

# Serving Stories: Servant Characters in Twentieth Century Japanese Literature

by

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Department of East Asian Studies  
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## **Abstract**

While the servants who appear in twentieth-century Japanese literature are often minor characters, they are far from insignificant. Rather, these servant characters in fact play a vital role in the narrative discourse seemingly out of proportion with the attention that their class, gender, and employment status—as well as a surface reading of the story—might lead us to expect. By exploring some of the different kinds of structural ‘work’ they do, then, as well as the ways in which their very literary nature grants them a degree of authority beyond that of their real-life corollaries, this dissertation aims to construct a narrative about a type of character whose impact on literary fiction well exceeds the bounds of the textual space they occupy. With this in mind, I take up an examination of servant characters in the works of three canonical authors who themselves experienced life with servants, Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965), and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970).

An analysis of servant characters offers an opportunity to explore issues of representation, power, and authority in modern Japanese fiction. From the ethical question of how to acknowledge those we cannot speak for, to examining the connections between domestic spaces and literary spaces, to uncovering the latent power of traditionally undervalued forms of labor,

this dissertation proposes a narratological examination of the role of servants in twentieth-century Japanese fiction as a means for rethinking questions of representation and the plurality of perspectives in literature.

Over three chapters, I discuss questions of literary ethics and what it means to respect and acknowledge the blind spots that always accompany difference, how servant characters share and construct the domestic space with their employers, and how the embodied intimacy and unbridled access afforded servant characters might empower them even to take control over their employers' narratives. In doing so, I argue for a reconsideration of what it means for the minor to assert itself from within the canon, proposing new ways of thinking about the structural dimensions of representation, power, and authority as revealed through the roles of minor servant characters.

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## Introduction

# Serving Stories: Servant Characters in Twentieth Century Japanese Literature

“Seriously, I’m going to tell you something I’ve never told anyone before in all my life. My mother—she was just a maid in my father’s house. She wasn’t his wife at all [実はな、今まで誰にもいわなかったがね、俺は女中の子なんだ].”

“Is that all? There’s nothing so unusual about that [うるせえな。それがどうしたんだ。珍しくもねえ].”

“Well, I’ve never heard anyone else say their mother was a maid like that [そうか知ら、でも俺はまだ誰も女中の子だって奴に会ったことがねえが].”

“Most people don’t go around bragging about it like you. But you can certainly read about it or see it in the films any day of the week [誰もお前みたいに自慢しやしねえさ、映画や小説にはあらな].”<sup>1</sup>

Before the long marches through the occupied Philippine countryside, before the paranoia, the hallucinations, the death and desperate cannibalism, a small band of Japanese soldiers in Ōoka Shōhei’s 1951 novel *Fires on the Plain* [*Nobi*] find themselves with nothing to do but talk. One such conversation, excerpted above, occurs between two of these soldiers, an older and a younger man who have come to share a particularly close bond, like that of a father and son. As

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<sup>1</sup> Ōoka Shōhei, *Fires on the Plain*, trans. Ivan Morris (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1957), 47-48. Ōoka Shōhei, *Nobi* in *Ōoka Shōhei zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1973), 145.

a token of this intimacy, the younger of the two decides to share with this new father the secret of his true parentage—the fact, that is, that he was born of his biological father’s affair with a household maid. This confession is revealing, however, not so much to its direct recipient—(who in fact dismisses it as “nothing so unusual [珍しくもねえ]”)—as it is with regards to the role of servants, of maids, in both Japanese society and literature. With the question of servants in mind, then, the cultural assumptions underlying the soldiers’ conversation can be divided into three major implications. Firstly, illegitimate children born of maids are common. Secondly, nobody talks about it. And, lastly, everybody writes about it.

On the first point—the ordinariness of children borne of maids—the Japanese text is clear. While much of the English translation is embellished to provide context, in the Japanese text, rather than giving any background about his mother working as a maid in his father’s house, the soldier simply states that he is a maid’s child [俺は女中の子なんだ].<sup>2</sup> Despite the undetailed nature of this declaration, however, the older soldier requires no further clarification before dismissing the confession out of hand, thereby revealing that, while he immediately grasps the implied context of what it means to be a ‘maid’s child [女中の子],’ he simply does not consider the occurrence particularly notable. Both soldiers, meanwhile, do agree that having a maid for a mother is not something people regularly talk (or, rather, “brag [自慢]”) about, but neither actually challenges whether or not it is in fact common [珍しくもねえ]. Indeed, nobody has ever told the young soldier that their mother was also a maid, but, he acknowledges, that does not mean that such parentage is so unusual. It is rarely spoken of, yes, but that says nothing of its

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase rendered in the English translation, that is, as “My mother—she was just a maid in my father’s house,” in Japanese, is just “I am a maid’s child [俺は女中の子なんだ].”



actual prevalence. After all, this is the first time he himself has told anyone the truth—(and only in an extreme situation, to someone he sees as a father figure)—so it seems only natural that nobody else would have told him the same. Underlying the two soldiers' conversation, then, is an assumption that, while indeed people rarely admit to being the illegitimate children of maids, there is nevertheless little doubt that it does happen.

