

Dazai Osamu: After the Silence

Ralph F. McCarthy

It doesn't seem to be only in Japan. Nor does it seem to be only in relation to literature. People are more concerned with the artist's demeanor than with the pleasure to be derived from the work itself. They aren't satisfied until they've sniffed out the artist's person, his weaknesses. They won't let a work stand alone, with a life of its own, separate from the artist, unsigned. Even as they read *Three Sisters*, they're conscious of Chekhov lurking in the shadows behind those three young women with a bittersweet smile on his face. This method of appreciating art is supposedly proof of intelligence and perceptiveness. They talk about the power to see right through the page—quite a feat. Some nerve they've got. It's time to realize how insipid and vulgar such notions as "perceptiveness" and the image of the delicate, pallid scholar are.

The one to be pitied is the artist. He can no longer allow himself a careless belly laugh. What's he to do when works of art are treated as textbooks for spiritual training? . . .

The author becomes more and more constrained. Faced with nothing but glinty-eyed readers forever peering between the lines, he has to be always on his guard. Don't be surprised if eventually some pathetic author appears who's so overwhelmed by the pressure that he ends up just sitting rigidly at his desk, contemplating the profound truth of the aphorism "Silence is golden." Humility is demanded only of the author; the author is supposed to feel small—modest to the point of servility—while the reader is master. The reader tries to dig down to the very bottom of the writer's private life. Such impertinence. On sale at cut-rate prices are the works, not the author's person. Humility is precisely what I'd like to request of the reader. (*Dazai Osamu Zenshū* [The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu], vol. 10 [Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1956], 99-100)

Ralph F. McCarthy is the translator of Self Portraits, 1991, a collection of stories by Dazai Osamu. He has also translated works by Kita Morio and Murakami Ryū and is at work on two more collections of Dazai stories. His translation of "Dekadan Kōgi" (Down with Decadence, 1939) on page 233 of this issue of the Japan Quarterly is the story's first appearance in English.

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Dazai Osamu (1909-1948; real name Tsushima Shūji) published these words in a 1938 essay titled "Ippo Zenshin Niho Taikyaku" (One Step Forward, Two Steps Back). This was at the tail end of nearly two years of virtual silence—the longest lapse in his professional writing career—during which he published only one short story and nine or ten brief essays.

Most of the celebrated scandals of Dazai's life were behind him by this time. He had been disowned by his wealthy family, largely as a result of his marriage to an uneducated geisha named Oyama Hatsuyo; he'd attempted double suicide with a young married woman he scarcely knew (she died, he didn't); he'd been held and questioned by the police several times about his involvement with the illegal Communist Party and had finally abandoned the movement; he'd been dismissed from Tokyo Imperial University for nonattendance; he'd supposedly attempted to hang himself after finishing the stories that made up his first collection of works, *Bannen* (The Final Years, 1936); he'd nearly died of acute appendicitis and peritonitis and a subsequent bout with tuberculosis that had left him addicted to a morphine-based drug for some two years; he'd engaged in hysterical, somewhat paranoid, and very public spats with Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) and Satō Haruo (1892-1964) over his failure to win the Akutagawa Prize; he'd been confined to a mental hospital for a month to cure his drug addiction; and he'd supposedly attempted a double suicide with Oyama after finding out about her infidelity during his hospitalization.



Courtesy of Kobikisha

After all the fuss and ruckus, I came down with a serious illness, and when I finally got out of the hospital I rented a small house on the outskirts of Funabashi, in Chiba, and commenced the life of a madman. This is a photo from that time. Awfully skinny, aren't I? This is exactly what they mean when they say "nothing but skin and bones." It doesn't look like my face at all, does it? It gives even me the willies. I look like some sort of reptile. At the time, I wasn't expecting to live much longer. It was during this period that my first collection of works, The Final Years, was published, and I had this photo inserted as the frontispiece for the book. I intended it, literally, as a portrait of the artist in his final years, but I still haven't died. I'm still slogging incongruously through life, like a firefly at high noon. ("Chiisai Arubamu" (My Little Album, 1942). In The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu, vol. 5, 217)



When both Dazai and Oyama survived the suicide pact, they separated and Dazai moved into a cheap boardinghouse in Amanuma, Tokyo. It was there that he began his reign of relative silence and set about trying to rethink his life.

