

MIKOŁAJ MELANOWICZ

Warszawa

NARRATOR AND CHARACTER IN JAPANESE PROSE A DISCUSSION BASED ON TANIZAKI JUN'ICHIRO'S WORK

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886—1965) was a great writer, authority and admirer of his native culture and language. He was intrigued and fascinated by the culture which assimilated the heritage of the Chinese and European thought, without losing its identity. Although a subject to numerous changes, and enriched with new values in each new epoch, it has preserved something constant, possible to trace from the deep Middle Ages up to the present time, and recognized as specifically Japanese.

Tanizaki repeatedly spoke on the specific features of the cultures of the East, having in mind particularly Japanese culture, and showed the complexity of assimilation of a foreign culture by the native one.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, Tanizaki was influenced by the European and American trends, but after 1923 he discovered the taste of the rich culture of his own country. Not all layers of cultural heritage, however, interested him in the same degree, not all of them contributed to the content and form of his work and played equally significant role. Hence, the realization of the principal cultural sources will be particularly helpful for the proper understanding of Tanizaki's work. Therefore, the court-prose of the 10—12th centuries was of particularly great importance for the writer, especially *monogatari* and its main representative the novel *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, XI c.).¹ As regards the epoch of the domination of the samurai culture (XIII—XVI) war tales, *nō* theatre and partly *kyōgen* farce should be mentioned here. *Kusazōshi* (illustrated booklets), *yomihon* (books for reading), and *ninjobon* (books of passions), belonging to the abundant prose of the bourgeoisie epoch, together with *kabuki* theatre and the puppet theatre of the same period (XVII—XIX) were of no less importance for

¹ *The Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki, transl. from Japanese by A. Waley, New York 1960.

the final shape of his plays, short stories and novels. As regards the Chinese culture, the influence of the classical Chinese language and the medieval Chinese novel can be detected. Also European prose (O. Wilde, E. A. Poe, H. Balzac, Stendhal, and others) and the drama and film of the beginning of the 20th century played no less significant role. In contrast to Kawabata Yasunari, however, the traditional lyrical poetry and Zen philosophy had a minor part in the formation of the writer's sensibility. Neither greater interest in the Confucianism can be noticed, in contrast to Mori Ōgai, the writer of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In general, the author of the *Diary of a Mad Old Man*² was never fascinated by the ethic which limited human passions or the aesthetic of rigorous simplicity. We shall not find in his work the complex buddhist philosophy or apologetics, although the premises of the buddhistic outlook on life and the customs which accompany important events in people's life, often of the past epochs, are present. Thus, we have the work of the writer who was familiar with the rich heritage of at least ten centuries, and appreciated its significance for his country's contemporary life. He not only participated actively in the dialogue with the tradition, but also acquired accepting much of the heritage and familiarizing with it his contemporary and future readers.

In Tanizaki's almost 80 years long life, 3 periods can be distinguished in conjunction with the places in which he used to live: 1) Tōkyō Period (until 1923), 2) Kansai Period, viz. the period of his stay in Kyōto, and in the vicinity of this ancient capital (1923—1950) and 3) Atami Period (1950—1965). This division is useful for the description of his output, however, not always sufficient. Alterations of style and content in a literary work of art are not necessarily paralleled with the corresponding changes of place of dwelling. But doubtlessly, the year 1923 was decisive both for the writer's life and the formation of his sensibility. It marks the boundary between the two sources of cultural inspirations: the culture of Kantō (Tōkyō) and—on the other hand—the culture of Kansai, rooted in medieval courtly one. Similarly, the year 1923—the date of the great earthquake in Tokyo and its surroundings—marks the end of his intensive and active interest in European culture and begins his deeper interest in the native one.

If we, however, attempt to consider the characteristics of his work, exclusively, and on this basis to establish a periodization the principal boundary will shift to about 1927—1928 viz. the publication of his essays entitled *Jōzetsuroku* (*The Talkative Chronicle*) and the first parts of the

² *Fūten rōjin nikki* transl. into English by H. Hibbett, see *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, Tokyo 1969. Transl. into Polish by M. Melanowicz in the volume *Dziennik szalonego starca. Niektórzy wolą pokrzywy* (*Diary of a Mad Old Man. Some Prefer Nettles*), Warszawa 1972.

novel entitled *Manji* (*Buddhistic Swastika*, 1928–1930). Translation of *Sannin hōshi* (*The Three Monks*, 1929),³ short story of the 17th century, and publication of *Tade kuu mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*, 1929)⁴ would be then the threshold of a new period called classicistic (*koten jidai*). We might assume that this period ended in 1941 with the translation of *Genji monogatari* into modern Japanese. The new period (since 1942) is characterized by his return to contemporary themes. The masterpieces of the period are: *Sasameyuki* (*Snowflakes*, 1942–1948),⁵ *Kagi* (*The Key*, 1956),⁶ *Fūten rōjin nikki* (*The Diary of a Mad Old Man*, 1962) and the novel *Shōshō Shigemoto no haha* (*General Shigemoto's Mother*, 1950) representing the classicistic trend. In this way we might divide Tanizaki's work into the following stages:

1. Modernistic Period (1910–1926) characterized by the considerable influence of the European literature, in particular O. Wilde's aestheticism. Early (1910–1923) and Transitional (1923–1926) Periods can be distinguished here.

2. Classicistic Period (1927–1941) characterized by the discovery and interpretation of the native culture.

3. Period of Return to the Present (1942–1965) with all the main themes of the previous periods. The problem of the role of sex in human life is emphasized here.

The proposed periodization of Tanizaki's work is very schematic and preliminary in character. Perhaps no classification would be free of criticism due to the fact that all through his life Tanizaki was faithful to several themes-obsessions—from the first short stories and plays until the last novels he considered the problem and role of beauty in human life, relation between art and life, love and sado-masochistic inclinations, he revealed nostalgia for his dead mother, femal physical beauty, he thought of life and death in youth as well as in the old age.

The following considerations will mainly be based on the material contained in the works of the Classicistic Period. We shall subsume under our speculations critical essays, novels and stories. At first, let us look closely at his critical and essayistic works.

