonfiction novel" to cover works that, like this one, intimately blend the modes of fact and fiction. "A Typology of Prose Narrative," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 3: 72.

A Recreated Past

The discovery had not come easily; he had been writing for ten years by the time *The Final Years*, in which “Recollections” was included, was done. Earlier works such as “Bottomless Hell,” although clearly based on personal experience, are not intimate in the manner of “Recollections.” In other words, they are more fictional—and less successful.

The Final Years is like a Dazai sampler, for nearly every kind of story he was later to develop is found in miniature among its fourteen: the Swiftian satire in “Sarugashima” (Monkey Island), the historical novella in “Chikyū-zu” (Map of the World), and several others. Characters who later became familiar are there in embryonic form: the abused woman, in “Metamorphosis”; the writer inept at the business of living, in “Monkey-Faced Youth”; the con man, in “He Is Not the Man He Used to Be.” And “Recollections.” Even two years after *The Final Years* was published, Dazai revealed how deeply attached to the whole collection he was, so deeply that he feared rebuff. He was both arrogant and timid:

The Final Years is my first collection of stories. I called it *The Final Years* because I thought it would be the only thing I left behind.

There are a couple of stories you might find interesting to read, so when you have free time, do try them.

Your life will not become the slightest bit easier from reading my stories. It will not become exalted at all. It won't become anything. Therefore, I cannot recommend them overly. . . .

What expression does a man wear at the extremity of emotion? Blank. I became a smiling Nō mask. No, I became a cold-blooded owl. There is nothing to fear. All I can say is that at last I too have come to understand the world.

Will you read *The Final Years*? Beauty is not something that can be felt when it is pointed out; it is something you discover. Whether or not you can find beauty in *The Final Years* is up to you. That is the highest right of the reader. And so I don't want to recommend it overly. You can never make a blind lout understand by beating him, after all. [10: 84–85.]

Man in history. In structure, “Recollections” is the model for a number of Dazai's stories. Such stories have an extended introduction, in length typically two-thirds of the story, that sets the psychological scene; a relatively short central section, often (as in “Recollections”) including a confrontation of some sort; and an almost anticlimactic or abrupt commentary on the whole, frequently after a physical break in the narrative.

“Recollections” is more than a structural model, however. It is a biography, but that of a literary character that Dazai made of himself. As such, it also states an intellectual position. Never a philosopher and opposed to philosophizing, Dazai nevertheless expresses an idea of history through the medium of his autobiographical fiction:

I am a writer of the marketplace. What I speak about remains within the purview of the history of the one little individual called “me.” There are those who will grow impatient with me, or denounce me as lazy, or sneer at me as vulgar, perhaps; but in later ages when the time comes to investigate our currents of thought, it may be that these personal fragmentary descriptions of our lives that we are always writing will be more reliable than the writings of so-called historians. [8: 203.]

The Osamu Saga is the proof that Dazai meant what he said. And it is here, at the beginning of his literary journey, that the nature of his achievement begins to emerge. With wit and irony, pathos and bitterness, and, alas, not without bathos and self-pity, he describes the place of a man in history. It is not a philosophy of man against fate, or an aesthetic of man in nature, or a polemic on man’s position as a social animal. It is a simple narrative of a man’s lifetime. If there are lessons in Dazai’s writings, they are taught not through pedantic argumentation but through juxtaposition. While Dazai is a sharp, sensitive, and intelligent observer, he does not intellectualize his perceptions; and readers looking for theories of art or politics or social interaction will be disappointed. In fact, this may partly account for the cooling of interest in Dazai’s writings that frequently occurs among some of his readers as they grow older and become themselves more politicized or socialized. To these readers, Dazai seemed at one time to have had so much to say about guilt and shame, and he seemed so strong in his attacks on conventional society, while being so accessible and readable. Where, then, is the philosophy, the theory, the thought behind these attitudes? There is none. Or at least, none of the tough, rigorous, or tendentious line of argument that is essential to an intellectual work. When an abstraction exists in one of Dazai’s stories, as in “Chansu” (Chance) where the stated theme is that there is no such thing as chance in love, it is nearly irrelevant to the force of the narrative. Most of his stories are intellectually as soft as a sentimental poem. In his youth, he had briefly tried using art politically:

There was something called proletarian literature. When I read it, I would get goose bumps and tears would come to my eyes. I would come up against its impossible, hideous style, and I don’t know why, but I would get goose bumps and tears would come to my eyes. Some comrades told me, “You seem to have literary talent, why don’t you write proletarian literature and give your income from the manuscripts to the party for operating expenses?” I even did try writing under a pseudonym, but as I was writing, tears sprang to my eyes, and it all came to nothing. [8: 208–9.]

It was not exactly art for art’s sake that he was advocating, for such a position leads to the kind of pretentiousness he tried to avoid, but it was definitely not “art for ideology’s sake.” His stories, particularly the ones dealt with

here, are personal; they are rich with the recreation of a private state of mind, a particular emotion, love, or terror—in other words, a slice of the history of a man.

The lost child seeks his way. “Recollections” is Dazai’s first step in the development of his most characteristic autobiographical method of storytelling, a method perfected in *No Longer Human*, where the narrator reveals his desperate need to cling to a hope of self-worth through a statement of seeming worthlessness. It is the humorous story of a lonely, frightened child and awkward adolescent striving to assert a conviction of self-value in the face of bewildering evidence to the contrary. It is told with a tone of almost amused indulgence, as if the narrator were truly an adult looking back affectionately on the child he was; and this is all the more proof of Dazai’s potential as a writer, for the author was anything but calm at the time he wrote it.

The hero, or victim, in “Recollections” is named Osamu. From here on, in contrast to his practice in earlier stories like “Bottomless Hell,” Dazai tends to use his own names (including Shūji) when writing about himself, until he creates a fully fictionalized version of himself in his culminating achievement, *No Longer Human*. “Recollections” does not just tell of Dazai’s experiences; rather, in order to tell a story, it restructures the reality of Dazai’s own childhood. What makes it a story, and distinguishes it for Dazai from all other autobiographies he has read, is that although it has a purpose—to show that “there was a dirty child like this one”—it has no pretentious claim to know causes from effects. Unlike the “thinkers” in “An Almanac of Pain,” whom he indicts for their “pernicious false explanations” invoking dramatic “turning points” as they strive to “connect the spaces between fragments,” Dazai tells a linear, narrative, historical tale as much about his own fragmentary perceptions as about events. In telling this tale, he feels, he produces a greater sense of reality than he could have in a causal account of mere real details. By choosing from among the fragments of his life without the pretense of finding explanatory authority through them, by creating some events that could have happened even if they did not, he not only avoids the risk of distorting the truth, but escapes from the fact/fiction dichotomy altogether. He is no more culpable for “fictions” in his stories than he is able to control “facts” in his life.⁴ His stories show that in his scheme, events just happen, and stories (even ones based on real events) happen as artistic flow demands, not as facts demand. One might ask of an autobiography, But did it *really* happen that way? and accuse the writer of “lying” if he adjusted the facts. In Dazai’s stories, the question is not meaningless, but it is irrelevant. It is enough for him that he should just tell the

⁴Despite his protestations to the contrary, of course, even during his lifetime Dazai was accused by some critics of using his writing as a form of evasive excuse making. But excuses are not explanations.

tale. Events in the Osamu Saga do not explain *why* something happened and what its effects were (which, Dazai felt, is what autobiography does), but only show *that* things happen. Relieved of their explanatory burden, events allow Dazai to create a story, they do not force him into what he felt to be the restrictions of an essay. The stuff of autobiography is unique and limited; the stuff of fiction is inexhaustible.

Although Dazai claims in "Eight Views of Tokyo" that "Recollections" was to be a suicide note, he does not show in it why he was thinking of committing suicide in 1933. In this respect it is quite unlike Akutagawa's famous and carefully reasoned suicide note of 1927; it even stops short of the period of Dazai's first attempt in 1929. Instead, it simply shows a sad, funny, lost child wandering through a brier patch of insecurity, neglect, and rejection; nothing very dramatic, nothing to which one could point and say, "You see? This is where it went wrong." Therefore, Osamu both is and is not Dazai; for this reason, the fine distinction between author and character will be maintained here by calling the first Dazai and the other Osamu. Dazai is writing a story, narrated by Osamu himself, based on the childhood of Tsushima Shūji. Any resemblances to persons living or dead are not coincidental.

Part I of "Recollections" grows like a vine; in other words, each section grows directly from the section before it, extends its own leaves, and gives rise to the next section. "At dusk, I was standing in the entry gate with my aunt," the story begins. The first three memories involve Osamu's aunt: he entertains her with guileful childish innocence; he suffers when others tease her at a family picnic, increasing his own terror; and he has a dream "that my aunt was abandoning me and leaving the house." The dream is vivid and oppressive. "Her bosom completely blocked the wicket gate at the entrance. Sweat dripped down her flushed swollen breasts. She was whispering fiercely, 'I hate you.' I pressed my cheeks to her breasts, weeping and pleading desperately over and over, 'No, don't, please don't.' My aunt shook me awake, and I found that I had been crying in my sleep with my face at her breast. . . . However, I would not tell the dream to my aunt or to anyone." (1: 23.) This "anyone" leads directly to Osamu's parents, with the apology that, in contrast to his aunt, he doesn't remember much of them at that time. The earliest memories selected by Dazai for his narrator Osamu open the story on a note of violence, loneliness, and emotion impossible of expression, all related to his aunt. This next segment, devoted to a catalogue of family members and memories of playing with lots of little girls, is a bland contrast. The muted tone of leaden, rainy skies and the unclarity as to who the girls might have been clear rapidly when "I reach six or seven, [when] my memories grow clearer." (1: 23.)

These are the memories of Take, of learning to read, of having the world

become clear as a result of the kind of mastery available to one when one knows how to read. The “leaves” of this section consist of the effect of Take’s lessons in morality. She showed Osamu the temple scrolls of the torments of hell: “Once she told me, ‘If you tell lies, you’ll go to hell, and your tongue will be pulled out like this by devils,’ ” and Osamu burst out crying. (1: 24.) She continued her disciplinary campaign of terror by teaching the child a method of graveyard divination in which he seemed destined to go to hell, while she was to go to heaven.⁵ The “Taki” portrayed in “Suzumekko” (Little Sparrow), a story in Tsugaru dialect also contained in *The Final Years*, is very like this one—a great favorite of the children, but with a strong streak of maliciousness in her play. Years later, Dazai apotheosizes Take, as a means of dealing with the kind of pain she had caused him. Two scenes, both written in 1944, are nearly identical, although one, showing Dazai and Take in *Tsugaru*, is presented as fact, and the other, in the fairy tale “Shitakiri suzume” (Tongue-Cut Sparrow), from *Fairy Tales*, as fiction:

Wordlessly, she sat bolt upright, her hands solidly placed on her plump trouser-clad knees, avidly watching the children’s race. However, I felt no dissatisfaction. Now I was completely secure. I stretched out my legs and watched the meet, not a concern in my heart. I was in that complete dreamy calm where you feel it doesn’t matter, whatever happens. Is this the feeling they call “peace”? If so, then I can say that, at that moment, my heart was at peace for the first time in my life. [7: 151.]

The sparrow, Oteru, was lying there, under a little red silk coverlet. She was like a beautiful doll . . . her face was somewhat pale. She looked steadily up at the old man, and then large tears fell from her eyes.

The old man sat down cross-legged beside her pillow, and without saying anything, watched the clear stream flowing swiftly through the garden. . . .

There was no need to say anything. The old man breathed a faint sigh. It was not a melancholy sigh. The old man was feeling peace of mind for the first time in his life. That joy transformed itself and appeared as the faint sigh. [7: 366.]

In *Tsugaru*, Take is inarticulate; in *Fairy Tales* the sparrow’s tongue has been cut out. Is it not possible that while paying homage to Take for the peace she brings him many years later, Dazai is also wreaking revenge on her for the punishment she predicted for young Osamu, “Your tongue will be pulled out by devils”?

At any rate, when Osamu enters grammar school, his memories “take a drastic change.” Take disappears, and so does his aunt. Although he does not comment on it, Dazai shows that school, for the young child, means loss, or going away, or both. And, Osamu says several times in the course of

⁵It depended on how one spun an iron wheel hung in a slotted groove in some grave markers. Perhaps there was a trick to spinning the wheel that she did not teach the child; there seems to have been enough innocent cruelty in Take to have tarnished her halo somewhat.

“Recollections,” more and more he came to hate school. He lost Take and his aunt; he had to leave home for high school; he had to leave the town he had grown used to in high school for college.

Later, in “Eight Views of Tokyo,” he would recount how he had to leave Tsugaru to attend university; and in a sense, going to university was the occasion for his being expelled from the family. In “Recollections,” however, reaching school age means to Osamu first, loss of “his” women, and second, loss of innocence. He was of an age where his brother’s nursemaid could teach him about sex. Sex leads to lying, first by the maid, and then by Osamu himself; and lying, of course, has associations with damnation for Osamu. Since the progression, nearly paragraph by paragraph, from the discovery of sex to telling lies to writing, is such a significant one, it merits closer attention. In “Recollections” the narrator Osamu skips lightly from recounting sometimes quite terrible things to, at other times, sad or touching things. The steady movement of part I with the topic, or sometimes just the last line, of the previous paragraph introducing the new subject of the next, leaves no room for tendentious intellectualizing on the part of the narrator. But the author, by his very juxtaposition of material, is clearly conveying the significance it has to him.

To the author, male-female sex has overtones of terror and violence that are barely contained. Incest-rape in the early “Metamorphosis,” from *The Final Years*; the animalistic coupling of the rape in *No Longer Human*; the near rape (“near” in the sense that Kazuko has changed her mind about taking Uehara as a lover, and yet she accepts his pathetic assault) in *The Setting Sun*; the threat of assault in “Asa” (Morning)—these are all typical of Dazai’s portrayals of sexual relations between men and women. Such scenes are not present for sensationalism, and they are depicted with great reticence and control; their significance lies in the feelings aroused in the victims or outside observers, not in the reader. The author seems not to identify with the assailants, or at least he seems to deny any complicity; scarcely ever does he present that perspective. The sexual molestation of the child Osamu in “Recollections” might almost be both model and explanation for the author’s identifying with the victim:

Once I entered school, I was no longer a child. The weeds grew thick around an abandoned house behind ours. One beautiful summer day, on that grassy plot, my younger brother’s nursemaid taught me something that made me gasp for breath. I was about eight, and I suppose that at the time she could not have been more than fourteen or fifteen. In my part of the country we call clover *bogusa*. She sent off my brother, who was three years younger than I, telling him to “go look for four-leaf *bogusa*,” and then she grabbed me in her arms and rolled around with me. From then on we would hide, in the storehouse or in a closet, and play. My little brother was a terrible obstacle. Once we were even found out by my next

older brother. My little brother had been left alone outside the closet, and he stood there crying. He told on us to my next older brother, who opened the closet door. The nursemaid told him blandly, "We dropped some money in the closet." [1: 25-26.]

The thing he learned made the boy "gasp for breath"; the girl was the aggressor, and quite calm about the whole thing.

Dazai says nothing overt in this passage. But short and elliptical as it is, it reveals a great deal. There is no literary necessity for an explanation of the Tsugaru dialect for "clover," but it does serve to underline this as an event or circumstance that has special meaning to the author. Only in one other instance in "Recollections" does he use and explain special vocabulary: when he draws the distinction between his aunt, whom he calls "Gacha," and his mother, whom he calls "Ogasa." Now this event too is significant to the young Osamu, since he is "no longer a child."

But if the aggression of the girl-woman is shocking to Osamu, Dazai attaches no such feelings to Osamu's discovery of his own maturing physical urges. What is special about Dazai's portrayal of this dimension of adolescence is the naturalness and even humor with which he shows Osamu's nervousness and despair over his demanding and (so he thinks) precocious sexuality. It is with a tone of nostalgia that he recounts the times Osamu ducked out of school with his friends, and how the boys headed for a pond around which they sat while they talked about girls and amused themselves by comparing their newly emergent pubic hairs. He speaks with sympathy about the agony Osamu felt over his adolescent acne, which, he felt sure, was a public sign of his secret vice, masturbation. The author is quite open about this habit, in fact, and although the scene appears in the context of Osamu's inability to feel close to his mother, the author is almost lighthearted about her near discovery of it. Osamu and his mother are sleeping in the same room, and when she notices his quilt moving and asks him what he is doing, he is "terribly flustered" and tells her, "My hip hurts and I'm massaging it." She answers, "Well, rubbing it is good for it, just pound on it a little." And so he does: "Silently, I stroked my hip for a while." (1: 28.) Osamu does not seem upset that "two servant boys had taught me to do [that] thing." He clearly finds his mother's innocent comment very funny, and refers from time to time during his story to "that 'massaging,' " as he euphemistically calls it, as being a regular part of his adolescent life. But the thing his brother's nursemaid taught him was another matter. If this episode does in fact represent Dazai's experience, it was not a promising beginning to his relations with women, and may have created one of the demonic images that haunted his entire writing career. *No Longer Human* ends with Yōzō being periodically molested by his aged caretaker. In Dazai's writings, sex between men and women remains fearsome and defiling, if also necessary.

For the moment, Osamu can say nothing direct about this “suffocating” event, but he can indicate his feelings indirectly. “We dropped some money in the closet,” the young maid says, ending the paragraph. “I too was constantly telling lies,” Osamu continues in the next paragraph. The abrupt switch of subject, with its bridging “too,” performs a triple function. It furthers the story’s organic growth, by which each new part develops from the old. It implicates Osamu with the maid in the fearsomeness of this thing she taught him, for lying has already been shown to have implications of damnation for the child. But it also removes him to relative safety, for the “lies” that he subsequently presents as evidence only present an even more sympathetic portrait of a lonely, sad, secretive child.

The lies are scarcely vicious ones. He tells his teacher at school that he is wanted at home to help with the Doll Festival decorations; at home he announces there was no school because of the holiday, and lends his “unneeded help.” He has a secret collection of bird’s eggs, of which, however, his older brother is aware. Also knowing that Osamu barter away his books for unusual eggs, the brother teases him by asking to see a book he knows is now gone. Osamu insists stoutly that it must be somewhere in the house, even though it is in fact gone. “I even went so far as to clamber up to look on top of the kitchen cupboard.” (1: 26.)

There is no transition when Dazai goes on in the next paragraph to talk about the school compositions Osamu wrote. They too are “lies.” He plagiarized—from boys’ magazines, from his older sister’s compositions. But, more significantly, “I strove to make myself out as a marvelously good child.” When he told the truth, though, he got into trouble. He describes his teachers’ persecution when he dared suggest that all men are equal. Dazai quoted this passage years later in “An Almanac of Pain” as evidence of youthful democratic ideals, but in “Recollections” the emphasis is on the child’s apperception that if he lies, he receives applause, but if he tells the truth, he is persecuted. In *The Setting Sun*, Naoji echoes the child’s pain and bewilderment, but with the added bitterness of a man who has learned that the world has no applause for him at all:

When I pretended to be precocious, people started the rumor that I was precocious. When I acted like 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. [9: 53–54; tr. Keene 1956, 66–67.]

Like Thomas Mann’s Felix Krull, Naoji is a kind of confidence man, pretending most of his life; the child Osamu still tells the truth sometimes, but he is

learning what Naoji knows: truth makes one too vulnerable, the audience only mocks and scourges. And Ōba Yōzō in *No Longer Human* is so hypersensitive that, in his inability to understand the easy social lying that makes for so-called good interpersonal relations, he ends up classifying himself as mad.

This problem obviously is crucial to Dazai's explanation to himself of why he was writing. His whole life, he says in the several volumes of the Osamu Saga, was an act, a "pretending," a cover-up of the truth. Yet he *had* to tell the truth, had to make manifest his "stupid, secret effort," for the child always seeks approval (a constant theme in "Recollections"), and although ninety-nine men mock, there is always the chance the hundredth might understand one's need. Yet at the same time, to protect himself, he had to keep up the shield that he was only pretending. The potential penalties for having oneself believed are shown in stories like "Haji" (Shame), published in 1942, where a reader who has believed the author's pose of decadence and ill health is dismayed and embarrassed to discover that he actually lives quite conventionally and is quite well, when she has made a special effort to look ugly to set him at ease. Neither of these portraits of the artist in "Shame" is totally Dazai, but the author worked hard all his career to perfect his make-believe, the "Flower of Buffoonery" (Dōke no hana) that is the title of another of his stories. Eventually, Dazai's weariness with the game of "he thinks that I think that he thinks that I think . . ." was several layers deeper than Naoji's, even, and Naoji himself ended the game with suicide. So clearly the narrative progression of the child Osamu from sex to writing through lying was a significant one for the author. Probably without realizing it himself, the young writer Dazai here outlined the conflict that was to draw his life and career together for the next fifteen years.

The child continues his story without a pause, though. From lying in writing to "inadvertently groaning" because he has not yet learned to mask his truth, he goes on to discuss his father, again a natural if abrupt transition. "Are we your father's equals?" an interrogating teacher asks. The child is stumped for an answer, and turns instead to explaining to us what his relation with his father was. The example of how Osamu attempted to communicate his desire for the father's fountain pen to this father he feared has been cited already, with its parallel in *No Longer Human*; here I need point out only that this scene in an early work is accordingly a seed that flowers in a later work, as do other scenes from "Recollections."

From father to mother (and the masturbation scene); from mother to attire. "I paid great attention to dress from an early age." (1: 29.) "Oshare dōji" (The Stylish Child), published in 1939, six years after "Recollections," focuses on this aspect of the child Osamu. "I liked white flannel shirts," he says in "Recollections." The third-person narration of "The Stylish Child"

elucidates: “the whiteness of the shirt sinks into one’s eyes, and how spotless one appears, like an angel.” (3: 45.) Clearly, this is the angel one is finally adjudged to be at the end of *No Longer Human!* The import of the concern for attire as shown in “Recollections” is that a secret fashionableness was both an immediate emotional outlet for the lonely child, and a chance to try out new poses. The narrator uses it as a springboard to point out the gap between his own defensively positive image of himself, and the negative response he got from his family. This is one of the refrains in “Recollections”: “my family said that of all the children, I was the ugliest. . . . When we boys sat together at the table, my grandmother and mother often talked seriously of how unattractive I was . . . I had heard my mother and grandmother saying that I was the ugliest boy.” (1: 29.) “My sister [said] there might not be anyone who would marry me.” (1: 47.) In “The Stylish Child” the loneliness is emphasized, as well as the ludicrousness of the effects the now adolescent youth was trying to achieve in the name of “style.” This story begins when the youth has left home for high school, after the death of his father, and carries him through university in Tokyo to his betrayal of the leftist cause and of his mistress. By the end, he has traded the “dark ages of style” for the “dark ages of the soul.”

From attire to grandmother, to the theater in traveling troupes and amateur theatricals, to insomnia, to sounds, to a description of his brothers, to his sisters . . . Osamu’s narrative in “Recollections” goes on, drawing diverse items, seemingly on the spur of the moment, into a unified and well-constructed whole. Part I, nearly half the whole story, ends eventfully with the excitement of Osamu’s father’s funeral. Thematically, however, this ending also outlines the two elements that fill much of the second and third parts: sexual desire and romance, and the terror of school, as Osamu takes his high school entrance examinations.

Love found. Time both tightens up and opens out in the latter half of “Recollections.” Part I has taken Osamu from infancy to age thirteen; part II covers three years of high school; and part III deals with Osamu’s awkward pursuit and loss of the maid Miyo during his fourth year of high school. And yet neither pacing nor tone changes particularly in the latter parts. It is with the same almost bemused attitude of part I that they continue. Now that Osamu has found his topic, the entrance of a child into the cares and confusions of the eventual adult, he jumps no longer from subject to subject; but here too, although turbulent emotions are present, they are not expressed turbulently. In this respect, “Recollections” and the rest of the stories that make up *The Final Years* are truly youthful works. That is, Dazai was gaining artistic strength and control; his personal life had not yet entered into the total desperation that followed “Recollections,” in which events in real life would affect even his writing style. Although “Recollections” was

written at a time when Dazai was passing through very hard times, and was intended, he said later, as a suicide note, it has a surprisingly undespairing tone, even light in places. It is, of course, not a happy story; but both nostalgia and irony show that Dazai, while yet not denying the past, had discovered how to distance himself from events through art.

Part II of "Recollections" shows the sorting out of Osamu's world into its various spheres—public, familial, private, and personal or secret. In the public sphere, Osamu sees the excitement and promise of "going away to school" fade into fear, and then boredom and disgust. He faces (justified) persecution from teachers, especially ones who had seemed sympathetic to him at first, when the clowning that had been overlooked in the local grammar school is now punished. No longer does he make public those seditious intuitions about the equality (or inferiority) of those who are supposed to be his superiors, but he makes his observations to his readers: when he is punished for his prodigious yawns in class, and later hears that these yawns are famous in the teachers' lounge, he begins to wonder how mediocre the teachers must be if "such a dumb thing should be a topic of conversation" among them. Teachers ordered their classes to take full lecture notes, but Osamu soon discovered the lectures were "like reading the textbook," so he began to copy out portions of the textbook into his notes. Through the first years of high school, although he got over his initial terror of failing, he did not slack off, but continued to study to remain ahead of the mob. Yet he managed to retain his classmates' goodwill.

Nevertheless, it was his classmates' sports fever that was another cause of the intolerability of school.

There was the cheerleader, who was deliberately disgusting and sloppy and carried a Rising Sun fan; he would climb a little hill in a corner of the schoolyard to harangue us, and the students would delightedly call out "Pig!" and "Slob!" Throughout the game at odd moments the cheerleader would flap his fan and shout, "O—*ru sutando appu* [All stand up]!" We would all stand and wave little purple pennants all together, singing our fight song: "They're good fighting men, but we're even better." I was so embarrassed, I would watch for my chance to escape and go home. [I: 41.]

Similarly, in "An Almanac of Pain," Dazai finds the efforts of the militarists during the war to promote interest in patriotic songs as disgusting as the cheerleader's attempt to get up school spirit; and he ascribes the lack of popularity of these songs to a similar feeling on the part of the populace: "it seems that people were too embarrassed to sing [them]." (8: 211.)

It was really behavior, however, and not academic weakness that early threatened to swamp Osamu's just-launched school career. One day, "a fellow student from my village . . . called me into the shadow of a sand dune in

the schoolyard and warned me that my attitude really did look provocative, and if I went on . . . like that, I'd fail for sure." Osamu is terrified. "After class let out that day, I hurried home alone by the seashore. I sighed as I walked on . . . I wiped the sweat from my forehead. . . ." (1: 38).⁶ Osamu realizes he will have no refuge at all from the scorn of his family—scorn that he has already drawn, he feels, for his awkwardness as a child—if he also fails school.⁷ Fortunately, the problem reaches a temporary solution when the first semester grades come out and he is third in the class, with an A in deportment. He is ecstatic.

Osamu's eldest brother, however, fails to realize that only the fear of being ordinary is keeping Osamu at his books, and the two very nearly clash over a literary review that Osamu begins when his younger brother comes to join him in high school. The eldest brother feels it will interfere with Osamu's studies. But more, he seems to feel it inappropriate: Osamu is too young to know anything. Osamu agrees with him that in general, one does need a certain amount of age and experience to understand literature, but he feels he is a special case.

This, in brief, is the struggle Dazai himself faced as a writer. He had served no apprenticeship, and had been slow to make important contacts, both considered necessary by the establishment. All he had was a desire to be a writer, and a conviction of his own specialness. Ibuse Masuji was skeptical of his early success; his brother, who had started family magazines when he was younger (but perhaps that was child's entertainment, not worthy of a man?) never did accept his talent.

Young Osamu in "Recollections" is full of confidence, however, for he has recently discovered his desire and need to write. "I believe in everything you say," he answers his brother. "I am fortunate to have such a splendid brother; however, do not worry that I am letting up on my studies because of writing—in fact, I am studying all the more because of it." (1: 46.) If the public sphere begins to reveal its limitations to Osamu, nevertheless the family scene is characterized by reconciliations. In the matter of writing versus studying, Osamu reaches a standoff with his eldest brother; but with the brothers immediately above and below him, between whom he had felt he was being crushed, he reaches an even more positive accommodation.

The return home for summer vacation after the first semester of high

⁶ That sand dune cast a considerable shadow. In addition to its presence in "Recollections," it appears in a different context in "The 'Flower' of Buffoonery," where a young classmate avidly watches his hero, named Ōba Yōzō (as in *No Longer Human*) pacing back and forth in the shadow of the dune, an admirable figure of solitude. The sandy schoolyard in which Takeichi penetrates Yōzō's buffoonery in *No Longer Human* is surely the same one.

⁷ Of course, the author himself was under similar pressure while he was in the process of writing "Recollections"—pressure, that is, not to reveal that he was failing university. A few years earlier, that same pressure had been enough to prompt a suicide attempt; and it would again, a few years hence.

school is a triumphal trip for Osamu. Now he can tell his younger brother extravagant tales of the outside world; now he can compete with his next older brother as a fellow denizen of that world. His little brother serves as equipment bearer as he wanders the hills collecting insects for his summer project; his older brother sculpts while he does watercolor sketches to fulfill another summer assignment. And this older brother, who had so often tormented Osamu in the past, makes the gesture of friendship:

One night he came to where I was sleeping and whispered, "Hey, Osamu, I have a marvelous bug for you." He squatted down and slipped something lightly wrapped in tissue paper under the mosquito netting. He knew that I was collecting unusual insects. I could hear the dry sound of insect legs scratching inside the package. That faint noise revealed brotherly love to me. As I roughly undid the paper, my brother cried out as if he couldn't breathe, "Watch it, watch it, he'll get away!" It turned out to be an ordinary beetle, but I included it anyway as one of my "ten unusual insects" and submitted it to my teacher. [1: 40.]

As for his younger brother, it is another couple of years before he is old enough to become a proper companion, when he comes to join Osamu away from home at school. What draws them together then are the magazine they start during summer vacation, their distance from home, and Osamu's unfortunate complexion. Osamu has been going to pharmacies, pretending he is shopping for someone else, to buy skin remedies. But now this same brother for whose failure in the school entrance exam Osamu had prayed is willing to go out and buy the ointments and potions for him. Dazai's actual younger brother Reiji died not long after graduating from high school, and there is something subdued and gentle about Osamu's description of his younger brother in "Recollections":

... I slowly began to understand how good-natured he was. As he grew older, he became quiet and introspective. He sometimes wrote short pieces for our little journal, too, but his style was timid. It was painful to him that his school record was not as good as mine, and if I dared sympathize, he became even more unhappy. And he found it infuriating that his hair grew into a widow's peak, like a girl's. He firmly believed that it was because his forehead was narrow that he was so stupid. I let him get away with anything. [1: 47.]

They come closest to each other during their long talks. Part II draws to a close, and hints at the subject of part III, with a discussion about the "invisible red string" that, a teacher had told them, is attached to the little toe of every boy's right foot. The string, "after much twining and stretching," is sure to be found attached to the same toe of some girl, who is fated to become that boy's bride.

The subject interests them both, but especially Osamu. By now he has had a couple of experiences of being in love, or at least, "in like." One was with a "small, dark boy" in his class, a simple high school crush that the two shared

secretly but scarcely acknowledged. The boy gave Osamu a newt, and Osamu, who hated newts, accepted it as if he were delighted. The other was a more difficult problem for the awkward boy. He had become self-consciously aware of a thin schoolgirl who lived next door. Osamu showed his interest in her by abruptly turning away every time he saw her on the street. A fire at a nearby shrine one autumn night gave them the ultimate romantic opportunity: she stood at her gate in her nightgown looking in his direction at the fire, and he turned his profile to her and watched the flames, sure that he must appear beautiful, bathed in the flickering red glow.

His loves, and his inability to express them, help make clear to Osamu the split between his inner and outer worlds. Or rather, he becomes aware that there is something private within him that he has yet to learn how to express; that he is not simply subject to the whims and cruelties of others, but that he is also an actor. The privateness of sex, the fact that he has secret desires, gives him an intimation, but he now begins to find the words to say what he intuited. He practices sports alone in an attempt to clear his complexion, swimming with his head stretched up "like a turtle" to get it even a little closer to the sun to be tanned quickly. He makes a running course in a cemetery, and rests between laps by wandering around reading grave markers. Politics becomes handmaiden to health as he "democratically" helps the servants in the fields, hoping this exercise will aid his face. He sits alone with a hand mirror and tries out expressions to make people laugh. He carves a pair of lips on his desk and kisses them, but they frighten him and he scratches them out. Lonely, he goes to bookstores and finds solace as he stands before the shelves, reading idly. And then he awakes from self-consciousness to consciousness:

One spring morning on the way to school, when I was in the third year of high school, I stood bemusedly for a while leaning against the round railing of a crimson-painted bridge. A broad river, like the Sumida, flowed lazily beneath. I had never before had quite such an experience of total abstraction. I was otherwise always constructing attitudes, as if someone were watching me from behind, giving a running commentary on my every slightest behavior—"He gazed perplexedly at his hands," "He muttered to himself, scratching behind his ear"—and so for me to act suddenly or unconsciously had been quite impossible. When I awoke from my spell on the bridge, I found myself racked with loneliness. With that emotion, I thought about my past and the future. I remembered many things as I crossed the clattery bridge, and again I was lost in reverie. Finally, I heaved a sigh and thought, I wonder if I will ever amount to anything special. Thinking about the consequences of such a desire brought confusion to my heart. I was never satisfied with anything, and so I was always struggling in vain. I wore layers of masks, ten—no, twenty deep. Not even I could penetrate to know which one was how unhappy. And then I discovered one poor outlet after all: writing. Here, it seemed to me, there were dozens of creatures just like me, all of them subject to

the same unfathomable shudders. Oh, that I might become a writer, I secretly prayed. [I: 86.]

That summer he begins the magazine with his younger brother, and draws the disapproval of his eldest one. But he is in a world of literature, and romance of his own making, now that he has found the secret of creating plots. Miyo becomes his first heroine.

"This was the only thing I hid even from my brother." When they had talked about the "red string," Osamu had not been particularly communicative. He already had someone special in mind, one of the maids at the family home. During summer vacation, he had developed the habit of smoking secretly before going to bed while he thought about such things as the "beginnings of novels." She shared the secret of that vice, as it was she who straightened up the room mornings.

Already aware of her, Osamu is open to these suggestions of shared secrets when another romantic opportunity occurs. Osamu and his brother refuse one summer evening to participate in a rural entertainment to which the servants have gone; instead, the boys gather fireflies. Later that night, after her return, Miyo sets up the mosquito netting around the beds, and the boys let loose the fireflies inside it. Miyo sits in the dark with them, quietly watching the glowing insects, she outside the netting, the boys inside. "I lay next to my brother, very much more conscious of Miyo's faint white body than of the fireflies' bluish light." They chat idly, but Osamu feels uneasy and out of sorts.

Ever sensitive to things seen indistinctly or distantly in the dark of night, Osamu would naturally have been quick to respond to the potential of this situation in which he feels himself drawn to Miyo, now tied to him with the "red string." Earlier in "Recollections" Osamu has recalled a nighttime scene he came across as a child, wandering the dark corridors of the house late at night, a scene that only heightened his nervous insomnia. A young student, all alone in the office where he served the family as an office assistant, was projecting moving pictures on the sliding door of the room. There was nothing special about the movie; it was a nature film about polar bears. But the child Osamu already understood loneliness, and was shaken by this discovery that it existed in others. Now, infatuated with Miyo, and open to new worlds of imagination, Osamu discovers new sources of unease in another night scene.

In "Leaves," another story from *The Final Years*, the narrator quotes in its entirety the story "Poor Mosquito" that Dazai had earlier published in the Hirosaki College newspaper. Here too the crucial incident, or image, is something the narrator has seen faintly at night—a ghost or apparition, certainly not a dream, he says. The story itself is "an important key for unraveling the chaos of his life." Here is the central scene:

Yes, it was that night I saw the ghost. I awoke suddenly and called out, "Wee-wee." There was no answer from my grandmother, and so I looked around sleepily, but she wasn't anywhere. Feeling quite forlorn, I got out of bed quietly and headed fearfully down the long black gleaming hallway toward the toilet. The bottoms of my feet were terribly icy, I was still half-asleep, and it was just like floating or swimming through a mist. That was the moment—I saw the ghost. It was all the way down at one end of the long, long corridor, crouching white, all alone, and it was tiny, like a film, since I was seeing it from some distance. But I was quite, quite sure that it was peeking into the room where my elder sister slept that night with her new husband. A ghost—no, it was not a dream. [1: 10.]

The implication is that this tiny white "ghost" is the naked figure of the child's grandmother, crouching in the dark hall and peeking into the nuptial chamber of the child's just-married sister. The grandmother has previously been depicted as a strong, vital, attractive woman, who would warm the child's feet by holding them between her legs as they slept together. But the adult narrator tells the story totally from the perspective of the four-year-old, who is innocently unaware of the significance of all his sharp eyes see. His father, "wrestling" with a geisha in a secluded corner of the house, the "ghost" crouching outside his sister's bedroom—all this is curious, even frightening, but not comprehensible to the child. So too with Miyo: her faintly seen body in the dark outside the mosquito netting arouses in Osamu a feeling of experience beyond his immediate ability to comprehend, and it makes him feel uneasy; but this time, Dazai decides that Osamu is old enough to do something about it.

It was not exactly sexual pursuit that Dazai meant as the new experience for this young hero that was himself, for the youth remains mightily free of that nastiness that so disturbed him as a child. Now, when Osamu masturbates, he must put all thought of Miyo out of his mind, for he "did not want to defile her." The youth in "The Stylish Child" or "Chance" is impervious to the charms of women; the narrator in "Eight Views of Tokyo" maintains that he had not known H carnally until she came to live with him in Tokyo, even though she was a geisha and they had kept company for several years. No, what Osamu feels about Miyo is a combination of spontaneous romantic infatuation and a consciously indulged and cultivated feeling that is one of his first works of art. It is the awakening of the writer. Or at least, that is its significance to us. In part III of "Recollections" Osamu is simply engrossed in telling us the course of his one-sided romance with Miyo.

Love lost. It is told well, the conclusion of this story that seems to end in the present. It is told by the writer that Osamu became; in fact, it ends far from the present. In actual time, "Recollections" goes only to the end of high school in Aomori, and does not even hint at the true sorrows Osamu will face at college in Hirosaki. But it does succeed in building background from

which we readers should be able to sympathize with the hero's later, inevitable disasters. He is too simple, too lonely, too defensive, and too poorly defended ever to survive unscathed.

This last section covers some nine or ten months, from the beginning of Osamu's fourth and final year in high school to the winter vacation of that year. By itself, with only a little rearrangement, it would be a self-sufficient story of an adolescent (although Osamu is eighteen, he is still very young for his years) in the throes of his first romance, which is complicated by social class considerations and a romanticism enhanced by reading:

I read a famous long Russian novel . . . an account of the life of a woman convict. The first step in her downfall had been when she was seduced by an aristocratic university student who was the nephew of her employers. I . . . put a marker of pressed leaves at the page where the two exchanged their first kiss under the wildly blooming lilacs. . . . The conviction that those two resembled Miyo and myself oppressed me. If only I were more aggressive, then I would be just like that aristocrat! [1: 50.]

It is typical of him that the fate of the heroine of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (the novel in question) should escape his consideration; rather, it is the tragic figure of the hero that catches his attention. From the start, the matter of Miyo offers Osamu that chance to be great or famous or at least unusual that he so seeks as an escape from his family's neglect. His "cowardice," as he calls his narrowness of spirit, has made his life too flat, he feels. Now he sees the chance to become "a brilliant sufferer." Not until later does the obverse occur to him: that falling in love makes him common and mediocre, as narrow-spirited and banal as any other man. For the time being, he carries the secret of his interest in Miyo in his heart, as if it were the plot of a novel he is hatching. Even when, eventually, he reveals it to his younger brother and his two closest schoolmates, he still does not make clear the extent of his preoccupation. He invites these two friends to his home for summer vacation, ostensibly so that they can study for college entrance examinations together, but actually so that they can see Miyo.

Dazai's sympathy for his hero makes him describe in very humorous but touching terms the torment of the young boy in his on-again, off-again romance. The youth is ambivalent about leaving the freedom of boyhood. He is in despair when, suspecting his brother also has designs on Miyo, he finds that his "luxuriant white lilacs [have] been splashed with mud"—a catastrophe all the more painful because the "villain" is a close relative.⁸ He weighs Miyo's reception of his totally uncommunicated intentions by the amount of cool air she sends toward each of the boys as she fans them at lunch. "She

⁸With uncanny prescience, Dazai here describes in miniature the situation that would occur five years later when Hatsuyo betrayed him with someone he had cared for.

fanned much more in my brother's direction. Despair hit me, and I dropped my fork on the plate of cutlets with a clatter." He is overjoyed when she hides the remains of a pack of cigarettes he has left behind, so he will not get caught; maybe it is he whom she loves after all! In every case, Osamu is capable only of seeing the situation from his own perspective. That Miyo may not have reciprocated the feelings of either brother—if indeed Osamu's brother is even involved—seems likely to the reader, but not to Osamu. When he gives her any number of opportunities to declare herself to him, and she shows no interest or inclination, he is not daunted, but only stirred to greater efforts.

But while his imaginative attention is caught by Miyo, the major part of Osamu's life continues to be tied up with his brother and friends. They lark together all the summer during which they should be studying, and in the fall, every weekend, they join Osamu's mother and sister at a hot spring where the girl is convalescing. The boys spend idyllic days out by the ocean.

Every time they came, we would go on a picnic. On the broad rocks by the seashore, we would make stews and drink wine. My brother had a good voice and knew many of the new songs, so we had him teach them to us, and we would all sing together. Tired out from our pleasures, we would fall asleep on the rocks; when we awoke, the rocks which had been a part of the shore would have become separate islands in the incoming tide. We felt as if we had not yet awakened from our dreams. [1: 54.]

In a sense, they truly have not yet awakened. And then a semipolitical incident at school shows Osamu how dependent he is on his friends' company and, ultimately, how alone he is. One day Osamu is punished by a teacher for something he has done out of "accidental chivalry." His friends rally to his support after school, when all the fourth-year students gather and angrily debate "purging" the teacher. Osamu is appalled when some students begin calling for a strike, and he circulates through the crowd trying to call them off. "I don't bear the teacher a grudge, it was just a simple little incident," he tells them. And they turn on him, calling him selfish and a coward. He feels stricken, and leaves them immediately, returning to his mother's rented house at the hot spring. He sits alone in the bath, thinking and muttering to himself as he scoops up water in his hand and lets it trickle out.

The teacher apologizes, and Osamu is, on the surface, reconciled with his friends. But, he says, "the crisis darkened me." Aware now of his true loneliness, he attempts to bury it by becoming frantic to see Miyo.⁹ He finds a pretext to visit the family home, and there he ponders his situation. Tor-

⁹"It reached the point that I even thought if I didn't see her, I would slide straight into decadence." (1: 55.) This is of course precisely what happened with Hatsuyo: when she was taken away from him, he drank for several days and then attempted suicide with another woman.

mented by the notion of mediocrity, which is the prospect that opens before him when he thinks of the commonness and stupidity of “mooning” over a woman, Osamu nevertheless reaffirms his belief that he is special: “In my case there is a Philosophy!” But what a sad philosophy, that he is doomed to suffer, and must inevitably pursue this unhappy course. Convinced that what he is doing raises him above mediocrity, Osamu is yet assailed by a terrible loneliness. He does not know its source, but Dazai does.

To a young child weeping over the dying leaves of autumn, who does not understand why she weeps, Gerard Manley Hopkins sadly observes: “Now no matter, child, the name: / Sorrow’s springs are the same. . . . It is the blight man was born for, / It is Margaret you mourn for.”¹⁰ There is some of this same sadness for the loss of childhood, for aging, that young Osamu feels in his headstrong pursuit of Miyo. But beyond that, the older author is only too aware of the cost of such a course. Osamu is excited at the thought of the family furor that will arise if he declares his intention to marry Miyo. Dazai had stubbornly persisted in such a course, and what emerged from the wreckage caused by the clash were an innocent bystander dead in an unsuccessful double-suicide attempt, disinheritance, and now another contemplated suicide, for which reason “Recollections” was being written. Osamu knew one level of suffering; Dazai knew many. The proof of the care with which he wrote “Recollections” lies in the lightness of touch he maintains despite his knowledge.

Osamu arranges to pick grapes with Miyo, in the course of which he accidentally pricks her with the pruning shears. This, he feels, is an event sufficient to put himself irrevocably in her mind, and he returns to school convinced that she is his. When he returns home for winter vacation, sure the die will be cast publicly, he is tense and uneasy. Miyo, however, is not at the door to meet the brothers; she is not anywhere in the house. After dinner, while they are playing cards, Osamu asks his elder brother about the missing maid. “Oh, Miyo? She had a fight with Grandmother and went home to her own village. She was quite a stubborn girl, that one.” (1: 58.) Later, Osamu hears that she had had an affair with one of the menservants and had left. Osamu never touches on what he felt when he learned that Miyo had not been worthy of his idealization. Her implicit enjoyment of sex, a subject that in “Recollections” had caused him nothing but confusion, moved her into a separate world. Osamu’s “white lilacs” had indeed been splashed with mud. A physical break in the narrative covers his painful disillusionment—a kind of betrayal—with silence. Osamu returns only for a carefully neutral post-script. At the end of vacation, he and his younger brother are in the family’s chilly library storehouse, looking over scrolls, books, and old photographs.

¹⁰“Spring and Fall: to a young child.”

Osamu is musing on the changes to which the contents of the storehouse bear witness, as gradually through the years his eldest brother has been replacing in the house the objects their father had treasured with ones he prefers. Suddenly his brother hands him a photograph. It is a recently taken group portrait of his aunt, his mother, and Miyo. The understatement and deceptive calmness of the concluding passage is an early example of a typical Dazai technique for retrieving the anonymity his hero has dropped in the course of the narrative, while yet ambiguously leaving an aftertaste of the emotion:

We drew close together, our attention riveted to the picture for some time. In my heart, I had long since made my peace with my brother; I was still confused and had not yet told him the truth about Miyo, so I was fairly well able to feign calmness as we looked at the picture. Miyo seemed to have moved, and her outline was blurred from her face to her chest. My aunt had her hands folded over her sash and she seemed dazzled by the light. I thought they resembled each other. [1: 59–60.]

“Recollections” Reflected

As the opening installment in Dazai’s story of himself, “Recollections” has a lot of ground to cover; and the author accomplishes his task with remarkable economy. It is quite a modern story, avoiding sentimentality and melodrama while being at the same time both nostalgic and dramatic. Moreover, “Recollections” establishes some of the types, situations, and responses that emerge in many of Dazai’s later stories. The hero is narcissistic, lonely, and subject to alternating storms of grandiosity and self-deprecation; he is uneasy about women and yet unable to escape his dependency on them, a dependency made all the more troublesome by their strangeness and seeming self-sufficiency; the more he seeks sociability, the more he casts himself into solitude. Ōba Yōzō, the protagonist of *No Longer Human*, is the extreme development of this character type, and accordingly not far from madness. Osamu senses disapproval everywhere and seeks to change it to approval; Yōzō no longer even understands what other people’s emotions might be, and he seeks to disarm them, on the premise that they could be dangerous to him. Dazai’s experience of life was that people’s emotions, whether positive or negative, were potentially dangerous to him.

The family members introduced in “Recollections” continue to appear through the years, mostly in stories of nostalgia. They are brought up to date in such pieces as “Going Home” and “Hometown” and they are laid to rest finally in *Tsugaru*. Most interesting, however, is the way “Recollections” forms a seedbed from which Dazai seems to pluck individual scenes, or even phrases, to make later stories. He does, of course, quote actual passages from

“Recollections” in later parts of the Osamu Saga. But, as it is obvious Dazai read “Recollections” himself time and time again, he probably found inspiration in it for describing other scenes in certain ways. One hears many echoes of it in, for example, “A Record of the Autumn Wind,” although in plot the stories are totally dissimilar. In the latter, a young man asks a young married woman to go on a trip with him. A friend since childhood, she is very sensitive to his moods, senses his needs, and through much of the story takes a maternal attitude toward him, although they are nearly the same age. By the end of the story, the disruptive presence of a geisha at their “revels” one evening cracks the woman’s armor of maternalism, revealing her to be as needful of support as the man; and only an anticlimactic accident preserves the two from making more potentially damaging revelations to each other. The rhetoric of the young man is much occupied with the sinfulness and decadence of being a member of the wealthy class, but its tone is much more that of the naive adolescent Osamu than of the destroyed Naoji of *The Setting Sun*. In “Recollections,” Osamu rides the bus back to school after the grape-picking incident with Miyo; he has resisted the urging of the family that he use their carriage, because “I felt uncomfortable in our shiny black coach, monogrammed as if it belonged to some lord.” (1: 58.) The narrator of “A Record of the Autumn Wind” is much more whiny, but he is reacting to the same pretentiousness when he asks the young woman: “Why can’t we live by our own efforts? It would be so nice to have, oh, even a fish shop.” “Nobody lets us,” she replies. “They all take such good care of us—they’re almost maliciously good to us.” (2: 260–61.)

Bath scenes in this story are used both as a stage for the couple’s debates and as a place for the narrator to brood alone. “I got up too and went down to the bath alone, not saying anything to K. Last night’s business is last night’s business. Last night’s business is last night’s business—the phrase repeated compulsively in my mind as I slowly swam around the huge bath.” (2: 256.) One is reminded of the similar scene from “Recollections” where Osamu ponders the violence of his classmates’ seeming defense of him. The metaphor for the Osamu–Miyo romance is the white lilacs of the Russian novel. When, as we have seen, this romance is threatened by the intrusion of a third party, the lilacs are splashed with mud. In “A Record of the Autumn Wind,” a bizarre accident occurs to the couple on a rainy mountain road:

“Oh, look out!” K leaned to shield me. With a crunch, her umbrella was torn away by the wheels of the bus, and following, K herself, as if she were taking a long dive, dragged in a smooth white line under the wheels. A wobbling flower cart.

“Stop! Stop!” I raged as if someone had clubbed me. I kicked the side of the bus, which had finally stopped, as hard as I could. K was lying prostrate under the bus, like a beautiful autumn bellflower. [2: 261–62.]

Finally, in form, the end of the story nearly reproduces that of "Recollections." The action stops with the bus accident; there are two brief postscripts indicating that K's injury was not serious; and then an almost unconnected passage implies and suppresses the emotion contained in the rest of the story:

Three days ago I had business in Shimbashi, and decided to walk along the Ginza on the way back. I suddenly saw a silver cross in a shop window, and entered the store. But instead of the cross, I bought a bronze ring that was on a display tray inside the store. I still had a little of the money I'd just gotten from a magazine publisher in my wallet. The bronze ring was decorated with a single narcissus made of some yellow stone. I sent it to K.

In return, K sent me a photograph of her daughter, who is three this year. This morning I looked at the picture. [2: 262-63.]

During their trip, the narrator had promised K a cross if they returned safely, so his choice of a ring instead refers indirectly to the accident. And the carefully neutral tone of the final statement is a clear denial of its significance. So too in "Recollections" Osamu has nothing more significant to say about a photograph of the three most important women in his life than that one moved, and the two standing resembled each other. And his aunt and Miyo do resemble each other in sharing that wincing expression that Miyo had when she was jabbed by the shears in the grape arbor.

From the hint of a sibling's taunt in "Recollections," Dazai in "Kirigirisu" (*The Cricket*), published in 1940, explores one possible consequence when a woman actually gets someone no one else would have. "The Cricket" might well have been inspired, at least in part, by Osamu's statement in "Recollections" that "my oldest sister, who was now married . . . seems even to have gone so far as to say there might not be anyone who would want to marry me." (1: 47.) It is cast in the form of a letter written by a woman to her artist husband, to explain to him why she is leaving him. This kind of woman, pursuing some deeper personal need at the expense of what society defines as her own best interests, receives much fuller treatment in the person of Kazuko in *The Setting Sun*.

The keynote of "The Cricket" comes early in the letter when she describes their courtship: "I wanted to marry someone whom nobody but myself would want to marry." (4: 21.) She discovered him when he was an unknown painter, she alone sensed his talents, she turned her back on her bourgeois social position to marry him—and she was jealous of an art dealer who had also begun to recognize the potential marketability of his paintings. Now that he is famous she can no longer bear to stay with him. There is some justice in her criticism of his present pretentious lifestyle, but the tone of the letter is nevertheless very ambiguous. Its weight lies in her repeating that, when he was poor and unknown, she was happy despite adversity because

she alone was his support; but now he belongs to the world, and although he takes care of her better, she feels “like a pet cat.” In other words, it was pleasant when she could have him to herself, like a pet or a child, but it is intolerable for her to be in that position herself, and the joy has gone from her life. The key word she uses is *hariai*, or the feeling that something is worth the effort (but also connoting a sense of emulation or even rivalry). Now there is no more *hariai* in her life.

“Recollections” is thus, in a wide sense, the foundation of Dazai’s career. And, although it is only one of the fifteen stories that made up the first edition of *The Final Years*, it is in a way the most mature and promising of them all.¹¹ The author’s statement on the first edition of the collection might just as well have referred to “Recollections” alone, but it is prophetic of his future career:

I have lost ten years of my life on just this little collection of short stories. For ten full years I have not eaten nourishing meals like other people. For the sake of this one book, I gave up a place to rest my body; my pride was battered; I was blown about by the cold winds of the world; I wandered about uneasily. I wasted mountains of money. I hang my head to think how much trouble I have caused my brother. I have suffered bitterly, have burned with passion, have deliberately abused my body beyond hope of recovery. I have torn up and thrown away a hundred stories. Fifty thousand pages of manuscript. And this is all that remains. . . .

However, I have faith—that *The Final Years* will surely, as time goes by, sink in more and more vividly to your eyes, your heart. I was born just to create this one book. From today on, I am practically a corpse. I will live out the rest of my life. If it should happen that I live long and write another collection, I think I will call it *Playing Cards*. Playing cards—basically, entertainment. Furthermore, entertainment where money is wagered. And if, as a joke, I happen to live on and on, and put out yet a third collection, I will probably have to call it *Judgment*. There is probably no other road for me to travel, grown impotent in all my amusements, than to go on scratching out totally lifeless autobiographies. . . .

Nonetheless, how happy it makes me to think of you lovingly reading this book, *The Final Years*, over and over again until it turns black and shiny from the grime on your hands. . . . [10: 40–41.]

Dazai’s intuitions may have been correct, after all. “Recollections” started him on the journey; among the stories that followed were some very fine “playing cards”; and, at the end, *No Longer Human* was surely “judgment.” Now is the time to look at some of those playing cards, as the Osamu Saga develops.

¹¹“The ‘Flower’ of Buffoonery” was included in the first edition; subsequently, it became the first part of three in *Wanderings in Falsehood*.

4. Establishing the Writer

The places we have known do not belong only to the world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at that time; the memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.

—Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*¹

“Eight Views of Tokyo” is, as might be expected, a much more mature and complex work than “Recollections.” In the seven years between them, Dazai had passed through hell and had survived; he had published nearly fifty stories and novels, as well as numerous essays and miscellaneous pieces. Now, by 1941, his opinions were being sought for publication in journals and the literary columns of newspapers. He was an “arrived” author, and although he had missed winning the Akutagawa Prize during the *Final Years* period, he now possessed the Kitamura Tōkoku Award for “Schoolgirl.” The worst of the adolescent horrors lay behind him. Convalescence was over and he was tired but calm, a safely married man who, conscious of his responsibilities, was earnestly determined to discharge them and to prove himself to his wife and mother-in-law. Or at least this was the pose he affected at the time, and not only in “Eight Views of Tokyo.” It was a fragile peace, as one can see from the conclusion of “Haru no tōzoku” (A Burglar in Spring), published in 1940:

Would it perhaps have been better, when this burglar saw fit to visit us, if I had mimicked a real bourgeois, leaped outside in my underwear yelling “Thief, thief!” and run around the neighborhood waking everyone up by banging on a washtub? Would that have been the thing to do? I refuse. If that’s what I have to do, then “reality” is hateful! . . . There’s no romanticism left in this world. I’m the only pervert. And now I too am trying my best to live a proper middle-class life, beginning to make my own stingy way through the world. I hate it. I don’t care if I’m alone. I’d rather jump back into that romantic hell of ambition and sacrifice, and be damned! [3: 145.]

¹*Remembrance of Things Past*, C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, trans., vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1981), 462.

Here he speaks for humorous effect, but the humor was as thin as the role of proper bourgeois was uncomfortable and even ludicrous to him.

Drawing the First Map

Who is he, then, this Dazai Osamu in "Eight Views of Tokyo," and what is his occupation? He is a writer, still paying off his debts, but with a little free time and a little extra money, both of which he plans to devote to a study of the past few years. A seemingly grown-up Osamu, seriously reflecting on the process that has brought him to the present.² Although a generous baker's dozen of the stories in the years since "Recollections" have been clearly autobiographical, they have all dealt with single events or the moods of a moment; "Eight Views of Tokyo" is the first one of them that can be called a summation. It is also the second major installment of the Osamu Saga.

"Eight Views of Tokyo" is in form "like the full moon of a bow drawn completely," to use the image that closes the story. It begins in the present, flashes back to cover the history that is its subject, and returns in a perfect circle to the very inn room where it began. And like a taut bow ready to let fly its arrow, it closes pointing toward the blank future, with the hint that the arrow will have to pass through years of empty space before it hits its target, the next part of the Osamu Saga. Despite having written this long story with "painstaking care" and "bone-breaking effort," Dazai knows this is not the end of the tale. Earlier, he had discovered that "Recollections" was not the summation he had desired. Even then, fully determined to die, he "could not strike a period, [he] just continued with little commas." The commas of that period produced *The Final Years*; since then there had been "Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century" (1937), "HUMAN LOST" (1937), "Discarding the Old Woman" (1938), "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" (1939), and "Kamome" (The Sea Gull, 1940); but even "Eight Views of Tokyo" was no period.

The plan, the conception of "Eight Views of Tokyo" had been difficult for him to develop, Dazai says in the course of the story. He had an instinct that it would be useful to organize the story of his years in Tokyo around the places that had marked the years. Through some two dozen moves in ten years, he had well pocked the map, and each place had its associations. From his latest vantage point, just outside the city limits in Mitaka, he looks toward the city and struggles to order the unruly story that was demanding to be written:

The past swirled around in my heart like a revolving picture lantern. . . . I flipped through the album in my own heart. . . . The spring rains in Totsuka. The twilight

²It is difficult to familiarly call the protagonist of this and later stories "Osamu," for he is now a man and has none of the youthful attractiveness of "Osa-ko" in "Recollections." Yet this conceit will continue to be used for the present, to distinguish the character from the author.

in Hongō. The festivals in Kanda. The first snows in Kashiwagi. The fireworks in Hatchōbori. The full moon in Shiba. The cicadas in Amanuma. Lightning in the Ginza. The autumn flowers at the mental hospital in Itabashi. The morning mists in Ogikubo. The evening sun in Musashino. The dark flowers of memory scattered and danced, and wouldn't fall into place. [4: 70.]

In each of these conventional images (what a jarring note “the autumn flowers at the mental hospital in Itabashi” strikes!) is hidden a world of private pain.

It is a measure of the mastery and sureness with which Dazai writes now that he does not describe the actual process of writing this story, which is itself part of the story, until near the end. The images are organized into a satisfactory story by being embedded in the format of another story. A year before “Eight Views of Tokyo,” he wrote a story called “Hachijūhachiya” (The Eighty-eighth Night), which, along with “One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji,” which we will explore later, in part foreshadows its structure. The protagonist, a writer named Kasai Hajime, is a man much like Dazai.³ He has been through some catastrophic event or period, left unspecified, and has emerged shell-shocked. He looks normal, his pursuits are conventional—but his mind has been disconnected. He lives in darkness, he moves in darkness, he understands nothing, he sees nothing ahead, he knows only that he must continue to move, to put one foot ahead of the other. He has a little money now, and one day he goes on a trip to a mountain hot spring in Shinshū. Why there? It is the only place he knows. Working there is a woman he used to know. He just knew her, he'd not slept with her. He talks to himself in his mind as he travels: “What on earth have you been doing these two or three years? Living. I know that. No, it's taken all my strength just to do that. I've learned a little how to make a living. The effort of each day's occupation is just like the effort of trying to straighten a nail that's been driven crookedly.” (3: 8.) Kasai has huge, unexplained debts. The crooked nail that is his life is slowly straightening, and the debts are nearly paid. He has no vices, no curiosity, no courage. He feels like a senile old man.

The trip begins to seem nightmarish, but to his relief the woman is there when he finally arrives. Yuki cares for him like a mother. The next day he destroys their fragile relationship by capriciously dallying with another of the maids, to be discovered in the process by Yuki. The shock, however, breaks through his fog of numbness. And (echoing “Recollections”) he discovers a route of escape: his work as a writer. “He went straight home. More

³Kasai Hajime first appears in 1936, during the period of *The Final Years*, as the protagonist of a story called “Kyōgen no kami” (The God of Farce), part of the series, including “The ‘Flower’ of Buffoonery,” in which Dazai attempted to deal literarily with his Enoshima and Kamakura suicide attempts. “The God of Farce” refers to the Enoshima incident, but is essentially the story of the Kamakura hanging attempt.

than half the money was left. It had been essentially a good trip. And this is not irony. Maybe Kasai will write something good.” (3: 20.)

Now, in “Eight Views of Tokyo,” Dazai no longer needs Kasai; in his own voice, he uses the format of “The Eighty-eighth Night” to get into the story that Kasai had to write. Osamu is in a dreary mountain hot spring village. Why there? He thinks it must be cheap there. At the moment he has some spare capital, but “the future [is] totally dark,” and this little margin could be wiped out in a couple of months if his writing drops off and he can’t sell anything. There is no guarantee that this will not happen; it has happened before. Unlike the amorphous depiction in “The Eighty-eighth Night” of Kasai’s mental state as he travels, “Eight Views of Tokyo” is quite dry and descriptive. Osamu briefly inventories the history of the ten years of misery that have so seasoned him that even this tiny momentary freedom from want fills him with deep rejoicing. He explores his feeling that at last, at the age of thirty-two, he feels he is an adult. “Recollections” was his attempt to show “what kind of a terrible child I had been”; now he feels the need to write the story of his ten years in Tokyo. “I would write it as my farewell to adolescence, without prettying it up.” (4: 50.) Since so much of the events of those years occurred under the cold stare of the literary establishment, he anticipates that malicious gossip will greet his account of them. At the moment, he feels more than equal to standing up to insensitive misapprehensions. Only on the stage can one play the juvenile forever; the writer must face up to adult responsibility. Kasai does not know why he travels; Osamu goes to the isolated village so he may write his story uninterrupted.

Once Osamu arrives at the Izu village (Dazai was at Atagawa spa in Izu during the period covered by the real elapsed time span of “Eight Views of Tokyo”), he enters into a dismaying dialogue with a slatternly maid at the inn. The reader is not sure if this may not be the extent of “Eight Views of Tokyo,” an inconclusive story about an intention derailed. After all, a year earlier, in “Zokutenshi” (Worldly Angel), there had been described a similar wandering from the track:

Now I didn’t feel anymore like writing anything. I had to send a twenty-page *tampen* to this magazine *Shinchō* by the day after tomorrow, and I had thought I’d start working tonight from here on, but now I had become a total idiot. I had the scheme all worked out already, even to the final words. I had planned to write about one autumn six years earlier, when I had taken one hundred yen and three friends and had gone to Yugawara hot spring for some fun. The four of us got into cutthroat arguments, and cried, and laughed, and made up. I had planned to write about that, but now I didn’t like it. There was nothing special about it—it was one of those things I was always writing. One of those indifferent “sketches,” shall we call it? [3: 74–75.]

Is this what “Eight Views of Tokyo” will become, one of those “indifferent ‘sketches’”? No, for once the maid has extorted nearly all Osamu’s money for a deposit (“I’ve left only small change for cigarettes here in my wallet”) and has left him in a room that compares unfavorably with the worst boarding house he had occupied during the rock-bottom period of his life, he pulls himself up and reiterates his determination to carry out this project:

I must not get angry. I have important work to do. I forced myself to reflect that maybe this was the kind of treatment I should expect in my present position in life. I started bringing out my pen, ink, paper, and other implements from the bottom of my valise.

This was what my first breathing space in ten years amounted to. However, I lectured myself gravely, this sadness too was part of my fate. I braced myself and began to work.

I did not come for pleasure. I came to do extremely difficult work. That night, under the dim light of the lamp, I spread the map of Tokyo out full on the desk. [4: 52.]

And as he pores over the map, Osamu enters into the true material of his story.

This account of the circumstances surrounding the writing of “Eight Views of Tokyo” is not simply a typical extended Dazai introduction, nor is the narrative of events pinpointed by the places on the map simply a story within a story. Rather, the structure of the story is a subtle melding of present and past, the present a cradle sheltering the past. They exist in a continuity, with the space between distant past (the “eight views of Tokyo”) and present (the hot spring village) bridged by two recently past incidents toward the end of the narrative, incidents that swell the already considerable number of sites, bring the narrator back psychologically into the center of Tokyo, and finally make him into one of the sights of Tokyo. It is a well-wrought story that succeeds at its task of, temporarily, summarizing all Dazai had to say about himself at the moment. There are more than eight views to be dealt with, which is what first troubles the author. Somehow there is no way to squeeze the misery of those years into only eight views. But then, suddenly, such a narrow scrupulousness seems no longer necessary. “Eight views” is a time-hallowed expression in Japan, and it conveys the sense of inclusiveness and completeness that the author accentuates with his image of a full-drawn bow. So he need not worry if the actual count runs over; the conception is large enough to contain everything he wants.

The story would not be uninteresting even if it were told in conventional linear fashion: I wanted to write this kind of story, and I struggled for a way to organize it, and then I got my idea, and I went away to write it, and this is my story. But Dazai’s plan is much more inspired, and accordingly, it draws

the reader into a much more intimate relationship with its author. When, two-thirds of the way through, we see the narrator actually sitting in his home, pondering how to write the story he has by now mostly told, and living with the calm and sad tone he has suggested at the beginning, in contrast to the upheaval he has gone on to describe, we care deeply for him in a way we would not if he had not drawn us so into his struggle. This scene of contemplation separates the earlier years, when he acted in blind pain, and the recent year or so, when he awoke to the sobering realization that his lot was set, and that his success or failure was totally up to him. What "Eight Views of Tokyo" reveals about Osamu is that, until the time of this awakening, he had lived in hope that something magical would remove him from his fate and make his world a paradise. Something or somebody would take care of him—death, his brother, his teachers, literary success. But now he knows that only he will take care of himself.

There is one other item to consider in Dazai's technique of telling the story of "Eight Views of Tokyo," namely, his use of dialogue. In the real-time portions of the present and the recent past—that is, at the beginning and end of the story—dialogue plays no unusual role. The narrator talks to the maid; he talks to his teacher, Mr. S; he talks to his wife and her sister and her sister's fiancé. But in the narrative of the distant past, which is fully two-thirds of the story, there are only two dialogue passages, both extremely brief, and both involving the narrator and H. The effect is appropriately dramatic. "Eight Views of Tokyo" is, after all, Dazai's attempt to come to terms with the significance of the years he spent with Hatsuyo. This careful and sparing use of dialogue signifies Dazai's apprehension that his failure and Hatsuyo's was one of their inability to transcend the boundaries of their individual needs and limitations. In the first brief exchange, she suspects something terrible is going to happen, and he refuses to take her into his confidence; in the second, he unwittingly alludes to something terrible that has happened without his knowledge, and she refuses to enlighten him. The truth always catches them undefended and isolated.

"Eight Views of Tokyo," despite its technically expert format and structure, may not be as interesting to the reader unfamiliar with Dazai Osamu's life as these dramatic dialogue passages would lead one to expect. For the story is told in a kind of curious outline; accent is provided by the change from place to place as Osamu moves or is forced to move, and continuity by Osamu's numbered and formulaic equating of passing time to his age: "I was twenty-three. . . . I turned twenty-four. . . . I had turned twenty-five. . . . I was now twenty-nine. . . ." But within the Osamu Saga, "Eight Views of Tokyo" occupies a crucial place. It shows the full bloom of his pain and degradation, and seems to point toward salvation and safety. Moreover, it offers a kind of synopsis of and even index to the whole saga, in the sense

that it contains most of what had been and what remained significant to Dazai throughout his life. In later years, he would reread it and say to himself, "I have not said enough about that," or "That was a good way to organize things, I should try it again." "Fifteen Years" quotes whole pages of it. "An Almanac of Pain" goes into more detail about the nature of Osamu's involvement in leftist politics, which in "Eight Views of Tokyo" is referred to simply as "that secret work that so terrifies society." Therefore, although "Eight Views of Tokyo" may somewhat perplex the uninitiated reader, who may wonder why he devotes so much attention to this and so little to that, it is, in fact, a rich part of the Osamu Saga. It also reveals much about Dazai's attitude toward his readers. Thus although in "Fifteen Years" he explains, for those who do not know it, what "Eight Views of Tokyo" is, he still expects that his audience is a loyal and intimate band and that they are keeping up on their reading of his works. He is extraordinarily revealing, it appears at first glance; and yet, unless you have been following the course of his argument through years of time and dozens of journals, he does not reveal too much to you at any one time. The significance of the sound and fury depends on the persistence of your attention, he seems to say. He cajoles his readers; he even teases them; but with the egotism of a committed autobiographer, he operates on the assumption that they will read him. Accordingly, this study of "Eight Views of Tokyo" will be at least in part a matter of hanging the elucidatory stories on its pegboard.

Culs-de-Sac

Totsuka: this is first base. From "My Older Brothers" the reader already knows that Osamu was living near, but not with, the older brother who was studying sculpture. In "Eight Views of Tokyo" Osamu explains that "we instinctively recognized a mutual reticence, although neither of us actually said anything; it was as if we felt that bad feeling would arise even between brothers on good terms if they lived under the same roof." (4: 53.) The story is quite laconic about the brother's death: "Three months later this brother was dead of illness. He was twenty-seven." All Osamu's emotion had been expended in "My Older Brothers" as he described the nightmarish three days he had sat alone with him, trying to clear congestion from the dying boy's throat so he could breathe. Instead, Totsuka now stands for the excitement the country boy Osamu felt at having the whole city of Tokyo at his command. He recalls how he hesitated to buy a map, fearing everyone would know he was a country bumpkin and sneer at him; but at last he screwed up his courage and brought the map home in secret, trembling triumph. "That night, I closed the door and covered the windows of my room carefully, and stealthily opened the map. A beautiful pattern of reds, greens, yellows—I

held my breath, lost in looking at it. Sumidagawa. Asakusa. Ushigome. Akasaka. Ah, everything was here! If I wanted to go somewhere, I could go right there, anytime. I felt as if I were seeing a miracle." (4: 52.) Years later in "Fifteen Years," with a world war behind him, Osamu no longer remembered his entry into Tokyo life with such tenderness:

By the time we were twenty, already most of us had participated in that "class struggle"; some had been imprisoned, some had been hounded from school, some had committed suicide. When I made my appearance in Tokyo, it was a forest of neon. . . . "The Black Cat." "House of Beauties." No matter what you were doing, the furious whirl of the Ginza, of Shinjuku. A wild dance of despair. Your eyes flitted restlessly, afraid you'd be losing something if you didn't participate, and you guzzled down whiskey. [8: 222–23.]

In "Eight Views of Tokyo" the "dance of death" is reserved for the events of several years hence. For the moment, continuity after his brother's death is provided by work in the leftist movement. Yet, although he is living for politics, Osamu does have aesthetic scruples: "I felt contempt for the literature that pompously styled itself an arm of that work."

And then H came "from the country" to live with him—the occasion for his first move and, shortly after, for a horrendous scene between him and his eldest brother. When H calmly left the disposition of her fate to the two brothers, allowing herself to be taken back to the country temporarily, and didn't write to Osamu, he was filled with anguish. In "Eight Views of Tokyo" he half reminisces, half apostrophizes the absent H, as he accuses her of "smug complacency" for not recognizing the price he has paid to stay with her. Osamu sees his subsequent suicide attempt with "a woman working at a bar on a Ginza back street" as payment to H for her insensitivity. Toward the woman who died instead of Osamu, he remains ambivalent. Her death "is a black stain on my life," yet when he describes their suicide pact the stain seems more from their shared emotion than from their deed: "A woman working at a bar on a Ginza back street developed a feeling for me. There comes once to everyone a time when he is so loved. It is unclean. I enticed the woman and together we entered the sea at Kamakura." (4: 54.) Earlier, in "The God of Farce," which deals with this suicide attempt and the next, H does not enter the arena; politics, in a veiled fashion, is much more central, and Osamu is much more intimately tied in with the woman who died:

One moonless night I fled alone. The other five, left behind, all lost their lives. I was a landlord's son. No exceptions for landlords. I am your enemy. I awaited the cruel punishment for traitors. I awaited the day I would be struck down. But I was

"An Almanac of Pain" is more scathing: when asked by the party to try writing proletarian literature to earn money for the cause, he tried, and the very attempt to write in its "hideous style" made him physically ill.

impatient. I could not wait to be killed, and plotted my own death. I chose a shameless, decadent style suitable to one from a ruined class. I wanted to be judged, mocked, punished alone by the people. Suicide with a married woman. . . . She is the only person in the world I respect. [1: 302.]

And in “The ‘Flower’ of Buffoonery” he expresses respect for the restraint exhibited by the woman’s husband.

In *No Longer Human*, Dazai established forever his feelings for the woman who died. As Ōba Yōzō (Osamu) lies in the hospital after being pulled out of the sea, he thinks of the dead Tsuneko—and weeps. “Of all the people I had ever known, that miserable Tsuneko really was the only one I loved.” (9: 410; tr. Keene 1958, 88.) Clearly, by the end of his life, Dazai had coalesced his feelings about this first suicide partner and H, and their betrayal of each other, into the only shred of human feeling Yōzō experiences. It is a betrayal crossed in such a complex pattern that all are equally guilty and equally sinned against: H abandoned Osamu by not giving him the reassurance that she cared enough for him to make up for his loss of his family; Osamu deserted H to die with another woman, and deserted the other woman by not dying; “Tsuneko” abandoned her husband to die with Osamu, stole another woman’s husband, and, by dying herself, left Osamu feeling abandoned and guilty that he had not died.

But let us return to “Eight Views of Tokyo.” With that same fine unconcern that already characterizes her to Osamu, H comes back a couple of months later, with the permission of Osamu’s brother, and they settle in Gotanda. The memory of the Enoshima incident seems to grow distant. Once the first shock is over, Osamu is even defiant: “Far from being ashamed of my disgraceful crime, I was even faintly proud.” Somehow the event made him special. After all, as a result, for a time at least, “My older brothers were very gentle with me, the would-be suicide.” (4: 55.) Attempted suicide would yet again be a source of gratification to Osamu before he awakened to realize what a sorry figure he made in other people’s eyes. The next year or so marks a series of aimless meanderings for him and H. He hangs around school from time to time, not attending classes; he passively does what he is ordered to by his contacts in the communist party; they move several times to avoid police questioning. H starts studying English, on Osamu’s instructions, but does not seem to learn much. Osamu plays at writing haiku. But mostly, they live “simply reflecting the moods of friends who dropped by,” and spending “day after day empty, male and female living in a hole.” (4: 55.) Then a crisis interrupts the blankness of their days. Osamu discovers that H had not been “innocent” before she knew him. He feels a fool, for he had trusted her word, and had bragged to his friends about her strength of character; at the same time, he cannot comfort himself that he, at least, has been a pillar of

virtue. He is caught in yet another trap of betrayed anger and guilt. Osamu and H never resolve this conflict. They have no one but each other, and so they have a "sorry reunion," but the wound remains festering under the surface, to erupt fatally another year.

Stymied

In the autumn of this year (his twenty-fourth), Osamu slowly comes to a familiar decision. Again, he must die. There is no other solution to the confusion of his life. "Maybe you'd call it an affectation; well then, so be it." (4: 58.) But this time is different. He will not act precipitously, out of panic. This time he will leave a testament. It will be his confessions of childhood and adolescence, to explain how he came to be what he is. He calls it "Recollections."

Here, then, in "Eight Views of Tokyo," is Osamu's explanation of the context within which "Recollections" was written. At the end of his rope, Osamu has discovered an inducement to go on living yet a while longer. He has not decided to *be* a writer. He simply needs to write so that he may die in peace. "Recollections" strikes a faint light in his dark soul, however; even when he concludes it, he has not finished writing. Osamu reveals his reason for writing now; and in a sense, he is revealing Dazai's reason for writing always: "I wanted to write out all the rest of it. I wanted to disclose the whole of my life up to that day. Everything. . . . Gradually I was being consumed by a demon who eternally beckoned." (4: 58.) The beckoning demon here gives Osamu a reason to live; it kept the writer Dazai going for the rest of his career. Stories of this sort were for Dazai always a farewell—to childhood, to adolescence, to the past—yet ironically (in a reversal of the usual demon role), this demon kept Dazai from actually saying goodbye for fifteen years. The temptation was always there. Although many times Dazai toyed with the idea that, once he was past the utter chaos of the *Final Years* period and sure he would be a writer, he might become an elder statesman of literature like Kawabata or Shiga, still his suspicion was that he would be lucky to reach his fortieth birthday. But much as the demon urged him on, Dazai never did reach it.

Osamu struggled on. For the next couple of years, he lived two separate lives. On the surface, everything seemed normal: he disarmed H, the friends they had moved in with, and his brother by pretending to attend school. He staved off the inevitable crash. Each year he failed to graduate, and each year he wheedled and cajoled and begged his brother to give him "one more year." One more year for what? To complete his testament, the literary legacy that was secretly consuming him with the desire to write it out. H knew about the paper bag, inscribed *The Final Years*, into which Osamu stuffed

each story as it was done. If she had any suspicions about the significance of the title, she did not voice them.

Osamu had to keep up the pretense of going to school, because that was the only justification for money from home. How could he ask his brothers to collaborate in his death? Yet the strain of maintaining a semblance of normalcy was tremendous. In "Eight Views of Tokyo," it is almost with a feeling of relief that Osamu at last completes the *Final Years* collection.

Late that fall, somehow or other I got it all written. From among the twenty-odd pieces, I chose fourteen; and I burned up the rest, together with all other manuscript fragments. There was a whole basketful. I took it out to the garden and set it ablaze.

"Why did you burn them?" H suddenly asked that night.

"Because I don't need them any more," I answered with a smile.

She repeated the question: "Why did you burn them?" She was crying.

I began settling my affairs. I returned books I had borrowed to their various owners, and I sold my letters and notes to the trashman. Into the *Final Years* bag I also slipped two letters. My preparations seemed to be ready.

This is the first dialogue in Osamu's narrative. If H had no suspicions before, she certainly has now. Yet Osamu expresses no tenderness or sympathy. He ignores the intent of her question, smiles distantly, and prepares to streamline his life for expeditious departure. But fate is not ready to have him leave the stage yet. His friends want him to start a literary magazine with them.

Wandering in literary circles. So far, in "Eight Views of Tokyo," Osamu's life except in relation to H and his writing has remained shadowy. The reader has little idea of what his outside friends are like—indeed, of whether he has any outside life at all after finishing with the communist movement. Until now, Osamu has meant politics when he speaks of "secret work." But now that he is out of politics, his only secret work is the stories he has been writing and putting away, "secret" because he tells no one the purpose he has for them.

This was the time in Dazai's life that he was getting to know Yamagishi Gaishi, Dan Kazuo, and other members of the literary circle described in Chapter 1. Osamu's strange world in "Eight Views of Tokyo" at this point, and undoubtedly to some degree the world of Dazai himself, are reflected in a rather curious story, published in 1935, called "The Common Herd."

The narrator of all but the postscript is a youth of twenty-five (Dazai's age when he wrote the story) who is called Sano Jirō, after the ladykiller (literally) in the nineteenth-century Kabuki play *Kagotsurube sato no eizame* (The Sharp Sword, or Disillusionment Cuts Through Intoxication). He has recently fallen in love for the first time, after years of courting with his "left profile" (we remember Osamu in "Recollections") and of fleeing at the first

sign of hesitation in the object of his interest. No, this time he is hopelessly in love. The woman has not welcomed his attentions, he has contemplated forcing her to commit suicide with him, she has rejected him totally, and that's that. Therefore, the premise is that Sano Jirō, who is passive and seemingly naive through much of the story, is suicidal. But attention now shifts to his friend Baba, whom he had first met one day at a teashop in Ueno. Baba is an expansive, confidence-man type, given to extravagant statements and dramatic costumes; he recalls the protagonist of "The Stylish Child," or the character Horiki in *No Longer Human*.⁵ Baba occupies center stage for most of the rest of the story. It is probably Baba who nicknamed Sano, and since he knows what a captivating woman Sano was interested in, he knows what condition Sano is in once she has disappeared from the pleasure quarters where Sano found her. In the words of the epigram that opens the first part, for Sano "at that time, every day was my last day [bannen]."

When Sano returns to his home "in the mountains at the northern extreme of Honshū, five hundred miles from Tokyo," Baba writes him that he should put off suicide and join him and some friends in starting a magazine, to be named *Le Pirate*. Sano meets the friends: Baba's cousin Satake, who later tells Sano that Baba is a total fraud, and Dazai Osamu, an obstructive and argumentative young writer. Eventually, partly through Dazai Osamu's abrasiveness, the group splits up, and plans for *Le Pirate* come to naught. Before they separate, Baba and Sano go drinking together. In the course of the evening, Baba first praises Sano for his "flexibility," and then gradually confesses to Sano that all his toughness is just a pose: he is actually weak and defenseless, he needs Sano and Sano's belief in him, he thought up the idea of the magazine just to keep Sano with him when he feared he was losing him. Finally he challenges Sano: "Which one do you like best? Dazai? Satake? Me? . . ." Sano wanders out into the rain. He finds himself muttering words Dazai had used. He parrots a catchphrase of Satake's. He has Baba's mannerisms. Flexibility? They have stolen his soul from him. He starts running in panic. In the postscript, Satake and Baba discuss the news that Sano Jirō had been struck and killed by a streetcar the night before.

"The Common Herd" was written at the request of *Bungei Shunjū*, right after Dazai had failed to win its first Akutagawa Prize competition. This, along with his narcotics addiction, may account for the story's strange tone and alternating lucidity and dreaminess. Dazai spent the entire income from

⁵Here we detect the typical Dazai technique of *bunshin* ("divided person"), where the persona of the author is split between several characters, each one representing an aspect of his total personality. For example, Naoji in *The Setting Sun* is modeled on the sensitive, young, emotionally distraught Dazai of the late 1920's and early 1930's; Uehara in the same novel represents the decadent and tormented writer of the mid- and late 1940's. The term, originally from Buddhist theology, refers to the false or temporary manifestations that bodhisattvas took on in order to save mankind in this world.

it on one night's carousing that started in Tokyo and ended at Yugawara hot spring. Whatever the other associations—Hatsuyo in the phantasmagorical woman of the gay quarters, Dazai in Sano and Baba, the helplessness of addiction in the terror of the “stolen soul”—this story is interesting in the view it presents of the way a literary group comes together to produce one of those dozens of little magazines that populate the Japanese literary scene. This is one of the few pictures of Osamu and his friends that Dazai gives. Their magazine *Aoi Hana* postponed Osamu's suicide, gained him two life-long friends, and, as we know from Dazai's biography, gave him an opening into the wider world of writers when it merged the following year with *Nihon Rōman-ha*. Nevertheless the picture, in “Eight Views of Tokyo,” of the emptiness surrounding *Aoi Hana*'s formation is a chilling one: the friends burn up “the last of ‘the passion of youth’ ” in their “mad dance the night before death”; H's clothes are pawned to provide starting capital for “the three fools”; and the magazine folds after its first issue. Nowhere in the story is the contrast more ironic than in the juxtaposition of H's bare cupboard and the empty idealism of a journal of “pure art.”

Sidetracked and Derailed

Nemesis, in “Eight Views of Tokyo,” is rapidly approaching. Death has been postponed by *Aoi Hana*, but graduation time is coming up, and Osamu will not graduate, and *The Final Years* has been completed. Yet, now faced with the desired inevitability, Osamu clings stubbornly to life. He pretends to be seeking a job; he pretends to be busy with graduation procedures; he prays to preserve peace for “one second longer.” One more second for what, one might ask; hadn't he long since made up his mind to die? For Osamu, peace is the desired state. He will pay for it with death, if there is no lesser coin; but as that is the ultimate price, he will try all others first. In “A Record of the Autumn Wind,” the narrator presages Osamu's anguished prayer with his own thoughts as he sits in the hot spring bath with his companion K: “We must not talk of conditions at home. We must not speak of our pain. We must not speak of the dread of tomorrows. We must not speak of people's hidden motives. We must not speak of yesterday's shame. Praying, just this short time, at least only this short time, let there be peace, we quietly washed our bodies.” (2: 253.)

Again, suicide is Osamu's inevitable decision. “Eight Views of Tokyo” is just one of several stories that deal with Dazai's 1935 attempt. Here, Osamu speaks only briefly about his decision to hang himself in the hills behind Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura. But in the 1936 story “The God of Farce” Kasai Hajime goes into much fuller detail about the events of the previous year. Kasai had failed the *Miyako Shimbun* entrance examination (the same

paper Dazai had failed to enter), and now wanders to Kamakura, the scene of an earlier suicide attempt. He thinks about the woman who had died then. He passes by the gate of the sanatorium at which he had recovered. Then it had been white and trim; now it is shabby, old, and dirty, as he feels himself to be. In a passage reminiscent of Akutagawa's suicide note, he ponders the merits and demerits of various methods of killing himself; gradually he comes to feel that hanging is the only way to do it. It seems that he will succeed; he starts to black out. "In my heart the moment before I died, the images of flowers whirled like a revolving picture lantern." (1: 311.) These words of his are almost identical with the ones Osamu uses in "Eight Views of Tokyo" to describe his difficulty in organizing that story: "The past swirled around in my heart like a revolving picture lantern. . . . The dark flowers of memory scattered and danced, and wouldn't fall into place." (4: 70.) Kasai comes back to consciousness, thinking of the foreign cigarettes he had bought. He hadn't died. ("Maybe my neck is abnormally thick," Osamu appends in "Eight Views of Tokyo.") Kasai lies quietly for an hour, recovering. He has a cigarette, and savors its deliciousness. He has scared away the God of Death. Even if he never becomes a great writer, never writes a masterpiece, still life holds the consolations of a fragrant cigarette before sleeping, the sweet, sweet pleasures of bourgeois life.⁶ The bitterness of Osamu's life is that even though he cannot escape desiring those pleasures, they continue to elude him. No matter how he may desire to sleep between white sheets like everyone else, he is fated to destroy his home.

But for the moment it seems in "Eight Views of Tokyo" that Osamu has gained tremendously by this dramatic gesture:

I returned blankly to the house in Amanuma, my neck still red and swollen.

I had tried to settle my own fate by myself, and had failed. When I wandered back to the house, an unfamiliar, astounding world opened to me. H met me in the entry hall and hesitantly stroked my back. The others also treated me gently. They kept saying, "Thank goodness you're all right." I was bewildered at the tenderness of life. My brother came running from the country. He berated me harshly, but I felt him incredibly, irreplaceably dear. It was perhaps for the first time in my life that I tasted these strange emotions. [4: 62.]