I

The silence marked the end of the first of the three fairly clearly defined periods (early, middle, and late) into which Japanese critics divide Dazai's professional career. The early period began with "Ressha" (Train; first published in 1933) and ended with "HUMAN LOST" (the title is in English; 1937), an often incoherent piece in the form of a diary that records the month Dazai spent in the mental hospital. While the stories of the early period comprise little more than a tenth of Dazai's total output of fiction, they remain a focus of critical attention largely on the basis of *The Final Years*, a tour de force that displays such a dazzling variety of narrative voices and fictional techniques that it would have assured him status as a cult writer and a permanent fixture in Japanese letters even if it had been, as he always insisted it was originally intended to be, his last work. *The Final Years* was in many respects so far ahead of its time that one is tempted to suggest we still haven't caught up. The few stories from this collection that have been translated into English give us only a hint as to the full range of fictional devices—from the terse, intense, slice-of-life vignette that is "Train" to the detached, ironic, and Freudian-tinged childhood reminiscences of "Omoide" (Memories, 1933), the disjointed pastiche of "Ha" (Leaves, 1934), the comic allegory of "Sarugashima" (Monkey Island, 1935), the fantastic, tragicomic farce of "Romanesque" (Romanesque, 1934), and the lyrical refashioning of an old legend in "Gyofukuki" (Undine, 1933). The stories won Dazai an immediate and dedicated following as they appeared in magazines, and he was declared a genius by many of his seniors and peers. He also, however, managed to alienate a number of critics who were baffled by what he was trying to do and often downright indignant that he continued to do it. Literary critic Kawakami Tetsutarō (1902–1980), for example, said of "Chikyūzu" (Map of the World, 1935): "This is a work that no right-minded reader is likely to understand. What could have possessed him to write such a thing?" (*Shinchō* (New Tides), January 1936). Poet and critic Itō Sei (1905–1969), reacted to "Inka" (Will-o'-the-Wisp, 1935), a piece made up of four separate vignettes, as follows: "Someone like Dazai Osamu just strikes me as an abnormality; he amuses himself by seeing how far he can go toward abandoning the form" (*Bungei* (Literature and Arts), May 1936).

As Dazai's personal life grew more and more dissipated and the writings that would make up his second and third collections of works, *Kyokō no Hōkō* (Fictional Wanderings, 1937) and *Nijisseiki Kishu* (Standard Bearer for the Twentieth Century, 1937), became more contentious and disordered, the critical reaction only grew harsher. "Sōseiki" (Genesis, 1936), the story that so enraged Dazai's erstwhile mentor with all its talk of "old man Satō," was proclaimed by novelist Sakaguchi Ango



(1906–1955) to be “nothing more than intellectual masturbation” (*Miyako Shimibun* (Capital Times), October 1, 1936). After reading “Standard Bearer for the Twentieth Century,” novelist Takami Jun (1907–1965) was moved to complain that “Dazai Osamu is not merely indulging in subversive acrobatics of form, he writes in the spirit of one who denies the concept of story altogether” (*Chūgai Shōgyō Shinpō* (Domestic and Foreign Commercial Times), December 31, 1936). It was with the last work of the early period, “HUMAN LOST,” however, that the chorus of denunciations reached a crescendo. “Literally ‘sick,’” said Kawakami (who was later to become a friend of Dazai’s). “One hopes he’ll soon find a way out of this state he’s in” (*Bungakukai* (The World of Literature), May 1937). An anonymous critic in the May 1937 issue of *Mita Bungaku* (Mita Literature) was less sympathetic. “Enough is enough,” wrote this person. “He’s forever setting down words inspired by the same paroxysm. . . . The cleverer he gets, the worse the aftertaste.”