Essays and sketches concerning the problem of the Eastern culture in confrontation with the West constitute a very important part of the output of this period. Much attention is also paid to the novel, which

³ *Sannin hōshi* (*The Three Monks*)—abridged translation see *Anthology of Japanese Literature, from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* compiled and edited by D. Keene, New York 1955.

⁴ *Tade kuu mushi* transl. into English by E. G. Seidensticker, see *Some Prefer Nettles*, New York 1960. Polish translation (see note 2).

⁵ *Sasameyuki* (*Snowflakes*) transl. into English by E. G. Seidensticker under the title *The Makioka Sisters*, Tokyo 1972.

⁶ *Kagi*—transl. into English by H. Hibbett under the title *The Key*, 1962.

is of particular interest for this paper. Tanizaki's most important critical works of this period are: *Jōzetsuroku* (*The Talkative Chronicle*, 1927), *In'ei raisan* (*The Praise of Shadow*, 1933–1934),⁷ *Bunshō tokuhon* (*The Handbook of Style*, 1934) and such essays as: *Gendai kōgobun-no ketten-ni tsuite* (*On the Weaknesses of Contemporary Japanese Language*, 1929), *Ren'ai oyobi shikijō* (*Love and Sex*, 1931), *Watakushi no mita Ōsaka oyobi Ōsakajin* (*Osaka and Its Citizens as I See Them*, 1932), *Tōkyō o omou* (*I Recall Tokyo*, 1934) and others.

CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE PLOT IN THE NOVEL

Jōzetsuroku is a collection of essays published between January–December 1927 in the magazine "Kaizō". The very first part of this *Talkative Chronicle* attracted the attention of the readers by its brave praise of the popular novel entitled *Daibosatsu tōge* (*The Pass of the Great Buddha*) by Nakazato Kaizan (1885–1944), considered the author of the so-called mass novels, which were of no interest for the contemporary critics. Tanizaki's interest and defence of this kind of literature meant appreciation of the literary values it possessed, and what is more—was a protest against the narrowmindedness of the contemporary critics. In this time a controversy with Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) who published then an essay entitled *Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na* (*Literary, Too Much Literary*) began. However it did not last long—as we know in July 1927 Akutagawa committed suicide.

The principal objective of the controversy was the problem of the role of the plot in the novel, the plot understood as the chain of events in a literary work of art. Tanizaki favoured the novel with the plot and attributed particular significance to the sequence and mutual connection of events. He declared himself against the novel typical of the late Japanese naturalists, often constructed of loosely connected sketches from the author's personal life and his surroundings, utilizing mainly description and narration. He did not attack Akutagawa, since he had no reason to. Akutagawa—like Tanizaki—often employed materials included in documents and native classical works. He also wrote short stories in which plot had a very important function. However, during a few months preceding his death, physically and mentally exhausted, he started to write autobiographical sketches. In this time his chief interest was the writer as a critic and a thinker, and did not attribute particular importance to composing a "normal novel". The truth of the writers inner life in confrontation

⁷ *In'ei raisan*—in English *Beauty in Shadows*, "Contemporary Japan", 1942, vol. no. 1; *Praise of Shadows*, trans. by E. G. Seidensticker, "Atlantic Monthly", January 1955; "Japan Quarterly", 1955, vol. I, no. 1 (data from *Modern Japanese Literature in Western Translations. A Bibliography*, Tokyo 1972).

with the outer world, was of greater concern to him. Tanizaki meditated over the style of his future works, his interest drifting towards the old Japanese novel (*monogatari*). He maintained that a modern novel—like the ancient one—should be fictitious, and not the immediate description of reality. “Lately I’ve felt a strange inclination; while writing or reading other authors works I’m not interested in them if they are not fictitious [*uso*—lie]. I do not intend to read or write employing facts, that is realistically,”⁸ he says in *Jōzetsuroku*. Further on he writes that he does not read contemporary works because they contain no fiction. He rejects them after a few pages, when he notices that the author speaks about himself and his background. Tanizaki admits that he prefers them to take a work about the past times, or distant events: for example *Dai-bosatsu tōge*, G. Moore’s *Heloïse and Abélard*, or Stendhal’s *Parmenian Hermitage*. He quotes Akutagawa’s view, decreasing the role of the plot in the novel and emphasizes that he is of different opinion, because of the thrill of combining things into one whole, the charm of structure, of architectural beauty that are hidden in the plot. Architectural beauty in literature is best embodied in the novel. Hence, what is the privilege of the genre can not be rejected. And the weakness of the Japanese novel is just its inability to combine the complexity of events into one structural unity—claims Tanizaki, having sound reasons. From the point of view of the development of the European novel Tanizaki can be accused of conservatism or an attempt to converse the undergoing changes, the essence of which was to degradate the plot in the 20th century. However, in the context of the development of Japanese literature Tanizaki’s announcement had a deeper sense. On the one hand Tanizaki postulated for maintenance of the best tradition of the native novel, and on the other hand, opposed the principal weaknesses of the development of Japanese contemporary prose, and the underappreciation of the plot and episodic character, impressionism not subjected to rigorous rules of composition—the weak points, particularly, of the so-called I-novel. Probably the tradition of intimate diaries (*nikki*) and literary sketches (*zuihitsu*) of the early Middle Ages (from the 11th c.) was revived in the genre of the I-novel (*watakushi shōsetsu*) transforming it into a diary of impressions and speculations of the characters and the narrator. The remedium, in this situation, could only be the restoration of the importance of the plot which had performed a significant function in the composition of the court novels (X—XII) and numerous variations of modern novel of Edo Period. Since the Japanese novel was inferior to European novel with respect to its composition, Tanizaki could only turn to European tradition in order to formulate his views. He was not only familiar

⁸ *Jōzetsuroku*, see Tanizaki Jun’ichirō *zenshū* (TJZ), Tokyo 1958, vol. 16, p. 162.

with E. A. Poe and O. Wilde, but also H. Balzac and Stendhal. He wrote plays and screen-plays being fully aware that much of the artistic value of a piece of art is dependent on the elaborate combination of events. Years before European literature convinced him about that, in the late twenties he also found arguments in the native tradition.