Osamu had seen suicide as an attempt to take fate into his own hands; but now, as if to emphasize his helplessness, fate intrudes again before he has time to test out this newly gained perception of how precious is the human warmth surrounding him. There follow appendicitis, peritonitis, lung complications—and narcotics addiction. Although his brother is sending money

⁶"The God of Farce" is no doubt the story meant by the narrator of "A Record of the Autumn Wind": "I had once written a story with a scene like this: the hero wants to die, but at the last moment he tries a single fragrant foreign cigarette, and just for that poor pleasure, he gives up the idea of dying." (2: 250.)

to Osamu and H in Funabashi, where they are now living so that Osamu can recover from his illness, no one knows yet of the addiction. The monthly stipend is quite inadequate to the secret expense. "Eight Views of Tokyo" speaks in general terms of Osamu's tormented efforts to borrow money, of his weeping "right in front of some magazine editor," of his attempts to extort story assignments and advances for stories not yet written. A dismal dialogue in "Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century" shows what it must have been like. Osamu had been assigned to write a piece on university students. He receives a postcard from the editor: "We can't use this—it's terrible. We will return it. Of course, we can't pay you." He confronts the man:

"I got your note. You're sure my piece is . . . no good?"

"Um. It just doesn't make it. Here, this is the one someone else wrote for us. This is what we need. It's 'real,' statistical. Anyway, read yours again, and think about it."

"I've always been a bad writer. I didn't know how to do it any other way. Just all that whimpery stuff."

"Whatever happened with the suicide, that 'disappointed love' one?"

"Lend me train fare, will you?" [2: 85.]

His view of reality seems so different from that of the rest of the world that finally, in *No Longer Human*, he must confess defeat and pronounce himself mad. No matter if you consider yourself the only sane, clear-sighted one around in a dull, mad world; it is they who make the rules and determine the limits of behavior and perception, and to the degree that you deviate from either, you are "unhealthy."

Osamu sells off his bag of *Final Years* stories, one by one. He cannot write anything new. "The literary establishment pointed its finger at me and gave its critique: 'Talent, but no virtue.'" (4: 64.) This is the only veiled reference he makes to the Akutagawa Prize and Kawabata's censorious judgment that had refused Dazai first place. Osamu is similarly closemouthed in "Eight Views of Tokyo" about the "conspiracy" between H and his loyal friends a year later that resulted in his being shut up for a month in a mental institution. The two stories Dazai wrote upon being released leave no question about what he felt, however. "HUMAN LOST" is in the form of a diary of that month. It begins with several days of stunned silence, erupts into weeks of fury, rage, pain, fear, and horror, and gradually emerges into calm acceptance of "reality." Along the way, he rails against his wife for "deceiving" him to get him into the hospital; not yet in "HUMAN LOST" does he know she had further betrayed him while he was there. The horrible truth he had to recognize as he observed his fellow patients is that they had all of them, himself included, been stripped of their humanity, their "qualifications to be

human.” Here is the crystallization of the idea of *ningen shikkaku*, or the disqualified human being, that provides both title and theme to *No Longer Human*. And this, too, is what “HUMAN LOST” means.

Under Way Again

A second dialogue scene takes place in the internal narrative of “Eight Views of Tokyo” the day Osamu is released from the hospital.

It was the first time we had seen each other in a month, but both of us were silent. The car started up, and after a while she spoke.

“You’ve stopped that medicine, right?” She sounded angry.

I said the sole thing I had learned in the hospital: “I don’t trust anything anymore.”

“I see.” H, ever practical, seemed to understand me in some kind of monetary sense; she nodded deeply and said, “People are not to be relied upon.”

“I don’t trust you either, you know.”

She looked out of sorts. [4: 65.]

“She had gotten rid of the Funabashi house while I was in the hospital, and now she was living in a one-room apartment [in Tokyo],” he says simply, but that house had meant a great deal to him. In “Fifteen Years” he describes the scene on the morning he had been taken from Funabashi to the mental institution, as he wept wildly and begged: “Please—let me sleep in this house just one more night, I planted the oleander by the entrance, I planted the paulownia in the garden.” (8: 222.) As hellish as that period had been, still he had put down tentative roots, and they were being torn up. Now at rock bottom, he thinks, he lies blankly in H’s apartment for months, living “silently, like an insect.”

H breaks the silence when she comes to him one day with a young painter friend of Osamu’s and announces that they had had an affair while he was in the hospital. Now Osamu realizes why H had looked so discomfited in the taxi when he had said innocently that he didn’t trust her. Osamu has no suggestions to make; gradually the painter drops out of sight, and H makes up her mind to die. This sounds familiar to Osamu, and he goes with her to Minakami hot spring, where they take sleeping pills and fail to die. “Discarding the Old Woman” is the story of that trip.

In the year between the event (after which he and H parted for good) and the writing of this story, Osamu slowly and unbeknownst to himself grows healthy, and makes a choice to live. The first step is for him to realize how the rest of the world views him. No more fantasies of being a hero or a cosmic victim. To them, he is simply a fraud, “an arrogant, ignorant decadent, or an imbecile, or . . . a fraud of fake genius,” who, when he is strapped for money, intimidates his family “with a suicide farce” and abuses his chaste wife “as

if she were a dog or cat," finally driving her away. (4: 67.) The second step is for him to begin to hear rumors of misfortune at home. His brother is accused of election irregularities. His sister dies, then his nephew, and his cousin. Somehow the gap between him and his family narrows, and the "whip of Family," as he calls it in "HUMAN LOST" (2: 105), no longer stings so much. Third, as he lives in isolation, his body recovers from the abuse to which it had been subjected in the previous years.

How does a man change?

Now, there are many things one can present as explanations for a man's turning point—age, war, shake-up of historical perspective, hatred of laziness, humility toward literature, recognition that there is a God—but they are all inadequate, somehow. No matter how great a degree of precision such explanations hope to achieve, somewhere one can sense a crack, and the scent of a fiction comes through. Maybe this is because people do not always choose a path by considering this, contemplating that. Many times, a man simply finds himself walking in a different field before he realizes it. [4: 68.]

In "The Sea Gull," published in 1940, Osamu had described the past period as a time when he was nearly mad—when he found himself "standing all alone in the middle of a burned-out field." (3: 89.) Now he stood in another field. "Early in the summer of my thirtieth year, for the first time, I reached a true aspiration to devote my life to a writing career. . . . This time I was not writing a 'last testament.' I was writing in order to live." (4: 68.) "Discarding the Old Woman" was the first product of this resolve, and it sold immediately. Although it deals with the breakup of his life with H, it has an almost farcical tone that indicates Dazai had started to find the kind of objectivity a professional writer needs to transfigure tragic personal experience into art. Dazai's potential as a comic writer had already shown up in "Recollections," where Osamu tells his story with an attitude of gentle bemusement; now, the account of Dazai and Hatsuyo's attempted suicide turns into a comedy of errors, sad but not tragic. Even the title is playful: it brings to the Japanese mind echoes of the legend of Mount Obasute, whereon, according to a tale in the tenth-century *Yamato monogatari* (Tales of Yamato) a young man, in the act of abandoning his aged aunt to die of exposure as custom decreed, was overcome by filial piety, and so brought her back home. Although the title means literally "discarding the old woman," Dazai's story is about love and pity. His humor in such works as this—"Recollections," "Eight Views of Tokyo," and *Tsugaru* are other examples—is gentle and sympathetic; there is, however, a satirical underside to it that is often sharp and disillusioned, as for example in "I Accuse," Dazai's version of Judas's betrayal of Jesus to the temple authorities, or "Kachikachiyama" (Crackling Mountain), from *Fairy Tales*.

Kashichi in "Discarding the Old Woman" is a man whose wife Kazue had "loved the wrong person," although he is willing to admit he drove her to it. He is quite reasonable: if they had had money, or if her lover had been more straightforward, something could have been arranged. But there was no way out of their predicament, and Kazue had made up her mind to die anyway. Therefore, Kashichi will die with her. They pawn most of the little clothing left to them, and spend the money on preparations and a few last entertainments. Repeatedly, Kashichi is struck by Kazue's curious innocence, her childlike, defenseless character. He thinks time and again, She mustn't die. They go to Minakami. He feels desire for her, and wonders if maybe they couldn't try to start life over again. But there are too many obstacles standing in the way of success: mountainous debts, feelings of dishonor, suffering, family. He muses sadly to her that his family probably did much to break her spirit. Yes, she agrees, they never did want her. They find a glen in the mountains and prepare to die. Explaining that he is used to sleeping medicines, he gives himself several times her dose. His plan is to merely put her to sleep for a while; he will die. They kiss. She falls asleep, and he, as a double precaution, prepares to hang himself too: as he falls asleep, his body will roll down the incline and off the little cliff on which they are sitting, leaving him dangling from the belt he has tied around his neck.

He wakes up. It is dark. He can't feel anything. He hears a strange noise. He realizes that he is not dead, that the sound is Kazue snoring. His body has rolled into a little depression just before the precipice, and he is now numb with cold in a little stream in which he has been lying. It is hours before she awakens, hours during which he has time to ponder that she is good, but just too much for him. They will have to separate.

Up toward the mountain. "Discarding the Old Woman" marks Osamu's turning point. With the proceeds from the story, he goes to live in the mountains of Kōshū. In the year he is there, he writes and publishes a dozen stories. He is also introduced to his wife-to-be, and marries her. "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" deals in a very wry and entertaining but nonetheless sentimental way with the beginning of this period, of which he has little to say in "Eight Views of Tokyo." Because this story is such a bridge between the period of rage and confusion and the period of control and literary professionalism, and is not unlike both "Eight Views of Tokyo" and "An Almanac of Pain" in its way of chronicling experience, it is worth looking at here in some detail.

In this story, different aspects of Mount Fuji highlight the author's state of mind, his situation, his changing perspective on the world around him. The "one hundred views of Mount Fuji" are actually twenty, and duration of time is an irrelevant concern. In "Eight Views of Tokyo," the passage of time is an important factor, and the different views of Tokyo only point to

the chronology of the narrator's story. Totsuka, Gotanda, Funabashi—these all equal Osamu, they symbolize events and moments in his consciousness of time. But Fuji is an antagonist; the narrator responds to it almost as to a living creature, and he is changed or psychologically moved whenever he responds. For the most part, "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" is a one-sided dialogue. Sometimes Osamu reacts toward the mountain itself; at other times, his thoughts are crystallized by a glimpse of it, or his thoughts of it open up an unexpected train of associations.

Osamu says in "Eight Views of Tokyo" that his trip to the foothills of Mount Fuji was made possible by the quick sale of "Discarding the Old Woman" to a magazine with one editor "who had not forgotten, who had been waiting for my work." Osamu is consciously picking up pieces. "I did not spend what I got for it foolishly. I first went to the pawnshop and redeemed a suit; then, sprucing myself up, I set out on a trip. I went to the mountains of Kōshū." (4: 69.) However, the opening of "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" shows an Osamu who is anxious not to dwell on the past. "In early fall of 1938, determined to renew my spirit, I set out on a trip carrying just a single briefcase." (2: 154.) His destination is Misaka Pass, in the foothills of Mount Fuji, where Ibuse Masuji also was staying.

The first view is a textbook comparison of the steep-angled Fuji of the woodcut prints of Hiroshige, Bunchō, and Hokusai with the rather more gently sloping mountain of geological survey maps. The effect of this comparison is to imply that Fuji is not such a big deal, that if it is the best Japan has to offer, well, it would scarcely win international contests. This argument is typical of Dazai as wry iconoclast, and is applied elsewhere to other objects of blind Japanese admiration, for example, the poet Bashō. Of course, as the story later makes clear, Fuji's impressiveness lies not in its height or in the steepness of its slopes, but in its massive presence. It is a mountain of considerable personality.

Another view of Mount Fuji brings painful memories. As seen from the window of his Tokyo apartment, it is little, like an ice cream cone; one of its shoulders droops more than the other, which makes Osamu think of a sinking ship. But that is not why the view recalls such pain:

In winter three years ago, a certain person revealed something unexpected to me; and I was stunned. That night I drank myself blind, alone in the one-room apartment. I didn't sleep a wink, just drank. At dawn, I went to the toilet, and from the square chicken-wire-covered window, there I saw Fuji. I cannot forget that Fuji, little, pure white, leaning a little to the left. . . . I remained standing in the dark bathroom, striking the window screen and weeping—I never want to have to go through that state of mind again. [2: 154.]

Hence the trip to Kōshū. We know from "Eight Views of Tokyo" what went between that cold dawn in Tokyo and the present trip. And now, "even if I

didn't feel like it, I had to face Fuji right before me." (2: 154.) This view displeases and embarrasses him. It is just too smug and perfect, too made to order: Fuji right in the center; below it, Lake Kawaguchi; and the foothills in the foreground bowing before the mountain and enfolding the lake. It is too much like the paintings on bathhouse walls, or a stage set.

Soon, he and Ibuse climb higher up to Mitsu Pass for another view. The "stylish child" is too, too aware of the disparity between Ibuse's proper hiking clothes and his own outfit, thrown together from things borrowed at their inn. And besides, the mist is so thick they can't possibly see Mount Fuji. They stop to have tea, and the old lady at the refreshment stall is so anxious that their trip not be in vain that she runs inside to get a huge photograph of the mountain. She stands holding it at the edge of the cliff, explaining that if they *could* see it, it would be this big and would be right here. The two laugh and enjoy this view, not at all sorry about the thick mist.

The next view is also a photograph. Gone down to Kōfu at the base of the pass with Ibuse, Osamu is having his first meeting with a possible marriage prospect. While Ibuse and the mother exchange inconsequentialities, Osamu sits with eyes downcast, unable to look at the girl. Ibuse looks up and calls Osamu's attention to a bird's-eye view photo of the mountain's crater. He looks at it for a while, and then as he returns to his original position, he quickly darts a glance at the girl. "It was settled. No matter what difficulties there might be, I wanted to marry her. How blessed that Fuji was." (2: 157.)

Later, when a young man from another foothill town comes to visit, Osamu has reason to envy the mountain its solidity. Young Nitta works in the post office and is interested in literature, so when he learns through mail handling that Dazai the writer is in the area, he decides to pay a call. As they become acquainted and begin talking comfortably together, Nitta reveals that he was to have come with two or three other friends, but they had pulled out at the last moment. The reason was this writer's public reputation: "Satō Haruo had written in a novel what a terrible decadent Dazai was, a totally broken-down character; since I had no way of knowing you would turn out to be such a serious, proper person, I couldn't very well force them to come with me." (2: 158.) Nitta goes on to ask if Osamu would mind if he brought his friends with him next time he came. "Not at all," Osamu tells him. "So you were the desperate bravo come to spy me out?" "I was the suicide squad." Nitta was frank. "Last night I read Mr. Satō's book again, and resolved to come." (2: 158.) With no comment on what pain he feels to be so considered by the world, or what effort of doublethink it costs him still to feel gratitude (such as he will express in "Eight Views of Tokyo") toward Satō Haruo, when Satō helped perpetuate legends of Dazai's degradation, Osamu looks out the window at the mountain standing silently, and thinks it splendid. "Good show," he says. He can't match up to Fuji. "I was

ashamed of my own wavering affections and disaffections.” (2: 159.) And, proudly and humbly together, he does not remonstrate when the youths later use toward him the same title of respect they had used for Satō, *sensei*. “I had nothing to be proud of, no learning, no talent; my body was falling apart, my spirit was weak. Only suffering—I had passed through enough pain to accept silently these young men’s calling me *sensei*.” (Ibid.)

Vistas clear and dark. In a line that has now been carved onto the memorial marker at Misaka Pass, Osamu decides of a wild flower blooming profusely there that “evening primroses go well with Mount Fuji.” (2: 163.) He plants some evening primrose seeds near the inn, saying he will return the next year; this is the first time in years he has made a pledge that he will live that long. And one night, as he struggles to find the means to say what is in his mind and heart, he begins to compromise a little with the mountain when it comes to seem a symbol for the sought-for beauty and simplicity of expression.

Some geisha, out on their one-day-a-year excursion, stop to rest at the inn, and Osamu watches them as they wander about, choosing postcards and picking flowers; Fuji, looming above them, seems to Osamu to be watching them with his arms folded, as if he were their smug boss. A bride, in full regalia, stops one day on her way to her wedding. Osamu and the young daughter of the inn’s proprietress are both struck by the romance of the situation, as the bride-to-be gazes out at Fuji—until she spoils it all by yawning broadly. The two spectators agree privately that this is probably not her first wedding, as she is too blasé.

Meanwhile, Osamu’s own wedding plans seem to have developed a hitch. His family will contribute nothing. He goes to Kōfu to report this. His future mother-in-law asks if this means they are opposed to the match.

“No, it’s not exactly that they’re opposed,” I said as I gingerly pressed the palm of my right hand to the table. “I think they’re saying, ‘You go it alone.’”

“That’s quite all right.” Her mother laughed comfortably and continued, “As you know, we’re not wealthy ourselves, and in fact, a big wedding would be quite a strain. Just as long as you have love and determination toward your work, that is fine with us.”

I even forgot to bow. I just sat a while staring blankly at the garden. I was conscious that my eyes were burning. I wanted to be faithful to this mother. [2: 167.]

The term “filial piety” may sound formal and Eastern to the Western ear, but in Dazai’s view it is a universal emotion of love, independent of the Japanese family system, that should be unencumbered by notions of coercion. While most Japanese readers would agree with this view, there is in Dazai’s insistent repetition of the argument an indication of his personal inability, as a

result of childhood confusions, to find a proper and immutable object for this kind of love. Here, with his future wife's mother, he has Osamu construct a new mother for himself; later, in *Tsugaru*, Take becomes his new mother.

When Osamu leaves his fiancée's house to return to the pass, she walks him to the bus station.

“Well, how about it? Shall we have some more conversation?” I was talking like an ass.

“No, thank you. This is enough.” She laughed.

“Do you have any questions?” I sounded dumber and dumber.

“Yes.”

No matter what she asked, I would answer her truthfully.

“Has the snow started falling on Mount Fuji?”

I was taken aback totally. “Well, yes, the summit—” I started to say, and suddenly, there, right in front of me was Mount Fuji. I felt queer. “Hey, what's going on? You can see Fuji yourself from Kōfu, can't you? You're making a fool of me.” I spoke roughly. “What kind of dumb question is that—you're trying to make a fool of me.”

The girl looked down and snickered. “But you're staying at Misaka Pass, and I thought I *should* ask something about Fuji. . . .”

What a funny girl, I thought. [2: 168.]

That evening, back at the inn, he realizes how tense he had been the whole time, when the proprietress and her daughter have to take turns massaging and pounding his shoulders to loosen a cramp.

Ibuse Masuji, in “Bōyū” (*My Late Friend*), first published in 1948, describes in detail the behind-the-scenes parts he and the Tsushima emissaries, Kita Yoshishirō and Nakabata Keikichi, played in Dazai's remarriage. The earnest concern of Kita and Nakabata that Dazai be safely married, in hopes that then he would calm down; their monthly visits to Dazai's boarding house in Ogikubo to keep an eye on him, at which times the hangers-on who lived off Dazai's meager stipend would dive out the back door as they came in the front; Ibuse's abortive attempt to arrange a match with the daughter of the proprietor of a bar he and Dazai frequented, after her parents had asked him if he knew of some suitable young man (“When we said anyone would do, we didn't mean Dazai!”)—these all have the feeling of a sad farce. But when Ibuse visits Misaka later, after leaving Dazai there alone to pursue this marriage proposition, the farce is over, and with it the confusion it symbolized. He arrives at the inn while Dazai is in Kōfu to see his fiancée:

I climbed to the second floor, and found his room in perfect order. Next to the ink bottle on his desk was a cider bottle holding an azalea branch. Beneath the nibbled pen-holder Dazai liked to use lay a large pressed maple leaf. It was scarlet.

At first sight, it made me think of a young girl's desk. I was strangely moved. But it was a sweet scene. It was possible to conclude that Dazai seemed to be quietly enjoying the autumn colors at this mountain inn. Compared to his room in Ogikubo, this one looked as if an entirely different person lived there.⁷

Throughout Ibuse's account, Dazai remains passive and uncommunicative, although he does respond at his own pace to Ibuse's suggestions. "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" is one of several stories that give Dazai's view of the period.

Finally Osamu decides to leave the pass and go down to Kōfu. It is getting too cold, and his wedding is approaching. On one of his last days there, two giggling girls ask him to take their picture with Mount Fuji in the background. He agrees reluctantly, feeling rather that it is his farewell to the mountain. The two stand stiffly in a proper "memorial" pose. Somehow he has trouble focusing on them, and he reframes the photograph to remove them from it. With a silent prayer of thanks to Mount Fuji for the care it has taken of him, and a secret smirk at the girls' irritation when they discover they're not in the picture, he photographs the mountain by itself. Osamu's last view of Fuji is from the verandah of his cheap inn at Kōfu. Only one-third of it peeks out from behind the foothills, like a winter cherry.

A Destination in Sight

Obviously, "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji" is quite different in tone from the other autobiographical pieces Dazai had written so far. There is a sense of ease and openness, of that margin of safety of which he speaks in "Eight Views of Tokyo." It is a very shaky and newborn peace; the shock waves of the past continue to make themselves felt when, for example, he is reminded of his unsavory reputation, immortalized by Satō Haruo's prose, or when his family refuses to help directly in his coming marriage. But Osamu now has the strength to look straight at the facts and feel a determination to succeed. No matter what his fiancée asks, he will answer her truthfully—even if it jeopardizes his chances to tie himself to her generous mother. As he reminds himself in "Eight Views of Tokyo," "this was not the time to be vainly heaving complicated sighs of ecstasy and terror [the same words as in the epigraph to *The Final Years*] . . . I had to climb upward without a pause. . . ." (4: 50–51.) "I have important work to do." (4: 52.)

This, then, is the point at which the misery of Osamu's early Tokyo years is neatly ended. In almost the same words as "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji," with the added perspective of two years of successful marriage, he sums it up in "Eight Views of Tokyo": "My Tokyo life had come to an end when I left that boarding house in Ogikubo and set out for Kōshū with my one briefcase." (4: 69.) Kōfu is some distance from Tokyo, and Mitaka,

⁷Ibuse, "Bōyū," 164.

where Osamu and his wife now live, is just outside the city limits. From now on, Osamu lives outside Tokyo, although his literary life, and to some extent his social one, continue to revolve around the center of the city. "Now I live by my writing. When I am on a trip, I write in the inn register, without equivocation, Occupation: Writer. If I am in pain, I rarely mention it. Even if it is pain that outmatches anything before, I feign a smile." (4: 69.)

Completing the first map. If "Eight Views of Tokyo" had a linear plot, it would end here. But, in a sense, this is still the middle, because it is in part a story about writing a story. And at this point, the writer explains how he started to develop the story. The pulsing evening sun over the Musashino Plain, he says, gives him the hint. Inokashira Park, which lies in the plain, is his local strolling place; it is outside the city limits, yet it is considered one of the leading sights of Tokyo. So why not add his little home, from which he watches the sun set? What other views can be included, now that he has the conclusion? "I flipped through the album in my own heart. But now what became art was not the scenery of Tokyo; it was me within that landscape. Had art deceived me? Had I deceived art? My conclusion: Art is me." (4: 70.) Now the plan is clear, and there is no use trying to cram them all into eight views—let them tumble out as they come. And while the writer is still trying to get the past into order, two more scenes from the present demand to be included. They belong, because they symbolize an acceptance by Osamu of the things that could not be changed, reconciliation of potentially divisive residues of feeling, and taking on of responsibilities, including, by implication, that of writing good work.

In April (the story is being written in July), Osamu visits "Mr. S," to whom he had "caused a great deal of trouble" during his illness five years earlier. This is clearly Satō Haruo, toward whom he might have had reason to feel some bitterness for Satō's advertising of Dazai Osamu's troubles, or guilt at having abused the teacher-disciple relationship so thoroughly. Their conversation is about paintings and the writings of Akutagawa. The significance of the first topic is soon revealed, as Osamu and S go to an art exhibition and find one of H's lover's paintings there; understanding the second's depends on the reader's knowing about Dazai's passionate involvement in the Akutagawa Prize competition, and realizing that Satō was one of those who alternately discouraged Dazai and assured him that he was nearly certain to win. S and Osamu spend the day together. Then, as they are about to part, Osamu finds another scene for the new story he has been telling S about. "Views of Tokyo . . ." S muses, not really understanding that Osamu means internal scenery, not the street on which they are standing. But Osamu is not impatient. "It was the sight of Mr. S and his expelled pupil that I wanted to include in my 'Eight Views.' . . ."

Most recently, Osamu has emerged as a family head. His wife's sister is engaged to be married, but her fiancé, T, has been drafted and is about to be

sent overseas. She has asked her sister and brother-in-law to represent her family in seeing him off. The final scene of "Eight Views of Tokyo" is the day of the young man's departure. Osamu builds a picture of himself and T, long before he arrives on the scene, that is calculated to draw out their similarities and differences. Osamu is socially inept, badly dressed, physically not outstanding (in fact, draft-exempt for health reasons), and poor. The youth's family is wealthy; the employees of the family factory are all there to give the popular young master a send-off; when he later appears, he is clean-cut and upstanding—Osamu as he might have been. Embarrassed at the poor figure he cuts, Osamu's thoughts are morose; and then as fantasy begins to weave, Osamu himself becomes his final view (or at least sight) of Tokyo. He is standing beside the famous Sammon Gate of Zōjōji Temple (destroyed later in the war by American bombing): "Off and on, about twenty buses went by the gate, and each time, the guide would point straight at me and start to explain something. At first I feigned unconcern but I ended up trying out different poses. I folded my arms composedly like the statue of Balzac. As I did so, the feeling came over me that I myself had become one of the famous sights of Tokyo." (4: 73.)

Now at last the concept of "Eight Views of Tokyo" has been completed. With the "full moon" image that in Japanese culture is a symbol of completeness and perfection, Osamu is finished with these memories. He returns us to the beginning, to the room where he has sat for ten days with pen, ink, paper, and his map of Tokyo. Only in the final words does he reach past the satisfaction that the writing of this long-desired story has given him, to refer again to the darkness of the future, and more: "Ten days have now passed since I set out, but I seem to be still at this inn. Doing whatever it is I'm doing." (4: 74.) In "Eight Views of Tokyo," Dazai has done what he wanted to do. He has told the story of Osamu's ten terrible years in Tokyo. He has carried Osamu's story into the present. But there is a sense in the last line that even though the story is complete so far, he still cannot strike a period. "Eight Views of Tokyo" ends on a comma. "Worldly Angel" shows the distance yet to go: although "Eight Views of Tokyo" rounds off phase one, the Osamu Saga will not be complete until he is calm, or despairing, enough to write *No Longer Human*. "Eight Views of Tokyo" is a concordance, not a complete history. The events and places are there, but not enough of the emotions.

But at least the pain has been diluted, so that for the present Dazai can grow and develop as a writer, family man, native of Tsugaru, and citizen of Japan. That the child within was not growing at the same pace would not become clear for several years. In the meantime, there was the problem of Tsugaru to deal with.

5. Going Home

I had thought Dazai was the only person born in Tsugaru to carry the scent of homeland and family deep in the marrow of his bones; but I came to see again and again that it was a special characteristic of all natives of Tsugaru.

—Tsushima Michiko¹

At the same time Dazai was pinning down his Tokyo self in “Eight Views of Tokyo,” he was continuing his search into his Tsugaru soul. In this sense, the Osamu Saga has for a time two threads that we can trace back to “Recollections”: Osamu grown up and gone to Tokyo, and Osamu still reacting to a country childhood, as part of a long process of reconciliation with his family. The latter was more than just the typical Japanese attachment to one’s native soil; in Dazai, it was more like an adopted child searching for his true parents. Homesickness is the disease of those who have no home. The average person takes for granted that the place where he was born and grew up is “home,” but for Dazai there was no such unexamined assumption. Suspicious of the “whip of Family,” Dazai had first to wander far afield before he discovered his true base to be among the very people with whom he had grown up. His home was not Kanagi; it was all of Tsugaru, which for him came to symbolize certain special qualities. He identified and personally resolved the source of his conflict with the family in Tsugaru, but, in the process, he had to give up family membership of his own choice.

Ironically, this discovery came as Dazai was being reintegrated into his family—a thread in the saga that begins even before “Eight Views of Tokyo” was written. It is a thread that reaches its destination in *Tsugaru*, with Osamu seeming finally to come to terms with who and what he is. In this part of the journey, the child abandons the attempt to gain recognition from home, and the man finds a saddened peace of mind, so that the writer is left only with the conclusion of the saga to write.

Moves Toward Reconciliation

“Konogoro” (These Days), a discursive three-part newspaper essay published early in 1940, shows Dazai broaching the subject of his past sins (to

¹Tsushima Michiko, “Omoidasu mama ni,” 115.

be more fully explained the next year in "Eight Views of Tokyo"), and family relations, as he explores the subtle difficulty of his position. The first part recounts a correspondence Dazai has had recently with a cousin working for a steamship line in the Palau Islands of the South Pacific. In some senses, the cousin's life had been just as unhappy as Dazai's, though Dazai never comments directly on that aspect of it. Ten years earlier this man had been active in a certain political movement; he had been arrested and had spent all the intervening time shut up in prison. Now he had been released to work in exile, clearly a form of alternate service for a Japan gearing up for war in the Pacific, although neither he nor Dazai could have known that at the time. A letter comes from him to Dazai in which he asks Dazai to visit his mother, sister, and wife, who are living away from the rest of the family, all alone in Tokyo. Dazai's answer reveals the tortured logic, unreasonable reticence, and semi-paralysis that characterize his every contact with family: I cannot go; my craziness of the past few years has made it impossible for me to have anything to do with family; I'm forbidden to communicate with home, and if they found out I'd been sneaking around seeing relatives here, that would cause trouble all around.

This is a line of argument that occurs time and again in Dazai's writing, to reveal his ambivalence. Until his brother gives him permission, he must wait in suspended animation; yet he may not, or will not, appeal for reconsideration of his case, nor do anything that might suggest he is reforming and repentant. At the same time, by juxtaposing his behavior with the response of an audience (in this case, his cousin), he shows by example if not by analysis that his behavior is unreasonable by commonsense or humane standards. Accordingly, he reveals that the emotional sources of his inaction are deeper than logic, and resistant to persuasion.

The cousin's return letter cuts through his resistance and Dazai capitulates, but the letter reveals three factors that make the visit possible: the mother's poor health (her condition is like Dazai's dead father's); the suggestion that these must be Matsuki relatives, Gen'emom's blood family, and not Tsushima, his adoptive family, so communication between the families would not be very close; and Dazai's identification with his cousin, who responded to political movements just as he did, even if their later histories were different. Dazai visits his aunt, and talks that night about the twenty years they have not seen each other. On the way home, his thoughts overwhelm him. He voices the cry that runs through all his subsequent writing about his family: "Why is this problem of family such a painful one?" (10: 145.) The rest of the essay avoids the question; it ends with a kind of whistling in the dark: "Recently, since I have quieted down, my family back home seems to be trusting me a little, and that makes me incredibly happy. Today I

got a package of rice cakes my eldest sister sent me secretly from home. This will surely be a good year.” (10: 149.)

No triumphal returns. Only a few months later, Dazai tackled Tsugaru, home, and self-respect head-on in “Thinking of Zenzō.” The true focus of the story is embedded in a wider account of how he, a new house renter in Mitaka, may have been “deceived,” as he put it, by a supposed farm woman selling rose bushes. With typical Dazai irony, he shows at the end of the story that although the woman may have been lying about herself, she appears to have sold him some excellent specimens at truly bargain prices. As usual, the transition from outer story to inner is abrupt, and only after this second inner story is told does Dazai show how it relates to the first. To tell the tale in chronological order, Osamu was sold some rose bushes last fall. This spring they show only a few leaves. He is sure he has been cheated. A painter friend comes to call one afternoon, and Osamu tells him about a horrendous incident that had occurred the night before. After that, the central story, they chat some more and then the friend suddenly notices the roses. Osamu tells him how he had been cheated, but the friend, who is a rose fancier, says that, on the contrary, they are splendid bushes, and offers to prune them. Osamu feels hope and faith grow in his heart.

The inner story is one of disaster, which makes the peace of the ending a very tremulous one, as usual. It is about a Tsugaru reunion in Tokyo, a banquet sponsored by the Tokyo office of a Tsugaru newspaper, for natives of the northern region working in the arts.² Osamu is sure he was sent an invitation not because he is beginning to be recognized as a serious writer, but because a close friend who works for the paper has included him. Yet there is a problem: Osamu feels uneasy about going, not because of the matter of professional recognition, but because of Tsugaru. This problem is the novelistic focus of the story. “Why, when I have feared my homeland for so long, did I say I’d attend?” he begins his account. (3: 180.) He had three reasons, none of them having anything to do with his career. First, a sense of responsibility. He must go out of *gimu*, or the social obligation to fulfill one’s social role. He must go out of *giri*, or responsibility to repay a friend’s favor.³ He must show that he is an adult, not a fearful little kid. Second, gratitude. His friend Kawauchi had treated him honestly and more than decently several years earlier when Osamu, in his “sickness,” had written him a crazy letter importuning him for money. The man had not been able to help him, but he had not dismissed or insulted him either. Now Osamu must not let Kawauchi think he wouldn’t come because he got no loan at the time. The third reason is the true, heart’s reason: homesickness, brought on by the wording of the

²The banquet, sponsored by *Tōō Nippō*, took place on September 20, 1939, at the Matsu-moto-rō restaurant in Tokyo’s Hibiya Park. Bessho, *Dazai Osamu Kenkyū*, 134.

³See the Conclusion for further discussion of the vocabulary of responsibility.

invitation. They were conventional enough phrases—"We are looking forward to a fourth straight year of bumper crops, with fields of golden rice and crimson apples"—but the effect was to remind Osamu that he was, after all, a child of Tsugaru. He had not been home for ten years. One brief, bitter memory of eight years earlier flashes into his mind, when he had been called to Aomori for police interrogation, had been released in the middle of the night to face a blinding snowstorm, and had slunk right back to Tokyo without anyone at home being aware he was there. But now he is seduced by a sweet autumn vision of golden waves and apple cheeks.

Once he accepts, he is consumed with growing anxiety. Too high emotional stakes are riding on the outcome. Fantasies of how his writing has no doubt been misread begin to obsess him: if people read his books at all, probably all they do at home is seize upon the misbehaviors of his heroes, and use these as examples of what an affront he is to Tsugaru. He remembers his brother's reaction, and suspects as bad of others:

Four years ago, when I met with my eldest brother briefly in Tokyo, he had said, "At the least, you stop sending your books to the family. I don't even want to read them. If they read your books, what would they—," he started to say, and then suddenly clamped his mouth shut and just bowed his head; but I understood exactly what he meant. I intend never to send one book of mine to the family, for as long as I live. And writers who come from my home region . . . they all laugh at me. Even artists who have nothing to do with writing—painters, sculptors—I'm sure they believe implicitly every word of criticism of my work that shows up on the rare occasions I'm mentioned in the newspapers, and they must smile, so knowingly, so sardonically. I'm not being paranoid, you know. [3: 182–83.]

Paranoid or not, he still imagines people sitting around gossiping about what a disgrace the youngest Tsushima boy (Dazai uses both "Dazai" and "Tsushima") is making of himself in Tokyo.⁴ The importance of the gathering is that it should be the prelude to a "return in triumph," a phrase he uses several times. He would dress up, and be humble and well-mannered, so that all the other participants would exclaim that the malicious gossip about him must not be true; and this would filter back home to warm the cockles of his aged mother's heart. These thoughts erupt into an overwrought and melodramatic cry: "I cannot cast you aside—my homeland, this land that has so

⁴Dazai explains here in parentheses that "Dazai" is his pen name, and "Tsushima" is his family name. However, instead of using the correct characters, he uses a homophonous combination to make a semipseudonym he had used in the past before he arrived at "Dazai Osamu." This is similar to his playing with names in "Beggar Student," where he explains that "Dazai Osamu" is his pen name while "Kimura Takeo" is his real name. In "Katei no kōfuku" (The Happiness of the Home), he asks his readers to imagine a fictional bureaucrat named "Tsushima Shūji" (true characters), since if he uses his own name, no reader can get angry thinking the author means to satirize him. This is an example of Dazai's ironic straddling of the line between objective fact and artistic necessity.

insulted me . . . I love my homeland. I love everyone who lives there!" (3: 184.)

The day arrives, and Dazai "the stylish child" makes elaborate preparations for the perilous journey—in space, from Mitaka to Tokyo, in mind, from disgrace to salvation. "Now was the chance to redeem ten years' infamy," he tells himself; and he fails totally. Contact with the atmosphere of home brings out the worst in him: he starts out tense and stiff, drinks too much, and ends up wild and sloppy. He senses a shift in his behavior to a childish willfulness; he loses all self-control in the face of tempestuous, conflicting emotions. All the others seem to be first-rank painters, sculptors, playwrights, dancers, composers. What is he doing in their company? They don't want me at home, never have wanted me, so why do I want so badly to be wanted? He resigns himself to defeat. Certainly this incident will not redeem his reputation.

That night, as he sorts over the events of the day, he reaches a kind of saving insight: It was foolish in the first place to think of a triumphant return. They will never accept him. In words that would soon appear in "Eight Views of Tokyo," he decides that he will never be a worldly success. He should be content with his small personal gains. It would be better to be heard only by people who want to listen. Art cannot command; the moment it acquires power to command, it dies. As so often happens with Dazai, what starts out as self-excuse ends up as an expression of what he intuits as truth. In confessing an inability to conform to family standards of propriety, he pinpoints the plight of creativity in the face of authoritarian oppression. It is not simply that art cannot be commanded, that is, that one cannot produce great art on command (a truth that was becoming all too well-known, with growing censorship). More important, art in a position of command partakes more of authority than of art. This is the philosophic basis of Dazai's instinctive reaction to writers like Shiga and Kawabata: by virtue of the very supremacy they are granted by the literary establishment or the world at large, they are inimical to the development of the individual artistic voice. Dazai saw himself as a weak voice crying in the wilderness—but a voice that spoke artistic truth. Weakness was his subject (as he decided in "These Days"), and weakness was his means.⁵

This is the story and the conclusion Osamu relates to his visiting painter friend. The friend understands what he means by the destructive pull of home, because he too has been "driven" from his hometown beside the Inland Sea. "This 'homeland' business, it's like a mole under your eye. If it bothers you, there's no end to it. Even if you have it removed, the scar remains," he adds, but Osamu is not comforted. (3: 190.) Now is the moment

⁵Makoto Ueda sees such statements in stories as revealing Dazai's view of the artist as a friend of the weak. *Modern Japanese Writers*, 152–57.

the friend notices his roses, and that turns out to be the comfort Osamu needs. This is the reward for nonresistance: satisfaction in small things. He has not really been cheated.

Circling in on home. So far, early in 1940, Dazai was new to the business of being a responsible citizen. Although Osamu in the story fantasizes instant vindication, the obsessive repetition of words like "willfulness," "crime," "guilt," "evil," and "shame" shows that his expectation was otherwise. Moreover, as time passed and Dazai established his career, it became obvious that he would never be a part of his family again. There were too many irretrievable things standing between himself and them; and even when they allowed him back physically, he himself was never able to make the psychological leap. From here on, whenever his attention turned back to Tsugaru, he felt compelled to balance defiant memories of people who had supported him with statements on the trouble he had caused.

In January 1941, Dazai wrote two short pieces for the same Tōhoku newspaper that had sponsored the banquet.⁶ Entitled "Goshogawara" and "Aomori," the names of towns that held special significance for him, the stories are about Osamu's experiences there, not the towns themselves. "Goshogawara" is the town where his aunt lived, and accordingly, the central memory and commentary involve her. When Osamu was seven or eight, one evening he fell into a deep, water-filled ditch. A man pulled him out; helpful passersby stripped his dripping clothes from him and put on some dry clothes from a used clothing store nearby. They were girl's clothes, and he was mortified; and yet, he implies, he was gratified when his aunt came running in terrified concern. Dazai concludes the brief sketch with a comment on his aunt: she treated him as a special favorite; when others teased him for being a sissy, she would buck him up by calling him a "good little man"; and she would get furious when they made fun of him. In a little over a page, Dazai recreates a couple of scenes from a country childhood. But more than that, having chided himself for being "unmanly," he succeeds in luxuriating over having his aunt fend for him again, assuring him that he is a man even if, symbolically, he is dressed in girl's clothes.

This characteristic exposure of faults, followed by refuge in uncritical love, continues in "Aomori." By this method, Dazai maintains the necessary fiction that he is extra special and worthy of extraordinary consideration, the premise on which much of his "willful" behavior depended. "Aomori" focuses on memories of Mr. Toyoda, the distant relative with whose family Dazai stayed during the four years of high school. Toyoda was clearly a substitute for the father Osamu had lost only recently, but he was a very different kind of person, warm and supportive. (Toyoda was also the man

⁶Thereby showing that Osamu's subjective interpretation of disaster had not objectively affected Dazai's career.

sent by the Tsugaru family to try to head Hatsuyo off when she first fled to Tokyo. Dazai does not make reference to that event in his discussion of the part Toyoda played in his life.) Osamu calls him "Odosu," the local dialect for "Father." One of the irretrievable things in Osamu's life is that "Odosu" died while Osamu was in the midst of his craziest period, and now there would never be a chance to set his mind at ease with the successes of the present.

When Osamu was in the second year of high school, one day he saw a painting he liked very much, so he bought it and gave it to "Odosu." Toyoda laughed warmly when Osamu told him some day it would be worth a lot. It was an early Munakata. Years later, Osamu has seen Munakata Shikō from time to time on Tokyo streets, but the smooth assurance of the famous artist always has daunted him, keeping Osamu from approaching him.⁷ Yet he prides himself on having recognized Munakata's excellence so long ago, and hopes for the Toyodas' sake that the little painting has grown more valuable through the years.

In 1942, a year after publishing these tiny sketches, Dazai made his first major efforts to explore his feelings about home in two long stories entitled "Going Home" and "Hometown." Unlike the stories of the line that leads from "Recollections" to "Eight Views of Tokyo," which are general summaries of a long period prompted only by the weight of accumulated time, these pull in the remote past only to explain recent events. Thus "Going Home" describes a visit home after an absence of ten years, and "Hometown" another visit shortly after, when Dazai's mother had become critically ill. "Hometown" is, in fact, an unexpected afterword, for Dazai had not thought her end was to be so soon.

A fragile foothold. In "Going Home" events are grouped into large periods: distant past, past, and present. The story begins with the narrator explaining why he is writing the story. In this explanation, Dazai reveals what he felt he was doing through his autobiographical stories: writing them was a system of moral bookkeeping. There was no way in a whole lifetime for him possibly to pay for the trouble he had caused so many people. But, as partial payment, he would write about those he owed. That the "payment" contained more than a little revenge is to be seen over and over again in the ambiguous way he describes these people; but at least on the surface, he felt he was sincere in his portrayal of their "goodness."

He was clear on the point that he bore total responsibility for the public images of the people he wrote about. This was the danger of autobiographical fiction: it was one thing to write about oneself, but another to involve

⁷The printmaker Munakata Shikō was one of the established artists whose self-assurance so intimidated Osamu at the banquet in "Thinking of Zenzō." See *Taiyō* (The Sun), no. 7 (Summer 1974) [Special issue on Munakata], 46-47.

other people.⁸ When others were involved, the writer had to be careful, for his subjects (or victims) had no access to redress. Thus, "Going Home" is about Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata, real people identified by their real names. Dazai also uses his own name, Shūji, and its diminutive, "Shū-cha" (instead of the "Osa-ko" of "Recollections"), and his brother Eiji's, although Bunji remains an anonymous "elder brother." But Dazai is delicate about one person: Ibuse Masuji, who plays a relatively minor part. He even explains elaborately that he has been using the phrase "a certain *sempai*" instead of the proper "—— Sensei," because —— Sensei doesn't like to see his name appear in stories.

Dazai can at this point in his life deal with Kita and Nakabata, of all the people to whom he owes debts of gratitude, because his relationship with them was innocent. When the catalogue of the messes he has been through with them is detailed, it might seem strange to call it "innocent," but what he means is that his reactions to them are on the surface relatively uncomplicated. Kita, Nakabata, Toyoda, his aunt, Take—these are all people with whom Dazai could play the willful child. They could be gruff, and they could scold him, but they were basically uncritical and allowed him to indulge at will in being as dependent as he liked. Now when it came to Hatsuyo, or Bunji, Eiji, and the family, that was "complicated." These people had strong needs of their own, needs that conflicted with Dazai's demand for unlimited license, including the need to uphold standards of adult responsibility—the "whip of Family" Dazai felt cracking at his back.

The underlying premise of "Going Home" is that it is the story of a writer with an extraordinary repertoire of guilt who doubts the very ground he stands on. The event that makes this self-examination imperative is a visit from Mr. Kita, who proposes to take Shūji home to Tsugaru for his first visit home in ten years. Shūji explains the part Kita and Nakabata played in his early Tokyo years, and expresses deep gratitude toward them.⁹ In "Going Home" Kita and Nakabata are nothing but good. They make possible the proper celebration of Shūji's marriage, they have a formal photograph of the wedding party taken,¹⁰ with exquisite courtesy they twist the facts of their relationship and apologize for the trouble *they* have caused *him* through the

⁸Other Japanese writers might have done well to be so scrupulous on that point. Shimazaki Tōson, for instance, did not consider the effect on his niece or her parents when he published *A New Life*.

⁹When, some years later in *No Longer Human*, Dazai creates the character Hirame, the "gratitude" seems much more ambiguous. Hirame ("Flatfish") plays in Ōba Yōzō's life a role similar to that of Kita in Dazai's. Hirame is a negative, slimy figure with no redeeming qualities; there is no trace of Shūji's love for Kita in him. By the end of Dazai's life, he has become a policeman.

¹⁰That photograph still exists. It shows Dazai and Michiko, Ibuse and his wife, the Kōfu go-betweens, Nakabata (dressed in civilian national guard uniform) and Kita (in the Western-style morning coat). It is reproduced on p. 75 in this book.

years. The trip has Kita as guide and protector to ease Shūji's first confrontation with his family since the troubles (unspecified in this story) of the 1930's. It is a journey of discovery for Shūji in a number of areas. First of all, on the train north, Shūji is reminded that he has created a real life for himself in the years he has been away from home. The childlike, trembling Shūji, fearful of his family, afraid he will be rejected, is also a professional writer named Dazai Osamu who is doing quite a businesslike job of making a career. In fact, a laudatory newspaper review of his latest novel is one of the things he reads on the train.¹¹

Yet there are shocks: in the years away, Shūji has almost forgotten the Tsugaru dialect he grew up speaking. In Tokyo, he had been laughed at for his strange accent. Now as the train takes on Tsugaru passengers, he finds that at first he cannot understand what the "natives" around him are saying. Although he does readjust quickly, speaking remains precarious, and he finds later that he has to use Tokyo words to explain to his mother and aunt his Tokyo life. Furthermore, the aftereffects of the initial shock remain: "I felt . . . as if I had just been presented with incontrovertible evidence that I had betrayed my homeland." (5: 256.) And his mother and his aunt—in ten years they have turned into little old ladies. Perhaps more than anything else, this brings home to him how much time has passed.

Another revelation that comes to Shūji concerns the land itself. In "Thinking of Zenzō," Tsugaru had been a vision of wealth and fruitfulness. In a sense, Dazai's fantasies about his family were superimposed on geography; to the end, Dazai wrote about a family of elegant aristocrats, his brothers, with himself the only pauper. In "Going Home" he now, if anything, identifies Tsugaru with his own poverty: "For the first time in ten years, I was standing on my home soil. What poor land it was. It was like frozen ground. It felt as if, year after year, frozen however many feet deep, the soil had broken down and turned powdery and faded." (5: 258.) That identification, and a fierce, defiant pride, grow and strengthen as Shūji continues his Tsugaru journey. Shūji has successes on the trip: his eighty-five-year-old grandmother welcomes him with delighted warmth, even though in "Recollections" she had been mean and irritable. His brother Eiji (his ally in "Recollections") pours beer for him at dinner, implicitly welcoming him home. He also has failures. He bows to an elegant young girl who brings in the tea, thinking that she is Bunji's daughter. She is a maid. Even worse, thinking it improper to just wander around the house as if he belonged there, he asks where the bathroom is. Eiji looks quizzically at him, and Mr. Kita

¹¹The novel was *A New 'Hamlet.'* There is an even sharper contrast drawn between the city Dazai and the country Shūji in that Shūji reads a Georges Simenon detective novel (albeit in translation) on the train that is carrying him to a land whose language he will discover he barely understands anymore.

laughs, “What a thing to ask—in your own home!” Here once again he comes up against what he sees as his sad fate: actions he undertakes after the most exquisite considerations and for the most scrupulous of reasons are misunderstood as weird by people who are unaware of his tortured logic. Even now, he still does not feel free to look around the house he so wanted to see. Osamu, staring miserably out the bathroom window in “One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji,” comes to mind as we see Shūji now gazing greedily out the tiny bathroom window in his boyhood home trying to drink in a view of the inner garden. There is so much he wants to see—who knows if he will ever be allowed back again?—but he feels he must satisfy himself with this limited view from a little window.

“Going Home” ends on an unsettled note, as do so many of Dazai’s stories. Although the trip had been successful, it had not been satisfying. Shūji had not seen his brother Bunji, who was away on business (ironically, in Tokyo). He had been to the house, but was not back in the family. Kita has fallen ill since returning from the rigorous trip, and Shūji is guilt-stricken: “I couldn’t stand it. It was all my fault. My vices had shortened Mr. Kita’s life by ten years.” (5: 262.) This feeling will resurface when Kazuko accuses herself and Naoji in *The Setting Sun* of having shortened their mother’s life. But in the balance, Osamu’s journey toward reconciliation has made a good start. The next story, “Hometown,” confirms this and moves Osamu farther, while at the same time underlining the emotional cost that accompanies attempts to recover from catastrophe.

Home, but not free. “Hometown” follows hard on “Going Home” and illustrates Dazai’s thinking of his work as all one big piece and of his readers as an intimate band. In case you missed the last installment, he says, I’ll tell you what was in it, and for the things I don’t want to repeat now, here is where you can find them.¹² This is the way it starts:

A year ago in the summer, I saw my hometown for the first time in ten years. This past fall, I wrote up what had happened at the time, gave it the title “Going Home,” and sent off the twenty-page story to a quarterly magazine. This is what happened right after that. The Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata I’d referred to in the story came to visit me at my little house in Mitaka. They told me that my mother back home was critically ill. I had been expecting in my heart to get news of this sort sometime within the next five or six years, but I had not thought it would be so soon. [5: 263.]

“Hometown” is the story of Tsushima Shūji’s trip home to his dying mother, and of his bringing his wife and daughter for their first visit—the

¹²In fact, because of publishing exigencies, “Hometown” came out before “Going Home” by several months. The Japanese word of the title, *kokyō*, while it means literally “hometown,” has special connotations. It implies country rather than city; and even if a person has lived away from this “hometown” for decades, it is still “home.” Although the phrase sounds too sentimental in English, “heart’s home” is probably closest to what Dazai meant.

only time mother would ever meet daughter-in-law and granddaughter. It is one of Dazai's most emotionally laden stories. After the introduction, the action is mostly of one day; but the weight is of decades. The condensation of so much emotion into such a simple form makes this a very fine story, complete in itself; but knowing that it reflects the writer's own conflicts and yet is so carefully structured and calm in tone adds a dimension to the reader's appreciation of it. In "Hometown," Shūji sees himself as the Prodigal Son, returning though unsure of his reception, and filled with a consciousness of his many sins. A tone of yearning and confusion is set from the start, as Shūji approaches Kanagi with his nervous wife and points out the roof of his "brother's house." He is mistaken; it is actually the roof of a nearby temple. Insecurity causes other mistakes, echoing those of "Going Home" and emphasizing how much a stranger to the Tsushima family Shūji has become. Remembering the earlier error in which he had bowed to a maid, thinking she was his brother's daughter, he tells his wife she need not bow to a pretty girl who meets them at the station. Later he discovers she is his sister's daughter.

It is a subterranean conflict that determines much of the story's action, and this too is the result of miscalculation. Shūji is insecure because he does not know his brother Bunji's attitude toward his being there. Bunji was the one who had forbidden him access to the family years earlier; Shūji would never be safe until it was Bunji who was allowing him in again. But Shūji and his wife have come to Tsugaru not at Bunji's bidding, but as a result of Kita's and Nakabata's engineering. His mother was critically ill; he had visited the previous year; surely, the "retainers" thought, Bunji would allow him to see his mother before she died. But because he has come uninvited, Shūji must be a supplicant, and for most of the story Kita and Nakabata are absent, closeted upstairs with Bunji, negotiating for Shūji's pardon. The complication is revealed partway through the story: Bunji had in fact sent a special delivery letter calling Shūji home—but Shūji had left on his own authority before it arrived. Without realizing it, Kita had backed Bunji into just the corner he had wanted to avoid, that of having to take an official stand, as family head, on amnesty for the transgressor. Bunji could call Shūji to their mother's side, as a kind of order, but now he was being asked to grant a favor that would seem to sanction past misbehavior. Shūji realizes that Kita has appeared to be meddling in private affairs. Now he must worry about two things, the disposition of his own case and the maintenance of Kita's "face."

Even on this latter issue, Shūji reveals ambivalence. When his wife asks him where they will spend the night, Shūji tells her it's no use asking him. He has no rights now; they must leave everything up to Kita. His wife has an intuition that Shūji's feelings are not as passive as his words. "Somehow, you seem resentful of Mr. Kita," she observes, and Shūji erupts in defense of his

deep appreciation of everything Kita has done through the years. But the fact that Dazai includes this interchange shows that, although Shūji could not consciously accept it, he knew that what she saw was true. He was indebted to Kita, and he hated that. Ironically, by anticipating his brother's summons, Shūji was now faced with the possibility that he might be rejected, whereas if he had waited he would have been accepted, even if not pardoned. Somehow, logical or not, it was Kita's fault.

In the working out of the problem, a sharp division between worlds is revealed: the men's world upstairs, in which hard and fateful bargaining is taking place, and from which Shūji is barred; and the women's world of human tragedy and emotional expression in which he is allowed to participate, around his mother's bed downstairs. The men must decide what is correct on the basis of abstract principles of family responsibility; the women can act "naturally" and welcome Shūji with warmth and love, although they would be bound by any decision Bunji made, even if it were unfavorable to Shūji. Shūji has no trouble with the women, among whom he is welcomed as a long-lost child; his difficulties are with the men. This division becomes crucial in Dazai's writing within the next few years, at the end of his life. As if to underline it, Dazai gives Shūji a scene alone, in which author and character in effect debate each other. Should he break down and weep for his mother and the lost past? Dazai the poseur is observing Shūji the poseur. The question is whether a man is more a hypocrite for hiding or revealing himself, and whether a writer is not the biggest hypocrite of all for having it both ways.

Shūji reaches a resolution that has great implications for both present and future. His struggle takes place in private, in silence, and that is his salvation, in the sense that it is the key to the foundation of an adult self-appraisal. By self-restraint, by silence, he has bought his ticket to independence; in this context, that comes to mean reconciliation. He has an intuition of the price to him of words. All that fateful bargaining in the Machiavellian world of men he has imagined existing upstairs, egotistically imagining it all revolving around the disposition of his fate—those words are cheap. The world of women downstairs, with the easy ebb and flow of emotion—words are cheap there too. It is not just that he has proved himself "manly" by not breaking down, even when alone; for he acknowledges that weakness is there, and he does not repudiate it. Instead, by holding silence, he proves himself his own man. Never, here or later, does he negotiate; any acceptance he gains is built on silence there too.

Paradoxically, this discovery contains the seeds of final disaster. A writer earns his living by words, and a writer for whom words are expensive must draw on emotional capital to continue. That is, since such a large number of Dazai's stories were drawn so directly from his own life and his own reac-

tions to events, to write meant to relive—often without the emotional release of resolution. As Dazai grew more and more popular, the public demanded more and more from him. The excellence of the postwar writing, following a seemingly recuperative silence, is proof that Dazai had indeed struck a well of strength within himself, but its cost is apparent in the increasing note of exhaustion. Lacking the benefit of hindsight, Shūji only knows for the moment that being alone and silent has been the right thing to do. With sure artistic instinct Dazai realizes that this scene crystallizes the value of Shūji's silence, which will be reinforced in two later tableaux: Kita's view of the Tsushima boys lined up at dinner, and the Tsushima children gathered in silent sorrow. The final scene is also one of silences: the three Tsushima brothers and their sister gather quietly, already mourning their mother who may die at any moment. This is Shūji's homecoming. He has allowed himself finally to bury his doubts, resentments, guilts, and fears, and be at one with them. If Bunji did not welcome him, he also did not dispute his right to belong. Osamu had gone to Tokyo and had at last returned to Tsugaru.

"Hometown" marks the opening in the deadlock in Dazai's life; he had resumed some limited contact with his brother. The visit described in "Hometown" took place early in October of 1942. The mother's condition stabilized and Dazai left for Tokyo with his wife and daughter. He wrote "Hometown" later in November, at Michiko's family home in Kōfu. The end came in December. There was a memorial service in January, for which Dazai returned to Kanagi with his wife and child. But for Osamu, the last stage of the Tsugaru leg of his journey yet remained. He had still to discover what Tsugaru itself meant to him personally. In the course of that search, he made Tsugaru famous throughout Japan.

Home Is Not Where You Thought It Was

For nearly a year and a half, Dazai wrote little about his Tokyo life, and virtually nothing about the Tsugaru part of the Osamu Saga. It was as if the intense experiences of "Going Home" and "Hometown" had to percolate through his soul before anything could be distilled from them; and when the new synthesis emerged, it was perhaps as much by chance as by design. At any rate, Dazai wraps up the issue of Tsugaru and his family in 1944, in *Tsugaru*. Two-thirds of the way through the book he explains the situation to himself as well as to his readers:

I've always felt spiritually exhausted in my family home. And what makes it worse is that I will write something like this afterward. The man whose unhappy fate it is to have to make a living by selling stories he writes about his family will have his homeland taken away from him by God. In other words, most probably I will spend the rest of my days dozing in my dilapidated house in Tokyo, dreaming of

home and yearning for it; I will wander around aimlessly, and die like that. [7: 103-4.]

But it is with a very reflective tone that he says this, with none of the note of hysteria that accompanied similar yearning and despair earlier. By the time he was writing *Tsugaru*, Dazai had solved at least that problem in his life. The fatal emptiness it left at the base of his life support was the price of resolution.

At the time of writing, Dazai seems in fairly good shape, although "Fifteen Years" later reveals that to have been at least partly a pose. The war was causing considerable hardship and yet, if anything, it adds spice to *Tsugaru*. Dazai's descriptions of his elaborate precautions not to appear a Tokyo scavenger out to plunder the bounty of the countryside are calculated to bring a smile to the urban reader now subject in 1944 to market scarcities, as is the continuing theme of concern lest sake, already severely rationed, not be available. Dazai's pose is that of a slightly sad clown taking pratfalls but doggedly bounding back. The serious, thoughtful man is there, too, and the brisk, competent, sensitive reporter. The book is imbued with warmth and a steadiness that appear perhaps nowhere else in his works. It is as if, somewhere within the child, the man whose existence is hinted at in "Hometown" has been developing and for a moment peeks out from his bizarre shelter to say a few words in his own behalf. It is a measure of the strength and depth of Dazai's attachment to home that only in relation to *Tsugaru* does this maturity make its appearance.

Tsugaru is a rich sea of experiences. Each incident rings true, although it is difficult to say if each is real. Dazai in "Fifteen Years" called *Tsugaru* a "novel," but it is also an account of an actual trip he took. Events are presented in such a way that it does not matter whether or not they really happened; Dazai convinces the reader that real people act as Dazai describes them, and we feel that we come to understand more about Osamu in his journey through life in each episode. "Reality lies in what we believe; reality cannot make us believe," is the way he puts it in his notebook early in the story. (7: 38.) Furthermore, every incident is a kind of discovery for Dazai too. Each stands as entertainment, but as he distills its significance, there is also a moral to each. Dazai learns something new about himself or his adjustment to the world each time. During the journey, Dazai is at the same time an insider and outsider. He is both more distantly objective an observer than a native son, and more intimate than a casual traveler.

Four themes run through the account of the three-week journey. The first is Dazai's own discovery of *Tsugaru*, the character of the land and the nature of the people. He reads and quotes the history of the region; he observes the wild, sad beauty of the scenery, the savage climate that contributes, he feels,

to the loneliness, stubborn pride, sense of tragedy, and strong affection he sees in the people. It is hardly an objective reading, because he associates Tsugaru's character and fate with his own.

Within this journey of personal and what might be called geopsychological discovery is the theme of childlike men drinking and carousing their way through life. In *Tsugaru* it is innocent diversion that brings some welcome but temporary variety into basically sober lives. But there are clues enough even in this story that meaningless dissipation is the dangerous potential of entertainment carried to the point of abuse. It is not such a big step from the wild and jolly fun of evenings spent by Dazai with his friends N and S in *Tsugaru* to the utterly nihilistic revels of Uehara's friends at the bar where Kazuko finds them in *The Setting Sun*. The hint is there, and although, in the general lightness of *Tsugaru*, Dazai does not make much of it, there is no doubt that he feels isolated in realizing that, for his country friends, such revels are a change, while for him, in his Tokyo life, they have been—and increasingly will be—a dismal practice.

Third is the matter of art and artists, literary discussions and gossip. Dazai is an exotic treat to provincial lovers of literature—a real, live Tokyo light—and he finds himself embroiled in halfhearted battles, attacking the reputations of established writers and crying out to be recognized as their equal. Again, in *Tsugaru*, these debates have a light, humorous tone; but elsewhere, as in the early “Kawabata Yasunari e” (To Kawabata Yasunari) and the yet-to-come “Thus Have I Heard,” Dazai revealed how deadly serious he felt about the problem of individualistic newcomer versus the literary establishment.

Finally, the theme of family runs throughout the novel. Many of the friends Dazai sees during his travels had served his family in years past; everywhere he goes, his being a Tsushima is at least as important as his Dazai identity, if not more so. The whole search into what it means to be a “man of Tsugaru” is a process of unraveling his personal relationship to his family. The climactic reunion with Take makes clear to him that he had gone so far in this process that in the end he could, or had to, unburden himself of the weight of his family altogether. It is a final statement of the biblical injunction he quoted so often, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” In a sense, although the postwar confusion contributed to make the writing of *No Longer Human* necessary, it was, as we shall see, the resolution Dazai reaches in *Tsugaru* that made it possible.

Establishing distances. The story begins with an introduction, in which Dazai delimits what he will and will not be dealing with—the dimensions of his task. He characterizes the towns he knows best—Goshogawara, Aomori, Hirosaki, Ōwani, Asamushi, Kanagi (the only towns he knows around home base)—by referring to other things he has written about them,

primarily in “Recollections” and “The Stylish Child.” Here, he says, he is trying to be objective, and he cannot be so about these towns, because they formed his character and set his fate.

In a sense, the Tsugaru-related writings from 1940 on are an attempt to pin down and identify for the audience the half-truths of the earlier period. “Recollections” was not necessarily the literal truth, Dazai says here in *Tsugaru*: although the atmosphere was true to the reality, it was full of “sad, fictitious jokes.” Here is the truth, he says: the town in “Recollections” was Aomori, the park was Gappo Park, the friend was N, the chicken keeper was T, the family was Toyoda, and so on. He establishes the premise from which he deals with his homeland: “I love thee, I hate thee. . . . I am a man of Tsugaru. For generation after generation, my ancestors were peasants of Tsugaru. . . . You might call me purebred Tsugaru. . . . If someone from the outside should hear my complaints and, as a result, underestimate Tsugaru, I’d certainly be most unhappy. After all, I do love Tsugaru.” (7: 19.) If you hope to learn details of Tsugaru’s geography, culture, educational system, defenses, and the like, you had best consult some other experts, he warns. Dazai’s specialization, the perspective from which he will view Tsugaru, is “the curriculum of love . . . what links one man’s heart to another.” (7: 23.) Dazai has some very individual ideas on the subject, developed through introspection, and he is going to be testing them to see if these are, as he suspects, characteristics held in common by the people of this tiny, peculiar section of Japan. Even in the epigrammatical lines that precede the introduction, Dazai’s premise that there is something especially fierce, sad, and lonely about Tsugaru is clear. Taken from a regional almanac, the list stands like a poem:

Tsugaru Snow

Powder snow
 Grain snow
 Flake snow
 Water snow
 Crusty snow
 Crystal snow
 Ice snow

Dazai (for so we may call Osamu in the last stage of the Tsugaru portion of his saga, as character and author merge in Dazai’s homeland) gives a tone of bittersweet fatalism to his account of the land and its soul, objectifying his observations on his own life. Japan is at war, and the war is coming to the home islands. Personal and national extinction are real possibilities. Even without his history of suicide attempts, he is, after all, thirty-six—a “dangerous” age for a writer, he observes at the beginning of chapter 1. Whether he is seeing old friends he has not seen for years, visiting his father’s original

family home and his own home in Kanagi, or being reunited with his nursemaid, Dazai in *Tsugaru* calls to mind Osamu in "Eight Views of Tokyo" tidying up his affairs as he completes the *Final Years* collection that is to be his farewell note. Although *Tsugaru* is bright and sweet, it is haunted with intimations of death. There is an undertone: after four attempts to settle his own fate permanently, the decision might be taken out of his hands by larger historical forces.

One issue he must settle early in the story is that of social class. This may seem a small item for a man contemplating the end of all conflict, but for Dazai it is part of reconciliations that would make the end, if it has to come, gentle. Social distinctions had been a problem to Osamu in his college and university years; now the problem appears to have been resolved. The structure of the resolution is typical of a number of potential crisis situations in this story: a narrative of increasing tension, then a turning point, followed by a swift and safe conclusion. In this episode, Dazai meets a friend from the past, the man who had as a child guarded the chickens at Osamu's house in "Recollections." Warmed by sake and excited to be back with his childhood friend, Dazai starts rambling on about what a dear friend he has always considered T to be. The moment the words are out of his mouth, he realizes he has made fools of them both; and T gently reminds him that there are distinctions that must be maintained if their relationship is to have any meaning. T was a servant, Dazai was a master, and that will never change. Only if they recognize this can they be friends. Dazai's lament on the loss of childhood freedom and his loneliness in the rigidity of adulthood is poignant: "Being an adult is lonely. Even if you love one another, you must be cautious and treat each other with propriety like strangers. Why, do you suppose, must we be so cautious? . . . Because we've been greatly betrayed and humiliated too many times. The first lesson that turns a youth into an adult is that you cannot trust other people. An adult is a youth betrayed." (7: 31-32.) Yet T's reminder of their differences does not constitute a betrayal; it stands in this case rather as an assurance of continuity. T and Dazai *are* friends, and T will join Dazai in his revels as they go on to spend the night with N, another friend in the next town.

If there were no other proof that the atmosphere of *Tsugaru* is warm, living, and benign, this happy outcome to the dilemma would be sufficient. Isolation, heightened by class differentiation, had been enough to drive the eighteen-year-old Shūji to attempt suicide. A year before *Tsugaru*, in "Sakka no techō" (A Writer's Notebook), Dazai had written about his childhood unhappiness at receiving special favor because he was the "master's" son. A circus had come to town, and all the children were chased away while trying to sneak in; he alone had been given a guided tour and shown all the animals. He was miserable, wanting only to be outside with the other children. In

later years, he continues in the story, a friend suggested that this was probably his “yearning for the masses.” Yet even now, Dazai says, now that he is one of the laboring masses himself, he feels they distance him from themselves. Everywhere else in Dazai’s works, the conflict is irresolvable; in *Tsugaru*, he receives a temporary reprieve.

Another problem more resistant to resolution is that of authority. In “Hometown,” Shūji had come to terms with his brother’s family authority; in *Tsugaru* Dazai even has leeway to pity Bunji. But his difficulties with his brother may have been the source of Dazai’s every resistance to any authoritarian figure or institution, and may have left their residue of guilt. Even ephemeral and transposed reminders cause him unhappiness. In *Tsugaru*, Dazai’s response is only mock-ferocious, but a seriousness underlies it. He has a running battle with the seventeenth-century haiku master Bashō, who is taken here to represent authority on the subject of “rules for the conduct of traveling literati.” Dazai sees Bashō as pretentious and self-aggrandizing in his insistence that writers should avoid trivial conversation not related to literature, and not talk about other writers. Dazai is determined to talk about anything but literature, and if he gets trapped into literary subjects, he *will* give his opinions on other writers.

There are strong elements of avoidance of responsibility as well as resistance to authority and plain sour grapes in Dazai’s quibbling with Bashō, amusing as it is. Unfortunately, a published writer inevitably represents the field of literature wherever he goes. In “One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji” he was humbly prepared to bear the burden of being a *sensei*; here he willfully excuses himself from having to pay any such dues. On the other hand, he is not avoiding this job simply out of a desire to live blithely incognito. Rather, the problem is that every time he does get into a literary discussion, he ends up feeling he has made a fool of himself. They never want to talk about his work, only other writers’, and he vents his envy and disappointment by attacking the latter. So his glee at having spent an evening in miscellaneous banter masks a fear of being put on the spot, which happens often enough.¹³

Yet disaster does strike. Since this is *Tsugaru*, however, it is not disaster but comic confusion. Dazai is pressed into talking about the contemporary literary scene, and before he knows it, he has broken Bashō’s injunction and

¹³Mishima Yukio’s antipathy toward Dazai apparently stemmed from such a conflict. He was taken one evening in 1947 to join Dazai, whom he admired, and a group of “disciples.” Mishima had hoped to talk literature; Dazai was clearly bent on drinking as much as he could in as short a time as possible. Mishima challenged Dazai: “I dislike your writing.” Dazai reportedly disarmed the twenty-two-year-old man’s attack by murmuring, “But he must like me, otherwise he wouldn’t be here.” Mishima never forgot the incident. See Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974), 115–16; and John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), 92–93.

is involved in downplaying "a certain writer in his fifties," Shiga Naoya. It is in the course of his tirade that he gives a hint at his own private definition of "aristocracy." The quality that will make the mother in *The Setting Sun* an aristocrat in Dazai's eyes is *mujaki*, or a kind of blithe, even innocent disregard for the ordinary, stolid middle-class standards of propriety. European court ladies of the middle ages urinating in the corners of the palace—this is *mujaki*, the attitude of true aristocrats.¹⁴ It is their servants who are stern and grave. Thus does Dazai establish a frail refuge as he contrasts his uncouthness with his brother's elegance. Here, in *Tsugaru*, he contrasts true nobility of spirit with what he considers sentimentalized fake elegance, which Shiga represents in his argument. There are echoes of his bitter reaction to Kawabata's smug criticism; and when Shiga, in virtually his only comment on *The Setting Sun*, would blandly say that those were not aristocrats because aristocrats never urinate in the garden, Dazai would again respond in fury to what he saw as hypocritical insensitivity in the establishment writers. In *Tsugaru*, Dazai has enough equilibrium to grant that some of his accusations may be overblown, and in fact, he comes to terms with both Shiga and Bashō later in the story. Shiga did write some good things, after all, he decides; and it was not Bashō who was at fault, but those who came after him, who deified him and distorted the master's intentions.

The curriculum of love. Dazai would never be an island, free of the pressures of authority. But in *Tsugaru* he develops a protection: a concept of the soul of Tsugaru as being one of resistance and wild emotional excess hidden within otherwise sober men. The people of Tsugaru love with an intensity beyond that of other Japanese; and that blood flows within him, primitive, uncivilized, misunderstood by outsiders, but genuine. Dazai feels that even Bunji, for all his elegant, withdrawn, surface coolness, partakes of this nature; he recognizes it in "My Older Brothers" and "Hometown," and the recognition is what makes possible Dazai's pity for his brother, trapped in a role that closed him to emotional expression.

It is through a new-found friend, S, who goes through a wonderful drunken monologue of hospitality one afternoon, that Dazai begins to discover some things about the "curriculum of love" he identified in the introduction to the story as his reason for studying Tsugaru. To the people of the supposedly more civilized central regions of Japan, S's wild excess must seem like insulting, crude violence; but Dazai recognizes the depth of S's desire to make his guests feel at home and to express his love and respect for them.

¹⁴Dazai had read this somewhere; it appears several times in his miscellaneous writings, and is the inspiration for Kazuko's mother to do the same ingenuously in her garden. Although Shiga Naoya objected that "real aristocrats" do not act that way, Raymond Chandler would have known what Dazai was talking about: "The nobility of France urinated against the walls in the marble corridors of Versailles. . . ." *The Long Goodbye* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953), 205.

This is the manner of Tsugaru, inarticulate in the ways of polite intercourse, explosive in the expression of warm fellow feeling. No wonder Dazai makes such a mess of things in his Tokyo incarnation; he is a literary flower grafted onto wild, unruly stock. S is incomparably dear to him for making this much of his fate so obvious.

The events in *Tsugaru* are carefully orchestrated to produce a contrast of tones. Bad weather alternates with good. A night of happy, drunken carousal with N at Tappi is followed the next morning by a little girl's innocent folk song. In the first half of *Tsugaru*, Dazai has a precious week or so of slipping back into the old days, teasing, quarreling, and playing with the freedom of adolescence. It is a time that will never be repeated. In the second half of the story, Dazai turns toward the more intensely personal part of his trip, visits to places that are emotionally significant to him. It is a journey he must make alone, for here he finally discovers the nature of his tie to home. Kanagi, Kizukuri, Fukaura, Goshogawara, Kodomari—at each place, he sees more clearly the strengths and limitations that make him what he is.

It is at his family home in Kanagi that the difference between *Tsugaru* and all the preceding autobiographical works becomes most readily apparent. This visit is complete in itself; it does not require, or even suggest, that prior knowledge of the significance of events be present. Dazai does no filling in, he does not explain that catastrophic events in the past are to blame for the present. There is some tenseness and awkwardness in the relationships we see, but Dazai connects them plausibly to a Tsugaru formality, and a kind of hierarchic rigidity normal to his family. He is, when compared to the self-portrait in "Going Home" or "Hometown," considerably more relaxed, and we see much more natural flow of emotion between most family members. Only with his eldest brother Bunji is there an impassable barrier, but Dazai describes it as falling within the limits of normal family relationships, and here expresses considerable sympathy and pity for his brother's isolation. There is a brief hint at "a time ten years earlier" that had caused the alienation between brothers. But Dazai elicits no particular curiosity about it, because Bunji's squelching effect on others in the family suggests that whatever it was, the split was as much the result of the eldest brother's sternness as the youngest's escapade. Nowhere in *Tsugaru* does Dazai indicate the overwhelming seriousness of his offenses against brother and family. And although he maintains a pose of self-accusatory inferiority, it is more with the tone of a literary conceit than of a heartfelt conviction. Never again, after "Hometown," does his attitude toward home have the tone of fear, guilt, and anger that had characterized it so far. Rather, it is a tone of resignation, that things are the way they must be.

Yet one thing is clear from *Tsugaru* in general, and from the section dealing with Dazai's visit to his family home in Kanagi in particular: in Dazai's

eyes, his brothers *are* aristocrats. No matter that the aristocratic veneer was only a generation or so deep, no matter that Dazai elevates them in order to dramatize the gulf between them and himself. The observation stands, that to Dazai the Tsushima family, excepting himself, are of a different quality from all other Tsugaru people with whom Dazai has contact, from N and S, to Take, Nakabata, and Matsuki, the current head of Dazai's father's family. To him, his brothers are aristocrats, and this prejudice survives into *The Setting Sun*. In fact, when Dazai visits the Matsuki house in Kizukuri, the degree of his fantasizing becomes clearer to the reader. The Matsuki family is actually of longer pedigree and, until Dazai's father's generation, historically more important in Tsugaru than the Tsushimas; yet Matsuki's bouncy goodwill makes him sound more like Dazai's friends N, S, and T. This is the heritage of Dazai's father, yet in the Tsushima house spontaneous feeling is smothered. Matsuki takes Dazai's writing career for granted, and assumes that he writes well; his only concern is that Dazai have all the facts. This is in sharp contrast to contacts with the Tsushima family. Dazai's personal conflicts force him into a logical inconsistency: the Tsushima family lacks totally the quality of *mujaki* he had earlier praised as being the sign of the true aristocrat; yet for his family alone, emotional constipation becomes a sign of aristocratic nature.

Heart's home. The conclusion of *Tsugaru* offers a perfect example of how Dazai reconstituted history to make it say what he wanted it to say. In the story Dazai's reunion with his childhood nursemaid is a beautifully told account of rising tension, suspense, and, finally, emotional repletion. Dazai has been to his home, but does not feel at home. The destination lies elsewhere. Take, he finally realizes, *is* home, for home is not a place; it is a state of mind. At last reunited with Take, he sits silently alone with her. Her love fills the room, and peace brings the wanderer home.

So, at least, says the conclusion of *Tsugaru*. But Koshino Take's own version of this reunion suggests that Dazai's account contains more than a little wish fulfillment, and is an artistic reworking of actual experience to make it both more dramatic and less privately significant. When Dazai arrived at the little hut from which Take was watching the local school's athletic meet, the priest of the local temple was there with her. He had been a schoolmate of Dazai's younger brother Reiji, so they were old friends. The priest had known nothing of Dazai's connection with Take; and Dazai virtually ignored her and spent the afternoon drinking the priest's sake ration and reminiscing about old days. Take says she was puzzled as to why Dazai had come, and was in fact relieved that the priest was there to entertain him. Far from inviting Dazai to come alone with her to the Ryūjin Shrine, Take was herself invited by some dozen of her lady friends to go with them for the little walk, and Dazai invited himself along, following some distance behind them

while they chattered amongst themselves. There never was a chance, then, for Dazai and Take to talk alone. It was after dinner that night that Dazai posed questions about which of the women in his childhood was really his mother—possibly his hidden motive for coming.¹⁵

But within the world of the Osamu Saga, Dazai's manner of expression is even more moving when one realizes what misery has gone before this warm outburst of love, even with its ambiguities, and what even greater misery is to follow. It is the end of childhood for Osamu. All that remains is for Dazai to find the words to explain what that means to him. For the moment, the reader too is invited to bask in the love of Tsugaru, before Dazai returns to Tokyo to finish the task the saga measures.

¹⁵Take's reminiscences are reported by Sōma Shōichi, "*Tsugaru ni tsuite*," in Dazai Osamu, *Tsugaru* (Hirosaki: Tsugaru Shobō, 1976), 223–26.

6. Fatal Success

I returned to Tokyo [from Tsugaru] feeling something akin to confidence in the pure Tsugaru character that flowed in my blood. In other words, it was rejuvenating to discover that in Tsugaru there was no such thing as “culture,” and accordingly, I, a Tsugaru man, was not in the slightest a “man of culture.” My work after that seemed to change somewhat. . . . I thought to myself that even if I died at that point, I could be said to have left good enough work as a Japanese writer.

—Dazai Osamu, “Fifteen Years”¹

As far as the Osamu Saga was concerned, *Tsugaru* had been preceded and now was followed by relative silence. Dazai was obviously busy, but his major writings at the end of the war were, except for *Tsugaru*, not part of the saga, and a number of them were removed from the twentieth century or even from ordinary reality. This was at least partly in defense against the strict censorship of which Dazai had already had experience. *New “Tales of the Provinces”* was a retelling of seventeenth-century tales; *Regretful Parting* had been commissioned by the government; *Fairy Tales* was a collection of classic folk tales retold by Dazai.

For a writer engaged in so many large projects, the year between the trip to Tsugaru and Japan’s unconditional surrender sped by quickly. The dislocations of fleeing from American aerial bombing compressed time even more. Almost before he realized it, Dazai was back in Tsugaru, a refugee with his family augmented by one. The husband and wife and two children lived in the annex that had been the domain of Shūji’s grandmother so many years earlier. Dazai was fortunate, he supposed, that if the war were to pursue and catch them this far away, still he would be dying at home.

The silence of the end of the war was reflected in the relative silence of the writer. *Regretful Parting* and *Fairy Tales* came out in September and October respectively, but they had been completed months earlier, before Dazai had left the Tokyo area. Nothing came from Tsugaru to Tokyo publishers for months, until the flow of stories started again with “Niwa” (The Garden), published in January 1946. By the time he left Tsugaru in November 1946 to

¹*Zenshū* 8: 229–30.

pick up his life in Tokyo, Dazai had written some fourteen stories and two plays; and *Pandora's Box* (the misfortune-plagued *Voice of the Lark*, from 1943) had appeared serially in a newspaper in Sendai. The tone of the early 1946 stories is quiet and reflective, as might well be appropriate to a man, and a nation, stunned by the end of an era. By the later part of the same year, Dazai's tone had darkened significantly; the impending return to Tokyo clearly presaged an ominous future. Now that the public war was over, Dazai was girding himself for his own private fight to the finish.

Cultivating One's Own Garden

Three stories from 1946 are of particular interest, as they bring the Osamu Saga into present time. "The Garden" shows the author evacuated from Tokyo and living parasitically (he feels) off his brother's largess in Tsugaru. It is an after-ripple of *Tsugaru*. "An Almanac of Pain" and "Fifteen Years," on the other hand, take long, overreaching looks at the past, in the manner of "Recollections" and "Eight Views of Tokyo," and are the final autobiographical summaries of the author's life. Once these stories were completed, the experiences could be organized and fictionalized into *No Longer Human*.

The five-page "The Garden" is a vignette, a conversation between Bunji and Shūji as they work to clean up the garden that had gone half to ruin while family attention was turned to the war effort. Now that the war is over, Bunji is returning to private order. The author's tone is ironic as he describes the prudent reserve of the younger brother, a "barbarian" with little interest in the historical tradition behind the style of garden landscape that the Tsushima garden represents, who nevertheless listens politely as befits a guest, a "parasite" living off his brother; and the condescending, complacent, unimaginative elder brother. Their central topic of conversation is a disguised debate on their own interaction: the relationship between the sixteenth-century tea master, landscape designer, and general cultural arbiter Sen no Rikyū and his employer the general Toyotomi Hideyoshi, called the "Taikō." Bunji wants to know why Shūji doesn't write about Rikyū, an interesting man. Shūji is ambiguously uncommunicative, his explanation being (to his reading audience) that "the parasite younger brother, too, when conversation turned to the novel, demonstrated quite a bit of the fastidiousness of the specialist." (8: 137.) This Shūji is prudent, not intimidated.

Bunji ignores Shūji's reticence, and goes on happily with his lecture. He interprets Shūji's reserve as a sign that he doesn't know anything about Rikyū, and twits him for being an "unscholarly *sensei*." Shūji's only response to his brother's mockery is that he doesn't like Rikyū very much. That's because Rikyū is a complex man, Bunji retorts smugly. Shūji takes

him up on that: “Right! There are a lot of cloudy issues. At the same time that he seemed to have contempt for the Taikō, he couldn’t bring himself to break away from him. . . .” (8: 138.) Bunji’s understanding of what Shūji means is shallow. He finds the answer simple: Rikyū was drawn by Hideyoshi’s charismatic character. Bunji deals only with external, basically static contrasts: Hideyoshi starting out poor, ugly, and unlettered, giving rise to the extravagant, brilliant Momoyama style that he made famous; Rikyū wellborn, educated, handsome, opposing the ostentation of Hideyoshi’s *nouvel arrivé* taste with the restrained elegance of aesthetic rusticity that the Japanese call *wabi*.

Shūji ponders to himself what *be* means by the ambiguity in the Rikyū-Hideyoshi relationship. He is interested in the psychological clash between the two, lord and retainer. The outcome of the contest was set from the start by their relative positions, he feels. If Rikyū was such a truly superior, elegant man, why did he not just let Hideyoshi have his fun? Why did he always have to prove he was right? If Rikyū was so sick of ostentation, why did he not just leave it all and travel, like Bashō? No, Shūji decides, there was something about Rikyū that made him need to hang around the seat of power. It was Hideyoshi’s *power*, and not his personality, that was charismatic.

Bunji finishes his monologue and looks at his brother with light disgust. He exclaims in irritation, “It doesn’t seem you’re going to write about him. You should go and study the adult world more. Ah, you are an ignorant *sensei!*” (8: 139.) The thirty-seven-year-old kid Shūji does not rise to the bait. He observes to his readers: “I bow out from the Rikyū [contest]. I don’t want to beat out my brother, [especially] while I’m living off him. This business of competition is shameful. Even if I weren’t living off him—I have never once tried to compete with my brother. From birth, the outcome was set.” (8: 139–40.) Clearly, Dazai is using the Rikyū-Hideyoshi clash to serve several purposes. First is the identification of Rikyū with the establishment, meaning such people as Bunji, Shiga, and Kawabata, and of Hideyoshi with Dazai. By refusing to compete with his brother, Shūji shows himself to be superior to Rikyū. Yet, since the same phrase, “the outcome was set,” is used to describe both Rikyū’s and Shūji’s contests, their fates must be linked. In the end, Hideyoshi won by ordering Rikyū to commit suicide. Of course, Rikyū’s aesthetic contribution survived his death, and so (perhaps Dazai is saying) history has adjudged him to be the winner. By implication, he links together, in himself, the ugly, unlettered Hideyoshi and the smug, aesthetically elegant Rikyū, thus making himself the aesthetician of weakness and roughness. It is the discoveries of *Tsugaru*, that he is his own man and yet is inevitably an extension of his family, that enable Dazai to continue quietly to assert his moral superiority while acknowledging the precariousness of his physical security in its dependence on his brother. The Japanese writers

Bunji approves of are Nagai Kafū and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, and he also reads Chinese essayists. The next day he is expecting a Chinese writer to visit; Shūji, sitting at the fire nursing a cold, thinks of his brother out weeding the garden. He consoles himself with the thought that the Chinese visitor, like himself, might also have rather appreciated a dilapidated garden with clumps of grasses here and there. Shūji is a connoisseur of true rustic style.

"The Garden" is a nice little piece. It bridges the time from *Tsugaru* through the end of the war to the present with great economy, and presents a vivid but relaxed portrait of personality conflict. "An Almanac of Pain" is considerably tenser and more argumentative. With the Occupation well established and national political life picking up again (there is mention in "The Garden" of the possibility of Bunji's running for representative to the Diet, or for governor), "isms" are in the air. Dazai decides to write the history of his "isms": democracy, "philanthropism," humanitarianism, communism, terrorism, militarism, conservatism—these are the kinds of "thought" his experiences have brought through his life, from the would-be democracy of his childhood to the self-congratulatory liberalism of the 1946 present.