Chiefly responsible for dispelling this doubt, to my third point, is the ubiquitous depiction of the phenomenon in literature and film. While the assumed truth, that is—much like the truth of the soldier's illegitimate birth itself—is not documented in any authoritative, official capacity, it is in fact reflected by and refracted through literature. Not only, after all, do literature and film find fertile ground in those elements of experience which are suppressed in polite society, but they also test the bounds of society's norms and suggest its hidden possibilities. Whether art reflects life or life reflects art, that is, the literary depiction of maids with illegitimate children both acknowledges the potential of scandal and creates a language which, in effect, normalizes its occurrence. Alternatively, in the words of the older soldier assuring the younger, people might not go around admitting to other people that they themselves are the children of maids, but it happens all the time in movies and novels [映画や小説], so it must be true.

This question of unspoken but unmistakable truths revealed only through fiction has clear implications in a novel like *Fires on the Plain*, which depicts in graphic detail the horrors and traumas of a war that the Japanese nation was unprepared to reckon with—one it wished it could rewrite. The idea, then, that literature can reveal what society has repressed—that literary representations might in fact be more revealing than official accounts—lies at the very heart of the novel, with stakes far greater than whether the children of maids are being transparent enough to assess the frequency of their illegitimate births. My focus here, however, is less about

the weighty subtext of the soldiers' conversation as it is about the impact of its concrete subject matter—the role of servants in twentieth-century Japanese literature.

## **Power and Servitude: Negotiating the Place of Servants in the Home and Society**

There has been much scholarship written in recent years about domestic servants in European and North American contexts, owing no doubt in part to the popularity of movies like *Gosford Park* (2001) and television shows like *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015) and *Upstairs Downstairs* (initial run 1971-1975, revived 2010-2012). All three are set in early twentieth-century England and focus on the everyday drama—(and, admittedly, extreme possibilities)—of domestic English life against the backdrop of a correspondingly dramatic time in national and world history. This early twenty-first century mini maid boom, moreover, was not contained to the UK, as 2010 also saw a remake of 1960 Korean horror thriller *The Housemaid* [下女 *Hanyeo*], in which maids pursue illicit affairs and murder plots under the employ of a wealthy family, while Hollywood offered up its own critical and box office success in the form of *The Help* (2011), an adaptation of a novel about a wealthy white woman's attempts to empathize with her black servants.

That all of these stories about servants—and particularly maids—hit the ground running and found eager audiences within the course of more or less a single year is noteworthy. Whether a sign of some newfound or reemerging socioeconomic anxiety resulting from the 2008 financial crisis and its subsequent worldwide recession, compounding racial and class tensions in the face of an increasingly connected world, a desire to retreat into the domestic comfort of a long-lost countryside, or simply the derivative and trend-hopping nature of contemporary entertainment, this influx of movies and television shows about maids seems hardly a coincidence. It comes as

no surprise, then, that the scholarship would follow, with historical studies of servants and literary explorations of servant characters proliferating alongside an ever-growing body of work to study and explore. (Of course, the close proximity of these television and box office hits to the publication of scholarship on servants may also be sheer coincidence, as much of the critical work which I discuss here was published at around the same time or just shortly after, and neither academic research nor its publication is known for moving at such lightning-fast speeds.) Regardless of the individual inspirations and motivations behind any given work, however, the variety itself testifies to how stories containing servants allow for an exploration of a variety of issues, time periods, and interpersonal and political dynamics. My work here thus aims to continue this exploration into the issues raised by servant characters and the literary worlds they complicate and uphold, and I am aided greatly in my task by any scholarship that recent popular attention to servant characters may have inspired, as well by all of the quality scholarship that preceded it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of the scholarship in question focuses on the English context and falls into two general categories. Michelle Higgs' *Servants' Stories: Life Below Stairs in their Own Words 1800-1950* (2015) is representative of one of these categories, comprising a loosely chronological collection of personal memoirs, interviews, and anecdotes—mostly from maids, but also a few butlers and houseboys—sourced from personal correspondence with the domestic workers and their families themselves. Citing the popularity of *Downton Abbey* as “proof” that the British “[a]s a nation...are fascinated by domestic service,” Higgs bemoans the fact that many of the resources available for learning about the history of domestic service are centered not on the servants themselves, but on their employers. The purpose of her book, then, Higgs states, is to rectify this by revealing “the servants’ side of the

story, warts and all” via “honest accounts of real experiences told by real people” who “deserve to be heard.”<sup>3</sup> Frank Dawes’ *Not in Front of the Servants: A True Portrait of English Upstairs/Downstairs Life* (1974), meanwhile, is a similarly microcosmic window into the still-living memories of life as a servant and, for its part, acknowledges even in its title the role the original *Upstairs Downstairs* television series played in inspiring its writing.<sup>4</sup> Both books share a real sense that servants have been systematically slighted in some way by previous works—that their stories have not been done justice. Accuracy of representation is thus the stated mission, and, while Higgs assures that this accuracy encompasses even the “warts,” both books nevertheless share an undercurrent of wishing to portray servants in a more relatable, human light. Such an endeavor was no doubt highly personal for their authors; Frank Dawes’ own mother was a servant, after all, as was Higgs’ grandmother.