PECULIARITIES OF THE JAPANESE NOVEL

Much more attention is paid to literature by Tanizaki in his review of the novel by Nagai Kafū entitled *Tsuyu no atosaki* (*During the Rains*, 1931).⁹ He reminds us that the novel had begun to play an important role since the time of Meiji (exactly since the end of the 19th century) under the influence of the western literature. In contrast to this new form of artistic prose (*shōsetsu*—*novelette*, short story, novel) the early medieval *monogatari* (tale, short story, novel) presented human life and customs of his epoch employing fictitious characters—holds Tanizaki. The author of *monogatari* introduced in his work several or even more characters, established spatio-temporal relations among them disconnected with the dimensions of the author's world. He did not reveal himself directly in the works, he did not appear in the presented world as one of the characters. The author behaved as if he had been using a mirror to reflect the world moving before him. The writer did not look into his characters psyche. He simply made the characters appear on the stage, talk, move; the events accumulated and piled up and due to these the shape of the changing life was attained. As if on a painting scroll, a much valued form of art then. It was in this sense that the outstanding writers were employing the technique of objective description, withholding their subjective opinions on the events and characters. Presenting thrills and bitterness of life on various examples they elicited the impression of authentic experience in the reader, thus enriching his views and feelings.

After these considerations Tanizaki adds that such novels are also to be found in the West, but—he emphasizes—in the East almost all writers wrote like this, in Japan as well as in China. The point is that the older Japanese writers put more emphasize on the plot (*suji*) often not bothering about the internal or external description of characters. They moved their characters from stage to stage like pawns on the chess-board. Although the interest in the dialogue increased near the end of Tokugawa epoch, called also Edo (XVIII—XIX), the individuality of the speaker was still of no concern to the writer. Tanizaki does not think that this attitude resulted from the immaturity of the writing technique. It was rather the dominating in the East tendency to view man as a part of nature and treat him in description like "grass, trees or stones."

⁹ "Tsuyu no atosaki" o yomu see TJZ, vol. 22, p. 55—76.

Tanizaki suggests that this attitude might have been derived from the thought of Lao-tsy,¹⁰ though he refrains from further developing of this interesting suggestion. One should not, however, conclude from the above that the novel in China and Japan developed in similar ways. In its earliest period the Japanese novel (tale, story) began and developed without the help of the Chinese one, which emerged a few centuries later.¹¹ But doubtlessly one can speak of a certain similarity in the treatment of characters as an integral part of great Nature, and also of the resulting from it, according to European criteria, weakness in characterology. In both traditions there is lack of dramatic tension accompanying man in his struggle against destiny, lack—so to speak—of conflict between the mutually exclusive existential levels—conflict of opposing ultimate values, which might be considered as a distinguishing factors of the tragic vision of the created world. There are, no doubt, resemblances between the classical Japanese novel of the 10–12th centuries and the Chinese one, but there are also great discrepancies, from which the lyrical factor and poetic mood in the old Japanese prose, and the objectivity and realism of description in Chinese ought to be mentioned. It should not be forgotten that we are discussing here the Japanese prose of the 10–12th and the Chinese of the 14–16th centuries.

The views on the novel which we find in the paper entitled *Ren'ai oyobi shikijō* (*Love and Sex*) are of interest for us. Not without reasons Tanizaki claims that the greatest influence of the European literature in Japan is visible in the so-called “liberation of love” or more precisely “liberation of sex.”¹² As we know, love in European literature is an all-embracing theme—not much of literature would be left provided all love events and motifs were removed. On the other hand the situation in China is entirely different. In the old Chinese prose and poetry not much is said about love of man and woman. Even in the works of such outstanding poets like Li Po (701–762) or Tu Fu (712–770) instead of love we find the motif of sadness evoked by parting with a friend. In the East—observes Tanizaki—love and love desires were only eluded to: this being one of the dogmas of the good artistic taste.

However, it would be erroneous to infer from the above generalization that there are neither descriptions of love, nor erotism in the Japanese literature from before the 19th century. In the period XVII–XIX love and erotic literature belonged to entertainment, and was considered

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹ If we assume that *San-kuo-chih-yen-i* (*History of Three Kingdoms*) was the first fully developed Chinese novel then the first Japanese novel *Utsubo monogatari* (*Tale about a Hollow in a Tree Trunk*) was written 4 centuries earlier. In different conditions and for different readers novels in Japan (aristocracy) and China (by middle class for middle class) were written.

¹² TJZ, vol. 17, p. 202.

inferior. This epoch has not created great love symbols comparable with European Beatrice and Laura. Love to woman as presented in literature, was not granted the same rank as in Europe, it remained in the province of inferior affairs, not deserving great poetic exultation and absolutizations. And the reason was perhaps the exceptionally low social position of woman in that society. Since the 13th century the woman was gradually becoming almost a slave and to adore her with love and affection was in disagreement with the ethic of chivalry. Man's inclination for woman would degradate him as a knight (*samurai*). In Medieval Europe—as we know—manhood and chivalry were never contradictory with kneeling before woman, they were rather mutually nobilitating. However, tales, intimate diaries and poetry proved that in Japanese literature before the 13th century women were respected by men who treated them as beings dear and worthy of poetic passions. Love gave origin to thousands of “short songs” (*tanka*), was a theme of many a chapter in tales, stories or anecdotes. There was no room in this literature either for overt erotism nor for explicit praise or description of female body, because nakedness was considered repulsive. A change in this respect came in the 17th century, simultaneously with the development of both middle class culture and the degradation of woman's social position. It was Ihara Saikaku (1642–1693) who expressed his overt admiration for nakedness, admiration for the femal beauty, on the pages of the novels of human passions. Love as presented by him is neither burdened with fear of God nor fear of committing sin. It is neither patronized nor condemned by God. It gives opportunity to experience the total joy of physical love, but provides no condition for it to be absolutized. The hero (Yonosuke)¹³ does not need overcome either woman's resistance, hypocrisy or social prejudices, like Don Juan for instance. He makes love with women destined for giving love. The same writer presents a different love in his later works—let us call it romantic love—bringing not only joy and physical pleasure, but also defeat and death. Human passion comes into conflict with various forms of obligation and social restrictions. Nonetheless, in both cases woman, as the object of love desires, does not even regain the position she held in Heian Period, and in particular in *Genji monogatari*. It was no sooner than in the second half of the 19th century—suggests Tanizaki—that the poetry of romantic poets grouped round the journal „Bungakukai” (“Literary World”) and “Myōjō” (“Morning Star”) and the prose of naturalists of the beginning of the 20th century brought a new vision of love, sexual desires and woman. Together with the nobilitation of the novel—degraded since the 17th century—comes a nobilitation of love as one of its themes.