"An Almanac of Pain" has been mentioned so often already, and it is so short (only nine pages), that all that is necessary at this point are some comments on its place in the saga. In form, it is fragmentary. Short passages, separated by asterisks, contain references to an idea, or an aside on some issue, or an explanation of a position. Some relate personal experiences, some are commentaries on the events of the day. After a general explanation of his ideas on the place of "thought" in history (none) and the evolution of his own "thought" ("I don't have any such thing . . . Only likes and dislikes"), Dazai places himself in time and space (family background, with peasants present and "thinkers" conspicuously absent), and launches into an impressionistic and often ambiguous account of his life. Only the reader who has followed Dazai's work so far will know, for example, the story underlying a passage, inserted between an account of a scandal contemporaneous with the attempted military coup of February 26, 1936, and a description of spreading international hostilities: "What next? I had already tried suicide unsuccessfully four times by then. And naturally, I thought of death several times a week." (8: 210.) This is the period between the split with Hatsuyo and the marriage to Michiko. But no names or references we have come to recognize appear: no Hatsuyo, no Michiko, no *sempai*, no hospitals. The names are public, the incidents newsworthy: Salvation Army, proletarian literature, the Osada Incident, strikes, the Manchurian Incident, Tōjō, the Emperor. An embittered Osamu floats from ideas of "proletarian dictatorship," to guarded resignation to the tides of militarism, to contempt for present critics of the Emperor. What has prompted this review seems to be a nightmarish feeling that, through all these years, nothing essentially has

changed. Stupidity, terror, ignorance, cruelty—all remain. Osamu has been through so much—is he at the beginning again? His understated, devout prayer for the future sums up his life: “At ten, a democrat; at twenty, a communist; at thirty, a pure aesthete; at forty, a conservative. And then does history repeat itself after all? I hope it does not.” (8: 212.)

“An Almanac of Pain” is pump priming of a most elementary sort. After the emotional respite occasioned by *Tsugaru*, and the physical recuperation made possible by the orderly life provided at his brother’s home, Dazai was starting to shift gears in order to take up his own life again. Reacting to the agitation of the day, felt only distantly in *Tsugaru* through newspapers and letters from friends, Dazai here answers the unasked question, “What do you think of the present schools of thought?” by dredging through the past in a form not attempted since “Eight Views of Tokyo.” Actually, the antecedents of “An Almanac of Pain” go back farther; although not chaotic as the earlier stories were, the work is in intention and, to some extent, tone quite similar to “HUMAN LOST” or “Leaves.”

Dazai’s autobiographical impulse was now strongly in motion again. “Fifteen Years” is less elliptical than “An Almanac of Pain,” organized as a postscript to “Eight Views of Tokyo.” This time, instead of the places in which he has lived, or the “isms” he has experienced, Dazai will use the books he has written to organize the story of his life as a writer—his “fifteen years.”² It begins almost identically to “The Garden,” with the account of why he happens to be in *Tsugaru*, and how he got there. But there is one important addition: not only has he had great difficulty getting his children to safety—they are the reason he is in *Tsugaru*. If it had been just himself (and his wife, presumably), he would have stuck it out in Tokyo; but it was necessary to get them to a place of shelter. Parenthood was an extraordinary burden to Dazai and to all his narrators male and female. Here, the sense of responsibility (which elsewhere is transformed into willful irresponsibility) seems a response to guilty resentment that children demand and need so much care, and that by their dependence they get attention he himself wanted. Osamu had at least been charmed by his daughter in “Hometown” and concerned about her in *Tsugaru*, but the guilt and resentment appear increasingly from “Fifteen Years” on, in such stories as “Hakumei” (Faint Light), “Chichi” (The Father), “Osan” (Osan), and “Ōtō” (Cherries) with its ironic repeating refrain: “The parent is more important than the child.” (9: 354.) In “Fifteen Years” there is little resentment, for with the children as an excuse, Dazai was able to attain something that might otherwise have been beyond his reach: the chance to live in his brother’s home. The price he pays is that “parasitic” self-consciousness that he is living off his brother and has to be careful of what he says and does.

²Because in “Fifteen Years” the narrator of the Osamu Saga is speaking of Dazai’s professional life, he merges with the writer and is here called “Dazai.”

He supposes that "most people know that for a long time, relations had not been good between me and my family. To put it crudely, I had been disowned because of the dissipation of my twenties." (8: 213.) Almost as if he had not written *Tsugaru*, he observes how strange it is to be back in the country, to find it so little changed, and himself so peasant-like, stolid, and rough. "Fifteen Years" will be an attempt to discover how this "man with the blood of Tsugaru dirt farmers" had managed to live in Tokyo all that time without picking up any city refinement. He wants to establish his "countrified basic nature." Actually, "Fifteen Years" is an affirmation of his city life, a self-reassurance that there *is*, after all, a novelist named Dazai Osamu, although at the moment, in this rustic setting that seems to deny any time has passed since his childhood here, it is hard to believe in another whole existence.

Dazai quotes lengthy passages from three of his stories, "Eight Views of Tokyo," "The Firebird," and *Pandora's Box*, and he synthesizes a letter to "a *sempai*." In keeping with his intention of looking at his life from a professional viewpoint, he is very restrained and sparing with personal details. The same narrative is there, but approached more abstractly. Even in describing the emotional upheaval of leaving his beloved house in Funabashi to go into a mental hospital, he gives no indication of why he was leaving or who was making him go. A passage from "Eight Views of Tokyo" is there simply to explain how he came to write the stories in *The Final Years*. Instead, his analytical faculties (displayed in emotional bursts of reaction) are turned to sorting out what it is about the world "out there" that has so appalled his Tsugaru soul that it has curled into itself, refusing to form contact with so-called refined circles. Dazai's covering metaphor for the hypocrisy, self-seeking, backbiting, kowtowing, stupidity, and cruelty he has seen and experienced in his contacts with the literary establishment is *saron no geijutsu* ("salon art"). "An elegant salon is the most frightful of human decadence," he posits, and he uses the concept to cover wide ground. Subsumed under it is his fear of the responsibilities of orderly home life. "If I were to have an elegant, salon-like home life, that would clearly mean that I had betrayed someone," he feels. (8: 221.) What he calls "the selfishness of the home circle" is the source of strength for the smug Shiga Naoyas of the world, he says in "Thus Have I Heard." "The happiness of the home," he concludes in the 1948 essay of that title, "is the source of all evils." (9: 353.) The essay examines his feelings that acts of terrible cruelty can be committed by people piously dedicated to upholding this "happiness." Such is the thrust of his struggle against the hypocrisy of conventional morality.

Contrasted to the healthy, handsome supporters of home, with their sturdy children, is Dazai, whose homes, without his willing it, seem spontaneously to crumble and fall apart over and over again. Twenty-five moves in fifteen years, twenty-five times when he has, as he puts it, "gone bankrupt,"

losing everything and having to start over from scratch. It is like the history of Tsugaru's crop failures. Sickly children. No home. Ill health. All the things Shiga Naoya has, Dazai has not. It is his desperate response to the unfairness of the situation that gives him his clear vision of the truth. If he had been able to partake of the others' comfortable success and easy words, he might have been as dull and imperceptive as they. His is the clarity of starvation, which sounds like feverish hallucination to the well fed. Dazai's refuge is in the story of the Ugly Duckling. Artists cannot be beautiful, he implies, for they would use up the beauty in themselves and have none left for their art. He uses a painting by Böcklin to symbolize the plight of the true artist: a lush tropical island, an ugly little creature hidden in the wild green trees, playing a flute; beautiful mermaids gathered on the shore margin, listening captivated to his piping. The artist's sad, solitary fate is that he must hide himself, revealing only his voice. If he were to show his true form, in all its ugliness, his audience would flee in terror. Likewise, the fledgling swan does not have the appeal of the fluffy little ducklings: "it has none of the cuteness suitable for the salon." As for the salon itself, he professes difficulty in finding words bad enough to describe it. "House of prostitution for intelligence" is too complimentary, because even whorehouses have the occasional decent inmate. "Thieves' market for intelligence" won't do either; sometimes a real gold ring turns up in one. Finally, he has it: the salon is "a wartime-Japan newspaper for intelligence." What he means by this, he explains, is that during the war, there was not a page in the newspaper that reported the truth; all that appeared were "painful evasions." The only part people could believe was one small corner of one page each day: the obituary column. That told the truth. (8: 217-18.)

As a footnote here, Dazai talks about the attitude of the public, himself included, to what they knew were lies in the newspapers: "(But we willed ourselves to believe, we were prepared to die. When a parent has gone bankrupt, and his back is to the wall, and he tells transparent lies, does the child expose them? No—he realizes his fate is set, and silently goes down with him.)" (8: 218.) The passage from "The Firebird" quoted in "Fifteen Years" later expands upon this: a mother tells the story of her son's giving up the schooling and career he was beginning in Tokyo to return to the country out of filial duty to take care of his father who has lost both his money and his mind through gambling. "The Firebird" was written in 1936, years before the Pacific War, and was intended to exorcise some of the aftershocks of the Enoshima suicide attempt; Dazai must himself have been impressed at how apt a metaphor he had produced here.

The war had been the main event between "Eight Views of Tokyo" and the present, and references to attitudes toward it are an important theme in "Fifteen Years." Long before war began with the United States and England, "it was truly perilous to wave your own flag on problems of love, or belief,

or art”; both “An Almanac of Pain” and “Fifteen Years” attest that Japan had been at war for years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Dazai persisted as best he could in hewing to his own line, but not out of any logical principles:

It was peasant stubbornness. However, I am not saying here, like some people, “I never did want war. I was an enemy of the Japanese militarists. I am a liberal”—these new-style opportunists who, once the war was over, immediately began attacking Tōjō and making a big racket over war guilt and the like. Now even socialism is being debased by “salon thought.” . . .

During the war, I was disgusted at Tōjō, and I felt contempt for Hitler; and I went around telling everyone. But at the same time, I was trying my best to be a supporter of Japan. I realized that it would probably not help one bit if someone like myself were an advocate, but I did my best for Japan. I would like to be clear on this point: right from the start, there was no hope, but Japan went on and did it. [8: 224.]

During the war, Dazai’s determination to stand by his “parent” had been sorely tried. First, if Japan won with conditions of oppression at home as they were, “it would not be the Land of the Gods—it would be the Devil’s Country.” But more personally crucial, his loose talking and reputation for loose living had given him an image of unreliability:

The rumor went out that I was under suspicion by the Office of Information, and requests from publishers for manuscripts disappeared. This may sound stingy, but with the cost of living going up and up, and my children growing, with hardly any income, I was in a terrible state. . . . Since everyone, except for war profiteers, was having a hard time, I felt I could not talk about just my living difficulties, as if I were the only one, so I did my best to feign lightheartedness; but nevertheless, I was so up against it that I sent a letter to a certain *sempai*. . . . [8: 227.]

In the letter, he discussed suicide. What held him back, he said, was not just concern for his wife and children.³ Rather, he said (perhaps a bit grandiosely), it was concern for the propaganda effect news of his death might have in giving aid and comfort to the enemy, and its demoralizing effect on his

³This is Dazai’s prescient answer to Shiga Naoya. In 1948, after Dazai’s death, Shiga wrote an essay absolving himself of any responsibility for Dazai’s death. With magnificent insensitivity, Shiga dismisses criticism that he had been insensitive to such famous “vulnerable” writers as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Oda Sakunosuke, and Dazai, and had accordingly contributed to their deaths. With the “selfishness of the home circle,” he sympathizes with the suicide’s poor wife and children and friends—but there is not a word of sympathy for the poor suicide. He sees the act as a kind of self-imposed euthanasia (about which he had recently read in *Reader’s Digest*); but nowhere does he express curiosity or concern about the “disease” from which the sufferer was seeking release. In his zeal to prevent any legends about his condescension toward Dazai and other young writers, Shiga if anything added fuel with his own hands. See his “Dazai Osamu no shi” [The Death of Dazai Osamu], *Shiga Naoya Zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1955–56), vol. 9, 229–35.

young friends at the front. In "Fifteen Years" Dazai asserts that the chief concern should be not for the survivors, but for the actor. The sources of pain in all human beings do not change; only the degree of tolerance does. Some men can bear the pain, some cannot. To Dazai, home and family were the least of the considerations in an act of such magnitude as self-destruction.

It was at this point that *Tsugaru* entered the picture—to give him a source of income and a new lease on life, he says in "Fifteen Years." With the attention of the entire nation focused to the south, on the Pacific, he went north. He found health in *Tsugaru's* clumsiness, its inelegance, its incompetence, its confusion in the face of what city people called culture. But he saw in its "great incompleteness" the possibility of a new culture, a new expression of love. Tragically, he would find the wellsprings of renewal dry in himself, for his task was not to begin new business, it was to complete old.

Now the war is over. Japanese culture is in an even worse state. All the leaders of culture are shouting this "ism" and that, and it all smacks of "salon thought." If he could swallow it, he feels, he too could be a success, but it sticks in his countrified throat. He cannot lie about his own perceptions. Far from becoming cultured, he is growing more and more peasant-like. "Salon thought" is getting farther and farther away. "Fifteen Years" ends with a passage from *Pandora's Box*, Dazai's novel about a young tuberculosis patient striving to recover in a sanatorium (a rather obvious metaphor for postwar Japan). Three of his nicknamed fellow patients, Kappore Dancer, Echigo Lion, and Hard Bread, are discussing "liberal thought." Echigo Lion concludes that Christ is the original freethinker, and that the roots of Japan's defeat in the war lie in its having taken the external manifestations of Western culture blindly, without understanding the ramifications that are there to be studied in the Bible. Christ, in contrast to today's self-proclaimed liberals who are only floating with the tide, shows that the liberal *has* to be in conflict with the status quo. And as for today's freethinker:

At this late date in Japan, to attack the militarists of yesterday is not liberal thinking. . . . To be a true courageous liberal, there is something you have to cry, no matter what else: To the Emperor—Banzai! Until yesterday, that was old-fashioned—or worse, a fraud. But today it is the newest of liberal thinking. This is where the liberalism of ten years ago differs from today's. This is not mysticism. It is true natural human love. I have heard that America is the land of freedom. Then surely they will recognize this cry of true freedom from Japan. [8: 236.]

This ending sounds vaguely hopeful, but it is clearly visionary and more than a little silly. Japan is not liberal, he knows; he is not liberal. Nor are they free, any of them.

In *Tsugaru* and the other books following it, he felt he had produced work

of a quality to assure the continuance of his name "even if I died at that point" through accident of war. But now, in the peace, it was time for him to turn his full confidence in the power of his craft to the accomplishment of his task, the telling of the story of "what kind of a terrible child I had been."

Preparing the Final Map

When *The Setting Sun* began to appear in June 1947, it signaled a new fictionality in the Osamu Saga. It was not the striking story line that marked a change in the author but his attitude toward his characters and the way he transformed fact into fiction. Up until 1947, while Dazai had embroidered upon the facts he used to tell the story of his life, while he had been less or more candid, he still had not tampered significantly with the sequence of real events as he transferred them to his stories. Perhaps he had never revealed what he and his brother discussed in the summer of 1932. He may have claimed that he and the woman in his second suicide attempt tried to drown themselves, when actually they took sleeping pills on the shore. But the events, in the saga's accounts of them, come where they came in his life, and they happen to characters named Osamu and Shūji. And Dazai found each attempt at telling the story inadequate to his vision of what needed to be said. Now with *The Setting Sun*, seemingly, he had stumbled on the clue for which he had searched so long: truth is better stalked through indirection than through confrontation.

Women show the way. Women became his vehicle as he rapidly worked out his method. For a time, the saga stories (such as "Chance" in 1946, and "Morning" and "The Father" in 1947) come to occupy a secondary position, and a new set of female-centered stories show what is happening to the writer's art. Although Dazai had often in the past used a female narrator, and although women had often appeared as prominent characters, there were now additions: a new kind of character, the embittered and disillusioned woman determined to survive her tribulations; and a new theme, the rape of innocents or what is shown as the near crime of unloving copulation between noninnocents. It was as if, having been disarmed by the love he found in *Tsugaru*, which he articulated in relation to women and through childlike, dependent emotions, Dazai had to abuse women in his stories in order to gain the strength to finish his story of Osamu. Japan's defeat in the war must also have played a part in producing both the rage and the paralysis exhibited by the male characters in these stories.

What is different about, for example, "Villon's Wife," *The Setting Sun*, and *No Longer Human* is that the characters have independent existences of their own. Kazuko in *The Setting Sun* is, of course, modeled on Ōta Shizuko, and her rhetoric sounds Dazaiesque; Ōba Yōzō in *No Longer Human* is

undeniably modeled on Dazai himself. But Kazuko's ambiguities, her shallowness and her deep anguish, are completely her own. "Villon's wife," Mrs. Ōtani, is not simply a stick figure intended to backlight her reprobate husband; she is a live woman, deeply wronged and quietly, unemotionally, liberated through pain. Yōzō is one of the most bizarre and emotionally touching characters in Japanese fiction.

Three "woman stories" show the direction of Dazai's change in course, as he works out the complexities of the need for and failures in love, security, and fidelity in human relationships. Dazai had been puzzling out these problems for years with the Osamu persona; now he does so through a series of strong female characters, who survive against great odds, and of weak male figures, who are defeated by life despite their struggles. In this way he hints at the conclusion of the Osamu Saga. *Fireworks in Winter* is a play that appeared in June 1946; the short story "Villon's Wife" came in March 1947, and the novel *The Setting Sun* in June.

Fireworks in Winter is talky and melodramatic, more a series of overwrought monologues than an integrated drama. Its central characters are Kazue, aged twenty-nine, her stepmother Asa, and three men, two not present: Kazue's six-year-old daughter's father, missing in action; her secret lover in Tokyo; and a village suitor, Seizō. The time is a year after the end of the war, the place Kazue's home village in Tsugaru, whence she had evacuated toward the end of the war. The play is about love, guilt, and despair. In a letter to a friend a couple of months after the play was published in the journal *Tembō*, Dazai tied its theme to a quotation from the Bible, "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." (Luke 7: 47.) Only one who bears a deep sense of sin within can love deeply, Dazai continued; hence the passionate sins of the women, Kazue's clear from the start, Asa's hidden until near the end. As a playwright, however, Dazai proves unequal to controlling the emotions of the theme, and the play remains confused and inconclusive, demonstrating in Kazue more a sense of anger at betrayal than love and compassion. These women, Kazue and her mother, cannot forgive themselves, so they feel their only choice of response is death or revolution. "Revolution" as Dazai uses it in the woman stories is an amorphous word only loosely connected with politics. Kazue in *Fireworks in Winter* and Kazuko in *The Setting Sun* speak of some sort of moral revolution that gives them the impetus to overturn conventional standards; the husband in "Osan" mounds inarticulate riddles about revolution that seem political until his wife discovers he is involved with another woman. Yet both women and men who use that battle cry are aiming at the same sort of freedom that, in Dazai's life and writings alike, is represented by suicide. Especially for men, in Dazai's view, death is immanent in revolution.

In outline, the plot of *Fireworks in Winter* sounds fairly silly. After a ten-

year absence, Kazue had returned to her country home in Tsugaru to escape wartime bombing. During the years in Tokyo, she had become involved with a novelist, had possibly married him, and had borne him a daughter, Mutsuko. How she had supported herself and the child after the writer was drafted and reported missing in action, Kazue's father has suspicions, which he airs at the opening of the play. He accuses her of selfishness, willfulness, and leading a dissolute life. Dembei had watched his wife lavish attention on Kazue through the years—more than she gave her own son, Eiichi, Kazue's half-brother, who is also missing in the war—but the selfish girl has never acknowledged it. The parents have surmised that Kazue has a lover in Tokyo, and now the father asks, on Asa's behalf, that Kazue leave little Mutsuko with them; the girl will only be a hindrance to Kazue's "free" life, he says bitterly. He and Kazue insult and verbally abuse each other. That night, Kazue has a secret and uninvited caller, Seizō, who claims he has waited the ten long years for Kazue to come back from Tokyo (where she had insisted on going to school) and marry him. He will kill her with his little dagger if she will not be his. Asa, listening in the hall, now enters at Kazue's appeal, seizes the knife, and tries to stab Seizō, who escapes.

Ten days later, Kazue is attending Asa, who has been confined to bed ever since she collapsed following the events of that night. Asa speaks weakly of wanting to die. Kazue, in an ecstasy of self-abnegation, assures Asa that she must not die; Kazue loves her and needs her so, she will give up her Tokyo lover and spend the rest of her life as a farmer here in the country, caring for Asa. Asa is good, the best and purest woman in the world, she cries hysterically. Asa then reveals her deep secret: six years earlier, she had been seduced by Seizō. The other night she had not been protecting Kazue—she had tried to kill Seizō for her own sake. Faced with the perfidy of the world, Kazue cackles wildly and determines to return to Tokyo immediately, "to fall as far as one can fall."

The issues with which Dazai was grappling could have made a better story, but the method and direction were too unfamiliar to him. Extended dialogue had never been his forte; his strength was the brief, telling comment embedded in a framework of exposition. The amount of exposition in the speeches of Kazue's father and Seizō is tiresome, as are Kazue's tirades. As a play, *Fireworks in Winter* fails so completely that no further discussion of its plot is necessary. It is important for other reasons. The play shows Dazai's attempt to truly get within the skin of a woman. Kazue is an independent voice, as the female narrators of earlier stories had not been. But her kinship to Dazai is at the same time inescapable, as will be Kazuko's in *The Setting Sun*. If he had been a woman, and had still been the person he was, this would have been his salvation, Dazai seems to be saying. In "Hometown" and *Tsugaru*, Dazai had betrayed his intuition that women live a life that is truer to

the emotions, one not open to men with their social abstractions. In effect, Kazue's defiant determination to return to her younger lover and "fall as far as one can fall," and Kazuko's dedication to a "moral revolution," are little different from young Shūji's throwing himself into the leftist cause in the late 1920's and early 1930's. At the same time, there is something vital and palpable in the women's revolt (symbolized by the child Kazuko carries in her womb, and by Kazue's daughter) that was lacking in the man's. Death was the only outcome for male abstraction; the women might experience degradation and hardship, but Dazai saw in them something that was darkly if melodramatically triumphant. Most of the women in the late stories are mothers already or desperate to bear a child. The woman's child in these stories is not an abstract "hostage to fate"; it is an ally, a talisman that ensures the woman's survival. The women in a number of the late stories see themselves as victims, and yet victors; but when in "Osan," for instance, the husband tries, in a suicide letter to his wife, to strike a similarly martyred pose, the wife reacts with contempt: "A letter full of nonsense. I wonder: does a man have to tell lies and strike poses to the end? Does he have to cling to his solemn purposes? . . . to die shouting about revolutions! I saw how worthless he had been. . . . I was less angry and sad than appalled at the utter nonsense." (9: 258-59; tr. Seidensticker 1960, 49-50.) Her disgust, aimed at a husband who claimed he loved his wife to the end, even though he was dying with the mistress he had gotten pregnant, is at the emotional waste caused by men's dishonesty:

Men are wrong when they think it their duty to be remembering their wives. Do they tell themselves it is right, do they salve their consciences, do they find it manly, to go on remembering their wives after they have found other women? A man begins to love another woman, and he heaves dark sighs in front of his wife, he exhibits his moral anguish. Presently the contagion is passed on to the wife, who must also sigh. If the husband would be brisk and airy about it all, the wife might be spared this hell. [9: 255; tr. Seidensticker 1960, 47.]

Having had it both ways, suffering as a man in physical life, and as a woman through his heroines in the last stories, Dazai came to the conclusion that there was truly no way out of his dilemma as a man.

The real conflict in *Fireworks in Winter* is not what Dazai thought it was. The failure of love and the absence of forgiveness more properly describe the world of *No Longer Human*. The significance of the tie between Kazue and Asa lies in a throwaway line from act 1, "Don't they say, 'The one who brought you up, rather than the one who bore you?'" (8: 344.) This is a folk saying about the person to whom one owes filial piety. The reverberations of Dazai's conclusions about his mother and Take in *Tsugaru* are still strong. *Fireworks in Winter* is the story of the price that must be paid for Asa's utter,

almost pathological trust and selflessness, so like Yoshiko's in *No Longer Human*; but Asa's perfection, and the powerful effect that her fall from grace has on Kazue, depends on her being Kazue's stepmother—not the one who bore her but the one who brought her up. In *The Setting Sun*, Dazai will strip the plot of such artificial complications to underline more clearly the ambiguity of Kazuko's relations with her mother; but here he is still working out the ramifications of emotional ties between people for whom the commitment must be conscious instead of customary. Thus the basis of Dembei's resentment is that he has watched Asa for years stinting herself to provide for an ungrateful wretch who is of his flesh, not hers. His seems to be the anger of impotence, for he has felt himself incapable of intervening. Kazue's attack, when she accuses Asa of loving Eiichi more than her, is all the more unreasonable, in his eyes; Eiichi is, after all, Asa's own child. But reasonableness is not the point. The father does not see that the issue is that Kazue needs to be shown proof in order to feel secure, which she does not. She is conscious of the extent of Asa's sacrifices for her, but that is not enough. She has felt so much love for Asa it sometimes had seemed to her that they must be lovers (Kazue says "lesbian love"). But the moment of Kazue's total capitulation to Asa's goodness comes when she sees Asa attacking Seizō with the dagger, like a lioness coming to the aid of her cub. The betrayal of Kazue's suddenly absolute trust comes when she discovers Asa's "selfishness" in trying to avenge her own honor. Any sign of ego in a love object thrusts Kazue again out into the cold. In *No Longer Human* this idea will be carried to its extreme, when the blameless Yoshiko is raped as a result of too much trust, and Yōzō is cast into outer darkness because he is made aware that he cannot control all aspects of his world. Take remained the object of Dazai's love only because she had no real part in his life. In *Tsugaru*, one visit in thirty years rekindles the smouldering flame. Kazue exemplifies Dazai's recognition that such an infantile demand for absolute attention cannot survive the test of everyday life.

The importance of *Fireworks in Winter*, then, is that it shows the development of the Kazuko character. In a dozen details, it also shows itself to be a major step in Dazai's working out of the action of *The Setting Sun*. Ōta Shizuko's life and diary went into the making of the novel, as did Dazai's thoughts about Chekhov and *The Cherry Orchard*, and about the downfall of his family and Japanese society. But *The Setting Sun* did not appear full-blown, with no preparation. *Fireworks in Winter* might be called its rough draft. The resemblance between the two heroines' names is the first and most obvious connection. Kazue, like Kazuko, is twenty-nine. In both stories, the father is there for reasons of plot, not of characterization. The mother is an essential part of the story. Kazue's relationship with her wavers between violent love and as violent resentment. She accuses the mother of loving her

brother more. The brother is missing in action. The novelist father of Mutsuko, and the lover in Tokyo, are in reputation like Uehara in *The Setting Sun*. Kazue's "secret man" in Tokyo prefigures Kazuko's "secret." Asa's helping Kazue surreptitiously is elaborated into Kazuko's helping Naoji. There are no more "Rising Sun" flags, so numerous during the war, in the toysthops of the defeated nation, so the only toys for Mutsuko are the unseasonal "fireworks in winter" of the title; this symbol fairly shouts out the image of "the setting sun." The mother is sick and wants to die, while the daughter nurses her, grimly determined to have her live. Like Kazuko, Kazue makes up her mind to become a farmer. She is firmly anti-intellectual, to the point of planning to urge her lover to give up painting in Tokyo and come make a paradise with her in the country; in the same way, Kazuko, for all her reading and arguing, is calling for a revolution of feeling, not ideology, and she gives evidence of her own lack of intellectuality. Kazue's lover is a painter; Naoji disguises Uehara as a painter in his suicide note. Asa might as well be speaking of Kazuko when she says to Kazue near the end of the play: "Women all have secrets. It's just that you haven't hidden yours." (8: 370.)

In such ways, Dazai developed his plan for *The Setting Sun*. But another story, "Villon's Wife," also had an important contribution to make, in the area of character development. More of the flotsam and jetsam of Dazai's immediate life and surroundings float up in this story; it is both more realistic and more focused than *Fireworks in Winter*. Ōtani, the narrator's common-law husband, is the younger son of country aristocracy, a brilliant poet according to popular opinion, slowly going downhill with drink and women. He spends little time at home, leaving his wife and four-year-old son, possibly retarded, to struggle along in abject poverty.⁴ When the story opens, he has just stolen money from a bar he has been patronizing regularly for several years. Mrs. Ōtani promises the proprietor that she will pay him back, to keep the man from calling the police, although she has no idea where she will find the money. The next day she starts working at the shop as a barmaid, hoping for some miracle. That evening one occurs, in a sense, when Ōtani comes into the bar with an older woman who pays back the stolen money. With that immediate worry off her mind, Mrs. Ōtani now asks if her husband has a balance on his account there. She determines to pay it back by continuing to work at the bar. Suddenly her life starts looking up: she is popular with the customers, and no longer has to sit alone in misery, her only companion the child whose very appearance makes her weep. Why hadn't she thought of this before? She is amazed to discover what her stupidity has cost her in suffering. A quiet revolution has begun to make her independent.

⁴Dazai often expressed concern and despair in his stories over his own son's health. The child is described as weak and frail, with retarded muscular and mental development, in (for instance) "Villon's Wife," "I'm Looking for Someone," and "Cherries."

Several weeks pass; she is happy in her work, and is taking a new interest in clothes and cosmetics. Ōtani stops by often to drink, letting her pay the bill and frequently going home with her. Then late one night she is raped by a customer who gains her confidence by professing interest in Ōtani's poetry. The next morning Ōtani is at the bar, reading a newspaper, when she arrives. She tells him nothing, acting with complete nonchalance. She announces simply that she is giving up their squalid house and from now on will probably live at the shop. He supposes that is a good idea.

Mrs. Ōtani is perhaps Dazai's fullest female portrait, for all that "Villon's Wife" is only one-fifth the length of *The Setting Sun*. She starts out thoroughly submissive, like Uehara's wife, anxious not to cause her husband any trouble, swallowing his insults, and silently taking on all the responsibilities he shirks. Gradually, through his delinquencies, her world expands; without shrillness or hysteria, she learns independence while still loving Ōtani and happy to see him. A terrible experience then snaps the bond that holds her to Ōtani, so that she no longer needs the drain of Ōtani's selfishness. In this she is like Kazuko, who will discard Uehara when she is finished with him. Unlike Kazuko, however, Mrs. Ōtani has no such defensive ego that makes her shout her independence defiantly. She is simply, quietly determined to stay alive.

The male figure is still not well delineated. Ōtani seems at heart a good person, and that is why his wife had stayed loyal to him. The proprietor of the bar liked him, and felt he behaved badly because he was "sick." In fact, he feels that "if only he had paid the bill he would have been a good customer." Mrs. Ōtani recognizes the external manifestations of his mental anguish:

I don't know where he goes or what he does. When he comes back he is always drunk; and he sits there, deathly pale, breathing heavily and staring at my face. Sometimes he cries and the tears stream down his face, or without warning he crawls into my bed and holds me tightly. "Oh, it can't go on. I'm afraid. I'm afraid. Help me!"

Sometimes he trembles all over, and even after he falls asleep he talks deliriously and moans. The next morning he is absent-minded, like a man with the soul taken out of him. [9: 29; tr. Keene 1960, 406-7.]

Despite this, Ōtani comes across simply as selfish and childish. Dazai, still working out his method for showing emotional relationships between the characters in his stories, fills out only one portrait at a time. This is Mrs. Ōtani's story. Later, in Ōba Yōzō's story, Dazai will describe the rape more vividly, since here his purpose is to show its effect on Yōzō; in "Villon's Wife," where it is Ōtani's desertion, leaving her vulnerable, and not the act itself that is significant to Mrs. Ōtani, she describes it neutrally: "The next

morning at dawn without ceremony he took me." Ōtani's sins are ones of omission, and he is so weak that she cannot feel anger or even reproach. The light just goes out.

Ōtani is not Dazai, although he resembles the portrait of himself that Dazai was drawing at the time in several other stories, and that probably accounts in part for the sketchiness. Ōtani's torment even sounds gratuitous, for he seems too insignificant to suffer—a whipped puppy. When, in *The Setting Sun*, Dazai divides Ōtani into two Osamu-like figures, Uehara and Naoji, paradoxically he succeeds in creating somewhat more rounded characters.

Final Destination in Sight

The Setting Sun is, compared with *Fireworks in Winter* and "Villon's Wife," a tightly integrated and subtle story. It still contains some weaknesses of structure and time sequence—weaknesses that will disappear in *No Longer Human*—but the vibrant will of its heroine to survive remains echoing long after the reader has closed the book.

"Ruin. No, not only we. Everyone in Japan, and especially everyone in Tokyo, drained of life, moving about sluggishly as if just to move were a great effort." (9: 245; tr. Seidensticker 1960, 39.) This, from "Osan," describes the world of *The Setting Sun*. The novel describes the complex emotional intertwinings of a mother and her two adult children. Mother, Kazuko, and Naoji are sadly adrift in the aftermath of the war. Mother is slowly dying, spiritually as well as physically, as postwar bankruptcy forces her to give up the family home in Tokyo and move to the seashore. She is both the dependent of her children and a catalyst for not-so-hidden rivalry between them for her love. Kazuko, through her own fault, has been divorced by her husband after the stillbirth of her baby. Her brother Naoji (one of the two Osamu-like characters in the novel) has been released from the hell of war and drug addiction, but is in a self-destructive frenzy of drink and dissipation. By the end of the novel, he is dead, a suicide. Uehara, Naoji's novelist "teacher" and the other Osamu figure, becomes Kazuko's lover as she pursues him with a fierce desire to have a baby by him, even though he is married. He too is dying from within. Everywhere is financial ruin, social and moral bankruptcy. This is the nightmare from which they all seek release, in their different ways.

In the midst of the chaos, trapped between the sensitive ones who have lost the will to live and the smug and prudent ones (exemplified by Kazuko's Uncle Wada) who walk the tightrope of solvency by cutting their losses, Kazuko refuses to give up—and, in the process, discovers the steely strength of her own will. If she seems to be turning hard and disillusioned, well, the

times demand it. Do I nourish a serpent in my breast? wondered the protagonist of "Osan," quoting the eighteenth-century playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon who created the original character.⁵ Kazuko knows she does, one that in the course of the novel battens on her mother and swells as that mother fades to a pale shadow. It is the twin of the "rainbow" Kazuko also carries in her breast (for that is what she calls her love for Uehara). The image of the snake that crawls through the novel is appropriate to the sexual aggression Kazuko equates with love. "Outbreak of hostilities" is how she describes the final stage of her pursuit of Uehara.

It is as easy to be harsh on Kazuko as it is to admire her vitality or pity her the emptiness of a life that makes her frantic struggle so imperative. Kazuko's deepest fault, and her most sympathetic quality, is the honesty with which she pursues her dreams, which are wildly romantic. She wants life to be bigger and riper and more vibrant than it can ever be. Kazuko, in other words, is an instinctive artist, but one with no form to contain her visions. Like the woman in "Suisen" (Narcissus), who left her husband and plunged into the bohemian life of Tokyo in order to develop her talent as a painter and "fall as far as one can fall" (the same phrase Kazuko utters in *Fireworks in Winter*), Kazuko is determined to do whatever is necessary to live within her definition of beauty. Six years before the present, Kazuko had destroyed her marriage through ill-advised ecstasy over the work of a certain painter. Now she is feverish about a novelist. Her approach is intellectualized but not rational: she was "wild" about Hosoda's paintings and pored over Uehara's novels, just as she devoured Rosa Luxemburg's theoretical writings. But it is not Rosa Luxemburg's economic theories that galvanize her to action; it is "the sheer courage the author demonstrated in tearing apart without any hesitation all manner of conventional ideas." As Luxemburg "gave tragically her undivided love to Marxism," so Kazuko thinks she will destroy the bankrupt order of the present in order to perfect anew. She even recognizes that the new dream of perfection may never come, but she is committed to destroy, "in the passion of love." (9: 191; tr. Keene 1956, 112.) In this, Kazuko betrays her ancestry: she is one with those wild, unbridled heroines of Tokugawa popular literature, based on real figures like Oshichi, who attempted to burn down Edo in order to be reunited with the boy she loved.⁶

⁵Osan is the abused heroine of the eighteenth-century puppet play *Shinjū ten no Amijima*, whose husband commits suicide with a courtesan. See Donald Keene, trans., *Love Suicides at Amijima*, in *Major Plays of Chikamatsu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 387–425.

⁶The story of Oshichi the greengrocer's daughter is contained in *Kōshoku gonin onna*, a collection of stories about real women who cast aside morality and social responsibility for passion, by the seventeenth-century writer Ihara Saikaku. See William Theodore de Bary's translation, *Five Women Who Loved Love* (Rutland, Vt., and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1956), 159–94.

Kazuko is not new; her passion is one of the vital myths of a repressed society in which opportunity scarcely exists.

One might think that, through his portrait of Kazuko, Dazai is patronizing women as mindless masses of emotion and selfishness. The men *do* things: they paint the paintings, write the novels, discuss the philosophy. All Kazuko has is her silly, passionate soul and her demanding body. In fact, she remembers from her school days, she once returned unread a book of Lenin's writings, which she had not read because "I hated the color of the jacket." Now spouting theories of life and art, she still seems to merit her friend's comparison of her to the "spineless" women of centuries earlier. But *The Setting Sun* makes it clear, if we did not know it already, that Dazai does not give Kazuko passion as a consolation prize. It is, in his eyes, the *only* real thing. The husband in "Osan" weeps weakly as, lost in thoughts of the sadness and beauty of destruction, he thinks of the French Revolution. He dies on "the cross of revolution," and his words seem empty. In *The Setting Sun*, Naoji dies, and Uehara's death is foretold. But Kazuko lives, and the child within her lives. In a final letter to Uehara, she exults in her pregnancy: "I cannot possibly think of it in terms of a hideous mistake or anything of the sort. 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." (9: 239; tr. Keene 1956, 172.)

While motherhood is a crucial status in these powerful late stories, Kazuko's passion to bear Uehara's child has less to do with her love for him than it does with the force of life within her. Her relationship with her mother is likewise a central issue in *The Setting Sun*. Her ambivalence toward her mother is a combination of infantile need (which she calls "love") and resentment at that motherhood as a silent reproach to her own childlessness. In the snake, Dazai found a vivid image to objectify and focus these emotions. It is used both symbolically and concretely, for a many-layered effect. As the snake Kazuko imagines in her breast, which she accuses of having devoured her unborn baby, and which grows stronger as Mother grows weaker, it has the elemental association with sex. It is a force that stands in opposition to social values, one that cannot be controlled or denied. Dazai had described its power years earlier in that same image in "The Stylish Child." Again, in *The Setting Sun*, Dazai uses Kazuko's preoccupation with a mother snake in the garden of their new seaside home to expose the feelings about her mother that she herself cannot express. Kazuko finds a clutch of snake eggs and—to the delight of the neighborhood children—burns them in a bonfire. She is quite casual about it, even burying the scorched eggs in a mock ceremony; but her mother reproaches her, calling it cruelty. Kazuko then remembers that Mother has had a "mortal dread" of snakes ever since

seeing some under mysterious circumstances the day Kazuko's father had died. Kazuko remembers clearly the ominous snake-related incidents accompanying her father's death (she was, after all, nineteen at the time). Now she is tormented by the thought that she may unwittingly have laid a curse on her mother. But obviously, she could not have been entirely unconscious of the significance of now attacking a mother snake in her most vulnerable spot. Kazuko uses the excuse of protection (she was "afraid" they might be viper eggs, instead of the ordinary snake's they turned out to be), and the response of remorse, to cover the real antagonism in her actions.

For mother snake and Mother are not so separate in Kazuko's mind. In fact, Kazuko's description of the delicate, graceful, sad beauty of the snake crawling slowly and wearily around the garden, as if searching for and mourning her babies, echoes the fragile sadness of Mother, exhausted by worry over her children. The snake lifting its head elegantly and flicking its "flame-like" tongue calls to mind Kazuko's description of Mother's "charming" and "strangely erotic" way of eating soup:

Mother . . . lightly rests the fingers of her left hand on the edge of the table and sits perfectly erect, with her head held high and scarcely so much as a glance at the plate. She darts the spoon into the soup and like a swallow—so gracefully and cleanly one can really use the simile—brings the spoon to her mouth at a right angle, and pours the soup between her lips from the point. Then, with innocent glances around her, she flutters the spoon exactly like a little wing, never spilling a drop of soup or making the least sound or clinking the plate. [9: 99; tr. Keene 1956, 4-5.]

Kazuko uses the simile of a bird, but there is something snakelike about her description. She calls it "appealing" and "really genuine" as her mother sits there "serenely erect," instead of eating as etiquette demands; but if there is something erotic in Mother's innocent coquetry, there is also something unpleasant in Kazuko's description, something that calls to mind the feelings usually associated with a snake. What, according to Kazuko, is genuine and truly aristocratic actually comes across tinged with decadence. And Kazuko is aware of what she is doing: "It occurred to me then that Mother's face rather resembled that of the unfortunate snake we had just seen, and I had the feeling, for whatever reason, that the ugly snake dwelling in my breast might one day end by devouring this beautiful, grief-stricken mother snake." [9: 109; tr. Keene 1956, 16.]

Mother must not be thought of as an innocent victim of Kazuko's emotions, however. For Mother's delicacy and charm are her children's downfall. Mother is and, one has the impression, has been for a long time, the one who demands to be taken care of. A mere accident of time, one might think; after all, it was not her fault that the war left them penniless so that they had

to sell the house that had been her emotional support through the years. Kazuko is strong and young, Mother is aging, so it should seem natural that Kazuko take over care of her physical needs when they move to the country. But it is Mother, Kazuko recognizes, who is playing her and Naoji off against each other, keeping Naoji dependent and yet seeming to demand that he be the man of the family, while keeping Kazuko in a state of disorder by leaning on her, petting her, and yet turning to Naoji the moment he returns. The times have little to do with the involutions of the relationships in this family. Their complications antedate the war. The events surrounding Naoji's drug addiction six years earlier, events that had contributed to the breakup of Kazuko's marriage, showed two children trying to keep the secret from their mother, not because it would have hurt her, but because she was too ethereal, they thought, to deal with it. By contrast, their own mundaneness comes to seem to them dirty and undesirable, thereby interfering with their ability to deal with reality. Even Kazuko's most direct and nearly neutral description of the children's dilemma hints at depths: "My brother Naoji says that we are no match for Mother, and I have at times felt something akin to despair at the difficulty of imitating her." (9: 109; tr. Keene 1956, 16.)

In this portrait of the way passivity can have as much destructive power as action, Dazai is dealing forever with his feelings about "the one who bore you." Kazuko and Naoji, in their feverish clinging to a mother who keeps them tied to her by pulling emotional strings, seemingly without guile yet also without giving them emotional sustenance, act out Dazai's feelings about all the women—Tane, Kiye, Take, Hatsuyo—who failed him in that most crucial area, emotional trust. Accordingly, once Mother is dead in *The Setting Sun*, Naoji sinks, and Kazuko floats away to fulfill her own destiny now that she has won the battle. She is the inheritor, the new Mother. When, in *No Longer Human*, Dazai returns again to Osamu's story, there is no need for a mother. Dazai has killed her off in *The Setting Sun*.

The Setting Sun does not, however, show a world without love. There is more than enough—Kazuko's for Uehara, Naoji's for Uehara's wife, Kazuko's and Naoji's for Mother, Mother's for her children—but it is all twisted and off target, and incapable of helping either lover or loved. In one of the most poetic passages he ever wrote, Dazai epitomizes the absolute confused hopelessness of such love in search of an object. The thoughts are Kazuko's as she watches Uehara sleep after she has finally yielded to him:

When the room became faintly light, I stared at the face of the man sleeping beside me. It was the face of a man soon to die. It was an exhausted face.

The face of a victim. A precious victim.

My man. My rainbow. My Child. Hateful man. Unprincipled man.

It seemed to me then a face of a beauty unmatched in the whole world. My

breast throbbed with the sensation of resuscitated love. I kissed him as I stroked his hair.

The sad, sad accomplishment of love. [9: 225; tr. Keene 1956, 151.]

Dazai was now prepared to finish the story of Osamu. He wrote about a dozen stories and a number of essays in the year between *The Setting Sun* and *No Longer Human*, among them the excellent "Osan" and "Cherries." When he turned to *No Longer Human*, it was with a technical mastery that matched the sureness of story conception.

The End of the Road

No Longer Human is a writer's story. It is in a sense a rewriting of "Recollections" and "Eight Views of Tokyo." The main part of the novel, narrated by Ōba Yōzō, is the story of Yōzō's life from childhood to a kind of living death at the age of twenty-seven; but it is framed by the comments of a carefully anonymous writer who has just "happened" upon Yōzō's notebooks and some photographs of him. (Dazai had tried out the technique of telling an "Eight Views of Tokyo" by describing photographs, in the 1942 "Chiisai arubamu" [A Little Album].) Therefore, one thing to keep in mind, for all the seeming passion and terror of Yōzō's narrative, is that this is a very calm and calculated story. Yōzō-Osamu "dies" at an early date, when he is "disqualified as a human being" in a mental institution; Dazai remained behind briefly to tell the story, in the last chapter of the Osamu Saga. The writer had known for more than eight years that he would have to write this novel:

Today is November 13. Four years ago on this day, I was permitted to leave a certain unlucky hospital. That day was not as cold as today. It was a clear, crisp autumn day, and in the hospital garden some flowers were still blooming. When another five or six years have passed, and I can be more composed, I intend to try writing slowly and carefully about that period. I intend to call it *No Longer Human*. [3: 75.]

In fact, it took Dazai longer than he had expected to become "more composed," and his composure turned out to be a calm preceding death.

"The First Notebook" covers roughly the period of part I of "Recollections," but with a world of difference. "Recollections" showed a very human little Osamu, sad, lonely, but also closely a part of a peopled world, with games, childish terrors, comforts, guilt, and pleasures all mixed together. Yōzō's world is empty and echoing. He is, by his own description, a bizarre little fellow. By some accident of fate, he has been placed in a world whose first principles he cannot even discern. What it means to be human is a puzzle to him. They are many and he is one, so he must adapt to survive; but like a

little creature from outer space plunked down on an alien planet, he can only change his surface coloration and pray that his truly different metabolism will not be discovered. Of course, Yōzō's weirdness is only a kind of metaphor. As with Akutagawa's water sprite in his Swiftian story "Kappa," the warped perceptions of Dazai's Yōzō expose the author's perceptions of truths about human ugliness—and beauty. If Yōzō stands appalled at human hypocrisy, stupidity, and mindless cruelty, he also is sadly unable to respond to the warmth, love, and trust that also exist in the human world. He is the alien yardstick of both human depravity and greatness.

One change from the earlier story of Osamu's childhood is immediately noticeable: there are no personified women in Yōzō's first notebook. Mothers, sisters, women servants are there, but they are shadowy and merge into a generalized mass, "women." Women are to be important to Yōzō, but never will he be able to receive or truly understand a woman's warmth. They are, if anything, the enemy:

Women led me on only to throw me aside; they mocked and tortured me when others were around, only to embrace me with passion as soon as everyone had left. Women sleep so soundly they seem to be dead. Who knows? Women may live in order to sleep. These and various other generalizations were products of an observation of women since boyhood days, but my conclusion was that though women appear to belong to the same species as man, they are actually quite different creatures. . . . I have often felt that I would find it more complicated, troublesome and unpleasant to ascertain the feelings by which a woman lives than to plumb the innermost thoughts of an earthworm. [9: 383, 385; tr. Keene 1958, 48–49, 51–52.]

Father is, however, a strongly personified and continuing negative force in Yōzō's life. In the context of Dazai's perception of the power of life in women and the emptiness of abstraction in men, this difference between the facts of the author's life and their symbolic transformation into Yōzō's is crucial. In the pedestrian truth of semiautobiography, Osamu's father died in "Recollections" while Osamu was still a child. The death of Dazai's mother, which came much later in his life, had, until *No Longer Human*, far more emotional impact on his writing. Now, having fictionalized the story to a much greater extent, he was free to work out an alternate reality to help him deal with the father he had so far largely neglected. That father, whose sexuality so troubled the youthful Dazai that he doubted his parentage, and in "Bottomless Hell" made the father of the protagonist such a monster of corruption that he tears away from one mistress the baby he has fathered on her and gives it to another mistress; the father who haunted Dazai the adult to such a degree that he went to Kizukuri during his Tsugaru trip in an attempt to find a clue to understanding him; this is the father who is a strong back-

ground presence in *No Longer Human*. In the novel, Yōzō's mother is a negligible quantity, and his father lives until after Yōzō's confinement in a mental institution at the age of twenty-four. In spirit, Yōzō and his father die together.⁷ Yōzō will respond to his father's death as if he himself had died: "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." (9: 470; tr. Keene 1958, 168.) When the bar madam at the end says, "It's his father's fault," that is Dazai's judgment on his life. If his father had not abandoned him, in life or in death, when he was in high school, his life would have been different. We can remonstrate that the outcome would have been the same, but the child in Dazai only repeats, "It was his fault."

"The Second Notebook" spans part II of "Recollections" and the early part of "Eight Views of Tokyo," but again with crucial additions and deletions. The ocean-side school by the cherry-blossomed park is there from before, but Takeichi is a new addition. In "Recollections," a sympathetic friend warns Osamu that his behavior at school will cause him trouble; in *No Longer Human*, Takeichi sees through Yōzō's deliberate attempts to be clumsy in physical education class, and by telling Yōzō that he knows he did it on purpose, makes Yōzō feel "as if I had seen the world before me burst in an instant into the raging flames of hell." (9: 465-66; tr. Keene 1958, 168.) Again, what was in "Recollections" a touching, amusing scene of Osamu's younger brother helping him paint acne medicine on his face, is transformed in *No Longer Human* into a horror scene of Yōzō swabbing out Takeichi's pus-filled ears to keep him, so he hopes, from revealing the truth behind Yōzō's self-protective clowning. Yōzō's pathological "fear of human beings" has evolved from all the ordinary, human kinds of insecurity, self-consciousness, and fears that Dazai has depicted in Osamu's world so far. Takeichi, this strange and ugly potential betrayer of Yōzō's "secret identity," turns out unexpectedly to be almost a friend. It is he, and not such self-communion as gave Osamu the inspiration to aspire to be a writer, who teaches Yōzō that his salvation could have been in art. Their discussion of what Takeichi called "ghost paintings"—their special, aberrant interpretation of some paintings by Modigliani and Van Gogh that Yōzō showed him—finally makes clear what were the "unfathomable shudders" Osamu had felt in "Recollections" at the point he prayed to become a writer. Other artists had these same terrible visions of truth:

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

⁷This can be seen as an inversion of Kazue's and Asa's (spiritual) double suicide in *Fireworks in Winter*.

horrible shapes. And the more nervous they are—the quicker to take fright—the more violent they pray that every storm will be. . . . 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. Takeichi was right: they had dared to paint pictures of devils. I was so excited I could have wept. . . . Takeichi's words made me aware that my mental attitude towards painting had been completely mistaken. What superficiality—and what stupidity—there is in trying to depict in a pretty manner things which one has thought pretty. The masters through their subjective perceptions created beauty out of trivialities. They did not hide their interest even in things which were nauseatingly ugly, but soaked themselves in the pleasure of depicting them. In other words, they seemed not to rely in the least on the misconceptions of others. Now that I had been initiated by Takeichi into these root secrets of the art of painting, I began to do a few self-portraits, taking care that they not be seen by my female visitors.

The pictures I drew were so heartrending 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. [9: 387–88; tr. Keene 1958, 53–54, 55.]

As Yōzō's relationship with Takeichi is only a parody of intimacy, so too his means of communication with the world has to remain clowning. His life is empty and deformed, and so he does not in fact become a fierce protector of his art. Instead, he debases his talent, becoming a cheap cartoonist whose only subject increasingly is pornographic. Osamu fought, throughout "Eight Views of Tokyo," to preserve his private vision of artistic integrity, and that persistence became the strength in Dazai that made his career. Above all, Dazai's world was filled with love—failed though it mostly was—while Yōzō's is devoid of it; and that is the difference.

There is no Miyo in Yōzō's story, and most strikingly, no Hatsuyo.⁸ The transition between high school in the North to university in Tokyo is handled simply: Father has Yōzō enter college to become a bureaucrat, even though the youth wants secretly to go to art school, and Yōzō, tired of high school, acquiesces and begins living at his father's Tokyo house. To tighten the storyline, Dazai brings in the devil-figure Horiki. In real life, the causes of Dazai's plunge from potential solid citizen to a life of chaos were to him complicated, the threads torn and knotted—*gidayū* lessons, Akutagawa's death, the class struggle, Hatsuyo, family, guilt, resentment, fear—no wonder Dazai could not get the story right. In *No Longer Human*, the control afforded by pure fiction makes it neater.

Osamu in "Eight Views of Tokyo" has already encountered serious trou-

⁸Curiously, though, Horiki fills in *No Longer Human* the same place in time as *H* in "Eight Views of Tokyo."

bles in his life by the time he comes to Tokyo, and his brother's death soon afterward does not help matters. Yōzō, to the contrary, lives quietly and comfortably in Tokyo at first, pursuing his own interests. People frighten him, and classes at university are "tedious," so he takes private art lessons. If he is not doing as his father had planned, at least his days seem constructive. It is Horiki, a fellow art student, who draws him out into the world, initiating him into the mysteries of "drink, cigarettes, prostitutes, pawnshops and left-wing thought."

Yōzō and Horiki are a natural combination, Yōzō terrified by the "realities of life" but financially comfortable, Horiki brash and confident, at ease in the worlds of pleasure, and a past master at spending other people's money to maximum mutual benefit. Yōzō blooms under Horiki's tutelage; chameleonlike, he adapts to his new circumstances so readily that before long even Horiki begins to call him a "ladykiller," a fate Takeichi had prophesied. His most kindred spirits are the prostitutes he frequents:

I never could think of prostitutes as human beings or even as women. They seemed more like imbeciles or lunatics. But in their arms I felt absolute security. I could sleep soundly. It was pathetic how utterly devoid of greed they really were. And perhaps because they felt for me something like an affinity for their kind, these prostitutes always showed me a natural friendliness which never became oppressive. Friendliness with no ulterior motive, friendliness stripped of high-pressure salesmanship, for someone who might never come again. Some nights I saw these imbecile, lunatic prostitutes with the halo of Mary. [9: 393; tr. Keene 1958, 63.]

Thanks to Horiki, he begins to prostitute himself to the communist movement. But here he maintains private intellectual reservations; he finds it "uproariously amusing" to see his "comrades" solemnly discussing "theories so elementary they were on the order of 'one and one makes two.'" Then disaster strikes. Yōzō's financial base is cut out from under him when his father sells the Tokyo house, so that he has to live solely on his allowance. Without the cushion that had held reality off, life quickly becomes intolerable. And Tsuneko enters to play her part.

She has not become dehumanized like Yōzō. Her tale of misery is all too human. It is a misery that overcomes Yōzō's dread of people and brings him close to her. A "feeling of comradeship for this fellow sufferer from poverty," an emotion of pity, are to Yōzō the first intimations he has had of that feeling humans call "love." Yōzō and Tsuneko consummate their love with a decision to die together. She mentions the subject first, and he acquiesces: "She too seemed to be weary beyond endurance of the task of being a human being; and when I reflected on my dread of the world and its bothersomeness, on money, the movement, women, my studies, it seemed impossible

that I could go on living. I consented easily to her proposal.” (9: 409; tr. Keene 1958, 86.) Tsuneko dies, Yōzō lives to enter a new phase. “The Third Notebook” covers a period of time that in Osamu’s life in “Eight Views of Tokyo” was bracketed between the Enoshima suicide attempt and institutionalization for drug addiction—in essence, the years with H. Again, the events are all transformed negatively.

In that portion of “Eight Views of Tokyo,” Osamu shows how he tried to write a suicide note and started instead to become a writer, although at the time he could not see the progress for the hell of daily life. But Yōzō’s life in *No Longer Human* after the suicide attempt is filled with great silences. For some three or four months he lives blankly at Flatfish’s house, under a kind of house arrest. Mean, stingy, ugly, unctuous Flatfish, with his clandestine “business,” becomes Yōzō’s guardian, and never for a moment does he allow Yōzō to forget that he considers the youth an extraordinary bother and probably mentally incompetent to boot. Yōzō passively allows Flatfish to violate his soul, just as he had and would allow others—the household servants when he was a child, his communist “comrade” in his party days, the old servant who takes care of him at the end of the book—to violate his body. In a traditional image he discovers soon after crawling away from Flatfish’s house (“running” is too assertive a verb), when he sees a kite caught in telephone wires, he is a captive kite, at the mercy of anyone who tugs his string. Yōzō would like to think of the kite, battered and buffeted about, as struggling in some kind of affirmation, like Osamu; but clearly, it is a prisoner.

Shizuko is the next holder of his string—an inversion of the “red string” in “Recollections.” She combines the best and worst of a woman: she cares for Yōzō, she loves him, she keeps him safe from the world, she attempts to help him develop a career; and at the same time, by her very control of all aspects of his life, she emasculates him. Yōzō remains emotionally insulated from every prospect she offers, but for a year, he continues as her kept man. It is only the sight of Shizuko and her five-year-old daughter Shigeko, unaware he is watching them secretly, playing happily together one day, that brings home to him that he has no part in that happiness. The realization drives him to his next keeper, the bar madam who, at the end of the novel, is the guardian of his notebooks.

Yet another year passes with Yōzō adapted to the society of the night, the patrons of the bar. And then Yōzō discovers seventeen-year-old Yoshiko, who works in a nearby tobacco shop. He does not fall in love with her. It is something more solemn, fragile, and absolute he feels: he trusts her, and he trusts in her innocence. With the bar madam’s assistance, he marries her. Then, while he and Horiki are engaged in a drunken conversation, she is raped by a shopkeeper for whom Yōzō draws cartoons. Yoshiko is not to blame, except for being too trusting, but Yōzō feels that his faith in her has

been betrayed. Why does he feel a "bottomless horror" surpassing anything he has known so far?

The answer lies in the nature of Yōzō's character, not Yoshiko's. Yōzō's emotional metabolism is totally different from that of the people surrounding him. To him, they are like another race of beings; he finds their emotions wholly mysterious and impenetrable. Just once, with the trustful Yoshiko, an instant came when it seemed that he had a meeting point with these beings. Her absolute trust in him elicited an extreme response in him. He took what was for him a terrible risk, and placed his soul in her keeping. The violation of Yoshiko is the violation of her "immaculate trustfulness"—the one virtue, Yōzō confesses to himself, that he had depended on.

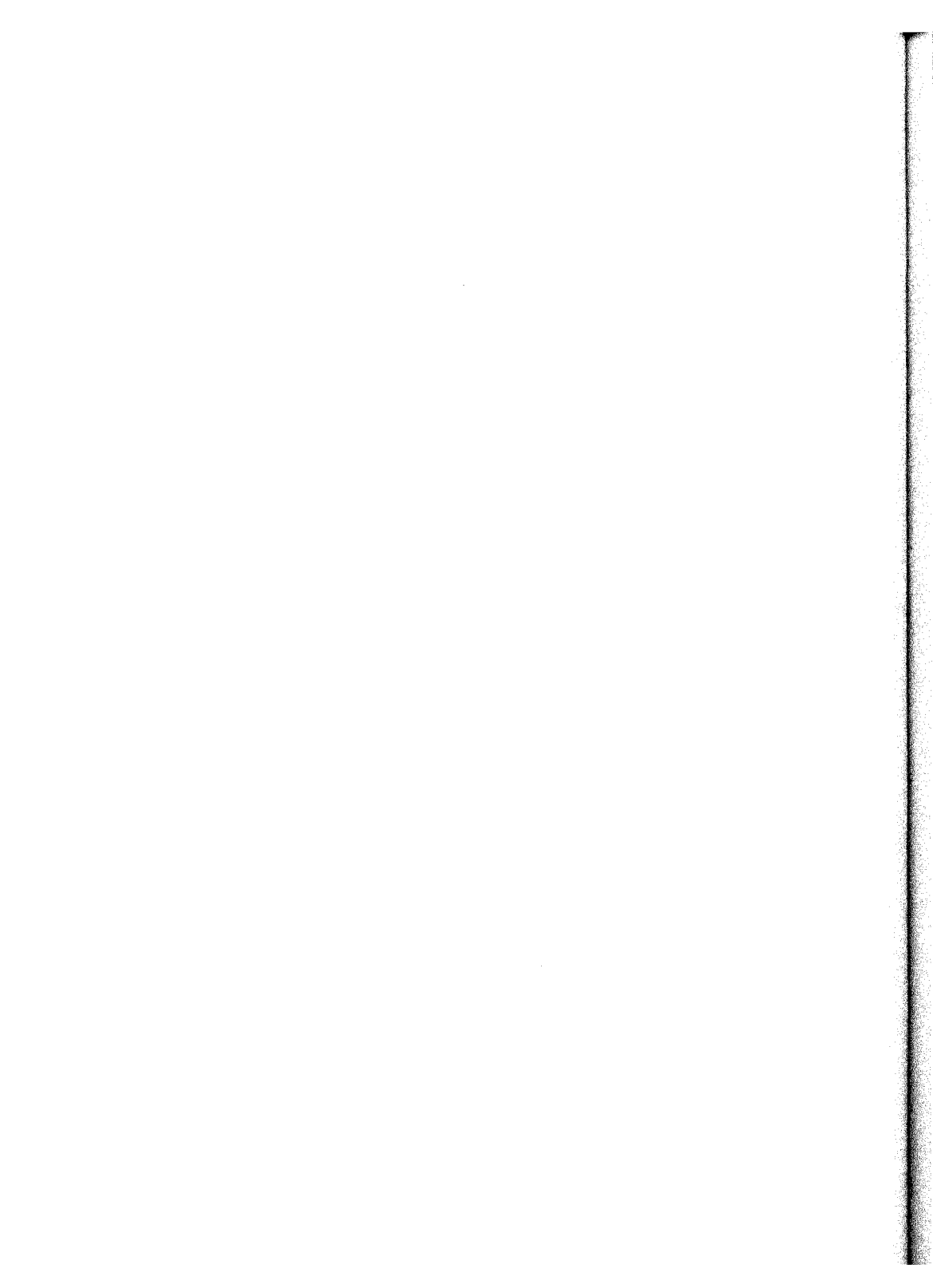
Yōzō's extreme reaction, then, makes sense in terms of his extreme personality, which Dazai draws with masterly strokes. But from its effect on Yōzō, we can tell that the rape of Yoshiko is also a metaphor for Hatsuyo's unfaithfulness. And that in turn explains the relationship of *No Longer Human* to the rest of the Osamu Saga. The Osamu of "Recollections" was already stricken with a fatal disease. One cannot live without hope; trust is the foundation of hope; but all the mainstays of Osamu's life were untrustworthy—the child had learned that love could disappear in the blinking of an eye. H in "Eight Views of Tokyo" only dealt the final blow. Dazai, the teller of the tale, was under a self-imposed sentence of death from "Recollections" on, and that is why Yōzō is twenty-four (Dazai's age when he wrote "Recollections") when he enters the hospital. When Dazai was twenty-seven, Yōzō's age at the end of *No Longer Human*, he himself became the "human lost" through his hospital stay, which was the occasion for Hatsuyo's final betrayal. Dazai does seem truly to have loved Hatsuyo. Like Yōzō's "miserable Tsuneko," she "really was the only one" he loved, the only one he had chosen of himself. And so she is transfigured into the crushingly innocent Yoshiko, her casual sexuality and consenting adultery dehumanized into the rape of solemn, pure Yoshiko. The effect is the same: the death of the possibility of love. *No Longer Human* is both an apology to Hatsuyo and an expression of helplessness from Dazai.

Yōzō's fatal flaw is, like that of Camus's "outsider," his pathological incapacity for the self-assertion that means life. Midway through the novel, he sits paralyzed in a cabaret, knowing that Tsuneko is "going to be kissed in another few minutes" by Horiki (the verb in the passive to emphasize her victimlike status); but he feels himself not qualified to *do* anything to affect the course of action. Later he watches, suffocating, while Yoshiko is violated; all he can do is flee, pursued by an overpowering "ancestral" fear, as if of a god. If Dazai had read Kierkegaard, he might have found the vocabulary for the existential dread that characterizes Yōzō's life. For him, even to feel guilty at his failure to act is too great an assertion of will. Yōzō's heart is

filled with negatives—emptiness, nonaction, self-abdication, omitted action—and it is this that disqualifies him from a humanity defined by desire and striving, murky and petty though its aspirations generally are.

This negative apotheosis of Osamu after all his striving was, finally, the literary image Dazai had been seeking. Emotion and art had met, joining seeming contradictions: with passion, with pity and love, Dazai had depicted a cold, echoing world. Yōzō has no emotion other than fear, no desire but to escape observation. He never connects with any character in the novel, not even Yoshiko. He deals with the fear—of life, of love, of trust, of commitment—by passively letting events flow around him without touching him. Here is finally the perfect metaphor for Osamu's experiences of failed love: a world where love is defined out of existence in the empty silence of Yōzō's soul. In this silence is the sad conclusion of the saga.

Yōzō is both crazy (one commonsense explanation for his life-long feeling of alienation) and infinitely pitiable, for being so in need of love and so blocked from it. He sets humanity's weaknesses into harsh relief, just as Dazai himself railed against the deceit, insensitivity, and arrogance he saw around him; he is thus disqualified from participating in humanity's warmth, as Dazai was unable ultimately to draw sustenance from the supports of family and friends. Through Yōzō, the story was finally told of how the "dirty child" had lived—and how he had failed. Dazai, "disqualified as a human being," was released from his self-imposed task. Osamu was not necessarily finished, for he resiliently surfaces again, like Till Eulenspiegel, in *Good-bye*; but his creator was. It is here that the split between Osamu and Dazai at last is clear.



Conclusion

The sad, sad accomplishment of love.

—Dazai Osamu, *The Setting Sun*¹

Dazai completed his long suicide note with *No Longer Human*, and so the Osamu Saga was finished. Osamu had tried to make sense of life, and had succeeded in some areas, but not in enough to find ultimate coherence and the impetus to go on. In his actual suicide note to his wife, Dazai wrote, “I’m not dying because I hate you—it’s because I’ve come to hate writing. They’re all so greedy—they want too much of me.”² And in the years since then, the active sympathy of Dazai’s readers with the struggles of Osamu has not diminished. Ōta Shizuko had wanted to meet Dazai because he seemed to speak for her as she read his stories, and she ended up having a child by him. Readers’ reactions to his stories, whether positive or negative, are still strongly personal, almost as if the stories represented a living man, not simply a character in a book. Long before Dazai’s final exit, the character Osamu had so come to life that Dazai himself had to deal with the consequences, and that he was not able to do. Because the effects of Dazai’s writing are a social phenomenon as well as of literary significance, we might look briefly in conclusion at what the Osamu Saga reveals about Osamu, as a way of perhaps gauging what makes Dazai a special kind of major writer, and for our understanding of what it is that Japanese readers respond to so strongly.

The Poet of Maturity Deferred

In Japan, Dazai remains the poet of adolescence. The problems of social adjustment he wrote about—personal identity, family role, politics, career, as man, husband, father, lover—are ones that emerge naturally when youth is on the brink of adulthood. From this viewpoint, it is easy to dismiss Osa-

¹*Zenshū* 9: 225; tr. Keene 1956, 151.

²Kitagaki, 175. This letter is only presumed to have been Dazai’s suicide note. Physical evidence indicates that it might have been written earlier, perhaps while Dazai was drunk, and that he might have meant to discard it. This is part of the theory that “Yamazaki Tomie made him do it (or did it to him).”

mu's inarticulate cry of pain, surprised innocence, and loneliness as a minor psychological and literary statement, since even in Japan society regards the terrors and upheavals of adolescence as but a passing phase for each individual, requiring but a tiny adjustment in the ongoing social order. Yet when an author, for whatever reasons of personal need, spends the best creative energies of his adult years wrestling the story of these terrors onto paper, the narrative that results may be of more than passing literary value.

Compared with both childhood and maturity, adolescence is a developmental period less able to accept external guarantees of personal worth, guarantees based upon social roles and involvements. Sadly, Dazai spent his life as just such an alien, unable to follow single-mindedly either the childish path of untroubled selfishness or the mature path of effective personal relationships. For better or worse, the *Osamu Saga* was the result—the record of daily confrontation, real and imagined, with the naked self, a self unprotected by either innocence or wisdom. The fact that Japanese society, more than many, values social integration in both family and public behavior over individual self-exploration, made Dazai's sustained adolescent investigation of his own mind and emotions all the more difficult and daring. Accordingly, we may value the limited successes of his life and art the more highly.

Dazai's energies might even have flowed into deeper channels, if a more public recognition of the interiority of the youthful soul had already been available among the literary commonplaces of his world. But for all the seeming introspectiveness of modern Japanese literature, the figures and situations depicted remain curiously abstract. Right from the start of the modern tradition, Japanese writers had shown the struggles of young men coming of age, had explored their minds as these young people (sometimes identified with the writers themselves) tried to discover themselves. But, perhaps because of what Masao Miyoshi speaks of as an inability of Japanese to understand what the West means by the self, there always remains, even in the most seemingly intense engagement of author and subject, a distance that leaves the reader asking, "But what is this man like, really?"³ Dazai, even with his sometime ironic distance, attempted to bridge that gap, in a manner that carries the reader with him. Unfortunately, he was forced to acknowledge a psychic stalemate in his own life at the age of thirty-eight (a stalemate he had obviously reached much earlier), having labored beyond endurance to bring such a document into existence. Happily, the *Osamu Saga* remains, to strengthen Japanese literature precisely at one of its weak points.

It can be said that, in the more than quarter-century since his death, Dazai has had a deepening effect on Japanese letters not because he is the poet of

³See Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, especially pp. xi–xii.

adolescence, but rather because he is the poet of maturity in progress, maturity deferred. Throughout the Osamu Saga the quest is for a better self. More than this, the saga is comic rather than tragic, despite the tragic end of its author. That is, the saga is a record, through setbacks and pratfalls, of cumulative and painstaking progress in the quest. Specifically, in area after area, we see Osamu at least attempt, if not master, the arts of contact and reconciliation with, and love for, those around him.

Because our information on Osamu is necessarily more complete (or limited) than what we know of Dazai, it is possible to make some interpretive judgments of his behavior and psychology. Two extremely schematic theoretical paradigms, one Western and developmental, the other Japanese and structural, will help summarize what happens to Osamu in the course of the Osamu Saga, and why it speaks so directly to a wide variety of audiences, but especially to young people East and West.

When the saga is seen as a whole, as the extension of what Dazai called in *Tsugaru* his "curriculum of love," we see that Osamu achieves varying degrees of success in each of four Eriksonian tasks of maturation: love between mother and child, love within the family as a whole, love within the wider circles of friends and companions, and love between man and woman. Of course, the essence of the Osamu Saga as a literary structure lies in the fact that Osamu's mastery of these tasks is neither orderly, nor linear, nor completely successful; but he can be scored informally on each.

In all areas, his score for deportment is terrible. It is a wonder he made progress at all; time carried him kicking and screaming into adulthood, and it seems more by chance than design that he confronted each of his tasks eventually. In this developmental view, the mother-child relationship is the first with which every man must deal; on it is based all future social behavior. The individual man-woman sex relationship is the last step beyond adolescence, and makes for replication of the cycle in the next generation. As Osamu's final resolution of the first area was delayed beyond all reasonable expectations, so the second and third were retarded. Accordingly, his ability to deal with the last was necessarily crippled altogether.

"Recollections" records Osamu's confused childhood, with its multiple mother-figures, none of them emotionally reliable. The child does not really settle on a stable concept of who his mother is, and what she means to him, until *Tsugaru*, when he is thirty-five years old and within four years of his death. There, as we have seen, he almost arbitrarily seizes upon Take as the solution to a number of problems concerning family identification and self-esteem. Osamu gets a high score for this resolution, for, if it does leave him isolated socially, it also gives him a solid sense of trust and mutual dependability. Take loves him, he thinks, as much as he wants to love her, and that sense of security is reflected back into the calm assurance with which Dazai

tells the story of the *Tsugaru* journey. Yet because Take is neither appropriate nor sufficient to fulfill Osamu's retrojected expectations, the security is ephemeral.

The second task, achievement of love in the whole family, is solved shortly before *Tsugaru*, in "Hometown." Osamu receives a somewhat lower score for this, for the resolution is a negative one. It is here that he begins to be resigned to the fact that although he depends on his family, and although he and his eldest brother have a very complex and deep relationship, the family never has and cannot now meet his emotional needs. The process is completed in *Tsugaru*, when he realizes at Fukaura that the family in some ways controls a larger world than he can hope to affect, and that within that world his only identity is as a minor appendage. But in the moment of sorrowing reconciliation that closes "Hometown," Osamu is coequal and integrated with the individuals that make up what remains of the family.

The world of friends is one in which Osamu gets top score. Again, because of his early failures at the first task, he is slow to recognize consciously what accomplishments of friendship he has made; but in *Tsugaru*, that too becomes clear. The hints have been there all along—golden afternoons with school chums in "Recollections," concerned comrades in "Eight Views of Tokyo," pals in "A Little Album," an editor in "Thinking of Zenzō"—but with N, T, and S, Osamu solves the problem: friends are few, and one loves them, and is loved by them, for both strengths and weaknesses.

Within the context of the saga, Osamu fails at love between man and woman—the fourth task, whose successful completion would signal maturity—because everything else has come too late. Sex is not the only element in the man-woman relationship, but Osamu has difficulty even with physical intimacy. His solutions to the three other tasks have been in the direction of distance: "mother" is safer and purer at a distance of thirty years and a thousand miles, family ties must be acknowledged but not drawn upon, friends are seen as few and far between. But the essence of love between man and woman lies in closeness, even in the Japan of Dazai's day, where some social roles and personal expectations may have been different from ours. Osamu was conscious of a distance between himself and his women that could never be bridged. "There are nights when the hole in your sock weighs so heavily on your mind that you can't even make it at love," he says to K in "A Record of the Autumn Wind." (2: 258.) The only point of contact in Osamu's world was with misery. Ōba Yōzō had once loved "that miserable Tsuneko"; Kashichi, in "Discarding the Old Woman," finds Kazue infinitely touching during their journey to find a place to die; Osamu and H live huddled together like animals, "male and female living in a hole," in "Eight Views of Tokyo." Never is love for or from a woman a positive force for life in Osamu's world; even Kazuko's pursuit of Uehara to have him give her a

child has something vindictive and destructive, not life-giving, about it. Osamu is in some of the stories (as Dazai was in life) a father, but we are left with a final view of him as a fatally damaged child, not a functioning adult.

Amae. A more Japanese way of looking at Osamu's problems is to see them as both successes and failures in *amae* relationships. *Amae* and its related structures have been identified by the psychiatrist Doi Takeo as distinctively Japanese in that, while the feelings are found in human beings of all cultures, only the Japanese language seems to have an extensive vocabulary to describe their workings.⁴ *Amae* (a noun) describes a system of interlocking dependencies, the model of which is the mother-child relationship, which cover the human need to love and be loved, to nurture and be cared for, to indulge and be indulged. The child *amaerus* (the verb) to his mother; she *amayakasu* him. He "makes up" to his teacher, presumes upon the goodwill of his boss, and tries by serving their needs to ensure that all others will support him. His teacher looks to be depended on; his boss is gratified both to be served and to smooth pathways; others create a sense of community.

Such is the ideal situation. But life is seldom ideal; adjustments are delicate and imbalances occur easily. At issue, then, is the individual's ability to deal with lacks in gratification. The positive, and also self-indulgent, terms of the vocabulary of *amae* show up frequently in Osamu's story; but even more frequent are words describing its failures. *Sumanai*, a word for "thank you" with a strong sense of apology ("excuse me" being a negative way of saying "please") appears, in fact, in a phrase used almost as a motto by Dazai, the epigraph of "Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century," *umarete sumimasen*, "Forgive me for having been born." *Kō* ("filial piety"), rather than being a natural development for Osamu, is such a problematic issue for him that he expresses surprise every time he feels it, whether toward his fiancée's mother in "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji," or toward Take in *Tsugaru*. *On*, which is a reciprocal relationship involving benefit passed down and gratitude passed up (always there is an effective if not actual status difference), determines all Osamu's relations with his family: Kita and Nakabata in "Going Home" and "Hometown" become *onjin* ("benefactors") to Osamu, in *on-gaeshi* ("repayment for *on*") to Osamu's family, which has been their benefactor. The situation is doubly difficult for Osamu, because Kita and Nakabata always describe their help so as to make it seem that they are paying Osamu back for trouble they have caused him, when in fact it is the other way around; his relationship with them is thus a reversal, a defor-

⁴Doi's *Amae*'s *no kōzō* (tr. 1973 as *The Anatomy of Dependence*) is an explication of his theories (hereafter cited in translation). See also his *Sōseki no shinteki sekai* (tr. 1976 as *The Psychological World of Natsume Sōseki*), in which he uses Sōseki's novels as case histories to explain various pathologies.

mation, of the proper order of things. Osamu also becomes mired in conflicts between *giri* and *ninjō*, another nexus of complementarities. Both concepts express human feelings that sometimes arise harmoniously one from the other but more often are in conflict. *Giri* frequently has a sense of burdenomeness; it is the responsibility of the heart's debt, whatever requires repayment of the *on* debt, and is therefore sometimes translated "duty." *Ninjō* is the freer (and therefore sometimes antisocial and potentially destructive) aspect of the heart's impulses. It is equivalent, depending on the context, to a wide range of English words: love, pity, generosity, sympathy, empathy, indulgence, even protection. *Gimu*, which Osamu mentions especially in "Thinking of Zenzō," is a more task-oriented aspect of *giri*; it is a responsibility fulfilled because the job requires it.

All of these words are important in Osamu's emotional vocabulary. His fundamental problem, as Dazai presents it, is that he never had as a child a firm, continuous, and unquestioned world of *amae*. Never did he feel an atmosphere of uncritical overwhelming indulgence—what Erikson might call the necessary conditions for developing a sense of trust. And so he never had a base of equilibrium from which to be able to handle the complicated reciprocities and responsibilities demanded by later life. That is the source of the coldness of Ōba Yōzō's world in *No Longer Human*: Yōzō cannot *amaeru* (a type of pathology Doi notes early in his study of *amae*), and until too late there is no one to *amayakasu* him. As a result, the love-starved Yōzō (like Osamu, throughout the saga) demonstrates an insatiable need to be indulged that surpasses the ability of anyone to satisfy it, and the antisocial manifestations of this hunger are such that they preclude any possible satisfaction. Such absolute need is translated into physically and psychically damaging appetites. As *amae* is related to the word *amai*, "sweet," so Osamu's (and Dazai's) physical tastes run to oral gratification: overindulgence in alcohol, in drugs like sleeping pills and narcotics. Osamu remains throughout life an *amaekko*, or *amae*-child, the type of child who in actual life demands his mother's breast long after it is considered appropriate.⁵

Osamu's extravagant behavior during the decade from college until his second marriage was a mad explosion of emotion seeking an object; metaphorically, his behavior spoke out for him. But he discovered in "Home-town" a silence even deeper than his culture's prejudice for intuitive communication over verbal speech.⁶ Despite this, Osamu had needs to

⁵Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, p. 55. In fact, in the school composition "My Childhood" the thirteen-year-old Tsushima Shūji wrote that one of his fondest early childhood memories still was of playing with his aunt's dry breasts as she told him fairy tales at night (Sōma, *Wakaki hi*, 61–62). Kitagaki (op. cit., 461–76) sees Dazai's problems as going back to a "weaning complex" brought about by the maternal (or maternal-figure) insecurity of his early childhood. Certainly this argument is a useful perspective from which to see Osamu.

⁶It is because he sees silence as a powerful compulsion throughout the whole society that Miyoshi calls his study of six Japanese novelists, *Accomplices of Silence*.

communicate beyond the abilities of his fellows to intuit. There was no vocabulary sufficient to his purposes. What he was seeking to describe, it seems to me, was the possibility for a sense of independent self in a society that saw the individual (*jibun, jiga, jiko*) as existing only as a valve between reciprocities, a part with no existence except by relation to the whole.⁷ Osamu does not function properly; in that sense, he is truly “no longer human” (*ningen shikkaku*), a man who has lost the right to be considered a human being by his society. As a result, receiving no approval for what he is, he ends up unequal to any set of standards: childish, weak, incomplete.⁸

Attempts at a Grammar of Love

What the Osamu Saga shows—what, perhaps, is the source of its appeal—is Dazai the author struggling to create a grammar of love, a way of describing the elementary principles of human emotional needs. Osamu, to get around the emotional inarticulateness that has been forced upon him, tries through a series of wild and desperate approximations to talk about the emotional force of love, not just its social forms.

Lack of vocabulary is an ironic frustration to, of all craftsmen, a writer. Osamu’s problem was Dazai’s. Again and again, Dazai was forced to demonstrate Osamu’s moments of emotional success in scenes of silence. To that end, Dazai reconstituted the actual events of his reunion with Take at the end of *Tsugaru* into a beautiful fiction. In the Osamu Saga, the significance of Take’s outburst of conventional questions lies in the silent tension that has been building from the moment she first saw Shūji, in the inexpressible emotion contained in words that seem bland on the surface. Shūji himself is taciturn—in sheer ecstasy of joy. It is a moment of perfect *amae*. Shūji, Eiji, and Bunji never do talk out their differences in the saga; they are provisionally reconciled only in silent sorrow. Part of the reason is Japanese reticence, but Osamu has more than amply shown by this time that the problem is not simply “Tsugaru ways.” Although the week in *Tsugaru* that Osamu spends with his old and new friends is played out against a background of random noise and wild carousing, the period itself is so little a part of Osamu’s regular life that it might be described as out of time.

With women, this silence becomes a vacuum, preventing communication

⁷These multiple approximations to the English “self” in Japanese translation should in themselves indicate differences between Japan and the West in arriving at a settled sense of what self is.

⁸See especially Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, 19–20, 132–41, for an analysis of *jibun*. See also Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, 158–61, for a discussion of protections available to developing individuality in Japan’s group-oriented culture, through what she calls the “social moratorium” of isolation. According to Lebra, stepping back from group involvement takes two forms, both observable in Osamu: introspection, and the total indulgence in one’s own feelings that she calls “emotional anarchism.”

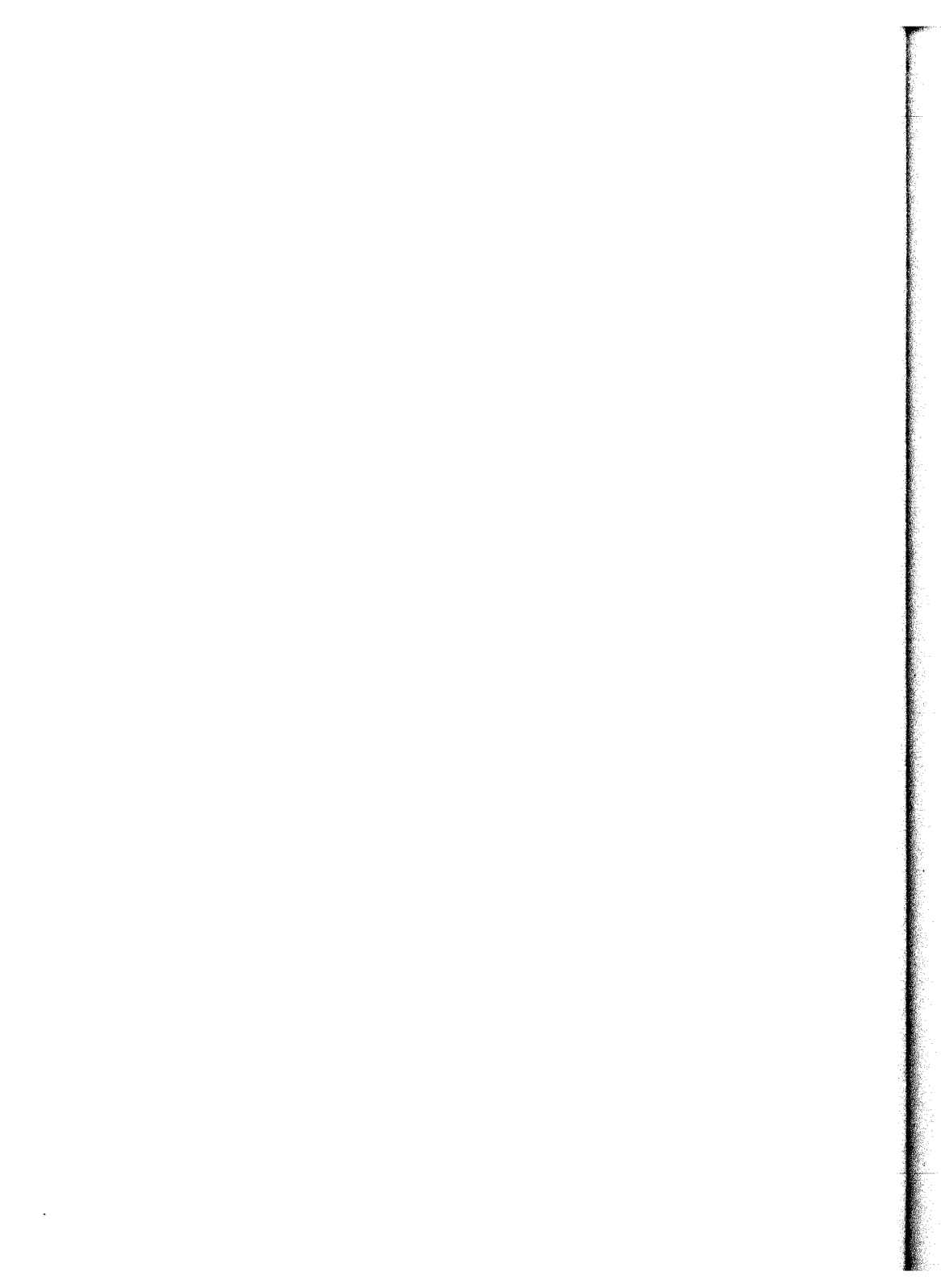
and making even intuition impossible. In part, Osamu's silence only reflects his society; but his is a more direct and personal failure, for in his case the inability to communicate interfered with that function his society regarded so highly: creation of a unified family unit, a stable environment in which to perpetuate society's values. Osamu's failure to integrate women into his life meant that, despite the late successes, he had failed the "final examination" in whose value, as his lifelong struggle to be a part of his family shows, he himself believed.

Had Dazai been a true rebel, he might have ignored outside values and proceeded on his own isolated path; and in fact, Osamu's saying good-bye to women at the last in the unfinished novel *Good-bye* shows that Dazai might have had some other ideas about the possible progress of his tale. But time had run out for Osamu, because his creator had finished his task.

For Dazai, the completion of the Osamu Saga meant that maturity could no longer be deferred; it was at hand. Yet the next step was never taken; maturity was not affirmed but denied. In his art, Dazai had discovered how to make society's constraint of silence an adequate vehicle for expressing his experience of the limited accomplishments of love. But the silences in Osamu's life spoke eloquently of the failure of such cramped and circumscribed love to provide positive meaning for the author's life. There were no words for the next step. The suicide note was done. The period had finally been struck.

OSAMU STORIES





Recollections

"Recollections" (*Omoide*) was first published in the coterie magazine *Kaihyō* in three installments in 1933. It then appeared in Bannen, Dazai's first short story collection, in 1936. For a discussion, see pp. 81–98.