Dazai was never one to take criticism lightly. One can imagine him sitting in his room at the boardinghouse, gazing vacantly at the shattered pieces of his life and career and perhaps contemplating the aphorism “Silence is golden.” Dazai described his boardinghouse days in “Tōkyō Hakkei” (Eight Scenes from Tokyo, 1941), a story so blatantly autobiographical and so filled with dates and names that it is still used as a virtual reference work by scholars of all persuasions.

No one associated with me except for two or three close friends with whom it was mutually difficult to part. Gradually I began to realize what the world at large thought of me. An ignorant, arrogant scoundrel; an imbecile; a base and cunning, lecherous dog; a con man pretending to genius, living the high life till he’s hard up for money, then threatening the folks back home with phoney suicide attempts. I’d abused my virtuous wife, keeping her as one would a dog or a cat and finally throwing her out. These and other descriptions of my character were sneeringly, contemptuously circulated, and I was ostracized and treated as an outcast, a leper. Once I realized this, I stopped going out. . . . Not a single assignment came from magazines or newspapers. Nor did I have any desire to write. I wouldn’t have been able to anyway. (*The Complete Works of Dazai Osamu*, vol. 4, 67)

Dazai was well aware that he had no one but himself to blame for the wretched reputation he had acquired, but to his mind everything he’d done he’d done for the sake of his art. In a letter to his lifelong supporter and mentor, Ibuse Masuji, dated September 1936—just a month or so before he entered the mental hospital—Dazai had written: “I’ve always intentionally chosen the most shameful and foolish things for my ‘works’ and my ‘actions.’ I’ve done so in order to force myself into a position where I had no choice but to write stories. There’s nothing unconscious about it” (*ibid.*, vol. 11, 116–117). I think we can take Dazai at his word on that, but it is clear that by the time he lapsed into his silence (a silence so nearly complete that there is even an uncharacteristic paucity of surviving correspondence from these days) he had come to bitterly resent the fact that all his self-inflicted suffering had earned him was the scorn of the literary establishment, and that his works were being judged



by his private life and his private life judged by his works. That resentment was the motivation behind the essay quoted at the beginning of this article and was to be voiced repeatedly in the stories he wrote once he got started again.

And he did, of course, get started again. In another letter to Ibuse, this one dated August 11, 1938, and addressed to Tenka Chaya, the teahouse on Misaka Pass in Yamanashi Prefecture (previously Kōshū) where Ibuse was staying, Dazai wrote:

I'm pushing ahead with the writing, little by little, each day. In another two or three days I'll finish the story I'm working on now and send it off to *Shinchō*, and then I plan to start immediately on another to send to *Bungei Shunjū*. For the time being I don't feel like writing realistic I-stories anymore. I plan to write just fiction, choosing only cheerful topics. . . .

. . . By September a little money should come in, and I'm thinking about going to visit you there in Kōshū, though I can't say for certain yet. I'm so inept with money, it makes even me angry. But I'm resolved to somehow reform my way of life this autumn. (ibid., 138-139)

Looking back to 1938 in "Eight Scenes from Tokyo," Dazai tells us of his recovery from despair and his determination to go on living and writing:

In early summer of that, my thirtieth year, I began for the first time in my life to aspire to making a living with my pen. Rather late, if you think about it. . . . I wasn't