¹³ Yonosuke—hero of Ihara Saikaku's novel *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* (*The Life of a Man Who Lived for Love*).

If we consider Tanizaki's prose in the above context, it will not be difficult to notice that his literary vision of love and woman takes inspiration from three major sources: the cult of beauty in Heian Period (particularly *The Tale of Genji*), enchantment with the beauty of female body in Ihara Saikaku's work, and the vision of woman in European tradition (her superiority to all other beings of this world and even demonization). In Tanizaki's work just woman symbolizes beauty creative as well as destructive, but never unimportant in human life. In the early period, his ideal was the woman conscious, particularly, of her physical attributes—not only beautiful and humble but also active, independent, breaking social and moral constraints. About such woman the poets and writers dreamt—contemporary of young Tanizaki—as he admits himself. But such change in life—from a submissive woman in the feudal epoch, to the emancipated one—was not possible in one or two generations. Literature is a reflection of reality, but at the same time the former exceeds the latter by a step—holds the writer.¹⁴ Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) presented in his novels a woman conscious and independent, but in real life they were rarely met. It was rather a postulate—in agreement with Tanizaki's aspirations—than a description of reality. In the next period, classicistic, Tanizaki sought the ideal of beautiful woman in the native tradition—which is attested by the stories and novels of this period and the writer's private life.¹⁵ To create the vision of his heroines—especially in historical novels—he had to go back to documents. But he encountered great difficulties here. Since it was considered embarrassing to express love openly in the Samurai Middle Ages, the preserved love letters are rather unique. What is more, there is no fundamental information on famous beauties connected with known historical persons. It is often not certain who was the legitimate wife of a chief or aristocrat. Though the data concerning male offsprings were carefully noted in family chronicles, there were no female names or surnames included. They simply noted "woman" or "daughter"—without names and dates of birth. The preserved portraits of contemporary beauties are stereotypic, devoid of individual features. Bearing this in mind, it would be easier to understand the poor characterization of heroines in Tanizaki's historical novels.

But there is even more serious reason for such a treatment of heroines (and also heroes), writes Tanizaki in *Love and Sex*. The point is that one of more important principles of upbringing and educating was suppressing of individuality, control of words and gestures, and non-revealing emotions. Since the Middle Ages the above was compulsory for wom-

¹⁴ TJZ, vol. 17, p. 204.

¹⁵ See M. Melanowicz, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō*. „Przegląd Orientalistyczny”, 1974, nr 4/92.

en, who were taught to conceal their emotions and subject to the accepted model of virtue. And the ancestors had always possessed such model. It was also the duty of pupils, whose principal was to be on the level with the masters. No doubt, it was one of the reasons of permanence of traditional norms and the scarce individual description of characters in novels.

NARRATOR AND TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN TANIZAKI'S PROSE

In classical Japanese tale and novel the third person narration was dominant, which unequivocally determined the role and place of the narrator. His authoritative position gave him complete control over the world genetically dependent on him. His characteristic was the complete knowledge of the world he was talking about. Knowing the fates of the characters at their very birth, possibility of appearance of new characters about which the acting character could not know yet, the narrator expressed his fortune-teller's power, alluding to persons and events which were to appear and take place many years later.¹⁶ He had at his disposal a sort of Divine Power, not requiring further justification. Such position of the narrator had also been dominant in the European realistic novel until the 19th century, even today it constitutes the principle of the structure of narration not only in the "traditional novel." In Japanese court tales narration was impersonal, making it possible for the created world to be presented objectively, as if reflected in the mirror. Because the plot was frequently not dominant, the central point of view of the narrator shifted with the change of the complexes of events. However, the authoritativeness of the description of what the characters do, and what the world they live in is like, did not change. The narrator did not specify precisely the temporal and spatial boundaries of this world. He permitted many subplots and events, and the gaps which resulted allowed for speculations, hence additional suggestions concerning other possible events, missing in the novel.

We said above that the narrator in the classical Japanese novel describes the world which moves before his eyes, as if it were moving in front of the mirror. It excludes or at least limits considerably—the possibility of presenting the world as seen by the characters of the novel, which is provided by the oldest form of Japanese artistic prose. We mean here intimate diaries (*nikki*),¹⁷ which flourished at the time of maturity of the

¹⁶ See I. Morris, *Świat Księcia Promienistego*, transl. by T. Szafar, Warszawa 1973, p. 257 (in English *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life of Japan*, Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹⁷ On *nikki* see ZRL, 1973, vol. XVI, nr 2 (31).

tale and court novel (X—XI); In *nikki*—as in some literary sketches (*zuihitsu*)—there is a personal narrator observing the outer world and the inner one from his limited perspective. Thus, so characteristic for the court *monogatari*,¹⁸ distance between the narrator's speech and characters is lost. The narrator's opinions are basically relative. Narrator addresses directly the receiver—in contrast to his "go-between" function in the novel. Moreover, he talks as a rule (there are also exceptions) about the present moment, about his time. He is also the hero of his story.

The distance in *monogatari* is due not only to the superior position of the narrator to the presented world. It is provided not only by the narrator in the function of the character of the presented world, but in the function of a "go-between" between this world and the times of the reader. Story refers to the past exclusively, about which the narrator is well informed. When everything to be narrated is already the past, problems and character's fates are determined. The narrator tells of what possibly had occurred some time ago, in more or less distant past. With the progressing narration he will be approaching the times of the reader, but he will never cross the temporal boundary between the past and his (narrator's) present. Similarly in oral tales, legends and myths, from which *monogatari* had possibly emerged.