I

I was standing by the front gate with my aunt at dusk. She was wearing a smock, and seemed to be carrying a child on her back. Even now I remember the silence of the gently darkening road at that hour. My aunt told me, His Majesty the Emperor has passed on. "He is a living god," she added. I seem to recall that I too whispered "living god" with deep interest. And then I seem to have said something disrespectful. She reproved me: "That isn't what we say; we say he has passed on." "On to where?" I asked deliberately, although I knew what she meant. I remember that made her laugh.

I was born in the summer of 1909, so at the time of the imperial funeral I would have been just past my fourth calendar year. It was probably around the same time that I went once with my aunt to visit some relatives who lived in a village about six miles from my home, and I can still remember the waterfall I saw there. It was in the mountains near the village. The broad waterfall dropped whitely from a cliff green with moss. I watched it from the shoulders of some man I didn't know. There was a little shrine beside it, and the man showed me all the votive pictures inside; but gradually I started to grow more and more lonely and frightened, and then I started crying for my aunt, whom I called "Gacha."¹ She was having a noisy good time with the other relatives in a distant hollow where they had spread a blanket, but she jumped up when she heard me crying. At the same moment her foot seemed to get caught in the blanket and she bent over deeply, almost as if she were making a formal bow. "You're drunk, you're drunk!" the others started teasing. I looked down at this, off in the distance, and screamed all the louder in shame and anger.

¹The standard word for "aunt" is *oba*; *gacha* is apparently local dialect, special to Dazai's region of Tsugaru. It is clearly related to the Tsugaru word for "mother," *ogasa* (standard *okāsan*).

One night I had a dream that my aunt was abandoning me and leaving the house. Her bosom completely blocked the wicket gate at the entrance. Sweat dripped down her flushed, swollen breasts. She whispered fiercely, "I hate you!" I pressed my cheek to her breast, sobbing and pleading desperately over and over, "No, don't, please don't!" My aunt shook me awake, and I found that I had been crying in my sleep with my face at her breast. Even after I was awake, I lay crying and sniffing for a long time, still overcome with misery. But I wouldn't tell anyone my dream, not even my aunt.

I have quite a few memories of my aunt, but, curiously enough, not a single one of my parents at that time. To be sure, it was a big family: my great-grandmother, grandmother, father, mother, three older brothers, four older sisters, one younger brother, and my aunt and her four daughters. But it was as if, except for my aunt, I lived for five or six years without knowing anything about the others. There used to be a number of big apple trees in the spacious back garden, and I vaguely remember that, for instance, one leaden, cloudy day, a lot of girls were climbing the trees; and that there was a bed of chrysanthemums in one corner of the same garden and once, when it was raining, I was out with the same crowd of girls with our umbrellas, looking at all the different kinds of chrysanthemums. The girls were probably my sisters or cousins.

My memories are clearer once I get to be six or seven. I was taught to read by a maid named Take, and we used to read all kinds of books together. Take was totally devoted to my education. I was sickly, and so I used to read a lot in bed. When I ran out of things to read, Take would go around to the village Sunday school and borrow book after book for me.² I had learned to read silently, so no matter how much I read I didn't get tired. Also, Take taught me moral lessons. She would take me with her to the temple and explain all the picture scrolls of heaven and hell. They were horrible: arsonists were being forced to carry baskets on their backs with red flames shooting out from them; men who had had mistresses were being crushed by blue snakes with two heads; there was the lake of blood, and the mountain of needles, and the bottomless pit with white smoke coming from it; and everywhere, pale, emaciated people, their tiny mouths open, were crying and screaming. Once she told me, "If you tell lies, you'll go to hell, and your tongue will be pulled out like this by devils." I burst out crying in terror.

Behind the temple, the ground rose to a small graveyard, and along some kind of yellow flowering hedge stood a forest of grave markers. Among them were some with a slotted groove in which was a black iron wheel about the size of a full moon. When you spun it, if it clattered to a stop and didn't move anymore, that meant you would go to heaven; but if it stopped for a moment and then clanked in the opposite direction, you would go to hell. That's what

²By analogy to the Christian Sunday school, introduced into Japan by missionaries, many Buddhist temples and schools offered a similar program.

Take taught me. When she spun it, it would turn for a while, ringing clearly, and then invariably it would slow to a halt; but when I spun, somehow it would always reverse itself. One day—sometime in autumn, I recall—I went to the temple by myself; and no matter which iron wheel I tried to spin, as if by common agreement, they all clanked in reverse. Holding down the fit of temper that threatened to overwhelm me, I stubbornly continued to spin them over and over again. At last the sun began to set. I gave up in despair and left the graveyard.

My parents were apparently living in Tokyo at the time, and my aunt took me there. They say I was in Tokyo for quite some time, but I don't have many memories of it. I remember only that an old lady came to visit from time to time. I hated her, and every time she came I would cry. The old lady gave me a red toy mail truck, but I didn't like it at all.

Finally, I entered elementary school back in our home village, and with that my recollections take a drastic change. At some point, Take disappeared. She went to get married in some fishing village; maybe she was afraid I would try to follow, because she just suddenly disappeared without saying anything to me. It must have been at harvest time the next year that she came back for a visit to my house. Somehow she was very formal and distant. She asked how I was doing at school. I wouldn't answer. Then someone else told her how I was getting along. All she said was, "Don't be overconfident, or you'll fail." She didn't praise me much.

About the same time, it happened that I had to be separated from my aunt, too. By that time, her second daughter was married, her third daughter had died, and the eldest daughter's dentist husband had been adopted into the family. The young couple took my aunt and the youngest daughter with them to set up a branch family in a distant town. I went along, too. It was winter, and as I huddled in a corner of the sled with my aunt before it began to move, my next older brother began to mock me and yell, "Hey, here's the bridegroom!" as he poked my rear end through the sling-bottomed sled from outside. I gritted my teeth and endured his insults. I had thought my aunt was taking me permanently, but when it came time to enter school, I was sent back home.

Once I entered school, I was no longer a child. The weeds grew thick around an abandoned house behind ours. One beautiful summer day, on that grassy plot, my younger brother's nursemaid taught me something that made me gasp for breath. I was about eight, and I suppose that at the time she could not have been more than fourteen or fifteen. In my part of the country we call clover *bogusa*. She sent off my brother, who was three years younger than I, telling him to "go look for four-leaf *bogusa*," and then she grabbed me in her arms and rolled around with me. From then on we would hide, in the storehouse, or in a closet, and play. My little brother was a terrible obstacle. Once we were even found out by my next older brother. My

little brother had been left alone outside the closet, and he stood there crying. He told on us to my next older brother, who opened the closet door. The nursemaid told him blandly, "We dropped some money in the closet."

I was constantly telling lies, too. Once, on Children's Day when I was in second or third grade, I lied to my teacher, telling him that they wanted me to come right back home to help set up the doll display, and I left without having to go to a single class; then I told them at home, "Today is Children's Day, so there's no school," and lent my unneeded help to removing the dolls from their boxes.³ I loved birds' eggs. I could get lots of sparrow eggs anytime by removing tiles from the storehouse roof, but ruby peewee eggs or crow eggs or things like that were never lying around in our roof. I got those brilliant green eggs or funny speckled eggs from classmates at school. I would exchange five or ten books from my library for them. I wrapped my egg collection in cotton and filled up my desk drawer with it. My next older brother noticed my secret commerce, it seems, and one night he asked me to lend him a book of European fairy tales and some other book I've forgotten now. How I hated him for his maliciousness. Of course I didn't have the two books—I had invested them in eggs. My brother intended to track them down if I said I didn't have them. I told him, "They must be around somewhere—let me look for them." I searched my room, of course, and went through the whole house carrying a lamp. He walked along with me, laughing as he said, "You don't have them, do you?" "I do too," I insisted stubbornly. I even climbed up to look on top of the kitchen cupboard. In the end, he said I could stop.

My compositions at school were almost totally a mess, too. I worked hard to make myself out to be a wonderfully good child. When I did, I would always be applauded by everyone. I even plagiarized. One essay called "My Younger Brother's Silhouette" was praised by my teacher at the time as a masterpiece, but it had won first prize in some boys' magazine contest—I had stolen it completely. The teacher had me copy it out with brush in my best hand and he entered it in an exhibition. Later it was found out by another student who read a lot, and I prayed that he would die. Around the same time, something else I wrote, called "An Autumn Evening," was also praised by all my teachers. It was a little sketch about how once I was studying and went out to the verandah to look at the garden because I had gotten a headache; it was a beautiful moonlit night and the carp and goldfish were swimming around in the pond. I was lost in gazing at the quiet garden landscape when the laughing voices of my mother and her companions arose

³The Doll Festival, *Hina matsuri* or *Momo no sekku*, was a traditional celebration for girls held on March 3, in which dolls dressed in classical court garb were displayed on a stepped dais. A similar festival for boys, *Tango no sekku*, occurred on May 5; now, the two are combined into Children's Day, on May 5.

from the next room and made me suddenly realize that my headache was gone. There wasn't a scrap of truth in the whole piece. The description of the garden was something I'd lifted from my sisters' composition notebooks, I'm sure, and anyway, I have absolutely no memory of ever studying enough to get a headache. I hated school and, as a result, I never opened my school books; I only read for pleasure. My family thought that so long as I was reading any book, that was studying.

But then, when I did tell the truth in my compositions, I was sure to get into trouble. When I wrote complaints that my parents didn't love me, I was called into the teachers' room by the headmaster and scolded. Once, we were given the title "If War Were to Break Out," and I wrote that if a war broke out—something more terrifying than earthquake, thunder, fire, or father—first of all I would run and hide in the mountains, and then I would invite my teachers to join me; teachers were human, and I was human, and surely we were all equally afraid of war. This time, the principal and the assistant headmaster were the committee of two that interrogated me. They asked me in what spirit I had written it; I evaded them flippantly, saying, "Mostly for fun." The assistant entered "He did it out of curiosity" in his notebook. Then he and I started a little debate. He opened: "You wrote, 'Teachers are human and I'm human,' but are all men equal?" I muttered that I thought so. I was becoming hopelessly tongue-tied. "Well then," he asked me, "if the principal and I are both equal, why are our salaries different?" I thought a while and answered, "Well, isn't it because your work is different?" Putting on his steel-rimmed glasses, the thin-faced assistant immediately wrote my answer in his notebook. Until then, I had liked this teacher. Then he posed a final question to me: "Are we your father's equals?" I was on the spot, and couldn't answer anything.

My father was a very busy man and he was not home very often. Even when he was at home, he didn't spend time with us children. I was afraid of him. I wanted his fountain pen, but I couldn't tell him, and I spent a lot of time fretting by myself what to do about it. Finally one night as I lay in bed with my eyes closed, I pretended to be talking in my sleep. I called out low, "Fountain pen . . . the fountain pen . . .," to my father, who was in the next room with guests, but of course neither his ears nor his heart seemed to hear. My little brother and I were once having great fun playing in the huge storehouse stacked with sacks of rice, when suddenly my father appeared, blocking the door, and he yelled at us, "Get out, both of you!" The light was full at his back, and he loomed up, a huge black shape. Even now, when I recall how afraid I was at that moment, I feel queasy.

I couldn't get close to my mother, either. I was nursed by a wet nurse and brought up in my aunt's arms, so I didn't really know my mother until I was in second or third grade. I had been taught to do something by two servant

boys, and one night my mother, who was sleeping next to me, became suspicious of the movement of my quilt, and she asked what I was doing. I was terribly flustered, and I told her, "My hip hurts and I'm massaging it." She answered sleepily, "Well, rubbing it is good for it, just pound on it a little." Silently, I stroked my hip for a while. Many of my memories of my mother are unhappy. Once I took a suit belonging to one of my older brothers from storage, put it on, and was wandering soulfully through the flower beds in the back garden, whistling a mournful tune of my own making, when I decided I wanted the student who helped with the household accounts to come play with me, dressed as I was, and I sent a maid to call him, but he didn't come and didn't come. I waited for him, killing time by running my shoe along the bamboo fence that enclosed the garden, to hear it clatter; but finally my patience was worn down, and I jammed my hands into the trouser pockets and burst out crying. My mother found me crying; why she did it, I'll never know, but she pulled down the trousers and paddled my bottom. I felt that I was being torn to pieces by shame.

I paid great attention to dress from an early age. Unless a shirt sleeve had buttons on it, I didn't approve. I liked white flannel shirts. Underwear would not do unless the collar too was white. I took care to see that the under collar showed an eighth to a quarter of an inch above the outer collar. For the full-moon festival every August 15, all the students in our village went to school in their best clothes, and I made it my custom every year to wear a brown flannel kimono with wide stripes; I would try trotting down the narrow school corridors with delicate little steps like a girl. I practiced my stylishness secretly so people wouldn't see me at it; that was because my family said that I was the ugliest of all the children, and I thought they would probably laugh at me if they knew. So in fact, I pretended to be unconcerned with clothing, and I think that to a certain degree I succeeded. They probably all did think that I was a dull clod. When we boys sat together at the table, my grandmother and mother often talked seriously about how unattractive I was, and I felt just terrible. I believed that I was all right, and so I would go to the maids' room and hint around to find out who they thought was the most manly among the brothers. The maids generally said, "Your big brother is the best, and next is you." I would blush, but even then, I was a little unsatisfied. I wanted them to say I was even better than my brother.

It was not just my appearance; my grandmother and the rest of them were not happy about my clumsiness. I held my chopsticks clumsily, and every time we ate my grandmother scolded me. I was also told that I looked ugly when I bowed because my rear end came up. I was forced to sit stiffly in front of my grandmother and make bow after bow after bow, but no matter how I tried, she never told me I was doing it well.

My grandmother was also hard for me to deal with. When a company of

actors called the Jakusaburō Troupe came from Tokyo for the opening of the new village playhouse, I went every day without fail during their engagement. I could get a good seat for free anytime, because my father had built the playhouse. I would come home from school, change immediately into comfortable clothes, attach a narrow silver chain holding a little pencil to my belt, and run over to the playhouse. This was the first time in my life I'd become acquainted with this thing called the Kabuki, and while I watched the drama I would cry again and again from excitement. When the troupe left, I formed a company with my little brother and other children of the family, and we worked to put on plays. I had always enjoyed calling together the maids and menservants and telling them folk tales or showing them stereopticon slides or moving pictures. This time I arranged three plays, *Yamanaka Shikanosuke*, *The Dove's House*, and *Kappore*. From a boys' magazine I excerpted the scene where Yamanaka Shikanosuke takes on his retainer Hayakawa Ayunosuke at a teahouse on the bank of the Tanigawa, and wrote a script from it. I painstakingly rewrote the long formal speeches into the Kabuki seven-five verse scheme. *The Dove's House* was a long novel I had read many times and wept over each time; I made two acts from the most touching scenes of the book. Since the *kappore* was the burlesque dance the Jakusaburō Troupe had used for the final appearance of the whole company, I decided we would have it, too. After five or six days of practice, at last the day came. The broad verandah in front of the library storehouse was the stage, and I arranged a small draw curtain. I had been making the preparations all day, but then my grandmother walked into the curtain wire and it caught her under the chin. She yelled at us: "Are you trying to kill me with this wire? Stop playing like you were bloody riverbed beggars!"⁴ Despite that, in the evening we gathered some ten servants and put on the plays as planned; but as I thought of my grandmother's words, my heart felt heavy and oppressed. I played Yamanaka Shikanosuke, and the boy in *The Dove's House*, and I danced the *kappore*, but I could not get into the spirit; I felt terribly unhappy. After that I sometimes put on plays, like *The Cattle Thief* and *The Ghost of the Dishes* and *Shuntoku Maru*, but each time my grandmother was unpleasant about it.

I did not like my grandmother, but on nights when I could not sleep I was glad to have her. I suffered from insomnia from sometime around third grade, and often I lay in bed crying until two or three in the morning, unable to fall asleep. All sorts of remedies were suggested by people in the house, such as drinking sweetened water before going to bed, or counting the ticks

⁴*Kawara kojiki no manekuso wa yamero*. This is far-from-elegant speech, revealing the grandmother's country background. The first Kabuki actors performed on the dry riverbed of the Kamo River in Kyoto, a gathering place for thieves, mountebanks, and other unsavory types; from this has come the slang word for "actors" used by the grandmother.

of the clock, or cooling your feet with water, or putting leaves of the “sleep tree” under your pillow, but none of them seemed to have much effect. I was a worrier and would pick at things and suffer over them, and that’s why I probably had even more trouble getting to sleep. Once I was fiddling with my father’s pince-nez secretly, and I cracked a lens; many nights followed in which I lay in bed, thinking tortured thoughts. There was a notions shop several houses down from ours that also sold books and magazines. One day I was looking through them, studying the frontispieces of the women’s magazines, when among them I found a watercolor of a yellow mermaid. I wanted it so badly I decided to steal it; but while I was quietly cutting it out, the young master challenged me. “Hey, Osa-ko!” he called out,⁵ and I flung the magazine loudly to the floor of the store and raced back home; but thoughts of my failure haunted me and banished sleep for some time. Then again, as I lay in bed, I began to be tormented by an unreasonable fear of fire. Once I started to think about how the house might burn down, there was no question of my being able to get to sleep. One night I went to the bathroom before going to bed, and I saw the student who lived with us and worked around the house projecting moving pictures for himself, all alone in the total darkness of the room we used as an office, across the corridor from the bathroom. There, on the sliding door of the room, was a flickering match-box-sized image of a polar bear throwing itself into the sea from a cliff of ice. I peeked in on the boy, and became horribly sad as I imagined his feelings. Even after I got into bed, my heart beat wildly as I thought of the movie. I thought about what kind of life the student-servant was living, and I worried about what I would do if the film caught fire and something terrible happened; and I didn’t doze off that night until near dawn. It was on nights like this that I thought how lucky I was to have my grandmother.

First, the maid had to lie beside me after she put me to bed around eight o’clock, until I fell asleep; but I felt sorry for her, and so I would pretend to fall asleep as soon as I got into bed. I would know when she was stealthily slipping out of my bed, and I would pray earnestly to be able to go to sleep. After tossing and turning in bed until ten, I would start crying and get up. By that time, everyone else in the house would be asleep, except my grandmother. She would be talking with the old watchman as they sat with the big sunken hearth between them. I would sit down between them in my robe, glumly listening to their conversation. Without fail, they would be gossiping about the people in the village. I will never forget how, late one autumn night,

⁵The Japanese attach customary suffixes to names to indicate “Mr., Mrs., Miss, Master.” Readers may be familiar with “-san,” as in Tanaka-san. A more formal equivalent is “-sama”; “-chan” is the “-san” for children; and “-chama” (used in *Tsugaru*) is the same as “-sama,” used for and by children or by servants for adults known from childhood. These suffixes will be used occasionally in the translations. The “-ko” in the present context is a dialect equivalent of “-chan.” That is, “Osa-ko” in *Tsugaru* dialect would be “Osamu-chan” in standard speech.

I followed their whispered conversation as the deep, reverberating sound of the great drum being beaten for the ceremony for driving away insects came from far off;⁶ and I remember how strongly it impressed me to realize, as I heard it, that there were many people still awake.

I remember sounds. My eldest brother was in Tokyo at university at the time, but every time he came home for summer vacation, he would spread the new fashions in music and literature to the country. He was studying theater. He had published a one-act play called *Struggling for It* in a provincial journal, and it had enjoyed some popularity among the young people of the village. When he'd finished it, he had read it to all us brothers and sisters. We all listened; the others said they didn't understand it, but I did. I could even understand what he meant by the poetic one-line curtain-closing speech, "It's a dark night, though." I thought the play should be entitled *Thistles*, not *Struggling for It*, so later I wrote it in tiny letters on a corner of manuscript paper that he had discarded, and left it lying around. He probably never noticed; he published *Struggling for It* with the title unchanged.

He also had quite a record collection. My father used to call in a number of geisha from a large distant city whenever there was some kind of banquet at the house. I have memories, from when I was five or six, of being hugged and carried around by the geisha, and I remember their songs and dances, like "Long, Long Ago," and "The Tangerine Boat from Kii." With that background, I was drawn more quickly to the Japanese than to the Western music in my brother's collection. One night while I was in bed, a beautiful melody came drifting in from his room, and I raised my head from the pillow and strained to hear. Early the next morning, I went to his room and began randomly putting on whatever records I could find. Finally I found it. The record that had excited me so much the previous night that I couldn't sleep was "Ranchō."⁷

However, I was much closer to my second oldest brother than to the oldest one. He had graduated from a school of commerce in Tokyo with outstanding grades and had come right back to the country to work in the family bank. He too was abused by the family. I heard my mother and grandmother saying that I was the ugliest boy and he was next, and I thought that maybe he was unpopular because he was unattractive. I remember how he'd mutter to me, in his joking, half-teasing way, "Hey, Osamu, we don't need anything; we only wanted to be born manly." But I never felt that my brother was not good-looking. I also believe he was one of the more intelligent among us brothers. Almost every day he would drink and argue with our grandmother. Each time, I would secretly hate her.

⁶*Mushiokuri matsuri*, a ceremony practiced in farming villages in which insects harmful to the crops are driven out with burning brands and loud drums and bells.

⁷A classical ballad about doomed love.

My third oldest brother, the one next to me in age, and I didn't get along. He had pried out many of my secrets and I was always afraid of him. On top of that, he and my younger brother resembled each other and everyone praised them for being handsome; I felt as if I were being crushed from above and below by the two of them, and could hardly stand it. This brother went to middle school in Tokyo, and at last I got some relief. My younger brother was the last child and had a gentle face, so both my father and mother loved him. I was always envious of this brother. Sometimes I would hit him; my mother would scold me, and I would hate her. I think it was when I was ten or eleven that fleas suddenly appeared on my shirt and the collar of my undershirt, looking like sesame seeds sprinkled over them. My younger brother laughed at me a little, and I literally beat him to the ground. Then of course I got worried, and I painted the lumps on his head with liniment.

I was a favorite of my older sisters. My oldest sister died, the next sister went to get married, and the remaining went away to girls' schools, each in a different town. Since there was no train to our village, the only way to get to the town where the train stopped, seven miles away, was by horse-drawn carriage in summer, by sled in winter, or in spring when the snow was melting and in autumn when the freezing rains came, on foot. My sisters got motion-sick in the sled, so when they came home for winter vacation, they had to walk then too. To wait for them, I would always go out to the edge of the village where the lumber was stored. Even when the sun had fully set, the road was still bright with reflection from the snow. Finally the lanterns of my sisters would come flickering from the dark forest separating us from the next village, and I would hail them loudly and wave my arms.

The school of the older of the two was in a smaller town than that of the younger, and so the presents she brought back were also poorer. Once she blushing brought out five or six packets of fireworks from her basket and gave them to me, telling me repeatedly that she was sorry she hadn't been able to get anything else; and I felt that my chest was being crushed. She too was told over and over by the family that she was not good-looking.

She had spent so much of her time with my great-grandmother in the house annex that I used to think she was my great-grandmother's daughter. My great-grandmother died about the time I graduated from elementary school; as I glimpsed her little stiff, white-clothed body being placed in the coffin, I was afraid that the sight would be indelibly burned into my mind, and then what would I do?

Soon afterward, I graduated from elementary school, but my family decided to have me go for a year to "higher" elementary school, on the grounds that my health was poor. My father told me, "When you get strong we'll put you in middle school, but it would be bad for your health for you to go to Tokyo like your brothers, so we'll keep you in the country." I didn't want to

go on to middle school all that much anyway, but all the same I wrote in a composition what a pity it was that my health was bad, and that drew sympathy from my teachers.

At the time, our village had come to be included in a centralized town system. The higher elementary school had therefore been financed and built jointly by us and five or six other villages in the area; it stood in the middle of a pine forest over a mile from the village. I was constantly absent for illness, but I was the representative of my elementary school, and so I had to try and lead the class even here, where the best students from the other villages were gathered. But even so, as usual, I didn't study. I felt smug because I soon would be going to middle school, and that made me feel that school was dirty and unpleasant. Mainly, I drew comic strips during class time. Then during recreation period I would narrate them to the students, imitating actors' voices. Four or five notebooks filled up with these cartoons. There were also times I spent the whole hour staring vacantly at the scenery outside the classroom with my head propped on my hand as I leaned over my desk. My seat was by the window. Long before, a fly had been squashed on the windowpane, and it stayed stuck there; whenever the large spot slid into a corner of my field of vision, I would think it was a pheasant or a turtledove, and it really surprised me many times. I would escape from classes with five or six classmates who were my particular friends, and we would lie on the banks of the swamp on the other side of the pine forest and play, talking about girls and hitching up our kimonos to compare the sparse pubic hairs that were beginning to show their shadows.

Even though it was a coeducational school, I had never myself had anything to do with girls. I had strong sexual desires, which I struggled to control; I even had a strong fear of girls. By that time, two or three girls had a crush on me, but I always went along pretending not to notice. I made do in various ways: there was a picture album of some imperial exhibition on my father's bookshelf, and I used to gaze with flushed cheeks at a certain bright picture that was hidden in it. I often mated the pair of rabbits I kept, and felt my heart beat fast as I watched the male's thickly humped back. I was something of a dandy, and I never let anyone know about the "massaging" I did. I read in a book about the harm that could come of it, and I tried terribly hard to stop it, but that did no good. Before long, thanks to the exercise of walking so far to and from the distant school every day, I gained weight. Little pimples popped out like millet grains on my forehead. How ashamed of them I was! I painted them with a certain red medicine. My oldest brother got married that year, and on the evening of the ceremony my younger brother and I went to sneak into his new bride's room, but she was sitting with her back to the door having her hair bound. As soon as I caught a glimpse of the bride's white-powdered, smiling face reflected in the mirror, I yanked my brother

out and fled. I told him with wild bravado, "Hah, she's not much!" It was all the attention I drew with my red medicated forehead that made me respond that way.

As winter approached, I had to begin studying for the high school entrance examinations. I looked at magazine advertisements and sent away to Tokyo for reference books. But all I did was line them up on the bookcase without reading a single one. The school I was applying to was in the biggest town in the prefecture, and there were always two or three times more applicants than places. Sometimes I was attacked by the fear that I would fail. At such times even I would study. Then after studying for a solid week, I would gain back the confidence that I would pass. When I was studying, I would not get to bed until near midnight, and generally I got up at four in the morning. While I studied, a maid named Tami stayed by my side, stoking the brazier for heat or making me tea. No matter how late she was up at night, Tami would come the next morning at four, without fail, to wake me up. While I struggled over arithmetic problems about mice having babies, Tami would sit quietly at my side reading a novel. Later it came about that Tami was replaced by a plump, middle-aged maid; I knew that it was at my mother's instigation, and I was furious to think what she must have been imagining.

The next spring, while the snow was still piled deep, my father started coughing up blood in Tokyo, and he died in a hospital there. The local newspapers reported his obituary in an extra edition. I was more excited at this sensational coverage than by his death. My name too appeared in the newspaper, among the list of survivors. My father's body came home in a big coffin lying across the sled. I went together with a huge crowd of the townspeople to near the next village to meet it. Finally a long procession of sleds emerged from the shadow of the forest and came sliding into the moonlight; I thought it was beautiful.

The next day, everyone in the house gathered in the Buddhist chapel room where my father's coffin was. The coffin lid was pulled back, and everyone burst into loud wailing. Father seemed to be sleeping. The high line of his nose had turned quite bluish white. Seduced by hearing everyone else weeping, I began to weep myself.

For a whole month, my house was in as much commotion as if there had been a fire. I was caught up in the confusion and completely let my exam studies slide. I also made up nearly random answers for my higher elementary school year-end exams. My grades put me about third in the class, but this was clearly a favor to my family from the teacher in charge. At the time I was already feeling a decline in my powers of memory, and since I hadn't prepared, I couldn't write anything on the examinations. It was the first time I had ever had such an experience.

II

My record wasn't very good, but that spring I took the high school exam and passed. I had new kimono trousers, black socks, and lace-up shoes to wear; I left behind the shawl I had used until now, and made my appearance in the little city beside the sea like a regular dandy, with my wool cloak unbuttoned, open in front, and flung over my shoulders. I settled in there at the home of a draper who was distantly related to our family. The house, with its tattered advertising banner at the entrance, was my home, and the family took care of me for a long time.

I had a strong tendency to get overexcited, and when school began I would wear my school uniform cap and formal clothes even to go to the public bath. Whenever I saw myself dressed up like that, reflected in a window as I passed, I would laugh a little and lightly give the reflection a bow of recognition.

Nevertheless, school was totally unpleasant. The white-painted school building was at the edge of town; right behind it was a broad, flattish park that faced out onto the strait, and the sound of the waves and the whispering of the pine trees came to us even in class. The corridors were wide and the classroom ceilings were high; it looked quite impressive to me—but the teachers persecuted me terribly.

Right from the first day, with the entrance ceremonies, there was a physical education teacher who used to beat me. He said I was impertinent. He had been in charge of my oral examination; at the time he had been deeply sympathetic and had said, "I realize that your father has just died, and probably you couldn't study properly," as I stood with drooping head; therefore, his turnabout wounded my spirit all the more deeply. Before long, I was being beaten by several of the teachers. I was punished for all kinds of reasons—for grinning, or for yawning, or things like that. I was even told that my gigantic yawns in class were famous in the teachers' room. I thought it was ridiculous that they talked about such a stupid thing.

A fellow student from my village one day called me into the shadow of a sand dune in the schoolyard and warned me that my attitude really did look provocative, and if I went on being punished like that, I'd fail for sure. That terrified me. After class let out that day, I hurried home alone by the seashore. I sighed as I walked on, the waves lapping at my shoes. As I wiped the sweat from my forehead with my jacket sleeve, a huge grey sail bobbed past before my eyes.

I was a flower petal about to fall. I trembled and quivered at the slightest breeze; at the slightest insult, I writhed about and considered dying. I had expected that I would certainly become famous before long, but if I couldn't even protect my good name and escape the scorn of these adults, the infamy

of failing school would be all the more disastrous. After that I went to class with great trepidation. Even during class, I would feel a hundred invisible enemies around me in the room, and I didn't dare relax my guard. Every morning before I went to school, I would deal out cards on my desk to divine my fate for the day. Hearts were best, diamonds next, clubs were ominous, and spades meant total disaster. And day after day, only spades came up.

Soon we had exams, and I attempted to memorize every word of every textbook, be it natural history or geography or ethics. My desperate meticulousness probably worked against me, and my study plan failed badly. I would become hopelessly bored with studying, and when the exam came I would be unable to adapt; if at times I was able to frame a nearly perfect answer, there were also times when I would trip on insignificant words and phrases, my thoughts would become disordered, and I would end up simply dirtying my paper with meaningless answers.

However, for the first quarter, my grades were third in the class. I also got top grades in deportment. I had been made to suffer so much for fear of failing; now I gripped my report card in one hand, carried my shoes in the other, and ran barefoot to the shore behind school. I was ecstatic.

Having made it through the first semester, I was now ready for my first return home. I wanted to tell my younger brother and the others at home my adventures thus far in high school in all their glittering detail. I stuffed my suitcase with everything I had picked up in the three or four months, including even my cushion.

The swaying horse cart passed beyond the forest of the neighboring village, and a vast sea of green rice fields spread before me; and there at the extreme edge of the fields rose the huge red roof of my house. I gazed at it and felt I had not seen it for ten years.

I was never more exultant than during that one-month holiday. I exaggerated the events of school, narrating them to my brother and the others as if they were from a dream. I also pictured the sights of the little city in as fascinating terms as possible.

I sketched scenery and collected insects; I ran around the fields and river valleys. We had vacation homework, to paint five watercolors and collect ten specimens of unusual bugs. I shouldered my butterfly net and had my younger brother carry the collecting kit, with its tweezers and poison bottle; we spent whole summer days chasing cabbage butterflies and grasshoppers in the meadows. At night we lit bonfires in the garden, and knocked down with nets and brooms the masses of insects drawn to the flickering light. My next older brother was studying clay sculpture at an art school, and he sat every day under a big chestnut tree in the inner garden, modeling clay. He was making a bust of our next older sister who had already graduated from girls' school. I sat at his side and made sketch after sketch of her face, and we

derided each other's finished products. Our sister modeled seriously for both of us, but when we clashed, generally she took the side of my watercolors. My brother would say that everyone is a genius when he is young, and he would belittle every one of my abilities. He even made fun of my compositions, calling them first grader's work. For my part, I too lavished scorn on his artistic capabilities.

One night he came to where I was sleeping and whispered, "Hey, Osamu, I have a marvelous bug for you." He squatted down and slipped something lightly wrapped in tissue paper under the mosquito netting. He knew that I was collecting unusual insects. I could hear the dry sound of insect legs scraping inside the package. That faint noise revealed brotherly love to me. As I roughly undid the paper, my brother cried out as if he couldn't breathe, "Watch it, watch it, he'll get away!" It turned out to be an ordinary beetle, but I included it anyway as one of my "ten unusual insects" and submitted it to my teacher.

I grew sad as vacation came to an end. Putting my home behind me, I returned to the little city; I was nearly in tears by the time I opened my suitcase alone on the second floor of the draper's shop. Whenever I felt lonely like that, I would go out to a bookstore. Now too I ran to one nearby. Just the sight of the spines of those masses of books lined up there banished my melancholy in an amazing way. On one shelf in a corner were five or six books I wanted very much but could not buy. Sometimes I would stop in front of them, acting casual, and flip through the pages, stealing a look while my knees trembled; but I didn't go to the bookstore just to read those medical texts. I went because at the time any book was recreation and solace to me.

School became less and less interesting. The greatest curse was assignments to fill in mountain ranges, bays, and rivers with watercolors on a blank map. I was the type to get caught up in things, and so I would spend hours doing the coloring. For history classes and the like, the teachers ordered us to take direct notes on the important points of the lectures; but listening to their lectures was like reading the textbook, so naturally all you could do was to start copying out portions of the textbook into your notes. Grades were still terribly important to me, however, so every day I would throw myself into doing my homework anyway. In the fall, sports meets began between the high schools of the town. I was a country boy and had never even seen a baseball game; but I at least knew all those words, like "bases loaded," "shortstop," and "center field," from stories I'd read. After a while, I learned how to watch the game, but I couldn't get very excited about it. And it wasn't just baseball: we had to be a cheering squad for tennis, or judo, or anytime we played another school in any sport. I decided that this was one of the things that made student life even more unpleasant. There was the

cheerleader, who was deliberately disgusting and sloppy and carried a Rising Sun fan; he would climb a little hill in a corner of the schoolyard to harangue us, and the students would delightedly call out "Pig!" and "Slob!" Throughout the game at odd moments the cheerleader would flap his fan and shout, "*O—ru sutando appu!*"⁸ We would all stand and wave little purple pennants all together, singing our fight song: "They're good fighting men, but we're even better." I was so embarrassed, I would watch for my chance to escape and go home.

That's not to say that I had nothing to do with sports. My face was pasty but dark, which I believed was due to that "massaging," and whenever anyone said anything to me about my coloring, I trembled as if my secret had been discovered. I began going in for sports, thinking it was the best thing I could do to clear up my complexion.

My complexion had been causing me agonies for quite some time. When I was in fourth or fifth grade, I heard about "democracy" from my next older brother. Even my mother knew the word, and I would hear her going on to guests about how taxes were soaring because of "democracy" and how nearly all the rice crop was being taken by taxes; and the whole concept confused me and made me uneasy. Still, I would help the servants in summer cut the grass in the garden, or in winter lend a hand in sweeping snow from the roof of the house, and while I worked, I would teach them about this "democracy." But in the end, I realized that the servants were not especially pleased to have my help. It turned out that they would have to go over and redo my "help." I had figured that the exercise of ostensibly helping the servants would improve my complexion, but not even that much hard work did any good.

When I entered high school, I thought that sports would help, and every day during the hot season I would go swimming in the ocean, before going home from school. I liked the breast stroke, where I could kick my legs wide like a frog. I swam with my head straight out of the water so I could watch everything—the ripples in the undulations of the waves, the green leaves on the shore, the sailing clouds. I swam with my head stretched up as far as it would go, like a turtle, so that my face would tan even faster for being a little closer to the sun.

Then again, there was a cemetery behind the house where I was staying, and I marked out a 100-meter course and ran there by myself with great seriousness. The cemetery was enclosed by tall, luxuriant poplars, and when I got tired of running, I would ramble about reading the grave markers. Even now, I remember some of the inscriptions—"All are a part of the Great Inten-

⁸This is Japanese pronunciation of the English "All stand up!" Especially in the 1920's (but even today) to use English phrases whether or not one could actually speak English was a classy touch.

tion," or "The Moon of Truth penetrates above and below." One day I was quite disturbed to find the name "Blessed Jakushō Seiryō," so full of intimations of death, solitude, and Nirvana in the characters making up the name, on a dark, dank tombstone thickly covered with lichens. There was a white paper lotus newly decorating the grave, and I wrote lightly on it in mud with my finger, as if a ghost had left the message, "I am playing with the maggots under this dirt," which I had memorized from a French poet. The next day around dusk, before I started on my exercises, I went first to pay my respects at the grave, only to find that the morning's sudden shower had completely obliterated the words of the departed soul, before they could cause any grief to his family. The lotus was broken apart and its white petals were scattered about.

These were the ways I amused myself, and the running did have some effect, after all, as the muscles of my legs grew round and firm. But, just as I'd feared, my complexion did not improve. Beneath the dark surface lay an unpleasant, stagnant, muddy, pale color.

I found my face terribly interesting. Whenever I got tired of reading, I would take out a hand mirror and, to my endless entertainment, try out different expressions—smiling, frowning, brooding as I leaned my cheek on my hand. I always knew which expressions would make people laugh. When I narrowed my eyes, wrinkled my nose, and screwed up my mouth, I was cute, like a bear cub. I used that expression whenever I was irritated or confused. At the time, my next older sister was hospitalized in the city where I went to school. I went to visit her, and showed her my bear cub expression. She rolled around in bed, holding her stomach with laughter. My sister was alone at the hospital with a middle-aged maid who had come from home with her, and she was very lonely, so that even the sound of my footsteps coming down the long corridor would put her in high spirits. (My footsteps were lighter than most people's.) If a week went by without my visiting her, she would send the maid to get me. The maid told me very seriously that if I didn't come, my sister's temperature would rise sharply and her condition would worsen.

By that time I was nearly sixteen. Blue blood vessels stood out transparently on the back of my hand, and I could feel my body grow strangely heavy. One of the other students in my class, a small dark fellow, and I had a secret crush on each other. We would invariably walk home together. If even our little fingers happened to brush against each other, we would both blush. Once when we were walking back along the road behind school, he found a newt swimming in the waterweed-choked ditch between the fields, and he caught it and silently gave it to me. I hated newts, but I stuffed it into my handkerchief, pretending to be delighted. I brought it back to the house and set it loose in the little pond in the inner garden. The newt swam around,

turning its short neck in every direction; but when I checked the next morning, it was nowhere to be found.

Because I had such strong self-pride, it would never even occur to me to reveal my feelings to another person. Ordinarily I didn't speak very much to this classmate anyway; and at the same time I had also become aware of a thin girl living next door. If I even met her on the street, I would turn my face away with a jerk, almost as if I were insulting her. One autumn night there was a fire. When I got up and went out to see, I found burning embers blazing in the shadow of a nearby shrine. The cedar forest around the shrine stood pitch-black, seeming to enclose the flames; above, disturbed flocks of birds flew about crazily like falling leaves. I knew full well that the girl was standing by her gate in her nightgown looking in my direction, but I turned only my profile to her and continued to watch the fire with undivided attention. I thought to myself that my profile must look beautiful to her, bathed in the flickering red light of the flames. As a result of all this, I couldn't develop any deeper relationship with either my classmate or this girl. By myself, however, I was certainly much more audacious. I would wink at myself in the mirror and burst out laughing, and once I carved a pair of thin lips on my desk with a penknife and pressed my own lips to them. Later I tried painting the lips red with ink, but that made them strangely murky and made me feel uneasy, so I scratched them out completely with the knife.

One spring morning on the way to school, when I was in the third year of high school, I stood bemusedly for a while leaning against the round railing of a crimson-painted bridge. A broad river, like the Sumida, flowed lazily beneath. I had never before had quite such an experience of total abstraction. I was otherwise always constructing attitudes, as if someone were watching me from behind, giving a running commentary on my every slightest behavior—"He gazed perplexedly at his hands," "He muttered to himself, scratching behind his ear"—and so for me to act suddenly or unconsciously had been quite impossible. When I awoke from my spell on the bridge, I found myself racked with loneliness. With that emotion, I thought about my past and the future. I remembered many things as I crossed the clattery bridge, and again I was lost in reverie. Finally, I heaved a sigh and thought, I wonder if I will ever amount to anything special. Thinking about the consequences of such a desire brought confusion to my heart. I was never satisfied with anything, and so I was always struggling in vain. I wore layers of masks ten—no, twenty deep. Not even I could penetrate to know which one was how unhappy. And then I discovered one poor outlet after all: writing. Here, it seemed to me, there were dozens of creatures just like me, all of them subject to the same unfathomable shudders. Oh, that I might become a writer, I secretly prayed.

My younger brother, too, entered high school at this point, and he came

to live in the one room with me. I consulted with him, and in early summer we started a little review with five or six other friends. Diagonally across from the house where we were staying was a printing shop, and we asked them to do it. The covers were beautifully lithographed. We distributed the magazine among our classmates. Every month I published an article in it. First I wrote a story on morality, full of philosophical arguments. I also took great pride in my short aphoristic essays. The magazine continued about a year, but it gave rise to an unfortunate problem between my oldest brother and me.

He was worried about my apparent passion for literature, and he sent me a long, stiff letter from home: In chemistry, there are equations, and in geometry there are theorems, and a complete key can be given for understanding them; but in literature there is no such thing, and I believe that until you reach a proper age and achieve a certain degree of experience, it is impossible to truly grasp literature. I agreed with him—and yet I believed that I had a special dispensation. I answered my brother immediately: I believe in everything you say; I am fortunate to have such a splendid brother; however, do not worry that I am letting up on my studies because of writing—in fact, I am studying all the more because of it. So I informed my brother, at great and hyperbolic length.

I was studying, truly, if only from the menacing thought that above all else I had to outclass the common herd. From my third year, I was always at the head of the class. It is hard to be at the head without being called a grind, but not only didn't they insult me that way, I even perfected the art of taming my school friends, including a judo captain nicknamed "Octopus." There was a big wastepaper basket in the corner of the classroom, and once in a while I'd ask him, "Doesn't the Octopus want to crawl into his lair?" He would put the basket on his head and start laughing, a peculiar laugh that echoed in the basket. The good-looking boys in the class hung around me, too. And even when I plastered triangle- and hexagon- and flower-shaped adhesive tape here and there over the pimples on my face, no one made fun of me.

What a torment those pimples were. Each day there were more than the day before; every morning when I woke up, I would pass my hand over my face to check out the situation. I tried medicines of all kinds, but none of them worked. Whenever I went to the pharmacy to buy one, I'd write the name on a piece of paper and say, "My friend told me you have this stuff," as if someone else had asked me to get it for him. I believed that the pimples were a sign of my sexual desires, and was hopelessly ashamed. There were even times when I thought I would rather die. My family's criticism of my face reached great heights. My oldest sister, who was now married into another family, seems even to have gone so far as to say that there might not be anyone who would want to marry me. I diligently applied my medicines.

My younger brother worried about my pimples, too, and he often went in my place to buy the potions. We had clashed so often as children that I had prayed he would fail the high school entrance examination; but now that we found ourselves like this, away from home together, I slowly began to understand how good-natured he was. As he grew older, he became quiet and introspective. He sometimes wrote short pieces for our little journal, too, but his style was timid. It was painful to him that his school record was not as good as mine, and if I dared sympathize, he became even more unhappy. And he found it infuriating that his hair grew into a widow's peak, like a girl's. He firmly believed that it was because his forehead was narrow that he was so stupid. I let him get away with anything. In those days, whenever I dealt with anyone, I would either cover everything up or lay it all bare. My brother and I revealed everything to each other.

One moonless night at the beginning of autumn, we went out on a wharf by the harbor, and as the fresh wind from across the strait blew against us, we discussed the "red string." That was something a teacher had once told us about during grammar class. Each of us had an invisible red string attached to the little toe of his right foot, which, after much twining and stretching, was sure to be attached to the same toe of some girl. No matter how far apart we were, the string would never break; no matter how close we came, even if we met each other in passing, the string would never tangle. And that girl was fated to become his bride. When I first heard the story I was so excited I went home and told my brother about it right away. That night too, as we listened to the sound of the waves and the crying of the seagulls, we talked about it. "What is your wife doing now?" I asked him. He pulled two or three times with both hands against the jetty railing, and then said awkwardly, "Walking in the garden." How perfect for my brother, I thought, as I imagined a young girl, wearing big garden shoes and carrying a fan, gazing at the evening primroses. It was my turn to tell about mine, but I continued to look out at the dark sea and said only, "Wearing a red sash"—and shut my mouth. The channel ferry boat came bobbing from the horizon like a big hotel with yellow light streaming from its windows.

This was the only thing I hid even from my brother: that summer, when I had come home for vacation, there had been a new maid, slight in stature and dressed in a summer kimono tied with a red sash, who had roughly helped me change from my suit. Her name was Miyo.

I had the secret habit of smoking before going to bed, while I thought about how to begin my stories, for example; and before long, Miyo learned of it. One night after laying out my bed, she left an ashtray right beside the pillow. The next morning when she came to do the dusting, I warned her that my smoking was a secret, and she shouldn't go leaving ashtrays around. She muttered sulkily that she understood. During that same vacation, the *naniwabushi* minstrels came to our town, and all our servants went to the play-

house to hear them.⁹ My younger brother and I were told to go along, but we scorned country entertainers and instead went out to the fields to catch fireflies. We went nearly as far as the neighboring forest, but the dew was so thick that night that we returned to the house with only about twenty in our cage. Later, the people who had gone to see the *naniwabushi* came straggling home. We had Miyo lay out the beds and set up the mosquito netting, and then we turned out the light and set the fireflies loose inside the netting, where they flew about quietly here and there. Miyo sat alone outside the netting and watched them. I lay next to my brother, very much more conscious of Miyo's faint white body than of the fireflies' bluish light. I asked her a little stiffly, "Were the *naniwabushi* interesting?" That was the first time I had ever exchanged words on anything but business with her. Miyo answered quietly, "No." I burst out laughing. My brother was silent as he used his rustling fan to chase one firefly that was stuck to the bottom edge of the netting. Somehow I felt out of sorts.

From that time on I began to be conscious of Miyo. Whenever the "red string" was mentioned, she was the picture that floated into my heart.

III

In my fourth year of high school there were two students who would come over to my house nearly every day. I served them wine and crackers. And I taught them all sorts of nonsense, devising various ways to astonish them. A whole book on how to light charcoal had come out, I told them. I spread machine oil over a book called *The Beast Machine*, by a new writer, and told them, "This is how it's being sold—don't you think that's an amazing binding?" I cut out parts of a translation of a book called *The Beautiful Friend*, and secretly had a printer I knew insert some terrible passages I had prepared in the blanks. "This is a strange book," I told them.

Miyo faded in my memory. I didn't like to think about two people in the same house mooning over each other. Then, too, I usually belittled girls anyway. Sometimes I was so disgusted to think that she could upset me, even if only a little, that I still held back from mentioning her not only to my two friends but even to my brother.

But then I read a famous long Russian novel, and had to rethink the whole situation.¹⁰ It was an account of the life of a woman convict. The first step in her downfall had been when she was seduced by an aristocratic university student who was the nephew of her employers. I ignored the larger implica-

⁹*Naniwabushi* is a form of popular entertainment, dating from the late eighteenth century, in which tales and songs were sung to *samisen* accompaniment. It was incorporated into Kabuki music during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and became newly popular in the twentieth, when even contemporary stories were set to music and performed by traveling troupes, especially in rural areas.

¹⁰The novel was Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.

tions of the whole novel, and just put a marker of pressed leaves at the page where the two exchanged their first kiss under the wildly blooming lilacs. I could hardly read such a splendid novel as if it did not concern me. The conviction that those two resembled Miyo and myself oppressed me. If only I were more aggressive, then I would be just like that aristocrat! The very thought seemed to diminish my cowardice. I decided that my life so far had been uninspired because my spirit was narrow and cramped. I felt myself wanting to become a brilliant sufferer.

I revealed this first to my brother, after we got into bed one night. I wanted to speak seriously, but had rehearsed my posture so carefully that actually it stood in my way, and I ended up sounding as if I were joking. I spoke without any dignity, rubbing the nape of my neck and wringing my hands. How sad it was that this was the only way I could do it, I thought. My brother listened without moving in bed, licking his thin lower lip, and then he asked, as if he found it hard to speak, "Are you going to marry her?" For some reason, this startled me. I answered, deliberately downcast, "I don't know whether or not I can." In a roundabout way and an unexpectedly adult tone, he suggested that probably I couldn't, in the long run. Listening to him, I could feel my true attitude emerging. I felt ruffled, and then angry. I half sat up in bed, lowered my voice and spat out intensely, "That—that's why I'm going to fight!" My brother twisted under his calico print quilt and seemed to be about to say something, but stealing a look at me, only smiled instead. I started laughing, too. "Well, I'm on my way—" I said, as I stretched my hand out to him. Embarrassed, he extended his right hand out of the covers. I shook his limp fingers two or three times, laughing quietly.

But luckily I didn't have to work so hard when I presented my intentions to my friends for their approval. They made a show, while listening to my story, of working out various schemes, but when I was finished, I knew they had only been trying to lend their approval more effect. Truly, that's all there was to it.

That year, I brought my friends back home with me for summer vacation, ostensibly so the three of us could begin studying together for the college entrance exams. But of course I also wanted to show Miyo to them, and they had to come with me whether they wanted or not. I prayed that my family would approve of them. My older brothers' friends were all young men from noted families in the area, and none of them wore simple little two-button jackets like my friends.

At the time, the abandoned house out back had been converted into a big chicken coop, and we studied, just during the morning, in the little watchman's hut next to it. The wood-floored hut was painted white and green outside; inside, our three freshly varnished tables and chairs just fitted side by side into the twelve-foot-square room. There were two big doors on the

east and north, and a Western-style window on the south; when we opened them all wide, a breeze blew in constantly and fluttered the pages of our books. The weeds had been left to grow thick around the hut, and dozens of yellow chicks played hide-and-seek in the grass.

We all looked forward to lunch. The question that preoccupied us was, Which maid would come to the hut to let us know when it was ready? If it wasn't Miyo, we would make a great racket, pounding on our desks and smacking our lips. If she came, we would all be quiet, and then, when she left, we would all burst out laughing. One sunny day my younger brother was studying with us, too, and as noon approached, we all began our usual debate over who would come. My brother was the only one who stayed out of the conversation, as he paced back and forth beside the window, memorizing English vocabulary. We continued to joke around, throwing books at each other as we stamped our feet and made the floor squeak; but before long I got a bit carried away. To bring my brother into the company, I lightly bit my lips, glared at him, and asked, "You've been quiet all this time—what do you think?" At this, my brother shouted out, "I hate it!" and waved his right hand wide. Two or three of his vocabulary cards fluttered from his hand. I was stunned and looked away. In that instant, I came to an unpleasant conclusion: I would give up Miyo after today. Then I dissolved in laughter as if nothing had happened.

Fortunately, it was not Miyo who came to announce lunch that day. I brought up the rear as we went back to the main house in single file on the narrow path between the bean fields; while clowning brightly, I kept tearing the round green leaves from the bean plants as I passed.

I had not started out thinking of myself as a victim. It's just that I couldn't stand it. My luxuriant white lilacs had been splashed with mud. And that the villain should have been someone so close to me, made it all the more hateful.

I spent the next two or three days thinking various painful thoughts. Didn't Miyo walk in the garden? My brother had been totally confused by my handshake. Clearly, I'd been a fool, hadn't I? There was no greater shame for me than to be a fool.

Bad things continued to happen. One day I was having lunch with my brother and my friends, while Miyo sat at the side, serving and cooling us with a fan on which was painted a red monkey's face. I tried to fathom her feelings by calculating the amount of breeze she was sending with the fan. She fanned much more in my brother's direction. Despair hit me, and I dropped my fork on the plate of cutlets with a clatter.

Everyone is being cruel to me, I brooded. I doubted all mankind indiscriminately, thinking that my friends must have known all along. It's all right, I told myself, you're already forgetting her.

Several days passed, and one morning I set out for the hut, forgetting I had

left a pack of cigarettes at the head of the bed with five or six unsmoked from the night before. When I noticed later, I scurried back to the room, but the bed had been neatly picked up and the pack was not there. I resigned myself. I called Miyo and interrogated her: "What happened to the cigarettes, they got found, didn't they?" Miyo looked at me seriously and shook her head. Then straightway she reached up to one of the beams in the room and plunged her hand into the recess behind it. Out came the little green paper packet with the two flying golden bats on it.

This incident gave me back my courage a hundredfold, and I returned to my previous determination. But whenever I thought of my brother, I got depressed; I avoided joking with my friends about Miyo; and I also felt a kind of sneaky reserve toward my brother. I held back from taking the initiative in pursuit of Miyo. I decided to wait to have a declaration from her. I gave her any number of opportunities. I kept calling her to my room to give her unnecessary orders, and when she came in I would strike some careless, casual attitude. In order to move her heart, I was careful even of my face. By that time the pimples had cleared up somehow, but from force of habit I put makeup on my face anyway. I had a beautiful silver compact with a cover deeply carved with some twining vine like ivy. From time to time I smoothed my face with the powder, but I worried a bit, anyway.

What happened now was up to Miyo, I decided. But the opportunity just never seemed to come. Even while we were studying in the hut, I would sometimes slip away and go back to the main house to see her. I would watch her secretly as she swept and cleaned vigorously, and bite my lips.

Before long, summer vacation drew to a close, and I would have to be leaving with my brother and friends. I prayed that something would happen to plant in Miyo's heart even a little memory that might help her remember me at least until the next vacation, but to no avail.

Departure day came, and we all got into the black family carriage. Miyo was standing in front of the entryway, in a line with the rest of the family and servants to see us off. She looked neither at me nor my brother. She had taken off the light green cord that tied back her sleeves while she worked, and was fingering it like a rosary; her eyes were downcast. Even when the carriage began to move slowly, she didn't change position. It was with great reluctance that I tore myself from home.

Autumn came, and I headed with my brother for a seaside hot spring about thirty minutes by train from the city. There, my mother and my sister, who was now out of the hospital, were renting a house for her convalescence. I lived there for quite a while, continuing my exam studies. Burdened as I was with the reputation of being a genius, it was essential for me to show that I was going on to college from high school. My hatred of school grew all the worse, but I studied steadily anyway, as if something were after me. I

commuted to school from the hot spring. Every Sunday, my friends came to visit. We all pretended to have forgotten Miyo by now. Each time they came, we would go on a picnic. On the broad rocks by the seashore, we would make stews and drink wine. My brother had a good voice and knew many of the new songs, so we had him teach them to us, and we would all sing together. Tired out from our pleasures, we would fall asleep on the rocks; when we awoke, the rocks which had been a part of the shore would have become separate islands in the incoming tide. We felt as if we had not yet awakened from our dreams.

I was lonely if I missed even a single day with these friends. It was around the same time that, one blustery day in late autumn, a teacher in school boxed both my cheeks. My friends were angry because I had been punished for an act of accidental chivalry. That day after classes were over all the fourth-year students gathered in the natural sciences room and debated a purge of this teacher. Some even called loudly for a strike. I was appalled. I went around imploring them, "If you're thinking of holding a strike just for me, call it off; I don't bear the teacher a grudge, it was just a simple little incident." My friends told me I was cowardly and selfish. I began to find it difficult to breathe, and left the classroom. I returned to the house at the hot spring, and went to the bath immediately. Two or three banana tree leaves, beaten and tattered by the rough wintery gales, threw blue shadows from their corner of the garden into the bathtub. As I sat on the edge of the tub, feeling more dead than alive, I was sunk in thought.

I had a habit, whenever troubled by shameful memories, of muttering to myself, "Well now," to chase them away. Now too, I repeated over and over again, "Well now!" as I thought of how I had looked wandering around whispering, "It was just a simple little incident"; and I scooped up water in my hand and let it trickle out, scooped it up and let it trickle away.

The next day the teacher apologized to us, there was no strike after all, and I easily made up with my friends; but the crisis darkened me. It made me start thinking keenly of Miyo again, to the point that I even thought that if I didn't see her, I would slide straight into decadence.

Just at that time, it happened that my mother and sister were going to leave the hot spring. Their departure day was a Saturday, so under the pretext of accompanying them home, I was able to return to our village. I left quietly, keeping it a secret from my friends. I didn't even tell my brother my real reason for returning home. I figured that he would know without my saying.

We all left the hot spring and first rested for a while at the home of the draper who had been taking care of us; then the three of us turned toward home. My brother came to see us off; as the train was about to leave the platform, he stuck his head with its dark widow's peak in the window and

said simply, "Keep plugging." I accepted his words meekly, nodding cheerfully in acknowledgment.

By the time the horse cart had passed the neighboring forest and was slowly approaching the house, I was nearly beside myself. The sun had set; the mountains and sky were black. I turned my ear to the voice of the autumn wind rustling through the rice fields, and it set my heart thundering. I ceaselessly searched the darkness outside the window, and when clumps of white pampas grass at the end of the road brushed by, floating right at the end of my nose, I was so surprised I tossed my head back.

In the dim light of the lanterns under the eaves, people came swarming out of the house to meet us. When the carriage stopped, Miyo too came clattering out from the entrance hall. Her shoulders were hunched as if she were cold.

That night, after I went to bed on the second floor, I thought dismal thoughts. I was tormented by the notion of mediocrity. Ever since the Miyo situation had come up, I'd been getting crazier and stupider, hadn't I? Anyone could moon over a woman. But my love was different—how, I couldn't quite say, but it *was* different. There was nothing common about my case. Yet, didn't every man in love think the same? But—I persisted, suffocating in the smoke of my own cigarettes—in my case there was a Philosophy!

That night, when I thought of the inevitable arguments with my family that would arise over my marrying Miyo, I gained an icy courage. I was firmly convinced that none of my actions was mediocre, that after all I certainly counted for quite a bit in this world. Nevertheless, I was terribly lonely. I didn't know where this sadness arose from. I couldn't fall asleep, and so I did that "massaging." I completely removed all thoughts of Miyo from my mind. I didn't want to defile her.

When I opened my eyes in the morning, the autumn sky was perfectly clear. I got up early and went out to the fields across the way to pick grapes. I had Miyo come along with me, carrying a big wicker basket. I gave my orders to her in such a light tone that no one suspected us. The grape arbor was in the southeast corner of the field, spreading over several hundred square feet. When the grapes were ripe, the arbor was tightly enclosed on all four sides with a reed screen. We opened a little door in one corner and entered the enclosure. Inside it was stifling hot. Several yellow wasps were buzzing around. The morning sun pierced brightly through the roof of grape leaves and the reed screen, and Miyo too looked faintly green. On the way over, I had been making my plans, smiling with my mouth twisted like a villain; but now that I found us all alone, just the two of us, I was so tense it nearly spoiled my mood. I even left the little wooden door open on purpose.

I was tall, so I didn't use a stepladder as I snipped off the clusters of grapes with the pruning shears, and handed them over one at a time to Miyo. She

briskly wiped the morning dew from each bunch on her white apron and put it in the basket below her. We didn't speak a word. A long time seemed to pass. After a while, I began to feel belligerent. Just as the basket was finally filling up, Miyo's hand, which was stretched out to take the bunch I was handing to her, suddenly twitched and pulled back. I pushed the grapes in her direction, told her to pay attention, and clicked my tongue in irritation.

She was clutching the base of her right hand tightly with the other hand and pressing down. I asked her if she had been stabbed, and she said yes, her eyes veiled, as if she were dazzled by the light. "You fool," I scolded. She was laughing silently. I couldn't bear to stay there anymore. "I'll put some medicine on it for you," I said, and burst out of the enclosure. I took her straight back to the main house and went to look for the ammonia bottle in the office medicine cabinet. I just handed over the purple glass bottle to her as roughly as possible, and didn't try to apply it myself.

That afternoon I left my village, swaying in the humble grey cloth-roofed bus that had recently begun running to and from town. The people in the house had told me to go in the carriage, but I felt uncomfortable in our shiny black coach, monogrammed as if it belonged to some lord. On my knees was the basket of grapes Miyo and I had picked together, and I gazed out profoundly at the country road carpeted with fallen leaves. I was satisfied. To have planted even that much of a memory in Miyo was courageous of me, I thought. Miyo is mine for sure, I felt comfortably.

That year's winter vacation was to be my last holiday as a high school student. As the day for our return home approached, my brother and I both increasingly felt a mutual awkwardness building up.

At last we returned to our home in the country. The first thing we did was go to the kitchen, sit down casually facing each other across the sunken kitchen hearth, and then glance curiously around the house. Miyo was not there. Two or three times our glances collided uneasily. That night after dinner was finished, we were invited by our next oldest brother to go up to his room, where the three of us sat around the heater and played cards. Every card was a total blank to me. When a good opening came up in the conversation, I commented resolutely, "We seem to be one maid short." I spoke in a disinterested tone, holding my five or six cards as if to hide my face. If my older brother happened to figure it out, fortunately my younger brother was with us too, and I was determined to tell everything.

As he wagged his head, trying to make up his mind which card to put down, he muttered, "Oh, Miyo? She had a fight with grandmother and went home to her own village. She was quite a stubborn girl, that one"—and sharply discarded a card. I too threw down a card. My younger brother too silently discarded.

Four or five days later I went out to the little guardhouse by the chicken

coop and heard further details about it from the young watchman, who liked novels. Miyo had been “soiled” just once by one of the menservants, and when this was discovered by the other maids, she found it impossible to remain at our house. The man had done various other bad things and he had already been dismissed by now. Nevertheless, the boy told me more than he had to. He added that the man had bragged of his exploits, saying that she had whispered, “Stop, stop,” only afterwards.

As New Year’s Day passed and our winter vacation drew to a close, my brother and I diverted ourselves by going into the library storehouse and looking at the various books and scroll paintings. We could glimpse the snow falling outside the high skylight window. I had noticed with deep interest each time I returned home how everything, from the decorations in the rooms to these books and scrolls, was changing as my oldest brother took over from the days when our father had been alive. I had unrolled a scroll that my brother seemed to have gotten recently, and was looking at it. It was a painting of mallow roses scattered on the water. Beside me, my younger brother had taken out a big box of photographs and was carefully going through the hundreds of them, blowing white breath on his chilled fingers from time to time. After a while, he passed over to me a newly matted card-sized photo. It would appear that recently Miyo had accompanied my mother to my aunt’s house, and the three of them had had this picture taken at the time. My mother was sitting alone on a low sofa, and behind her stood my aunt and Miyo, both about the same height. The background was a scene of a flower garden with roses blooming wildly. We drew close together, our attention riveted to the picture for some time. In my heart, I had long since made my peace with my brother; I was still confused and had not yet told him the truth about Miyo, so I was fairly well able to feign calmness as we looked at the picture. Miyo seemed to have moved, and her outline was blurred from her face to her chest. My aunt had her hands folded over her sash and she seemed dazzled by the light. I thought they resembled each other.

Eight Views of Tokyo

"Eight Views of Tokyo" (Tokyo hakkei) appeared in the January 1941 issue of the magazine Bungakkai. It was republished later the same year in a short story collection of the same title. For a discussion, see pp. 102-26.

(For people who are suffering)

It was a colorless mountain village in southern Izu, with nothing to offer but its bubbling hot springs. There were probably no more than thirty houses. I chose such a dreary village only because I thought the inns would be cheap. It was July 3, 1940. At the time, I even had a little extra money. Nevertheless, from there on the future was totally dark. I mean, I might become unable to write. If I went for two months without writing anything, I would revert to my former state of penury. Come to think of it, that was a pretty miserable margin I had; but even that little extra was the first I'd had in ten years. I had begun my Tokyo life in the spring of 1930. At the time, I was already living with a woman named H. My brother was sending me enough money monthly from the country, but by the end of the month we two fools always had to carry something or other off to the pawnbroker, even though we forbade each other luxuries. Finally, after six years, I parted from H. All that was left to me was a set of bedding, a desk, a table lamp, and one wicker chest. Also, an ominously large pile of debts. Two years passed after that, and thanks to the efforts of a certain mentor, I made a conventional arranged marriage. Two years again passed, and now for the first time I could draw breath. Nearly ten collections of my poor writings had been published. I had come to feel that if I wrote conscientiously and took my stories around, two out of three would sell, even if no one had commissioned them. From now on it was adult's work, with no fooling around. I would make my way writing just what I wanted to write.

It might have been a miserable, tight margin, but I was happy to the bottom of my soul. For at least a month, I could go on writing what I liked, without worrying about money. I could scarcely believe this state of affairs. I found myself unable to settle down, in a strange disturbance of heart that alternated between ecstasy and terror. I could not get down to work.

“Eight Views of Tokyo.” I had wanted to try such a short story some day, writing slowly, with great care. I had wanted to tell the story of my ten years in Tokyo, with the events of my life tied to the places I had lived at each time. I was thirty-two this year. According to Japanese ethics, this was the age when one should already have started to enter into the solidity of middle age. And sadly enough, when I looked into my own body and spirit, I could not deny that it was happening. You’d better remember this: you have already lost your youth. You have the face of a serious adult. “Eight Views of Tokyo.” I would write it as my farewell to adolescence, without prettying it up.

“He’s really turned into a philistine, hasn’t he?” Such was the ignorant, malicious gossip that came wafting into my ears with the breeze. Every time I heard it, my heart would respond sharply: “I was a philistine right from the start. You just didn’t notice, did you?” They have it backwards. When I finally made up my mind to commit myself to literature as my life’s work, the fools chose instead to view me as a turncoat. I just laugh faintly. Only on the stage can one play the juvenile role forever. It does not lie in literature.

“Eight Views of Tokyo.” I would have to write it now. At the moment I had no impending work commitments. I had over a hundred yen to spare. This was not the time to be vainly heaving complicated sighs of ecstasy and terror and pacing around the narrow room. I had to climb upward without a pause.

I bought a map of the city of Tokyo and boarded a train for Yonehara at Tokyo Station. I kept telling myself over and over, “You are not going for pleasure, you are going so that you can expend enormous effort to build an important monument to your whole life.” At Atami, I changed to an Itō-bound train, and at Itō changed to the Shimoda bus. For three hours the bus bounced and rattled southward, following the east coast of the Izu Peninsula, and finally I disembarked at this insignificant mountain village of thirty houses. A place like this couldn’t cost more than three yen a day, I thought to myself. Four little inns stood in a row, unbearably depressing in their humbleness. I chose one named F. It seemed to give just a little better appearance than the others. I followed a mean-looking slattern of a maid to the second floor; and when she showed me into the room, old as I was, I wanted to cry. I remembered the room I had rented three years earlier in an Ogikubo boarding house. That was about the worst you could find, even in Ogikubo. But what she showed me beyond the dressing room was even more shoddy and dismal than the boarding house.

“Don’t you have any other rooms?”

“Yes, but they’re all full. This one is cool, you know.”

“I see.” I sensed that she was making a fool of me. Maybe there was something wrong with the way I was dressed.

“Rates are three yen fifty sen and four yen a night. Lunch is extra. Which do you want?”

“I’ll take the three-fifty. Whenever I want lunch, I’ll let you know. I plan to be here working about ten days.”

“Wait here a moment.” The maid went downstairs, and then returned after a while. “Uh, if you’re planning a long stay, we ask you to put down a deposit.”

“Oh? How much shall I give you?”

“Well, now, any amount . . .,” she mumbled.

“Shall I give you fifty yen?”

“Um.”

I lined up the bills on the desk. I couldn’t stand it. “Look, I’ll give you all of it. Here’s ninety yen. I’ve left only small change for cigarettes here in my wallet.” Why on earth had I come to such a place?

“Thank you. We’ll hold it for you.”

The maid left. I must not get angry. I have important work to do. I forced myself to reflect that maybe this was the kind of treatment I should expect in my present position in life. I started bringing out my pen, ink, paper, and other implements from the bottom of my valise.

This was what my first breathing space in ten years amounted to. However, I lectured myself gravely, this sadness too was part of my fate. I braced myself and began to work.

I did not come for pleasure. I came to do extremely difficult work. That night, under the dim light of the lamp, I spread the map of Tokyo out full on the desk.

How many years had it been since I had last opened a map of Tokyo before me like this? When I had first come to live in Tokyo ten years ago, I had even been ashamed to go out looking for one. I had hesitated for a long time, thinking people would laugh at me for a country bumpkin; but finally I gritted my teeth and went to buy it. I asked for it roughly, with a tone of self-contempt; I thrust it under my jacket and tramped off home wildly. That night I closed the door, covered the windows of my room carefully, and stealthily opened the map. A beautiful pattern of reds, greens, yellows—I held my breath, lost in looking at it. Sumidagawa. Asakusa. Ushigome. Aka-saka. Ah, everything was here! If I wanted to go somewhere, I could go right there, anytime. I felt as if I were seeing a miracle.

Now when I look at Tokyo, shaped like a worm-eaten mulberry leaf, all I think of are the lives of the people who live there. The mob comes pouring into this featureless plain from all over Japan. Dripping with sweat, they push and jostle one another, disputing every inch of land, joys and sorrows fleeting by, eyeing each other jealously, feuding, females calling to males, males just wandering around half-crazed. Quite suddenly, out of context, a

couple of sad lines from a novel entitled *Petrified Wood* floated through my mind: "What is love?" "To dream of beautiful things and do dirty ones." Words that had no direct connection to Tokyo.

Totsuka: this is where I was first. My next older brother had rented a house for himself in this area; he was studying sculpture. I had graduated from Hirosaki College in 1930 and entered the French literature department of Tokyo Imperial University. I didn't know a word of French, but I wanted to hear the lectures on French literature. I vaguely revered Professor Tatsuno Yutaka. I rented a room in the rear of a newly built boarding house about three blocks away from my brother. We instinctively recognized a mutual reticence, although neither of us actually said anything; it was as if we felt that bad feeling would arise even between brothers on good terms if they lived under the same roof. So we lived nearby but separated by three blocks. Three months later this brother was dead of illness. He was twenty-seven. Even after his death, I stayed at the Totsuka boarding house. From the second semester on, I stopped going to school almost completely. I was calmly involved in that secret work that so terrifies society. I felt contempt for the literature that pompously styled itself an arm of that work. At the time, I was living purely for politics. That fall, a woman came to me from the country. I had summoned her. It was H. I had gotten to know her in autumn of the year I entered college, and we had played around together the next three years. She was an innocent geisha. I rented a room for the woman in Higashi Komagata, Honjo Ward. It was on the second floor of a carpenter's shop. So far, we had never known each other physically. My eldest brother came to Tokyo from our hometown because of the woman. We had lost our father seven years earlier; and now we had a conference in my dim room in Totsuka. Faced with the vicious attitude of this younger brother who had changed so radically, my brother cried. On the condition that we be allowed to become man and wife, I agreed to hand the woman over to him. Without a doubt, the brother who took her suffered considerably more than the arrogant brother who did the handing over. The night before I sent her off, I slept with her for the first time. My brother took the woman with him and returned to the country for the time being. She was passive from beginning to end. One brief, businesslike letter came from her, announcing that she had arrived safely, and that was all. I had no more news from her after that. She seemed terribly calm. I didn't think it was fair. It's just not right for you to lie back in smug complacency, while I have to fight with my family and disrupt them all, and force the bitterness of hell on my mother, I thought. You should be writing me every day, I thought. You should love me much more, I thought. But the woman seemed not to feel like writing letters. I despaired. From early morning until late at night, I abandoned myself to political work. I never refused anything requested of me. Little by little, signs of the limits of my

ability in that direction began to appear. My despair doubled. A woman working at a bar on a Ginza back street developed a feeling for me. There comes once to everyone a time when he is so loved. It is unclean. I enticed the woman and together we entered the sea at Kamakura. When one is broken, it is time to die, I had thought. I was beginning to be broken in that sacrilegious work. Just because I feared I would be called a coward, I had taken on a load of work that was physically impossible. H thought only of her own happiness. You're not a woman. You refused to recognize my agony, and here's your payment. It serves you right. What was most painful for me was to be alienated from my family. The most direct, single cause of my suicide attempt was my realization that my mother, my brothers, my aunt, had all been disgusted by the H affair. The woman died, I survived. I have already written many times about the woman who died. It is a black stain on my life. I was held in jail. As a result of the investigation, I was put on probation. It happened at the end of 1930. My older brothers were very gentle with me, the would-be suicide.

My brother freed H from her geisha contract, and in February of the next year returned her to my custody. He was scrupulously true to his word. H came to me, totally unconcerned. We rented a house for thirty yen beside some land that had belonged to Lord Shimazu and was being subdivided. H set to work diligently. I was twenty-three, H was twenty.

Gotanda was our crazy period. I had no will at all. I had not the slightest hope of a fresh start. I lived, simply reflecting the moods of friends who dropped by. Far from being ashamed of my disgraceful crime, I was even faintly proud. It was truly a shameless, imbecilic time. I scarcely showed up at school at all, of course. I abhorred all effort, and spent my time lying around watching H indifferently. It was crazy. I did nothing. I slipped back into political work, but this time there was no passion. The nihilism of the idle. That is what it was like when first I had a home in a little corner of Tokyo.

We moved in summer. Dōhōchō in Kanda. And again in late fall. Izumichō, again in Kanda. And early spring of the next year. Kashiwagi in Yodobashi. There's nothing to tell about. I got involved in writing haiku, under the name "Shūringō." I was like an old man. I was detained for questioning twice, because of my political work. Each time I was released, I followed the warnings of friends and moved somewhere else. I felt no enthusiasm, nor any hatred. I was in a state of such extreme apathy that all they had to do was tell me something was "for the common good," and I would do it. Together, H and I spent day after day emptily, male and female living in a hole. She was cheerful. Two or three times a day she would nag abusively at me, but after it was over she would settle down to study English as if nothing had happened. I made her a time schedule and set her to studying. She didn't seem to learn

much. She finally got to be able to read the Western alphabet, and then before long she dropped it. Naturally, she was not very good at writing letters. She didn't really want to write. I would make rough drafts for her. She seemed to like to play the role of gun moll, and when I was taken in to police headquarters, she didn't get especially upset. Sometimes she was even happy about it; she thought the "party line" was heroic. Dōhōchō, Izumichō, Kashiwagi; I turned twenty-four.

In late spring, I had to move once more. It looked as if I would be pulled in by the police again, and I fled. This time it was somewhat complicated. I told my brother in the country some trumped-up story, and got him to send two months' allowance at one time; we decamped from Kashiwagi with it. We divided up our household goods among friends for safekeeping and moved to a room over a lumber dealer in Hatchōbori, Nihonbashi, with just what we could carry. I became a native of Hokkaidō named Ochiai Kazuo. We were miserable, naturally. I was very careful of the money we were carrying. I hid my own uneasiness by thinking uselessly that somehow things would work out. I made no provision for tomorrow. There was nothing I could do. From time to time, I would set out for school and spend hours silently lying on the lawn in front of the lecture hall. One day, a student in the economics department who had graduated from my college forced me to hear a hateful story. I felt as though my insides had been scalded by boiling water. It couldn't be, I thought. Instead, I hated the student who had told me. I'll find out the truth if I ask H, I thought. I rushed back to our second floor over the lumber shop in Hatchōbori, but somehow it was too hard to say right out. It was an afternoon in early summer. The western sun streamed in, and the room was hot. I had H go out and buy me a special cheap beer. At the time, it cost twenty-five sen. I drank that one and asked for another, and H began to scold. As she nagged at me, my mind steadied, and I was able to tell her, as casually as possible, what I had heard that day. H muttered in our country dialect that he was crazy, and frowned sharply as if she were angry. That was all; she continued her sewing. There were no signs of anything dirty. I believed her.

That night I read something unfortunate: Rousseau's *Confessions*. I came across the part where Rousseau learns of his wife's past and feels the bitterness of life. It was unbearable. I couldn't believe H now. That night, I finally forced her to spit it out. What I had heard from the student was all true. The actuality was even worse. The deeper I dug, the more bottomless it seemed. I halted her midway.

Now, I am the last one to have the right to condemn anyone in that area. What about the Kamakura incident? But I was seething that night. I was conscious of how proud I had been of her until then, how I had prized her, like a jewel in the palm of my hand. I had lived just for her. I had truly thought

that I had saved her virtue. I had naively seconded everything she said about it, like a hero. I had even spoken proudly of it to my friends: "H has such strong character that she managed to preserve herself until she came to me." Stupid, dumb—there were no words to describe it. Idiot child. I just hadn't known what women were like. I hadn't the slightest desire to hate H for her deception. I even found this H who had confessed to me sweetly touching. I wanted to stroke her back to console her. But I was just devastated. I felt sick. I wanted to smash my life to bits. In short, I couldn't stand it. I gave up and left the house.

My inquisition reached this stopping point, and then I found myself wandering the streets of Tokyo again. I had no place to return to but her room. I hurried back to where she was. It was a sorry reunion. We shook hands weakly, laughing cravenly the while. We left Hatchōbori and moved to Shirogane Sankōchō, in Shiba. We rented the one-room gatehouse of a large vacant mansion. My brothers back home had completely given up on me, and yet they continued to send money furtively. H perked up as if nothing had happened. However, somehow I was very slowly awakening from my stupidity. I wrote my last testament. A hundred pages, entitled "Recollections." Nowadays, I consider this to have been my maiden work. I wanted to get down in writing an unembellished record of all the evils of my childhood, to leave behind me. It was autumn of my twenty-fourth year. I sat in our one room, gazing out at the weed-choked, ruined garden, and completely forgot how to laugh. I planned again to die. Maybe you'd call it an affectation; well then, so be it. I didn't feel responsible. After all, I regarded human life as a drama. No, I regarded drama as life. Now I was no longer of use in any part. My incomparable H, even, was shopworn from others' handling. I had absolutely no inducement to go on living. I made up my mind to die, as one of the losers of the world. I would act out faithfully the role that the tides of time had assigned to me, the sad, servile role of always letting myself be bested by other people.

However, life is not theater. No one knows the second act. Some men come on stage to play the loser's role and yet do not exit until the very end. I wrote down my confessions of childhood and adolescence, of what kind of a terrible child I had been, as a little farewell note; and instead, my attention was intensely caught by this last testament, and a faint flame lighted in my emptiness. I couldn't die yet. No matter what the cost, this single story "Recollections" did not satisfy me. Anyhow, I had gone this far; now I wanted to write out all the rest of it. I wanted to disclose the whole of my life up to that day. Everything. It all began pouring out. First I wrote about the Kamakura incident. No good. Somewhere I had left something out. I wrote another, and sure enough, it wasn't right. Heaving a sigh, I got involved in the next work. I could not strike a period; I just continued with little commas. Grad-

ually I was being consumed by a demon who eternally beckoned. It was like an ant trying to stop an express train.¹

I had turned twenty-five. It was 1933. I was supposed to graduate from university in March. But far from graduating, I hadn't even taken my examinations. My brothers back home didn't know this. They seemed to be waiting in secret expectation. "He's done one crazy thing after another, but surely he'll graduate, to make up for it. He's got at least that much honesty." I betrayed them splendidly. I had no desire to graduate. To deceive people who are relying on one is hell enough to drive one crazy. And I lived in that hell for the next two years. "I *will* graduate without fail next year, please, give me one more year," I appealed tearfully to my brother—and then betrayed him. That year was the same. So was the next. In the midst of constant fear, self-contempt, and contemplation of death, I did not die; I remained intent on this series of stories I willfully styled my last testament. If only I could complete this. Maybe it was no more than immature, conceited sentimentality. But I was wagering my life on that sentimentality. Three . . . four . . . gradually the number of stories grew, and I stored the completed manuscripts in a large paper bag on which I inscribed *The Final Years*. It was to be the motto of my last testament, in the sense that this would be the end. Some purchaser had been found for the vacant house in Shiba, so in early spring we had to leave. Moreover, when I didn't graduate, my allowance from home was cut considerably. We had to be all the more frugal.

Amanuma Sanchōme in Suginami. We rented a room in the house of an acquaintance. He was a splendid responsible citizen who worked for a newspaper company. We lived with them for two years, and caused them no end of worry. I had even less desire to graduate. I was just absorbed, like a fool, in completing that collection of stories. To hold my friends and H off, because I was afraid what they might say, I lied to them, telling them that I would be graduating next year. About once a week I got all dressed up in my school uniform and left the house. At the school library I would borrow books at random and flip through them, take a nap, make rough drafts for my stories; and then in the evening I would leave the library and return to Amanuma. Neither H nor my friends doubted me in the slightest. On the surface, there was no trouble, but secretly I was frantic. Minute by minute I grew more impatient. I wanted to finish writing before the money from home was cut off. But I was working too hard. I would write things and destroy them. That demon was devouring me, unprepossessing though I was, to the marrow of my bones.

¹The original proverb, here paraphrased, is *toro no ono*, literally "The praying mantis's ax." Like a weak person who foolishly pits himself against overwhelming force, the praying mantis is pictured as raising its ax-like forelegs against a huge carriage that is rushing down on it.

A year passed. I did not graduate. My brothers were furious, but I made another of my customary appeals. "Next year I absolutely will graduate," I told them, lying straight out. There was no other justification for asking them to send me money. I certainly could not let anyone know the real state of affairs. I did not want to have anyone be an accomplice. I wanted to make myself the prodigal son all by myself. I believed that if I did this, the position of the people around me would be clear, and they would not be implicated in the slightest. I couldn't say right out something as wild as, "I need one more year to complete my last testament." If they thought these were simply self-centered, romantic fantasies, that would be worse than anything. As for my brothers, if I said something so extraordinary, they would have no other choice but to stop my allowance, even if they had wanted to send it. The rest of the world would forever have considered them accomplices, if they had continued to send me money while knowing the true state of affairs. Maybe it looks like a thief's rationalization, but I thought in all seriousness that I had to remain the crafty and flattering younger brother and deceive my brothers to the bitter end. So I continued once a week to put on my uniform and head for school. H and my friends couldn't have been more convinced that I would graduate the next year. I was being backed into a corner. Each day was as black as the day before. I'm not a bad person, I wanted to say. But keeping up the deception was hell.

Eventually, we moved to Amanuma Itchōme. My friend explained that Sanchōme was inconvenient for his work, and he moved to Itchōme behind the market in the spring of that year. It was near Ogikubo Station. We were invited to go along, and we rented the second floor. Night after night, I could not sleep. I drank cheap sake. I began coughing up phlegm. I thought maybe I was really sick, but no such luck. I longed to round out the collection of stories in the paper bag quickly. Maybe that was selfish vanity, but I wanted to leave it behind as an apology to everyone. It was the greatest effort of which I was capable. Late that fall, somehow or other I got it all written. From among the twenty-odd pieces, I chose fourteen; and I burned up the rest, together with all other manuscript fragments. There was a whole basketful. I took it out to the garden and set it ablaze.

"Why did you burn them?" H suddenly asked that night.

"Because I don't need them anymore," I answered with a smile.

She repeated the question: "Why did you burn them?" She was crying.

I began settling my affairs. I returned books I had borrowed to their various owners, and I sold my letters and notes to the trashman. Into the *Final Years* bag I also slipped two letters. My preparations seemed to be ready. Every night I went out to drink cheap sake. I was afraid to face H. About that time, a school friend came to talk about starting a group magazine. I was half joking when I told him I'd probably join them if they called it *The Blue*

Flower. It started as a joke, but the opening move had been made. Supporters came from here and there to declare themselves. I rapidly became close friends with two of them. I burned up the last of the "passion of youth" there. A mad dance the night before death. We got drunk and beat up stupid students. We loved filthy women as if they were our closest family. Before H knew it, her closet was totally bare. *The Blue Flower*, a journal of pure art, was ready by December of that year. Just one issue came out, and then the assemblage scattered to the four winds. They were disillusioned at the strange, pointless frenzy. Afterwards, only the three of us remained. The Three Fools, we were called. But we three became lifelong friends. I have been taught many things by those two.

The next year in March, graduation season approached again. I tried the entrance examination at a certain newspaper publisher.² I wanted to pretend to the friends we were living with, and also to H, that I was busy with my upcoming graduation. I made them all laugh happily when I said, "I'll become a newspaper reporter and live ordinarily ever after." I wanted to preserve peace one day longer, one second longer, even though I was bound to be found out; the thought of how stunned they would be was unbearably horrible, and I lied for all I was worth about what was happening. I was always like that. Then, driven into a corner, I would think of dying. In the end I would be found out, I knew, and that would make people even more shocked and furious; but I could not tell the dismal truth. One more second, one more second, I prayed, as I dug myself deeper into the hell of falsehood. Naturally, I did not intend to enter the newspaper company, nor was there any likelihood that I would pass my university final exams. Now my perfect deception began to break down. The time to die has come, I thought. In the middle of March, I went to Kamakura alone. It was 1935. I planned to hang myself in the hills of Kamakura.

It was now five years since I had jumped into the sea at Kamakura and caused such an uproar. It was difficult to die in the sea, since I could swim. I chose hanging, which, I had heard, was certain. But it was another miserable failure. I came back to consciousness. Maybe my neck was abnormally thick. I returned blankly to the house in Amanuma, my neck still red and swollen.

I had tried to settle my own fate by myself, and had failed. When I wandered back to the house, an unfamiliar, astounding world opened to me. H met me in the entry hall and hesitantly stroked my back. The others also treated me gently. They kept saying, "Thank goodness you're all right." I was bewildered at the tenderness of life. My brother came running from the

²Many Japanese businesses give entrance examinations just like colleges. The examinations provide for confused, pressured youths like Dazai (and many young people today) yet another opportunity for certified failure.

country. He berated me harshly, but I felt him incredibly, irreplaceably dear. It was perhaps for the first time in my life that I tasted these strange emotions.