Courtesy of Kobikisha

Once I'd left Funabashi I started to get fat. Look at this next picture. I was in Funabashi for about two years and then, when I came back to Tokyo, I separated from the woman I'd been living with for six years and rented a room alone in a boardinghouse on the outskirts of town, and as I was lolling around in that room I gained all this weight. I've slimmed down again since then, but during my boardinghouse period I was fat as a mole. That smile on my face is a smile of embarrassment at being so chubby. I put this photo in my second collection of works, Fictional Wanderings. A friend of mine says I bear a striking resemblance to a duckbilled platypus in this picture. Another friend tried to console me, though, by saying, "You look like Douglas Fairbanks, buy me a drink." At any rate, I was really a pig, wasn't I? When you're this fat, you can put on the saddest, loneliest face, but it just doesn't click. I was extremely lonely in those days, but I couldn't get my face to evoke that at all and ended up wearing this embarrassed smile all the time, the upshot of which was that nobody sympathized with me much. ("My Little Album," 217)



writing suicide notes now: I was writing in order to live. A certain mentor of mine encouraged me. When everyone else ridiculed and despised me, that one writer alone quietly, consistently, gave me his support. I had to repay him for the priceless trust he'd placed in me. (ibid., vol. 4, 68-69)

That "certain mentor" was, of course, Ibuse, who while at Misaka Pass was trying to arrange a marriage between Dazai and Ishihara Michiko, a schoolteacher who lived in the nearby city of Kōfu. Dazai continues in "Eight Scenes":

In due course, I finished "Obasute" [Old Folks]. It was an honest account of the time H[atsuyo] and I went to Minakami Hot Springs to die. I was able to sell it immediately. One of the editors I knew had not forgotten me and had been waiting for me to submit something. Rather than squander the money thus acquired, I redeemed my dress kimono from the pawn shop and set out on a journey. The mountains of Kōshū. To reaffirm the change in my heart and mind, I intended to begin a long novel. I was in Kōshū for one entire year. I didn't complete my novel, but I did manage to write and publish more than ten stories. I heard voices of support from all sides. . . . Shortly after New Year's 1939, with that mentor of mine acting as go-between, I took part in an ordinary arranged marriage. Or, no, it wasn't so ordinary: The groom hadn't a penny to his name. We rented a two-room house on the outskirts of Kōfu City. . . . I published, in succession, two volumes of collected works. (ibid., 69)

"Old Folks" and "Mangan" (A Promise Fulfilled) were both published in September 1938 and mark the beginning of Dazai's middle period, which is defined as having lasted until the end of World War II. The middle period was the longest and most prolific of the three stages of Dazai's career. It was also, as far as I'm concerned, the time when he wrote his very best stuff, although I must hasten to add that this is clearly a minority opinion. The works of the middle period seem to be generally considered too light and sunny—too entertaining—to be of any real significance. The really "important" works are said to be those of the late period—the less than three years between the end of the war and Dazai's death—including, of course, his "masterpieces," *Shayō* (The Setting Sun, 1948), *Ningen Shikkaku* (No Longer Human, 1948), and "Viyon no Tsuma" (Villon's Wife, 1947), all of which were translated decades ago by the august Donald Keene. I won't argue that these aren't great works (although "Villon's Wife," at least, is a tempting target), but they do present Dazai at his gloomiest—they were written, after all, at a time when his health was very bad, he was drinking much too much, his personal life was a shambles, and he was bitterly disappointed by what he saw as the hypocrisy and inanity of postwar Japan—and I think their canonization has led to some unfortunate misconceptions about Dazai and his *oeuvre*. The grimness and the relative humorlessness of the postwar works make them the perfect foil for those scholars in Japan and abroad who treat Japanese literature as if it were a body of archaeological texts from which are to be wrested clues about the great mysteries of Japanese society and the Japanese mind; the intense self-absorption and despair of the works, on the other hand, have helped to brand



Dazai a relentlessly "confessional" writer, the ultimate I-novelist, an author who was basically unconcerned with structure and plot and more or less incapable of creating characters other than semifictional alter egos, and a personality whose all-pervading despair would be comical if it weren't so boring. While all this is quite useful for pigeonholing Dazai, as well as spinning "theories of the Japanese," it is simply unsatisfactory in terms of producing a balanced appraisal of the artist and his art. Let me see if I can't tip the scales a bit by contradicting a few of the more common critical conceits about Dazai and laying my own prejudices on the line.