If, bearing in mind the above features of the narrator, we look at Tanizaki's works written in the classicistic period, we shall notice that the patterns adopted from the tradition and utilized or proposed by the author are more varied. Third person narration (auctoral) is employed in four, out of ten works taken under consideration, viz. *Tade kuu mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*), *Rangiku monogatari* (*The Tale of the Dispersed Chrysanthemum*, 1930), *Bushū kō hiwa* (*Secret Story about the Lord of Musashi*, 1935)¹⁹ and *Neko to Shōzō to futari no onna* (*Cat, Shōzō and Two Women*, 1936). The third person narrator determines the final outlook of such known, though not analyzed here, novels like *Sasameyuki* (the title of American translation *The Makioka Sisters*) and *Shōshō Shigemoto no haha* (*General Shigemoto's Mother*).

The narrator in *Tade kuu mushi*, who is located beyond the created world shifts the central (as if the author's) point of view from one group of characters (Kaname—Misako) to the other (Kaname—Ohisa—father-in-law). A similar kind of the narrator can be found in *Neko to Shōzō...* and in *Rangiku...*, however in the latter we may detect the multitude of perspectives of narration, which change almost with every alteration of places and characters. This, of course, excludes unity and coherence of the work, making it a series of episodic tales. In *Bushū kō hiwa* there

¹⁸ On *monogatari* see ZRL, 1975, vol. XVIII, nr 1 (34), p. 118—126.

¹⁹ *Bushū kō hiwa*—transl. into Italian by A. R. Suga under the title *Vita segreta del Signore di Bushu*, Milano 1970.

is the first person narrator (author's narration) with a limited knowledge, who reconstructs and interprets the created world. Hence, changeability of the point of view which is common with classical *monogatari*, is also characteristic of the majority of mentioned works, in particular of popular novel viz. *Rangiku monogatari*. Though the narrator in *Bushū kōhiwa* is in the third person, he qualitatively differs from his classical prototype. He addresses the reader many times, thus he identifies with the author. He is not omniscient, his competence is limited by the historical sources. Although his story refers to the distant past, still the formal device combining this past with the narrator, chronicle, is preserved.

With the works with the first person narrator the matter is even more complex. Here the author makes the most interesting experiments, connecting elements of classical form with the contemporary. In the novel *Manji*, the woman-narrator relates her experiences, at the present moment, to her listener, called by her "sensei" (master, teacher, doctor, tutor). The novel has the form of an oral confession of a person, who is one of the characters of the novel. In the story *Mōmoku monogatari* (*A Blind Man's Tale*, 1931)²⁰ the narrator is located in the past and also relates his past experiences to the listener, called by him "danna" (master). His story is a monologue with the characteristic retrospections and forerunnings. As regards the structure of narration, it reminds more closely of slavie *skaz*. In *Yoshino kuzu* (*Arrowroots of Yoshino*, 1931) the contemporary existing narrator also recalls the events from his not so distant past. In the course of the narration he also functions as a hero-listener. A similar form was employed more consequently in *Ashikari* (*I Feel Bad without You...*, 1932),²¹ in which the contemporary narrator recalls the past events and he changes into the hearer of the main tale of the Narrator II. In *Shunkinshō* (*A Portrait of Shunkin*, 1933)²² the contemporary narrator reconstructs the character's past on the bases of a fictitious document and the witness' testimony. He is a kind of a researcher investigating the preserved relicts in order to know the by-gone world. Author-narrator in *Kikigakishō* (*A Collection of Narrated Tales*, 1935) behaves like a historian who brings out of a document important from his point of view matters, arranges them and interprets. The main line of the story has the previous narrators fixed in the document. The narrator often reminds of the author, especially when he comments on how to write novels, often he identifies with him.

²⁰ *Mōmoku monogatari*—transl. into English by H. Hibbett, see *A Blind Man's Tale*, [in:] *Seven Japanese Tales*, New York 1965.

²¹ *Ashikari and the Story of Shunkin*, transl. into English by R. Humpherson and Hajime Okita, Tokyo 1936. Polish translation by M. Melanowicz in: *Dwie opowieści o miłości okrutnej*, Warszawa 1971.

²² *A Portrait of Shunkin*, [in:] *Seven Japanese Tales*.

It also follows from the above survey that the story based on a colloquial monologue plays an important role in the structure of the narration (*Mōmoku monogatari*, *Manji*, *Yoshino kuzu*, *Ashikari*, *Kikigakishō*) which itself is different from the majority of classical *monogataris* of the 10th and 11th centuries. It does not mean, however, that in the native classical prose Tanizaki did not find similar, inspiring sources. For instance, one of the historical novels, so-called "mirror" *Ōkagami* (*The Great Mirror*, XI) has the form of a tale of two old men in the presence of a group of listeners in a temple. There was the narrator among the listeners, who as if took down the tale. It seems, however, that it was the frame story of the kind *otogizōshi* (fairy tales) entitled *Sannin hōshi* (*The Three Monks*, XV) which Tanizaki translated into modern Japanese, that made him consider the form of the old novels—early as well as late medieval. For this reason it deserves our attention here. In the introduction to this work Tanizaki informed that the author and the place at which it was written are unknown. It is not outstanding—he admits—written in not too elaborated style, but is distinguished by an interesting composition of the tale of the three monks. It is for the composition that the work should be granted much literary value. This opinion is an evidence for his particular interest in this work for its composition exclusively. Let us look closer at it.

There live some people at the Kōya Mountain, who disillusioned with secular life, devote their time to religious practice. One evening, three of such hermits met and one of them proposed, instead of meditating, to talk about the reasons for which they had rejected their previous life. This part of the work has the third person narration. The next part consists of the first person monologues, constituting the history of the three monks, narrated directly in the form of a confession. The closing word is by the third person narrator, who informs about the conclusions the hermits drew from their own stories. They declared that the evil is the other side of the good.

As in this 15th century story, the main contents and plots of the works involved are included in these monologues-confessions. The auctorial narrator presenting the situation was substituted by the personal one or eliminated. Thus, the following three types of structure of narration were created:

A. Narrator I (I) and Narrator II (I). The second is at the same time a character (in *Ashikari*).

B. Narrator I (I) who brings plots out of documents (a) in *Shunkinshō*, or the narrator animates new narrators presenting story (b) in *Kikigakishō*.

C. Narrator (I), a character too, directly relating events at the presence of the listener in *Mōmoku monogatari* and *Manji*.

In A and B the writer employs and transforms the classical model of the frame story, in case of C—model of personal narration.