A totally unexpected fate soon overtook me. Several days later, I was attacked by a fierce pain in my stomach. I bore it, unable to sleep, for a day and a night, and used a hot water bottle. I began to lose consciousness, and they called a doctor. I was carried straight from my bed to an ambulance, taken to a hospital in Asagaya, and operated on immediately. It was appendicitis. In addition to the delay in calling a doctor, the hot water bottle had been bad. The infection had reached the peritoneum and made the operation dangerous. The second day after the operation, I began spitting up blood clots: an old lung ailment had suddenly surfaced. My breathing grew faint, and even the doctor gave up on me. But true to my deep, evil fate, little by little I began to recover. A month later the stomach incision had healed. However, I was now moved to the Kyōdō Hospital in Setagaya, as a patient with a communicable disease. H was constantly at my side. She laughed as she told me the doctor had said she was not to kiss me. The director of the hospital was a friend of my eldest brother, so I was given extra special care. We rented two of the large hospital rooms and brought all our household furniture, taking up residence at the hospital. May, June, July . . . when mosquitoes were starting to appear and white mosquito netting was hung in the sickrooms, we moved, under instructions of the hospital director, to Funabashi in Chiba Prefecture. It was on the seacoast. We rented a newly built house on the outskirts of town. The idea had been that the change of scene would help my convalescence, but it turned out to be bad for me. The upheavals of hell began. While I was in the hospital in Asagaya, I had developed an abominable habit: the use of narcotics. At first the doctor had used them to kill the pain of the incisions when the bandages were changed morning and evening, but gradually I couldn't sleep without them. The pain that kept me from sleeping made me extremely weak. Every night I would ask the doctor for medication. He had no hope for my recovery, and always acquiesced gently to my pleas. Even after I moved to the second hospital, I would press the director for it. He responded reluctantly, one time out of three. Already I had come to need it not for my body, but to extinguish my shame, my torment. I had no strength to endure grief. After we moved to Funabashi, I went to a doctor in town and extorted the drugs from him, pleading insomnia and addiction. Later, I forced the weak-willed doctor to write me an affidavit so I could purchase my drugs directly from a pharmacy in town. By the time I realized what I was doing, I was already a miserable addict. At once, I was pressed for money. My brother was sending ninety yen a month for our living expenses. Understandably, he refused to send any additional emergency funds. My brother loved me, but I wasn't raising a finger to repay him. I was just selfishly playing around with my life. When I

appeared on the streets of Tokyo from time to time that fall and later, I already looked filthy and half-mad. I know exactly how wretched I looked time and again during that period. I cannot forget. Of everyone in Japan, I was now the lowest of the low. I would go to Tokyo to borrow ten or twenty yen. There were incidents: I would cry right in front of some magazine editor, while another would scold me for begging too persistently. There were some signs that my manuscripts might make money. Through the good offices of friends, two or three stories from the "testament" in that paper bag had already been published in good magazines while I was in the hospital. The words of attack and the words of support that came in response were too much for me; confused and uneasy, I lost my head, while my need for drugs increased radically. Everything hurt so much that I would shamelessly head for some magazine, seek an interview with an editor, or even the company president, and pester him for an advance. I was so crazed with my own pain that I couldn't see the natural truth: other people too were living at the limits of their strength. I sold off every last one of the works in the paper bag. Now I had nothing left to sell. Nor could I immediately do a new story. All the materials had been exhausted, and I couldn't write anything. The literary establishment at that time pointed its finger at me and gave its critique: "Talent, but no virtue"; but I myself believed that it was, "The bud of virtue, and yet no talent." I had nothing of what they call literary genius in me. I knew no other way but to go on crashing into things. A savage. I was so scrupulously aware of the rigid demands of morality—the requirement that one feel an eternal sense of obligation for bed and board—that life became unbearable, and in desperation I would do one scandalous thing after another. I had been brought up in a fiercely conservative family where borrowing money was the worst sin. Trying to escape from debts, I created even greater ones. I goaded myself on: Those drugs—to forget the shame of debts, take more, more. The pharmacy bill only got larger. There were times I would walk the Ginza in broad daylight, weeping and sniffing to myself. I wanted money. I borrowed money from nearly twenty people, as if I were plundering them. I could not die. I would die after I had carefully paid back all my debts, I thought.

People began to avoid me. A year after we had moved to Funabashi, in the fall of 1936, I was put into a car and bundled off to a certain hospital in Itabashi, Tokyo. I slept the night there, and when I awoke and looked around, I found I was in a mental hospital.

I stayed a month, and finally one clear autumn afternoon I was permitted to leave. I got into the car with H, who had come to meet me.

It was the first time we had seen each other in a month, but both of us were silent. The car started up, and after a while she spoke.

"You've stopped that medicine, right?" She sounded angry.

I said the sole thing I had learned in the hospital: "I don't trust anything anymore."

"I see." H, ever practical, seemed to understand me in some kind of monetary sense; she nodded deeply and said, "People are not to be relied upon."

"I don't trust you either, you know."

She looked out of sorts.

She had gotten rid of the Funabashi house while I was in the hospital, and now she was living in a one-room apartment in Amanuma Sanchōme. I settled down there. Requests for manuscripts had come from two magazines. I began writing immediately, the night I got out of the hospital. I completed two stories and took the proceeds from their sale with me to Atami, where for a month I drowned myself in sake. I had no idea of what I should do from there on. This was the third year I had been able to squeeze a monthly stipend from my brother, but the mountainous pile of debts I had had before entering the hospital still remained just as it was. My plan was to write something good at Atami and pay back at least the most pressing debts with the money I got from it. But I could not bear the bleakness all around me, and far from writing, all I did was drink. Over and over I felt from the bottom of my heart that I was no good. At Atami I even increased my debts. No matter what I did, it was no good. I was in a state of total rout.

I returned to the Amanuma apartment and laid out my filthy body, from which all hope had fled. I was now twenty-nine years old. I was nothing. I owned only the clothes on my back, and H too had just what she wore. I thought, this must be about rock bottom. I clung to my brother's monthly allowance, and lived silently, like an insect.

But that was not yet quite the bottom. Early that spring, a certain Western-style painter came for a totally unexpected conference, something I could never have foreseen. He was a very close friend. I listened to what he was saying, and felt I was suffocating. H had already made a sad slip. Suddenly I remembered how she had looked in the car the day I had gotten out of that ill-omened hospital, when she had been so upset by my trivial, abstruse words. I had caused her a lot of trouble so far, but I was intending to stay with her for as long as I lived. Since I expressed my love clumsily, neither H nor the painter had paid any attention to it. Although he had now come to me for advice, I could think of nothing to do. I don't want to hurt anyone, I thought. I was the oldest of the three of us. I was hoping that at least I would stay calm and figure out some splendid solution for us; but I was so upset by the enormity of the situation that I wandered about confusedly until finally H and the man insulted me. There was nothing I could do. Before long, the painter began to get more and more evasive. In agony as I was, I still felt sorry for H. She seemed to have already made up her mind to die. Whenever things became unbearable, I too thought of dying. We would die together. After all,

God would forgive us. We left on a journey, as close as if we were brother and sister. Minakami hot spring. That night, we attempted suicide in the mountains. I must not let H die, I thought, and made efforts to assure that. She lived. I failed splendidly to die, too. We had tried drugs.

At last we parted. I did not have the courage to detain her beyond this. I don't mind that people say I discarded her. Even if I had pretended to bear it, with a show of so-called humanitarianism, I felt I could predict what my life would be from then on: day after day of sheer hell. H went back by herself to her mother's place. No one knew where the painter was.

Left alone in the apartment, I began a solitary existence. I learned to drink rotgut. I lost some teeth. I became quite unpleasant-looking. I moved to a boarding house near the apartment. It was the lowest class of boarding house. I thought that was just right for me. Often I would drink alone in the tiny room, go out when I was drunk, and lean against the gate pillars muttering some foolish song like

Here is my farewell to life;
I stand beside the gate,
The moonlight fleets across the withered plain
And the pines are alone.

No one kept me company but two or three intimate, inseparable friends. Gradually it became clear even to me what I looked like to the rest of the world. I was an arrogant, ignorant decadent, or an imbecile, or the lowest of cunning sensualists, a fraud of fake genius; I lived in the lap of luxury; when I was strapped for money, I would intimidate my family in the country with a suicide farce. I abused my chaste wife as if she were a dog or a cat, and finally drove her away. There were other legends passed around among men of the world with derision or ill will or anger; I was ostracized and treated as a defective. When I noticed this, I became reluctant to stir a foot outside the boarding house. There were remotely enjoyable nights, when I had no sake and would read detective stories while munching on salty rice crackers. Not a single request for a story came from magazines or newspapers. And I didn't want to write anything. I couldn't write. However, although no one pressed me on the debts I had contracted during my illness, I suffered over them even at night in my dreams. I was now thirty years old.

What was the turning point? I had to live, I thought. Was it the misfortunes of my family back home that gave me that natural strength? My brother was elected to the legislature, and right afterwards he was accused of election irregularities. I deeply respected my brother's strict, upright character. Surely he must have gotten into bad company. My older sister died. My nephew died. A younger cousin died. Rumors of these things came to me on the wind. For quite some time I had been totally out of touch with the

people at home. Bit by bit, my family's continuing bad luck began to force me up from prostration to a sitting position. I had been embarrassed at how large our family home was. I had grown desperate under the handicap of being a rich man's son. The hateful, frightening feeling of being unfairly blessed had made me mean-spirited from childhood, had made me weary of life. I believed that rich men's children would end up in their own circle of hell. Since it was cowardice to flee, I strove to die in style, like an evil child. But one night when I looked about me, I found that far from being a rich man's son, I was among the poorest of the poor, who hadn't even enough to wear. Even the money I was getting from home was to be cut off this year. I already had been removed from the family register. Furthermore, this family, where I was born and grew up, was now in the depths of unhappiness. No longer did I have any special inherent rights for which I had to apologize to people. On the contrary, all I had were minuses. And I realized one other thing, which I must cite as another crucial factor: while I had lain around in that room losing even the will to die, my body had grown curiously and perceptibly healthy.

Now, there are many things one can present as explanations for a man's turning point—age, war, shake-up of historical perspective, hatred of laziness, humility toward literature, recognition that there is a God—but they are all inadequate, somehow. No matter how great a degree of precision such explanations hope to achieve, somewhere one can sense a crack, and the scent of a fiction comes through. Maybe this is because people do not always choose a path by considering this, contemplating that. Many times, a man simply finds himself walking in a different field before he realizes it.

Early in the summer of my thirtieth year, for the first time, I reached a true aspiration to devote my life to a writing career. To be sure, it was a late vocation. In that little boarding-house room, with nothing you could call furniture in it, I wrote with all my energy. If there was some dinner left on my tray, I furtively packed it up and hid it away to provide against hunger as I worked late into the night. This time I was not writing a "last testament." I was writing in order to live. One mentor cheered me on. No matter how others unanimously hated or derided me, this older writer alone had constantly, unchangingly, secretly supported my spirit. I had to repay that precious trust. Finally a work named "Discarding the Old Woman" was finished.³ It told honestly what had happened when H and I had gone to Minakami hot spring to die. This sold immediately. There was one editor who had not forgotten, who had been waiting for my work. I did not spend

³The title refers to legends of Mount Obasute (Ubasute in some nonstandard dialects and the pronunciation Dazai used), in which old people were abandoned to die. Although versions of these legends exist throughout Japan, there is no evidence that such a practice actually occurred.

what I got for it foolishly. I first went to the pawnshop and redeemed a suit; then, sprucing myself up, I set out on a trip. I went to the mountains of Kōshū. I made an even more radical decision, to begin a long novel. I was in Kōshū for a full year. I did not complete the novel, but I published more than ten short stories. Voices of support came from all quarters. The literary establishment is a good place to be, I thought. Happy are those who can spend their whole lives there, I thought. The next year, early in January of 1939, I made a conventional arranged marriage through the good offices of that same mentor. No, it wasn't conventional: I celebrated the wedding without a penny to my name. We settled in a little rented house with only two rooms, on the outskirts of Kōfu. The rent was six yen fifty sen a month. I published two collections of short stories in a row. I put a little money aside. Bit by bit, I settled the debts that had so weighed on me, but that was quite a job.

In early fall of that year, we moved to the village of Mitaka, outside Tokyo. Now I was beyond the city of Tokyo. My Tokyo life had come to an end when I left that boarding house in Ogikubo and set out for Kōshū with my one briefcase.

Now I live by my writing. When I am on a trip, I write in the inn register, without equivocation, Occupation: Writer. If I am in pain, I rarely mention it. Even if it is pain that outmatches anything before, I feign a smile. The fools say I've gone soft. Every day, the evening sun over the Musashino Plain is huge. It trembles and seethes, and then sets. I spoke to my wife as I ate my lonely dinner in the little room from which one can see the evening sun. "This is the kind of man I am. I shall never be a great success, nor shall I be rich. But I will somehow or other preserve this house." At that moment, I suddenly hit upon "Eight Views of Tokyo." The past swirled around in my heart like a revolving picture lantern.

We are outside the city limits of Tokyo here, but since the nearby Inokashira Park is counted as one of Tokyo's famous sites, I took the liberty of including the evening sun of Musashino Plain in the eight views of Tokyo, anyway. Trying to establish the other seven, I flipped through the album in my own heart. But now what became art was not the scenery of Tokyo; it was me within that landscape. Had art deceived me? Had I deceived art? My conclusion: Art *is* me.

The spring rains in Totsuka. The twilight in Hongō. The festivals in Kanda. The first snows in Kashiwagi. The fireworks in Hatchōbori. The full moon in Shiba. The cicadas in Amanuma. Lightning in the Ginza. The autumn flowers at the mental hospital in Itabashi. The morning mists in Ogikubo. The evening sun in Musashino. The dark flowers of memory scattered and danced, and wouldn't fall into place. Then again, I thought, it would be vulgar to organize everything and force it unreasonably into just eight views. In the meantime, this spring and summer, I came across two more views.

On April 4 this year, I visited my teacher, Mr. S, in Koishikawa. I had caused Mr. S a great deal of trouble during my illness five years earlier. In the end, he had reprimanded me severely, and I had been practically excommunicated. But this year I had gone to make a New Year's call, and had given him my deep apologies and respects. Since then I had been out of touch, but that day I went to ask him to be the sponsor for a banquet to celebrate the publication of a close friend's book. He was home. He acceded to my request, and then I asked him some questions about painting, and the writings of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. Among other things, he said, with his customary heavy tone, "I had feared that I had treated you badly, but now that things have worked out better than expected, I find myself pleased." We went together in a car to Ueno to see an exhibition of Western-style painting at the Museum of Fine Arts. Many of the paintings were mediocre. I stopped in front of one. Finally Mr. S too came over and looked very closely at it.

"Bland, isn't it?" he said innocently.

"It's no good." I too spoke clearly.

It was by H's Western painter.

After we left the museum, we entertained ourselves for the rest of the day by going to Kayabachō to see a preview of a film entitled "Beautiful Struggle," and then going on to the Ginza for tea. Evening came; Mr. S told me he would return by bus from Shimbashi Station, and so I walked to the station with him. Along the way, I told him my plan for "Eight Views of Tokyo."

"The evening sun in Musashino is big, you know."

Mr. S stopped on the bridge in front of Shimbashi Station, and said quietly, "That could be a picture." He pointed toward the Ginza bridge.

"Yes." I too stopped and gazed out.

"It could be a picture," he repeated, as if speaking to himself.

It was not the scene we were looking at that I wanted to include in my "Eight Views of Tokyo," but rather the sight of Mr. S and his expelled student.

About two months later, I collected an even brighter scene. One day we got a special delivery letter from my wife's younger sister. "The day has finally come, and T will be leaving tomorrow. We'll be able to see him briefly at Shiba Park. Come to Shiba Park at nine tomorrow morning. Please have my brother-in-law tell T what I feel; he can do it well. I'm stupid, and so I haven't said anything to him." The sister was twenty-two, but she was small and looked like a child. Last year a marriage had been arranged between her and T, but right after the official exchange of engagement presents, T had been drafted and was now in a certain Tokyo regiment. T had been in uniform the one time I had met him, and I talked to him about half an hour. He was a bright, well-mannered young man. Now, apparently, he was finally to be leaving for the front the next day. Not two hours after the first special

delivery, another one came from the sister: "When I thought it over carefully, I decided the earlier request I had made to you was very forward. It's better that you don't say anything to T. Just see him off, please." My wife and I both burst out laughing. We could well imagine the whirl she was in, all by herself. Already she had been at T's parents' house some two or three days, helping out.

The next morning we got up early and headed for Shiba Park. In the inner compound of Zōjōji Temple a large crowd had gathered to see off their men. There was an old man wearing a khaki veteran's uniform who was walking around, busily elbowing his way through the crowd. I grabbed him and asked where T's unit would be. He answered that it would be stopping in front of the great main gate for a five-minute rest and then would be starting off again. We left the compound and went over to the gate to await the arrival of T's unit. Finally the sister came along with T's parents; she was carrying a little flag. This was the first time I had met his parents. They were not yet really relatives, and I am socially inept anyway; I didn't give them a full greeting, but exchanged light, polite glances with them, and started talking to the sister. "How are you? Are you calm?"

"It's nothing!" She displayed a sunny smile.

"What's she up to?" My wife frowned. "Grinning like that."

There was a whole crowd of people seeing T off. Six big banners with his name were lined up in front of the main gate. The men and women who worked at his family's factory had taken the day to see him off. I stood to the side of the gate, apart from everyone. I was ashamed. T's family was wealthy. I was missing teeth, my clothes were disreputable. I was not wearing formal clothes, I was not even wearing a hat. I was just an impoverished writer. Surely T's parents were thinking, Here are our son's fiancée's dirty relatives. When the sister came over to talk to me, I chased her away, saying, "Today you play an important part, so go stay with his father." T's unit still hadn't come. Numbers of sight-seeing buses full of girls on school excursions passed before us. The names of the girls' schools were written on paper strips pasted to the bus doors. Among them was the name of a girls' school in my hometown. My oldest brother's daughter would be going to that school. Maybe she was on the bus. Maybe she was innocently looking at me slouching in front of this famous gate, one of the sights of Tokyo, not knowing as she passed that it was her crazy uncle, I thought. Off and on, about twenty buses went by the gate, and each time the guide would point straight at me and start to explain something. At first I feigned unconcern, but I ended up trying out different poses. I folded my arms composedly like the statue of Balzac. As I did so, the feeling came over me that I myself had become one of the famous sights of Tokyo. One o'clock approached, and the cry arose, They've come, they've come! Before long, trucks full of soldiers arrived in

front of the gate. T could drive Datsuns, and so he was riding in the cab of the truck. I looked on vacantly from behind the mass of people.

"Brother!" The sister came over, whispering, and poked me hard in the back. I straightened up, to find that T, now dismounted from the cab, seemed to have discovered me right away, standing at the very back of the crowd, and he was greeting me with a salute. I doubted for a moment anyway, and hesitated, looking around, but there was no question, it was I that he was saluting. I braced myself and, pushing the crowd aside, marched right up to T with my sister-in-law.

"You have nothing to worry about here. This sister of mine is a scatter-brain, but she certainly knows a woman's most important concern. You haven't the slightest worry. We will all answer for her." Strangely for me, I spoke without the slightest smile. When I looked at the sister, her face was raised and she looked tense. T's face flushed a little and then he saluted again.

"And you—is there anything else you want to add?" Now I laughed, as I asked her.

"That's enough," she said, looking downward.

Soon afterward, the departure signal came. I went again furtively to hide myself in the crowd, but again the sister pushed me from behind; this time we made it right up to the cab. Only T's parents were standing there.

"Go with an easy heart, and come back to us," I cried in a loud voice. T's honored father abruptly whirled around and looked at me. A flicker of displeasure flashed in his eyes, as if to say, Who is this crazy intruder? But this time I did not flinch. Was it not the affirmative insight that in the ultimate stand of human pride, something within me had suffered almost unto death? I was 4F, and poor to boot, but now I did not hold back. The Wonder of Tokyo raised his voice even louder, and cried out, "You have nothing more to worry about!" Should any difficulty arise in their marriage from here on, I could be their unfailing, final resource; since I was an outlaw, I didn't care about public opinion.

With this last view of the great gate of Zōjōji, I felt that the conception of my story was complete, like the full moon of a bow drawn to its limit. Some days after that, I set out optimistically for a journey to Izu, taking with me a large map of the whole city of Tokyo, pen, ink, and manuscript paper. Since my arrival at the Izu hot spring inn, how has it turned out? Ten days have now passed since I set out, but I seem to be still at this inn. Doing whatever it is I'm doing.

Going Home

“Going Home” (Kikyōrai) first appeared in the second part of the November 1942 issue of the magazine Yakumo, which was published in June 1943. It was included in the 1944 short story collection Kajitsu. For a discussion, see pp. 133–36.

It’s only with the help of other people that I’ve managed to get by, and things will probably continue that way. Everyone has taken good care of me, while I’ve just gone on looking unconcerned. And without a doubt, I’ll continue to look as unconcerned. Yet I realize that there’s probably no possible way, from now until the day I die, for me to pay back the great debts of obligation I owe. That hurts.

There have been so many people who have helped me, who have done so much for me.

Here, I’m planning to write only about Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata; but I do hope to write about others to whom I owe so much, when I get to be a better writer. I’m still not very good, and so I feel that somehow I’d not be able to do justice to complicated relationships; but it also seems to me that I should be able to be fairly faithful to what happened with Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata, even with my current skills. Because, you see, we had on the whole a rather innocent, straightforward relationship. Of course, it goes without saying that one must practice scrupulous caution when depicting real, private people—caution, because they don’t have any recourse and can’t revise my depictions of them.

I must not write lies.

Both Mr. Nakabata and Mr. Kita are somewhere around fifty, with Mr. Nakabata maybe a couple of years the younger. Mr. Nakabata seems to have been much loved by my late father. He was the chief clerk in a dry goods store in a town called Goshogawara, some six miles from our town, and apparently he took care of some other matters for our family, which brought him to the house all the time. My father used to tease him and call him The Log, because there was nothing exciting about him; even as he neared thirty, he’d still not done anything about getting married. Finally, with my father’s help, he married someone who was distantly related to our family. After a

while, Mr. Nakabata set up his own dry goods store, and it prospered, and now he is one of the leading figures in Goshogawara. These past ten years, I have heaped a tremendous load of trouble and worries on the whole Nakabata family.

When I was about ten years old, visiting my aunt in Goshogawara, I was startled to hear a loud voice calling me, as I walked alone through the town. "Shū-chaa!" said the voice.¹ It was Mr. Nakabata, calling out from the back of his clothing store. It was so unexpected that I really was startled. I hadn't known until then that he worked at a clothing store like that. He was sitting there in the shadowy shop, clapping his hands and beckoning to me, but I was so embarrassed to hear my name yelled out loudly that I turned and fled. My real name, by the way, is Shūji.

I had another experience of being upset by having Mr. Nakabata call out to me, this time when I was in high school. I think it was when I was in the second year at Aomori High. One morning, I was heading for school, and as I passed a small troop of soldiers, a tremendously loud voice called out, "Shū-chaa!" I was stunned. There was Mr. Nakabata, walking along with a rifle on his shoulder, his cap tilted back on his head. He was probably doing reserve guard training or something. I never expected to find Mr. Nakabata a soldier, and I was flustered. He was smiling cheerfully, and he made as if to drop out of line. I got more and more upset, a flush mounted in my face, right to my ears, and again I fled. I could hear the other soldiers laughing.

I shall always treasure these two memories of Mr. Nakabata calling out to me.

I came to Tokyo when I entered university, in 1930. From then on Mr. Nakabata became indispensable to me. He was established in his own store by then, and would come to Tokyo to order his stock; each time he would secretly stop by to see me. At the time I was living with a woman, and all communication with my home had been cut off, but my aging mother would ask Mr. Nakabata privately to bridge the gap as her agent. I, and the woman, too, basked in Mr. Nakabata's generosity, and we would say all kinds of things and make immoderate demands of all kinds. I have in my possession a document that clearly illustrates how things stood at the time, so I shall present it. It is a letter that comes near the end of one of my works, "A Fictional Spring," and of course it is a fictional letter. But even though the facts of the situation may have been different, I think it gives quite a true picture of what the atmosphere was like in those days. It is in the form of a letter sent to me by someone (*not* Mr. Nakabata); but of course there is not a shred of actual fact in it, and I present it only with repeated reminders that Mr. Nakabata never sent me such a peculiar letter—the whole thing is just a

¹In this story Dazai, as he explains, uses his own real name, Shūji, for his narrator. "Shū-chaa" is a Tsugaru diminutive for the standard "Shū-chan" (formally, "Shūji-san").

story that I made up. It is enough that you understand what an impossible troublemaker I was.

In accordance with your mother's instructions of the twenty-third of this month, I forwarded to you one package of rice cakes and salted fish for the New Year, and one container of pickles. Apparently, according to your letter, the pickles have not arrived. It is a great inconvenience to you, but I beg that you inquire at your station and please send me a report. I'd appreciate your conveying this information to your wife.

Now a few words from myself. This year will mark the twenty-eighth year that I have had the favor of your family's attention, myself a poor tradesman, from when I was sixteen until this, my forty-fourth year. I am an ignorant man, but although it is a presumptuous indiscretion on my part, and I know that this is not the time for me to speak some few poor words of advice, nevertheless, with trepidation and hesitation, I beg leave to give my opinions briefly on a subject that will be painful to your ears.

According to what I hear, your vicious habit of borrowing money has once again emerged; you have even made requests of noted gentlemen whom you don't even know, you have importuned like a howling mongrel, and on top of that, you've accepted being disinherited, and you've said without the slightest trace of shame that there is nothing wrong with borrowing money, that as long as you return it as promised, there's no harm to the lender, and it has saved your life, so what is wrong with it? And I have heard that because of this, the other day you threw an ashtray at your wife, and broke two glass doors. When I hear these stories, even if only the half of them is true, I cannot hold back my secret tears.

I know that to you literary people a pedigree that includes membership in the House of Peers and an Order of Merit (Second Class) is nothing to be proud of, and that it is simply musty and old-fashioned; but thoughts of your incomparable mother, bereft after your father's death, compels someone as insignificant as myself to say the following: I think it is terrible that you say, "I was the one to be disinherited and stricken from the family register, and driven from home; now I'm the only one they abuse, and thanks to that, things have quieted down everywhere else." They have established respectable families themselves, so why should your elder brother and sister say mean things about you now? I do find such twisted reasoning senseless. The other day I received a heartfelt lament from your elder sister Kikuko who has married into the Yamagita family. This makes me feel as if I were playacting, but I will take on the role of Masaoka.² If it were someone I didn't like, say, even someone in my master's family, I would make my excuses and decline to help, but it is not just I. Your sister Kikuko, too, would put herself in an awkward position with her new family, I know, and would give service above and beyond the call of duty, in order to help you. So from today, please, please, stop trying to borrow from outsiders; if by chance you can't stop yourself, I beg you to come to me, and I will take on as much of the burden as I can. It would become too large an issue if your elder brother were to know about it, so for the

²Character in *Meiboku sendai hagi* (The Disputed Succession, 1777), by Naka Kamesuke; Masaoka is a nursemaid who sacrifices her own son to protect the young heir of her lord.

time being I will take care of it, and let us leave things at that. I will say it again: I wouldn't give advice to someone I didn't like. With these matters in mind, I pray that you take care of yourself and grow in self-respect.

In early summer of 1936, my first collection of short stories was published, and to celebrate the event my friends threw a party at the Seiyōken Restaurant in Ueno. By chance, Mr. Nakabata had come to Tokyo three days earlier, and he stopped by at my place. I begged him for a complete set of formal clothes: a linen kimono of the best quality, an overjacket with my family crest, summer *hakama*,³ formal belt, long kimono underwear, formal white socks—the whole thing. Mr. Nakabata was upset. There wasn't enough time. You could get the belt and the *hakama* easily enough, but you'd have to choose the fabric for the kimono and underwear and then have them made up. I brushed aside all his arguments and countered with my own groundless self-confidence. We could do it, we'd ask Mitsukoshi, or some other big clothier, they could do it overnight, they could put ten or twelve seamstresses on a single order, so they could get it done fast, there was nothing that couldn't be done in Tokyo! Finally, Mr. Nakabata said he'd try. On the morning of the third day, the day of the banquet, my order was delivered by a certain clothier. Everything was of the best quality. I'll probably never wear such good stuff again. I put it on and went to the banquet. The overjacket was a bit too arty a touch; it broke my heart not to wear it, but I didn't. The next day I took everything to the pawnshop. And eventually I lost it all.

I wanted very badly to have Mr. Nakabata and Mr. Kita come to the party, but despite my urging neither of them came. Maybe they had reservations. Maybe they were too busy to be able to find the time. I wanted to show them my good sponsors, my friends, to set their hearts at ease, but maybe that too was just self-indulgent vanity. If I'd shown them such a celebration, far from setting their minds at ease, it might only have worried them more about what was going to happen to me.

I gave Mr. Kita enough worries, too. Mr. Kita was a Western-style tailor in the Shinagawa area of Tokyo. But he wasn't just an ordinary tailor. He was quite different. His house was an ordinary house, without a sign or show window. In a single room in the back, two master apprentices worked at clattering sewing machines. Mr. Kita worked only on orders for special customers. He had the willful temperament of a master craftsman. There was something about him that would make him, as we say, incapable of immoderation even in the pursuit of wealth and fame. My father and older brother always had their suits made by him. When I came to the university in Tokyo, it was chiefly Mr. Kita who kept me under surveillance. And all I did was deceive him. I did such awful things, one after another, that finally I was

³Skirt-like trousers worn over kimono.

locked up on the second floor of his house and forced rather into the position of having to live off him. My brother at home got so sick of my irresponsibility that from time to time he'd cut off my allowance, but each time, Mr. Kita would get involved and negotiate for me to get him to extend it for another year. It finally happened that my woman companion and I separated, and that occasion too caused Mr. Kita a great deal of trouble. I can't even count how many incidents there were. To tell you the truth, I caused enough trouble to supply material for twenty novels. And while all this was going on, there I was, looking unconcerned, just getting by with other people's help, not even trying to handle any of the details of my own life by myself.

At New Year's of my thirtieth year, I married my present wife, and the whole wedding ceremony was managed thanks to Mr. Nakabata and Mr. Kita. At the time, I was practically penniless. I had borrowed the twenty yen for the engagement money from one of my *sempai*.⁴ There was just no way that I could scrape together the money for the wedding expenses. I was renting a little house in Kōfu, and on the day of the wedding I headed for the house of this same *sempai*, dressed in ordinary clothes. The arrangement was that I would meet my bride there, exchange the cups of wedding sake under his sponsorship, and then return to Kōfu with my bride. Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata would be kind enough to stand in as substitutes for my family. I left Kōfu early in the morning and arrived at my *sempai*'s house around noon. I was just in my ordinary clothes, without a haircut, without *hakama*. All I owned was what I wore, and I had almost nothing in my wallet. My *sempai* was in the study, working quietly. (I say *sempai*, but what I really mean is *sensei*.⁵ He hates to see his name appear in stories and essays, so I am using this awkward euphemism.) He looked as if he had completely forgotten that there was to be a wedding. As he gathered his papers together, he lectured me on the trees in the garden. Then suddenly, as if he'd just noticed, he said, "Your kimonos have come—from Mr. Nakabata. They look pretty good."

There it was, totally unexpected: a complete set of black formal wear, and an additional striped silk kimono. I was stunned. I had been thinking that all there'd be was that gesture from my *sempai*, the exchange of wedding cups, and then I'd simply take my bride back with me. Mr. Nakabata and Mr. Kita finally arrived, both of them laughing. Mr. Nakabata was wearing national militia uniform, Mr. Kita a morning coat.

"Come on, let's begin!" Mr. Nakabata was excited.

⁴A *sempai* is one's "senior," someone who precedes one in school, career, age, experience, skill in an art, etc.—a term more indicative of relative position and collegueship than of actual respect. "Engagement money" is a prenuptial exchange of "earned money" or property.

⁵"Teacher," a title of respect used for teachers, artists, doctors, writers, or any person to whom, deservedly or undeservedly, intellectual or moral authority is imputed.

The dinner was a proper, formal wedding banquet. They had me put on my formal kimono. They had a picture taken.

"Shūji, come here a minute." Mr. Nakabata led me to the next room. Mr. Kita was waiting there for us.

They sat me down, and then they placed themselves in front of me and made a formal bow.

"Congratulations," they said. Then Mr. Nakabata continued seriously: "We're sorry today's dinner is such a poor one, but the two of us have tried to do the best we could for you, so please accept it in good spirit. We've caused you so much trouble through all these years, and we'd like to take this opportunity to pay back even a little of our debt."

I will never forget this.

"Mr. Nakabata did all the work." Mr. Kita always gave the credit to him. "He ran around to all your relatives and got them to contribute for the clothes and then had them made. Come, let's see you do it up right."

Late that evening, the time came for us to leave on the train from Shinjuku, and—I'm not joking—all I had in my wallet was about two yen. When I was out of money, I was really out. This time I had planned to ask to get back half of the twenty yen engagement money I'd given. If I had the ten yen, I would be able to buy two tickets to Kōfu.

As we left my *sempai's* house, I pulled Mr. Kita aside and asked him, "I don't suppose I can get back half of the engagement money? I was counting on it."

Mr. Kita blew up. "What are you saying? That's what's wrong with you. What a thing to think of! That's why you're no good, if you can say something like that!" With that, he whipped out several notes from his wallet and slipped them to me.

But when we reached Shinjuku, and I got ready to buy the tickets, we found that my bride's elder sister and brother-in-law had already bought them for us (second class tickets, at that), and I didn't need any money at all.

I tried to return the money to Mr. Kita on the platform, but he waved me away—"It's a bon voyage present." It was a beautiful gesture.

After the wedding, I made no more major errors; and a year later we left Kōfu and got a three-room house in Mitaka, a suburb of Tokyo, where I devoted myself to writing; and then two years after that, our daughter was born. Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata were delighted, and brought splendid birth presents.

They both seem to feel somewhat easier about me these days, and they aren't always dropping in to give me instructions, the way they used to. But I haven't changed. I still feel the same pain, each day still brings me to the end of my rope. And I feel so alone, now that they have stopped coming. I really

wish they would come. One rainy day last summer, Mr. Kita dropped by unexpectedly, wearing his galoshes.

I took him right away to my regular restaurant near Mitaka Station. The waitress came over to our table and kept calling me *sensei*, which made me feel rather awkward, right there in front of Mr. Kita. He pretended not to notice my confusion, and asked the girl with a grin, "And is Dazai Sensei good to you?" Naturally, she had no way of knowing that this was the man who used to supervise me, and she joked back, "Oh yes, *real* good." I was furious. Mr. Kita had come that day with a proposition. Well, rather than a proposition, it might be more accurately described as an order. Wouldn't I go back to visit my family home with him? My home was at the northernmost end of the main island, near the center of the Tsugaru plain. I hadn't seen it for ten years. Ten years earlier, I had caused a certain incident, and since then I hadn't been able to show my face there.

"Has permission come down from my brother?" We sat at the restaurant, drinking beer. "It hasn't, has it?"

"Well now, really, think of his position—you know that he couldn't very well allow you yet. That's why I'm doing it completely on my own initiative. Don't worry, it'll be all right."

"No . . . sounds dangerous." I felt oppressed. "Suppose we go sweeping in, and get turned away at the door, and some great scene erupts—then it would really backfire on us. I think we should just leave things as they are, a little longer, you know."

"That won't happen." He was bursting with self-confidence. "If I bring you, it'll be all right. Look, this is the situation: I don't mean any disrespect, but remember, your mother is seventy now, and they say she's really been failing these days. You never can tell when something might happen to her. It would be unfortunate if things still stood as they are now. The situation would be too complicated then."

"I suppose you're right." I was depressed.

"See? I told you so. That's why you should take this chance to have me bring you along, and then you can see the whole family. This way, you've gotten together again, and then no matter what happened, you could come running without a second thought."

"Yes, that is, if it works . . ." I was terribly uneasy. No matter what he said, I was totally pessimistic about this proposition of his. I had a premonition that it would blow up. I have, after all, done some absolutely awful things these ten years in Tokyo. There's no reason in the world I should ever be forgiven.

"Don't worry—it'll all work out!" Mr. Kita was in high spirits, all by himself. "Listen, you go as Yagyū Jūbei,⁶ and I'll play the part of Okubo

⁶Famous swordsman (1607–1650).

Hikozaemon.⁷ Your brother will be the Lord of Tamba. It's bound to work. Not even the Lord of Tamba can hold out when Hikoza wants to have his own way!"

"But . . ." Weak-kneed Jūbei was hopelessly skeptical. "Wouldn't it just be better not to want to have your own way? I'm not qualified to be Jūbei yet, and I suspect that if Okubo misses his footing, the whole thing will blow up."

I was inalterably afraid of my stuffy, quick-tempered brother. I could hardly joke about him as Lord of Tamba!

"I accept full responsibility," he said enthusiastically. "Whatever the result, I accept full responsibility. Leave everything up to old Hikoza, and trust me to be firm as a rock."

I couldn't resist any further.

Mr. Kita moved fast. He said we were to take the express from Ueno at seven the next night. I left it all up to him. That night, after parting from him, I went to a cafe in Mitaka and got totally drunk.

At five the next afternoon, we met at Ueno Station and went to have supper at an underground cafeteria. Mr. Kita was wearing white linen. I had on an unlined silk kimono, and had stashed away a raw silk kimono and *hakama* in my valise. As we drank our beer, Mr. Kita spoke.

"The wind has changed." He thought for a moment and then went on, "The thing is, your brother is in Tokyo right now."

"Well, then, there's no reason for the trip!" I felt disappointed.

"No, remember, your purpose in going home was not to see your brother. It's enough for you to be able to see your mother. That's what I think."

"But doesn't it look sneaky if we go barging into the house while he's away?"

"Not at all. I met with your brother last night and told him a bit about it."

"You told him you were bringing me along with you?"

"No, of course I couldn't say anything like that. If I had, he'd have had to tell me what a difficult spot it put him in. No matter what he really felt, his position would compel him to take that stand. That's why I didn't tell him anything. If I had, I would have messed everything up. All I told him was that I was going to Tōhoku on some business, planning to leave on the seven o'clock express, and that while I was there I might take the liberty of stopping by at the house in Tsugaru. That's enough. Actually, it's even better that your brother won't be there."

"When you said you were going to visit Aomori, my brother was delighted, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he said he would call the house to give them instructions to show me around, but I told him not to."

⁷Faithful retainer of the early Tokugawa shoguns (1560-1639).

Mr. Kita was stubborn, and he had never once been to visit the family house. He hated to have people put themselves out for him, or take any trouble for him.

"When is he going back? Oh, no, not on today's train—"

"Of course not. Don't try to turn everything into a game. This time he came with the mayor of the town. Some complicated business, it seems."

My brother did come to Tokyo from time to time. However, never once did we happen to meet.

"Now that I'll probably not be seeing him at home, all the challenge has gone out of it." I had wanted to meet my brother. And then, I had wanted to make a long, silent, formal bow.

"Don't be silly. You can see your brother any time after this. It's your mother who's at issue, not him. Remember, she's seventy, is it? No, sixty-nine?"

"Do you suppose I can see my grandmother, too? She'd be near ninety, I guess. And there's my aunt in Goshogawara . . ." Now that I thought of it, there were lots of people I wanted to see.

"Of course, you'll see them all." He spoke resolutely. He certainly did look as if he could be relied upon.

I began to look forward to this trip home with pleasure. I wanted to see my next oldest brother, Eiji, and my older sisters. It had been ten years since I'd seen any of them. And the house—I wanted to see the house. The house where I'd been born and had grown up.

We got on the seven o'clock train. Before that, Mr. Kita sent a telegram to Mr. Nakabata in Goshogawara: "LEAVING SEVEN KITA."

That's all. Apparently, Mr. Nakabata would know what it meant. Mental telepathy.

"If I were to let him know straight out that I'm bringing you, that would make his position difficult, too. This way, he won't know anything at all, and come to the station to meet me, and then, for the first time, he'll see you, and he'll be surprised. If we don't do it that way, he'll have trouble with your brother later. He might be asked why he didn't stop you, if he knew about it. But this way, he won't know. If we do it this way, he can say that the first he knew was when he came to meet me at the station, and it was a total surprise, and then as long as you'd come all this way from Tokyo, he might as well let you see your mother . . . and that way his responsibility will be light. I'll be responsible for all the rest. And since I'm Okubo Hikozaemon, I don't care if the Lord of Tamba does get angry at me!" It was a most ingenious explanation.

"But Mr. Nakabata *does* know, doesn't he?"

"That's why it's so ambiguous. 'Leaving seven.' That's enough." Okubo's

plot was a little too intricate for me to follow completely. But anyway, I left it all up to him. Far be it from me to complain.

We boarded the train. Second class. It was fairly crowded. We finally found seats, on opposite sides of the aisle. Mr. Kita whipped out his glasses and started reading the newspaper. He was totally composed. I began to read a Georges Simenon detective novel. I generally try to read detective stories whenever I have a long train ride. A train is not the place to make one feel like reading something like Kant's *Prolegomena*.

Mr. Kita passed the newspaper over to me. I looked, to find that a review of my *A New 'Hamlet'*, which had just been published, was prominently spread over almost three columns. It was actually a laudatory appreciation, by one of my *sempai*; in fact, the praise was a bit excessive. Mr. Kita and I looked at each other, and grinned happily. I began to feel that this would be a splendid trip.

It was about eight the next morning that we arrived in Aomori. It was the middle of August, but quite cool even so. A mist-like rain was falling. We changed to the Ōu line, and bought boxed lunches.

"How much?"

"— sen!"

"What?"

"— sen!"

I could understand the "sen" part, but couldn't tell how many. Finally, on the third try, I got it: sixty sen. I was stunned.

"Mr. Kita, did you understand what the vendor was saying?"

Mr. Kita shook his head seriously.

"That's what I thought. Not even I could figure it out. No, I'm not pretending that I'm some old son of Tokyo. That's not why I asked. After all, I am a country boy, born and bred in Tsugaru. How many times they laughed at me in Tokyo for my Tsugaru accent! But now I come up against pure Tsugaru language for the first time in ten years, and I can't understand it—at all! How weak we human beings are, aren't we? Separated for ten years, and we can't even understand each other's words." I felt a terrible tension, as if I had just been presented with incontrovertible evidence that I had betrayed my homeland.

I focused on the conversations going on around me among passengers in the car. I couldn't understand, the accent was so amazingly strong. I put my full attention to it, and bit by bit, it started to come to me. Once I began to understand, the rest followed in a great rush, as when dry ice suddenly disappears without going through a water state. Of course: I am a Tsugaru man. By the time we changed to the Gonō line at a station called Kawabe, around ten o'clock, there wasn't a Tsugaru phrase I didn't understand, and I could

follow everything. But I had no confidence that I would myself be able to produce pure Tsugaru speech.

At Goshogawara Station, Mr. Nakabata was not there to meet us.

"He should be here." This was the first time that Okubo Hikozaemon's face clouded over.

We went out the ticket gate and looked around the waiting room, but still there was no Mr. Nakabata. We went out to the plaza (so it might be called, though in fact it was just a pathetic open area, with gravel, horse droppings, and two rickety horse carts) in front of the station, and stood there dejectedly holding our valises.

"Oh, there he is!" Okubo shouted in ecstasy.

A big man came toward us, laughing, from the town. It was Mr. Nakabata. He wasn't the slightest bit surprised to see me. He greeted us heartily.

"This is all my doing." Mr. Kita seemed to be bragging a bit. "Thanks for everything."

"I understand completely." Mr. Nakabata, dressed in his kimono, looked like Saigō Takamori.⁸

We were led to Mr. Nakabata's house. My aunt, hearing the news, came clattering over. In the ten years, she had turned into a little old lady. She sat in front of me, gazing at my face, as tears coursed down her cheeks. Ever since I was little, she had always stubbornly supported me in everything.

I changed to my formal clothes there. My family home was in Kanagi, another seven miles or so from Goshogawara. The village, in the middle of the Tsugaru plain, was straight north from Goshogawara on a spur line, about thirty minutes away. Around noon the three of us—Mr. Nakabata, Mr. Kita and I—headed out in the little train.

The rice fields spread out before us, in a pale shade of green. So this is what the Tsugaru plain is like, I thought, unexpectedly moved. In fall of the previous year, I had taken a trip to Niigata, and had even gotten over to Sado Island. I had been terribly depressed to see how thin was the green of the trees and grasses in those northwestern reaches, and how dry and bleached the soil was, and how even the sun felt weak; but now I saw right before me that this plain was just the same. It felt strange to realize that I had been born here and had grown up blithely playing in this bleak, tentative landscape, without ever noticing how sad it was. A light drizzle had been falling when we got to Aomori, but it had cleared up before long, and now the weak sun was starting to come out. Even so, it was chilly.

"These must all be your brother's fields, right?" Mr. Kita asked with a laugh, as if teasing me.

Mr. Nakabata spoke up from the side, also laughing. "That's right. As far

⁸General during the Meiji Restoration, and a great popular hero and symbol of physical and moral strength (1827–1877).

as you can see, they're all his." He seemed to be boasting a little. "But it's a poor crop this year."

Far off in the distance, ahead of us, the great red roof of the family house came into sight. It was floating lightly in the sea of pale green rice fields. I was suddenly embarrassed, and muttered, "It's not as big as I'd thought."

Mr. Kita spoke, almost as if reproving me. "How can you say that? It's a castle!"

The shuttle train kept at its leisurely pace, and finally reached Kanagi Station. I looked out, and saw my brother Eiji waiting at the gate. He was smiling.

For the first time in ten years, I was standing on my home soil. What poor land it was. It was like frozen ground. It felt as if, year after year, frozen however many feet deep, the soil had broken down and turned powdery and faded. The houses and trees, and the land too, felt as if they had been worn down and scoured. The road was white and dry, and when you walked, your steps left no print behind. It was all very tentative.

Someone said quietly, "Let's go to the cemetery." The four of us went straight to the temple. We paid our respects at my father's tomb. The chestnut tree beside the grave was just as it had always been.

My heart started to pound as we entered the house. It was silent inside, like a temple rectory. Room after room was polished to an extraordinary degree of spotlessness. Though it should have been older and shabbier, in fact it had an aura of neat perfection. It wasn't a bad atmosphere.

We were shown into the *butsuma*.⁹ Mr. Nakabata opened wide the doors to the memorial shrine. I faced the altar and bowed deeply. Then I greeted my sister-in-law. An elegant young girl brought tea to us; thinking she was my oldest brother's daughter, I bowed to her with a laugh. She was one of the maids.

I heard halting footsteps behind me, and tensed up. It was my mother. She sat down some distance from me. I bowed to her silently. When I raised my head, I found her wiping tears away. She'd become a little old lady.

Again I could hear halting footsteps. For a moment—I know this sounds ridiculous—I felt uneasy. Until whoever it was appeared before me, somehow I was afraid.

"Shū-cha! How good of you to come!" It was my grandmother. She was eighty-five. She talked loudly. She was quite a bit more robust than my mother. "I've been wanting to see you. I didn't say anything, but I've wanted to see you again."

She was full of good cheer. They said that even now she never missed a drink in the evening.

⁹Formal room where the family Buddhist altar and ancestor plaques are kept.

Dinner trays appeared.

"Drink up!" Eiji poured beer for me.

"Right." I drank.

Eiji had stayed in Kanagi after graduating from school, and was my eldest brother's right-hand man. He had set up a branch family some years earlier. Eiji had the sturdiest constitution of all of us brothers, and should even have had something rough and heroic about him; but now that I was seeing him after these ten years, I found him actually gentle and elegant. Compared to me, after my ten years of fighting with all sorts of people in a wild and depraved life in Tokyo, he was a fine, totally different kind of creature. His face was refined and delicate. I realized clearly that I was the only one of the family to have turned into an ugly, poor, mean-spirited man, and I smiled bitterly to myself.

"Where's the washroom?" I asked.

Mr. Kita laughed. "What a thing to ask—in your own home!"

I stood and went out into the hall. I knew of course that there was a guest washroom at the end of the corridor, but I'd thought it wouldn't be right, in my brother's absence, for me to go wandering around the house as if I knew everything. That's why I'd asked Eiji—but now Eiji probably thought I was a pompous fool. After I washed my hands, I continued to stand there for a while, looking at the garden through the window. Not a tree or flower had changed. I wanted to go through the house, looking at everything. There were so many places I wanted to see and remember. But that would be too brazen, and so I had to content myself with just gazing greedily at the garden from the one little window.

"We had, oh, about thirty-two blossoms on the water lilies this year." My grandmother's loud voice carried all the way to the washroom. "No, I'm not joking—thirty-two!" She'd been talking about the water lilies for quite some time.

We left Kanagi around four o'clock in a car, and returned to Goshogawara. Mr. Kita and I had had an understanding that we should leave early, before anything went wrong. There were no such disasters, and we left in the rented car in a spirit of overflowing peace and harmony. Mr. Kita, Mr. Nakabata, myself—and my mother. At the gentle urging of Eiji and my oldest brother's wife, she was coming with us to Goshogawara. Our destination was my aunt's house, where I was to spend the night. Our plan when we'd left Tokyo had been that Mr. Kita would stay over too, and the next day we would take a little excursion to such nearby sights as Asamushi hot spring and Lake Towada; but that morning a telegram, telling of some rather bad news, had come to the house in Kanagi from his family, so he was going to have to return to Tokyo on that night's express. The telegram announced the death of a neighbor's wife; the family was terribly unfortunate, Mr. Kita told

us, and he had no choice but to go back, because without him they wouldn't be able to arrange the funeral. He would hear nothing more from us, and we realized that we couldn't forcibly hold back the stubborn Sir Okubo. We had dinner at my aunt's house, and then I went to see him off at Goshogawara Station. I felt terrible, imagining how tired Mr. Kita must be and yet have to get on the train again.

That night my mother, my aunt, and I talked quietly, just the three of us, until late. I told them with a laugh about the little vegetable garden my wife was keeping at our house in Mitaka. The two of them seemed to like that very much, and they nodded to each other with constant exclamations of *My! Imagine that! Goodness!* By now I was able to speak the Tsugaru dialect quite naturally, but when it came to complicated subjects, sure enough, I had to use Tokyo language. Neither of them seemed to have much of an idea of what I did for a living. I explained to them things like page rates and royalties, but they seemed unable to understand even half of what I told them. "Well, let's see, if you sell books, then you're a book dealer? Oh not that?" Their questions came pouring out, and finally I gave up and just agreed that it was something like that. My mother asked what my income was; I told her cheerfully that I got five hundred or a thousand yen when money was coming in; and then I was terribly discouraged to have her calmly ask among how many people I had to divide it. She kept thinking, apparently, that I ran a bookstore. I began to find myself thinking that maybe after all I shouldn't be thinking of *any* of it as having been earned by myself alone. Maybe I should think of it as having been gained by group effort, and I should properly consider dividing it with everyone.

I finally became impatient when they wouldn't recognize what I had accomplished by my own efforts. I pulled out my wallet and took two ten yen bills from it. I was both ashamed and desperate as I laid the money on the table in front of them and said, "Please take this. You can use it as an offering when you go to the temple or whatever. I have plenty of money. I've earned it all myself, by working, so please take it!"

My mother and aunt looked at each other, and giggled. I persisted stubbornly, and finally got them to accept the money. My mother put it in her big purse, and then took out an envelope and passed it over to me. When I checked later, I found that it contained an amount equal to what I would have gotten for a hundred-page manuscript.

The next day, we parted. I went to Aomori and stayed at a relative's house for a night, and then, without stopping anywhere else, almost as if fleeing, I went back to Tokyo. Although this had been my first visit home in ten years, I had had no more than a glimpse of it. Would I have another chance for a more leisurely stay? If something happened to my mother, then I would see my home again. But that was too painful to think about.

About two months after the trip, by chance I ran into Mr. Kita on the street. He was quite pale, and didn't seem well.

"What happened? You've lost weight."

"Yes, well, I've had appendicitis." He'd left that night on the train, and the stomach pain had started immediately after his return to Tokyo.

"That's terrible! You really did overextend yourself, didn't you." I've had appendicitis, and I know from experience that overstrain can cause it. "That was a forced march for you . . ."

Mr. Kita smiled sadly. I couldn't stand it. It was all my fault. My vices had shortened Mr. Kita's life by ten years. And there I was, looking unconcerned as usual.

Hometown

"Hometown" (Kokyō) first appeared in the magazine Shinchō in 1943. It was published in the short story collection Kajitsu in 1944. For a discussion, see pp. 136–39.

A year ago in the summer, I saw my hometown for the first time in ten years. This past fall, I wrote up what had happened at the time, gave it the title "Going Home," and sent off the twenty-page story to a quarterly magazine. This is what happened right after that. The Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata I'd referred to in the story came to visit me at my little house in Mitaka. They told me that my mother back home was critically ill. I had been expecting in my heart to get news of this sort sometime within the next five or six years, but I had not thought it would be so soon. At the time Mr. Kita had taken me back home that summer a year ago, my oldest brother was away, but I had been able to see my second brother Eiji, my sisters-in-law, my nephews and nieces, my grandmother, and my mother, who was sixty-nine. She was extremely frail and looked unsteady on her feet, but she certainly wasn't an invalid. I imagined, with deep hope, that she'd be good for a few more years, even ten more. I tried to write these things down as seriously and truthfully as I could; but anyway, due to various complications, I'd been able to have only a brief three or four hours at home. At the end of the story, I'd written that there was much, much more of home that I'd wanted to see, there were just so many things I'd wanted to see, but that all I'd been able to do was steal a glimpse of it. Would I ever be able to see the mountains and rivers of home again? If something happened to my mother, I thought, then I might be able to have a long stay, but that was too painful to contemplate.

It had never occurred to me that the opportunity to visit home again would come to me right after I sent off the manuscript.

"I'll take responsibility for this trip, too." Mr. Kita was tense. "Bring your wife and the child with you."

The previous summer, Mr. Kita had taken me alone. This time he was saying that he would bring not just me, but my wife and Sonoko (my nearly year-and-a-half-old daughter). I've already explained at length in "Going Home" who Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata are, but in short, Mr. Kita is a tailor

in Tokyo, and Mr. Nakabata has a dry goods business in a town near my family home; both of them have a long history of intimate involvement with my family, and five or six times—no, innumerable times through the years—when I'd gotten myself into scrapes and was cut off from communication with my family, these two took care of me out of what we might call pure affection, without once showing disapproval. A year ago in the summer, the two of them had consulted with each other, and, determined to brave my oldest brother's wrath, had maneuvered to get me back home for the first time in ten years.

"But are you sure it's all right? It would be terrible if I brought my wife and daughter, and then we were turned away at the door, you know." I always imagined the worst possible outcome.

"That won't happen," the two responded seriously.

"What did happen, that summer?" There may be in my character a kind of stingy cautiousness that made me suspect even a sure thing. "Didn't Bunji [my brother's name] give either of you a talking-to, later? Didn't he, Mr. Kita?"

Mr. Kita answered, picking his words carefully. "Now, consider your brother's position . . . he had the rest of the family to think of; he couldn't just go and say that you were welcome. But if I bring you, I'm sure it will be all right. About that summer—there too, when I met him later in Tokyo, he had just one thing to say: 'Kita, you certainly are a problem, aren't you.' That's all. He wasn't angry."

"That's right." Mr. Nakabata raised his head and continued. "He didn't say a word to me, either. Up until now, every time I helped you out, afterward he was sure to have some little sarcastic comment, but this time, he had nothing to say about the summer visit."

"You're sure?" I was somewhat relieved. "If it won't backfire and cause you trouble, then please, I would appreciate your taking me back with you. It's hardly that I don't want to see my mother, and since Bunji wasn't there in the summer, this time I want badly to see him. I'd be terribly grateful if you'd take me with you, but what about my wife? This would be the first time she's met my family. Women have all sorts of complicated things to do, like getting clothes together, and it might tire her out too much. Would you explain the situation to her, Mr. Kita? If I tell her, she's sure to complain and make a fuss." I called her into the room.

But her reaction was not at all what I had expected. Even as Mr. Kita was telling her about my mother's critical condition, and about having her see Sonoko at least once, my wife placed her hands on the mat and made a deep bow. "I'll do whatever you want me to," she told him.

Mr. Kita turned around to me and asked, "When can you be ready?" We agreed on the twenty-seventh of October. At the time, it was the twentieth.

From that moment on, for the entire week, my wife was in a frenzy of getting ready. Her younger sister came from their hometown to help her. There were all sorts of new things she absolutely had to buy. I was on the verge of bankruptcy. Sonoko was the only one unaffected, as she toddled around the house.

The 7:00 P.M. express train, on the twenty-seventh. It was full. We stood nearly five hours, until Haramachi.

"MOTHER WORSE GET DAZAI HERE FAST WAITING NAKABATA." Mr. Kita showed me the telegram. It had come to his house from Mr. Nakabata, who had returned just ahead of us.

We got to Aomori the next morning at eight and transferred immediately to the Ou line, changing again at a station named Kawabe for the train to Goshogawara. By that time, the train was running between the apple orchards. It looked like this was going to be a bumper year for apples, too.

"Oh, how pretty they are!" My wife looked around eagerly with eyes somewhat bloodshot from lack of sleep. "I've always wanted to have the chance to see apple country."

The apples glittered redly, close enough to grab if you stretched out your hand.

We arrived at Goshogawara Station around eleven. Mr. Nakabata's daughter was there to meet us. He lived in this town. The plan was for us to rest for a while at his house, and then my wife and Sonoko would change and we would go to visit my family's house in Kanagi. Kanagi was about forty minutes north of Goshogawara, on the Tsugaru Railroad.

While we ate the lunch prepared for us at Mr. Nakabata's, we were filled in on the details of my mother's condition. She seemed to be near death.

"It was so good of you to come." Mr. Nakabata thanked us instead. "I've been very worried, wondering when you'd get here. Now at least I can relax about that. Your mother hasn't said anything, but it would seem that she's been holding on just for you to come."

The story of the Prodigal Son flashed through my head.

As we finished lunch and prepared to leave, Mr. Kita said to me, rather too heartily, "It's probably better not to bring the suitcases along, right? Your brother hasn't given permission yet, and if we were to arrive with suitcases in our hands—"

"I understand."

We decided to leave everything at Mr. Nakabata's. Mr. Kita warned me that it was still not even clear that they would let us see the sick woman.

We took only Sonoko's diaper bag with us on the train. Mr. Nakabata came with us.

Moment by moment I sank deeper into gloom. They're all good people. Not a one of them is bad. I'm the only one to have done terrible things in the

past. Even now I'm not very smart. My bad reputation has spread everywhere. It's because I'm a poor writer, scribbling to make ends meet, that things have reached this sorry pass.

"This is pretty country, isn't it," my wife said, as she gazed out the window at the Tsugaru plain. "It's a much brighter land than I'd expected."

"Do you think so?" The rice had all been harvested, and as far as the eye could see there was a wintry look to the fields. "It doesn't look that way to me . . ."

No feeling of pride in my homeland arose then. All I felt was terrible, constricting pain. Summer a year ago had not been like this. To see my homeland after ten years' absence had in fact set my heart dancing.

"That's Mount Iwaki. They call it the Tsugaru Fuji, because it's said to look like Mount Fuji," I explained, with a painful smile. There was no excitement. "That low mountain range is the Bonju Mountains. That's Mahage Mountain." I just tossed the information out, haphazardly.

It's a really lovely scene in *The Courier for Hell*, where Chūbei proudly introduces Ninokuchi Village to Umegawa: "This is where I was born, my father's house is just another four or five hundred yards . . ." But in my case it was different. This Chūbei was furiously angry. On the other side of the rice fields, a red roof flashed into sight.

"That's—" my house, I started to say, but then stricken with scruples I continued, "—my brother's house."

But actually, it was the roof of the temple. My family's roof was to the right of it.

"No, wait, that's wrong. It's that one to the right, the biggish one." Everything was falling apart around me.

We arrived at Kanagi Station. My little niece and an older, pretty girl were there to meet us.

"Who's that girl?" my wife asked me in a whisper.

"Probably one of the maids. We don't have to worry about formal introductions." I had uncomfortable memories of my visit the previous summer, when I had practically prostrated myself in a formal bow to an elegant young girl about the age of this one. I thought she was my brother's daughter, only to discover that she was one of the maids. So this is why I was so cautious.

The "little niece" was my brother's second daughter. I had met her during that summer visit, so I knew her. She was eight years old.

"Shige-chan!" I called out to her, and she laughed without reserve. I felt somehow relieved a bit. This child, at least, probably didn't know anything about my past.

¹The reference is to *Meido no hikyaku*, a 1711 play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Its hero Chūbei is a man who embezzles money to keep his courtesan girl friend Umegawa from being claimed by another customer. They flee, but are apprehended and executed. See Donald Keene's translation in *Major Plays of Chikamatsu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

We got to the house. Mr. Nakabata and Mr. Kita immediately went up to my brother's room on the second floor. I went into the *butsuma*, and we paid our respects at the altar. Then we passed on into what we called the "ordinary room" where only the most intimate guests gathered, and sat down in a corner. The wives of my oldest brother and my second brother greeted us with smiles. My grandmother came in, led by the hand by one of the maids. She was eighty-six. She seemed to have gotten hard of hearing, but she was still strong. My wife tried hard to get Sonoko to bow, too, but she totally refused, and toddled around the room threatening to bump into everyone.

My brother appeared. He passed through the room quickly and went into the next one. His color was bad, he was shockingly thin, and his face was grim. In the next room was a visitor who had stopped by to see how my mother was. My brother talked with him for a while; then, when at last the visitor left, he came back into the room where we were, and before I could say anything, he nodded with a brief sound of recognition and bowed lightly.

"I've caused you a great deal of worry," I said stiffly, as I bowed. "My brother, Bunji," I told my wife.

Before she could begin her greeting, he turned to her and bowed. I felt a nervous flutter inside. As soon as he finished his bow, my brother went back to the second floor abruptly.

What's this? I thought. I jumped to the conclusion that something had happened. My brother had always been like this, but only when he was in a bad mood: strangely distant, like this, formally and frigidly polite. Mr. Kita and Mr. Nakabata were still up there on the second floor. Maybe Mr. Kita had failed somewhere? As I thought this, my heart suddenly started to pound, whether in desolation or fear I couldn't say. My sister-in-law came in with a bright smile and invited us to follow her. I stood up, with a feeling of relief. I could see my mother. There was nothing particularly the matter, the meeting with my mother was to be permitted. What had I gotten all excited for? I'd worried a bit too much.

As we crossed the hall, my sister-in-law said to us, "She's been waiting these past two or three days, she's really been waiting for you."

My mother was in a large room in the house annex. She lay on a large bed, emaciated and dry as a withered leaf. But her mind was still clear.

"I'm glad you've come," she said. My wife made her first formal greeting, and my mother lifted her head lightly and nodded. I picked Sonoko up in my arms. When I pressed her little hands into my mother's thin palms, Mother gripped tight with trembling fingers. My aunt from Goshogawara, sitting at the head of the bed, wiped away tears as she smiled.

Other than my aunt, there was a crowd in the sickroom: two nurses, my oldest sister, my second oldest brother's wife, and several elderly ladies, all relatives. We went into an adjoining room and exchanged greetings. They

buzzed among themselves: "Shūji [my real name] hasn't changed a bit, he's a little fatter, and he looks even younger than he did." Sonoko too was being amazingly unshy, and was smiling at everyone. We all gathered around the charcoal brazier in the room, talking in hushed voices. Bit by bit, the tension relaxed.

"You're going to stay for a while this time, aren't you?"

"Well, I really don't know. Probably it'll be like summer a year ago: we'll stay for two or three hours and then leave. Mr. Kita said that might be best. I want to do whatever he tells me to do."

"But with your mother in such bad condition, can you just abandon her and leave?"

"I have to check with Mr. Kita about anything—"

"You don't have to pay so much attention to Mr. Kita, do you?"

"Of course I do. All these years, he has gone to a great deal of trouble for me."

"Well, that may be, but after all, Mr. Kita—"

"No, that's why I say I have to check with him. If I follow his plans, then there will be no mistakes. Mr. Kita's still upstairs talking to my brother—don't you think there's something complicated going on? Here the three of us come barging in shamelessly, without permission—"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about that. Didn't they say that Eiji [my second brother's name] sent you a special delivery letter telling you to come right away?"

"When was that? We didn't see it!"

"What? Oh, we've been thinking that you'd come in response—"

"So that's what's up! His message must have crossed us. That's it—now it looks as if Mr. Kita has butted into things that weren't his business." I felt that somehow now I understood the whole situation completely. Just my bad luck, I thought.

"Probably there's nothing wrong. In fact, the earlier you came, the better."

But I was devastated. Poor Mr. Kita, too, who'd set aside his business solely to bring us here. I could imagine the bitterness of my brothers, who felt that they had chosen the proper time to let me know. Everything was all wrong, I thought to myself.

The young girl who had been at the station to meet us came in and bowed with a smile. I'd failed again—this time, out of overcaution. She wasn't a maid at all. She was my sister's daughter. I had known her until she was seven or eight, but at that time she was a tiny, dark-skinned little thing. Now I saw a totally different person, slender and elegant.

"This is Mitsui," my aunt said, also laughing. "She's turned into quite a beauty, hasn't she!"

"A beauty, indeed," I answered seriously. "And so fair-skinned."

Everyone laughed. My feelings loosened a little. Suddenly, in the next room, I saw that my mother, her mouth open and slack, was gasping wildly, her shoulders heaving, and then she was sharply clawing at the air with one thin hand, as if brushing away flies. What's happening? I thought. I stood up and went to her bedside. The others gathered around her pillow, too, concern on their faces.

The nurse explained in a low voice, "She seems to be in pain from time to time," and putting her hand under the blanket, she vigorously stroked my mother's body. I knelt at her pillow and asked where it hurt. She faintly shook her head.

"Hold on. You just have to stay with us to see Sonoko grow up." I said this, holding out against the awkwardness I felt.

Suddenly, one of the old ladies took my hand and clasped it to my mother's. I gripped her cold hands not just with that one hand, but warmed them in both of mine. The old lady pressed her face to the blanket and wept. My aunt and Taka (my next oldest brother's wife) burst into tears. I endured it, my mouth clamped shut. I stayed like that for a time, but finally, unable to bear it any more, got up abruptly and went out into the hall. I went down the hall and into the Western-style room. It was cold and empty. Two oil paintings hung on the wall, one of poppies and one a female nude. A clumsy wood sculpture squatted on the mantelpiece. A leopard skin was spread on the sofa. The table and chairs and carpet were all as they used to be. I paced around the room, struggling to keep myself from crying, telling myself: If you shed a single tear now, it's a lie; if you cry, it's a lie. Here we have the splendid tenderhearted son, lost in thoughts of his mother, running off by himself to weep for her. Pretentious! He really thinks he's great. Just like some cheap movie. What's this, our sweet gentle thirty-four-year-old Shūji? Stop this sentimental playacting. You're not likely to become the filial son at this late date. Try to control this willful self-indulgence. Quit it! If you cry now, it's a lie. Your tears are fake. I said these things in my heart, as I paced around the room with my arms folded over my chest, but a sob threatened to break out at any moment. I was truly at the end of my rope. I smoked a cigarette, blew my nose, tried various things to bear up, and in the end, managed to let not a single tear escape from my eyes.

The sun set. I didn't return to my mother's room, but lay down on the sofa. This Western room in the annex seemed not to be used these days, and even though I turned on the switch, no lights came on. I was alone, in the cold darkness. Neither Mr. Kita nor Mr. Nakabata came to the annex. What were they doing? My wife and Sonoko were still in the sickroom, apparently. What would happen to us tonight, from here on? According to the first plan, we would do as Mr. Kita said, leave Kanagi right after seeing my mother, and

spend the night at my aunt's in Goshogawara. But now that my mother was in such a bad state, wouldn't it be even worse if we were to follow that course and leave immediately? At any rate, I wanted to see Mr. Kita. Where in hell was he, anyway? He'd undoubtedly gotten caught up in heavier and heavier complications as he talked to my brother. I felt that there was no place for me.

My wife came into the dark room.

"What are you doing? You'll catch cold."

"Sonoko?"

"She's sleeping." She said they'd put her to bed in the room next to my mother's.

"Will she be all right? You left her where she won't get cold?"

"Yes, your aunt brought me a wool blanket for her."

"How about it—they're all good people, aren't they?"

"Yes." But she seemed uneasy, anyway. "What's going to happen with us, now?"

"I don't know."

"Where will we stay tonight?"

"It's no use asking me. We have to follow Mr. Kita's plans. That's been my custom, these past ten years. If I ignore Mr. Kita and address my brother directly, we'll have a catastrophe. That's how it is. You don't understand, do you? I don't have any rights at all, now. I can't even come with a single suitcase."

"Somehow, you seem resentful of Mr. Kita."

"Don't be silly. I understand Mr. Kita's affection, deep within me. But now we're in a situation where he has stepped in between us, and relations between me and my brother have gotten extremely complicated. There's Mr. Kita's honor to be protected. They're all good people—"

"Yes, really . . ." My wife seemed to be catching on at last. "Mr. Kita was going specially to bring you, and I thought it would be wrong to refuse, and so Sonoko and I came along with you, and now it's caused him a lot of trouble, and I feel bad."

"That's right. He's not one to help people casually. I'm a hopeless case, and I shouldn't even exist. Poor Mr. Kita—this has been rough on him. When he takes the trouble to come all this way on purpose, and he doesn't get much thanks from me, or from my brothers, that's hard. This is when we, at least, should figure something out, somehow or other, to save his face, but we just aren't in a position to, unfortunately. If we poke our noses in clumsily, it will only make things worse. This is a time to leave things as they are for a while, and feel our way carefully. You go back and rub my mother's feet or something. We'd best think of nothing else but Mother's illness."

But my wife made no immediate move to leave. She stood drooping in the

darkness. It would be quite awkward for the two of us to be seen together in the dark if someone came by, I thought, and so I got up from the sofa and went out into the hall. The cold was bitter. This was, after all, the northernmost end of the main island. Even when I looked out the glass doors on the verandah, there was not a single star in the sky. Just oppressive dark. I began, unreasonably, to want to get back to my own work. Why, I couldn't say. All right, let's do it. Devote yourself to it. That's how I felt.

My sister-in-law came looking for us.

"Why, what are you doing here!" She spoke in a light, surprised tone, and continued: "It's time for dinner. Michiko, you're to join them, too." There seemed to be nothing at all guarded in her attitude toward us. I felt that to be an extremely promising sign. I couldn't go wrong, I thought, if I talked things over with her, no matter what.

We were led to the *butsuma* in the main house. Places were set for just seven: with their backs to the scroll alcove were the doctor from Goshogawara (my aunt's adopted son-in-law), Mr. Kita, and Mr. Nakabata; and facing them, my oldest brother, my second oldest brother, myself, and Michiko.

"The special delivery letter crossed us," I blurted out, as I looked into my second brother's face. He nodded briefly.

Mr. Kita didn't seem well. He looked depressed. For the very reason that he was usually quite lively at banquets, his depressed spirits that night were even more noticeable. I was now sure that something had happened.

Nevertheless, the doctor from Goshogawara got a little drunk and boisterous, so the table was fairly lively. I reached over and poured for both my brothers. I mustn't think about whether or not I'd been forgiven, I thought. There was no reason that I should ever in my lifetime be forgiven, and besides, I should get rid of such a self-indulgent, spoiled idea as "being forgiven." After all, the issue was whether or not I loved my brothers. The man who loved was fortunate. It was enough that I loved my brothers. I had to give up this deep nostalgic longing. Such was the absurd debate I carried on in my mind, as I drank heavily, pouring for myself.

Mr. Kita was to be staying that night at my aunt's house in Goshogawara. Perhaps he was reluctant to stay at the Kanagi house, which was in an uproar because of my mother's illness; but at any rate, he would be staying in Goshogawara. I walked him to the station.

"Thank you for everything. It was all your doing," I said, from the bottom of my heart. I felt empty and lonely now that I was to part from him. From here on, there would be no one to give me guidance. "There's no problem with our staying in Kanagi tonight?" I wanted to hear something from him.

"No, I don't suppose they mind." It may have been my imagination, but

his tone of voice seemed somehow cool and distant. "At any rate, since your mother is in such bad condition . . ."

"Well, then, we'll have them let us stay here two or three days—would that be too bold, d'you think?"

"That depends on your mother's condition, doesn't it? At any rate, we'll arrange it by telephone tomorrow."

"And you?"

"I'm going back to Tokyo tomorrow."

"That's terrible! You went straight back after that summer visit a year ago, and this time we'd come prepared to show you around the hot springs near Aomori . . ."

"With your mother doing so badly, this is no time to be thinking of hot springs. I had honestly not thought we'd find her in such bad shape. It was quite unexpected. I'll do the accounts later and return to you what you paid for my train ticket." I was confused, to have him bring up the subject of train fares so suddenly.

"Don't be silly. It's my job to buy you the return ticket, too. Stop worrying about things like that."

"No, let's keep our accounts straight. And I'll ask Mr. Nakabata to have the luggage you left at his house delivered to Kanagi tomorrow, first thing. After that, my business will be finished." We walked steadily down the pitch-black road. "The station is this way, isn't it? You don't have to see me any farther. Really, this is far enough."

"Mr. Kita!" I quickened my pace for two or three steps, as if pursuing him. "Did my brother say anything to you?"

"No." Mr. Kita slowed his pace, and spoke with a deep and serious tone. "You'd best not worry about that anymore. I felt very good tonight. When I saw you three splendid children sitting together, Bunji, Eiji and you, I was so happy I could have cried. I don't need anything more. I'm satisfied. Right from the start, I've not looked for a penny of reward. You know that, don't you? All I wanted was to see you three brothers sitting together. It feels good. I'm satisfied. Shūji, you too—from here on, buck up. It's come time for us old people to withdraw from the scene."

I saw him off, and then turned back to the house. From here on, I'd have no Mr. Kita to rely on, but would have to deal with my brothers directly, myself. When I realized this, instead of happiness, I felt fear. I was filled with a cowardly uneasiness, sure that I would make yet another horrendous blunder that would arouse my brothers' wrath against me.

The house was in total confusion with all the visitors coming to see how my mother was. I entered stealthily from the kitchen so as not to be seen by them, and was preparing to go to the sickroom in the annex, when, glancing into the little anteroom next to the "ordinary room," I discovered my second

brother sitting there alone. I slipped in and sat down at his side, as if drawn by something I feared. With not a little fear and trembling inside, I asked, "Is there no hope for Mother?" Even I was a bit put off by the abruptness of the question. Eiji looked around briefly with a painful smile, and said, "Well, we have to think this is it."

Suddenly my oldest brother came in. He walked around the room in some agitation, opening and closing closet doors, and then sat down heavily beside our other brother. "I don't know what to do, this time I just don't know what to do," he said, his head bowed, and he pushed his glasses up onto his forehead and pressed his eyes with both hands.

Then I suddenly became aware that at some time or other, the older of our sisters had come in and quietly sat down behind me.

An Almanac of Pain

"An Almanac of Pain" (Kunō no nenkan) first appeared in the magazine Shinbungei in 1946. It was reprinted in the 1947 short story collection Fuyu no hanabi. For a discussion, see pp. 152–53.

I don't think things change at all. It makes you feel kind of foolish. Isn't this what is meant by "as uneasy as a fox on horseback"?

Here's the opening paragraph of "Recollections," the story of a hundred pages or so that became my maiden work:

I was standing by the front gate with my aunt at dusk. She was wearing a smock, and seemed to be carrying a child on her back. Even now I remember the silence of the gently darkening road at that hour. My aunt told me, His Majesty the Emperor has passed on. "He is a living god," she added. I seem to recall that I too whispered "living god" with deep interest. And then I seem to have said something disrespectful. She reproved me: "That isn't what we say; we say he has passed on." "On to where?" I asked deliberately, although I knew what she meant. I remember that made her laugh.

This memory remains from the time of the death of the Emperor Meiji. Since I was born in the summer of 1909, at the time I must have been in my fourth calendar year.

Again, this appears in "Recollections":

Once, we were given the title "If War Were to Break Out," and I wrote that if a war broke out—something more terrifying than earthquake, thunder, fire, or father—first of all I would run and hide in the mountains, and then I would invite my teachers to join me; teachers were human, and I was human, and surely we were all equally afraid of war. This time, the principal and the assistant headmaster were the committee of two that interrogated me. They asked me in what spirit I had written it; I evaded them flippantly, saying, "Mostly for fun." The assistant entered "He did it out of curiosity" in his notebook. Then he and I started a little debate. He opened: "You wrote 'Teachers are human and I'm human,' but are all men equal?" I muttered that I thought so. I was becoming hopelessly tongue-tied. "Well then," he asked me, "if the principal and I are both equal, why are our salaries different?" I thought a while and answered, "Well, isn't it because your work is different?" Putting on his steel-rimmed glasses, the thin-faced assistant

immediately wrote my answer in his notebook. Until then, I had liked this teacher. Then he posed a final question to me: "Are we your father's equals?" I was on the spot, and couldn't answer anything.

Since this happened when I was ten or eleven, it would have been in 1918 or 1919. A tale from nearly thirty years ago.

Then again, there was this:

When I was in fourth or fifth grade, I heard about "democracy" from my next older brother. Even my mother knew the word, and I would hear her going on to guests about how taxes were soaring because of "democracy" and how nearly all the rice crop was being taken by taxes; and the whole concept confused me and made me uneasy. Still, I would help the servants in summer cut the grass in the garden, or in winter lend a hand in sweeping snow from the roof of the house, and while I worked, I would teach them about this "democracy." But in the end, I realized that the servants were not especially pleased to have me help. It turned out that they would have to go over and redo my "help."

This too was from the same period, 1918 or '19.

When you look at it that way, it would seem that there's very little difference between the social ideas that had infiltrated even as far as one small child in an isolated village at the northern extreme of Japan's main island nearly thirty years ago, and the self-styled new thought that is being vaunted nowadays in 1946 in newspapers and magazines. This is what makes you feel kind of foolish.

What social conditions were then in 1918-19, and what became of the tide of democratic thought after then, could probably be found out by investigating the appropriate records; but to report on that is not the object of this memorandum of mine. I am a writer of the marketplace. What I speak about remains within the purview of the history of the one little individual called "me." There are those who will grow impatient with me, or denounce me as lazy, or sneer at me as vulgar, perhaps; but in later ages when the time comes to investigate our currents of thought, it may be that these personal fragmentary descriptions of our lives that we are always writing will be more reliable than the writings of so-called historians. They're not something to be belittled. Accordingly, I feel that I would like to set down here the history of my own personal thought, irrespective of the inquiries and conclusions of the many shades of social thinkers.

And when I read memoirs or manifestos of these so-called thinkers, recording the development of their thought and entitled something like, "How I Became a ——ist," they seem unbearably empty and shallow to me. In the process of becoming a ——ist, there always seems necessarily to be some one turning point. And that turning point is generally dramatic. It is deeply moving.

All that feels like a lie to me. Although I struggle to believe, my senses do not agree. I am truly dumbfounded by those dramatic changes. The thought of them gives me gooseflesh.

I feel that they are no more than clumsy sophistries. And so I want at least to avoid such transparent distortions, now that I have come to write the history of my own thought.

I feel resistance even to the word "thought." I am all the more impatient when it comes to something like "development of thought." I start to feel it is all a monkey show.

Rather, I want to say: "I don't have any such thing as 'thought.' Only likes and dislikes."

Below, I want to record in fragmentary form just those realities I cannot forget. The thinkers, trying to connect the spaces between fragments, are absorbed in the barefaced lies that they call explanations; those pernicious false explanations, covering up the gaps, seem to intensely delight philistines—whose admiration and applause are stimulated precisely by such fictions. No wonder I'm so disgusted.

"By the way," the philistines ask. "How *did* the democracy of your childhood later grow and develop?"

I stare back dumbly and answer, "Well, now, I don't really know what happened to it."

*

The family into which I was born has no proud pedigree. The only certain thing is that my ancestors were peasants who came floating in from somewhere and planted themselves in this northern extreme of Tsugaru.

I am the descendant of poor, ignorant, subsistence farmers. The first my family name began to be even somewhat known in Aomori Prefecture was with the generation of my great-grandfather Sōsuke. At that time, apparently, there were in each prefecture those four or five men qualified as representatives to the House of Peers on the basis of the size of their income tax payments. My great-grandfather was one of them. Last year, in an old bookstore outside the castle walls in Kōfu, I found a picture of my great-grandfather in a register of early Meiji period gentlemen. He looked truly like a loutish peasant. This great-grandfather was an adopted son-in-law. So was my grandfather. So was my father. Women have the strength in this family line. My great-grandmother, and my grandmother, and my mother, all outlived their husbands. My great-grandmother was alive until I was ten. My grandmother is still going strong at ninety. My mother lived until seventy, and died just a couple of years ago. The women all liked going to the temple very much. My grandmother's faith in particular could be called excessive. It even became the source of humorous family anecdotes. The temple was of

the Jōdo Shinshū sect, the sect found by the Holy Shinran.¹ We too were forced to go to the temple when we were children—so often, in fact, that we came to hate it. We were also made to learn the sutras.

*

There is not one thinker in my family line. Nor is there a single scholar. Nor any artist. Nor even a government official, nor a military officer. They were just utterly plain, ordinary, rural landlords with large holdings. My father served once in the House of Representatives, and then in the House of Peers, but one does not hear stories that he was particularly active in the world of national politics. My father built a terribly big house. It had no special atmosphere or anything, it was just big. There are perhaps thirty rooms to it, among them quite a few large ones. It is a frighteningly well-built house, but it has no special character.

Among the books and pictures and bric-a-brac, there was not one thing that could be classed as an important work of art.

My father seems to have liked the theater, but he didn't read novels. Once, when I was a child, he read a long novel called *Face to Face with Death*, and I remember his ignorant complaints afterwards that it had been a waste of time.

On the other hand, there is not one complicated, dark spot in this family lineage. There wasn't even anything like a property dispute. Essentially, no one ever behaved disgracefully. It seems to have been counted one of the most genteel families in the Tsugaru region. In this genealogy, the only one who committed follies about which people whispered disapprovingly was I.

*

During the course of my childhood [One often encounters such an opening sentence in the memoirs of our thinkers. Out of a deep concern that what I will now be trying to note down could also turn out to sound pseudoprofound, smacking of a thinker's memoirs, if I were not careful, I have decided to fight poison with poison and use such a pompous opening line. But what follows is most definitely not a fiction. Really, it is the truth.] I feel it is not at all an exaggeration to say that from the moment I opened my eyes in the morning until I went to bed at night, there was never a time when I was without a book at my side. I truly read a lot, whatever I could lay my hands on. But then, scarcely ever did I read anything twice. I would read one book after another, four or five a day. I liked foreign children's stories rather than Japanese fairy tales. It could have been "The Three Prophecies" or "The Four Prophecies," I've forgotten now, but I particularly liked one story about

¹Shinran (1173–1262) was the founder of the populist True Pure Land (Jōdo Shinshū) sect of Buddhism, which rejected esoteric or rigorous meditation practices and stressed the mercy of Amida Buddha on whom all men could call for salvation.

a man who received prophecies about when he would be saved by a lion, when he would meet up with a fierce enemy, at what age he would become a beggar, and so forth, and he didn't believe them in the slightest, but then it turned out just as the prophecies had said; I do recall re-reading that two or three times. And there was another story from among those childhood books, that sank most amazingly into my heart. It was in one of those children's magazines called something like *The Golden Boat*, or *The Red Star*, or something, and there was nothing particularly interesting about it at all. A girl was sick, in the hospital, and in the middle of the night she suddenly got thirsty, and as she was about to drink the little bit of sweetened water that remained in the cup at her bedside, a sick old man who shared her room began to whisper, "Water, water." The girl got out of bed and gave the old man all of her water. That's all there was to it, but even now, I dimly recall the illustration that accompanied the story. Actually, that was what had sunk into my memory. And beneath the title of the story, this was written: Love your neighbor as yourself.

However, I don't want these memories to give a false impression of why I think the way I do. If through my tales of the past I tried to give a forced significance to the teachings of Shinran from my family's religion, or that later notion of democracy I just told you about, that would make them exactly the same kind of bald lies as Professor X's "How I Became a —ist." This memory of my readings remains to the end a fragment. No matter how you try to stretch the truth, it won't work. The lies always show up.

*

Well then, from that point on, what gradually became of my so-called democracy? Well, with this and that, nothing came of it. It faded just as it was. As I have stated before, I am not trying here to report social conditions of that time. I just want to write down and observe the fragments of my physical sensations.

*

Philanthropy. At a snowy crossroad, one crouches, holding a lantern, and another, throwing out his chest, repeats "Oh, Almighty God," over and over again. The one holding the lantern whispers "Amen." I burst out laughing.

The Salvation Army. The noisiness of the band. The charity kettle. Why, do you suppose, does it have to be a cooking pot? Isn't it insanitary to put dirty coins and bills into a kettle? The brazenness of those girls. Somehow their clothes just aren't right, don't you think? You girls don't have any taste.

Humanitarianism. Russian peasant tunics called *rubashka* became popular, everyone was singing the song, "Katusha, How Sweet You Are," and all were horribly pompous.

I just watched these currents go by.

*

Dictatorship of the proletariat.

That was a new perception, indeed. It was not a matter of cooperation. It was absolutism. Beat down the opposition, with no exception. The rich are all evil. The aristocrats are all evil. Only the penniless common people are moral. I approved of armed insurrection. A revolution without the guillotine is meaningless.

However, I was not of the common people. I was of the class that was to be sent to the guillotine. I was a nineteen-year-old college student. I alone in my class stood out, with my noticeably fine clothing. Increasingly, I began to think that there was nothing for me to do but die.

I took an overdose of a sleeping medicine, but I did not die.

"You need not die. You are a comrade." Classifying me as a "man of promise," one schoolmate introduced me around here and there.

It became my function to provide funds. And when I came to Tokyo to attend university, I continued to put out money; in addition, I was made to take up responsibility for the sheltering and feeding of other comrades.

The so-called big shots were generally honest people. But I was put off by the "little shots." They were horrible, told nothing but lies, and attacked people indiscriminately.

They deceived people, and then called it strategy.

There was something called proletarian literature. When I read it, I would get goose bumps and tears would come to my eyes. I would come up against its impossible, hideous style, and I don't know why, but I would get goose bumps and tears would come to my eyes. Some comrades told me, "You seem to have literary talent, so why don't you write proletarian literature and give your income from the manuscripts to the party for operating expenses?" I even did try writing under a pseudonym, but as I was writing, tears sprang to my eyes, and it all came to nothing. (At the time, there was something called jazz literature, and it was in opposition to proletarian literature; but this was not a matter of bringing tears to my eyes—it was total gibberish. It wasn't even funny. I ended up finally unable to understand those magazines they called reviews. I just could not understand the modern spirit. I suppose you could say that the currents in Japan at that time were a blending of American and Soviet styles. It was the period from the end of the Taishō era to the beginning of the Shōwa, the mid-1920's. Twenty years ago. Dance halls and strikes. Spectacles, like flagpole sitters.)

In the end, the only talent I possessed was for deceiving my family back home; in other words, it was through strategy that I had them send me money or clothes or various other things, which I divided up among my comrades.

*

The Manchurian Incident occurred. The Three Human Bombs. I was not at all impressed by stories of their heroism.²

I was often thrown into jail. One investigating officer was astounded by my overly meek attitude, and he said: "Hey, a poor little rich boy like you could hardly be capable of causing a revolution. *We're* the ones who make real revolutions."

There was an eerie sense of reality to his words.

I couldn't help getting the oppressive feeling that sometime in the future this man too would join up with the so-called Young Turks and be included in the ranks of those hateful, illiterate, ill-omened men who prosecute their revolutions with brutality.

The comrades were imprisoned one after another. Nearly all were imprisoned.

The war with China continued.

*

I yearned after the idea of purity. Unrecompensed actions. A life totally without calculation. However, such a frame of mind was terribly hard for me to achieve. All I did was drink rotgut whiskey.

The thing I hated most was hypocrisy.

*

Christ. I thought only of his pain.

*

An extraordinary heavy snow fell over Tokyo and the entire Kantō area. That day the event known as the 2/26 Incident occurred.³ I was disgusted. What could we do?

I was deeply unhappy. I thought they were damned idiots. It was a feeling close to fury.

Did they have a plan? Did they have organization? Nothing.

It was an act very like that of madmen.

Unorganized terrorism is the most evil of crimes. You cannot even call it crazy or anything like that.

The stink of this arrogant folly hung around right to the end of the so-called Greater East Asia War.