II

Dazai's major concern throughout his career was not to bare his soul or reveal the workings of the Japanese mind but to entertain his readers with good fiction. His longer works are relative failures; the short story was his forte, and he was a master of the form. At his best, he was simply brilliant at plotting and characterization and at achieving the maximum effect with a minimum of verbiage. Some of his "short-shorts" are unsurpassed in world literature, and his genius at storytelling is matched only by his wizardry with words. He was the single greatest innovator in modern Japanese fiction in terms of bringing an easy, intimate, and colloquial style to the written language. Far from being strictly a gloom-and-doom writer, he is almost always fun to read and often hilarious. Though he frequently comes across as being personally involved in his own fiction, this is generally achieved with a certain ironic, self-deprecating stance that serves to counteract and defuse the tedious "self-absorption" that is in fact all but universal in Japanese letters. He employed a greater variety of distinct narrative voices and fictional techniques than perhaps any other Japanese writer to date. And finally, and most emphatically, when Dazai uses an "I, Dazai" narrator in his stories, it is wisest to view that as simply another fictional technique, to remember that there is nothing uniquely Japanese or uniquely Dazai about this (think of Mark Twain, Céline, Charles Bukowski), and that it was far from being the only trick he had up his sleeve.

I realize that an impartial panel of experts might read these statements and declare me certifiably out to lunch, but I make them simply because I am a great fan and think that Dazai's storytelling brilliance has been grossly underestimated as a result of the tendency to concentrate on his rather sensational life. Perhaps it would be best, however, to let Dazai address this question himself. He does precisely that in the long and rambling preamble to "Haru no Tōzoku" (A Burglar in Spring, 1940), from which I have taken the following excerpts.

One needs to be extremely prudent when bringing a character called "I" into a story. Since olden times, in any country—although in this country the tendency seems particularly pronounced—readers have had the bad habit of believing works of fiction to be revelations of scandals from the author's life, and to put on a superior air as they censure him or smile pityingly. . . .



When writing I-novels, authors generally paint themselves as "good boys." Has there ever been a main character in an autobiographical novel who wasn't a "good boy"? I seem to remember that Akutagawa Ryūnosuke wrote a similar complaint somewhere or other. It was in fact this sort of suspicion that inspired me to describe my "I" as the most vile-natured, the most demonic of all the characters. This struck me as more gallant and pure than trying to garner sympathy by becoming the queer little "good boy." That was my mistake. There are limits to what you can get away with in this world. . . .

I know full well that to set public opinion straight is no easy task. I have nothing to aid me in this task—no social standing, no authority, no money, nothing. Armed only with a pen, setting down these thoughts one character at a time in my attempt to correct what's gone awry, I'm in a precarious position indeed. What is burned down in an instant requires a hundred years to rebuild. . . .

But isn't this, once again, the author writing about his private life? . . . Aren't you contradicting yourself? No, I'm not. We've already entered the world of fiction. The reader, too, must proceed with caution.

To get back on your feet is, as I've just said, not an easy thing to do. The proof is that, in order to write a tale about a burglar, I've had to first set down this long disclaimer. The scathing criticisms, not so much of my work as of my actual life, my personality, my physical constitution, have left me all but defeated, to the point that merely to write a single piece of fiction I have to exercise all these precautions. Blessed is he who can love fiction as fiction. The world does not consist of such perceptive persons alone, however.

I originally intended to make this a plausible-sounding confession, a tale of how I, finding myself in dire need of cash, acted as a burglar. I'm quite sure it would have been a realistic and fascinating story. I put too much care into my fiction, the upshot of which is that people—even persons whom one would think should know better—are forever wondering whether what I've written is not, in fact, the truth. Even I myself have at times begun to wonder. . . . That's what I get for doing nothing but read useless storybooks for the past twenty years. I must preserve, to some extent, the romanticism that has seeped all the way through to the marrow of my bones in that time. But I also have to learn moderation. I have to become, to some extent, more mediocre. . . .