Given the widespread commercial success of television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs Downstairs*, books like Dawes’ and Higgs’ are frequently produced by niche publishers, marketed at an audience of dedicated fans already presumably invested in servant-heavy media. On the other end of the spectrum, then, is the second category of written discourse on servants, featuring works more strictly academic, published through academic venues, such as in journals and through major university presses.<sup>5</sup> Embracing more of a history proper, more analytical and

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<sup>3</sup> Michelle Higgs, *Servants’ Stories: Life Below Stairs in their Own Words 1800-1950* (South Yorkshire, England: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2015), xi-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Dawes, *Not in Front of the Servants: A True Portrait of English Upstairs/Downstairs Life* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> The publisher of Higgs’ book, Pen & Sword Books Ltd., for instance, per their website metadata, focuses on the publication of “A Variety of Military, Aviation, Maritime, Local History, True Crime and Nostalgia Books.” (Pen & Sword Books Ltd. <https://www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/>. Accessed May 13, 2020.) Similarly, Dawes’ book was published by the now-

less personal, this other major category focuses not on the experiences of individual servants, but rather on the socioeconomics and class tensions surrounding servant labor as a whole. Unlike the prior category, with its desire to fill in the blanks in servants' stories, the monographs and articles that make up this second category instead aim to acknowledge and explore the very history and mechanisms which led to the deprivileging of servants' stories in the first place.

This second category is of more interest for my purposes here, however, not because of its academic pedigree, but because it is specifically in these more conventionally "historical" works where literature makes its impact known. Indeed, literature's centrality in these works is motivated by many of the same circumstances motivating the prior category's compilation of anecdotes and reminiscences about servants' lives. After all, recalling my previous discussion with regards to the soldiers' conversation in *Fires on the Plain*, the very same relative societal silences driving the popular demand for servants' reconstructed memoirs also manifests in literature as a relative bounty of servant images. As a result, literature in these critical works often serves as the principal—and sometimes only—contemporaneous source from which to glean a history of domestic servitude.

The most obvious reason for the literary foundations of servant-centered scholarship is thus that of simple necessity. As Swapna M. Banerjee writes in a 2004 article "Down Memory Lane: Representations of Domestic Workers in Middle Class Personal Narratives of Colonial Bengal," for instance, the availability of primary source material on domestic workers in colonial

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defunct Taplinger Publishing Company, which mainly published everything from astrology primers to music notation and calligraphy guides, but also branched out at times, including, notably, with a 1980 translation of Endō Shūsaku's 1966 novel *Silence* [*Chinmoku*].

Bengal is hampered considerably by the very circumstances of their lives and work. As a mostly illiterate caste engaged in the everyday work of domestic labor, Banerjee explains, these servants left behind a virtual vacuum of personal written accounts and historical documentation regarding their thoughts and experiences. Meanwhile, the private, domestic nature of their labor also left them out of any larger considerations of the “working class” as a whole. Beyond some minimal accounting for their numbers, that is, these domestic servants in the end garnered little attention from labor historians and public agencies. “Domestic workers did appear as an occupational category in the Indian censuses,” Banerjee writes, “but that information is far from perfect” and reflects little of the “lives and views of domestic servants,” and thus “[m]ost of what we know about them is expressed in the discourse of their employers.”<sup>6</sup>

For this reason, while acknowledging the gaps in the historical and literary record, Banerjee qualifies both her scholarly aims and her source materials. Her “article is not an exercise in the argument over whether servants can speak or not,” she explains, and neither “does it claim to recover the voice of servants from sources produced by their employers, the hegemonic subject.” Rather, it “is about a particular kind of representations of servants in a prominent genre of Bengali middle-class literature.”<sup>7</sup> Banerjee’s study is thus an attempt at reconciling both of the major categories I have identified in servant-centered scholarship. While indeed drawing on the personal memoirs of real people, that is, Banerjee nevertheless approaches these texts from a literary perspective, undertaking close readings of the images of servants in bourgeois memoirs in order to deduce “their own subject positions” from how they “[appear] as

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<sup>6</sup> Swapna M. Banerjee, “Down Memory Lane: Representations of Domestic Workers in Middle Class Personal Narratives of Colonial Bengal,” *Journal of Social History* 37.3 (2004): 682.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 683.

marginal characters to make a case, illustrate an incident, prove a point, resolve an action, or fulfill a need.”<sup>8</sup>

Servants who appear as minor or marginal characters in literary form, that is to say, occupy an entirely different space and serve an entirely different purpose from real people performing servant labor. Nevertheless, it may be possible, as Banerjee endeavors, to reverse-engineer some sense of the real-life positions of servants from the sorts of literary duties which they perform. Whereas in real life, for instance, a servant may enter a room to serve tea or retrieve the laundry, a servant in a story—whether fictional or anecdotal—might appear instead in order to overhear something important, interrupt the action, serve as contrast with another character, or set up some new development. Rather than attempting to determine what real servants did through literary depictions, however, my aim is the opposite—to examine the ways in which literature employs servant characters, in light of the kinds of duties performed by real-life servants, to both facilitate and complicate the story. While servants fulfill a variety of functions that often go unnoticed and unappreciated in both literature and in real life, in literature, these subtle functional duties include tasks as fundamental as providing structure to the very flow of the story, moving the plot, and otherwise giving meaning to events of the story.