²The Manchurian Incident was the occupation of Manchuria by Japanese army forces on the pretext of maintaining public order, starting on September 18, 1931. The Three Human Bombs were three Japanese infantry soldiers who were ordered during a campaign outside Shanghai in February 1932 to open a path for Japanese troops by destroying a barbed-wire barrier. They did so by attaching explosive charges to themselves.

³In the 2/26 Incident, which took place in the early morning hours of February 26, 1936, a group of dissident young army officers attempted a coup d'état by assassinating a number of important government officials. The revolt was put down within four days and the ringleaders executed.

One thought: there must be something behind Tōjō. But there was nothing in particular. All was empty. It was like a ghost story.

At the opposite pole from the 2/26 Incident, there was in Japan at the same time something called the Osada Incident.⁴ Osada disguised herself with an eye patch. When the time came for the seasonal change from winter to summer clothing, she changed to lighter clothing while fleeing.

*

What next? I had already tried suicide unsuccessfully four times by then. And naturally I thought of death several times a week.

*

The war with China lengthened interminably, and most people came to think that it was meaningless. Conversion.⁵ The enemy became England and America.

*

The generals at central headquarters solemnly taught us the word "escalation." They didn't seem to be trying to be funny. But I could not use the word without laughing. The generals promoted a song that went, "No matter how hard it is, we're going to win this war!" but it never became the slightest bit popular. It seems that people were too embarrassed to sing it, which was natural enough. Again, the generals made the newspaper people use the word "cordon" indiscriminately. But that made one think of "coffin." They also invented a word for "shifting position" that made one think of a bouncing, rolling ball. There were generals who came forward and said with a nasty leer, "The enemy is walking right into our embrace." Any one of us would have thrown a fit if even a single bee came into our embrace, and yet these generals were embracing the whole enemy army and being very smug about it. Perhaps they were intending to squash it? The "Tennōzan" changed from place to place.⁶ Why, I wondered, were they dragging out this

⁴On May 19, 1936, Abe Sada (known familiarly as Osada), a thirty-two-year-old waitress, strangled her lover, Ishida Kichizō, aged forty-two, as they made love, fearing that he was preparing to leave her. Newspapers of the day titillated readers by calling her a "frightening beauty" and a "vampire" for her shocking subsequent actions: she cut off his penis and testicles, wrote "Sada and Kichi, alone together," in blood on his left thigh and on the bedding, and carved their initials on his upper right arm with the knife. When arrested on May 21 and asked whether carrying around the parts of her dead lover hadn't given her the creeps, she reportedly smiled sunnily and replied, "Why? They were the sweet things of my man!" The film *In the Realm of the Senses* is based on this incident. See also Jack Seward, *Japanese in Action* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1968), 189-91.

⁵*Tenkō*, Dazai's word here for "conversion," was used in the context of wartime Japan to refer to the wholesale public repudiation of leftist or liberal sentiments by hundreds of writers following government suppression of the Communist Party in 1933. Autobiographical and confessional works inspired by this "conversion" are treated now as a subgenre, "*tenkō* literature."

⁶Tennōzan was a hill strategically important in a battle near Kyoto in 1582.

Tennōzan again? Wasn't Sekigahara or whatever, where it had been crucial, good enough? Whether or not it was a mistake for "Tennōzan," there emerged generals who would call the strategic points "Temmokuzan."⁷ If it was to be "Temmokuzan," then one might as well forget the whole thing. The simile would be totally pointless. One staff officer announced, "Our present campaign is beyond the enemy's incomprehension." It appeared just like that in the newspapers. Neither the officer nor the newspapers seem to have intended it as humor. They were quite serious. If it was beyond the enemy's incomprehension, then there was nothing to do but give up. It was too much of a leap.

Our leaders were all illiterate. They did not even reach the level of common sense.

*

They did terrorize us, however. Using the name of the Emperor, they bullied us. I like the Emperor. I like him very much. But there even came one night when I secretly cursed him.

*

Japan made its unconditional surrender. All I felt was shame. I was so ashamed, I could say nothing.

*

The number of people who had bad things to say about the Emperor increased dramatically. But when I saw what was happening, I realized how deeply I had come to love the Emperor. I professed myself a conservative to my friends.

*

At ten, a democrat; at twenty, a communist; at thirty, a pure aesthete; at forty, a conservative. And then does history repeat itself after all? I hope it does not.

*

I wait in hope that an entirely new current of thought will come sweeping in. More than anything, I need sheer nerve in order to announce what it is. The situation I now dream about is a self-sufficient, anarchistic Shangri-la based on the apperceptions of the French Moralists, and positing the Emperor as its model of morality.

⁷Literally, "Tea Bowl Hill" instead of "Heavenly King Hill."

TSUGARU

Tsugaru was published in 1944 as the seventh volume in a series of regional studies by noted authors commissioned by the publisher Koyama Shoten. For a discussion, see pp. 139–48.

The map and the drawings reproduced in the translation are Dazai's, as are the accompanying legends.

Tsugaru Snow

Powder snow

Grain snow

Flake snow

Water snow

Crusty snow

Crystal snow

Ice snow

Tōō Almanac

Introduction

One year in the spring, for the first time in my life, I took a three-week trip around the Tsugaru Peninsula at the northernmost end of Honshū.¹ It was one of the major events in the thirty-odd years of my life. I was born in Tsugaru and spent my first twenty years growing up there, but all I had seen were the towns of Kanagi, Goshogawara, Aomori, Hirosaki, Asamushi, and Ōwani. I knew nothing about any of the other towns and villages.

Kanagi is where I was born. It is situated just about in the center of the Tsugaru plain. It's got a population of five or six thousand, and no noteworthy characteristics. All the same, it does have something of a pretentious, cosmopolitan air to it. To speak well of it, it is clear as water; to speak negatively, it comes across as shallow and show-offy.

Six miles south along the Iwaki River is the town of Goshogawara. It is the trading center for the products of the region, and has a population of over ten thousand. Aside from it, and Aomori and Hirosaki, there are no other towns over ten thousand in the area. To speak well of it, it's a bustling town; to speak negatively, it's noisy and restless. There's nothing of the country town about it; the shudders of loneliness that are special to a metropolis seem to have crept quietly into even this town, small as it is. If we were to compare it to Tokyo (to use a figure so grand it embarrasses me, too), then Kanagi might be Koishikawa, and Goshogawara would be Asakusa.² Goshogawara is where my aunt lives. When I was little, I was more attached to my aunt than to my own mother, and so I was constantly over at her house in Goshogawara.

Until I went to high school I knew virtually nothing of the rest of Tsugaru, outside of these two towns.³ When the time came for me to go to Aomori to take the entrance exam for high school, what should have been just a simple three- or four-hour trip felt to me like an extraordinarily grand journey. The following is from a story I wrote about the events of that time. It's not exactly the literal truth; I've dramatized the excitement, and added a kind of sad, farcical fiction. But I do think it represents my feelings at the time.

The youth, having just graduated from the village elementary school, was setting out for the small city that was the prefectural capital, twenty-five miles away. He was dressed with a pitiful stylishness, incomprehensible to anyone else, that had been elaborated through the years. He jiggled about in the horse-drawn carriage and then got on the train, on his way to take the entrance examination for

¹Main island of the Japanese archipelago.

²Both parts of the present city of Tokyo, still invoking for contemporary Japanese memories of the premodern city of Edo and its merchant-class "downtown." Koishikawa summons up a quietly tasteful residential area; Asakusa would have the brash glitter of an old-fashioned entertainment district.

³For the prewar school system, see Chapter 1, Note 4.

high school. His costume for that occasion was pathetically fantastic. He was quite taken with white flannel shirts, it seems, and sure enough, he wore one on that occasion too. This one had a wide collar, like butterfly wings, and he had flipped the collar outside his kimono so as to cover the neckline, like a summer shirt open outside the jacket. It looked somehow like a baby's bib, but the poor boy was thrilled. He thought he looked just like a prince. Over his figured kimono he wore a short *hakama* with whitish stripes, and with that, long socks and shiny black high, lace-up shoes. Over that, a cloak. The boy's father was dead and his mother was an invalid, so that the only one to care for him was his elder brother's tender-hearted wife. He cleverly played up to her and insisted on having the shirt made with that big collar; she laughed, and he was furious. It vexed him almost to tears to think that no one understood his aesthetics. "Smartness and elegance." That summed up the boy's idea of aesthetics. No, no, it summed up all of life for him, the entire purpose of human existence. He left the cloak unbuttoned, and wore it thrown over his narrow shoulders, which it threatened to slip off at any moment. He believed that wearing it so was a sophisticated little touch. He may have learned that somewhere, or perhaps the instinct for style is something you discover for yourself, even if you have no model. This was practically the first time in his life that he had set foot in a city worth the name, and so he put everything he had into his appearance. He was so excited that even his speech changed from the moment he arrived at the little city at the northernmost end of Honshū. He started using the Tokyo dialect he had learned from some boys' magazine. But once he settled down at the inn and heard the maids speaking, he realized that they spoke Tsugaru dialect, just about the same as the language of the boy's birthplace, and that took a little of the wind from his sails. His birthplace and this little city were, after all, not even twenty-five miles apart.⁴

The little seaside city is Aomori. In the first year of Kan'ei [1624] the magistrate of Sotogahama⁵ set about developing it as the premier seaport of Tsugaru. That's roughly 320 years ago. It's said that there were already a thousand houses there at the time. From then on, maritime traffic gradually flourished with Ōmi, Echizen, Echigo, Kaga, Noto, and Wakasa. Aomori became the most prosperous strategic port in Sotogahama, and when in Meiji 4 [1871] the old *han*⁶ were abolished and prefectures established, it became the capital of Aomori Prefecture. Now it guards Honshū's northern portal; and what with the rail-ferry connection to Hakodate in Hokkaidō, there's probably no one who hasn't heard of it. At present, it has more than twenty thousand households, with a population in excess of one hundred thousand. Yet somehow it doesn't really make a very good impression on travelers. It's no one's fault that periodic major fires have left it with such

⁴From Dazai's story "The Stylish Child," *Zenshū* 3: 46-47.

⁵Literally, "outer shores."

⁶"Feudal domains," from the seventeenth century until prefectures were established in the 1870's.

ramshackle houses. Still, a visitor would be hard put to figure out where the center of town is. Strangely grimy houses stand blankly side by side, calling out nothing to the passing visitor, who hastens uneasily through the town. But I spent four years there, and those years were extremely important in my life. That period is fairly faithfully described in one of my early works, "Recollections":

My record wasn't very good, but that spring I took the high school exam and passed. I had new kimono trousers, black socks and lace-up shoes to wear; I left behind the shawl I had used until now, and made my appearance in the little city beside the sea like a regular dandy, with my wool cloak unbuttoned, open in front, and flung over my shoulders. I settled in there at the home of a draper who was distantly related to our family. The house, with its tattered advertising banner at the entrance, was my home, and the family took care of me for a long time.

I had a strong tendency to get overexcited, and when school began I would wear my school uniform cap and formal clothes even to go to the public bath. Whenever I saw myself dressed up like that, reflected in a window as I passed, I would laugh a little and lightly give the reflection a bow of recognition.

Nevertheless, school was totally unpleasant. The white-painted school building was at the edge of town; right behind it was a broad, flattish park that faced out onto the strait, and the sound of the waves and the whispering of the pine trees came to us even in class. The corridors were wide and the classroom ceilings were high; it looked quite impressive to me—but the teachers persecuted me terribly.

Right from the first day, with the entrance ceremonies, there was a physical education teacher who used to beat me. He said I was impertinent. He had been in charge of my oral examination; at the time he had been deeply sympathetic and had said, "I realize that your father has just died, and probably you couldn't study properly," as I stood with drooping head; therefore, his turnabout wounded my spirit all the more deeply. Before long, I was being beaten by several of the teachers. I was punished for all kinds of reasons—for grinning, or for yawning, or things like that. I was even told that my gigantic yawns in class were famous in the teachers' room. I thought it was ridiculous that they talked about such a stupid thing.

A fellow student from my village one day called me into the shadow of a sand dune in the schoolyard and warned me that my attitude really did look provocative, and if I went on being punished like that, I'd fail for sure. That terrified me. After class let out that day, I hurried home alone by the seashore. I sighed as I walked on, the waves lapping at my shoes. As I wiped the sweat from my forehead with my jacket sleeve, a huge grey sail bobbed past before my eyes.⁷

The school remains, as it was then, on the western edge of the city. The "flat park" is Gappo Park, and it was so closely connected to the school that it might as well have been its backyard. Except when it was snowing in winter, I went through the park on my way to and from school, and walked

⁷From "Recollections," *Zenshū* 1: 37–38.

along the seashore. That was the back road, and not many students took it. I found it refreshing. It was particularly nice on early summer mornings.

The draper who looked after me was Toyoda. They were an important, long-established Aomori enterprise, going back nearly twenty generations. The father passed away a couple of years ago; he had taken better care of me than if I'd been his own son. I won't ever forget that. I've been to Aomori a couple of times in the past few years, and by now it's become customary for me to visit his grave, and then stay at the Toyodas' for the night.

One spring morning on the way to school, when I was in the third year of high school, I stood bemusedly for a while leaning against the round railing of a crimson-painted bridge. A broad river, like the Sumida, flowed lazily beneath. I had never before had quite such an experience of total abstraction. I was otherwise always constructing attitudes, as if someone were watching me from behind, giving a running commentary on my every slightest behavior—"He gazed perplexedly at his hands," "He muttered to himself, scratching behind his ear"—and so for me to act suddenly or unconsciously had been quite impossible. When I awoke from my spell on the bridge, I found myself racked with loneliness. With that emotion, I thought about my past and the future. I remembered many things as I crossed the clattery bridge, and again I was lost in reverie. Finally, I heaved a sigh and thought, I wonder if I will ever amount to anything special. . . .

I was studying, truly, if only from the menacing thought that above all else I had to outclass the common herd. From my third year, I was always at the head of the class. It is hard to be at the head without being called a grind, but not only didn't they insult me that way, I even perfected the art of taming my school friends, including a judo captain nicknamed "Octopus." There was a big wastepaper basket in the corner of the classroom, and once in a while I'd ask him, "Doesn't the Octopus want to crawl into his lair?" He would put the basket on his head and start laughing, a peculiar laugh that echoed in the basket. The good-looking boys in the class hung around me, too. And even when I plastered triangle- and hexagon- and flower-shaped adhesive tape here and there over the pimples on my face, no one made fun of me.

What a torment those pimples were. Each day there were more than the day before; every morning when I woke up, I would pass my hand over my face to check out the situation. I tried medicines of all kinds, but none of them worked. Whenever I went to the pharmacy to buy one, I'd write the name on a piece of paper and say, "My friend told me you have this stuff," as if someone else had asked me to get it for him. I believed that the pimples were a sign of my sexual desires, and was hopelessly ashamed. There were even times when I thought I would rather die. My family's criticism of my face reached great heights. My oldest sister, who was now married into another family, seems even to have gone so far as to say that there might not be anyone who would want to marry me. I diligently applied my medicines.

My younger brother worried about my pimples, too, and he often went in my place to buy the potions. We had clashed so often as children that I had prayed he

would fail the high school entrance examination; but now that we found ourselves like this, away from home together, I slowly began to understand how good-natured he was. As he grew older, he became quiet and introspective. He sometimes wrote short pieces for our little journal, too, but his style was timid. It was painful to him that his school record was not as good as mine, and if I dared sympathize, he became even more unhappy. And he found it infuriating that his hair grew into a widow's peak, like a girl's. He firmly believed that it was because his forehead was narrow that he was so stupid. I let him get away with anything. In those days, whenever I dealt with anyone, I would either cover everything up or lay it all bare. My brother and I revealed everything to each other.

One moonless night at the beginning of autumn, we went out on a wharf by the harbor, and as the fresh wind from across the strait blew against us, we discussed the "red string." That was something a teacher had once told us about during grammar class. Each of us had an invisible red string attached to the little toe of his right foot, which, after much twining and stretching, was sure to be attached to the same toe of some girl. No matter how far apart we were, the string would never break; no matter how close we came, even if we met each other in passing, the string would never tangle. And that girl was fated to become his bride. When I first heard the story I was so excited I went home and told my brother about it right away. That night, too, as we listened to the sound of the waves and the crying of the seagulls, we talked about it. "What is your wife doing now?" I asked him. He pulled two or three times with both hands against the jetty railing, and then said awkwardly, "Walking in the garden." How perfect for my brother, I thought, as I imagined a young girl, wearing big garden shoes and carrying a fan, gazing at the evening primroses. It was my turn to tell about mine, but I continued to look out at the dark sea and said only, "Wearing a red sash"—and shut my mouth. The channel ferry boat came bobbing from the horizon, like a big hotel with yellow light streaming from its windows.⁸

My brother died two or three years after that, but at the time, we used to like to go out onto the pier. Even in winter, on nights when it was snowing, we'd go out there with umbrellas. It was great to see the snow whispering down onto the deep water of the harbor. Aomori harbor is hardly scenic these days, crowded with cargo ships.

The wide river like the Sumida is the Tsutsumi, running through the eastern part of the city and flowing directly into Aomori Bay. Just before it flows into the sea, there is a portion where it seems strangely to hesitate, and the current becomes so slow that it almost flows backward. I would stand there, bemusedly watching the slow current. To use a fancy metaphor, maybe this was just at the point my boyhood was about to flow out from the river into the sea. That may be why I say that those four years in Aomori were so unforgettable.

That's about the extent of my memories of Aomori. The seaside hot

⁸From "Recollections," *Zenshū* 1: 45-48.

spring town of Asamushi, about seven miles east of Aomori, is also unforgettable territory. As you might expect, there's a passage about it in "Recollections":

Autumn came, and I headed with my brother for a seaside hot spring about thirty minutes by train from the city. There, my mother and my sister, who was now out of the hospital, were renting a house for her convalescence. I lived there for quite a while, continuing my exam studies. Burdened as I was with the reputation of being a genius, it was essential for me to show that I was going on to college from high school. My hatred of school grew all the worse, but I studied steadily anyway, as if something were after me. I commuted to school from the hot spring. Every Sunday, my friends came to visit. Each time they came, we would go on a picnic. On the broad rocks by the seashore, we would make stews and drink wine. My brother had a good voice and knew many of the new songs, so we had him teach them to us, and we would all sing together. Tired out from our pleasures, we would fall asleep on the rocks; when we awoke, the rocks which had been a part of the shore would have become separate islands in the incoming tide. We felt as if we had not yet awakened from our dreams.⁹

This may be the point for me to joke, "Well, my boyhood really did pour into the ocean, didn't it!" The sea at Asamushi is clear and cold and not bad, but I certainly can't say that the inns are all that good. It's only natural, and certainly nothing to be criticized, that it should have the atmosphere of a bleak Tōhoku¹⁰ fishing village; but I wonder if I'm the only one to have been put off by what I sensed to be a small, peculiar arrogance, rather like that of the frog in the well who doesn't know of the great ocean. It's my own homeland, and that's why I dare to say all these slanderous things; but for all that it's in the country, I can't help feeling that it's lost its innocence and turned strangely edgy. I haven't visited there recently, but it would be only luck if the inns weren't shockingly expensive. Clearly, I'm speaking out of turn—I've not been there recently, I've only seen it from the windows of the train. I say these things just from the feeble perceptions of a poor artist, with no other proof at all, so I don't want to force my intuitions on the reader. In fact, it might be better for the reader not to trust my intuitions at all. I'm sure Asamushi has even taken off in a new direction these days, as a modest health resort. It's just that doubts flash through my mind. At one time, fancy, young, vigorous visitors from Aomori made this bleak hot spring curiously self-important; they probably made the landladies of the inns drunk on cheap visions, as they sat in their shanties, thinking that their inns were as good as

⁹From "Recollections," *Zenshū* 1: 54. Dazai has slightly cut the quotation to remove the reference to Miyo, who is central to the action of "Recollections" but not part of the *Tsugaru* world.

¹⁰Literally, "of the Northeast." Tōhoku is a general designation for the northernmost region of Honshū.

the ones in Atami and Yugawara.¹¹ And so here I am, a poor man of letters made crotchety by travel, not daring to get off the train, only riding by this hot spring of memory from time to time—that's all I can say about it.

Asamushi is probably the most famous hot spring in Tsugaru, and Ōwani is probably next. Ōwani is near the southern edge of Tsugaru, by the Aomori-Akita prefectural border, and may be known throughout Japan more as a ski resort than as a hot spring. It's in the foothills, and traces of the history of Tsugaru *han* still linger here. My relatives used to come here often for the waters, and I came on vacations when I was a boy, but I don't have as vivid memories of it as I do of Asamushi. But while my memories of Asamushi are clear, I can't say they're all that happy. By contrast, my memories of Ōwani are hazy, but I look back fondly on them. Could it be the difference between the sea and the mountains? I haven't been to Ōwani for nearly twenty years, but if I saw it now, I wonder if it would have Asamushi's wasted, hung-over, dregs-of-the-city atmosphere? I can't give up on it. Compared to Asamushi, the travel connections to Tokyo are quite bad. That's my first sign of hope. Then there's a place called Ikarigaseki near the hot spring, which was a government inspection post at the border of Tsugaru and Akita in the old *han* days, so as a result there are many historical relics in the area, and deep roots to the daily life of the people of old Tsugaru must still remain, and I can't imagine that they would be so easily swept away by winds from the city. Furthermore—the final great safety net—less than eight miles to the north is Hirosaki Castle, whose towers remain even now just as they were; and the cherry blossoms which enfold them year after year in the warm springtime boast its continued health. I like to think that as long as Hirosaki Castle is waiting there, Ōwani hot spring will not suck at the leavings of the city and fall into a drunken frenzy.

Hirosaki Castle. This is the heart of the history of Tsugaru *han*. Ōura Tamenobu was the founder of Tsugaru *han*; he joined forces with the Tokugawa side in the Battle of Sekigahara,¹² and when Tokugawa Ieyasu was named shōgun in 1603, he was given the fiefdom of 47,000 *koku*.¹³ He began at once to lay out a moat and castle on a high hill in Hirosaki, which reached completion under the second lord, Tsugaru Nobuhira. From then on, generations of *han* lords occupied the castle. In the time of the fourth lord, Nobumasa, a branch family was set up in Kuroishi under the headship of Nobuhide, another member of the clan, and control of Tsugaru was divided between the two *han* of Hirosaki and Kuroishi. The good government of

¹¹Fashionable hot spring towns within easy reach of Tokyo.

¹²In 1600, where hegemony over all Japan was won for Ieyasu.

¹³Measure of rice for feudal stipends. One *koku* is equal to about five bushels, supposed to be sufficient to support one adult for a year. Forty-seven thousand *koku* is at the low end of major holdings.

Nobumasa, who was celebrated as the leading light among the Seven Great Lords of Genroku,¹⁴ did much to enhance the honor of Tsugaru; but the great famines of the Hōreki and Temmei periods¹⁵ during the tenure of the seventh lord, Nobuyasu, transformed all of Tsugaru into a living hell, and the *han's* finances approached the brink of total collapse. Amid unrelieved bleakness, the eighth lord, Nobuakira, and the ninth, Yasuoya, worked desperately to restore the *han's* strength; but by the time of the eleventh, Yukitsugu, it finally just managed to pull itself out of danger. And then in the time of the twelfth lord, Tsuguakira, the *han* records were auspiciously restored to the Emperor, and the present Aomori Prefecture was born. This history of Hirosaki Castle is also a much-abbreviated history of Tsugaru itself. I plan to go into greater detail in the following pages, but for the moment I'll write a bit about my memories of Hirosaki, and with that round out my introduction of Tsugaru.

I spent three years in the castle town of Hirosaki. For those three years, I was in the literature department of Hirosaki College;¹⁶ but at the same time, I was deeply involved with *gidayū*.¹⁷ That was really quite strange. On my way home from school, I would stop by at the house of a woman *gidayū* teacher. I may have started with *Asagao nikki*; I've forgotten every last one of them now, but at the time I learned a fair number—*Nozaki-mura*, *Tsubosaka*, *Kamiji*, and the rest.¹⁸ Why, I wonder, did I take up something so queer and so much out of my line? I can't blame Hirosaki entirely, but I do expect it to accept part of the responsibility. It's a town where *gidayū* is unusually popular. From time to time, there are amateur programs at the local theaters. I went to see one once, and there they were, the gentlemen of the town, impeccably dressed in *kamishimo*,¹⁹ wailing away with all seriousness. None of them was very good, but there was nothing put-on about them; they wailed on with great conscientiousness and seriousness. Ever since the old days, Aomori has had not a few stylish gentlemen, but they seem to be the type of shrewd customers who learn popular ditties just to have geisha tell them how clever they are, or who use their stylish trappings as ammunition in political or business maneuvering; in Hirosaki, rather, there were all these poor gentlemen, uncomplainingly and stupidly sweating away at their trivial art. In other words, there seem to be genuine holy fools still left in Hirosaki.

¹⁴Genroku (1688–1703) was a period of great cultural efflorescence during the Tokugawa or Edo period (1603–1868). The Seven Lords of Genroku were noted in accounts of the day as particularly outstanding leaders and politicians.

¹⁵Hōreki, 1750's; Temmei, 1780's.

¹⁶See Chapter 1, Note 4.

¹⁷A kind of chanting to *samisen* accompaniment. Associated with the *bunraku* puppet theater of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and also a traditional amateur art.

¹⁸Kabuki and puppet theater plays or scenes from plays.

¹⁹Stiff, wide-shouldered garment worn over kimono.

Here's a passage from an old text called the *Eikei gunki*:²⁰ "The hearts of the people of the southern parts of Ōu²¹ are mad. They don't even know to obey someone strong in authority. They say, 'That one is an ancestral enemy,' or, 'This one is worthless,' or, 'He is only temporarily well favored by the passing fortunes of war and that's why he takes pride in his authority.' And so they do not obey." That same genuine, crazy will is in the people of Hirosaki. There is this tendency in them not to bow to the winner, no matter how many times they are beaten; they guard their splendid isolation fiercely, at the cost of becoming laughingstocks. It's the fault of those three years I spent there that I got such a taste for the old days, and developed such a passion for *gidayū*, and came to exhibit the sort of romantic spirit demonstrated in the following passage from one of my earlier stories. While it is undeniably a farcical fiction, I must confess ruefully that it is essentially true to the atmosphere of the time:

As long as he was just going to cafés and drinking wine, there was no problem; but before long, he picked up the habit of breezing into restaurants and eating with geisha.²² The boy didn't think there was anything particularly bad about that. He believed that to act like a gangster and man of the world was the height of taste. He went two or three times to eat at the quiet, old restaurants of the castle town, and soon his instinct for elegance swiftly reared its head again, and this time it was quite something. He wanted to go to a restaurant dressed as one of the *tobi no mono*²³ he'd seen in the play *The Battle of Me Company*,²⁴ and sit at leisure, cross-legged, in a private room opening onto the inner garden. He would say to the geisha, "Hey, sweetie, you sure are gorgeous!" With his heart pounding, he threw himself into preparing his attire. A navy blue workman's apron. He found that easily. In the big front pocket, he put an old-fashioned purse; when he walked around with it, his arms folded over his chest, he looked like a regular tough. He also bought a tie belt. It was a Hakata *obi*, which squeaked when he pulled it tight. He had a Tōzan²⁵ jacket made to order at a draper's. His costume was such a jumble it would have been hard to figure out if he was supposed to be a fireman or a gambler or a shop clerk. Nothing went with anything. Anyway, as long as it gave the impression that he was a character from the play, the boy was satisfied. It was early summer, and he wore hemp-soled sandals on his bare feet. By itself, that would have been all right, but then he suddenly got a strange idea. Leggings. The

²⁰Ōu *Eikei gunki* is a historical record of disputes between the Tsugaru and Nambu *han*. Date unknown, but before the nineteenth century.

²¹Old name for the northwest portion of Tōhoku, made up of the old provinces of Mutsu and Dewa.

²²"Cafés," *kissaten*; "restaurants," *kappōten*.

²³Firemen of the Edo period, established as a separate guild in 1718; something between popular heroes and thugs.

²⁴Kabuki play about a famous fight in 1805 between several *sumō* wrestlers and the Me Company of firefighters, in which several participants were killed or injured.

²⁵Finely striped, high-quality silk fabric. Originally imported from India, then woven in Kyoto and later exported to America, it had the cachet of distinction that Osamu was seeking.

firemen in the play had been wearing long, tight, navy leggings, and he decided he wanted them. "You goons!" they'd yelled, and flipped up their kimonos and tucked them into their belts. The navy leggings had so stood out at that moment that they'd burned into his memory. He wasn't satisfied with the ordinary short leggings. He scoured the castle town from end to end, looking for what he wanted. There were none to be found. He went around to dry goods stores and footwear stores, earnestly explaining: "You know, those things, like, you know, plasterers wear, you know what I mean, those long, tight, navy ones?" And the shopkeepers would shake their heads and laugh, telling him there wasn't much of a chance, nowadays. It was already quite hot as the boy made his rounds, and he was dripping with sweat. Finally, the owner of one shop gave him wonderful advice: "We don't carry them, but if you go round to the next alley, there's a shop that specializes in firemen's equipment, and if you ask there, they just might happen to have them." The boy brightened up immediately. "Of course—I didn't think of that—we don't call firemen *tobi no mono* anymore, so I forgot, but we still have firemen now, that's right." He flew off to the shop he'd been told of. Fire pumps, large and small, stood lined up in the shop, and firemen's standards, too.²⁶ He felt somehow intimidated, but plucking up his courage, he asked if they had leggings. The answer came back instantly: "Yes, we do." They were undeniably long, navy cotton leggings that the shopkeeper brought out to him; but on the outside of both sides was the bold red insignia of the fire department. In the end, he hadn't the courage to go around wearing something like that, and so sadly, the boy had no choice but to give up on the leggings.²⁷

Even on this undisputed home ground of fools, a fool of this magnitude was probably rare. Your author himself feels a little depressed even as he writes about it. The entertainment district where I'd eaten at restaurants with geisha—wasn't it Hackberry Lane?²⁸ That was nearly twenty years ago, and my memories are distant and hazy, but I seem to recall that it was indeed Hackberry Lane, at the bottom of the hill, below the shrine. And the place where I'd been running around dripping with sweat as I tried to buy my navy leggings was Embankment Street,²⁹ the most flourishing of the shopping streets below the castle. By comparison, the entertainment area in Aomori is Beach Street.³⁰ I don't think that name has any character. The shopping district in Aomori equivalent to Embankment Street is Big Street.³¹ That name's not distinctive, either. While I'm at it, I may as well list the streets of Hirosaki and Aomori, so you can see with amazing clarity the difference in character between these two little cities. Some Hirosaki street names: Base, Government, Embankment, Good Living, Barrelmaker, Bronze Smelters, Tea Plantation, Magistrate, Thatch, One Hundred Koku, Upper Sword-Guard, Lower Sword-Guard, Gun, Young Retainer, Servant, Falconer, Fifty Koku,

²⁶ *Matoi*, symbols of each fire company.

²⁸ Enoki kōji.

³⁰ Hamamachi.

²⁷ "The Stylish Child," *Zenshū* 3: 48–50.

²⁹ Dotemachi.

³¹ Ōmachi.

and Indigo Dyer streets.³² Compare them with these from Aomori: Beach, New Beach, Big, Rice, New, Willow, Temple, Dike, Salt, Little Clam, New Little Clam, Shore, Edge of the Waves, and Flourishing streets.³³

Now, this does not mean that I think Hirosaki is therefore a high-class town and Aomori is low-class. Hirosaki is not the only town with nostalgic names like Falconer Street or Indigo Dyer Street—you're bound to find them in castle towns all over Japan. Certainly, Hirosaki's Mount Iwaki is more graceful than Aomori's Mount Hakkōda. But the master novelist, Kasai Zenzō,³⁴ himself a native of Tsugaru, had this to say to us fellow natives: "You mustn't flatter yourselves. The reason Mount Iwaki looks so splendid is that there are no other high mountains nearby. Just go and look elsewhere. There are dozens of mountains as big. It's because there are no big mountains nearby that it looks so wonderful. Don't flatter yourselves."

Throughout Japan, there are virtually innumerable historical castle towns, so why do you suppose the people of Hirosaki seem to take such perverse pride in their feudal qualities? I don't mean to quibble, but compared to Kyūshū, the western provinces, Yamato,³⁵ and so forth, the Tsugaru region might be considered practically newly opened land. What kind of history could it have, to boast of throughout the country? I mean, even in the recent past, during the Meiji Restoration,³⁶ what loyalists came from this *han*? What was the attitude of the *han*? To put it bluntly, didn't they just trail along behind the other *han*, advance or retreat? Where on earth is this tradition to be proud of? Yet the people of Hirosaki just go on stubbornly with their backs up. And regardless of how strong the person in authority, they just say, "He is worthless, he is only temporarily favored by passing fortune and that's why he takes pride in his authority," and they do not obey. I've heard a story that whenever His Excellency Ichinohe Hyōe, an army general and a native of this region, went back to his home village, he always wore Japanese garb, with a serge *hakama*. He knew that if he'd returned in his general's uniform, the people of the village would have fixed him with a stare, crossed their arms, and said, "Who does he think he is? He's just made it due to chance." And so, wisely, when he went home he decided to go in kimono and serge *hakama*. Even if this tale should be somewhat apocryphal, it is not unreasonable for such legends to arise, given the firm, unfathomable

³²Honchō, Zaifuchō, Dotemachi, Sumiyoshichō, Okeyamachi, Dōyamachi, Chabatakechō, Daikanchō, Kayachō, Hyakkokumachi, Kamisayashimachi, Shimosayashimachi, Teppōmachi, Wakatōchō, Kobitōchō, Takajōmachi, Gojikkokumachi, Kon'yamachi.

³³Hamamachi, Shinhamamachi, Ōmachi, Komemachi, Shinmachi, Yanagimachi, Teramachi, Tsutsumimachi, Shiomachi, Shijimigaimachi, Shinshijimigaimachi, Uramachi, Namiuchi, Sakaemachi.

³⁴1887-1928.

³⁵Kyoto-Nara area, the center of the classical central culture.

³⁶1860's. The Meiji period lasted until 1912; the "Restoration" refers to the change of government in 1868, from the Tokugawa shoguns to the Emperor Meiji.

resistance of the people of Hirosaki. Why should I hide it? The fact is that I have those same unfortunate bones in me. I can't blame everything on that, but it's at least partly why I've not yet been able to rise above a hand-to-mouth existence. Several years ago I was asked by a certain magazine to write "Words to Send to My Hometown," and this is what I said in reply:

I love thee, I hate thee.

I've said a lot of nasty things about Hirosaki, not out of antagonism, but because I've looked into myself. I am a man of Tsugaru. For generation after generation, my ancestors were peasants of Tsugaru *han*. You might call me purebred Tsugaru. That's why I can say such awful things about Tsugaru without the slightest hesitation. If someone from the outside should hear my complaints and, as a result, underestimate Tsugaru, I'd certainly be most unhappy. After all, I do love Tsugaru.

Hirosaki: present number of households, ten thousand; population, a bit over fifty thousand. Hirosaki Castle and the five-storied pavilion of Saishōin Temple are designated National Treasures. Tayama Katai³⁷ apparently once certified that Hirosaki Park in cherry blossom season is the best in Japan. Hirosaki is the headquarters of the Hirosaki Army Division. There's a festival called the Mountain Pilgrimage where every year for three days, from the twenty-eighth of the seventh month to the first of the eighth month of the lunar calendar, tens of thousands of people make a pilgrimage to the inner shrine at the summit of Mount Iwaki, Tsugaru's sacred peak, and the whole town resounds with excitement as they dance through on their way up and back. These are the sorts of things a guidebook would tell you right off. But I find such things quite inadequate to explain Hirosaki. That's why I've been wandering among my childhood memories, hoping to find something that would give you as vivid a picture as possible of Hirosaki's specialness. But all I've come up with are these idle maanderings. They aren't going as I'd hoped, and now they've turned into terrible complaints, which I'd certainly not expected. And now not even the writer himself knows where to go from here. I'm being too hard on the castle town of the old Tsugaru *han*. It is certainly the source of support for the souls of us people of Tsugaru, and yet, my explanations leave much of its character ambiguous. A castle tower wrapped in cherry blossoms isn't, after all, something you'll see only in Hirosaki. Aren't most castles anywhere in Japan usually wrapped in cherry blossoms? Does it seem reasonable that Ōwani hot spring has been able to preserve the scent of Tsugaru just because of the cherry blossom-wrapped towers near it? I did get stupidly excited back there when I wrote that as long as Hirosaki Castle was there, Ōwani might not fall into a drunken frenzy, sipping on the dregs of the city; but if I now push my thoughts to their logical

³⁷Modern novelist, 1871-1930.

conclusion, I come to realize that this has been no more than irresponsible, sentimental "beautiful writing." You can't rely on any of it, and that just depresses me. The thing is, the town is simply hopeless. Maybe it is the site of the castle of generations of the old *han* lords, but another upstart town went and seized the prefectural capital from it. In the rest of the country, prefectural capitals were generally set up in the old *han* castle town. In fact, I think it's a misfortune to Aomori Prefecture that the capital had to be taken from Hirosaki to Aomori. I have no particular dislike for Aomori. It's even refreshing to see a developing town prosper. But it sets my teeth on edge to see Hirosaki blandly going along while it's being defeated. It's natural to want to buck up the underdog. I wanted to take Hirosaki's side, somehow or other, and that's why I've tried to write these various things in my own clumsy way. But in the end, I haven't been able to describe Hirosaki's definitive beauty, the distinctive strength of Hirosaki Castle. I'll say it again: this is the source of support for the souls of the people of Tsugaru. It must have something. It has to have some special, different, splendid tradition, not to be found anywhere else if you searched the whole country. I know instinctively what it is, but I can't show you readers clearly and concretely what it is. That's so painful, I can't stand it. It just kills me.

It was at dusk, one day in the spring, I recall, while I was a student in the literature department at Hirosaki College. I went up alone to see the castle. I was standing in a corner of the courtyard, gazing out at Mount Iwaki, when I suddenly noticed a dream city spreading out before me, below my feet, and a shiver ran through me. Until that moment, I had always thought of the castle as standing all by itself out on the edge of town. But no, look, here was the town, right below the castle, with an antique elegance I had never seen before, crouching silently, holding its breath, its little roofs shoulder to shoulder, just as they had been for so many hundreds of years. Ah, there's been a town even in a place like this! Young as I was, I spontaneously sighed deeply, feeling as if I were in a dream. It was like those "hidden ponds" that appear so often in the *Manyōshū*.³⁸ I don't know why, but I felt as if I understood Hirosaki, and Tsugaru, at that moment. As long as *this* town existed, Hirosaki would never be an ordinary town, I thought. This may be my own complacent conceit, and maybe you, reader, won't understand what I'm talking about, but I have no choice except to insist that Hirosaki Castle is incomparably splendid because it has this "hidden pond." Suppose many-branched flowers bloomed on the shores of the hidden pond, and the white

³⁸First great poetry anthology of the Japanese people, eighth century. The reference is to a pond or swamp (*komorinu*) surrounded by dikes, in which the water is dammed up. See, for example, the envoy to the poem by Hitomaro on the death of Prince Takechi: "Like the water of the hidden pool / On the bank of the Haniyasu Lake / They know not whither to go— / Sore perplexed are they, the servants of the prince!" Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, *The Manyōshū* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 41.

walls of the castle tower rose mutely above them—then that castle would certainly be one of the greatest ones in the world. And a hot spring near this matchless castle would eternally preserve its innocence. Such is the wishful thinking (to use a current phrase) I've been indulging in, as I bid farewell to my beloved Hirosaki Castle.

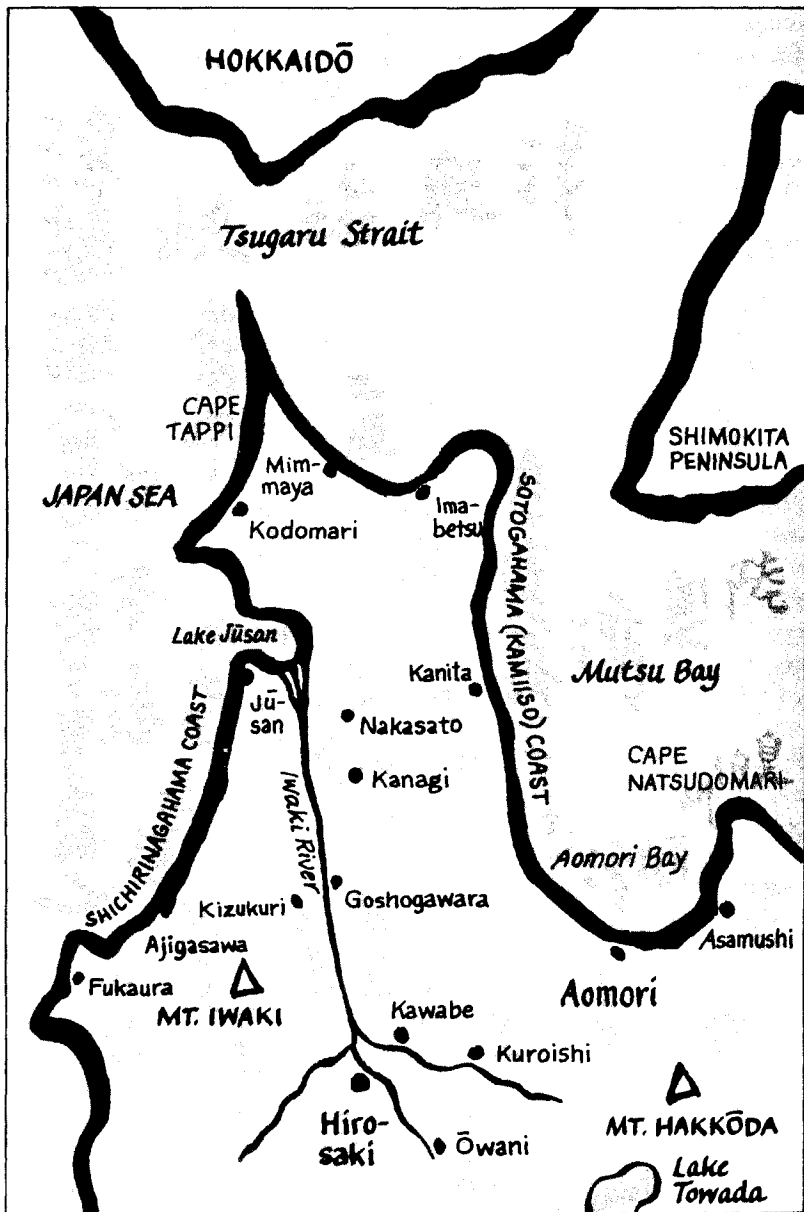
In fact, it is just as excruciatingly difficult to talk about the central core of one's homeland as it is to speak of one's own family. You don't know whether to praise or damn. In this introduction to Tsugaru, I have presented my boyhood memories of Kanagi, Goshogawara, Aomori, Hirosaki, Asamushi, and Ōwani, at the same time as I have been putting forward my presumptuous, outrageous criticisms. But when I try to decide whether or not I've spoken adequately about these six towns, even I can't help but get depressed. What I've said may be seditious enough to merit the death penalty. These six towns were so close to me in the past, forming my character and fixing my fate, that I may in fact have blind spots toward them. I am clearly aware that I may not be at all the most suitable person to talk about them. From here on, in the text itself, I think I should avoid as much as possible talking about these towns. I'll tell you about the other towns in Tsugaru instead.

One year in the spring, for the first time in my life, I took a three-week trip around the Tsugaru Peninsula . . . Finally, I retrace my steps to the opening lines of this introduction. On this trip, I saw the other towns and villages of Tsugaru virtually for the first time in my life. Until then, I really did **know** nothing beyond those six towns. While I was in elementary school, we took excursions to some of the villages near Kanagi, but I have no deep, nostalgic memories of them. When I returned to Kanagi for summer vacation during high school, I would stretch out on the sofa in the Western-style room on the second floor, gulping down cider from the bottle and reading idly through my brother's library just as the books came to hand; I never traveled anywhere. When I was in college, during vacations I would always go to visit my next older brother in Tokyo (he was studying sculpture, but he died at the age of twenty-seven), and when I graduated from college, that was it—I **came** to attend university in Tokyo, and didn't return to my hometown for some ten years. That's why I have to say that this Tsugaru trip was quite an important event for me.

I hope to avoid pseudospecialist pronouncements about the topography, geological and astronomical features, finances, developmental history, education, sanitation, and so forth of the villages and towns I saw on this trip. Whatever I say would, after all, only be an embarrassingly thin plating of instant knowledge. People who want to know such details would do well to consult the studies of real specialists on the region. I have a different area of specialization: what others might call, provisionally, "love." It is a study of

how one man's heart touches another's. This, in the main, is the curriculum I was pursuing on this trip. I think to myself that, no matter what direction I pursue it from, as long as I manage to convey to readers a feeling for actual, contemporary life in Tsugaru, I'll get a passing grade for my Shōwa Tsugaru almanac,³⁹ won't I? Ah, if only it works out . . .

³⁹Dazai says, "Shōwa Tsugaru *fudoki*." "Shōwa" is "present-day" (that is, belonging to the period from 1926 to the present); *fudoki* were from classical times a kind of almanac, encyclopedia, or gazetteer of a local region—a form that Dazai here proposes to imitate.



Map of Tsugaru. (A sketch, additionally sketchy for reasons of national defense.)

I. Pilgrimage

“Why are you taking this trip, anyway?”

“Because I’m in pain.”

“There you go with that ‘pain’ again—I don’t believe you!”

“Masaoka Shiki, thirty-six, Ozaki Kōyō, thirty-seven, Saitō Ryokuu, thirty-eight, Kunikida Doppo, thirty-eight, Nagatsuka Takashi, thirty-seven, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, thirty-six, Kamura Isota, thirty-seven.”¹

“What’s that?”

“How old they were when they died. They all died off, one after another. Pretty soon I’ll be that old. To a writer, this is the most crucial age, and . . .”

“And . . . painful?”

“Are you trying to be funny? You, of all people, should be a bit more understanding. I’m not saying any more. Otherwise I’ll just sound pompous. I’m taking the trip, anyway.”

Maybe it’s because I’ve started getting on in years, but explaining my feelings seems pretentious to me (and a generally boring literary affectation, besides), so I don’t want to say any more.

Why don’t you write us something about Tsugaru? An editor with whom I was on good terms had been asking me to do it for a while, and I did want anyway, at least once while I was still alive, to look into all the nooks and crannies of the region I’d been born in. And so one year in the spring, looking like a beggar, I set out from Tokyo.

It was in the middle of May. I’m being quite subjective when I say I looked like a beggar, but to be objective, I didn’t look great. I didn’t own a suit. All I had was a labor-service² outfit—and not one I’d had specially made to order, either. My wife had dyed some cotton scraps we’d had around the house and had made the navy outfit, a windbreaker-type thing with pants, to some weird pattern of her own. When she’d dyed it, the material was navy, to be sure; but after I’d worn it outdoors a couple of times, it suddenly turned a strange purplish color. Even a woman would have to be quite a beauty to be able to wear purple well. With my purple work clothes, I wore green synthetic cotton gaiters and white rubber-soled canvas shoes. My hat was a tennis hat made of synthetic cotton. This was the first time in my life I’d ever gone on a trip looking like this—and I was usually such a dandy, too. But I consoled myself with what was in the knapsack on my back: a set of formal clothes with a made-over monogrammed *haori*³ that was a keepsake of my late mother. Never could tell when it might come in handy.

¹Modern writers from the late nineteenth century to the 1930’s.

²*Kinrōhōshi*, volunteer service on public projects, especially as part of the domestic war effort.

³Loose jacket worn over kimono.

I left Ueno on the 5:30 express; as the night wore on, it got terribly cold. All I had on under the windbreaker thing were two thin shirts, and only shorts under my trousers. Even people who had thought to bring a winter coat or a lap rug started complaining about how especially cold it was that night. I thought it was unusually cold, too. By this time in Tokyo there were already some early birds going around in unlined serge kimonos. I had forgotten how cold Tōhoku could be. I scrunched up my hands and feet as tightly as possible and curled up like a turtle, telling myself, Now this is it, it's good spiritual discipline, transcend your body. But as dawn approached, it got even colder, and finally I gave up on the spiritual self-denial and prayed for the most vulgar, this-worldly thing I could think of: Oh, let's get to Aomori fast, I want to get settled at some inn, right by the fire, with a hot flask of sake beside me! We arrived in Aomori at eight in the morning. T was at the station to meet me. I'd let him know by letter ahead of time.

"I thought you'd be wearing Japanese clothes."

"These aren't the times for it." I tried hard to make a joke of it.

T had brought his little girl with him. Ah, I should have brought her something, I realized.

"Won't you rest for a bit at my house?"

"Thanks, but I'd planned to go on to N's in Kanita by noon."

"I know that. Mr. N told me. He is expecting you, too. But why don't you rest at my house anyway, until the bus for Kanita leaves?"

My mean, disreputable prayer, to be settled by a fire with a flask of sake, was miraculously brought to pass. A fire was blazing away in T's hearth, and there was a decanter heating in the iron kettle.

"Thank you so much for coming all the way up here," said T, straightening up and giving a formal bow. "Perhaps you'd rather have beer?"

"No, no, thanks, sake's . . ." I trailed off, clearing my throat.

T had worked for my family. His primary responsibility had been the chicken coops. We were the same age, so we'd played together a lot. I remember once hearing my grandmother criticizing T: "His bad point and his good point is that he yells at the maids and distracts them." Later, T had gone on to study in Aomori, and then he'd been working at a hospital there, and was rather highly valued by both patients and hospital staff. The year before, he'd been drafted and sent to battle on a small island in the South Pacific; then he'd gotten sick and had come back last year, and then he'd gotten better, and now was back working in the same hospital.

"What made you happiest when you were at the front?"

T answered quietly. "Drinking my beer ration straight down from a glass. I'd be drinking it so carefully, sipping at it a little at a time, and I'd think, I'll take the glass from my lips for a moment, to take a breath, but somehow I never could stop."

T too had been someone who liked his liquor. Now he didn't drink at all. From time to time, he coughed lightly.

"How're you doing, I mean, your health . . ." Quite a while back, he had had pleurisy, and that had flared up at the front.

"Now it's service at the home front. When you take care of sick people in the hospital, if you've never been sick and in pain yourself, there's a lot you won't understand. It was a good experience for me."

"So it builds character, eh? Yes, to be sure, illnesses of the chest . . ." I'd gotten a little drunk, and now shamelessly began to expound upon medicine to the medical man. "It's all psychological. Forget it, and you get better. Sometimes you should even have yourself a big drink."

"Yes, well, I do my best," he said, laughing. The expert didn't seem to have much faith in my mad medicine.

"Won't you have something to eat? We don't seem to be getting much good fish even in Aomori, these days—"

"Hey, no, thanks . . ." I mused over the tray at my side. "It all looks great. You've gone to a lot of trouble for me, I know, but I'm just not that hungry."

I had made a vow to myself as I set out for Tsugaru: to be abstemious about food. I'm no saint, and it embarrasses me to say something like this, but I think Tokyo people want food too much. I may be old-fashioned, but I really do love that crazy do-or-die endurance, ridiculous as it may seem—you know, "The samurai sports a toothpick, even if he hasn't eaten." You don't have to go so far as to use a toothpick, but it does show a man's pride. And "man's pride" is, after all, likely to show up in ridiculous ways. I've heard rumors that there are Tokyo people who go out to the hinterlands and make incredibly exaggerated entreaties, without the slightest compunction. They say they're practically on the verge of starvation, and then they eat up the white rice the country people bring out for them as if worshipping it, and then they go on, oozing flattery: "Might you perhaps have something more to eat, oh, potatoes? That would be marvelous, how many months has it been since I've had such delicious potatoes? My, I would so like to take some home, I wonder if you'd share them with me." They make their pleas with obsequious smiles spread across their faces. In reality, however, the people of Tokyo all have to be getting exactly the same food rations as everyone else. It would be strange for them to be the only ones on the brink of starvation. Maybe they have enlarged stomachs, but anyway, pathetic appeals for food really are unseemly. Even if you don't invoke something as serious as "doing it for the nation," still, regardless of the times, you do want to see people have pride as human beings. I've heard that enough of this small minority of exceptions have gone out to the countryside with these terribly irresponsible tales of food shortages in the capital that now country people have started to treat all visitors from Tokyo with contempt, as if they've all come scavenging

for food. I have not come to Tsugaru to scavenge for food. I may look like a beggar, with my purple outfit, but I'm a beggar for Truth and Love, not Rice! Such was the secret desire I had come to Tsugaru with, to take this grand, pretentious, didactic stand for the honor of all Tokyo people. If someone said to me with all goodwill, "Here, this is white rice, please, eat until you burst, we've heard things are terrible in Tokyo," well, I planned to take just one little bowlful and tell him this: "Maybe I'm just used to it, but Tokyo's rice is tastier. Just when we think our food supplies are going to run out, why, there come the next rations. My stomach seems to have shrunk, at some time or other—now I get full even when I eat just a little. So it works out perfectly."

But my tortuous precautions were totally unnecessary. I visited quite a few people in Tsugaru, but never once did anyone say to me, "Here's white rice, eat up till you burst." And even my eighty-eight-year-old grandmother told me, as if she were ashamed, "You can eat all the wonderful things you want in Tokyo, so we've really had a terrible time trying to figure out what to feed you. I thought we might give you squash *kasu* pickles, but for some reason, we haven't been able to get any sake *kasu* at all, these days."⁴ That made me especially happy. In other words, the only people I met were not particularly sensitive about food and didn't worry much about it. I thanked God for my good fortune. No one tried to force food on me to take back, either; you know, "Here, take this with you." As a result, I was able to continue my journey with a light knapsack on my back. But then, when I got back home, I was stunned to discover that the kind people I'd visited had all sent packages to my house that arrived before I did. But that's another story; anyway, T didn't urge food on me except that once, and not a word came up in conversation about the food situation in Tokyo. Our main topic was, as you might expect, memories of our childhood together, playing at the house in Kanagi so long ago.

"You know, I've always thought of you as a bosom buddy," I said. How truly outrageous my words were, rude, affected, pretentious, stagy, conceited. I squirmed as soon as I'd spoken. Surely there was another way to have said it.

"That's not right." T seemed to have read my thoughts. "I am someone who served in your house in Kanagi. And you are the master. If I don't think in those terms, I'm not happy. Strange, isn't it? Twenty years have gone by, but even now I dream constantly about your Kanagi house. I dreamed even when I was at the front. I'd think to myself, 'Damn! I've forgotten to feed the chickens'—and then I'd wake up!"

It came time for the bus. I went out with T. I wasn't cold anymore. The

⁴*Kasu* is sake lees, used for pickling.

weather was good, and I'd drunk the heated sake, and far from being cold, I felt sweat lying lightly on my forehead. We talked about how the cherries in Gappo Park were in full bloom just then. The streets of Aomori lay bleached and dry—no, I will restrain myself from giving my irresponsible impressions of what reflected in my drunken eyes. Aomori is currently shipbuilding at full speed. Along the way we stopped by at the grave of Mr. Toyoda, who had looked after me in high school, and then hurried on to the bus terminal. If I were the man I used to be, I would have asked T if he wouldn't come along with me to Kanita; but maybe I've learned to be more reserved as I've gotten older, and so, at any rate—no, no more complicated emotional explanations. In short, maybe we'd both become adults. Being an adult is lonely. Even if you love one another, you must be cautious and treat each other with propriety like strangers. Why, do you suppose, must we be so cautious? The answer is simple: Because we've been greatly betrayed and humiliated too many times. The first lesson that turns a youth into an adult is that you cannot trust other people. An adult is a youth betrayed. I walked on in silence. Suddenly T spoke:

"I'm going to Kanita tomorrow. I'm taking the first bus in the morning. We'll meet at Mr. N's house."

"What about the hospital?"

"Tomorrow's Sunday."

"What the—of course! Why didn't you say something sooner?"

There were still left within us traces of boyhood innocence.

2. Kanita

Since the old days, the western coast of the Tsugaru peninsula has been called Sotogahama, or the Outer Shores, and it has always had a thriving maritime trade. You take the bus from Aomori, and as you head north you pass through such towns as Ushirogata, Yomogita, Kanita, Tairadate, Ippongi, and Imabetsu, finally arriving at Mimmaya, famous in the Yoshitsune legends.¹ It takes about four hours to Mimmaya, the end of the line. From there, if you walk north about three hours along a miserable road right by the edge of the waves, you finally end up at the hamlet of Tappi, literally at the end of the road. This cape is the absolutely northernmost point of Honshū. Of course, these days it's become important to national defense, and so I shall have to avoid giving you any details about actual mileages and so on. But the Sotogahama area has the oldest history in the Tsugaru region. And Kanita is the biggest town in Sotogahama. It is about an hour and a half—well, make it two hours—from Aomori by bus, by way of Ushirogata and Yomogita. It's in the center of Sotogahama, with nearly a thousand households and well over five thousand in population. The Kanita police headquarters, which seems to have been built just recently, is one of the major architectural sights of the entire Sotogahama region, all of whose towns are under its jurisdiction. According to the *Outline History of Aomori Prefecture* of one Takeuchi Umpei of Hirosaki, the shore at Kanita was a source of iron-sand in the old days; now it's all mined out, but when Hirosaki Castle was being built during the Keichō period,² they smelted the sand at the shore for iron. Five large ships were built on the beach at Kanita to aid in suppression of the Ezo insurrection of Kambun 9 [1669]. And during the Genroku period, in the time of the fourth lord, Nobumasa, it was designated one of the nine ports of Tsugaru, and a town magistrate was appointed, mainly to regulate the export of lumber. Of course, these are all things I learned later, when I did some checking around. Until then, the only things I knew of Kanita were that it was famous for crabs,³ and that N, my sole friend from high school, lived there. I was planning to impose on N's hospitality on the occasion of my Tsugaru pilgrimage, and I'd written him ahead of time. In my letter I'm sure I wrote: "Don't make any special arrangements—but if you could, just get some apple wine and some crabs. . . ." In my self-injunctions to eat abstemiously, I made an exception for crabs. I love crabs. I'm crazy about crabs. I love all those un nourishing things: crabs, shrimp, rock

¹ Younger brother of Minamoto no Yoritomo, twelfth-century shogun. He was a tragic hero, hunted to death by his brother for political reasons. See Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1975).

² Early seventeenth century.

³ The name means "crab fields."

shrimp. And another thing I love: sake. Ah, the story takes a turn: the disciple of love and truth, who should have no interest whatsoever in food or drink, unexpectedly exposes his true gluttonous nature.

N was awaiting me at his house, with a small mountain of crabs piled high on a big red tray table.

“Does it have to be apple wine? Sake, or beer, that’s no good?” N asked me with difficulty.

No good? They were worlds better, for sure, but the “adult” me knew how precious they were, and so I’d restrained myself and told him apple wine in the letter. I’d heard rumors that Tsugaru had recently started producing it, as the Kōshū region was doing with grape wine, and that it was in relatively good supply.

“Well, now, either one . . .” I gave a complicated smile.

N looked relieved. “You don’t know how welcome that is to hear! I just don’t like apple wine. The fact is that my wife read your letter, and she was sure, from what you’d written, that you were tired of sake and beer, and were coming here for a taste of home, and that’s what the apple wine was for, and she was wondering if that’s what she should serve, and I said there was no way you’d ever get tired of beer and sake, and that you were just being shy, not that that’s your style, anyway.”

“Yes, well, but it’s not that what your wife said was *wrong* . . .”

“Don’t be silly. Enough said. Shall we have the sake first? Beer?”

“Maybe we could save the beer for later—,” I said, a little boldly.

“That’s the way I’d like it, too. All right, dear, it’s sake—bring it on right away, we don’t mind if it’s not fully heated yet!”

No matter where the place, liquor is hard to do without.

In this remote region, we speak of our old friendship.

We have not accomplished much, we are surprised at each other’s
white hair.

We parted twenty years ago, went three thousand leagues apart.

If at this time we had no cups before us, how could we speak
of our ordinary lives? (Po Chū-i)

When I was in high school, for some reason I hardly ever went over to anyone else’s house except N’s. He was in the same class, and I was at his place constantly. At the time, he was boarding on the second floor of a big sake dealer on Temple Street. Every morning we would call for each other and go to school together. We’d return by the back road, meandering along the seashore. Even when it rained, we never ran, but just poked along happily, wet as drowned rats. When I think about it now, there was something grandly scatterbrained about us as children. Maybe that was the key to our friendship. We would race each other in the big courtyard of the temple, or

play tennis; on Sundays we'd pack a lunch and go out to the hills nearby. The "friend" who appears in "Recollections," one of my early stories, is generally N. After graduating from high school, he went to Tokyo and apparently worked for a magazine company. I came to Tokyo two or three years later and was registered at the university, and our friendship picked up again. At the time, N was boarding in Ikebukuro, and I was in Takadanobaba,⁴ but we got together almost every day. This time our entertainments were not running and tennis. N had left the magazine and was working for an insurance company. He was somehow generous by nature, and, like me, was always being taken in by people. However, each time I was taken in, I became a little gloomier and meaner, while N went in the opposite direction: no matter how many times he was used, he just got sunnier and more easygoing. Even our otherwise foul-mouthed companions were struck with admiration at his innocence, and admitted that he was an extraordinary man, it was amazing that he never turned twisted; they could think of it as nothing but a precious legacy from his forefathers. N had sometimes come to my house in Kanagi, too, when we were in high school, and when we were in Tokyo he often came over to my brother's house in Totsuka. When my brother died at the age of twenty-seven, N took time off work and handled various things for us, to the deep gratitude of my family. After some time, N had to go back to his home in the country to take over his family's rice-polishing business. Even then, his extraordinary goodwill earned him the trust of the young people in the town. A couple of years ago, he was selected for the Kanita Town Council, and now he was a group leader of the youth organization and the executive officer of some other group, and involved in several other activities—in short, he was a man Kanita could not do without.

That night several of the younger big shots in the area joined us in drinking, and I could see how popular N was. He was the star of the group. Among Old Bashō's Pilgrimage Rules that have been passed down to us is the following: You must not drink for pleasure; if it be impossible to refuse hospitality, then you must stop at slight intoxication and not reach a state of disorder.⁵ But there is that passage in the *Analects* of Confucius which I take to mean, Drink as much as you like, but don't act disreputably. So I don't even try to follow the Old Man's teachings. As long as you don't bother others by getting dead drunk, you're all right. Makes sense, doesn't it? I can hold my liquor well. Several times better than Old Bashō, I'm sure. I certainly wouldn't be so stupid as to go to someone else's house, receive his hospitality, and then go wild. "If at this time we had no cups before us, how could we speak of our ordinary lives?" I drank a lot.

⁴Sections of Tokyo, two stations apart on the Yamanote line, built in 1925, which is the Tokyo loop of the national railroad.

⁵The haiku poet Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), also referred to here as the Old Man.

Another of the Old Man's rules goes: You must not indulge in idle chatter, but must stay with poetry; if idle topics come up, you should take a nap to replenish your energies. I didn't follow this rule either. From the perspective of us ordinary mortals, Old Bashō's pilgrimages might even give rise to a suspicion that they were practically business trips for the purpose of advertising the Bashō Style, they were so full of poetry groups set up like Bashō regional branch offices at every stop on the journey. I suppose if you've got a poetry teacher surrounded by his students, then it's up to him to decide to avoid topics other than poetry and to take a nap or whatever if the conversation strays. But my trip was not for the purpose of setting up Dazai Style regional branch offices, and really, N was not likely to have set up the evening's drinking circle just to hear me lecture about literature. And besides, the fact is that the big shots who came over that evening showed me some kindness and drank with me because N and I were close friends from way back, so I hardly think it would have been decent for me to have turned on them and started to lecture on the locus of the spirit of literature, and then lean against the wall and take a nap if idle topics came up. That evening, I didn't say a single word about literature. I didn't even use Tokyo words. Instead, I did my pretentious best to speak pure Tsugaru dialect. And all we talked about were the most common, ordinary, everyday matters. I was facing the world as the *ozukasu* of the Tsushima family of Tsugaru, so intently that at least one of them must have noticed and thought to himself, He doesn't have to be trying so hard! (Tsushima Shūji is my legal name from birth; *ozukasu* might be written with the characters for "uncle" and "dregs,"⁶ anyway, it's a term used in this part of the country to belittle a third or fourth son.) I can't say that part of my plan for this trip was not also to restore myself as the *ozukasu* of the Tsushima family. I have felt uneasy about myself as a city man, and so I have hoped to grasp what I am as a man of Tsugaru. To put it another way, I took this trip to try to figure out *what* a man of Tsugaru is. I came to Tsugaru to try to find a pure Tsugaru man for me to model my life upon. And I discovered them, easily, everywhere. It's not a matter of who did what. It would be impermissible for this poor beggarly traveler to criticize so presumptuously. It would be the height of rudeness, in fact. I didn't find it in the things individual people said, in the way individual people acted with me. I didn't have any intention to go snooping around cleverly like a detective. Generally, I walked around with my head bowed, looking down at my feet. But something I might call fate was always whispering secretly into my ear. I believe what it said. My discoveries, then, if I can call them that, were, like my fate, extremely subjective, without reason or form. I was not particular about who did what, or who said what. To be

⁶Ozu, dialect for *oji*, the standard word for "uncle."

sure, I had no qualifications to be particular about those things; but anyway, the reality didn't consist in what I saw with my eyes. Twice, I wrote in my travel notebook the following curious words: Reality consists in what you believe; reality cannot make you believe.

I think I've been restraining myself, but here I go giving my clumsy emotional impressions again. My theories wander around in circles; often I don't know myself what I'm saying. Sometimes I even tell lies. That's why I hate to explain my feelings. Somehow it looks as if I'm putting on some empty, clumsy show, and I feel totally ashamed of myself. I know for sure that I'll feel bitter regret, but I get excited, and whip on my reluctant tongue, and harp incoherently on the same points over and over. Do I make my audience despise me? Worse—I make it pity me. Such would seem to be yet another part of my fate.

That night, however, I did not go on with my crude opinions. Ignoring Old Man Bashō's injunctions, I took no naps, but talked cheerfully and drank on until late at night, nothing but idle chatter, while I gazed at the mountain of crabs I liked so much, piled up before me. N's small, energetic wife, seeing me happily looking at the pile of crabs but making no move to take one, probably thought I was doing so because it was too much trouble to clean them myself, so she set about busily and skillfully cleaning the crabs and putting the beautiful white flesh on the shells. She offered them to me, one after another, like those cool, fragrant desserts—what do you call them, fruit something-or-others?—in the shape of the actual fruit. The crabs must in fact have come from the Kanita beach that very morning. They had a light, fresh taste, like just-picked fruit. I easily broke my resolution not to be interested in food, and ate three or four of them. That night, as each guest came, N's wife brought out a tray table for each, and even these local people seemed surprised at the luxuriance of food on the plates. After the local lights left, N and I moved from the formal living room to the smaller tea room and began what's known in these parts as an *atofuki*. In Tsugaru, whenever there's a wedding or some occasion when large numbers of people are invited to your house, after the guests go home the small remaining number of close friends and family gather up the leftovers and have what they call this *atofuki* to celebrate the hard work they've put into the event. It may be local dialect for *atohiki*.⁷ N is an even stronger drinker than I, so fortunately we did not go to the point of disorder, but I said to him with a deep sigh: "You certainly still can drink, can't you! Of course, I'm not surprised, since you taught me . . ."

It really was N who had taught me to drink, and that's the truth.

"Um," N said, nodding seriously, holding his glass. "I've thought a lot about that. Every time you'd mess up some way or other as a result of drink-

⁷"Withdrawing," "pulling back."

ing, I'd feel it was my fault. I've suffered, you know. But recently I've been doing my best to rethink the whole thing. Even if I hadn't taught you, you'd have become a drinker on your own—you're that type! It's not the result of knowing me."

"Now, there you are, you're quite right. It's not your fault at all. You've got it right!"

After a while, his wife came and joined us as we talked about our old childhood days. Our *atofuki* heart-to-heart went on, until suddenly we were startled to hear a rooster crow, announcing the dawn, and I went off to bed.

When I awoke in the morning, I could hear T's voice. As promised, he'd come from Aomori on the first bus. I jumped out of bed. T had come to join us, and that made me feel somehow secure and strong. He'd brought along one of his colleagues from the hospital, a man who liked novels. And S, the director of the Kanita branch of T's hospital, had also come with him. While I was washing my face, M, another young man who liked books, came in with a shy smile; he was from Imabetsu, a town near Mimmaya, and apparently had heard from N that I was in Kanita. M was an old friend of N, T, and S, it turned out. They seemed to have agreed on consultation that we would all leave right away for Kanita's mountain to go flower viewing.

Mount Kanran. I set out in my purple windbreaker and green gaiters, but there was no need at all for me to have gone to such grand lengths. The "mountain" was very small, not even a hundred meters high, on the outskirts of town. On the other hand, the view from the mountain wasn't at all bad. The day was dazzlingly clear, with not a breath of wind. Across Aomori Bay we could see Cape Natsutomari, and, on the other side of Tairadate Strait, Shimokita Peninsula seemed right next to us. Southerners probably imagine the seas of Tōhoku to be dark, murky, and ominous, wild and whirlpool-filled, but the sea near Kanita was extremely gentle and calm, its color light, as if it weren't even very salty. There wasn't much of a seashore smell, either. It was a sea of melted snow, almost like lake water. I probably shouldn't say anything about how deep it is, for national security, but the waves gently tease at the sandy beach. And right near the shore, nets are set out and all sorts of fish are caught easily, all year long: crabs, of course, squid, flounder, mackerel, sardines, cod, angler. Every morning, just as they always have, peddlers walk about the town, their carts piled high with fish, shouting out as if they're angry, in their local accents: "Squid and mackerel, angler and *aoba*, sea bass and *hokke!*"⁸ The fish stores in the area sell only that day's catch; no one seems to deal with the previous day's leftovers. Maybe they send them elsewhere. As a result, the townspeople eat only the freshest of fish. If the sea is rough one day and they can't catch anything, there's no fresh

⁸*Hokke* is a sea fish of the rock trout (*ainame*) family. *Aoba* seems to be a local name; in any case, I cannot identify the fish in question.

fish to be found anywhere in the town; they make do with dried fish and vegetables. Not only Kanita is like that; every fishing village in Sotogahama—no, every fishing village on the west coast of Tsugaru, as well—is like that. Kanita is also richly blessed with wild greens. It is a seacoast village, but it's also on the plain, and there are mountains. The mountains on the eastern coast of the Tsugaru Peninsula come right up to the shore, so there isn't much of a plain, and in many places, fields are dug into the hillsides. The people who live in the western part of the peninsula, on the broad plain on the other side of the mountains, call the Sotogahama region The Shades (meaning, the shade of the mountain). It's not without a certain sadness of atmosphere. Only the Kanita area has fertile fields to rival any on the western side. Kanita natives would probably snicker to hear that the westsiders pity them. The Kanita River, full and peaceful, flows lazily through the region, and the fields spread out widely in its basin. Of course, the east winds and west winds hit strongly, and bad harvest years are not rare, but the land is not as impoverished as westsiders imagine. When you look down from Mount Kanran, the ample Kanita River coils like a long serpent, and the rice paddy fields spread out quietly after the preparatory ploughing, creating a rich, promising scene. The mountains are Mount Bonju and its adjoining hills, one segment of the Ōu Range. This range rises from the base of the peninsula, runs straight north, and plunges into the sea at Cape Tappi, the northernmost point. The low mountains stand side by side, most of them two to four hundred meters high. Ōkura Peak, which rises bluely above them, just about due west of Mount Kanran, is one of the highest in the range, along with Masukawa Peak; but it's only seven hundred meters or so. Now, there are utilitarians who do not hesitate to go around making direct, horribly boring assertions to the effect that we should treasure the area not because of the high mountains, but because of the trees, and therefore the people of Tsugaru need feel no shame over how low the mountain range is. It is the prime source of cypress in the country. Tsugaru can take pride in its long history of providing cypress. Not apples. After all, apples were first planted experimentally only in 1868, from seeds brought by the Americans; by the late 1880's, French missionaries were teaching French pruning methods, and they suddenly caught on, so that people in the provinces got serious about apple cultivation. But it wasn't until the 1910's that they became known throughout the country as a special product of Aomori. Now, they certainly aren't as trivial a product as Tokyo's *kaminari* rice crackers, or Kuwana's steamed clams, although they hardly have as rich a history as Kishū's tangerines. When you say "Tsugaru," people from Kantō and Kansai⁹ think immediately of apples, but they don't seem to know much about the cypress forests. The branches

⁹The Tokyo and Kyoto areas, respectively.

of Tsugaru's forests interlace so thickly and stay so lush and green even in winter, that you might imagine they gave the name to Aomori Prefecture.¹⁰ In the old days it was apparently counted as one of the three great forest areas. This is what the 1929 *Outline of Japanese Geography and Ethnography* says:

The great Tsugaru forests were the legacy of the founder of the old Tsugaru *han*, Tamenobu; since then they have remained as dense under a strict forestry system that is a model for our whole country. Forest management was first carried out in the Tsugaru Peninsula in the Tenna and Jōkyō periods,¹¹ on the sand dunes for several leagues in from the Japan Sea coast, as a windbreaker for the salt winds, and it also served to clear the wilderness on the lower reaches of the Iwaki River. From then on, the *han* pursued this plan, and, as a result of vigorous planting, by the Kan'ei period¹² the so-called screen forest had reached maturity, and some 8,300 hectares of farm land were opened up. Subsequently, forests were established one after another in every part of the *han*, reaching a total of some one hundred great *han* forests. In the Meiji period, the government directed much attention to forest management, and good report of the cypress forests in Aomori Prefecture spread. The quality of the timber in this area makes it especially prized: it is quite suitable for all kinds of building and construction, is especially able to withstand moisture, produces a great deal of lumber, and is relatively convenient to transport. The annual production is eight million cubic feet of lumber.

That was in 1929; now, in 1944, it must be three times as much. This is, of course, an account of all the cypress forests in Tsugaru, and couldn't serve as a source of special pride for the Kanita area alone; but the deeply forested mountains you see from Mount Kanran are the best forest bands in the Tsugaru region. In the *Outline of Japanese Geography and Ethnography* there is a big picture of the mouth of the Kanita River with the following caption: "In the vicinity of the Kanita River is a national cypress forest, designated as one of Japan's three most beautiful. The harbor of the town of Kanita is quite active in transporting lumber. The forest railway leaves the coast at this point and heads into the mountains, each day bringing back large quantities of lumber. The lumber is noted for being of good quality and cheap." Even if the people of Kanita don't want to be proud, they can't help it. And it's not just cypress: Mount Bonju, which forms the spine of the Tsugaru Peninsula, produces lumber from cryptomeria, birch, oak, silver fir, horse chestnut, larch. And it's noted for its wealth of wild herbs. The Kanagi area, on the west of the peninsula, is quite rich in such greens, too, but in Kanita they can be easily gathered from the mountain slopes right outside town: bracken

¹⁰Meaning "green forests."

¹¹In the 1680's.

¹²The early 1700's.



Left: Apple blossoms. Right: A branch of *asunarō* (called cypress—*hiba* or *hinoki*—in the Tsugaru region).

shoots, flowering fern, *udo*, bamboo shoots, butterbur, cardoon, and many kinds of mushrooms.¹³

You readers must be thinking of Kanita as a heaven of perfect contentment, blessed with paddies and fields, the luck of the mountains, the luck of the sea; but somehow the town you see as you look down from Mount Kanran has an air of sadness. There's no liveliness. So far I've been praising Kanita, even overpraising it. Now if I say some bad things about it, I wonder if the natives won't turn on me. The people of Kanita are gentle. Being gentle is a virtue, but for the townspeople to be so without spirit that it makes the town sad is depressing for the visitor. Kanita is so calm and deathly quiet that it makes one wonder if being blessed by nature isn't a bad thing, after all, in terms of the town's energy. The breakwater at the mouth of the river

¹³Bracken shoots, *warabi*; flowering fern, *zenmai*; bamboo shoots, *takenoko*; butterbur, *fuki*; cardoon, *azami*; mushrooms, *kinoko*. *Udo* (*Aralia cordata*) is a perennial herb growing four to eight feet in height. The young blanched shoots are eaten in spring. Butterbur (*Petasites japonicus*) is one of a large genus of herbaceous perennials, growing to six feet in height with leaves four feet across. The young stalks are eaten like rhubarb and the flower buds used as a condiment. These plants together virtually symbolize spring to Japanese readers.

looks as if it was half built and then abandoned. They level the land to build a house, then leave the house unbuilt and plant pumpkins in the red soil of the vacant lot. You can't see it all from Mount Kanran, but it does rather seem that there is too much construction abandoned partway through. I asked N if there weren't some strange old schemer throwing up obstacles to the fresh driving force of the town government. This young town councilman smiled bitterly—and told me to lay off. The samurai should be discreet in business matters, the literary man in political talk. My nosy questions about Kanita's government came to a stupid end: all I did was draw the amused pity of the professional councilman. It reminded me immediately about Degas's mistake. Edgar Degas, the master of the French art world, once suddenly found himself sitting on a couch in the lobby of a Paris music hall beside the great statesman Clemenceau. Without the slightest hesitation, Degas began to lecture the great politician on the lofty political thoughts he'd been harboring for some time. "If I were prime minister, why, I would feel the weight of the responsibility. I would break every bond of affection and take on the simple, frugal life of an ascetic. I would rent a tiny, one-room apartment on the fifth floor of some building near the ministry, and have just a single table and a plain iron bed in it. When I returned from the ministry, I would work at the table until late at night, finishing up my remaining work. Overcome by drowsiness, I would tumble onto the bed without removing my clothes or shoes. I would arise the next morning as soon as I awoke, eat a light meal of eggs and soup standing up, and return to the ministry with my briefcase. I am sure that would be the way I lived!" He spoke with passion, but Clemenceau said not a word, just staring with astonished contempt at the master of the art world. Degas was, it seems, crushed by his expression. He was ashamed, and told no one the story of the disaster; only fifteen years later did he reveal it secretly to just one of his small circle of friends, Valéry, whom he cared for most of all. When you realize that he had hidden it for fifteen long, terrible years, you feel sympathy rise in your own heart to think that even such an arrogant, presumptuous master was so done in by an unconscious expression of contempt from the professional politician, that he was crushed to the marrow of his bones. Anyway, the political talk of an artist can cause damage. Degas is a good object lesson. Somehow, it would appear to be safer for me, poor litterateur that I am, to talk only about the cherry blossoms of Mount Kanran, or the love of my Tsugaru friends.

On the previous day a strong west wind had been blowing, shaking the doors and windows of N's house, and with my customary tendency to pontificate on my own authority I had commented, "Kanita certainly is a windy town." But today, as if to mock my rash theories, the town basked gently in beautiful weather. There wasn't even a breeze. This was the time of year for

Mount Kanran's cherries to be in full bloom. They were blooming, quietly, delicately. "Splendidly" is the wrong word. The petals were fragile and the light passed through them; they were heart-wrenching, somehow, as if washed with snow. They almost made you think they might be a different strain of cherry—flowers so ephemeral they might almost be the blue flower *Novalis* fantasized.¹⁴ We sat at ease on the grass beneath the cherry blossoms and opened the picnic lunches N's wife had, of course, prepared for us. And a big bamboo basket filled with crabs and rock shrimp. And beer. I ate well enough (so they wouldn't think I was slighting the food), peeling the rock shrimp, sucking at the crab legs, digging my chopsticks into the picnic lunch. One of the dishes was squid stuffed with translucent squid eggs, broiled with a soy sauce baste, and then cut into round slices. I thought it was tremendous. Our returned soldier, T, said he was hot and took off his shirt, then stood up and started doing military exercises, bare from the waist up. With his dark face and towel headband, he looked a bit like Burma's premier, Ba Maw. The group that day acted as if they wanted me to chat about literature, each of them of course with a different degree of intensity. I answered clearly just whatever I was asked. I was following Old Bashō's Pilgrimage Rule that "it is not proper not to answer questions." But I splendidly disobeyed other far more important clauses. Item: Do not speak of the shortcomings of others, and of your own strengths; it is despicable to slander others and praise yourself. I did all those despicable things, anyway. Bashō himself must have had a few nasty little things to say about other poetry schools, but surely he never acted as meanly as I, in total bad taste. Surely he didn't raise his eyebrows, curl his lip, or hunch his shoulders as he abused other writers. Despicable as that may be, that's exactly what I did. They asked me about the work of a certain Japanese writer in his fifties, and quite in spite of myself, I said that it wasn't so great.¹⁵ Recently, for what reason I don't know, the work he did in the past has been received by Tokyo readers with near-reverence. Some people have gone so far as to call him a god. A strange tide of opinion now finds it proof of the loftiness of your reading tastes if you confess that you like this writer. It may be a case of his supporters being his own worst enemies, and he himself may be perplexed and bitterly amused by all the fuss. But I've been observing his peculiar influence for some time, alone and automatically excited with that idiocy of the Tsugaru native—"He's a fool, it's only the luck of the draw, etc., etc."—and I have simply not been able to follow the tide meekly. Not long ago, I reread the greater part of his work and found myself thinking, This stuff is good, you know; but still, I didn't sense any particular loftiness of taste. In fact, I felt that his strength lay rather

¹⁴In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), a novel of the German Romantic School, published a year after his death. The flower is mythical, the object of a symbolic quest.

¹⁵The implication is that this refers to Shiga Naoya (1883–1971).

in the nasty parts. The world he writes about has its own stingy, bourgeois, meaningless, self-important joys and sorrows. From time to time the protagonists of his stories reflect on their own lives with “conscience,” but those parts are especially old-fashioned—so much so that we’d be better off without such reflections, if they have to be so nasty. You can feel the mean-spiritedness, where the more he tries to escape literary callowness, the deeper he gets mired in it. With unexpected frequency, he seems to try desperately to be humorous, but there’s a dull nerve throbbing uneasily, maybe because he can’t let himself go, and the reader can’t laugh innocently. I’ve heard a childish judgment that he’s “aristocratic,” but that’s ridiculous, a case of your supporters being your worst enemies. Don’t “aristocrats” have an untidy amount of openness of spirit in them? At the time of the French Revolution, a mob broke into the king’s chamber. Feeble-minded though he was, King Louis XVI burst out laughing, and suddenly snatched a revolutionary hat from one of the rioters, clapped it on his own head, and cried out, “Vive la France!” The bloodthirsty rioters themselves were struck by this incomparable, amazing nobility, and spontaneously joined the king in shouting, “Vive la France!” Then they meekly withdrew from his chamber without laying a finger on him. The true aristocrat has this kind of innocent nobility, unconcerned with keeping up appearances. It is the aristocrat’s servant who prissily tightens his mouth and adjusts his collar. You mustn’t use such a sadly resonant word as “aristocratic.”

That day, the group drinking beer together at Mount Kanran also seemed to some degree to be fans of this writer in his fifties. That’s all they asked me about, so after a while I broke Old Bashō’s rule and started saying bad things about him. As I spoke, I got more and more excited, until finally I was raising my eyebrows and twisting my mouth. Aristocratic? That’s the crazy point that derailed me. My audience showed not the slightest sympathy with what I was saying.

“Aristocratic? We’re not talking about something so stupid,” said Imabetsu’s M almost to himself, with a perplexed expression on his face. He seemed totally put off by this drunkard’s idle chatter. The others were looking at each other and snickering.

“Essentially—” My voice was almost a shriek. Oh, you must not bad-mouth your seniors. “I’m saying that you shouldn’t be taken in by a man’s appearance. Louis XVI was one of the ugliest men in history.” I was getting farther and farther off track.

“But I like his work,” M asserted with unpleasant clarity.

“Don’t you think his work is pretty good, I mean, for Japan?” H, from the hospital in Aomori, spoke modestly, looking conciliatory.

My position just got more precarious. “Well, it may be relatively all right. Yeah, I suppose . . . all right. But, you know, you guys are not being fair, not

to say a single thing about my work with me here, you know." I was laughing, but I gave myself away.

They all smiled. Sure enough, as long as you reveal your true intentions . . . I pursued the advantage. "My work is a mess, but I do have great aspirations. I get dizzy just because my hopes are so high. That's what you see before you. I may look disreputable and ignorant and grungy to you, but I do know what true quality is. To serve little teacakes shaped like pine needles, to throw a narcissus into a celadon vase—that's not what I think of as elegance. That's *nouveau riche* taste, that's vulgar. True elegance is a single white chrysanthemum on a great huge jet black rock. It has to be a huge, utterly filthy rock, or it won't work. That's what I mean by true quality. You guys are still young, and so you think of schoolgirl lyricism, a carnation with a wired stem propped up in a glass—you think that's artistic quality!"

These were outrageous statements. "Do not speak of the shortcomings of others, and of your own strengths. It is despicable to slander others and praise yourself." This Pilgrimage Rule of the Old Man is like a holy truth. In truth, it *is* despicable. But I have this nasty vice, and so even in the Tokyo literary establishment, I make everyone unhappy, and everyone avoids me for the disgusting fool I am.

"Ah well, there's nothing I can do." I clasped my hands behind me and looked up. "Because my books really are a terrible mess, you know. There's nothing I can do about it, no matter what you say. But couldn't you give my work even one-tenth the recognition you give to that writer you like? You all pay no attention whatsoever to my work. That's why I find myself having to run on like this about the wrong things. Come on, give me some recognition. Even one-twentieth would be OK. I need it!"

They all laughed uproariously. I felt relieved, to have them laugh at me. S, the director of the Kanita branch hospital, started to get up, and he spoke with that special, deep, compassionate conciliatory tone that is the special property of a man of the world. "How about it? Shall we move on to the next site?" He said he'd had the E, the largest inn in Kanita, prepare a lunch for us. I questioned T with my eyes to see if it was all right.

"Fine. We appreciate the offer." T stood up and continued, as he put on his shirt, "We'd worked out this plan earlier. S said he'd saved his ration of first-class sake, so let's all go and accept his hospitality. We can't always be letting N treat us!"

I followed T's orders meekly. That's why I felt strong with him beside me.

The E Inn was quite pretty. The decorative alcove¹⁶ in the room was just right, and the toilets were clean. Even if you were staying there alone, you

¹⁶*Tokonoma*, a decorative alcove in a formal room where hanging scrolls, flower arrangements, etc. are displayed. One side of the *tokonoma* is outlined vertically with a pillar, often of fine wood. The guest of honor is seated so that his back is to the *tokonoma*.

wouldn't feel lonely, I thought. In general, the inns on the eastern coast of the Tsugaru Peninsula are of higher quality than those on the western coast. Maybe it's a sign that, since the old days, they've been used to lodging many travelers from other parts of the country. Long ago, if you wanted to cross to Hokkaidō, you took a boat from Mimmaya, and that's why the Sotogahama Highway was so heavily traveled by people from elsewhere in the country. There were crabs on our trays at the inn, too.

"Well, there's no doubt we're in Kanita," someone said.

T couldn't drink, so he started in on his food ahead of us; the rest of us put off eating and sat around drinking S's choice sake. S grew more and more expansive the drunker he got.