As we mentioned earlier, Tanizaki who was against the I-novel did not reject the first person narration. He was also well acquainted with the formal changes of the European prose. The turn to the first person narration—as we know—appeared one of the most significant changes of the novel in the end of the 19th century in Europe²³ and in the beginnings of the 20th century in Japan (late naturalism, modernism). It is a commonplace that this form of narration is not the invention of the 19th or 20th centuries, it was also known in the 18th century (Fielding): it was rejected by the great realistic writers of the 19th century. In the 3rd person narration the point of view of the narrator can be arbitrarily changed and shifted to various characters and places, it is then the matter of choice. In the personal novel (I person) it is obligatory, closely connected with the narrator, who—depending on the ideology and assumptions of the author—can represent a document from the character-narrator's life or his confession of experiences and viewpoints. Thus the direction of evolution from documentary to confession is characteristic of the development of the Japanese naturalism, one of the significant consequences of which was the I-novel. Tanizaki attempts to overcome this danger of destruction of the composition of the novel and changing it into a series of sketches on everyday and hopeless life of a given person (author?). The inclination of personal prose to human documentation and impressionistic characterization Tanizaki overcomes by means of the nobilitation of the old fashioned plot, by introducing additional narrators based on many century tradition of medieval monk-tellers and their reflection in the form of written literature. The third essential and determining the character method was providing him with inclination to learning the truth about the world and people of the by-gone times (*Shun-kinshō*).

The personal novel uses often non-fictitious forms like diary, journal, letter and relation of an eye witness. This view is supported by Tanizaki's prose—not mentioned here and not falling within the scope of our considerations, the masterpiece *Fūten rōjin nikki* (*Diary of a Mad Old Man*) and *Kagi* (*The Key*). We mean here particularly the imitation of the sanctioned in the respective culture non-fictitious works. Diary, chronicle, journal or the relation of a witness are often historical in character and support in Tanizaki's work the truth of personal narration—by nature tending to be subjective. It should be emphasized that Tanizaki brought to perfection the method of using fictitious documents (the same device was employed earlier by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke in his tale *Hōkyōnin no shi*, *The Death of the Christian*, 1918) and less known historical sources. Employing historical or fictitious documents he attributed particular

²³ See M. Głowiński, *Powieść młodopolska*, Wrocław 1969, p. 192.

importance to his narrator: a) narrator's task was not only to say what, where and why?, b) he had to be active—discovering, classifying and interpreting facts from the past. Though Tanizaki's narrator was modeled according to the principal traditional trends of court-novel and court intimate diaries of the 11th century, the influence of European tradition cannot be denied.

CHARACTERS IN TANIZAKI'S PROSE AND TRADITIONAL SOURCES

As far as social influence of the novel is concerned, realistic as well as historical of the 19th century (and its consequence in the 20th century) in Europe, it was the characters not the narrator that played the most important role. They are characterized by their immediate actions, description of their behaviour, description of outer and inner features. Much room is devoted to the description of the features of outer appearance as the premises for psychological analysis, transformed many a time into an elaborated and introspective treatment of mental states and complications. The heroes' relations with other characters and also with the outside world were exposed. The characters became types or individuals representing respective social, class groups. They became the carriers of the principal problems of the 19–20th centuries with their obsessions, fears, hopes, questions about the elementary and ultimate truths. They fought against God or sought Him, experienced class crises, clashes between the ideal and the reality. In the arrangement of character's fates, a tendency to tragic solutions, leading to death or unjust misfortune can be observed.²⁴ So they are the carriers of a particular conception of human fate, to which the plot and their solutions are subjected.

Against this background Tanizaki's characters are not equally imposing: they do not effect the reader with their greatness or tragic vision of fate. First of all, Tanizaki introduces a limited number of characters in the mentioned works. He also limits their relations with other members of society. They move in the world which is as if delimited from the particular society, nation, country, or even class or group. The extremes at which they act, disappear in indefiniteness, as if in the darkness. In fact, the characters often live in the world of darkness—often as the blind—in total darkness. Many important events take place at night. It is only then that the main characters are visible—everything else around is drawn in darkness. Even by day, the same principle is observed—the surroundings are hidden in mist, human face is devoid of sharp expressiveness, as if in mist. This treatment of characters and space in which

²⁴ On H. Sienkiewicz's novels for instance see T. Bujnicki, *Trylogia Sienkiewicza na tle tradycji polskiej powieści historycznej*, Wrocław 1973, p. 97.

they exist and act is the outcome of the specific concept of culture and also of the novel. The author discusses this issue in *In'ei raisan* (*The Praise of Shadow*), the volume devoted to criticism of culture. Frequently referring to examples, particularly to architecture, Tanizaki says that the Japanese do not like glittering objects, instead they prefer dull colours, as if patinated. In contact with such objects, heart rests better. Doubtlessly there are colourful objects in Japanese culture, but the beauty of their colours emanates in darkness not by daylight. It was in the darkness that the Japanese discovered beauty. "The Mysticism of the East", about which they talk in the West probably means the silence of darkness, which often evokes the feeling of coldness and fear. Golden screens, colourful pots and clothes would have a spotlight like function. Since the Late Court Period the female body, often clothed and almost locked in the depth of pavilions, was also hidden in darkness. Near the end of his speculations Tanizaki says:

Beauty is not hidden in the object itself [*buttai*] but in the design of shade, that arises among objects, or more simply, beauty lies in the interplay of darkness and light.²⁵

Tanizaki wanted to revive in literature this already disappearing world of shadow and darkness, in the 20th century civilization.

I wish to deepen — he writes in *In'ei raisan* — the eaves of the palace called literature, to darken the walls, to put into darkness the things which are too visible, to tear useless ornaments of the interiors. It need not be done all along the street, but I wish there were at least one such a house. What will it be like? I shall switch off the light for a test.²⁶

The author, however, did not state precisely how he imagined this world of darkness in literature would look like. From the examples described above, one may infer, that he meant to locate characters and events in darkness of space and time, to use colours and passions, to perceive beauty, in the relations between things—the elements of the world. He wants to show and perceive beauty—and meaning—suggested by the relations of the set of elements, and the impressiveness results not from precision of the description of things, but from the ambiguity of only sketched ones.