Thus, while it may be easy for a society to systematically devalue the daily labor of maintaining a home, it is far harder for the literary world to downplay the importance of maintaining narrative structure. In the modern realist novel, for instance, with its focus on depicting “truths” about society, the importance of servants’ contributions to narrative structure supersedes the lack of individuality granted them, in fact effectively putting them on equal

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 700.

ground with their employers, who are likewise defined by the social reality they face. Meanwhile, even in psychological novels, with their penchant for depicting the complex interiority of (mainly middle- and upper-class) individuals, servant characters not only maintain the same basic functions as in realist novels but also gain new ones, serving both to facilitate and relativize the stories of their masters. Servant characters, that is, may be denied the dignity of acknowledging their complex interiority, but the unintended consequence of this denial is that they instead serve as pillars of stability allowing for the very exploration of their masters' psychological disarray.

While servants in real life no doubt experienced a great deal of their own internal turmoil, for the bourgeois writers whose own knowledge of servants was limited to the employment of them, the requirements of modern novelistic structure often led to the necessary inclusion of servant characters unfettered by the same emotional and practical dramas which plague their main characters. As necessary as they were, that is, for facilitating their masters' stories, servant characters also left those masters with the problem of how to differentiate their own paralyzing modern dramas from the relentless and unencumbered functionality of their servants. Servant characters could not simply be inserted into functional roles and allowed to do their structural work in silence (as real-life servants may have been expected to do with housework). Rather, the essential nature of their literary work required that servant characters be invited into spaces where their presence, impact, and even humanity had to be both encountered and accounted for.

The very same structural functionality which made servant characters so useful thus also meant that their difference could not simply be ignored, and the triangulation of a history of servants through a literature written by their masters therefore becomes possible precisely because servants' inclusion in these narratives was not simply documentary, and not entirely



unmotivated. Instead, these narratives reveal no small measure of servant-centered class anxieties, evident in efforts to distinguish servants from their employers and prescribe the proper management of servants, as well as in the fact that these differences were often exaggerated to the point of caricature. While literature might not be able to testify to how servants “actually were” at any given point in history, then, we can nevertheless learn a great deal from the ever-present tension between how they were and how their masters needed them to be.

Much of what these modern masters needed from their servants, for instance, was a viable Other. As Sônia Roncador explains in *Domestic Servants in Literature and Testimony in Brazil, 1889-1999* (2014), the creation of the servant class was essential to Brazil’s modernization project to the extent that domestic servants were fashioned as “a quintessential trope of otherness” against which to distinguish an otherwise sophisticated, enlightened ruling class. Even as these servants in Brazil, then, consisting predominantly of black and indigenous women, were indispensable to cultivating a distinguished domestic life for their white-coded employers, their presence also brought about anxiety in these employers that they might be “contaminated” by their servants, or that they were at risk of falling into “mimicry of these servants’ uncultivated manners, indecent behavior, and primitive beliefs.”<sup>9</sup> While the servants I discuss in the following chapters, conversely, are all of the same racial background as their employers, regional and linguistic differences create similar fault lines. In works by Sōseki, for instance, characters often contrast their own self-perceptions of psychological depth against the seeming simplicity of their servants, while servants’ linguistic peculiarities in Tanizaki’s works both set them apart from their masters and make their way into their masters’ speech. This

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<sup>9</sup> Sônia Roncador, *Domestic Servants in Literature and Testimony in Brazil, 1889-1999* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 2.

complex interplay of the designation of servants as modernity's "other" in combination with the (real and imagined) risks of their influence thus greatly informs images of servants in literature. As sources of both self-definition and fears of losing the self, that is, servants gain a measure of attention and significance in literature disproportionate to the de facto disenfranchisement of their voices in the larger public discourse.

Roncador thus explains the goals of her project in similar terms, re-emphasizing how much is at stake in the representation of servants in literature.

In fact, despite their social marginalization and even ontological invisibility (invisibility has persistently stood as an attribute of good service), servants emerged as major literary tropes in the main forums of elaboration, negotiation, or else contestation of modernity. Such symbolic relevance, however, calls our attention to the lack of a comprehensive study on the circulation of numerous and diverse representations related to female domestic servants found in Brazilian literature. In other words, a study that reveals, through an analysis of the complex literary and cultural imaginary of servants, how the ruling classes have *invented* this subaltern social group over time, reflecting mainstream ideologies of servitude, subordination, womanhood, and domesticity.<sup>10</sup>

The actual servant class itself, that is, was created alongside and through literary servant characters via a series of complicated maneuvers whereby servants were made disproportionately more visible as a means to solidify them as 'subordinate' and 'other.' Servants, in their intimacy with the lives of their employers, thus represented both the clearest contrast to their superiors' relative modern 'cultivation' and the greatest threat to it. So long as they were designated as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

fundamentally non-modern and stayed that way, servants were exactly where their employers needed them to be, but this vital role in their employers' self-definition also came with the risk that servants' influence might loom so large as to either unravel their employers' trappings of modernity—or even to reveal the very pursuit of modernity as farcical from the start. While the particular opposition of modern/non-modern does not apply so much to the Japanese servant characters I discuss in the following chapters, class-based distinctions in fact create similar dynamics whereby masters work to define themselves against the 'otherness' of their servants. Literary servants are more than just background characters in their masters' stories, that is—they are a locus for contextualizing, solidifying, as well as questioning the desired narrative—and writing and reading servants in modern fiction thus becomes an avenue not only for the establishment of social norms but also for engaging in social criticism and satire.