. . . Were I to get carried away as usual, filling my scandalous account with fine details, who knows but that people might whisper, "Well, I wouldn't put it past him. He may very well have done a bit of burglary in his time"—and once again I'd be smearing my own name with mud. When I've become a bit more respectable, when the world's opinion of my character is not as low as it is now, when my reputation is elevated to the point where I can at least report on my private life just as it is, then I shall show you the bold use of a main character named "I" as a model of all sorts of depravity. But I mustn't do that now. Sad to say, but I mustn't.

The story I'm about to tell you is fiction. A burglar broke into my house last night. And that is a lie. It's all a lie. The absurdity of having to make this disclaimer. I can't help but laugh to myself. (*ibid* vol. 3, 115-118)



The story I'm about to present is also fiction. We may presume (if we like) that the author himself is both narrator and main character. The biographical information in the text basically conforms with the facts of Dazai's life, and I have taken the perhaps inexcusable liberty of filling out the place names Aomori, Asamushi and Kanagi and the surname Tsushima where the text only gives us initials ("A," "AS," "K," and "T," respectively). The events described may even have actually taken place (though one doubts it), but let's get this much straight: Whether the story is "true" or not, it is a work of fiction nonetheless. Fiction is not the opposite of truth. Fiction is a form of art, and art, as the most overrated painter in history once said, is a lie that makes us realize the truth.

"Dekadan Kōgi" (Down with Decadence; *ibid.*, 343-348) was first published in 1939. It is by no means considered one of Dazai's major works; in fact, I've never seen it mentioned in a critical study of any sort. It may not even be a very good story. An editor friend of mine read it and dismissed it as an overly long joke with an obscure punch line. Maybe he's right. I don't know. I like it, and I think it's an interesting comment on Dazai's approach to literature, and life, for that matter. Though the translation is, as always, inadequate—wooden where the original flows; artificial where the original convinces—perhaps it will give the reader a glimpse of the Dazai I find most endearing, the Dazai who had just recently decided to say yes to life and rediscovered his voice.

Down with Decadence

The fact that a certain story depicts a rather dissipated young man does not, it seems to me, justify calling it an example of "decadent" literature. I have always written stories that might best be described as idealistic.

I'm perfectly serious. I may very well be an idealist of sorts. Sadly, however, the words and deeds of idealists are generally regarded as somewhat suspect, or even comical, in the eyes of the world. Consider Don Quixote. Nowadays his name is nothing more than a synonym for "fool." But whether he was or was not a fool is something only another idealist can say for certain. No one who has not cast off his own fortune and position in life for the sake of some lofty ideal and leaped headlong into the fray can ever understand the heartrending sorrow of Don Quixote. Somewhere out there, I suspect, are a few self-righteous old boys who would rather not hear this.

My brand of idealism isn't the least bit lofty when compared with Don Quixote's. Rather than brandish a sword in the fight against the forces of evil, I prefer to beguile a rosy-cheeked country lass into spending the night. Idealism takes many forms. For the sake of the lecherous sort that I subscribe to, I have relinquished my wealth,



my clothes, my shoes and been reduced to a state of truly ascetic poverty. And, for want of a better name, I call these salacious ideals of mine "romanticism."

I was still a child when my romanticism began to bud. My home town is in the mountains of the deep north. Whenever there was a celebration of any sort at our house, my father would call a few geisha from the small city of Aomori, some twenty-five miles away. Since there was no other means of transportation, the geisha would arrive on horseback, and occasionally one would fall from her horse. Our story begins one night in the winter of my twelfth year. The celebration had to do with some honor or decoration my father had received. Five geisha came. One was quite old, two were younger women, and two were apprentices scarcely in their teens. One of the apprentices performed the Wisteria Girl dance. Her eyes were red; perhaps she'd been plied with sake. I thought she was exquisite. Each time she finished a movement and struck a pose, the guests would respond with an "Ah!" of admiration, and I even heard four or five people sighing. Obviously I wasn't the only one who thought her beautiful.