"Basically, I like everyone's novels, you know. They're all interesting to read. They're all pretty clever, somehow. That's why I just can't help liking writers. I'm crazy about them—*any* writer. My little boy's three now, but I think I'm going to have him be a novelist. And I've named him Fumio, that's written with the characters 'man of letters.' Somehow the shape of his head resembles yours. I don't mean any disrespect, but it's rather like a bowl that gets wide at the top."

This was the first time I'd been told that my head was like an open bowl. I was sure I had an exhaustive knowledge of the multiple defects in my physiognomy, but I hadn't noticed that even the shape of my head was strange. I was overcome with a profound uneasiness: Mightn't there still be lots of defects I hadn't noticed yet? And right after I'd said all those horrible things about that other writer? S's mood swung even higher.

"How about it? Looks like we'll be running out of sake soon, so why don't you all come on over to my house next? OK? Just for a while? Please, let my wife and Fumio meet you. Please? At least we've still got lots of apple wine in Kanita, so come on over to the house, won't you?" He pressed me eagerly, trying to tempt me. I appreciated his goodwill, but since that bowl-head business my spirits had taken a sudden nose dive. I wanted to go back to N's house, straight to bed. If I went to S's house, this time it wouldn't be just my bowl head: Mightn't they end up seeing through to the *contents* of my head, and then start abusing me? At the thought, my heart sank even further. As before, I checked the expression on T's face. If he said go, I'd have to go, I resolved. T thought for a moment, with a serious expression. "Shall we go? S is terribly drunk today, quite rare for him, but he has been looking forward so eagerly to your coming, for such a long time."

I decided to go. I gave up being so touchy about my bowl head. I reconsidered: S must have meant it as humor. It's wrong to brood about such a ridiculous thing, just because you don't have any confidence in your personal appearance. It wasn't just my appearance: maybe what I most lacked was self-confidence itself.

We went to S's house. Even though I was a Tsugaru native too, like him, I was somewhat taken aback at his wildly enthusiastic hospitality, which revealed the true nature of the people of Tsugaru. No sooner had we entered the house than he began a stream of instructions to his wife:

"Come on out, I'm here with our guest from Tokyo. We've finally made it. This is that Dazai I was telling you about. Come meet him. Hurry up, come on out, give him a proper greeting. Now for some sake. No, that's right, we drank it all up. Bring us the apple wine. What's this—only one bottle? That's not enough! Go buy another two. Wait a minute. Shred us some of that dried codfish from the verandah—no, wait, it won't be any good unless you soften it with a hammer first. Wait, you're doing it wrong, I'll do it. This is how you do it, just like this, this way—ouch!—well, like that. Hey, bring the soy sauce. You have to have soy sauce with dried codfish. We need another glass—no, two. Bring them, hurry up—no, wait, will these teacups be all right? There, come on, drink up, bottoms up! Go get another two bottles—no, wait, bring the boy in. I want Dazai to look at him and tell us if he'll ever be a writer. What do you think? This is what I meant by an open bowl, this part of his head. I really do think it looks like yours. So we really did it! Hey, take him away. We're not going to put up with that noise. What disrespect, to bring such a messy child out to a guest! Nouveau riche taste! Quick, another two bottles of apple wine, or our guests will run away. Wait a minute, you stay here and pour. Here, you serve them. Have the old lady next door go and buy the wine for you. She wanted the sugar, so give her some of ours. Wait, we can't give it to her. Give it all to the Tokyo guest as a present to take home. Don't forget, right? Give him all of it. Wrap it in newspaper, then oiled paper, then tie it with cord. Don't let the child cry, that's impolite, nouveau riche. Aristocrats aren't like that. Wait—you can give the guest the sugar when he leaves. Music, music! Let's put on a record. Schubert, Chopin, Bach—anything you want. Let's have some music. Wait, is that Bach? Stop it, we can't stand the noise. Can't even talk. Put on something quieter. Wait—we've run out of food. Fry us up some angler. The sauce is our own house specialty. We don't know if it will appeal to our guest's taste or not, but, wait, the fried angler, and some egg-*miso kayaki*. That's something you have to come to Tsugaru to get. That's it, the egg *miso*. Just the egg *miso*. Egg *miso*!"

I am not exaggerating the scene at all. This wild, raging storm of hospitality is an example of how the people of Tsugaru express their love. Dried codfish is made by leaving a big codfish out in a blizzard, letting it freeze, and then drying it. It has the light, delicate taste that Old Bashō seemed to enjoy. There were five or six of them hanging from S's verandah; he staggered over, grabbed a couple, and started beating wildly at them with a hammer, hit his

left thumb, collapsed, and then crawled around pouring apple wine for everyone. That business of the bowl head wasn't meant at all to make fun of me, nor was it meant in humor, I fully realized. S sincerely seemed to respect a head shaped like an open bowl. He seemed to think it was something good. Look well at the beautiful, honest simplicity of a Tsugaru man. It made him go to the lengths of calling for egg-*miso kayaki*—ah, but I think I should explain that a bit for the general reader. In Tsugaru, we call beef casseroles and chicken casseroles beef *kayaki* and chicken *kayaki*. It might be dialect for *kaiyaki*, “shell-broiled.” They don't do it now, but when I was young, we used to use large scallop shells to stew beef. I can't say that there isn't some folk belief that a kind of broth comes out of the shells, but anyway, it might also be a custom taken over from the original inhabitants of the region, the Ainu. We were all brought up on *kayaki*. Egg-*miso kayaki* is a primitive sort of dish, made with a shell as the pot, in which bonito shavings are mixed into *miso* bean paste and brought to a boil, and then an egg is dropped into it. Actually, it was something you ate when you were sick and had lost your appetite. They'd give you egg-*miso kayaki* on top of rice gruel. This dish is undoubtedly special to Tsugaru. S had remembered that, and that's why he'd wanted to have some made for me. I told his wife I'd had more than enough, practically begging her, and took my leave. I'd like to have you readers realize this: S's actions that day were a manifestation of Tsugaru love, that of a man who was Tsugaru to the bone. I behave just like S all the time, and so I can talk about it without reservation. When a friend comes a long way for a visit, I never know what to do. My heart starts to pound, I pace around in confusion—I've even walked into the lamp and broken the lampshade. When an unexpected visitor appears at dinner time, I throw down my chopsticks and go right out to the door, still chewing my food; sometimes the visitor himself winces to see me. I just can't have a visitor wait while I calmly continue my meal. And then, like S, you give your full and sincere attention, and your wife brings out this and that, putting on her best hospitality; but all you end up doing is appalling your guest and having to apologize for your boorishness later. Such expressions of love—tear it off and toss it in, shred it and toss it in, take it up and toss it in, finally, even your life itself—mustn't they seem like rude violence to the people of Kantō and Kansai, and in the end make them keep a watchful distance? Such, I began to feel, was my fate. That's what I had learned from S, and on the way back, I found myself thinking of poor S as painfully dear to my heart. It may be that people from other parts of the country find the Tsugaru expression of love too much to take if not diluted with a little water. After all, Tokyo people just bring out food tiny bits at a time, with strange pompousness. It's not “fresh mushrooms,” but how many times have I too, like Lord Kiso, been viewed with contempt by

is handed down that long ago there was a ruler of this domain [Tsugaru] named Iwaki Hangan Masauji. In the winter of the first year of Eihō [1081], while he was in Kyoto, he was slandered by some person and was exiled to the western seas. He had left in his home country two children. The elder, a girl, was named Anju. Her younger brother was named Zushiomaro. They wandered with their mother beyond Dewa, to the bay of Naoe in Echigo," etc., etc. It ends like this, seeming itself to lose steam: "Iwashiro and Tsugaru's Mount Iwaki are hundreds of leagues apart, so it is unlikely that this is what is being worshiped." In "Sanshō the Steward," Ōgai writes, "They left their home in the Shinobu district of Iwashiro." In other words, the same characters can be read "Iwaki" and "Iwashiro," and the two were probably confused, and that's how Tsugaru's Mount Iwaki came finally to be associated with the legend. However, that the people of the Tsugaru of the old days firmly believed that Anju and Zushio were Tsugaru children, and that they hated Sanshō the Steward so deeply that they were convinced the weather would deteriorate if someone from Tango came into Tsugaru, never fails to thrill those of us who sympathize with Anju and Zushio.

That's enough of old tales of Sotogahama. Our bus arrived in M's town of Imabetsu around noon. As I mentioned earlier, Imabetsu is a cheerful harbor town that could even be called modern. The population is around four thousand. N led us to M's house, but his wife came out and told us he wasn't home. She seemed a trifle subdued. I have a bad habit, when I meet someone with this attitude, of assuming immediately that they've been arguing about me. Sometimes I'm right, sometimes I'm wrong. Writers and reporters tend to arouse feelings of uneasiness in virtuous households. This fact causes quite a bit of pain to the writer. A writer who has not experienced this pain is a fool.

"Where is he?" asked N, unperturbed. He took off his knapsack and sat down in the entryway. "Anyway, we appreciate the chance to rest."

"I'll go get him."

"Thanks for going to the trouble." N was quite composed. "Is he at the hospital?"

"Yes, I think so." The beautifully modest wife spoke in a small voice as she put on her clogs and left the house. M worked at the hospital in Imabetsu.

I sat down next to N and we waited for M.

"Did you have a firm agreement with him?"

"Yeah, well . . ." N calmly went on smoking.

"I guess we shouldn't have come at lunchtime." I couldn't help worrying.

"No problem—we brought our own lunches," he said with as calm an air of innocence as Saigō Takamori might have had.¹⁴

¹⁴See "Going Home," Note 8.

M came. Laughing shyly, he invited us in.

“No, we couldn’t do that,” N said, standing up. “If the boats are going out, we want to be heading on to Tappi by boat right away.”

N nodded lightly. “Right. I’ll go check if they’re leaving or not.”

He went down to the wharf for us, but sure enough, they weren’t going out.

“Too bad!” My sturdy guide showed little sign of disappointment. “Well then, shall we rest here a bit more, and eat our lunches?”

“Yes, we can stay right out here.” I was indecently reticent.

“Won’t you come in?” M asked weakly.

“Shall we?” N calmly began taking off his gaiters. “Let’s plan our next travel moves at leisure.”

We were shown into M’s study. There was a little hearth with a charcoal fire crackling away. Books crowded the shelves to overflowing, including the complete works of Valéry and Kyōka.¹⁵ Nankei, with his confident judgment that “it is natural that their manners and culture are not very developed yet”—if he were here, he might be amazed.

“We have sake.” M was so refined that *he* blushed. “Shall we drink?”

“No, no, if we drink here . . .” N started to speak and then broke off, chuckling.

“It’s all right.” M was sensitively perceptive. “There’s more set aside for you to take with you to Tappi.”

N laughed in delight and answered, “No, the thing is, if we start drinking now, we may never make it to Tappi today.” But while he was speaking, the wife came in silently, bringing sake decanters. I rethought the situation, took the interpretation that was most favorable to me, and decided that she was probably just quiet by nature, and not angry with us at all. I turned to N and proposed, “Well then, shall we have a little to drink—not enough to get drunk, of course?”

He spoke with the voice of experience: “If we drink, we get drunk. Then we’ll spend the night at Mimmaya?”

“That’s all right, don’t you think? You can take it easy here in Imabetsu, and then walk on to Mimmaya. Let’s see, that’ll take an hour, even at a leisurely pace. You can make it easily, no matter how drunk you are,” M also urged. We decided to spend the night at Mimmaya, and started drinking.

One thing had bothered me as I’d come into the room. A collection of essays by that writer in his fifties whom I had so slandered at Kanita was sitting right in the center of M’s desk. A devoted reader is a marvelous thing: none of the terrible abuse I’d heaped on the writer that day at Mount Kanran seemed to have shaken M’s faith in him in the slightest.

¹⁵Izumi Kyōka, 1873–1939, novelist and short story writer.



Tsugaru cradle. Woven straw. (Seen at M's house, Imabetsu).

“Let me see that book, will you?” I was somehow upset and couldn’t settle down, so finally I borrowed the book from M, flipped it open at random, and began to read it with the eyes of a bird of prey. I wanted to pick out flaws, to crow with triumph. But the parts I read seemed to have been written with special tension, and there were no cracks I could get into. I read on, silently. One page, two, three . . . Finally, after five pages, I threw down the book.

“What I’ve just read was fairly all right. But there are some really bad places in his other stuff,” I said. Sour grapes.

M seemed very pleased.

“I mean, the binding is gorgeous.” I continued to mutter my sour grapes. “Any kind of writing would seem great if it were printed on paper as good as this, in such big type!”

M wouldn’t take me on, but just smiled silently. The victor’s smile. But deep in my heart, I didn’t mind so much. It was a relief to read something good. It felt much better than to crow with triumph over flaws. I’m not lying. I *want* to read good writing.

There is a famous temple called Honkakuji in Imabetsu. It is noted for having had a famous priest named Teiden as its head. Takeuchi Umpei’s *Outline History of Aomori Prefecture* mentions this Teiden Oshō:¹⁶

¹⁶“Priest Teiden.”

Teiden Oshō was the son of Niiyama Jinzaemon of Imabetsu. Early in his life he became an acolyte at Seiganji in Hirosaki. Then he trained for fifteen years at Senshōji in Iwakidaira, and at the age of twenty-nine he became the head priest at Honkakuji in Imabetsu, Tsugaru. From then until Kyōhō 16 [1631], when he was forty-two, his instruction spread beyond the Tsugaru area to the neighboring provinces. For example, at the consecration service for the construction of a gilded bronze stupa in Kyōhō 12 [1627], the faithful, both men and women, came in great crowds to worship from within the domain, of course, but also from the Nambu, Akita, and Matsumae regions.

Town Councilman N, our guide to Sotogahama, suggested that we go see the temple. "Talking about books is fine, but your lectures aren't for the general public. There's something peculiar about what you talk about. That's why you'll never be famous. Now, someone like Teiden Oshō . . ." N was pretty drunk. "Teiden Oshō left the Buddhist sermonizing for later, and first paid attention to improving the lives of the common people. If you don't do it like that, the people won't listen to the teachings of Buddha. Teiden Oshō promoted production, and he—" N started laughing to himself. "Well, anyway, let's go see it. It would be a shame to come to Imabetsu and not see Honkakuji. Teiden Oshō is the pride of Sotogahama. Of course, to tell the truth, I haven't seen it yet, either. This is a good chance—I'd like to see it today. Let's all go together, all right?"

I wanted to stay just where we were, drinking and having one of those "peculiar" literary discussions with M. He seemed to want that, too. But N was so passionate about Teiden Oshō that finally he got us off our heavy butts.

"OK, we'll stop by at Honkakuji and then walk on to Mimmaya." I sat in the entryway putting on my gaiters, and invited M to come that far with us.

"Thanks, I'd be happy to accompany you to Mimmaya."

"That's great! The way things were looking, I was really depressed to think that the town councilman might have to give a long lecture tonight at the inn on Kanita town politics. I feel better already, knowing you'll be with us. Mrs. M, we're borrowing your husband for the night!"

She gave just a brief sound of acknowledgment, and smiled. She seemed somewhat used to this. No, maybe she was just resigned.

Our various canteens were filled with sake, and we set off in high spirits. Along the way, N babbled on about Teiden Oshō, Teiden Oshō. Just as the roof of the temple came into view, we met up with a woman peddling fish. She was pulling a cart piled high with all kinds of them. I found a *tai*¹⁷ about two feet long, and asked her, "How much is this one?" I couldn't even guess.

"One yen seventy sen." Cheap, I thought.

Finally, I bought it. But now that I'd bought it, I didn't know what to do

¹⁷Sea bream, a felicitous fish often used in celebrations.

with it. We were about to go to the temple. It would be absurd to go there dragging a two-foot fish with me. What could I do with it?

N insulted me, a sneer on his face: "You really bought yourself a load of trouble, didn't you! What did you have in mind, buying it?"

"Yeah, well, I thought we'd take it to the inn in Mimmaya and have them do it whole, salt-broiled, and bring it in to us on a big platter, and then we could all pick at it."

"You really do think of weird things, don't you! Was this supposed to be a wedding banquet or something?"

"Well, think of being able to get such a feeling of luxury for only one yen seventy sen—that's pretty great, isn't it?"

"What's so great? One yen seventy sen is expensive for these parts. You really made a bad bargain."

"Yeah . . . really . . ." I was crushed.

Eventually, we entered the temple grounds. I still had the two-foot fish hanging down from my hand. I had a whispered consultation with M: "What'll I do? I don't think I've got the nerve to go on."

M thought for a moment, looking serious. "Let's see . . . I'll go to the temple to get some newspaper or something. Please, wait here for me."

He went around back to the living quarters. After a while, he came back with some newspaper and twine, wrapped up my problem fish, and put it in my knapsack. I was relieved, and started sightseeing immediately. I looked up at the big main temple gate, but couldn't see anything special about the architecture.

"It's not much of a temple, is it?" I whispered to N.

"No, no, that's not the point. It's the contents that're important, not the external form. Anyway, let's go in and hear what the priest has to say."

I felt oppressed as I plodded in behind N. And then we were really in trouble. The priest was away, it seems, and some housewifely woman in her fifties came out, showed us to the main hall of the temple, and started in on an interminable explanation. We had to sit formally on our legs and listen respectfully. Her lecture finally reached a stopping point, and I was about to get up with a sense of great relief, when N pushed forward on his knees and said: "That's very interesting. I wonder if you might answer another question? When, in fact, did Teiden Oshō build this temple?"

"What are you saying? The Blessed Teiden did not construct this temple. He was the master who restored its fortunes, the fifth in the line of Blessed Ones . . ."—and she was off again on her long explanation.

"Is that so?" N looked totally stupefied. "Very interesting. Might you answer another question? This Teizan Oshō . . ." That's what he said, Teizan Oshō. Things were becoming completely unraveled.

N was lost in his own private enthusiasm. He kept advancing on his knees,

until there was only the space of a sheet of paper between his knees and the old lady's, as he asked one question after another. Gradually, the room grew dark around us, and my heart sank as I wondered if we'd even make it as far as Mimmaya.

"That splendid large tablet over there was painted by Ōno Kurobei."

"You don't say!" N admired it. "When you say Ōno Kurobei—"

"You know him, of course. He was one of the Loyal Retainers." She really did say "Loyal Retainers."¹⁸ "He died around here. He was forty-two when he died, and they say he was a gentleman of very deep faith, he often gave this temple enormous offerings—"

At this point, M finally stood up, went to the old lady, took from his inner pocket something wrapped in white paper, gave it to her silently with a polite formal bow, and then turned to N. "It's time for us to be leaving," he said quietly.

"Oh, yeah, right, time to leave," N said expansively. "We certainly thank you for your full explanations," he flattered the old lady, and at last stood up. We found out later that he couldn't remember a single word of what she had said.

I asked him in disgust, "But weren't you the one who was so keen on pumping her with questions?"

He answered, "No, it was all a show. The thing is, I was drunk out of my mind. I figured there must be a lot of things you guys would want to know, and so I just held on and tried to endure it, to be the old lady's conversational partner. I sacrificed myself." And that's how he demonstrated his ridiculous spirit of sacrifice.

By the time we arrived at the inn in Mimmaya, the sun was already setting. We were shown to a nice room on the second floor in the front. All the inns of Sotogahama are elegant out of proportion to the towns. The room looked directly out on the ocean. A drizzle started falling, and the sea lay white and calm.

"This isn't bad! We have the *tai*, and we can drink slowly as we watch the rain on the ocean." I took the wrapped-up fish out of my knapsack, and handed it over to the maid. "This is a *tai*. Salt-broil it, just as it is, and bring it to us."

The maid didn't look too bright. She just grunted in assent, took the package blankly, and left the room.

"Do you think she understood?" N seemed to feel the same uneasiness I

¹⁸One of the chief retainers of Lord Asano Naganori of Akō *han*; fictionalized as the villain Ōno Kudayū in the eighteenth-century play *Chūshingura*. When the celebrated "forty-seven loyal *rōnin*" plotted to avenge the insult that had caused Naganori to commit ritual suicide in 1701, Ōno Kurobei left their company. See Donald Keene, trans., *Chūshingura, The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). Kurobei is *not* remembered as a "Loyal Retainer"!

did. He called her back and went over it again. "Now, you're to salt-broil it just as it is. You don't have to cut it in three pieces just because there are three of us. There's no special need for it to be in three equal portions. Understand?" N's explanation wasn't exactly what you'd call clear, either. All the maid did was give that same vague grunt of assent.

At length, the dinner trays arrived. Our seemingly dim-witted maid announced without a trace of a smile that the *tai* was being broiled right now and that they had no sake today.

"Well, there's no help for it. Let's drink the sake we brought with us."

"Looks like that's what we'll have to do," N said, quickly pulling the canteens over. "Say, bring us two decanters and three cups, will you?"

As we sat around joking about his "no special need for three pieces," the *tai* appeared. His special warning had had an absolutely terrible result. The head and tail were gone, and all that was left were five chunks of salt-broiled *tai*, piled on the plate, light brown, with not the least bit of appeal to them. I'm not picky about my food. But I hadn't bought this two-foot *tai* because I wanted to eat it. I think you readers can understand what I mean. I had wanted it broiled in its original form, and then I wanted to gaze at it as it lay on a big platter. To eat or not to eat was not the question. I had wanted to feel rich as I gazed at it and drank. N's instructions had been strange—"no special need to cut it in three"—but the insensitivity of the people at this inn, to have decided therefore to cut it in five! It was inexcusable, it made me furious, I wanted to throw a tantrum.

"What a mess they made of it." I looked at those five stupid pieces of broiled fish (it wasn't a *tai* anymore, just broiled fish) piled on the plate, and wanted to cry. At least if we'd asked them to do it as *sashimi*,¹⁹ I could have taken some consolation from it. But what had happened to its head and bones? Had they just thrown out that wonderful big head? In a region blessed with fish, this inn had grown insensitive to fish and didn't even know how to prepare it.

"Don't be angry—it tastes great!" N, affable as usual, unconcernedly applied his chopsticks to the broiled fish.

"Is that so? Well then, you can eat it all yourself. Go on, eat! I won't. How can you eat something as stupid as this? It's all your fault. That idiot girl got all confused by your instructions. 'We don't especially need three equal pieces'—Is that the kind of pretentious talk you use for the Kanita town budget committee? It's your fault. I'm mad at you."

N snickered, untroubled. "But don't you think it's funny? I told them not to cut it in three, and they cut it in five! That's classy. They've got class, these people. Come on, drink up. *Kampai! Kampai!*"²⁰

¹⁹Sliced raw fish and other seafood, usually eaten after dipping in soy sauce flavored with horseradish or ginger.

²⁰"Bottoms up!"

I was forced into meaningless toasts, and maybe because I was so furious about the *tai*, I got dead drunk and came dangerously close to getting disorderly, and so I quickly went off to bed by myself. Even now when I think about it, I'm really pissed off about that *tai*. They were unbelievably insensitive!

When we got up the next morning, it was still raining. We went down and asked the people at the inn if the boat was running, but that day too it seemed to have been cancelled. We had no other choice but to walk to Tappi along the seashore. We decided to leave as soon as the rain stopped. Until then, we crawled back into our beds and lay there talking, waiting for the rain to clear.

"Once there were two sisters." I began to tell a fairy tale. "They were both given the same number of pine cones by their mother, and told to make rice and soup with them. The younger sister was stingy and cautious, and she conserved her pine cones, feeding them into the fire one at a time, and so she couldn't even make the rice properly, much less the soup. The older sister had a generous, unconcerned nature, and she put all her pine cones into the fire at the same time, begrudging not a single one. The fire easily made the rice, and with the embers that remained, she was able to make the soup. You know what I'm talking about? Come on, let's drink. We said we were taking some sake to Tappi, so last night we left one canteen. Let's drink it. It's no good to be stingy. We should use it all up at one time, without worrying about it. Then maybe there'll be some embers left. No, it doesn't even matter if there aren't any left. Something will turn up when we get to Tappi. It doesn't really matter, anyway, whether we drink at Tappi or not. We won't die from it, after all. It wouldn't be so bad to go to bed without drinking, just to think quietly about the past and the future."

"Enough, enough!" N sprang out of bed. "Let's do it the way the sister did. We'll use it all up at one time!"

We got up and gathered around the hearth, using the iron kettle to heat the sake; and as we waited for the rain to stop, we drank it all up.

Around noon, the rain cleared. We ate a late breakfast and got ready to leave. It was chilly and overcast. We parted from M in front of the inn, and N and I headed north on foot.

"Want to go up to see it?" N stopped in front of the stone *torii* gate to the Gikeiji.²¹ The name of the donor of the *torii*, someone or other from Matsu-mae, was carved on one of the pillars.

²¹*Torii* are simple, squared-off archways, usually of wood or stone, in front of Shinto shrines. Although Gikeiji is a Buddhist temple, in Japan both Buddhist and Shinto elements are often combined in architecture and even in worship. Gikei is Sino-Japanese pronunciation for the characters making up the name "Yoshitsune." *Ji* is the Sino-Japanese pronunciation for the Japanese word *tera*, "temple." Hence, Dazai indicates in the original text, *Gikeiji* is the proper pronunciation for characters that might more commonly be read *Yoshitsune-dera* ("Yoshitsune Temple").

"Yeah." We went through the stone *torii* and climbed up the stone stairway. The top was quite some distance up. Raindrops dripped from the branches of the trees lining both sides of the steps.

"Is this it?" At the summit of the little hill at the top of the steps was a broken-down temple building. On the door of the sanctuary was the flowering gentian crest of the Minamoto clan. Why, I don't know, but I felt extremely bitter, and I asked again, "Is this it?"

"This is it," N answered, his voice blank.

Long ago, Minamoto no Yoshitsune, escaping from Tairadate, came this far to cross over to the Ezo. There not being a favorable wind for the crossing, he stayed here several days. Unable to endure the waiting, he had their statue of Kannon set upon a rock rising out of the ocean, and he prayed for favorable winds. Immediately the wind changed, and he crossed safely over to Matsumae. This statue is now at a temple there, and is called the Yoshitsune Wind-Prayer Kannon. This was the temple so introduced in the *Record of an Eastern Journey*.

We went back down the steps without a word.

"Hey, see these depressions here, and there, on the stone steps? There's some story that they're Benkei's footprints, or Yoshitsune's horse's, or something like that." N laughed without enthusiasm as he spoke. I wanted to believe him, but it didn't work. We saw a rock as we went back out through the *torii*. The *Record of an Eastern Journey* had said: "At the edge of the waves is a great rock, with three caverns in a row in it, like horse stables. This is the place Yoshitsune's horses stayed. That is why they called the place Miumaya, it is said."

We passed by this huge rock with particular haste. Legends of this sort about your homeland are peculiarly embarrassing.

"That pair of Kamakura²² juvenile delinquents must have come wandering here from somewhere else. They'd have said things like 'No need to hide our identities, I am Kurō Hōgan,²³ this one with the beard is the Musashi priest, Benkei,²⁴ we'd like an inn for the night,' and they'd have played around with the country girls. There are just too many Yoshitsune legends in Tsugaru. Yoshitsune and Benkei seem to have been traveling around not just in the Kamakura period—they were around during Edo, too!"

"But, you know, the Benkei role isn't much fun." N's beard was darker than mine, and he seemed worried that he'd be pushed into playing Benkei. "He's got to walk around with those seven heavy weapons²⁵ on his back—what a pain!"

²²Kamakura period, 1192–1219.

²³Yoshitsune.

²⁴Yoshitsune's heroic retainer, a mountain priest.

²⁵The seven "weapons" of the warrior: armor, short sword, long sword, bow, arrows, hood, and helmet.

As we talked, we began to imagine how marvelously entertaining the wanderings of the two delinquents must have been, and we even started to feel envious.

"There do seem to be a lot of good-looking women here," I muttered to N. As we passed through each little hamlet, we would suddenly glimpse a girl in the shadows of a house, and just as suddenly she would disappear. They were all light-skinned and looked neat and classy. You had the feeling that their hands and feet would not be chapped.

"Think so? Now that you mention it, you might be right." There are few men as interested in women as N. The only thing he's more interested in is sake.

"Hell, they probably wouldn't believe me if I told them I was Yoshitsune." I'd been lost in a ridiculous fantasy.

We had started out exchanging such silly comments as we walked along, but gradually our pace quickened. It was as if we were competing to see who could walk faster. Our conversation dropped off completely. The intoxication from Mimmaya wore off. It was bitterly cold. We had no choice but to hurry along. Our faces became serious, and we trudged along steadily. The shore wind gradually blew harder and harder. Time and again I just saved my hat from blowing away, and each time I pulled the brim down sharply lower, until finally the rayon brim ripped completely away. Rain started spattering down. Black clouds hung low in the sky. The crash of the waves grew louder, and the spray hit our cheeks as we followed the narrow road at the edge of the shore.

"But you know, even at this, the road is a lot better than it used to be. Six or seven years ago there wasn't even this much. There used to be lots of places where you had to wait for the waves to retreat and then run across quickly."

"Yeah, but even now, you couldn't do it at night, right? Doesn't look like you could walk it."

"Right—not at night. Not even Yoshitsune or Benkei could make it."

We both looked serious as we talked, and walked even faster.

"You're not tired?" N turned around to ask. "I didn't think you could walk so well!"

"Um, well, I'm not old yet, you know."

After we'd been walking about two hours, the scene around us somehow or other became strangely awesome. It was even forbidding. This was no longer "scenery." Scenery is something that has been gazed at and described by people through a long passage of years, that has been, as it were, tasted by human eyes, softened and tamed by human beings, so that even Kegon Falls, 350 feet high, gives off a faint human scent, as would a wild animal in a cage. All famous spots and dangerous places, without exception, that have been painted in pictures in the past, memorialized in poems, or apostrophized in

haiku, let you discover a human face. But this seacoast at the northernmost end of Honshū was nothing at all like scenery. It totally rejected human existence. To put it more strongly, if you wanted to have a human presence in this scene, you would have to go borrow some old Ainu wearing white robes. A weak fop wearing a purple windbreaker is just wiped out. It doesn't make itself into a picture or a poem. Just rocks and water. Was it Goncharov,²⁶ who once encountered stormy weather while sailing on the ocean? The aged captain said to him, "Go out on deck for a bit, and see if you can find anything to compare the waves to. You writer fellows must surely have some splendid adjectives to give these waves." Goncharov stared at the waves, and finally sighed and spoke a single word: "Frightening."

Just as no literary adjectives float up for the wild waves of the ocean or the fierce winds of the desert, so too the rocks and water at the end of this road in Honshū were simply frightening, and I turned my eyes away from them and walked along just looking down at my feet. When we were still about thirty minutes from Tappi, I laughed faintly and spontaneously revealed my stupidity: "God, we should have left some sake! I'll bet there's none at the inn in Tappi, and it sure is cold!"

"Yeah, that's just what I was thinking. Up ahead a little, there's the house of an old acquaintance of mine, and he may just happen to have his sake ration, because they don't drink."

"Let's hope we have luck!"

"Yeah, we do need some sake."

This man he knew lived in the hamlet just before Tappi. N took off his hat and went into the house. In a little while, looking as if he could hardly keep from laughing, he came out. "Our wicked luck holds. I've had them fill the canteens to the brim. We've got almost a quart."

"So there were some embers left! Let's go."

It was just a little farther. We bent against the fierce wind, and pushed on to Tappi, almost trotting. The road's gotten so narrow, I was thinking, when suddenly I bumped my head against a chicken coop. For an instant, I couldn't understand what had happened.

"We're in Tappi," N said in a strange tone of voice.

"This?" I looked around calmly, and realized that what I'd thought was a chicken coop was the hamlet of Tappi. The little houses were all huddled together closely, supporting each other against the onslaughts of the violent wind and rain. This was the absolute end of Honshū. No road went beyond this hamlet. All you could do past this point was fall into the ocean. The road ran out totally. This was *the* dead end of Honshū. Readers, remember this

²⁶Ivan Alexandrovich Goncharov (1812-1891), Russian travel writer and novelist, author of *Oblomov*. In 1853 he went to Nagasaki with a diplomatic delegation as secretary to a Russian admiral.

well: Whenever you start to walk north, if you follow the road forever, on and on, you will eventually have to come to the Sotogahama Highway, and the road will get narrower and narrower, and if you keep going, you will fall into this amazing world, exactly like a chicken coop, and here your road will run out completely.

"Everyone is surprised. The first time I came here, I was terrified. I thought I'd walked into someone's kitchen," N told me.

However, this territory is extremely important to national defense, and so I have to avoid telling you any more about the village. We continued down the wet road until we came to the inn. An old lady came out and showed us to our room. The room here too was surprisingly pretty, and not at all badly furnished. We changed immediately into padded robes, sat down at the little hearth, relaxed, and finally started to feel human again.

"Ah, might you have some sake?" N asked the woman, calmly and with an air of prudence. Her response was unexpected.

"Yes, we do." She was a refined elderly woman with an oval face. She spoke with total composure.

"No, maybe you don't understand, you see, we want to drink quite a bit," N continued with a painful smile.

"By all means, as much as you'd like." She was smiling.

We looked at each other. Could it be that she didn't even know how precious sake had gotten these days?

"Our ration came today, and, you see, there are some places nearby that don't drink, and so we've collected theirs," she said, making motions with her hands as if gathering it in; and then rounding her arms as if carrying lots of big bottles, she continued, "And just a while ago one of our people went and brought this much back."

"Well, if it's that much, you've got enough." I was finally reassured. "We'll use this kettle to heat it up, so bring us four or five decanters—no, that's too much bother—bring us six bottles, please." I thought it might be better to get us as much as possible before the old lady's mood changed. "You can bring our meal later."

The old lady, as requested, brought us a tray with six decanters on it. As we drank our first and second, the dinner trays arrived.

"Please, take your time."

"Thanks."

The six flasks disappeared in almost no time.

"They're gone!" I was amazed. "That was crazy—too fast!"

"We've drunk that much?" With an air of suspicion N picked up each empty decanter and shook it. "Gone. Well, it was so cold out there, we must have drunk it in a trance."

"Each one of them was full to the brim, you know. If we drink them this

fast and tell the old lady to bring another six, she might think we're freaks and get suspicious. How terrible, to scare her for nothing; she might refuse to bring us more. So maybe we'd better heat up the sake we've brought with us and *then* order another six from her. Aren't we going to stay up all night, anyway, drinking here at the northernmost end of Honshū?" This strange stratagem that I proposed was the starting point for a great disaster.

We poured the sake from our canteens into the decanters, and this time drank as slowly as we could. Before long, N got drunk in one great rush.

"This won't do! I might get drunk tonight." *Might?* He already looked totally plastered. "Got to be careful. I'm getting drunk tonight. That all right? D'y mind if I get drunk?"

"I don't mind—I'm planning to get drunk tonight, myself. Come on, let's take it easy."

"Will you let me sing a little? You've probably never heard me sing, right? I hardly ever do. But I want to sing tonight. Hey, OK? Think it's OK?"

"I don't have any choice. I'll listen." I braced myself for it.

"No matter . . . how many mountains and rivers . . . I cross . . ." N began quietly intoning Bokusui's²⁷ famous travel song, with his eyes closed. It wasn't as horrible as I'd feared. I listened silently, and could feel it sinking into my body.

"How was it? Weird?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I even felt a little moved."

"Well then, here's another one."

This one was awful. Maybe coming to this inn at the northernmost end of Honshū had expanded his spirits; at any rate, he raised an incredibly hideous, barbarous howl.

"The shore . . . of the little island . . . in the eastern sea . . ." He started Takuboku's²⁸ song, but his voice was so rough and loud that it totally covered up the sound of the wind outside.

"That's terrible," I said.

"That bad, hunh? Then I'll try again." He took a huge, deep breath, and raised that monstrous howl again. "The little island on the shore of the eastern sea," he started, mixing up the words, and then for some reason, suddenly the *Masu kagami*²⁹ song came out: "Ah, the *Masu kagami*—writing about now and years gone by . . ." He was groaning and yelling and shrieking—and the result was terrible. I had been holding my breath, praying that the old lady in the back wouldn't hear, but sure enough, the door of the room slid open and she came in.

"All right, gentlemen, you've had a chance to sing, and now it's time for

²⁷Wakayama Bokusui, modern poet and songwriter, 1885—1928.

²⁸Ishikawa Takuboku, modern poet, 1886—1912.

²⁹A fourteenth-century chronicle.

you to go to bed.” She took away our dinner trays, and quickly made up our beds. As might be expected, N’s barbarous voice and expansive spirits seemed to have frightened the old lady no end. I had been planning still to do a lot of drinking, but it was hopeless.

“That was really poor. Your singing was awful. If only you’d stopped with one or two songs. Anyone would’ve been put off by something so bad.” I muttered my complaints as I sniffled my way to sleep.

The next morning, I awoke to hear the charming voice of a little girl singing. The wind had died down, and the sun was streaming into the room, and the little girl was singing a handball rhyme on the road in the back. I raised my head to listen.

*Sessesse*³⁰
 Summer is coming in
 The eighty-eighth night
 In mountain, in field
 Blows the fresh green wind
 Purple wisteria waves
 Billow in the leaves . . .

I could hardly bear it. Here at the northernmost end of Honshū, which people of the central regions believed even now to be the land of the Ezo, and looked down on for that—I had not thought to hear such a beautiful song, in such clear tones. It was just as Prof. Sato had said:

If people wish to speak of the present Ōshū, they must first recognize in it the burning driving force of Italy on the brink of the Renaissance. In culture, as well as in industry, the august intentions of the Meiji Emperor in regard to education penetrated with great speed into every little harbor and hamlet of Ōshū, stimulating the decline of the special Ōshū nasal accent, so painful to the ears, promoting the standard dialect, and shedding the glorious light of education on the land of what used to be ignorant savages sunk in their own abysmally primitive conditions. Now look ye . . .

I felt such promise, filled with hope, in the little girl’s charming singing voice, that I could hardly stand it.

³⁰Japanese poetry relies not upon rhyme but upon line syllable count for its regularity, so even in the original these lines do not rhyme, but are of seven syllables each—perfect for a child’s handball game. *Sessesse* is a common opening phrase in children’s chanting games, the equivalent of “Ready, set, go.”

4. The Tsugaru Plain

TSUGARU, old designation for the northeasternmost part of Honshū on the Sea of Japan. In the reign of Empress Saimei,¹ the governor of Koshi, Abe no Hirafu, governed the land of the Ezo in the Dewa region, reaching as far as Akita, Nushiro (present-day Noshiro), Tsugaru, and finally even Hokkaidō. This is the first appearance of the name Tsugaru. In other words, he made its chieftain the administrator of Tsugaru. At that time, the ambassador to the T'ang court, Sakaibe no Muraji Iwashiki, presented some Ezo to the emperor of China. The official who accompanied him, Yuki no Muraji Hakatoko, in response to questions, explained the tribes of the Ezo, saying that there were three, the closest being the Nigi Ezo, the next the Ara Ezo, and the most distant the Tsugaru. Other Ezo seemed naturally to be recognized as different tribes. The designation Tsugaru Ezo was seen frequently at the time of the Ebisu Revolt in Dewa in Genkei 2 [878]. The shogun at that time was Fujiwara no Yasunori. After suppressing the revolt, he went from Tsugaru to Watarijima and annexed the lands of all barbarian peoples who had not been conquered in previous reigns. Watarijima is the present-day Hokkaidō. Tsugaru became a part of Mutsu when Minamoto no Yoritomo² pacified Ōu and put it under the military governor of Mutsu.

AOMORI PREFECTURE, HISTORY OF. Until the first year of Meiji [1868], the land of this prefecture, with what are now Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures, was part of one province known as Mutsu. In the first year of Meiji, the land was comprised of the five *han* of Hirosaki, Kuroishi, Hachinohe, Shichinohe, and Tonami; but in July 1871 the *han* system was abolished and prefectures were established, and in September of the same year the prefecture was constituted from the former *han*. For a time they were consolidated into Hirosaki Prefecture, but in November of the same year Hirosaki Prefecture was abolished and Aomori Prefecture set up, with the above-mentioned *han* under its administration. Later, the Ninohe area was made a part of Iwate Prefecture, and so it stands today.

TSUGARU CLAN, a clan originating from the Fujiwara clan. Hideshige, an eighth-generation descendant of the naval shogun Hidesato, in the Kōwa period,³ controlled the land of the Tsugaru region of Mutsu. Later, he built a castle at the harbor of Jūsan in Tsugaru, and took Tsugaru as his clan name. During the Meiō period,⁴ the son of Konoe Hisamichi, Masanobu, succeeded to the family headship. The clan became prominent with Masanobu's grandson, Tamenobu. Their descendants severally became the masters of the old Hirosaki and Kuroishi *han*, and the heads of several houses.

¹Ca. A.D. 655-661.

²Late twelfth-century shogun, older brother of Yoshitsune.

³Late eleventh to early twelfth century.

⁴Late fifteenth century.

TSUGARU TAMENOBU, a general in the Sengoku period.⁵ His father was Ōura Jinzaburō Morinobu, his mother was the daughter of the master of Horikoshi Castle, Takeda Shigenobu. He was born in the first month of Temmon 19 [1550]. His childhood name was Ōgi. In the third month of Eiroku 10 [1567], when he was eighteen, he became the adopted heir of his uncle, Tsugaru Tamenori, and the ward of Konoe Maehisa. His wife was Tamenori's daughter. In the fifth month of Genki 2 [1571] he battled against Nambu Takanobu and cut him down, and on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of Tenshō 6 [1578], he struck against the master of Namioka Castle, Kitabatake Akimura, and seized his domain. He then annexed neighboring village territories, and by Tenshō 13 [1585] had generally unified Tsugaru. In Tenshō 15 [1587], he set forth in an attempt to have an audience with Toyotomi Hideyoshi,⁶ but the warden of Akita Castle, Abe Sanesue, blocked his way, and he had to return without achieving his aim. In Tenshō 17 [1589], he sent hawks and horses and the like to Hideyoshi to cultivate his favor. At the time of the conquest of Odawara in Tenshō 18 [1590], he responded quickly to Hideyoshi's army, and was assured the whole area of Gappo and Sotogahama in Tsugaru. He sent troops during the Kunohe Revolt in Tenshō 19 [1591], and in the fourth month of Bunroku 2 [1593] he went to the capital and had an audience with Hideyoshi and with the Konoe family, and was granted the right to use the peony as his crest. Next, he sent an envoy to Nagoya in Hizen, and provided supplies for Hideyoshi's camp, and in the first month of Bunroku 3 [1594] he was made *ukyō-dayū*⁷ of the lower junior fourth rank. In the Battle of Sekigahara in Keichō 5 [1600] he sent troops to join the Tokugawa side,⁸ went farther west, fought at Ōgaki, and increased his property with Ōdate in the province of Kōzuke, 2,000 *koku*. On the fifth day of the twelfth month of Keichō 12 [1607], he died in Kyoto at the age of fifty-eight.

TSUGARU PLAIN, a plain in the province of Mutsu, covering the southern, central, and northern portions of Tsugaru. It is the valley of the Iwaki River. It is bounded on the east by the mountain range that forms the backbone of the Tsugaru Peninsula, running north from west of Lake Towada; on the south, the watershed is formed by Yatate Pass and Tateishi Cut on the border of Dewa and Echigo; and the west is guarded by the Iwaki mountain range and a wall of sand dunes on the seacoast (called Byobuzan, or the Folding Screen Mountains). The main branch of the Iwaki River flows from the west, joins the Hira River from the south and the Asaseishi River from the east, north of Hirosaki City, and then runs due north into the sea, after pouring

⁵Period of the Warring States, late fifteenth to late sixteenth century.

⁶Last great rival to Tokugawa Ieyasu's hegemony.

⁷First vice-minister of the Office of the Capital, Right Division, lower junior fourth rank.

⁸Thereby betraying Hideyoshi, the lord whose favor he had sought.

into Jūsan Sound. The plain covers an area some 38 miles long, north to south, and 12 miles wide, east to west. It narrows toward the northern end; at a line crossing Kizukuri and Goshogawara, it is about 7 miles wide, and by Jūsan Sound, it is a mere 2 miles across. The land is low and flat; tributaries and irrigation canals cross it like a net, and the great portion of Aomori Prefecture's rice production comes from this plain.

(*The above items are from the Encyclopedia Japonica.*)

The history of Tsugaru is not very widely known. There seem to be some people who even think that Mutsu, Aomori Prefecture, and Tsugaru are the same thing. That's not surprising, because in our school history textbooks the name "Tsugaru" appears just once, briefly. When Abe no Hirafu subjugates the Ezo, there's a line like this: "Emperor Kōtoku died, and Empress Saimei succeeded to the throne, and Prince Naka-no-ōe became Crown Prince and assisted with the government, and Abe no Hirafu was sent to subjugate the regions now known as Akita and Tsugaru." The name is there, but actually, that's all; aside from those parts about Hirafu, not even the name of Tsugaru appears, not in grammar school textbooks, nor high school textbooks, nor college lectures. When the Four Shoguns were dispatched in year 573 of the Imperial Era,⁹ they seemed to have gotten only as far north as present-day Fukushima Prefecture; and Prince Yamato Takeru's¹⁰ pacification of the Ezo about 200 years later was as far north as the province of Hidakami, which seems to have been in the northern part of our Miyagi Prefecture. Then about 550 years passed, and there was the Taika Reform [645], and the name Tsugaru comes floating up for the first time, with Abe no Hirafu's subjugation of the Ezo, only to sink without further mention. In the Nara period,¹¹ it is reported only that Taga Castle (in the vicinity of Sendai City) and Akita Castle (Akita City) were built and the Ezo subdued; no longer does "Tsugaru" appear. In the Heian period,¹² Sakanoue no Tamuramaro advanced far into the North, destroyed the Ezo home base, and built Isawa Castle (around the town of Mizusawa in Iwate Prefecture) as a center for pacification, but apparently he didn't get as far as Tsugaru. After that, in the Kōnin era,¹³ there was Bun'ya no Watamaro's campaign, and again, in Gangyō 2 [878], there was the Ezo rebellion in Dewa. Fujiwara no Yasunori went to suppress it, and the Tsugaru Ezo supported the revolt, it is

⁹A traditional reign-date calendar, beginning with the legendary Emperor Jimmu, whose accession date is equated with 660 B.C. The Four Shoguns were sent to the barbarians in the four directions by Emperor Sūjin.

¹⁰Protohistorical hero. See Donald Philippi, *Kojiki* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), and Morris, *The Nobility of Failure*.

¹¹A.D. 718-794.

¹²A.D. 794-1156.

¹³A.D. 810-824.

said. But for those of us who aren't specialists, when you say "subjugation of the Ezo," it just means Tamuramaro, and then you skip about 250 years to the beginning of the Gempei period,¹⁴ and all they taught us about was the Early Nine Years War and the Later Three Years War. The stage of these battles was present-day Iwate and Akita prefectures, and it was only the so-called Nigi Ezo of the Abe and Kiyohara clans that were involved. There wasn't a thing mentioned in our textbooks about the movements of such pure Ezo of the interior regions as the Tsugaru. And then there was the glory of the three generations of the Fujiwara clan, some 100 years, at Hiraizumi.¹⁵ In Bunji 5 [1189], Ōshū was pacified by Minamoto no Yoritomo, and from this point on our textbooks withdraw even further from the Tōhoku region. At the time of the Meiji Restoration, too, the various *han* of Ōshū were seen as just standing up for a while, flicking off the dust from the edges of their garments, and then sitting down again; their commitment has not been recognized the way that of the *han* in the lands of Satsuma and Chōshū¹⁶ was. Even if you tell me, "Well, they were playing it safe, just taking advantage of the times," there's nothing I can do about that. I mean, there's *nothing* in the textbooks. Of course, they speak reverently about the Age of the Gods, but to say that from Emperor Jimmu to the present you can find the name "Tsugaru" in only one place, with Abe no Hirafu, is truly depressing. What in hell do you think was happening to Tsugaru all that time? Was it just sitting there quietly dusting off its clothes and shifting in its seat, dusting itself off and shifting, blinking its eyes and not venturing one step outdoors, for 2,600 years? Hardly likely! Suppose the subject itself were to speak, this is what we might hear: "Maybe it looks that way, but we've been quite busy, thank you!"

Ōu is a blanket term for Ōshū and Dewa, and Ōshū is an abbreviated term for Mutsu-shū. Mutsu was originally the general name for everything north of Shirakawa and Ninoseki, the two major government inspection checkpoints. It means *Michi no oku*, "the interior of Michi," abbreviated as *Michinoku*. The word *michi*, used as the name of the province, was pronounced *mutsu* in the old provincial dialect, and so the region became Mutsu Province. This region was at the end of the two old highways, the Tōkaidō and the Tōsandō, and since it was the dwelling place of the most remote strange peoples, it naturally became known

¹⁴Late twelfth century, time of warfare between the *Genji* (or Minamoto) and *Heike* (or Taira) clans, hence *Gempei*.

¹⁵A branch of the Kyoto-based Fujiwara clan attempted to establish a rival cultural center at Hiraizumi in the North. The castle was destroyed with its defenders by Yoritomo for giving shelter to his brother Yoshitsune. One of Bashō's most famous haiku was inspired by the ruins of Hiraizumi, nearly five hundred years later: "The remains of the dreams / Of brave warriors: / The grasses of summer."

¹⁶Areas on the islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū from which major leadership for the Meiji Restoration came.

to most people as “the interior of Michi.” The character used to write *mutsu* has the same meaning as the one for *michi*, “road.”¹⁷

Dewa, which can be read *ideha*, is understood to mean *idehashi*,¹⁸ “place to go out.” In the old days, the area from the central part of Honshū to the Sea of Japan part of Tōhoku was generally called the province of Koshi. The interior of this region, like Michinoku, was an uncultured place, long the dwelling place of strange peoples, and that may be why they called it *idehashi*; in other words, the name signified that, like Mutsu on the Pacific Ocean side, it was originally long a hinterland lying outside the imperial influence.

This is the explanation of Professor Kida, Ph.D.,¹⁹ and it is concise. There is no better explanation than one that is simple and clear. Since Dewa and Mutsu were already regarded as beyond the pale of culture, when it came to the northern extreme, the Tsugaru Peninsula, they must have thought of it as inhabited only by bears and monkeys. This is how Professor Kida continues with his history of Ōu:

Although they speak of the post-Yoritomo pacification of Ōu, it could not of course be ruled as other areas were, and using the excuse that “Dewa and Mutsu were the land of the Ebisu,” they stopped allocation of fields under the reform system that they had attempted to implement for a time, to the extent that they now had no choice but to order that they should follow the old system of Hidehira and Yasuhira.²⁰ Accordingly, as in the northernmost part of Tsugaru, the majority of the inhabitants still held to the old ways of the Ezo. Apparently, the Kamakura warriors found it difficult to rule, and they deputized the local lords, the Andō clan, as officials and had them pacify the area as Ezo governor-generals.

Well, it is from the time of this Andō clan that we begin to know a little about conditions in Tsugaru. Before them, who knows, maybe there were just Ainu prowling about the place. However, these Ainu were not unimportant. They were among what you’d call Japan’s original peoples, but they seem to have been a fundamentally different type from the demoralized Ainu left these days in Hokkaidō. Their relics and remains show that their pottery was among the most highly developed of any Stone Age culture in the world, it is said. The ancestors of the present-day Ainu lived anciently in Hokkaidō, and had little contact with the culture of Honshū. Their territory was isolated, with few natural advantages, and accordingly, even in the Stone Age, they did not reach the level of development of the same peoples in the Ōu region; especially in the middle ages, since the Matsumae *han*, they were often oppressed by the central peoples, they were terribly emasculated, they fell to

¹⁷They both can mean “land” or “road,” hence *michi no oku* also means “roads to the hinterlands.”

¹⁸In modern Japanese, *deba*.

¹⁹Kida Teikichi, 1871–1939. Anthropologist, archaeologist, ethnographer.

²⁰The last two lords at Hiraizumi.

the extremes of degradation. By contrast, the Ōu AINU had strong pride in their own independent culture, and may have migrated to the central provinces; also, peoples from the central regions came in great numbers to Ōu, until eventually they became Yamato people, indistinguishable from people in any other region. Professor Ogawa Takuji,²¹ Doctor of Science, has come to the following conclusions:

There is a record in the *Shoku Nihongi*²² that around the time of the Nara court, some Su-shen people and Po-hai people²³ came to court from across the sea. Especially notable were Tempyō 18 (1406), in the time of Emperor Shōmu, and Hōki 2 (1431),²⁴ in the time of Emperor Kōnin, when over 1,000 of the Po-hai and then 300, respectively, arrived in the present-day Akita region, and it is not difficult to imagine that very free traffic went on with the Manchuria area. From the fact that *goshusen*, ancient Chinese coins, were unearthed in the Akita vicinity, and that there seem to have been shrines dedicated to King Wen and King Wu,²⁵ it can be surmised that in both cases direct intercourse went on between the continent and this region. When we put together the account in the *Konjaku monogatari*²⁶ of Abe no Yoritoki's experiences in Manchuria with these archaeological and anthropological materials, we find that it is not a dismissible, unique folk tale. To advance yet another step, we can confidently affirm that the level of culture reached by the tribes living in Tōhoku at that time, before the eastward advance of imperial authority and as a result of direct contact with the continent, was not low, as can be presumed from the incomplete historical materials remaining in the central region. When we realize how extremely difficult it was for generals like Tamuramaro, Yoriyoshi, and Yoshiie to conquer them, that the enemy were not simply fierce, ignorant natives like the savages of Taiwan, then for the first time, understanding begins to dawn.

Professor Ogawa goes on to add, Is it not interesting to speculate that among the peoples constantly cited by the officials of the Yamato court—the Emishi, the Azumabito, the Kebito—there might have been a sense of wanting to take on the valor of the peoples of Ōu, and their foreign, modish ways? When you look at it this way, the ancestors of the people of Tsugaru seem not to have been simply wandering around the northernmost end of Honshū. But for some reason, not one bit of this comes out in the central histories. Just for a little while, as I've mentioned above, you can get a vague idea of conditions in Tsugaru, at around the time of the Andō clan. Professor Kida says:

²¹Ogawa Takuji, 1870–1941. Geographer of Japan and China.

²²*Later Chronicles of Japan*, ninth century.

²³Peoples from the northeastern regions of China.

²⁴These dates are in traditional reign-date reckoning. By the Gregorian calendar they would be 746 and 771, respectively.

²⁵Deified Chinese emperors, protectors of literary and military arts.

²⁶Eleventh-century tale collection, *Tales of Then and Now*.

The Andō clan is the successor to Abe no Sadato's son Takaboshi. Its progenitor is said to have been Nagasunehiko's elder brother, Abi. Nagasunehiko defied Emperor Jimmu²⁷ and was punished with death; his elder brother Abi was exiled to Sotogahama in Ōshū, and his son began the Abe clan, it is said. At any rate, there is no doubt but that they were important nobility in Hokuō²⁸ even before the Kamakura period. The lower or inner three districts were ostensibly ruled by the Kamakura *bakufu* government, while the inner three were under the administration of the imperial court in Kyoto;²⁹ in fact, it is said, Hokuō land was not entered into any government lists at all or under any central administrative system. This perhaps implies that the power of the Kamakura *bakufu* did not extend into the interior, so that the land was left free to the Andō clan as territory closed to the so-called *shugo*³⁰ system.

At the end of the Kamakura period, there was an internal feud within the whole Andō clan in Tsugaru, which ended in the Ezo Revolt; the *bakufu* regent, Hōjō no Takatoki, sent in military power to suppress it, but this was not accomplished by the force of Kamakura arms after all, but by rule of negotiation.

Professor Kida employs, as usual, rather cautious terms to speak of the history of Tsugaru. It does certainly seem that Tsugaru's history is not very clear. One thing does seem to be true, however: this northernmost province never fought with other provinces, and it was never defeated. It seems to lack completely the concept of submission. The generals of other provinces seem to have been stymied by this, and they pretended not to see, and left the people of Tsugaru to do as they pleased. That's just like some people in the present-day Shōwa literary establishment—at any rate, they tend to scuffle and exchange insults among themselves, since no other regions have ever been their partners. The uprisings of the Tsugaru Ezo, which started in the internal disputes of the Andō clan, are an example of this. According to Takeuchi Umpei's history of Aomori Prefecture—and he is, after all, a man of Tsugaru—"this disturbance of the Andō clan expanded to become a rebellion of the eight northern districts—what the *Hōjō kudaiki*³¹ called, 'The beginning of a danger that would threaten the life of heaven and earth.' " Finally, as he points out, it turned into the Genkō Uprising and the Kemmu Restoration,³² and so maybe it should also be counted as a remote cause of

²⁷Legendary first emperor, with apocryphal reign dates 660–585 B.C.

²⁸Another name for northern Ōshū, "Northern Interior."

²⁹Until the Meiji Restoration, two administrations existed in Japan: the imperial court, usually powerless, and the *bakufu* of the shogun, usually governing. Until the fifteenth century, the imperial court attempted from time to time, usually unsuccessfully, to exercise its authority; during the Edo period, the *bakufu* was the single unchallenged authority.

³⁰Military governor.

³¹Also known as *Kamakura nendaiki*, a two-volume history of the Kamakura *bakufu*, author unknown, written ca. 1330.

³²Both in the 1330's. The Kemmu Restoration was the attempt in 1334 of Emperor Go-Daigo to wrest control of the government from the Kamakura *bakufu*. It failed in 1336 when his general, Ashikaga Takauji, turned on him and so became the first Ashikaga shogun.

that restoration. If so, this is a real case of Tsugaru's influencing the central political situation, if only a little; and then we would have to call the internal dispute of the Andō clan a singularly auspicious episode worthy of special mention in the history of Tsugaru. From ancient times, the Pacific Ocean side of Aomori Prefecture had been Ezo territory, known as Nukanobu; but from the Kamakura period on, the Nambu branch of Kōshū's Takeda clan³³ moved in to live there, and their strength grew tremendously. Through the Yoshino and Muromachi periods,³⁴ up to Hideyoshi's unification of the country, Tsugaru fought with the Nambu; in Tsugaru, the Tsugaru clan took the place of the Andō, and they consolidated the whole province. The Tsugaru family continued for twelve generations, and at the time of the Meiji Restoration the *han* leader Tsuguakira reverently restored the *han* registers to the Emperor. That, I guess, is a greatly abbreviated history of Tsugaru.

There are a number of theories about the remote ancestors of the Tsugaru family. Professor Kida touches on them: "In Tsugaru, the Andō clan declined and the Tsugaru clan became independent. Since they bordered on the Nambu clan, they had long stood in an adversarial relationship with them. The Tsugaru clan is designated as descending from the Konoe regent, Hisamichi. However, some say that they were a branch of the Nambu clan, others say that they come from Hideshige, the younger son of Fujiwara no Motohira, and yet others say they are part of the Andō clan; and so we do not know which theory to follow." Then Takeuchi Umpei records the following:

Throughout the Edō period, the houses of Nambu and Tsugaru remained in a posture of extreme mutual estrangement. The reason for this was that the Nambu clan regarded the Tsugaru house as ancestral enemies who had wrested away part of the old domain after being originally part of the Nambu family; although protected by the Nambu, they had turned their backs on them. On the other hand, the Tsugaru house insisted that their remote ancestors were of the Fujiwara clan, and that during the Middle Ages they had added the blood lines of the Konoe house; from this their enmity seemed to arise. Of course, the truth was that Nambu Takanobu had been overthrown by Tsugaru Tamenobu and the Nambu castles within the Tsugaru region seized. And furthermore, among Tamenobu's ancestors several generations back, the mother of Ōura Mitsunobu had been the daughter of Nambu Kuji, Lord of Bizen, of a family line designated several generations later as the Nambu Lords of Shinano. And so I think it probably would not be unusual for the Nambu clan to feel deep resentment against the Tsugaru house as traitors to the family. Now, the Tsugaru house worked to have its distant ancestors appear to be from the Fujiwara and Konoe houses, but when we look at this claim from a present-day perspective, it does not seem supported with any incontrovertible proof that would convince us. The defensive claim of the *Kasokuki*,³⁵

³³Whose home region was in the mountains west of Tokyo.

³⁴Mid-fourteenth to mid-sixteenth century.

³⁵*The Account of Kasoku*, a history written by a younger son of the third lord of the *han*, Tsugaru Nobuyoshi, who became a monk and took the name Kasoku.

that they are not of the Nambu clan, is an extremely weak argument. The Takaya house records of the past have the Ōura clan as a branch of the Nambu house; the *Kidachi Diary*³⁶ says, "The Nambu and the Tsugaru are the same house"; in the recently published *Tokushibiyō*,³⁷ Tamenobu is in Kuji clan (Nambu family) entry. In contrast to this, at present there does not seem to be any firm evidence to deny their claim, either. However, even if there was a Nambu blood connection from the past in Tsugaru, and even if it was a protectorate, that is not all there is to the relationship.

Like Professor Kida, he avoids a definitive decision. My simple, plain, unquestionable resolution of the problem, since we have only the *Encyclopedia Japonica* to go on, is to quote its passages as references at the beginning of this discussion.

I know I've gone into great and tedious detail, but when you think about it, Tsugaru's existence really has been seen as pretty insignificant to the rest of Japan. Bashō wrote at the beginning of his *Narrow Road to the Deep North*³⁸ that, as he got ready to set out on the trip, his heart was "heavy at the thought of the three thousand leagues ahead of me"; but the farthest north he ever got was Hiraizumi, and that's only the southern end of Iwate Prefecture. To get to Aomori Prefecture, he'd have had to walk twice as far. And Tsugaru is the only peninsula in Aomori facing onto the Sea of Japan. In general, the old Tsugaru had the Tsugaru plain as its center, stretching out on both sides of the Iwaki River, nearly 55 miles in length. To the east, it went as far as Aomori and Asamushi; to the west, it went along the Sea of Japan coast down as far south as Fukaura; and to the south, I guess, it reached about as far as Hirosaki. The branch family fief of Kuroishi was south of that, but it had its own distinctive traditions as the Kuroishi *han*, and what we might call different cultural currents flowed here as compared to Tsugaru, and that's why I leave it out. The northernmost point was Tappi. It is truly depressingly small. Not without reason was it not drawn into the history of the central regions, I began to realize. We spent the night at the inn at the remotest extreme of our "Road to the Interior"; the next day, just as we'd suspected, the boat was not running, so we walked back to Mimmaya along the same road, had lunch there, and then returned directly to N's house in Kanita by bus. But, you know, when you walk it, Tsugaru doesn't seem so small. Two days later, I left Kanita by myself around noon on the scheduled boat, got to Aomori harbor about three in the afternoon, took the Ōu line train to Kawabe, changed there to the Gonō line, arrived at Goshogawara

³⁶Records of the Kidachi family, Edo period; exact date unknown.

³⁷Historical study published in 1935 by Tokyo Imperial University Historical Institute (Tokyo Teikoku Daigaku shiryō hensanjō).

³⁸Nobuyuki Yuasa, trans., *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 97-143.

around five, headed north immediately up the Tsugaru plain on the Tsugaru Railway; and by the time I reached the place of my birth, Kanagi, it was already getting dark. From Kanita to Kanagi was just one side of a rectangle, but Mount Bonju lay between them, and there seemed to be nothing like a real road through the mountains, so there was no choice but to take the long way around the other three sides of the rectangle.

As soon as I got to the family house, I went to the *butsuma*. My eldest brother's wife came with me and opened the doors of the family altar wide, and I sat looking at the pictures of my mother and father for a time, and then made a deep, formal bow. Then we withdrew to the "ordinary room," as we called the family living room, and again I made my greetings to my sister-in-law.

"When did you leave Tokyo?" she asked. A few days before I left I had sent her a postcard saying that I planned to make a circuit through Tsugaru, and while I was there, I wanted to stop in Kanagi, and hoped to be allowed to visit the graves of our parents.

"About a week ago. I've been taking my time along the eastern coast, and I took great advantage of N's hospitality in Kanita." She would know who N was.

"Oh, I see. Your postcard came, and then day after day you didn't appear, and we began to worry that something had happened. Yōko and Mitchan have hardly been able to contain themselves, and every day they've been taking turns waiting at the station. Some people even got angry and wondered if you were even coming!"

Yōko was my oldest brother's oldest daughter, and about half a year ago she'd married into the family of a landowner near Hirosaki, but she and her new husband were constantly visiting Kanagi, it seems, and this was one of those times. Mitchan was a quiet child, the youngest daughter of my oldest sister, not yet married and always over in Kanagi, helping out at the house. My two nieces came in, arm in arm, giggling as if at some joke, and greeted their no-good drunkard of an uncle. Yōko still seemed like a schoolgirl, without the slightest trace of the married woman about her.

"What strange clothes!" They both immediately burst out laughing at what I looked like.

"Don't be silly—this is the latest Tokyo fashion!"

My grandmother came in, led by hand by my sister-in-law. She's eighty-eight.

"Welcome! Oh, thank you for coming," she said loudly. She was healthy, but seemed to be getting a bit weaker.

"How shall we do it?" My sister-in-law turned to me. "Do you want dinner here? The others are all upstairs . . ." Apparently my two older brothers had begun drinking upstairs, with Yōko's husband.

I still didn't know exactly how much formality to maintain with my brothers, or how free and unreserved to be with them.

"If they have no objections, shall we go upstairs?" It seemed weak-spirited and cowardly for me to sit down here alone, drinking beer.

"No problem, either way!" She laughed. "Well, then, bring his dinner tray upstairs," she said to Mitchan.

I went upstairs just as I was, in my windbreaker. My brothers were drinking quietly in the best Japanese-style room with the gold screen. I stumbled in and turned first to the bridegroom: "I'm Shūji. How do you do?" Then I made my apologies to my brothers at how long it had been. My brothers just grunted lightly and nodded slightly. That was the custom in our house. No, maybe you could say that's the way things are everywhere in Tsugaru. I expected it, and so I turned to my dinner tray easily, without a second thought, and drank sake silently with my sister-in-law and Mitchan pouring for me. The new husband was sitting with his back to the pillar of the decorative alcove, and his face was already quite red. My brothers used to be strong drinkers, but nowadays they seemed to have gotten much softer, and they both kept deferring elegantly to each other: "Here, please, have another, no, I really shouldn't, here's one for you, please do . . ." I had just come from the wild drinking of Sotogahama, and this was like some heavenly paradise. I grew tense as I realized all the more keenly just how different in tone were the lives my brothers and I led.

"What shall I do about the crabs? Later?" my sister-in-law whispered to me. I had brought a present of some Kanita crabs.

"Let's see . . ." Crabs seemed somehow too suited to the outdoors and too crude for these elegant trays, and I hesitated. Maybe my sister-in-law was feeling the same thing.

"Crabs?" my eldest brother asked sharply. "No problem. Bring them in—with napkins." Maybe because his son-in-law was there, my brother seemed to be in a good mood.

The crabs appeared.

"Won't you have some?" he urged the son-in-law, and then himself started right in, peeling off the shells. I breathed a sigh of relief.

"Excuse me, please, but . . . who are you?" the son-in-law asked me with an innocent smile. I was taken aback. I reconsidered, and realized that this was not unnatural, and answered with a laugh, "Yes, well, ah, I'm Eiji's younger brother" (he was my next older brother); but then I got depressed, thinking that maybe I shouldn't have used Eiji's name. My thoughts raced miserably, and I checked out the expression on his face, but he showed no special signs of anything, so I was still adrift. Oh, the hell with it. I sat back from my formal position, and this time had Mitchan pour me some beer.

I've always felt spiritually exhausted in my family home. And what makes

it worse is that I will write something like this afterward. The man whose unhappy fate it is to have to make a living by selling stories he writes about his family will have his homeland taken away from him by God. In other words, most probably I will spend the rest of my days dozing in my dilapidated house in Tokyo, dreaming of home and yearning for it; I will wander around aimlessly, and die like that.

The next day was rainy. I got up and went to my brother's study on the second floor, where he was showing paintings to his son-in-law. He had out two golden screens. One of them was of cherry blossoms in the mountains, the other was a refined landscape of the type called "rural scenes." I looked at the artist's signature but couldn't read it. "Who painted it?" I asked timidly, blushing.

"Suian," my brother answered.

"Suian." I still didn't know.

"Don't you know him?" he went on mildly, not particularly scolding. "Hyakusui's father."³⁹

"Really?" I had of course heard that Hyakusui's father was a painter, but I hadn't known that his name was Suian, nor that he painted so well. I didn't exactly dislike painting—in fact, far from it, I rather fancied myself knowledgeable in the field—but not to have known Suian was a major blunder. Suppose I had glanced at the screen and lightly commented, "Hey, Suian?" my brother might have started to see me in a better light. But instead, I come out with a "Who?" like an idiot, and that's hopeless. I'll never retrieve it, I agonized; but my brother paid me no attention and just went on quietly to his son-in-law, "There are some famous people in Akita."

"What about Tsugaru's Ayatari?"⁴⁰ I butted in, trembling, trying to recapture my honor and flatter my brother at the same time. If you talk of Tsugaru painters, well, I guess Ayatari is it, but the fact is that I had only learned for the first time that Tsugaru had had such a good painter the last time I was in Kanagi, when my brother had shown me a painting he owned.

"That's a different matter," my brother muttered, with no enthusiasm in his voice, and sat down in a chair. We had all been standing as we looked at the screen paintings, but when my brother sat down, the son-in-law took a chair facing him, and I sat on a sofa near the door, a little apart from them.

"These men are, well, the main line," he said to his son-in-law. As always, my brother did not talk much to me directly.

To tell the truth, the fleshy heaviness of Ayatari's style gave an uneasy sense of being about to descend into folk craft.

³⁹Suian (1844–1890), Akita painter who specialized in painting animals. His son Hyakusui (1866–1933) painted in both Japanese and Western styles.

⁴⁰One of the artistic names of Tatebe (originally Kitamura) Ryōsoku (1719–1774), also known as Ryōtai and by several other names. Some of his paintings, reproduced as woodblock prints, are in the Ryerson Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago.

"What shall we call it . . . 'the tradition of culture'?" My brother hunched his shoulders and looked intently at his son-in-law. "I believe there's something of that deeply rooted in Akita."

"And Tsugaru's no good?" No matter what I said, it would turn out clumsy, so I gave up and just spoke to myself with a laugh.

"I hear you're writing something about Tsugaru now?" My brother suddenly spoke to me.

"Yes, that's right, but I don't know anything about Tsugaru and so . . ." I floundered in confusion. "Do you know any good reference works?"

My brother laughed. "Well, now, I haven't had much interest in local history, either."

"Isn't there some popular thing like *A Guide to Famous Places in Tsugaru*? I really don't know a single thing."

"Nothing, nothing." He shook his head with a bitter smile, as if put off by how slipshod I was being. Then he stood up, said to his son-in-law, "Well, I have to go to the Agricultural Association for a while, so please help yourself to any of these books. Sorry the weather's so bad," and left.

"I suppose the Agricultural Association is pretty busy right now," I said to the son-in-law.

"Yes, right now they're working out the rice delivery quotas, so it's quite a job." Young as he was, he was a landowner, and so he knew a lot about it. He explained it to me with all sorts of complicated figures, but I didn't understand the half of it.

"Until now, I've probably never thought seriously about rice, but in times like this, I mean, I even look out of the train windows at the paddies with mixed feelings, as if they were mine. This year has been so miserable and cold for so long, I wonder if the planting had to be delayed." As usual, in the company of an expert, I paraded my superficial knowledge.

"It'll be all right. These days, when it's really cold, we have plans to deal with it. The seedlings seem to be developing normally, too."

"Is that so?" I looked grave and nodded. "Of course, what I know is just what I've gleaned from looking out at the Tsugaru plain from the train yesterday, but what do you call those things—horse-drawn plows? You attach them to horses and plow up the fields with them? Well, an awful lot of them seem to be pulled by oxen. When we were children, everything, not just horse-plows, but even baggage carts, was pulled by horses, and as for the functions of oxen, well, there were hardly any—so much so, that when I first went to Tokyo and saw oxen pulling carts, I found it quite strange."

"I can imagine. Horses have just about disappeared. They've mostly been sent to the front. And then, I suppose it has something to do with oxen not needing as much attention. But then, from the standpoint of efficiency, oxen may be only half as good as horses—no, maybe much, much less."

“Speaking of conscription, have you already—”

“Me? I’ve already been called twice, but both times, along the way, I was sent back. It’s embarrassing.” It was good to see the healthy youth’s carefree laughing face. “I don’t want to be sent back the next time.” He spoke lightly, in a natural tone of voice.

“Are there any hidden heroes in this region that you can admire and respect without reservation—ones you think are truly great?”

“Well, now, I don’t really know, but there might be some among what are called the ‘conscientious farmers,’ don’t you think?”

“That sounds right.” I agreed completely. “I’m not very good at theorizing, but I’ve always wanted myself to live with a single crazy intention, to be what you could call a ‘conscientious writer.’ But, you know, there’s my worthless pride, and so my intention always turns into something quite ordinary and pretentious, and it just never works out. But then, even your ‘conscientious farmer’—if you label him too much as one, he’ll go bad too, won’t he?”

“Right—you’ve got it. The newspapers are irresponsible, they raise a big fuss and pull him out and make him give speeches and things like that, and your ‘conscientious farmer’ turns into a peculiar beast. When you get famous, it’s all over.”

“Precisely!” I agreed here too. “Man is a pitiful creature, isn’t he? He’s so fragile in the face of fame. After all, journalism was invented by American capitalists, if you look into its roots, so of course it’s pretty sleazy. It’s a poison, you know, that usually turns you into an idiot as soon as you get famous!” This was a strange occasion for me to reveal my deep resentment. But, you know, a malcontent like me may say things like this and still harbor within himself the desire to be famous, so be warned.

In the afternoon, I went out alone for a walk in the garden, with an umbrella. I felt as if not a tree or blade of grass had changed. I realized that the efforts my brother had taken to preserve the old house as it was had not been inconsequential. As I was standing at the edge of the pond, I heard a little sound: plink! A frog had jumped in. It was an insignificant, transitory sound. All at once, I came to comprehend Old Bashō’s “old pond” verse.⁴¹ I had never been able to understand it. I couldn’t even have made the slightest guess at what was good about it. Nothing famous is ever worth its reputation, I had decided; but it was the education I had received that was at fault. What explanation had we been given at school for that old pond poem? This is what they’d taught us: In a silent spot deep in the forest, dark even at midday, is a hoary old pond; into it, a frog jumps, plo—nk⁴² (he’s surely not

⁴¹One of Bashō’s most famous haiku: “The old pond: / A frog jumps in— / The sound of water.”

⁴²The onomatopoeia Dazai uses to make the contrast is a light *chabori* and a heavy *dobuu—n*.

casting himself into a great river, you know); ah, the echo spreads in ripples, the cry of a bird is heard, and once again the mountain returns to silence—that's what it means. But what a priggish, pompous, mediocre, limping poem! It was so awful it gave me the creeps. It was so disgusting that I avoided it for a long time. But now, I reconsidered. It wasn't like that at all. Plo—nk: no wonder I hadn't understood it, with an explanation like that. There weren't any echoes, or anything. Just a little “plink.” Just a weak little sound, in a tiny spot somewhere in the world. It was a meager sound. Bashō heard it, and felt it touch upon his own life. “The old pond: / A frog jumps in— / The sound of water.” When you realize that, and reconsider the poem, it's not bad at all. It's a good poem. It brilliantly kicks over the precious mannerism of the contemporary Danrin school.⁴³ We might call it an unprecedented concept. No moon, no snow, no flowers. No elegant flourishes. Just the poor life of a poor creature. You can well understand how this poem must have confounded the fancy poetry masters of the day. It meant the destruction of existing concepts of elegance. It was a revolution. If a good artist doesn't do the same, his life is a lie, I thought; and I wrote with solitary excitement in my travel notebook that night: “‘Yellow kerria roses: / A frog jumps in— / The sound of water.’ That's what Kikaku suggested. He didn't know anything. ‘Come with me / And play, / Motherless sparrow.’”⁴⁴ It's fairly close to that, but too open and tasteless. ‘The old pond’: that's peerless.”

The following day was superb weather. My niece and her husband and I and Aya shouldered our picnic lunches and went off to spend the day on the gentle slopes of a hill not even two hundred meters tall, called Takanagare, about two and a half miles east of Kanagi. “Aya” is not a woman's name, although it sounds like one. It means something like “the old handyman.” It's also used to mean “Dad.” The “femme”⁴⁵ of *aya* is *apa*, or sometimes *aba*. I don't know anything about where these words come from. It's useless even to speculate on whether or not they might be dialect for *oya* or *oba*.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly various people have various theories. The mountain's name, Takanagare,⁴⁷ according to my niece, should properly have been Takana-gane,⁴⁸ with the gently widening slopes giving exactly the feeling of long roots, or something like that; but then, here again, various people must have

⁴³Late seventeenth-century haiku school, innovative in its day, but, after Bashō, seen as artificial.

⁴⁴One of the most famous poems of the haiku poet Kobayashi Issa (1762–1826). Kikaku was one of Bashō's disciples, present when the “old pond” verse was composed. “Yellow kerria roses” was his suggestion for the first line.

⁴⁵Dazai's word, written in Roman characters.

⁴⁶“Parent,” or “father,” and “aunt.”

⁴⁷“High-flowing course.”

⁴⁸“High long root.”

various theories. It would appear that the charm of regional studies lies in the very confused undecidability of these various theories. My niece and Aya were taking a long time getting the lunches packed and making other arrangements, so her husband and I left the house together ahead of them. The weather was great. You should travel in Tsugaru only in May and June. Our *Record of an Eastern Journey* itself says this:

You should know that from days of old, people traveling to the northern regions for pleasure went only in summer, when the trees and grasses are richly green, and the wind shifts to blow from the south, and the sea is gentle, and then there is nothing to remind one of its fearsome reputation. I went to the north country from the ninth month to the following third month, and I met virtually no other travelers on the road. My travels were for the purpose of my medical practice, and that is a special situation. If you travel only to visit famous sights, then this is country you should visit only after the fourth month.

This is the one thing you readers should believe and remember from that travel expert. In Tsugaru at this time all the fruit trees are in bloom at once: plum, peach, cherry, apple, pear, sour plum.

I set out ahead, as if I knew what I were doing, and got as far as the outskirts of town, but I didn't know which road to take from there to Takanagare. I had been there only two or three times when I was in elementary school, and so it was not even surprising that I might have forgotten; but in addition, the area had changed completely from what I remembered of my childhood days. I spoke in perplexity: "They've built this parking lot, or whatever it is, and it's changed the place totally. I just don't know how to get to Takanagare anymore. That's the mountain—," and I pointed out a hill that rose before us, light green, like a low pyramid. "Let's hang around here a bit and wait for Aya and your wife," I suggested with a laugh.

He laughed too. "Sounds fine. I've heard something about an experimental farm that Aomori Prefecture has set up around here." He knew more than I did.

"Well, then, let's hunt it up."

The training farm was at the top of a small hill about a hundred yards to the right of the road we were on. It had been established to educate the future leaders of farming villages and to train farmers emigrating to the colonies, but the facilities were so showy for this meadow at the northern end of Honshū as to seem almost a waste. At the time His Imperial Highness Prince Chichibu was serving with the Eighth Army Division in Hirosaki, he gave great encouragement to this farm; the auditorium, thanks to His Highness's efforts, turned out to be a building of an impressiveness seldom seen in the provinces. In addition to that building, there was a workshop, as well as barns for domestic animals, a compost storage bin, and dormitories. I just looked at it all with amazement.



The Tsugaru Fuji and Tsugaru Plain, seen from Kanagi.

“This is incredible—I had no idea! Isn’t it too grand for Kanagi?” Even as I said it, I felt a strange, uncontrollable joy. So the land of my birth had been secretly flexing its muscles.

There was a big stone memorial set up at the entrance to the farm, and on it were reverently recorded many honors, layer on layer: Aug. 1935, Visit by H.I.H. Prince Asaka; Sept. 1935, Visit by H.I.H. Prince Takamatsu; Oct. 1935, Visit by Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Chichibu; Aug. 1938, Second Visit by H.I.H. Prince Chichibu. The people of Kanagi should be much, much prouder of this farm. And not just Kanagi; this should be to the eternal pride of the entire Tsugaru plain. The fields and fruit orchards and paddy fields—might we call them practice fields?—set up by the model farming youths selected from every hamlet in Tsugaru, spread out in true beauty, with the buildings as their backdrop. My niece’s husband walked here and there gazing intently at the cultivated plots, and said, heaving a sigh, “That’s quite impressive.” He was a landowner, and so he must have been able to tell, a lot better than someone like me.

“Hey—Fuji! That’s great!” I yelled. It wasn’t Fuji. The Tsugaru Fuji, as they call Mount Iwaki, 1,625 meters high, floated delicately at the far end of the rice fields that stretched as far as we could see. It really did seem to be floating lightly. Liquidly pale, more feminine than Mount Fuji, its lines left and right perfectly even, the slopes like many-layered ancient court robes, a ginkgo leaf turned upside down, it floated quietly in the blue sky. She was not a particularly high mountain, but she was an elegant, beautiful woman, almost translucent. “Kanagi’s not so bad, is it,” I said in a rush. “It’s not bad,” I added sharply.

"It is good," the husband said calmly.

I had seen the Tsugaru Fuji from a number of different directions on this trip. When you see it from Hirosaki, it's somehow heavy and dignified, and you think maybe Mount Iwaki does belong to Hirosaki. But then you see it from the Tsugaru plain, from around Kanagi, or Goshogawara, or Kizukuri, and you'll never forget its clean, elegant lines. It looks terrible viewed from the western coast. It's crumpled in, and there's not a trace of the beautiful woman. Some folk belief apparently has it that the rice grows well and so do beautiful women in the lands from which Mount Iwaki looks beautiful; to leave the rice out of it, even though the mountain looks so beautiful, the "beautiful women" of northern Tsugaru seem a pretty forlorn bunch to me. But that may just be due to the shallowness of my perceptions.

"Where are Aya and your wife?" I suddenly began to be worried. "Mightn't they have gone on past us?" We had been so impressed by the facilities and layout of the training farm that we had totally forgotten about them. We returned to the main road and looked around; and then Aya appeared unexpectedly from some side path, laughing as he told us that they had separated to try to find us. Aya had been searching the fields in this area, while my niece was to keep going ahead on the road to Takanagare, and we would catch up with her, he said.

"What a pity. Poor little Yō-chan must be quite a bit ahead. Hello—o there!" he hailed her loudly, looking up the road, but there was no answer. "Let's go," he said, swinging the provisions up onto his back. "It's a straight road, anyway."

Larks were busily twittering in the sky. Had it been, what, twenty years since I had last walked like this on the field paths of my hometown in spring? There was grass on one side, and here and there on the gently undulating land were low clumps of bushes and little swampy places—a decade ago, city people would have praised it as a first-rate golf course.⁴⁹ Aya went on explaining how hoes were being turned steadily to opening new fields on the plain: "See how beautifully the roofs of the houses sparkle, that's a renovated hamlet, that is a branch of the neighboring village . . ." and as I listened, I found myself thinking keenly, Kanagi too is developing and getting busy. Gradually our path started sloping up into the mountain, but we still had seen no sign of my niece.

"Where is she?" I worried like a mother hen.

"No problem—she's somewhere," the groom answered self-consciously but with a show of easiness.

"Anyway, let me ask someone." I took off my hat and bowed to a farmer working in a field beside the road. "Has a young woman wearing a dress come by on this road?" I asked. "She has," he answered. "She seemed to be

⁴⁹Another ironical reminder of the war: decadent foreign sports such as golf were forbidden.

in some terrible rush, almost running.” I could imagine my niece almost running up the spring path, hurrying to catch up to her new husband. It was not a bad picture. After we had climbed the mountain a bit, we found her standing in the shade of a row of larches, laughing. She had come this far and still hadn’t caught up with us, so she figured we must be behind, and she’d stopped to gather fern shoots, she said. She didn’t look particularly tired. This area seemed to be a treasure house of spring greens: bracken shoots, *udo*, cardoon, bamboo shoots. In the fall, mushrooms of every description—*hatsutake*, *tsuchikaburi*, *nameko*—grew, to use Aya’s phrase, “as thick as a carpet,” and people came from as far away as Goshogawara and Kizukuri to gather them, he said. “Yō-chama is an expert at mushroom picking,” he added.

As we continued up the mountain, I commented, “I hear that His Imperial Highness came to visit Kanagi,” and Aya answered with a respectful tone in his voice that that was so.

“It must have been wonderful.”

“Yes,” he said tightly.

“He was kind to come to such a place as Kanagi, wasn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Did he come by car?”

“Yes. He came by car.”

“Did you bow to him?”

“Yes. I had the privilege of bowing to him.”

“You are fortunate, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” he answered, wiping the sweat from his face with a towel he had around his neck.

A bush warbler sang out. Flowers were blooming brightly in the grass on both sides of the mountain path: violets, dandelions, wild camomile, azalea, white deutzia, akebia, wild roses, and even flowers I didn’t know. Low willows and oaks were putting out buds, and as we climbed higher, the bamboo grass got thicker and thicker. The mountain wasn’t even two hundred meters high, but the view from it was quite fine. We could see very nearly from one end of the Tsugaru plain to the other. We stopped for a while and looked down at the plain, while listening to Aya’s explanations, then walked on a bit, and stopped again, and gazed with admiration at the Tsugaru Fuji; and before long, we arrived at the summit of the little mountain.

“Is this the top?” I asked Aya, somewhat deflated.

“Yes, it is.”

“Is this all?” I said; but then I found myself entranced by the springtime plain stretching out before me. The Iwaki River glittered like a narrow silver line. At the far end of the silver line, gleaming dully like an ancient mirror, mightn’t that be Tappi Swamp? Yet farther in the distance, spreading wide

and white, hazy like smoke, seemed to be Lake Jūsan. Lake Jūsan,⁵⁰ also known as Jūsan Sound, is described as follows in the *Tosa ōrai*⁵¹: “The courses of some thirteen large and small rivers in Tsugaru come together at this spot and form a large lake. Nor does each river lose its individual color.” It is at the northern end of the plain. Thirteen of Tsugaru’s rivers, large and small, starting with the Iwaki River, gather here; the lake is some twenty miles in circumference, but because of the silt borne by the rivers, it is quite shallow—at its deepest, they say, it is only about three meters deep. The water is briny because of the influx of seawater, but because of the not inconsiderable volume of the Iwaki River entering, the lake is fresh water near the mouth of the river, and they say that both fresh- and saltwater fish live in the lake. At the southern mouth of the lake, where it opens out to the Sea of Japan, is the little hamlet of Jūsan. There is an account that this area was settled some seven or eight hundred years ago and was the home base of the powerful local lords, the Andō clan of Tsugaru, and that in the Edo period it and the harbor town of Kodomari to the north flourished exceedingly through the shipment of Tsugaru lumber and rice; but there’s not the slightest trace of that now. You can see Point Gongen to the north of Lake Jūsan. But from here on, we enter into territory critical to national defense, and so let’s turn our gaze instead to the crisply drawn blue line off in the distance ahead of us beyond the Iwaki River. That’s the Sea of Japan. You can see the single sweep of Shichirinagahama.⁵² There is nothing to distract your eye, from Point Gongen in the north to Point Ōdose in the south.

“This is wonderful. I’d build my castle here,” I started to say, when Yōko interrupted me.

“What would you do in the winter?” That stopped me.

“If only it didn’t snow, this would be the place,” I sighed sadly, feeling a faint melancholy.