In terms of how servants might reinforce a particular narrative of modernity, Dorice Williams Elliott, in "Servants and Hands: Representing the Working Classes in Victorian Factory Novels," explores differences in the depiction of female domestic workers versus that of female factory workers. While there are no doubt many such differences, Elliott explains, the driving force behind all of them is simple: servants were highly intimate to the middle class, whereas the working class was not. For this reason, the Victorian middle class in fact saw female servants—who were 'with' them but not 'of' them—as a key venue for the social control of the female working class. Servants, that is, through their greater proximity—and thus respectability—to the middle class, were seen as an intermediary through which, as Elliott puts it, the "frightening new kind of freedom" of the working class may "be brought under middle-class,

specifically female, supervision.”<sup>11</sup> In order to make this mediation possible, however, it was not enough just for servants to be distinct from factory workers. Rather, these literary servants in fact had to serve as idealized emissaries of everything their masters wanted to be. Elliott writes:

In order to underscore the moral and physical superiority of domestic service over factory work, the domestic servants portrayed in the factory novels are almost always well-dressed, well-fed, happy, and loyal to the family, while factory workers are dirty, ragged, tired, usually hungry, and often hostile in their demeanor. In return for their supposedly superior living and working conditions, domestic servants in these novels willingly acquiesce in the paternalist model of social relations that requires them to repay their employers with deference and loyalty. Some servants are so loyal that they give up their own identities and become the trusted confidant(e)s and gatekeepers for their masters and mistresses. In most cases, in fact, the novels portray the servants themselves as the primary enforcers of traditional hierarchical relations both between and within classes. It is usually a servant, for instance, who decides whether a visitor will be allowed to enter through the front or back door, or even to speak to a member of the family.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, servants’ authority over the domestic space and their role as the “primary enforcers” of domestic life will come into play frequently throughout the following chapters, most notably in the chapter on Mishima Yukio. As I will discuss in that chapter, moreover, this provisional authority also puts them in a position where the opposite might happen—rather than serving as conduits of their employers’ authority, that is, they may just as easily move to challenge it. The

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<sup>11</sup> Dorice Williams Elliot, “Servants and Hands: Representing the Working Classes in Victorian Factory Novels,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28.2 (2000): 381.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

responsibility for upholding the social order is thus bestowed on servants with the understanding that that same responsibility might equally empower them to undermine that order. The great fear of the middle class, then, Elliott explains, was that, rather than taming factory workers the way they themselves felt they have tamed their servants, these servants would instead opt to align themselves with the factory workers. Were this to happen—were servants to fail (or refuse) to cultivate a supervised, docile working class—the middle class would then be faced not with the paternalistic protectorate they wanted but instead with the unified proletariat which they feared.<sup>13</sup> The integrity of class divisions thus required the fostering of a sense of common identity between middle-class, servant-class, and working-class women, wherein middle-class women were to be the standard and servant-class women the bridge that translated these standards to the working class. This middle-class anticipation of the danger posed by a female proletariat therefore encouraged gender solidarity even as it discouraged class solidarity—and placed the ultimate power over its potential enforcement (or non-enforcement) into the hands of servants.

In *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class* (1994), Bonnie Thornton Dill discusses both of these potentials at the intersections of race, class, and gender in order to examine the lives and roles of Black female domestic servants in the United States. While the paternalistic dynamic discussed by Elliott was unfettered by racial and ethnic difference in its creation of a supervisory bond between women of the employer and servant classes, the issue of race complicated any such endeavors in the United States. The history of slavery and race relations in the country, Dill explains, had firmly solidified the “association of servitude with people of African descent” as

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 386.

“the distinguishing feature of domestic service in the United States,” thereby deepening the gulf between White employers and Black servants.<sup>14</sup> This gulf, however, while it surely led to substantial friction between employer and servant, also enabled Black servants a clear vantage point from which to assess the very different lives of their employers.

Low-income Black women who worked in the homes of middle- and upper middle-class White families experienced and observed, on a daily basis, two very different life-styles: their employer’s and their own. They became aware of the impact of material conditions on these different life-patterns. Their perceptions of disparities which could reflect back on the most intimate sphere of their own lives provide a unique opportunity to examine the impact of race and class on the family life of two different but interacting segments of the society. It also provides a basis for exploring, in very concrete terms, the nature of this interaction.<sup>15</sup>

This awareness of the sometimes vast differences between themselves and their employers thus enabled these Black female servants a measure of critical distance regarding the ways in which they and their employers navigated some of the same facets of domestic and family life, from childrearing to meal preparation to housework to the celebration of holidays. Dill’s study, then, does justice to these servants’ knowledge precisely by amplifying their own voices in a way more historicized and contextualized than some of the other more anecdotal, memoir-like formats which I mentioned above. In doing so, she balances the need for an understanding of

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<sup>14</sup> Bonnie Thornton Dill, *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of Work and Family among Black Female Domestic Servants* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

systemic issues surrounding the place of servants in the home and in society with the necessity of recognizing servants' own views and voices.