I wanted to know her name. Simply to ask someone, however, was out of the question. As a mere child of twelve, I had to feign complete indifference to geisha and such. So I stole into the family office and began looking through a ledger in which I knew I'd find a list of expenditures for the banquet. Under the heading "Performers," in the somber script of the man who managed the office, were the names of the five geisha, along with an unsmiling note as to how much each was paid. I looked at the five names. The second to last was Nami, and I was certain that this was the one. There was no doubt in my mind. Nami. Having established her name with the mysterious intuition peculiar to children, I left the office satisfied.

I made a firm resolution that as soon as I was old enough, I was going to hire that geisha for myself. Two years, three years went by, and still I remembered Nami. Five years, six years, and now I was a higher school student. As far as I was concerned, I was already an adult and could hire a geisha if I pleased without fearing punishment from the school. Now was the time. Aomori, where Nami no doubt still resided, was only an hour by train from the castle town my school was in. I made up my mind to go.

I left on the first morning of a two-day holiday, wearing my school uniform and cap. The outfit was shabby enough, in keeping with higher school tradition, but I wasn't ashamed of it. I fancied that I rather resembled *Kan'ichi-san*, the lovelorn student of novels and plays, and that my clothes were the most fitting, the most romantic attire for going to meet, at long last, the elegant little geisha girl whose image I'd kept in my heart over the months and years. I deliberately ripped one of the buttons from my jacket, hoping to give the impression of one whom love had left haggard and weary, and a wee bit wild.

Arriving in that little city by the sea shortly before noon, I chose at random a large restaurant near the station and marched inside. In those days, I was free of self-consciousness and other such loathesome constraints, being possessed, instead,





デカダン抗議

一人の遊蕩の子を描写して在るゆゑを以て、その小説を、デカダンでも、謂はば、理想小説を書いて来たつもりなのである。大まじめである。私は一種の理想主義者かも知れない。中不実、滑稽の感をさへ隣人たちに与へてゐる場合が、多いやうである。彼は、いまでは、全然、馬鹿の代名詞である。けれども彼が果して馬鹿であるか、どの如く投げ打つて、自ら駒を陣頭にすすめた経験の無さ、おのれの財も、おのれの理想は、耳の痛い、耳の痛くない、類の赤い、類の赤い、はこの好み

まじつた。さうして、私は、すでに幼時より、このロマ、ひじがある、父は、十里は、馬の背に乗つてやつて来る。他には、私が十二歳の冬のことであつた。さんが一人、ねえさんが二人、半五さん、たか、眼もとが赤かつた。私は、その人を美、間から、まあ、といふ嗚声が起り、四、五人の溜息、である。

呼んでゐる。中である。家に何か祝言者たちは、それぞれあつた。物が、言が五人、やつて来た。姿、知つた。すこし、海をささぐれ

を撥つて悪者と格闘するよごんの種類があるものであ、全くの清貧になつてし

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of a beautiful sort of courage that allowed me to act directly upon any impulse I might have. I later found out that the restaurant I'd entered was one of the very finest in the region and was patronized by a host of local luminaries that included the prefectural governor. The entrance vestibule was, to be sure, an elaborate affair, and in the rear garden was a huge waterfall. The waterfall, bathed in a blue spotlight, was visible from the entrance as if at the end of a tunnel, beyond a long, wood-paneled corridor that shone with the cold, dark luster of temple floors. The cherry trees were in leaf, and the waterfall thundering away in the shade of those glittering green leaves was, to me at eighteen, like something out of a dream.

Suddenly remembering myself, I addressed a maid who'd appeared and had evidently been cleaning up. She held a broom and wore a kerchief over her head.

"I want to eat."