We descended to the river valley in the shadow of the mountain and opened our lunches on the bank. The beer, cooled in the mountain stream, wasn’t bad. My niece and Aya drank apple juice. Suddenly I saw it. “A snake!”

The husband grabbed the jacket he’d taken off, and jumped up.

“It’s all right—don’t worry,” I said, pointing to the rock wall on the other bank of the stream. “It’s trying to climb up that wall.”

It popped its head up from the narrows, and as we watched, it started to pull itself up the foot-high rock wall, and then fell down in a heap. Again, it

⁵⁰“Lake Thirteen.”

⁵¹Tosa (not to be confused with Tosa *han* in Shikoku) was the ancient place-name reading for Jūsan. The *Tosa ōrai* contains the history of the northwestern section of Ōu during the Andō family’s campaign to bring it under their control. Their headquarters was at Tosa Harbor (now the village of Jūsan). Date unknown, but before the eighteenth century.

⁵²“Seven-League Long Beach.”

started crawling up, and again it fell. Intently, it tried about twenty times over, and finally, as if exhausted and discouraged, it let itself be propelled by the flow and just floated along the surface of the water toward our bank. Aya stood up at this point. He came running over silently with a six-foot-long tree branch which he plunged down into the water, stabbing at the snake. I turned away and cried unhappily, "Is it dead?"

"It's all taken care of," Aya answered, throwing the tree branch into the stream as well.

"It wasn't a viper?" I was still terrified.

"If it were a viper, I'd have taken it alive. This one was a rat snake. The liver of a live viper is good medicine."

"Are there vipers in these mountains, anyway?"

"Yes."

I drank my beer without enthusiasm.

Aya finished his lunch before the rest of us, and then dragged a big log over, threw it into the stream, and, using it as a stepping stone, hopped across to the other bank. And then, clambering up the sheer wall of the slope on the other side, he went gathering wild greens—*udo*, cardoon.

"That's dangerous! He doesn't have to pick such a dangerous place—there are lots of those things growing in other places." I scolded at his adventure nervously. "I'm sure he's doing it just because he's excited and wants to make a great show to us of how brave he is."

"You're quite right," my niece agreed, laughing heartily.

"Aya—a," I yelled over to him. "That's enough. It's too dangerous—that's enough!"

"All right," he answered, and slid easily down the slope. I breathed a sigh of relief.

On the way home, Yōko carried Aya's wild greens on her back. Even as a child she had never cared about her appearance. Although I had been a "good walker, not old yet" at Sotogahama, I got tired along the way back, and walked on silently. As we descended the mountain, a cuckoo was singing. At a lumber mill on the outskirts of town, lumber was piled up high and trucks went back and forth ceaselessly. The scene showed a prosperous village.

"Kanagi has certainly turned into a lively place," I said as if to myself.

"Do you think so?" The husband seemed a little tired, too. He spoke wearily.

Suddenly I was embarrassed. "No, I mean, I don't know anything about it, but as I recall, Kanagi wasn't like this ten years ago. It feels somehow as if it's revived."

We got back, and I told my brother that Kanagi looked pretty good, and I'd gotten a new perspective on it. He answered, "When you get older you

come to think that maybe the land where you were born and grew up might even be better than Kyoto or Nara.”

The next day, we added my brother and his wife to the previous day's company and headed for a spot about four miles southeast of Kanagi called Kanoko Reservoir. Just as we were about to leave, a visitor came to see my brother, so we left ahead of him. My sister-in-law was outfitted with *mompe*, thick white socks, and sandals. This may have been the first time since she came to Kanagi as a bride that she had walked as far as five miles from the town. The weather that day too was superb, and it was even hotter than the day before. Led by Aya, we trudged along the tracks of the forest railway, following the Kanagi River. The rails were laid out in extremely irritating fashion, with the space between the ties too narrow for a full pace and too wide for a half pace, and we found the walking quite a bother. I got tired and quickly subsided into silence, only wiping off sweat from time to time. Apparently when the weather is too good, the traveler becomes exhausted, and he rather tends to get depressed.

“Around here you can see traces of the flood,” Aya explained, stopping for a moment. For some acres around the river, huge roots and logs lay scattered about, making you think of the aftermath of some fierce battle. The previous year, a flood bigger than any my grandmother had ever experienced in her eighty-eight years had assaulted Kanagi.

“These trees all were washed down from the mountain,” Aya continued, looking sorrowful.

“This is terrible,” I said, mopping at the sweat. “It must have been like an ocean.”

“It was like the ocean.”

We cut away from the Kanagi River and now climbed for a while following the Kanoko River. And then we were finally freed from the forest railway, and we went in a little to the right, where a big reservoir, maybe more than a mile in circumference, lay brimming with still, dark water, its surface all the more quiet for the call of a bird. They say that this area used to be a deep valley called Soemon Marsh, but quite recently, in 1941, they dammed up the Kanoko River which flowed at the bottom of the valley and made this big reservoir. My brother's name was carved on the big stone monument at the edge of the reservoir. The raw red earth walls remained exposed after the construction, around the circumference of the reservoir, and so it lacked a certain natural impressiveness, but it did give a measure of the power of one little hamlet, Kanagi, and such a product of human effort couldn't help but be a pleasant sight. So thought the presumptuous traveling critic, as he stopped and smoked a cigarette, gazing around in all directions as he came to his arbitrary conclusions. With great self-confidence, I led the group around the banks of the reservoir. “This is all right. This is the place,” I said,

and sat down in the shade of some trees on a point of land beside the pond. "Aya, check this out, won't you? This isn't a lacquer tree, is it?" The thought of having to continue my trip with a lacquer rash was unbearably depressing. He said it wasn't a lacquer tree.⁵³

"Well then, how about that one? Somehow it looks suspicious. Check it out." Everyone laughed, but I was serious. It wasn't a lacquer tree either, he said. Completely relieved, I decided to open my lunch here. As I drank my beer, I felt in a good mood, and started to get loquacious. When I was in second or third grade, I went on an excursion to a place called Takayama, on the western seacoast, only about nine miles from Kanagi. I told them of my excitement at seeing the ocean for the first time. The teacher leading us was more excited than any of us, and he had us form a double line facing the ocean and sing the song, "We Are Children of the Sea."⁵⁴ Maybe because it was the first time in my life I'd ever seen the sea, anyway, it seemed unnatural even to my child's heart, and I felt embarrassed and uneasy singing this song of children born beside the sea: "We are children of the sea, by the pine flats of the shore, where white waves crash . . ." I had been peculiarly obsessive about my attire for the excursion: I wore a straw hat with a broad brim and carried a white wood staff, used by my elder brother when he climbed Mount Fuji, which was branded beautifully with a number of shrine seals; and although we had been told by our teacher to be as lightly burdened as possible and to wear straw sandals, I alone wore a useless *hakama* and long socks and lace-up shoes as I set out like a delicate little coquette. But before we'd walked a couple of miles, I was already exhausted. First, I was forced to take off the *hakama* and shoes, and they gave me a miserable, frayed pair of sandals—I say "a pair," but they were not matched, one having a red rope thong, the other, a straw thong. Finally, I gave up the hat, and my staff, too, and in the end I was put on the baggage cart that had been brought along from school in case anyone got sick. When I got back home, there was not a trace of the splendor with which I had set out; I clung to the walking stick, my shoes dangling from my hands. This is the story I told, with embellishments, and it made everyone laugh. Suddenly a voice hailed us: "Hello—o there!" It was my brother.

We all hailed him back. Aya ran to meet him. At length, my brother appeared, with his hiking staff. I had drunk up all the beer we'd brought with us, so the timing was quite bad. My brother ate his lunch right away, and then we all walked on beyond the reservoir. There was a loud sound of flapping, and water birds started from the pond. My niece's husband and I looked at each other, and then nodded meaninglessly. Wild geese? Ducks?

⁵³ *Urushi*, lacquer or varnish tree (*Rhus verniciflua*). Oils in the bark cause a skin rash similar to that of poison ivy or poison oak.

⁵⁴ Famous children's song.

Neither of us seemed to have the confidence to say what they were. Anyway, we were sure that they were wild waterfowl. I could feel the spirit of "remote mountains and dark valleys," as they say. My brother walked along silently, his shoulders hunched. How many years had it been since I had walked outdoors with him like this? There had been a time, some ten years earlier, when he had walked a path like this one, silent, his shoulders hunched, on the outskirts of Tokyo, while I, several paces behind, walked alone, weeping, looking at his back. Maybe this was the first time since then. I do not think he has yet forgiven me for that incident. It may be no good between us for the rest of our lives. There's nothing you can do with a cracked teacup. It will never be as it was before, no matter what you try. The people of Tsugaru, especially, don't forget cracks of the heart. I may never again have another chance to walk with my brother outdoors—this may be it, I thought. The sound of falling water gradually grew louder. At the end of the reservoir was one of the scenic spots of the area, Kanoko Falls. Before long, we saw at our feet the slender waterfall, falling nearly fifty feet down. In other words, we were walking along a narrow little path, about a foot wide, skirting the edge of Soemon Marsh, with a hill standing like a screen close on the right side, while on the left a precipice dropped from just beyond our feet, and the water fell to the bottom of the valley into a swirling basin, incredibly blue and deep-looking.

"It quite makes me dizzy," my sister-in-law said, joking, and she clung to Yōko's arm, walking as if in fear.

Azaleas were blooming beautifully on the hillside to our right. My brother carried his hiking staff over his shoulder, and every time he came to a spot where the flowers were especially spectacular, he slackened his pace a bit. The wisteria too was just starting to bloom here and there. The path gradually sloped downward, and we came out at the top of the falls. Near the middle of the course of the little six-foot-wide mountain stream there was a clump of tree roots; using it as a stepping-stone, you could jump over the river in two bounds. One after another, we jumped across. Only my sister-in-law was left. "I can't make it," she laughed, and didn't even try to jump. She seemed unable to go on.

"Go carry her on your back," my brother told Aya. But even when he went over to her, all she would do was laugh and wave him off, saying it was useless. At this point, Aya exhibited amazing strength, as he brought a huge root over in his arms and heaved it into the mouth of the falls. It made a sort of bridge. My sister-in-law started to cross over, but once again, she didn't seem to be able to make her feet move any farther. Finally, holding on to Aya's shoulder, she made it about halfway over, and then, because the stream was shallow from there on, she jumped down from the improvised bridge

and splashed on through the rest of the way over. The bottoms of her *mompe* and white socks and sandals all looked soaked through.

"This is just like the return from Takayama," she said laughing, suddenly seeming to remember my earlier story of the miserable figure I'd made on that excursion. Yōko and her husband also burst out laughing, and my brother turned around and asked, "What?"

They all stopped laughing. My brother had such a strange expression on his face that I thought I should explain. But it was such a stupid story that I didn't have the courage to go through the origin of "The Return from Takayama" once more. He said nothing and started walking again. Always, my brother was alone.

5. The Western Seacoast

I've told you several times already that even though I'd been born and brought up in Tsugaru, I knew hardly anything about it. And as far as the western seacoast on the Sea of Japan was concerned, I had never been there even once, except for the "Takayama outing" when I was in second or third grade. You get to Takayama beyond a fairly large village of about five thousand, called Shariki, some eight miles due west of Kanagi; it's just past there, a little mountain on the shore.¹ Its Inari² shrine is famous, they say, but since my memories are all from childhood, the only thing that remains vivid in my heart is that sartorial disaster; all the rest is vague and hazy. I had planned this time to take the opportunity to try going around the western coast. The day after our ramble to the Kanoko River reservoir, I left Kanagi and got to Goshogawara around eleven in the morning, changed to the Gonō line, and within barely ten minutes, had arrived at Kizukuri Station. This is still a part of the Tsugaru plain. I had thought I'd like to see a bit of this town too while I was here. I found on disembarking that it was quiet and old-fashioned. The population is a little more than four thousand, a bit smaller than Kanagi's, but the town seemed to have a long history. I could hear the steady sound of the machinery languidly turning in the rice polishing mill. Doves were cooing under the eaves somewhere. This is where my father was born. My family in Kanagi had produced only women for generations, and generally their husbands were adopted into the family. My father had been the third son of the old M family in this town, and he was taken into my family as the some-number-or-other master in the line. My father died when I was fourteen, and so I have to say that I know hardly anything about him as a "human being." Let me borrow another passage from my work, "Recollections":

My father was a very busy man and he was not home very often. Even when he was at home, he didn't spend time with us children. I was afraid of him. I wanted his fountain pen, but I couldn't tell him, and I spent a lot of time fretting by myself what to do about it. Finally one night as I lay in bed with my eyes closed, I pretended to be talking in my sleep. I called out low, "Fountain pen . . . the fountain pen . . .," to my father, who was in the next room with guests, but of course neither his ears nor his heart seemed to hear. My little brother and I were once having great fun playing in the huge storehouse stacked with sacks of rice, when suddenly my father appeared, blocking the door, and he yelled at us, "Get out, both of you!" The light was full at his back, and he loomed up, a huge black shape. Even now, when I recall how afraid I was at that moment, I feel queasy. . . .

The next spring, while the snow was still piled deep, my father started cough-

¹Takayama means "high mountain."

²Inari is a Shinto god, represented iconographically as a fox. There are Inari shrines throughout the country.

ing up blood in Tokyo, and he died in a hospital there. The local newspapers reported his obituary in an extra edition. I was more excited at this sensational coverage than by his death. My name too appeared in the newspaper, among the list of survivors. My father's body came home in a big coffin lying across the sled. I went together with a huge crowd of the townspeople to near the next village to meet it. Finally a long procession of sleds emerged from the shadow of the forest and came sliding into the moonlight; I thought it was beautiful.

The next day, everyone in the house gathered in the Buddhist chapel room where my father's coffin was. The coffin lid was pulled back, and everyone burst into loud wailing. Father seemed to be sleeping. The high line of his nose had turned quite bluish white. Seduced by hearing everyone else weeping, I began to weep myself.³

This is about all I remember of my father, so after he died I felt the same sense of intimidation toward my eldest brother as I'd felt toward my father; and also, for the same reason, I'd freely leaned on my brother and never once felt that I was alone because I had no father. However, as I have gotten older, I have come around to speculating rudely on what kind of man my father could have been. My father has even appeared in my dreams as I've dozed in my hut in Tokyo. It has seemed that he did not actually die, but went into hiding for some political reason; he appeared a little older and tired than the traces of him that remain in my memory, and I've felt a deep sense of closeness to him. I know talking about dreams is a bore, but anyway, it is true that my interest in my father has recently grown extremely strong. My father and his brothers all had lung trouble; he didn't have tuberculosis, but he did certainly have some kind of respiratory impairment that made him cough blood, and that's what he died of. He died at the age of fifty-three. To my childhood reckoning, that seemed terribly old and a proper time to die, but now? Far from thinking of fifty-three as the time for a peaceful death in one's old age, I've come to see it as extremely early. If my father had been granted a few more years of life, he might have done even greater things for Tsugaru, I have impertinently thought. I had wanted at least once to see what kind of a house my father had been born into, and what kind of a town he'd grown up in. Kizukuri is a town with just one central street, with houses lining it on both sides. Beyond the houses, beautifully plowed paddy fields spread wide. Here and there among the fields stand rows of poplars. This was the first time I'd seen poplars on this trip to Tsugaru. I must have seen many of them elsewhere, but none stay in my memory as vividly as Kizukuri's. The pale green newly emerged poplar leaves fluttered tenderly in the gentle breeze. The Tsugaru Fuji seen from this spot didn't look the slightest bit different from the one seen from Kanagi, a delicate extreme beauty. Is this where that legend comes from, that rice and beautiful women come from

³From "Recollections," *Zenshū* 1: 28, 36-37.

places like this where the mountain looks beautiful? The rice does seem luxuriant in this region, but I wonder about the beautiful women. Mightn't that item be a little depressing, too, as in the Kanagi area? I even wondered to myself whether the converse of the legend might not be true. In lands from which Mount Iwaki looks beautiful—no, I'd better not go on. These matters will quite likely cause offense, and so the traveler who is simply passing through town may have no right to his casual judgments. That day, too, the weather was beautiful. On the concrete road that ran straight through town from the station parking lot, something like a thin spring mist was rising hazily. As I trudged down the road, making no sound, like a cat in my rubber-soled shoes, I was affected by the springtime sultriness, and my head became foggy. I read the sign on the Kizukuri Police Headquarters as “Mokuzō Police Headquarters,”⁴ and I stood there for a moment nodding, thinking, Ah, yes, of course, the building is made of wood . . . , before I suddenly woke up, and smiled ironically at myself.

Kizukuri is above all a town of *komohi*. *Komohi*: in the old days, on the Ginza, when the sun burned down strongly in the afternoons, each shop put a sunscreen awning up over its front, right? And you readers would walk under the awnings, looking cool, right? And you probably thought that this was just like a long instant verandah—in other words, that the long verandah was not just an awning, but had been constructed sturdily and permanently to extend the eaves of the buildings about six feet out. If you think of that as the *komohi* of the northern country, you won't be far off. Of course, these were not constructed to ward off the sunlight. They're not so fancy. These long verandahs are built to join the eaves of each house roof, so that people can get from house to house conveniently in winter when the snow piles up deeply. During snowstorms there's no fear of being blasted by wind or snow, and you can go out shopping without worry, so it's really marvelous. As a place for children to play, it's not dangerous like Tokyo's streets; on rainy days, it's probably a great help to pedestrians; and travelers like me, overcome by the spring heat, can plunge in there to cool down (of course, there is the penalty of being coolly inspected by the people sitting in their shops). Anyway, it's a wonderful verandah. It seems to be commonly believed that *komohi* is dialect for *komise*, “little shop,” but I rather amuse myself to think that you might understand it more readily if you use the characters for *komose*, “hidden current,” or even another *komohi*, “sun-hidden.” As I walked along the *komohi*, I came upon M Pharmaceuticals, Wholesale. This is the house my father was born into. I didn't stop, but continued walking by, straight down the *komohi*, and as I walked, I wondered what I should do. The *komohi* were really long in this town. Most of

⁴The characters for *Kizukuri* may also be read *mokuzō*, meaning “wood construction.” Dazai read the sign as “Police Department—Made of Wood.”

Tsugaru's old towns have *komohi*, but it seemed to be rare for the whole town to be connected up with them the way Kizukuri was. I decided even more strongly that Kizukuri was the *komohi* town. After I'd walked for a while, I finally came to the end of the *komohi*, and I did a right about-face, heaved a sigh, and headed back. I had never once before been to the M house. I'd never been to Kizukuri, either, except maybe once when I was very little, when I was brought for a visit by someone, but I have no memory of it. The current head of the M family was four or five years older than I, a lively man who in the old days used to come to visit Kanagi all the time, a familiar face to me. If I stopped by now, he probably wouldn't be annoyed, but, you know, it was awfully sudden. If I were to show up like this, dressed as poorly as I was, and barge in with no business in mind, but just a "Well, M, how've you been?" with a stupid laugh, mightn't M be startled, and wonder, Hey, this guy must be down-and-out in Tokyo and he's come to borrow money? And to say that I wanted to see the house where my father was born, once, before I die—that was too horribly pompous. There are some things a man can't say when he grows up. As I walked along, struggling with myself as to whether I shouldn't just leave at this point, I found myself back in front of M Pharmaceuticals, Wholesale. I would never have another chance to come. It doesn't matter if I embarrass myself, I thought. Let's go in. I made up my mind on the spot, and called out to the rear of the shop: "Excuse me!" M came out, and with great welcoming noises and enthusiasm, and without letting me say anything, he practically pulled me into the house beyond the store, and sat me down in the seat of honor in the parlor. "Come, bring some sake," he told the family, and before two or three minutes had passed, the sake arrived. It was really fast.

"It's been a long, long time," said M, himself drinking freely, too. "How many years has it been since you were last in Kizukuri?"

"Well, if I did in fact come here as a child, it's been about thirty years, I guess."

"Yes, yes, it must be that long. Come, now, drink up. You've come to Kizukuri—no need to be shy. It was so good of you to come, so good!"

The layout of the house was very similar to that of the Kanagi house. I had heard stories of how my father had completely renovated the present Kanagi house to his own plans soon after he'd been adopted into the family, but there was nothing to it—he'd just rebuilt it to the plan of the house of his birth. I felt that in some way I could understand the psychology of my father, adopted son-in-law that he was, and it made me smile. With that in mind, I could see that even the placement of the trees and rocks in the garden was similar, too. It was a small, unimportant discovery, but I felt as though I had begun to understand the man my dead father had been. It had certainly been

worth stopping by at M's house, I thought. M tried to offer me something to eat.

"No thanks, really, this is fine. I have to catch the one o'clock train for Fukaura."

"Fukaura? For what?"

"No special reason, I just wanted to see it once."

"You're writing about it?"

"Well, there is that, too, but . . ." I couldn't go and depress him with something like "You never know when you might die."

"Well, then, you'll be writing about Kizukuri, too, right? If you're going to write about Kizukuri," M started out without hesitation, "first of all, I'd like to have you write about how much rice we deliver. According to the comparisons of police jurisdictions, Kizukuri District is number one in the country. How about that—Japan Number One! To call it the crystallization of our united efforts wouldn't be far off base. When the water dried up from our fields in this area, I went to the neighboring villages to get water, and in the end we had great success. They called me the Water Tiger God, instead of the Great Tiger.⁵ Just because we're landlords doesn't mean that we're slackers. I have trouble with my spine, but I was out in the fields weeding, you know. Ah well, soon we'll be delivering mountains of delicious rice to you folks in Tokyo." He was hopeful in the extreme. From when he was little, M had always had a generous nature. His big, round, childlike eyes were compelling and he was apparently loved and respected by everyone in the area. Praying in my heart for M's happiness, but still working desperately not to be detained, I finally took my leave, managing to make it in time for the one o'clock train for Fukaura.

From Kizukuri on the Gonō line, you've passed Narusawa and Ajigasawa in about thirty minutes, and that's the end of the Tsugaru plain. From there on, the train runs along the coast of the Sea of Japan. To the right you look out onto the sea. Close on the left are the foothills of the northern end of the Dewa Hills, and after about an hour the beauty spot of Ōdose opens before you outside the window on the right. The rocks in this area are said to be fragmented volcanic tufa. The mottled green rock shelves, made flat by sea erosion, were exposed above the sea like ghosts around the end of the Edo period, making a platform like a room, big enough to hold a banquet for several hundred people on the shore, and so they named it Senjōshiki, or Thousand-Mat Room. Further, here and there on the rock shelf are round depressions filled with seawater, exactly in the shape of huge brimming sake cups, and they call that Sakazukinuma, or Sake Cup Marsh. It must certainly have been a big drinker who named them, for him to see all these big holes,

⁵Euphemism for "drunkard."

six and twelve feet across, as sake cups. Along the seacoast in this area, fantastic craggy rocks have been carved out, their bases ceaselessly washed in the surging waves—yes, well, I could go on like a travel guide, and that’s what this would turn out to be. But it has none of the awesome harshness of the northern shoreline of Sotogahama, it’s just plain scenery such as you can find anywhere in the country. There’s none of that enigmatic atmosphere, a kind of crabbedness special to Tsugaru, you could call it, so particularly hard for people from other parts of the country to understand. In other words, this area is all open. It has been caressed by people’s eyes, it is bright and tamed. Our Takeuchi Umpei’s *Outline History of Aomori Prefecture* says that there’s a record that from this region south was not anciently part of the Tsugaru domain, but part of Akita domain that was incorporated into Tsugaru in Keichō 8 [1603] upon consultation with the Satake clan of the neighboring *han*. I speak only from the irresponsible direct impressions of a traveling vagabond, but I do feel that from here on is somehow no longer Tsugaru. There is none of Tsugaru’s unhappy fate here. That special Tsugaru quality of tactlessness is not to be found here. All you have to do is look at the scenery to begin to realize that. It’s all fully wise—what you’d call “cultured.” It has no crazy, prideful spirit. From Ōdose, you get to Fukaura in about forty minutes, but this harbor town too has the kind of reserved, genial, carefully unobtrusive expression that you often come across in fishing villages on the Chiba coast⁶: to put it negatively, a clever, calculating expression with which it silently greets and sends off visitors. That is, it shows a total lack of interest in the traveler. I am certainly not positing this atmosphere as a defect in Fukaura. Perhaps if a man does not have this expression, he can’t make it in the world, I thought. This may be the expression of a man grown to adulthood. There is a self-confidence clear through to the bottom. There’s none of that childish squirming that is found in northern Tsugaru. Northern Tsugaru is like half-cooked vegetables, while this area is cooked clear through. Ah, I have it. You’ll understand this comparison: The people in the heart of Tsugaru, when you come right down to it, have none of the self-confidence of history. None whatsoever. And so they can’t help but brusquely hunch their shoulders, swagger, insult other people with a “He’s worthless,” and arrogantly take the high ground. That may be what has gone to make up the orneriness of the people of Tsugaru, their obstinacy, their crabbedness, and their sad, solitary fate. People of Tsugaru, lift up your heads and laugh! Didn’t someone even pronounce without hesitation that he recognized pent-up pre-Renaissance energy raising its head in this land? When Japan’s culture has come to the dead end of its minor completion and is stymied as to where to go, how much may the great incompleteness of this

⁶Northeast of and close to Tokyo.

Tsugaru region be its hope? So I thought, one night; and no sooner had I thought it than there I was, unnaturally on the defensive. The self-confidence someone else stirred up in me comes to naught. Shouldn't we just pretend not to notice anything, and have faith, and continue our efforts a bit more?

Fukaura now has a population of around five thousand, and it was the port at the southern end of the western coast of the old Tsugaru domain. In the Edo period, together with Aomori, Ajigasawa, and Jūsan, it was one of the four harbors with town magistrates; and it was one of the most important ports of the Tsugaru *han*. It has a small harbor between hills, with deep water and gentle waves, and has such coastal attractions as Benten Island, Cape Yukiai, and Azuma Beach with its rock formations. It is a quiet town. In the gardens of the fishermen's houses splendid large diving suits dry hanging upside down. They somehow give you a feeling of resignation, calm and deeply quiet. Straight out the central street on the outskirts of town is the Niō Gate of the Enkakuji Temple. I heard that the Yakushi Hall of this temple has been designated a national treasure. I thought I would visit the temple and then take off from Fukaura. Completed towns give the traveler a forlorn feeling. I went down to the beach and sat on a rock, greatly perplexed as to what to do next. The sun was still high. Suddenly I remembered my child back in our little Tokyo house. I had worked as hard as possible not to think of her, but an image of her little figure leaped into my breast, aiming at the crack of emptiness in my heart. I stood up, went to the post office, bought a postcard, and wrote out a short message to the family waiting for me at home. The child had whooping cough. And her mother was expecting our second child soon. I couldn't stand it. I entered an inn on the spur of the moment, was led to a dirty room, and called for sake while I took my gaiters off. A meal tray and sake appeared right away. It came with unexpected speed. I was somewhat saved by the swiftness. The room was dirty, but on the tray was a rich profusion of dishes whose main ingredients were *tai* and abalone, which seemed to be special products of this harbor. I drank two decanters of sake, but it was still too early to go to bed. Ever since I'd come to Tsugaru I'd constantly been the guest of other people. Now the silly idea came to me that maybe today I would try doing some hard drinking on my own. I went out into the hall, grabbed the twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl who had brought my tray earlier, and asked her if they had more sake. "No," she told me. "Isn't there some other place I can drink?" I asked, and she muttered, "Yes." I breathed in relief, and asked her where the place was. She told me, and I went, to find it an unexpectedly clean little restaurant. I was led up to the second floor, to a good-sized ten-mat room which looked out on the ocean. I settled down cross-legged at a Tsugaru lacquer table, and called for sake. They brought it to me right away. This too was a blessing. Generally they take their time with food, and leave the guest waiting all

alone, but here, a middle-aged woman in her forties, with her front teeth missing, came quickly with just the decanters. I decided to have her tell me some tales of Fukaura.

“What are Fukaura’s famous spots?”

“Have you visited Kannon-san?”

“Kannon-san? Oh, is that what you call the Enkakuji Temple? Yes.” I thought I might be able to get her to tell me some old-fashioned tales; however, a plump young woman then appeared and began a stream of strangely pretentious jokes. I hated it and felt trapped, and so thinking a gentleman should be frank, I said to her, “Say, I’d really appreciate it if you’d go downstairs, okay?” A warning to you readers: A man should not speak frankly at a restaurant. The result was awful. The young maid stood up in a huff, and the older woman stood up with her, and the two of them disappeared. Apparently for one to stay sitting quietly while the other was chased out of the room would have been an injustice, and she couldn’t do that, even if only out of loyalty to her compatriot. I sat alone in the large room, drinking sake, watching the light in the harbor lighthouse. The sense of the loneliness of travel only grew deeper and deeper, and I returned to the inn. The next morning as I was forlornly eating my breakfast, the master of the inn came in with a sake decanter and a little plate. “You’re Mr. Tsushima, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes.” I had written my pen name, Dazai, in the register.

“I thought so! Somehow, I thought you looked like them. I was in the same class in high school as your older brother, Eiji. You wrote ‘Dazai’ in the register and so I didn’t realize it, but you really do resemble him so closely . . .”

“But that’s not a false name, you know.”

“Yes, yes, I know that, I had heard that there was a younger brother who had changed his name and was writing novels. Please, excuse us for not taking care of you last night. Here, please have some sake, and this, on the plate, that’s abalone *shiokara*,⁷ it goes well with sake.”

I finished breakfast, and then had the sake and *shiokara* to which he was treating me. The *shiokara* was good, it really was. Even though I’d come this far, to the edge of Tsugaru, favors were coming my way only as an aftereffect of my brothers’ power. I realized that there wasn’t a single thing I could do by my own efforts, and what I was eating lay all the heavier in my guts. In essence, what I had gained at this harbor at the southern extreme of the Tsugaru domain was to know the extent of my own older brothers’ influence; and with that, I blankly got on the train.

Ajigasawa. On my way back from Fukaura I stopped by at this old harbor

⁷A chunky sauce made from salted and fermented scraps of the meat, intestines, etc., of squid, fish, and the like.

town. This area is at the center of the western coast of Tsugaru, and it seems to have been quite a flourishing port in the Edo period, when a large proportion of Tsugaru's rice was sent off from here; it was also the landing spot for the old-style coastal boats out of Osaka. In those days, too, it was rich in sea products, with the fish taken offshore from its beaches bringing cheer to the tables of the area, from the castle in Hirosaki to households throughout the Tsugaru plain. Nowadays, however, it has a population of about 4,500, smaller than those of Kizukuri and Fukaura, and seemed to me to be losing the influence it had held in prosperous years gone by. It's called Ajigasawa, or Horse Mackerel Marsh, so you might well imagine that at one time, long ago, it must have been a place where you could catch lots of splendid *aji*, but when I was little there wasn't the slightest word about *aji*. Instead, it was famous for its *hatahata*. Even in Tokyo *hatahata* is distributed from time to time through the food ration, so I think you readers may be familiar with it; it's spelled with several different characters, it's about six or seven inches long, without scales, and you wouldn't be too far off to think of it as a saltwater smelt, I guess. It is a special product of the western shore, and the Akita area seems to be its home base. Tokyo people apparently find it oily and unpleasant, but we feel it has an extremely light flavor. In Tsugaru we take fresh *hatahata*, broil them in light soy sauce, and eat them one after another. It's not at all unusual to put away twenty or thirty without a second thought. I've even heard from time to time, for example, of *hatahata* competitions, where whoever eats the most gets a prize. The *hatahata* that reach Tokyo have probably gotten a bit ripe, and people don't know how to prepare them; that may be why they're thought to be especially unappetizing. *Hatahata* appear in haiku dictionaries, and I have a recollection of reading an Edo period haiku to the effect that the *hatahata* has a light flavor, so it may be that they were a delicacy to Edo connoisseurs, too. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that eating *hatahata* is one of the pleasures of the winter Tsugaru hearth. I had known of Ajigasawa since my childhood, because of the *hatahata*, but this was the first time I'd seen the town. It has the mountains at its back and in the other direction it goes right down to the sea, a terribly long, straggly town. "In the town: / The smell of things . . ." The town has a strangely stagnant sweet-sour smell, that makes you think of that verse of Bonchō's.⁸ The water in the river, too, is dank and muddy. Somehow, it's tired out. There are long *komohi* here too, as in Kizukuri, but they've

⁸The opening lines of a *renga* poetry sequence. See Earl Miner, *Japanese Linked Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 298–315. Bonchō was a disciple of Bashō, who also participated here. *Renga* is a form of linked-verse poetry composed by one or more poets. Each verse is linked to the previous and following verses by complex associational rules. As a form, it developed from the thirteenth century on. What we know as "haiku" today came in the seventeenth century with the isolation of the initial verse, the *hokku*, of a *renga* sequence as an independent poetic form.

started to fall apart, and there's no coolness under them like Kizukuri's. That day too the weather was terribly good, but even when I walked under the *komohi* to escape the sun, I felt it strangely hard to breathe. There seemed to be a goodly number of eating places, which made you think that in the old days there might have been a lot of those so-called barrelhouse brothels.⁹ Perhaps as a carry-over from those days, four or five noodle shops stand eaves to eaves, and passersby on the street are hailed, in a manner rare for these days, to "come on in and rest a while!" It was just noon, so I entered one of the shops and took a rest. Two side dishes of grilled fish with the noodles came to forty sen. And the sauce for the noodles wasn't bad, either. All the same, this town is long. No matter where you go on the single road that follows the coastline, identical houses stand one after the other, straggling along without change. I felt as if I'd walked more than two miles. Finally I got to the outskirts of the town, and then turned around and came back. There was no spot you could call the heart of the town. In most towns, the central energy of the town clusters in one place which is its linchpin. It's built so that even a traveler passing through is made to feel, Ah, this spot is the *climax*.¹⁰ But in Ajigasawa there's no such place. It felt to me like a fan with a broken rivet and its ribs lying loose and scattered about. The rivet is so inadequate that you start to feel Degas-like political opinions rising in your breast: With things in this state, no wonder the town's struggle to make something of itself is so hopeless.

As I write this, I am smiling with faint irony. If I had close friends here too, in either Fukaura or Ajigasawa, who would greet me with exclamations of pleasure at my having come, and guide me here and there, and explain things to me, I'm sure I would discard my own immediate perceptions and manage to write in a literary style of deep emotion: Fukaura and Ajigasawa are the soul of Tsugaru. That's why, in fact, you simply mustn't trust accounts of travel impressions. I hope, therefore, that if the people of Fukaura and Ajigasawa read my book, they will excuse it with a light laugh. After all, what real authority do my written impressions have to spoil your homeland's reputation?

By the time I'd left Ajigasawa and had returned again to Goshogawara by the Gonō line, it was two o'clock in the afternoon. I went straight from the station to Mr. Nakabata's house. Since I happen to have written quite a bit about Mr. Nakabata in a series of recent works, including "Going Home" and "Hometown," I will not go into tiresome detail here; suffice it to say that he is someone to whom I owe a deep debt of obligation for having handled, without the slightest expression of disapproval, the consequences of my frequent misconduct when I was in my twenties. Mr. Nakabata, whom I hadn't

⁹*Meishuya*.

¹⁰Dzai's word, written out as *kuraimakusu*.

seen for a while, had aged tremendously, to a sad degree. He had been sick the previous year, and they say he'd gotten so thin since then.

"It's the times. But that you should come all the way from Tokyo, looking like that . . ." he said, steadily observing my beggarly appearance, but with apparent pleasure all the same. "Oh, your socks have holes in them," he continued, and got up himself to get a pair of good-quality socks out of the dresser, which he passed over to me.

"I was thinking of going on over to High-Collar Street¹¹ at this point."

"Ah, that's good. Have a good time. Keiko, come, take him over." No matter that he had grown so thin: Mr. Nakabata's quickness of spirit was just as it had always been in years gone by. My aunt's family in Goshogawara lived on High-Collar Street. That is, the street used to be called High-Collar when I was little, but now it seems to have another name, Ōmachi, or something. I talked about the town of Goshogawara in the Introduction, but I have many childhood memories from here. Four or five years ago I wrote the following piece for a Goshogawara newspaper:

Because my aunt lived in Goshogawara, I often visited when I was little. I came to see the opening performance at the Asahiza Theater, too. I think that was when I was in third or fourth grade. I'm sure it was Tomoemon who performed. Ume no Yoshibei made me cry.¹² That was the first time in my life that I'd seen a revolving stage, and I was so astonished I stood up spontaneously. Soon after that, there was a fire at the Asahiza and it burned down to the ground. At the time, we could see the flames clearly from Kanagi. They say the fire broke out in the projection booth. And some ten elementary school children who were in the audience burned to death. The projectionist was charged with the crime—negligent manslaughter. For some reason, my child's heart couldn't forget the name of the projectionist's crime, or his fate. There was also a rumor I heard that it had burned because the name of the theater was related to the word for "fire."¹³ That was more than twenty years ago.

When I was seven or eight, as I was walking down one of Goshogawara's bustling streets, I fell into a ditch. It was fairly deep, and the water came up to my chin. The ditch might have been almost three feet deep. It was night. A man put his hand down to me from above, and I grabbed it. I was pulled up and then stripped naked while the crowd gathered about and watched. I was terribly embarrassed. It was right in front of a secondhand clothing store, so I was immedi-

¹¹Haikarachō. In the Meiji period when western clothing first appeared, a man who wore a "high collar" (as opposed to kimono) was at the height of sartorial and social elegance. Hence, the term came to have connotations not just of modernity and foreign fashion, but of chic, modishness, even dandyism and foppery. It is now an old-fashioned but still understood word.

¹²Ōtani Tomoemon VI, 1886–1943, Kabuki actor. Ume no Yoshibei is the hero of a series of related eighteenth-century Kabuki and Bunraku plays about an event that took place during the Genroku period, in which a gangster killed an apprentice and stole money. In the plays, the Yoshibei character (who had been the villain in the actual incident) becomes a tragic hero caught in a moral dilemma, forced to kill in order to get money to help his former master.

¹³Asahi means "morning sun." The words for "fire" and "sun" are both pronounced *hi*.

ately dressed in some used clothing from the store—a girl’s summer robe. The belt was a green waistband. I felt horribly ashamed. My aunt came running, her face pale. She had always spoiled me. I wasn’t very manly, and I was always being teased by people, so I stayed by myself and felt myself treated unfairly. Only my aunt would say I was a good little man. When other people would say bad things about my looks, she would get furious. These are now all distant memories.¹⁴

I left Mr. Nakabata’s house with his only child, Kei-chan, and said, “I’d like to see the Iwaki River a bit. Is it far?”

She said that it was nearby.

With Kei-chan as guide, by the time we had walked just five minutes, so it seemed, we’d already come to the big river. I had memories of being brought to the banks of this river when I was little, any number of times, but I seem to remember that it was farther from town. I suppose even this distance seems far to a child’s feet. Furthermore, I always stayed in the house and was afraid of going out, and when I did go out I was so tense I got dizzy, so I must have thought it all the more distant. There was a bridge. It wasn’t very different from what I remembered; sure enough, to see it now, it was still just as long a bridge.

“They call it Inui Bridge, don’t they?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“‘Inui’—how do you write that? As the *inui* that means the direction ‘northwest’?”

“I wonder. Probably.” She was laughing.

“You don’t know? Well, it doesn’t matter. Let’s cross it.”

I slowly went across the bridge, running one hand along the railing. The view was very nice. Of the rivers in the Tokyo area, it most resembled the Arakawa Canal. A heat shimmer rose from the green grass on one side of the river bed and made my eyes seem blurry. And the Iwaki River flowed on glittering whitely, licking at the green grass on both banks.

“In the summer, everyone comes here for the evening cool. There’s nowhere else to go.”

The people of Goshogawara like to enjoy themselves, so that must be a very lively scene, I thought.

“That’s the recently completed Memorial Hall that Father takes such pride in,” she added softly, with a smile.

It looked like quite a fine building. Mr. Nakabata was an executive officer in the home national reserve. He must have been terribly busy demonstrating his characteristic humanitarianism in restoring the Memorial Hall. We crossed over the bridge to the other side and stood for a while at its foot, talking.

¹⁴From Dazai’s story “Goshogawara,” *Zenshū* 10: 207–8.

"I've heard that the apple orchards are being thinned out, and after the trees are cut down, they're planting potatoes or something where they used to be."

"Doesn't that depend on the area? We've not yet heard such tales around here."

In the shade of the dikes beside the big river were apple orchards, their white powdery blossoms in full bloom. As I looked at them, I could almost smell white face powder.¹⁵

"You've sent us a lot of apples, haven't you, Kei-chan? I hear you're getting married."

"Yes." She nodded seriously, without the shade of a smile.

"When? Soon?"

"The day after tomorrow."

"What?" I was startled. But Kei-chan was cool, as if it were entirely someone else's concern.

"Let's go back. Aren't you busy?"

"No, not at all." She was incredibly calm. Here she was, the only child, a daughter, whose husband would be adopted into the family, about to carry on the line. Sure enough, such a person, even if she was so young, only nineteen or twenty, seemed somehow to be different from other people. I was secretly impressed.

"I'm going to Kodomari tomorrow." As we retraced our path across the long bridge, I spoke of other things. "I thought I'd see Take."

"Take. The Take who shows up in your stories?"

"Right."

"She'll be happy, won't she?"

"I wonder. It'll be nice if I can see her, but . . ."

During this trip to Tsugaru, there was one person above all that I'd wanted to see. I thought of her as my own mother. I had not seen her for nearly thirty years, but I'd not forgotten her face. You might even say that my whole life had been determined by her. Here is a passage from one of my writings, "Recollections":

My memories are clearer once I get to be six or seven. I was taught to read by a maid named Take, and we used to read all kinds of books together. Take was totally devoted to my education. I was sickly, and so I used to read a lot in bed. When I ran out of things to read, Take would go around to the village Sunday school and borrow book after book for me. I had learned to read silently, so no matter how much I read I didn't get tired. Also, Take taught me moral lessons. She would take me with her to the temple and explain all the picture scrolls of heaven

¹⁵Japanese brides traditionally had their faces painted with a thick white cosmetic called *oshiroi*. It is this that Dazai seems to smell, and what perhaps reminds him that Kei-chan is soon to be married.

and hell. They were horrible: arsonists were being forced to carry baskets on their backs with red flames shooting out from them; men who had had mistresses were being crushed by blue snakes with two heads; there was the lake of blood, and the mountain of needles, and the bottomless pit with white smoke coming from it; and everywhere, pale, emaciated people, their tiny mouths open, were crying and screaming. Once she told me, "If you tell lies, you'll go to hell, and your tongue will be pulled out like this by devils." I burst out crying in terror.

Behind the temple, the ground rose to a small graveyard, and along some kind of yellow flowering hedge stood a forest of grave markers. Among them were some with a slotted groove in which was a black iron wheel about the size of a full moon. When you spun it, if it clattered to a stop and didn't move anymore, that meant you would go to heaven; but if it stopped for a moment and then clanked in the opposite direction, you would go to hell. That's what Take taught me. When she spun it, it would turn for a while, ringing clearly, and then invariably it would slow to a halt; but when I spun, somehow it would always reverse itself. One day—sometime in autumn, I recall—I went to the temple by myself; and no matter which iron wheel I tried to spin, as if by common agreement, they all clanked in reverse. Holding down the fit of temper that threatened to overwhelm me, I stubbornly continued to spin them over and over again. At last the sun began to set. I gave up in despair and left the graveyard. . . .

Finally, I entered elementary school back in our home village, and with that my recollections take a drastic change. At some point, Take disappeared. She went to get married in some fishing village; maybe she was afraid I would try to follow, because she just suddenly disappeared without saying anything to me. It must have been at harvest time the next year that she came back for a visit to my house. Somehow she was very formal and distant. She asked how I was doing at school. I wouldn't answer. Apparently someone else told her how I was getting along. All she said was, "Don't be overconfident, or you'll fail." She didn't praise me much.¹⁶

My mother was an invalid, and so I never drank a drop of her milk, but was given to a wet nurse as soon as I was born. When I was three and had started toddling about, my wet nurse left me and in her place, it was Take who was hired to take care of me. I slept in my aunt's arms at night, but other than that I was always with Take. From three to eight years of age, I was educated by Take. And then one morning, I opened my eyes and called to her, but she didn't come. I was stunned. I seemed somehow to know by intuition. I screamed and wept wildly. "Take's gone, Take's gone," I cried heartbrokenly, and all I could do was sob for the next two or three days. Even now, I've not forgotten the pain of that incident. And then, about a year later, I met her unexpectedly, but she was strangely distant, and that felt horribly cruel to me. Since then, I'd not seen her. Four or five years ago, I was asked to do a radio broadcast on the topic, "Words to my hometown," and I read the Take sections from "Recollections." When I say "homeland," I think of

¹⁶From "Recollections," *Zenshū* 1: 23–25.

Take. Probably she never heard my broadcast. I didn't hear from her. So things have remained; but from the very moment I set out on this Tsugaru trip, I had been praying fervently at least to see her, if only briefly. I had a secret taste for self-denial, to save the best for last. I had put off going to the port of Kodomari, where Take lived, until the end of the trip. No, in fact, I had even thought I'd go from Goshogawara directly to Hirosaki, walk its streets for a while, and then go on to stay a night at Ōwani hot spring before finally going to Kodomari. But the little bit of travel money I'd brought from Tokyo was running out, and maybe travel exhaustion was starting to show. At any rate, wandering around here and there was getting to be a burden, so I gave up on Ōwani and changed my plans so that I'd just stop off in Hirosaki briefly on the way back to Tokyo; and I resolved to ask them to put me up for the night at my aunt's house in Goshogawara, and then go right on to Kodomari the next day. When I went with Kei-chan to my aunt's place on High-Collar Street, we found that she was not at home. One of her grandchildren was sick in the hospital in Hirosaki, and she had gone to accompany the child.

My cousin said with a laugh, "Mother knew that you were coming, and she wants at all costs to see you, so she phoned to ask you to stop by at Hirosaki." This cousin's doctor husband had been adopted into the family, and it was through them that my aunt's family line was continuing.

"Oh, I had been planning to stop by for a while in Hirosaki on my way back to Tokyo, anyway, so I'll be sure to go to the hospital."

"He says he's going to Kodomari tomorrow to see Take." Kei-chan, who must surely have been busy with her own preparations, hadn't gone home, but was just calmly relaxing with us.

"Take." My cousin's face became serious. "That's good. I can imagine how happy she'll be." She seemed to know how much I'd been yearning for Take.

"But I don't know if I'll be able to see her." That was my worry. Naturally I had not made any arrangements ahead of time. Koshino Take of Kodomari. That was all I had to go on to ask for her.

"I've heard there's only one bus a day to Kodomari." Kei-chan went to check the timetable hanging on the kitchen wall. "If you don't take the first train leaving here tomorrow, you won't make the bus in Nakasato. Be sure not to oversleep on your important day." She seemed to have completely forgotten her own important day. I'd take the first train at eight from Goshogawara, north on the Tsugaru Railroad, past Kanagi, arriving at Nakasato, the terminus of the line, at nine. Then it would be about two hours on the bus to Kodomari. I estimated that I would get to Kodomari by noon tomorrow. Evening came, and Kei-chan finally went home. Right after she left, the doctor (that's what we'd always called the doctor son-in-law, as if it were his

proper name) came back from the hospital, and then we drank and talked nonsense late into the night. The next morning I was awakened by my cousin. I ate breakfast in a great rush and then ran to the station, managing to make the first train. Today too the weather was beautiful. My head was murky. I felt as if I had a hangover. There was no one in the High-Collar Street house for me to fear, and so the previous night I'd drunk a bit too much. Greasy sweat oozed out on my forehead. The fresh morning sun shone into the train car. I alone seemed to be messy and dirty and degenerate, and I felt no match for anyone. Even though I'd experienced this kind of self-loathing some thousands of times, always after drinking too much, I still hadn't been able to feel like giving up drinking. It was because of my weakness for liquor that people had contempt for me. If there weren't such a thing as liquor in the world, I might even have become a saint, I thought stupidly, with great seriousness, as I gazed idly out the window at the Tsugaru plain. At length, we passed Kanagi and arrived at the little station of Ashino Park, no larger than a grade-crossing guard hut. I remembered an anecdote of the time the mayor of Kanagi had asked at Ueno Station on his way back from Tokyo for a ticket to Ashino Park, and was furious when they told him there was no such station. "Don't you know the Tsugaru Railway's Ashino Park?" he asked, and he made the agent search some thirty minutes before he finally got a ticket to Ashino Park out of him. I put my head out the window to see the little station. Just then, a young girl wearing a patterned kimono with matching *mompe* over it came running up, two cloth-tied bundles hanging from her hands. With her eyes lowered, she lightly lifted her face to the handsome youth who was manning the wicket. He understood, and with the very same motions as a skilled dentist pulling front teeth, smartly clipped the red ticket she held between her white teeth. Neither the girl nor the youth smiled at all; they were as matter-of-fact as if it happened all the time. As soon as the girl boarded the train, we started with a lurch. It was as if the engineer had been waiting for the girl to get on. Without a doubt, there are few stations in this country as tranquil as this one. Next time, the mayor should shout even louder for Ashino Park at Ueno Station, I thought. The train ran through a forest of larches. This area was Kanagi's park. A marsh appeared. It was called Ashinoko, or Lake of the Reeds. A while back, my brother donated a sightseeing boat for the marsh. Soon we arrived in Nakasato, a small community of four thousand. From this point on, the Tsugaru plain narrows, and by the time you reach the hamlets to the north—Uchigata, Aiuchi, Wakimoto—the paddy fields practically disappear, so you could probably call this the northern gate to the plain. When I was little, I visited relatives here, drapers named Kanamaru, but I must have been about four at the time, so that all I remember is a waterfall on the outskirts of the village.

“Shū-chaa,” someone called, and I turned around to see the Kanamarus’ daughter standing, laughing. She must have been a year or two older than I, but didn’t look that old.

“It’s been quite a while, hasn’t it! Where are you going?”

“Oh, to Kodomari.” I wanted to see Take as quickly as possible, now, so I couldn’t pay attention to anything else. “I’m taking this bus. Sorry. Bye.”

“I see. Well, please do stop by on the way back. We’ve just built a new house, on that hill.”

I looked in the direction she was pointing and could see a new house standing on a little green mountain to the right of the station. If it hadn’t been for Take, I would have rejoiced at this unexpected encounter with my childhood friend, and would certainly have stopped at their new house and had them tell me about things in Nakasato. But I was unreasonably excited, as if there were no time to be lost, and I said, “Well, see you later,” or some such offhanded parting, and hurried onto the bus. It was quite crowded, and I had to stand the whole two hours to Kodomari. I was seeing the territory from Nakasato north quite for the first time in my life. The Andō clan, who are called the forefathers of Tsugaru, lived around here; I’ve already told you about how flourishing Jūsan harbor used to be, and apparently the center of the history of the Tsugaru plain lies here, between Nakasato and Kodomari. The bus progressed north, up the mountain road. The road looked bad, and the bus swayed quite roughly. I clung to the railings of the overhead luggage racks, and bent down to look at the scenery outside the bus window. Sure enough, this was northern Tsugaru. Compared to the scene around Fukaura, there was something wild about this. There was no scent of human flesh. The trees in the mountains, the roses, the bamboo grass, all were living with absolutely no connection to man. It was much gentler than the Tappi area on the eastern shore, but even the trees and grasses around here were one step short of being what we call scenery, and they held no converse with passing travelers. Finally, Lake Jūsan stretched out before us, cool and white. The lake gave an impression of water filling a shallow pearl oyster shell, elegant but ephemeral. There was not a single wave. No boats, either. It was hushed, and very broad. A solitary pool, abandoned by men. It was as if not even the drifting clouds or the flying birds would be reflected on the face of the lake. After passing Jūsan, we came out on the shore of the Sea of Japan. This area is of course important to national defense, and so, as is my practice, from here on I’ll avoid detailed descriptions. A little before noon, we arrived at Kodomari. This is the northernmost harbor of the west coast of Honshū. North of here, just over the mountains, is Tappi, on the east coast. Kodomari is the last hamlet on the western shore. In other words, with Goshogawara as the center, I had, like the pendulum of a grandfather clock, swung back from Fukaura, the southern extreme of the old Tsugaru domain’s west coast,

and now at a single stroke I'd come to Kodomari, the northern extreme of the same coast. This is a tiny fishing village with a population of about twenty-five hundred, but from ancient times it was already being frequented by vessels from other provinces, and they say that ships in trade with the Ezo, especially, would always seek sheltered mooring here from the strong east winds. I must already have written some about how in the Edo period rice and lumber were dispatched from here as well as from the nearby Jūsan harbor. Even now, the village's harbor works are inappropriately impressive. There are only a few paddy fields on the edge of the village, but sea products seem to be quite abundant, and in addition to squid and fish like *soi*, *aburame*, and sardines, they also gather great quantities of seaweeds like *kombu* and *wakame*.

As soon as I got off the bus, I grabbed a man walking nearby and asked, "Do you know Koshino Take?"

The middle-aged man, wearing National Guard uniform¹⁷ and looking as if he might work in the village office or something, tilted his head. "Koshino . . . Take . . . you say? There are a number of families in this village named Koshino . . ."

"She used to live in Kanagi. Oh, and she'd be around fifty now," I pursued intently.

"Ah, I know who you mean. She's here."

"She is? Where? Where does she live?" I walked following his directions, and found Take's house. It was a neat little hardware store, about eighteen feet across. It was ten times finer than my shack in Tokyo. A curtain hung down in the front of the shop. This is ominous, I thought, and went running up to the glass door, to find that a little padlock was firmly attached to the door. I tried the other glass doors, but they were all closed tight, too. She was out. I didn't know what to do next, and mopped the sweat from my brow. She couldn't have moved. Maybe she'd just gone out somewhere for a bit. No, this wasn't Tokyo; in the country, if you just go out for a little while, you don't draw the curtains in your shop, or lock the door. Maybe she'd gone somewhere for two or three days, or longer? This was awful. Take had gone to some other village. That made sense. If I just knew where, I'd be okay, I thought stupidly. I knocked on the glass, calling out, "Koshino-san, Koshino-san!"—but of course there was little chance of a reply. Sighing, I left the house and walked a little, to the tobacco shop diagonally across the street. I went in and told them that there didn't seem to be anyone home at the Koshinos', and would they know where she'd gone? The thin old lady answered unconcernedly that she'd probably gone to the sports meet. I said excitedly, "Well then, where is the meet going on? Is it close? Or far?"

¹⁷*Kokuminfuku*, a kind of everyday khaki garb similar to military uniform. Prescribed in 1940, it was worn by civilians throughout World War II.

"Right over there," she said. "Follow this road until you come to the paddy fields, and the school's there, and the meet is going on behind the school. She left this morning with the children, carrying lunch boxes, you know."

"Really? Thank you!"

I followed her instructions, and sure enough, there were the paddies. As I traced my way along the path on the ridges between the fields, I came to a sand dune, and on top of the dune stood a public school. I went around behind the school and stopped, dumbfounded. Was this what they meant by "living a dream"? Here at this little fishing village at the northernmost end of Honshū, a bright festival was taking place right before my very eyes, so beautiful it was sad, exciting, just as such things had always been, unchanged from days of old. Flags of all nations. Little girls all dressed up. Here and there, people drunk in broad daylight. And around the playing field, nearly a hundred lean-tos stood shoulder to shoulder—no, there wasn't even enough room around the field, and so they'd set up some of them on the slopes of the little hill, looking down on the field, each one tightly walled with woven straw mats. Now was the noon rest period, it would seem, and in each of those little houses families were opening their lunch boxes, the adults were drinking sake, and the children and women were talking and laughing in high spirits as they ate their lunches. Japan is a blessed country, I thought over and over again. Truly, it is the land where the sun rises, I thought. Even now, in the midst of the great war on which we have gambled our nation's fate, here in this neglected village at the northern end of Honshū, such a bright, amazing celebration is being held. I felt as if I were looking on at the unrestrained laughter of the ancient gods and following their vivid dances, right here in this remote corner of Honshū. It was as if I had turned into the hero of a fairy tale: I had crossed seas and mountains, walked three thousand leagues seeking my mother, to find a gorgeous sacred dance being celebrated on the top of a sandy hill at the end of the country at which I had arrived. Well, now, I had to hunt out the parent who had raised me—hunt her out from amidst the crowd in this spirited sacred dance. It had been nearly thirty years since we had parted. She was a red-cheeked woman, with big eyes. She had a little red mole on her right eyelid—or was it her left? That was all I remembered of her. If I saw her, I'd know her. I had that confidence, but as I looked around at the field, I felt like crying: it would be hard to find her in this mob. There was no way I could do it. All I did was wander around at the edge of the playing field.

"Do you know where the person named Koshino Take is?" I plucked up my courage and asked a boy. "She's about fifty—the hardware store Koshino." That was the sum of my knowledge about Take.

“The hardware store Take?” He thought a moment. “Oh yes, I seem to recall that she was in one of the huts somewhere over there.”

“Really? Over there?”

“Well, I’m not exactly sure. I think I saw her there. . . . Try looking over there, anyway.”

His “looking there” would be quite a job. After all, I couldn’t very well bare my soul to the boy and say anything as pretentious as “I haven’t seen her for thirty years.” I thanked him and then wandered in the direction he’d vaguely pointed out, but that wasn’t likely to be enough for me to find her. Finally I poked my head in at one of the huts where a family group was in the middle of eating lunch, and asked, “Pardon me, but might you know if Koshino Take, that is, the hardware store Koshino, is here?”

“That’s not us.” The plump housewife answered brusquely, frowning.

“Oh, I beg your pardon, but I wonder if you mightn’t have seen her somewhere around here?”

“No, I really don’t know. There are so many people here, you know.”

I looked in at another hut and asked. They didn’t know. Another hut. I walked around the field twice, as if possessed, asking “Is Take here, the hardware store Take?” But no one knew. I still felt hung over, so I was unbearably thirsty, and I went to the school well and had some water; then I went back to the field, sat on the sand, took off my windbreaker, mopped the sweat, and gazed absently down at the happy bustle of old and young, men and women. She was here, in the midst of this, for sure she was here. Right now, unaware of my suffering, she was opening the lunch boxes and feeding her children. I considered asking one of the teachers to announce with a megaphone “Koshino Take, someone to see you,” but I hated the thought of using such violent means. I just couldn’t stomach promoting my own happiness at the expense of such grotesque horseplay. It was just not fated. God has said, You will not meet. Let’s give up. I put on my windbreaker and stood up. I traced my way back along the paddy ridge path and came into the village. The meet would probably be over around four. Four hours. Surely I could lie around at some inn and wait for Take to get home, I thought. But then I wondered if I wouldn’t get into a terrible mood, lying around all alone in some dirty inn room while I waited, so that I wouldn’t even want to see Take. I wanted to see her now, while I felt as I did at present. But there was no possible way for me to see her. In other words, it wasn’t fated. How appropriate to my whole bungled life: I come all this way, know almost exactly where she is, and still have to go back without seeing her. Always, unfailingly, my overoptimistic plans go astray. That’s my unfortunate fate. Let’s go. After all, no matter how much I may call her the parent who brought me up, the bald truth is that she was a servant. Wasn’t she a maid? Are you a maid’s child? Here you are, a grown man, still yearning after your nursemaid

of long ago, wanting to see her—that's why you're no good. No wonder your brothers have written you off as a disgusting wimp. Why do you suppose you're the only one of the brothers who's different—good-for-nothing, dirty, mean? Pull yourself together. I went to the bus depot and asked when the bus would be leaving. There was one for Nakasato at one-thirty. It turned out to be the only one. I made up my mind to leave on the one-thirty bus. I still had about half an hour. I had gotten a little hungry. I went into a shadowy inn near the depot. "I'd like something to eat in a hurry," I said. Something like hope still lingered in my heart; I thought that if I liked the inn, I would rest there until four. But I was turned away. A sickly woman, the proprietress, peered out from the rear and told me in chilly tones that everyone had gone to the meet and she couldn't fix anything. Now fully determined to leave, I sat on the bench at the bus depot. I rested about ten minutes and then got up again and walked around idly. Well then, I might as well go over to Take's empty house again and take my lifelong farewell without her even knowing; I smiled bitterly and went to the hardware shop. Suddenly I saw that the padlock had been removed from the door—and the door was open a crack. Merciful heaven! With a rush of courage I pushed open the glass sliding door with a crude and fierce clatter. "Excuse me, is anyone here?"

"Yes," came the answer from the rear of the shop, and a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old girl in a sailor suit peered out. From her face I clearly recalled Take's. No longer hesitant, I went up to the child, who stood a step above the dirt floor in the rear. "I'm Tsushima from Kanagi," I identified myself.

The girl murmured a sound and smiled. Take must have told her children over and over again how she had brought up the Tsushima boy. With just that, there was now no longer the slightest remains of strangeness between us. How blessed, I thought. I am Take's child. A servant's child—none of that matters. I can say it out loud: I am Take's child. I don't care if my brothers sneer at me. I am this little girl's brother.

"Oh, I am lucky," I went on unrestrainedly. "Take—is she still at the meet?"

"Yes." The little girl too expressed no suspicion or embarrassment toward me; she nodded calmly and went on, "I had a stomachache so I've just come back to get some medicine." I sympathized with her, but it was a wonderful stomachache. I gave thanks for that stomachache. Now that I had latched on to this child, I was reassured. I would be able to meet Take with no trouble. As long as I stuck to this child, no matter what happened, I'd be all right.

"I walked all around the athletic field for a long time, but I couldn't find you."

"Yes," she said, nodding faintly and holding her stomach.

"Does it still hurt?"

"A little," she said.

"Did you take the medicine?"

She nodded silently.

"Does it hurt terribly?"

Laughing, she shook her head.

"Well then, please, do me a favor? Take me to your mother right away. I know your stomach must hurt, but I've come from very far away. Can you walk?"

"Uh-huh," she grunted, nodding strongly.

"Oh, aren't you brave. Please, do me this favor."

She nodded twice in a row, came straight down to the dirt floor, and put her shoes on; and then, holding her stomach and bent over, she left the house with me.

"Did you run in the meet?"

"Yes."

"Did you win a prize?"

"No."

Still holding her stomach, she walked on quickly ahead of me. Once again we traversed the path through the rice fields, came to the sand dunes, went around behind the school, and cut right through the athletic fields; then she quickened her pace, and ran into one of the little lean-tos. Soon, in her place, Take came out. She looked at me blankly.

"It's Shūji." I laughed and took off my cap.

"Oh, my." That's all. She didn't even smile. She looked serious. But soon her firm stance crumbled and in a casual, strangely defeated, weak voice, she said, "Well come on in, watch the meet . . ." She took me into her lean-to, and pointing beside her, said, "You sit down here." That's all she said. Wordlessly, she sat bolt upright, her hands solidly placed on her plump trouser-clad knees, avidly watching the children's race. However, I felt no dissatisfaction. Now I was completely secure. I stretched out my legs and watched the meet, not a concern in my heart. I was in that complete dreamy calm where you feel it doesn't matter, whatever happens. Is this the feeling they call "peace"? If so, then I can say that, at that moment, my heart was at peace for the first time in my life. The mother who bore me, who died last year, was a gentle, elegant, splendid mother, but she never gave me such an astounding feeling of reassurance. Do all mothers give their children this kind of sweet repose of security? If so, then I certainly wanted, without reservation, to be a filial son. I could not understand why anyone with such a blessed mother would want to be sick or lazy. Filial piety is a natural emotion. It is not a matter of morality.



A portrait of Take in Kodomari.

Take's cheeks were still red and, sure enough, over her right eyelid was a little red mole the size of a poppyseed. Her hair was sprinkled with white, but still I felt not the slightest difference between the Take who sat so properly beside me and the Take I remembered from childhood. I heard later that when she had come to serve at our house and carried me on her back, I was three and she was thirteen. From then on, for about six years, I was brought up and educated by her. But the Take of my memories was certainly not such a young girl; she was someone as elderly as the Take now before my eyes, not an inch different. I learned from her later that the patterned navy blue sash she was wearing this day was one she had also worn while she worked at our house, and her pale lavender neckband was from the same period, one she had received from my family. Maybe that was the reason she sat there perfectly reflecting my memories. I might be prejudiced, but I sensed that she had an entirely different quality from the other *aba* (the "femme" of *aya*) of this fishing village. Her kimono was of a new striped handwoven cotton, and she wore *mompe* of the same material; the pattern was hardly flamboyant, but the choice was impeccable. She was not dull. Her whole presence gave a strong impression. I maintained my silence, but after a while, as she continued to watch the meet straight ahead, Take began breathing long, deep sighs, her shoulders heaving in waves. At that, I realized she too was not unmoved. But even so, she kept silent.

Suddenly she said to me, as if she'd just thought of it, "Won't you have something to eat?"

"I don't need anything," I answered. Truly, I didn't want to eat anything.

"There are rice cakes, you know." She put her hand on the lunch boxes put away in a corner of the hut.

"No, I'm fine. I don't want anything to eat."

She nodded lightly and didn't try to urge me any further. "It's not rice cakes he wants," she said under her breath, smiling. Even though we'd not had news of each other for nearly thirty years, she seemed to have divined my drinking habit. Amazing. When I grinned, she frowned and said, "And you smoke. You've been smoking one after another all this time. I taught you to read, but I never taught you about cigarettes or whiskey." Here I'd been overconfident. My smile disappeared.

Now that I had turned serious, Take laughed. Standing up, she invited me: "Will you come see the Dragon God's cherry blossoms? How about it?"

"Oh, yes, let's go."

I followed Take as we climbed the sandy hill behind the lean-to. Violets were blooming on the hill. Low wisteria vines spread across it. Silently, Take continued to climb. I ambled after her, saying nothing. We climbed clear to the top and, as we stumbled downward, there was the forest of the Dragon God shrine. Here and there along the path that ran through the wood bloomed big double cherries. Take suddenly stretched out her arm and broke off a short cherry branch. As she walked on, she tore off its blossoms and tossed them away on the ground. Then she stopped, turned sharply toward me, and abruptly, as if a dam had burst, became eloquent:

"What a long time it has been! At first I didn't understand. My child said it was Tsushima from Kanagi, but I thought it couldn't be. No, I couldn't believe that you'd come to see me. Even when I came out of the hut and saw you, I didn't know. Then you said to me, 'It's Shūji,' and my mind went blank and I couldn't speak. I couldn't see the meet or anything. For nearly thirty years, I've wanted to see you, and I've lived on thinking only, Will I be able to see him? Maybe we'll never meet. And you've become such a proper adult, and to think that you'd come all the way here to Kodomari just to see me. I don't know if I'm blessed, or happy, or sad, or—who cares about that, ah, how good of you to come. When I went to serve at your house you were just starting to walk, you'd toddle around and fall down, you couldn't walk well yet, at mealtime you'd take your bowl and wander around, your favorite place to eat was at the bottom of the stone steps of the storehouse, you would have me tell you fairy tales and you would let me feed you, a spoonful at a time, while you looked at me so seriously, you needed a lot of care, but you were so loving, and now you've become such an adult like this, it's all like a dream. I've gone back to Kanagi on occasion, and I'd wander around the town, looking at each little boy that was your age then, hoping you might be playing somewhere around. Oh, how good of you to come." She spoke on,

word by word, at each word unconsciously tearing a cherry blossom from the branch she held, tearing them off and throwing them away.

"Do you have any children?" At last she bent the branch in two and threw it away too, stretched her arms, and shook her *mompé*. "How many?"

Leaning lightly against a cedar at the edge of the path, I answered, "One."

"Boy? Girl?"

"Girl."

"How old?"

She fired off question after question. In touch with her way of expressing love strongly and unreservedly, I thought, Ah, how much like Take I am. I realized that the reason I alone, of all my brothers and sisters, had a coarse and crude element within me was the influence of this sad parent who had brought me up. Now for the first time I was made aware clearly of the true nature of my upbringing. I am assuredly not a man of gentle rearing. It is no wonder that I should have much within me that is not like a child of wealth. Look at the people who are unforgettable to me: T in Aomori, Mr. Nakabata in Goshogawara, the *aya* in Kanagi, and Take in Kodomari. *Aya* is working for my family in Kanagi even now, but all the others too at some time or other in the past served the family. These people are my friends.

Well, now, I'm not making this out to be the "*kirin* catching"¹⁸ of the Sage of old; but it might not be a mistake to rest my pen for the while from this new Tsugaru almanac, written during our holy war, with this confession of the author's "friend catching." There are still things here and there I would have liked to write about, but I seem to have fairly well described above the living atmosphere of Tsugaru. I have not put on any affectations. I have not deceived my readers. So, readers, while we have life, there will be another day. Stay well. Do not despair. Till then, see you.

¹⁸Reference to the tradition that Confucius laid aside his brush after writing the words "In the [duke's] fourteenth year in the spring, some hunters in the west captured a *lin*." *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, trans. James Legge, in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, 833 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960). The *Annals* does in fact end at that point. The *lin* (Japanese *kirin*) was a mysterious and probably mythological creature, horned and something like an antelope, that appeared only "when there is an intelligent king" (*ibid.*, 834). It may have been the inspiration for the Western unicorn. The reference is a common metaphor for a writer's finishing his work.

Appendixes



Chronology of Dazai's Life and Works

1909

Real name: Tsushima Shūji. Born on June 19 in Kanagi village, Northern Tsugaru District, Aomori Prefecture, the tenth child (two sons had earlier died in infancy) of Tsushima Gen'emon and Tane. Gen'emon, who had been adopted into the Tsushima family in 1888 to be Tane's husband, was one of the largest landowners in the prefecture, and served in both the lower and upper houses of the national legislature.

1911 (Age: 2)

Take (14 at the time) comes to be his nursemaid.

1912 (Age: 2-3)

Older sister Tama dies, younger brother Reiji is born.
(Emperor Meiji dies and Emperor Taishō ascends the throne.)

1916 (Age: 6-7)

January. Goes to Goshogawara with his aunt when her daughter marries. Take does not accompany them.

April. Returns to Kanagi to start first grade.

1920 (Age: 10-11)

December. Great-grandmother dies.

1922 (Age: 12-13)

April. Begins a year of upper elementary school as preparation for high school.

1923 (Age: 13-14)

March. Father dies in Tokyo.

April. Enters Aomori High School. Starts writing stories.

(September 1. A great earthquake destroys much of the Tokyo-Yokohama area.)

1925 (Age: 15-16)

Begins thinking of being a writer. With school friends, starts two literary magazines: *Seiza* (Constellation) and *Shinkirō* (Mirage).

1926 (Age: 16-17)

September. Starts the magazine *Aonbo* (Big Boy Blue) with his brothers.

(Emperor Taishō dies and Emperor Shōwa [Hirohito] ascends the throne.)

1927 (Age: 17-18)

April. Enters Hirosaki College literature department. Develops an interest in Edo culture, begins studying *gidayū*.

Autumn. Meets Oyama Hatsuyo (professional name Beniko), a young geisha. (July 24. The writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke commits suicide.)

1928 (Age: 18-19)

May. Publishes magazine *Saibō bungei* (Cell Literature) with friends. Begins peripheral involvement in leftist activities.

Summer. Goes to Tokyo and attempts to meet Ibuse Masuji, but fails.

December. Becomes a member of college newspaper and magazine staff.

Principal writings: "Mugen naraku" (Bottomless Hell), "Aware ga" (Poor Mosquito).

(March 15. Nationwide crackdown on Communist Party. Some 1,600 arrested.)

1929 (Age: 19-20)

January. Younger brother Reiji dies.

February. School strike over financial malfeasance of principal. Begins writing "Jinushi ichidai" (A Landlord's Life).

December. On the night of December 10, first suicide attempt, with sleeping pills. Recovers consciousness the following afternoon. Spends a month recuperating at Ōwani hot spring with his mother.

(October 29. Stock market crash in United States ushers in worldwide depression.)

1930 (Age: 20-21)

April. Enters Tokyo Imperial University French literature department.

Meets Ibuse Masuji, who becomes his personal and professional mentor. Approached by former Hirosaki classmate, begins making monthly 10 yen contribution to leftist movement.

June. Next older brother Keiji dies in Tokyo.

October. Hatsuyo flees geisha contract, comes to Tokyo. Dazai's oldest brother Bunji comes to Tokyo to discuss situation, takes Hatsuyo back to Aomori.

November. Removed from family register. Attempts suicide with waitress Tanabe Shimeko at Enoshima (actually at Koyurugigasaki on the mainland across from Enoshima). The woman dies; Dazai is charged as an accomplice in her death but is released.

December. Recuperates at Ikarigaseki hot spring. Marries Hatsuyo there, in his mother's presence.

Continues writing "A Landlord's Life" (left incomplete).

1931 (Age: 21-22)

January. Returns to Tokyo. He and Hatsuyo move frequently.

April. Questioned by police about political activities. Released into custody of Tobishima Sadashiro, friend of late brother Keiji.

July. Questioned again by police. Involved in writing haiku, under the name Shū-rindō. Virtually no other writing.

(September. Manchurian Incident signals Japan's wartime expansion on the Chinese mainland.)

1932 (Age: 22-23)

April. Questioned again by police. Released into Kita Yoshishirō's custody. Brother Bunji angered, cuts off monthly support of 120 yen but restores it two months later reduced to 90 yen.

July. Finds out about Hatsuyo's past. Summoned to Aomori for police questioning. Cuts leftist connections.

August. Goes for rest to Numazu with Hatsuyo.

September. They return to Tokyo, move in with Tobishima. Begins writing "Omoide" (Recollections) and other *Bannen* (Final Years) stories.

December. Called again to Aomori for police questioning, released.

1933 (Age: 23-24)

January-May. Bout with TB, bedridden on and off.

February. Uses pen name Dazai Osamu for first time, with story "Ressha" (The Train), which wins prize from *Tōō Nippō* newspaper.

March. Joins group publishing *Kaihyō* (The Sea Lion). Stories start appearing there.

Writings: "The Train," "Gyofukuki" (Metamorphosis), "Recollections."

1934 (Age: 24-25)

April. Publishes partly ghost-written piece, "Yōnosuke no kien" (Big Talk from Yōnosuke) under Ibuse Masuji's name in *Bungei Shunjū* (Literary Seasons).

December. Publishes magazine *Aoi Hana* (The Blue Flower) with friends. It lasts only one issue.

Writings: "Ha" (Leaves), "Sarumen kaja" (Monkey-Faced Youth), "Kare wa mukashi no kare narazu" (He Is Not the Man He Used to Be), "Romanesque" (Romanesque).

1935 (Age: 25-26)

February. "Gyakkō" (Losing Ground) published in *Bungei* (Literary Art), his first story in a noncoterie magazine.

March. The *Blue Flower* group merges with *Nihon Roman-ha* (The Japanese Romantic School). Dazai dropped from Tokyo Imperial University for nonpayment of tuition, but already knows he would never graduate anyway. Fails entrance examination for *Miyako Shimbun* (Capital News). Attempts to hang himself in Kamakura.

April. Contracts peritonitis after emergency appendectomy, while lung problems flare up again. Narcotics prescribed for the pain; is an addict by the time he is released from hospital.

July. Moves with Hatsuyo to Funabashi to recuperate.

August. Is a runner-up for the first Akutagawa Prize.

Writings: "Dōke no hana" (The "Flower" of Buffoonery), "Dasu gemaine" (The Common Herd), "Kawabata Yasunari e" (To Kawabata Yasunari).

1936 (Age: 26-27)

February. Importunes Satō Haruo to help him win Akutagawa Prize. Hospitalized for addiction at Satō's urging, but withdraws uncured. Begs money from friends.

June. First collection of short stories, *The Final Years*, published.

July. Party to celebrate book publication. Height of addiction, lungs again affected.

August. Goes for rest to Tanigawa hot spring. Hears he has failed again to win Akutagawa Prize.

September. Speaks of suicide to friends in letters, tells other friends he is planning to spend two years in TB sanatorium.

October. On October 13, is taken to Musashino (mental) Hospital by friends. Is kept there until November 12. Addiction finally broken, health somewhat improved. Begins writing "HUMAN LOST" and "Nijisseiki kishu" (Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century) as soon as released, but otherwise little work until mid-1938.

1937 (Age: 27-28)

March. Learns of Hatsuyo's earlier adultery. They go to Minakami hot spring and attempt suicide together; both survive. They return to Tokyo and separate; Hatsuyo goes first to the Ibuses and then to her uncle's house.

May. Travels for a week with Ibusu and friends to Miyakejima.

July. Hatsuyo returns to Aomori with a 30 yen parting gift from Dazai.

Writings: "Standard-Bearer for the Twentieth Century," "HUMAN LOST."

1938 (Age: 28-29)

For the first half of the year, lives in idle disorder. Little writing.

September. Called to Misaka Pass in the foothills of Mount Fuji by Ibusu. Spends the next two months there, starts writing again. Is introduced to Ishihara Michiko; their engagement is arranged in November.

November. Leaves Misaka, settles in Kōfu.

Writings: "Ubasute" (Discarding the Old Woman), "Hi no tori" (The Firebird).

1939 (Age: 29-30)

January. With the Ibuses as intermediaries, marries Michiko. They rent an apartment in Kōfu.

April. Wins 50 yen prize for "Ōgon fūkei" (Golden Landscape).

May. Travels in the Suwa area with his wife.

June. Travels in the Izu area with his wife, her sister, and mother-in-law.

September. Moves to a rented house in Mitaka, just outside Tokyo.

Tōō Nippō holds a banquet in Tokyo for Aomori-born writers and artists; Dazai is included. Wins fourth annual Kitamura Tōkoku Award for "Joseito" (Schoolgirl).

Writings: "I can speak" (I Can Speak), "Fugaku hyakkei" (One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji), "The Schoolgirl," "Oshare dōji" (The Stylish Child).

(September. World War II begins in Europe.)

1940 (Age: 30-31)

April. Organizes banquet to celebrate publication of friend Yamagishi Gaishi's book.

July. Goes to Izu, starts writing "Tokyo hakkei" (Eight Views of Tokyo).

Autumn. Lectures at Tokyo Commercial University and Niigata College. Travels on Sado Island.

Writings: "Zokutenshi" (Worldly Angel), "Anitachi" (My Older Brothers), "Haru no tōzoku" (A Burglar in Spring), "Zenzō o omou" (Thinking of Zenzō), "Kojiki gakusei" (Beggar Student).

1941 (Age: 31-32)

January. Travels in Izu with wife.

February. Goes to Shizuoka to begin writing *Shin Hamuretto* (A New 'Hamlet').

April. Goes to Kōfu, continues writing.

June. First daughter Sonoko born. Begins receiving letters from Ōta Shizuko.

August. At Kita Yoshishirō's urging, returns to hometown after having been away for ten years, sees mother, grandmother.

September. Meets Ōta Shizuko. Their friendship develops.

November. Called up for writer's draft, exempted for weak lungs. Sees Ibuse off for Singapore.

Writings: "Eight Views of Tokyo," *A New 'Hamlet'*.

(December 8 [Japanese dating]. Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor marks beginning of Pacific War with United States.)

1942 (Age: 32-33)

February. At a hot spring near Kōfu, begins writing *Seigi to bishō* (Righteousness and Smiles).

June. Called up as a reservist; from here on, performs local self-defense functions from time to time.

Summer. Travels in Kōfu and Hakone areas.

October. "Hanabi" (Fireworks) about to be published, rejected by censors (published after the war as "Hinode mae" [Before the Dawn]). Mother seriously ill, goes to Kanagi with wife and child.

December. Travels to Atami with Ibuse. Goes on to Shizuoka area to write *Udaijin Sanetomo* (Sanetomo, Minister of the Right). Mother becomes critically ill, goes alone to see her. Mother dies on December 10.

Writings: *Righteousness and Smiles*, "Kikyōrai" (Going Home).

1943 (Age: 33-34)

January. Goes to Kanagi with family for mother's memorial service.

March. Finishes *Sanetomo, Minister of the Right* in Kōfu and nearby hot springs.

April. Is master of ceremonies at friend's wedding.

November. *Hibari no koe* (Voice of the Lark) written but, for fear of censorship, not published. (Appears after the war as *Pandora no hako* [Pandora's Box].)

Writings: "Kokyō" (Hometown), *Sanetomo, Minister of the Right*.

1944 (Age: 34-35)

January. In Atami to write script for film of his story "Kajitsu" (Happy Day). While there, visits Shizuko in nearby Shimo Soga. Commissioned by government agency to write *Sekibetsu* (Regretful Parting).

May–June. Takes three-week trip through Tsugaru to gather material for *Tsugaru*, commissioned by Koyama Shoten. Sees old friends and childhood nursemaid, Take.

June. Takes wife to Kōfu to await birth of their second child, returns alone to Mitaka after ten days.

July. Finishes *Tsugaru*.

August. Son Masaki born.

September. Brings family back to Tokyo. “Four Marriages,” the film of “Happy Day,” is released.

October. Hatsuyo dies in China.

December. *Voice of the Lark* is destroyed in press during bombing of printing plant, but a galley proof remains. Goes to Sendai to do research on Lu Hsün for *Regretful Parting*.

Writings: “Happy Day,” *Tsugaru*.

(American bombing is increasingly intense, and everyday life is very difficult.)

1945 (Age: 35–36)

February. *Regretful Parting* is finished.

March. Begins *Otogizōshi* (Fairy Tales). Sends family to Kōfu to escape continued bombing of Tokyo.

April. House in Mitaka heavily damaged in air raid. Leaving house in the care of Koyama Kiyoshi, goes to join family in Kōfu.

June. *Fairy Tales* completed.

July. Kōfu is bombed in predawn raid. Gives manuscript of *Fairy Tales* to Koyama Kiyoshi to be sent on to Chikuma Shobō, and evacuates to hometown. The trip takes three days. Faces the end of the war quietly, reading and farming.

November. Older sister Kiyō dies. In letters, Dazai reveals growing despair over his “parasitic” life.

Writings: *Shinshaku shokoku banashi* (New “Tales of the Provinces”), *Regretful Parting*, *Fairy Tales*, *Pandora’s Box*.

(August 15. Japan surrenders to United States to end World War II.)

1946 (Age: 36–37)

February. Participates in round-table discussions in Aomori area and lectures at high school alma mater. Corresponds with Ōta Shizuko.

April. Oldest brother Bunji is elected to Diet House of Representatives. Koshino Take comes to visit from Kodomari.

May. Actor Akutagawa Hiroshi, son of writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, visits for two days.

July. Grandmother dies.

November. Returns to house in Mitaka, outside of Tokyo, with wife and children. Participates in round-table discussion with writers Sakaguchi Ango, Oda Sakunosuke.

December. Rents workroom in neighborhood. Out drinking most evenings. The play *Fuyu no hanabi* (Fireworks in Winter) is closed in rehearsal by Occupation authorities.

Writings: “Niwa” (The Garden), “Kunō no nenkan” (An Almanac of Pain), “Jū-

gonenkan" (Fifteen Years), *Haru no kareha* (Dry Leaves in Spring), "Shin'yū kōkan" (The Courtesy Call).

1947 (Age: 37-38)

February. Spends several days with Shizuko in Shimo Soga.

March. Starts writing *Shayō* (The Setting Sun) at Mitohama nearby. Returns to Tokyo. Visits Shizuko again. Wife learns of affair. Meets Yamazaki Tomie. Second daughter Satoko born. Moves to workroom near Tomie's apartment.

May. *Dry Leaves in Spring* is broadcast on NHK radio. Shizuko and brother go to discuss Shizuko's pregnancy, but Dazai takes them drinking and they meet Tomie, now obviously his mistress.

June. *The Setting Sun* is finished.

July. Tomie gets official notice of husband's death. She writes her first will. On the same day, Dazai tells a friend he has promised a certain woman to die with her within the year.

August. At Tomie's apartment, Ibuse, Usui Yoshimi, Chikuma Shobō's owner Furuta Akira visit to discuss publishing Ibuse's collected works, for which Dazai will be general editor. Dazai's health visibly deteriorated; he is using Tomie's apartment as workroom and is scarcely ever at home.

September. Visits Atami resort with Ima Harube, Tomie.

November. Yakuma Shoten contracts to publish Dazai's collected works. Shizuko's daughter, Haruko, is born and Dazai names the baby. By now Dazai is coughing blood.

December. Accidental sleeping pill overdose. Recovers, but health increasingly bad.

Writings: "Tokatonton" (The Sound of Hammering), "Viyon no tsuma" (Villon's Wife), "Osan," *The Setting Sun*.

1948 (Age: 38-39)

February. Dazai's play *Dry Leaves in Spring* staged in Tokyo. Writes afterword for Ibuse's collected works. Wife's sister dies. While wife is out making funeral preparations, Dazai brings Tomie to house and wife subsequently learns of their affair.

March. Goes to Atami with Tomie, begins writing *Ningen shikkaku* (No Longer Human). *Asahi Shimbun* commissions serial newspaper novel, *Guddo-bai* (Good-bye). Starts publishing "Nyoze gamon" (Thus Have I Heard), angry response to Shiga Naoya's criticism.

April. Ibuse urges him to stop "Thus Have I Heard." Volume 1 of Yakumo Shoten's *Dazai Osamu Zenshū* (Complete Works of Dazai Osamu) published. Goes to Ōmiya with Tomie, stays there until mid-May, finishing *No Longer Human*.

May. Begins *Good-bye*. More lung hemorrhages.

June. First parts of *No Longer Human* are published. First installments of *Good-bye* are finished.

June 13. Dazai and Tomie disappear in the middle of the night, leaving behind farewell notes. The newspapers report them missing on June 15. The Tamagawa Canal is searched.

June 19. The two bodies are found in the Canal on the morning of Dazai's thirtieth birthday (fortieth by Japanese count).

June 21. Dazai's funeral. His ashes are interred at Zenrinji Temple in Mitaka on July 18.

July 25. The complete *No Longer Human* is published by Chikuma Shobō.

Writings: "Thus Have I Heard," "Ōtō" (Cherries), *No Longer Human*, *Good-bye* (incomplete), "Katei no kōfuku" (The Happiness of the Home).

List of Dazai Stories in English Translation

The following abbreviations have been used:

<i>JQ</i>	<i>Japan Quarterly</i>
Lyons	This book
<i>MN</i>	<i>Monumenta Nipponica</i>
O'Brien	James O'Brien, <i>Dazai Osamu: Selected Stories and Sketches</i> . East Asia Papers, no. 33. Ithaca, N.Y.: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, 1983.

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- “Chichi” (The Father). David Brudnoy and Kazuko Shimizu. *MN* 24, no. 4 (1969): 511–18.
- “Dasu gemaine” (Das Gemeine). O'Brien, 72–96.
- “Fukusō ni tsuite” (On the Question of Apparel). O'Brien, 147–60.
- “Gangu” (Toys). O'Brien, 66–71.
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- “Kobutori” (Taking the Wen Away). O'Brien, 194–206.
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 ——— (Osan). O’Brien, 228–39.
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- “Romanesuku” (Romanesque). John Nathan. *JQ* 12, no. 3 (1965): 331–46.
- “Sange” (Fallen Flowers). Thomas Swann. *MN* 24, nos. 1–2 (1969): 169–79.
- “Sarugashima” (Monkey Island). Aileen Gatten. *Voices* 3, no. 1 (1971): 33–38.
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- “Saruzuka” (The Mound of the Monkey’s Grave). O’Brien, 185–93.
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