These women, Dill explains, far from simply “subservient,” were thus active shapers of their own lives, who “adopted and modified elements of their employers’ lifestyles” and “imitated the things that they thought would help them or their children get ahead.”<sup>16</sup> Their insight and ability to look across class boundaries allowed them to balance a belief in “the possibilities of upper mobility” with “a keen awareness of the material and social inequities which made their lives so different from their employers.”<sup>17</sup> Just as real-life servants witnessed the difference between their reality and the reality they maintained for their masters, moreover, this same level of critical distance allows servant characters in literature to draw the reader’s attention to points of instability—or even absurdity—in their masters’ stories. Servants thus demonstrate a remarkable ability to evaluate and critique their masters’ lives and self-images—no matter how badly these masters may wish to limit their servants’ contributions only to the actual housework. For this reason, the struggle to maintain balance between servants as agents of physical labor versus servants as people with their own inner lives is a prevailing theme in both the literary and critical discourse. I will go into greater detail about the complicated physicality of servants in my chapter on Mishima, but here as well I wish to draw attention to the precarious division of servants’ minds and bodies.

In sharp contrast, that is, to what Carolyn Steedman, in an article about valuations of servant labor in the eighteenth-century English tax code, calls the “startling comedy” of “the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

vision of [servants] as a kind of prosthesis or extra limb, as another pair of hands—in the paradigmatic synecdoche of the English language—as a mere ‘hand’” at their masters’ disposal—the servants discussed by scholars like Dill retain final authority over not only their hands, but their minds and voices as well.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Steedman herself, in another article titled “Poetical Maids and Cooks Who Wrote,” discusses the complex power negotiations often necessitated by servants’ own access to literary production. “Poetical maids were fashionable in the second half of the eighteenth century,” she explains, as their employers lauded their “humble genius” and “plebeian literary creativity,” as well as “the edifying consequences of contemplating talents that might, without your charitable donation...be doomed to disperse themselves upon the desert air of a provincial village or a gentleman’s back kitchen.”<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the literary talents of servants could be conceived of as under control, as a possession, a curiosity to be admired among their masters and their acquaintances like some quaint tchotchke. Underneath these benign, noble savage-esque sentiments, however, were also practical benefits which nevertheless left openings for agency and the expression of servant interiority even within the very interior of their masters’ homes. Steedman goes on to explain,

To employ a poetical maid might be a fashionable thing to do and literacy in a cook [for the purposes of bookkeeping and recording recipes] was certainly a useful commodity; but perhaps these factors did not outweigh the discomfort of realizing that the servants

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<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “The Servant’s Labour: Tthe Business of Life, England, 1760-1820,” *Social History* 29.1 (2004): 2. The association of labor and “hands” applies in Japanese as well, for example with 手伝う [to help] or 手を借りる [to get help], or even お手伝いさん [helper/servant].

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Steedman, “Poetical Maids and Cooks Who Wrote,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31.1 (2005): 7.



might live an autonomous life in your kitchen, quite independent of what law and legal theory said they were: mere aspects of your personality, exercising your own (unused) capacity to turn spits and collect eggs, as kinds of proxy.<sup>20</sup>

The indication of agency and interiority implied by the ability to write, that is, as well as concerns over what these servants might be writing about, had to be carefully balanced with the benefits of literate help. The very skills that made some servants especially helpful, that is, also allowed them a level of self-determination and power to write their own narratives which, subsequently, gave them a measure of power over the narratives of their employers. Such tensions over servants' minds versus the labor of their bodies thus lie at the center of the history of servants and their incorporation into the narratives of those who employed them. While the level to which servants' agency receives recognition may vary considerably, then, the literature nevertheless bears out a prevailing attentiveness not only to the lives and roles of servants in the home, but also to the different perspectives and modalities which they might potentially introduce.

The satirical essay by Jonathan Swift, *Directions to Servants* (1745), for instance, is a humorous example of how the awareness of servant agency might complicate the relationship between servants and masters. Taking a form reminiscent of the kinds of instructional texts meant to impart to servants the best practices of their profession, the lighthearted essay imagines a world in which servants are unified not in serving their masters, but rather in secretly messing

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 9.

with them.<sup>21</sup> Instead of teaching servants how to best serve and appease their masters, that is, Swift's *Directions* instructs servants on how to undermine their masters and get away with it. In the process, it reveals just what sorts of things these masters must have feared their servants were already doing—a fact testified to by the extent to which Swift's text clearly resonated with the English populace. Though incomplete and only published after his death, *Directions to Servants* was wildly popular and long-lived, inspiring, even nearly a century later, adaptations such as John Jones' *Hints to Servants: Being a Poetical and Modernised Version of Dean Swift's Celebrated "Directions to Servants;" in which Something is Added to the Original Text, but those Passages are Omitted which Cannot with Propriety be Read Aloud in a Kitchen by an Upper Servant* (1843).<sup>22</sup> Thus revisiting Swift's humorous instructions in poetic form, this adaptation confirms from the outset that servants themselves are a welcome audience, even as it pokes fun at the performance of propriety by its middle- and upper-class readers. After all, it promises, it has omitted those parts which would have been inappropriate were the servants to read them aloud amongst themselves—which they inevitably will.