So the principal feature of Tanizaki's characterization is scarcity of means and concentration on suggesting a shape rather than univocal description. Neither physiognomy is paid more attention (with the exception of some women) nor the shape and expressions of face provide basis for psychological characterization. Only women are devoted a des-

²⁵ TJZ, vol. 22, p. 30: „Bi wa buttai ni aru no de wa naku, buttai to buttai to no tsukuridasu in'ei'no aya, mei'an ni aru to kangaeru.”

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

cription, very scarce however, often limited to an assertion of their beauty, and what sort of beauty it is. Often immediate means of characterization are employed: an old faded photograph, a portrait showing no individual features, the blind man's imagination, socially accepted norms suggesting a traditional type of beauty. Even less attention and room is given to the description of male characters. Little is known about their physiognomy, clothes and their virtues. It is only by locating them in a particular cultural circle and hints as to their age suggest the reader their hypothetical appearance.

Certain features of personality are drawn more strongly. But even in this case the author rarely characterizes his heroes directly by means of a description. The features of characters are revealed through behaviour, gestures, and situations but it does not mean they are a puzzle for the reader. The other characters' reactions in an individual and cultural situation explain it. The behaviour and deeds are not given one uniform evaluation, they rather suggest various possibilities of interpretation. Particularly female characters gain in certain aura of mystery and distance. The indefiniteness of their motifs moves them beyond the mediocrity of secondary characters, particularly men. In the reader's or even narrator's opinion they seem to belong to the world of higher rank (gods) who need not explain these or other decisions. So, through the scarce characterization the author gains justification for his cult and man's worship of woman.

The heroines of Tanizaki's early works (before *Manji*) are imperious, merciless and do not hide their inclinations and prejudices. They do not accept any social or moral norms, which might limit their passions. In fact, they attribute no particular importance to social morality. Their behaviour is neither moral nor immoral—according to the narrators. They follow in their behaviour their nature, not subjected to rigorous norms established by other people. It is for the beauty of their body together with outer stimuli of their activity that they are called demonic women and the works in which they appear belong to so-called diabolism.

Also bodily drives hidden in subconsciousness thus not observable in their normal social life, decide about the behaviour of heroines of the classical period. The difference is that the latter reveal neither their feeling nor their emotions. They were given the masks of classicistic beauties: their personalities are subjected to the principles of portraits of court ladies, samurai wives and daughters, stereotyped masks of *nō* theatre, faces of puppets from modern theatre (Oyū, Oichi, Ohisa, Kikyō, Shunkin). Passions were subjected to certain types, but they did not stop to decide about the motifs of behaviour and activity. The impulses hidden in darkness were revealed through specification of certain desires. Immediately after this indefinite force appeared, the fates of characters were determined. It is difficult to talk here about the change, develop-

ment or maturation of characters. Naturally the characters grow older, the situations in which they act accumulate but hero doesn't undergo any inner change, it remains basically the same to the very end. To frequent features of personality belong obsessions with beauty, lust for a woman of enormous beauty, masochistic tendency to sacrifice, sadistic inclination to ruling and tormenting. Neither Kaname, Sasuke and Shunkin nor Oyū or Yaichi recognize such notions like nation, state, fatherland, religion. Hence, they cannot decide about creation of attitudes, characters or ideologies. There are only cultural-aesthetic motivations and inner impulses hidden in darkness. The combination of the two is best represented in *Bushū kō hiwa*, when a beautiful girl washed the heads of the beheaded—a scene watched by the main character.

If there are any ultimate and absolute things for these characters, then they are connected with the cult of female beauty. There is no reflection in their lives, over the essence of existence, life, love or the existence of God. There is only pure life and pure love in the disguise of traditional aestheticism. Many heroes are characterized by the ages long anxiety for beauty, not for God. For them the concept of God—as it was said—does not exist.

Neither positive nor negative characters are found among them, since they do not embody moral values. Kaname, Misako, Ohisa etc. from *Some Prefer Nettles*, are neither positive nor negative. But the relations among them give raise to certain values preferred by the narrator which does not mean that he rejects others as bad and hostile. Similarly, in *Ashikari*, *Shunkinshō* and other works. Everyone is similarly predisposed to good and evil, greatness and smallness, like in *Bushū kō hiwa*. The system of rewards and punishments does not play any role here, because there is no moral basis for their distribution. So the principle typical of the late prose of Edo period: praise of the good and condemnation of the evil, according to the Confucian ethics, does not work here. Tanizaki did not accept indiscriminately moral and ethical norms of the past. What fascinated him in the past was first of all the forms of expressing beauty, forms of culture capable of serving modern man. Consequently, the character is an acting being rather than a thinking one—similarly with the majority of classical Japanese artistic prose. In his activity he is neither spontaneous nor changing the world: it is self-directed and realized in a passive attitude. There is, however, some force in this passivity which leads him in the appropriate direction. In Tanizaki's work that direction (for men) is most frequently hero's attempt to approach the ideal of the desired woman. Because he doesn't need overcome the fatum on his way, nor God's restrictions, because he does not experience mental conflicts, he is not above the average people. He does not realize that his every act is risky and may eventually end unsuccessfully. He is as if prepared for everything in ad-

vance. That Shunkin was deprived of her beauty was painful but no conflict or tragedy followed. Shunkin's death was not tragic for Sasuke, though he had loved her immensely. None of the characters rebels against fate, they rather live according to its judgements, above suffering and the horror of death. Hero is born and dies, he is killed and tortured — like in *Bushū kō hiwa* — but he is still able to overcome the misfortune. The situation, which might change into tragic, changes into a grotesque vision in Tanizaki's work, cf. *Manji* or *Bushū kō hiwa*. The classicistic character in Tanizaki's work is never defeated though seldom wins, possibly because he doesn't require more from the world than the latter can give him. Or perhaps he considers the changeability of fate and impermanence as necessary attributes of life. And if we are allowed to talk about his experiencing happiness, it is only with respect to his identification with another being or with Nature. It is through acceptance that the passive connection with the environment is achieved (nature, society)—viz. filling oneself with another being is for many characters what gives meaning to their life. There are no —we emphasize—divine ideals or for example patriotism.