"Yes, sir," she said, smiling for some reason as she set down a pair of slippers for me.

She led me to the second floor and into a room at the rear that featured a golden folding screen. Not a sound issued from inside the restaurant, but the roar of the waterfall was oppressively loud here.

"I want to eat something," I said again, plopping down on a cushion and folding my legs carelessly before me. I sounded almost angry. I was doing my utmost to avoid being taken for a fool. "Bring me some sashimi, an omelet, sukiyaki, and pickled vegetables," I said, naming every dish I could think of.

The maid, about forty, was skinny and dark complected but had a gentle, pleasant manner. I ate hungrily as she served up the dishes.

"Isn't there a geisha in this town named Nami?" I asked, without the least embarrassment. I had my beautiful courage, remember, and felt, more than anything, a sense of triumph. "She's an acquaintance of mine."

"No," said the maid. I nearly dropped my chopsticks. I was crushed.

"What d'you mean, 'no'?" I growled.

The maid, after reaching behind her back to adjust her sash, explained. There had been a geisha named Nami, but she was forever being taken in by men's lies, and a strolling player from a troupe touring the countryside had taken advantage of her. Now she was no longer in the city but was said to be plying her trade at a hot springs resort called Asamushi.

"I see. Well, that's Nami for you. She always was that sort of girl," I said, blathering away as if I knew Nami intimately even as gloom filled my heart. When I left the restaurant I got right back on the train, and that was the end of it. It was as if I'd journeyed to Aomori simply to see a waterfall.

But I didn't forget Nami. In fact, my love for her only grew stronger. Deceived by a traveling actor—how romantic could you get? I thought she was wonderful. She wasn't one of the common herd. I decided that, if it was the last thing I ever did, I would go to that hot springs resort, find Nami, and tell her how much I admired her.



Three more years went by. I entered university in Tokyo and came to know women who worked in teahouses and bars, but still I couldn't forget Nami. During summer vacation that year, when the train taking me back home stopped at Asamushi Hot Springs, I made up my mind in an instant and swept out through the door like a bird taking wing.

I met Nami that night. Nami was fat, stumpy, and not the least bit attractive. I guzzled sake. Getting drunk revived my romantic sensibilities somewhat.

"Didn't you ride horseback into the village of Kanagi once, about ten years ago?"

"I did, yes," she said, without the least sign of interest.

I scooted toward her on my knees. I was there that night, I said, and watched you dance. I was only twelve then, but I've never been able to forget you. Long and hard I've searched, and tonight, after ten years, I've finally found you again. As I was telling her all this, a lump came to my throat and tears welled up in my eyes.

"So you're one of the Tsushima boys?" she asked brusquely, still without much interest.

I wanted to reply that I was, but my taste for the romantic would not allow it, as it might seem as if I were boasting of being the rich kid. No, I told her, I was only a poor, working student who was distantly related to the family, but, anyway, that wasn't what mattered; what mattered was that after ten years my desire to meet her again had finally been fulfilled. Stay here tonight so we can talk, I said, working myself into quite a state of excitement. My romanticism meant nothing to the woman, however. She said she couldn't stay because she was "soiled." I misunderstood her meaning, and her words had a tremendous impact on me. I edged still closer to her.

"What are you talking about?" I said. "I'm not the same person I was, either. I'm a mass of scars! I know you've suffered. Well, so have I. I'm soiled, too! You needn't feel inferior because of some dark cloud in your past!" There was even a sob in my voice.

She didn't stay. She was a fatuous thing. The real reason she left never occurred to me. I was convinced it was because she was ashamed of her status as a fallen woman.

Now, of course, I realize what she meant about being "soiled." That callow, hasty misconstruction of mine strikes me as sad in a complex sort of way, but the memory of that night is by no means repugnant to me. I even feel a certain tender affection for the naive young man who fervently shouted, "But I'm soiled, too!" An idealist, that is most certainly what I am. Laugh with scorn if you will—or can.