Such circuitous acknowledgements of servants' autonomy—and specifically, their voices—are in fact more rule than exception. As J.L. Hodson argues in an article titled "Talking

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<sup>21</sup> Such instructional texts for servants were common in England. Despite ostensibly being meant to instruct servants, however, the details of their publication indicate that their intended audience was likely not servants themselves but rather the middle- and upper-class women who employed them. (See, for example, *A Few Rules for the Manners of Servants in Good Families*, published by the Ladies' Sanitary Association, 1895.) The same holds true in Japan, moreover, such as in the case of the volume *Jochū no tsukaikata* [*How to use maids*], which was published in 1913 by the makers of the popular women's magazine *Fujin no tomo*.

<sup>22</sup> John Jones, *Hints to Servants: Being a Poetical and Modernised Version of Dean Swift's Celebrated "Directions to Servants;" in which Something is Added to the Original Text, but those Passages are Omitted which Cannot with Propriety be Read Aloud in a Kitchen by an Upper Servant* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1843).

like a Servant: What Nineteenth Century Novels Can Tell Us about the Social History of the Language,” for instance, the very conceptualization of servants was often inextricable from the analysis of their speech. Positing the question whether or not literary texts can stand as evidence of how servants spoke in the past, Hodson concludes that the distinctiveness of servant speech, as rendered in dialect, is better understood as the product of a desire to establish the separateness of servants from their masters than as a faithful recreation of how they actually spoke. For this reason, while I do discuss at times the attention paid to servants’ speech patterns and dialect in the following chapters, I do so not to argue that these novels are in some way representing or preserving the qualities of servants’ actual speech, but instead to note that a distinction is being made between their voices and the voices of their masters. By either putting something in the words of a servant—or alternatively, paraphrasing their speech—that is, a text changes how the content of that speech is interpreted in comparison with the ‘standard’ speech of their masters and the literary style of the narrator. Whether these words are meant to indicate authenticity and firsthand authority or irony and provincial naiveté, then, the representation in literature of servants’ speech is always determined by how it either highlights or downplays their difference.

For Hodson, similarly, the fact that nineteenth-century English novels “do not simply represent the speech of servants” does not detract from their ability to “provide complex and compelling commentaries on what it means to be a servant.” Rather, by emphasizing the difference of servants’ speech, Hodson argues that “one of [these novels’] recurrent messages is that to speak like a servant is to be a servant.”<sup>23</sup> This close connection between the definition of servants and the unique character of their speech thus both reinforces and contradicts the image

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<sup>23</sup> J.L. Hodson, “Talking like a Servant: What Nineteenth Century Novels Can Tell Us about the Social History of the Language,” *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 2.1 (2016): 44.

of the servant as a silent foil or simple ‘hand’ for their masters—just as Swift’s satirical essay teases the possibility for the conspicuous silence of servants to be more indicative of subterfuge than obedience. Despite, then, all efforts to distinguish servants from their masters, the literature and historical record are in fact replete with avenues and ironies whereby servants might cease to serve unambiguously either their masters or their masters’ narratives.<sup>24</sup>

### **Family, Nation, Service: A Brief History of Servants in Japan**

Having laid out many of the common tendencies and tensions present in scholarship about servants in general, I turn now to the specific Japanese context with an aim to explore the unique aspects of the role of servants in Japanese history and discourse. Perhaps the greatest of these differences, as identified by Shimizu Michiko in her book “*Jochū*” *imeeji no katei bunkashi* [A History of Maid Images in Family Culture] (2004), is the more familial nature of the relationship between servants and their masters in Japan. In contrast to American and European practices in the late nineteenth century, she explains, “rather than the equal commercial relationship [売買関係] of compensated labor, the relationship between employer and employee in Japan was a master-servant relationship [主従関係] which incorporated the entire worker, their whole persona [働く者を人格をも含めて身ぐるみ抱え込む].”<sup>25</sup> This difference,

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<sup>24</sup> In the Japanese context, one such speech-related irony is the linguistic influence of maids’ speech on women’s speech in general. For an overview of how the speech norms of maids in aristocratic and samurai families came to define women’s and polite speech as a whole, see Matsui Toshihiko, *Jochū kotoba shū no kenkyū: joseigo no seidoka to tenkai* [A Study of Compilations of Maids’ Speech: The Systematization and Spread of Women’s Speech] (Tokyo: Musashino shoin, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Shimizu Michiko, “*Jochū*” *imeeji no katei bunkashi* [A History of Maid Images in Family Culture] (Tokyo: Sekai Shisōsha, 2004), 14.

moreover, correlates with a much different history of service in Japan. As recently as the Edo period (1603-1868)—and unlike the modern trend of girls from rural, poor families entering service with wealthier urban families—pre- and early-modern servants in Japan “did not have earning money as an objective but rather the learning of etiquette and housework.” As such, they often “not only didn’t make money through their service but sometimes even paid for it [給金を貯めるどころか持ち出しになることもあったらしい].”<sup>26</sup> Service, therefore, was seen by young girls not as a working-class occupation but in fact as an opportunity to elevate one’s potential and status. This mentality continued well into Japan’s modern period, moreover, in which working as a maid was seen simultaneously both as a temporary stop on the way to a good marriage and as a lifelong connection marked by quasi-familial loyalty.<sup>27</sup>

This objective of Edo period maids bringing refinement back to their own families thus converted in the Meiji period (1868-1912) into the twin aims of both earning a bit of money and preparing to embrace the Good Wife, Wise Mother [*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母] archetype of the modern housewife. In the Taishō (1912-1926) and Shōwa (1926-1989) periods, however, even