In *Tade kuu mushi*, *Yoshino kuzu*, *Ashikari*, *Shunkishō* and other works the preferred characters do not identify themselves with conflicts with the state or fatherland or social class. They neither experience metaphysical anxieties: gods are neither source of strength, faith or hope, nor the severe judges who condemn and sentence. The characters do not claim to possess the ideal of faith in man, but do not condemn him either. They do not evaluate others according to the principle of religious faith, or to this or other political one. In judging others they do not use moral norms of good and bad, and even if their attitude may suggest evaluation according to the categories of good and bad, we shall not detect the struggle between these two elements in characters' lives, nor their mutual exclusiveness. Both categories are at most different aspects of the same problem—it depends on the point of view. There are no good and bad elements in the world of their existence. What concerns man is never considered in moral or metaphysical terms. What goes on is determined in different levels: existential and aesthetic and ethic levels. On the one hand we see man as he is born, his growing in years, illness and death of individual human body in which this natural, everlasting and cyclic process takes place. On the other hand, physical symptoms of life are subjected to aesthetic norms. Between the physical symptoms of life and its end, there is no room for such notions as evil, good, sin etc. Is human existence then equal with physical phenomena? Not exactly. Character's life is regulated by tolerance, sense of harmony and sympathy for the surrounding world of men and nature. It seems that the principal value here is the contact with another man, the most sublime form of which is love.

Let us recall that in *Genji monogatari*, the work representative for Heian Period, to which Tanizaki owes so much, the mood of sadness of life, sense of temporariness of life and love dominate, reluctance to human body and physical symptoms of life are clearly visible. In Kamakura epoch (XII–XIV) the motif of unity of love and religion dominates. After the 17th century, however, there are numerous examples of affirmation of love in literature—often through negation of life—and admiration for female body. Simultaneously, eroticism becomes a striking feature of the novel, and even of culture in general. For example Saikaku presents a healthy joy of love, strength and joy of physical life.

Against this background, Tanizaki-classicist's concept of love is close to this last epoch, in particular to Saikaku. There is, however, certain difference between them. Saikaku is more natural, even brutal, he shows lust and earthly pleasures more fully and openly. Tanizaki hesitates between the spiritual (moral) order and an unbounded lust for physical pleasures, in the classicistic period he even suppresses the symptoms of desire and lust of his characters. He assumes the elements of cult of beauty in *Genji monogatari*, the examples of beauty and of behaviour from the characters of the middle class drama of Edo Period. So that aestheticism plays important role in the concept of life as well as death. Aesthetic stereotypes go-between the characters and the reader. We do not learn about the "authentic" psychological conflicts and passions, through immediate narration—they are suggested by a sketchy presentation we may try to explain the character's gestures. Tanizaki is here in agreement with the very important system of Japanese aesthetic norms, observable in many fields of traditional culture. We mean particularly scarcity of words and other ways of presenting feelings, aestheticism of the presented world as the principal constituent of all humanistic values.

It must be emphasized that Tanizaki's treatment of characters is totally in agreement with traditional samples. Characters—to a greater degree than the narrator—reflect the strong connection of his work with native tradition. The structure of characters—elaborated in medieval and modern Japanese literature—is one of the principal elements distinguishing this literature from European and this confirms most clearly the Japanese origin of the works of the author of *Tade kuu mushi* and *Shunkishō*.

NARRATOR I POSTAĆ LITERACKA W PROZIE JAPOŃSKIEJ NA PRZYKŁADZIE TANIZAKI JUN'ICHIRO

STRESZCZENIE

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965), jeden z najwybitniejszych pisarzy japońskich, był znawcą i miłośnikiem rodzimej kultury, która wchłonęła dorobek myśli chińskiej

i europejskiej, a mimo to nie zatraciła własnej tożsamości. Tanizaki wielokrotnie wypowiadał się na temat cech specyficznych kultur Wschodu i ukazywał złożone problemy asymilacji kultury obcej przez własną.

Autor we wstępie artykułu ukazuje główne źródła rodzime pisarstwa Tanizakiego, poglądy pisarza na specyfikę kultury japońskiej oraz na rolę i kompozycję powieści w Japonii. Tanizaki szczególnie żywo interesował się formą klasycznej *monogatari* (opowieść, powieść, opowiadanie), która dla niego stała się głównym obszarem poszukiwań formalnych w latach 20- i 30-tych XX w. W klasycznej prozie japońskiej (począwszy od X w.) nie zwracano baczniejszej uwagi na charakterystykę wewnętrzną — a nawet zewnętrzną — postaci. Bohater w *monogatari* jawił się jako integralna częśćka opisywanej całości świata przyrody. Ponadto wychowanie na Wschodzie z zasady zmierzało do stłumienia cech indywidualnych człowieka, uczyło powściągliwości słów i gestów i nieujawniania emocji. Od XIII/XIV w. obowiązywało to zwłaszcza kobiety. Biorąc pod uwagę te i inne cechy kultury japońskiej autor analizuje strukturę i funkcję narratora w prozie Tanizakiego, porównując z klasycznym japońskim i europejskim. Następnie omawia bohatera literackiego i wydobywa cechy charakterystyczne: oszczędność środków kreacji postaci, posługiwanie się raczej sugerowaniem niż opisem, przedstawianie fizjonomii bohatera nie dającej podstaw do charakterystyki psychologicznej człowieka. Sens i motywy działania postaci są tu rzadko objaśniane — tłumaczą się one w relacjach z innymi osobami, w sytuacjach indywidualnych i kulturowych. Kobiety analizowanych utworów Tanizakiego otrzymały maski klasycznych piękności z portretów, teatru *nō* i teatru lalek. Jego bohaterowie nie są też nosicielami wartości moralnych — zwłaszcza wzajemnie się wykluczających. Postać kryje w sobie wszelkie możliwości — dobra i zła, choć te kategorie nie grają tu istotnej roli.

Struktura bohatera Tanizakiego, wiele zawdzięczająca średniowiecznej i nowożytnej literaturze japońskiej, jest jednym z głównych czynników różniących tradycyjną prozę japońską od europejskiej.

Artykuł dostarcza wiele informacji o twórczości pisarza, jak również o różnicach między kulturą japońską a europejską.

Mikołaj Melanowicz