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>27</sup> This assumption of temporariness is also true of houseboys [書生], but for very different reasons, as houseboys were generally university age young men themselves from the middle classes with the assumption that after their education was complete, they themselves would become educated workers and heads of their families. In this sense, houseboys—predominantly from rural areas—performed various domestic tasks in payment for their lodgings in the city, but their position within those households was closer to the modern homestay than to maids’ employment specifically as domestic workers. As the chapters on *Sōseki* and *Mishima* both feature houseboy characters in addition to maids, it is thus important to note these differences in maids’ and houseboys’ social statuses, educations, and expectations for the future. In terms of their literary function, however, houseboys and maids often play strikingly similar roles in the story and generally occupy the same scenes and spaces. This increased emphasis in literature on houseboys’ and maids’ similarities over their differences, I argue, is another side-effect of the ways in which the function of domestic service so often translates, in literature, into serving the narrative itself (i.e. literary function).

this semi-apprenticeship-style mode of service gave way to a clear bifurcation of roles, as the ideal housewife was now expected to do for free all the work her maids once did, and maids themselves reemerged as a solidly working-class—and often only provisionally employed—category of domestic laborer.<sup>28</sup> These changes in the realm of domestic service naturally led to considerable debate among social reformers and historians of the day. Writing, for instance, about an exhibition on the ideal modern family on display from November 1919 to February 1920 in the Tokyo Education Exhibition Hall, Elise K. Tipton explains some of the ambivalent opinions held by Taishō feminist activists and reformers regarding the diminishing role of servants in the home:

Although the poster in the exhibition depicted a maid, household management reformers were ambivalent about keeping housemaids. Most recommended having fewer housemaids or other servants, but not only to save money. [The 1930s feminist] Tsukamoto Hamako believed that it was irrational to leave housemaids with little knowledge to do the cooking in traditionally dirty, messy kitchens. Kaetsu Takako [founder of the first private school for women in 1903] took a different perspective, condemning Japanese treatment of servants as slaves and women’s pride in leaving all kitchen work to housemaids. She argued that servants should be treated as members of the family and their rights as human beings respected, as in foreign countries. Ishizawa [a professor of household management at Nara Women’s Advanced Teacher’s College] similarly pointed to the United States as a model, where he noted that housewives did all

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<sup>28</sup> For an in-depth study of the changes in labor supply and demographics which led to this bifurcation of roles, see Ushijima Chihiro, “Senkanki no Tōkyō ni okeru Shinchūkansō to ‘jochū’: mō hitotsu no kōgaika [Maids and the New Middle Class in Wartime Tokyo: Another Suburbanization],” *Shakaigaku hyōron* 52.2 (2001): 266-282.

the housework with the help of family members and without a housemaid. He criticized Japanese women for feeling ashamed to do the work themselves. [Scholar of women's history] Ōta Umeko went further, suggesting that having housemaids made housewives lazy and was detrimental to their health.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, it is worth pointing out here that this assertion that servants in other countries were treated—more so than in Japan—like family and as equals does not bear out in the literature that I have discussed thus far, which in fact indicates that the opposite was true. Certainly, as well, the claim that housewives in the United States received help from the rest of the family is a bit of an exaggeration, assuming that the practice being referred to is simply the assigning of chores. What this passage does indicate, however, is revealed most clearly through the association of “housemaids with little knowledge” and “traditionally dirty, messy kitchens”—the emergence, that is, of a perceived incompatibility of housemaids with modernity, with hygiene, with good sense. Thus considered inextricable from the particular environments in which they worked, housemaids were denizens of the dark and damp, doomed to obsolescence right alongside pre-modernity and the traditional Japanese home itself.

Despite this condemnation, however, the practice of employing household servants did not go away so easily. (In fact, for some, like Tanizaki, who I discuss in Chapter 2, this association between maids and the space of the traditional home was even something to be celebrated.) For this reason, only those specific elements of domestic service which reflected the particularities of Japan's past—right down to the very terminology used to refer to servants—gradually gave way to a professionalized domestic workforce whose primary motivation was the

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<sup>29</sup> Elise K. Tipton, “How to Manage a Household: Creating Middle Class Housewives in Modern Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 29.1 (2009): 105.

receipt of payment for their labor. Koizumi Kazuko, in *Jochū ga ita Shōwa* [Shōwa, When There Were Maids] (2012), in fact points to as late as the mid-sixties as the final demise of the young live-in female servants known as *jochū*. At that time, she explains, the full-time housewife [*sengyō shufu* 専業主婦] arose alongside the full-time office worker [サラリーマン], and live-in maids subsequently vanished from the family, to be replaced by *otetsudai-san* [お手伝いさん, helpers]—caregivers and housekeepers, who commuted to the home as needed.<sup>30</sup>

Of the authors I discuss in my chapters, then, only Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) never lived to see this demise of the *jochū* in the 1960s, living his entire life in a world of live-in servants.<sup>31</sup> As a result, while there is some acknowledgment that the paradigm of life-long servants bound by loyalty is on its way out—as in the case of Kiyō in *Botchan* (1906), for instance—the young maids and houseboys in Sōseki’s novels are otherwise firmly entrenched in the domestic landscape. That servants were a fact of life in Sōseki’s time—that, if anything, they were becoming more and more a fact of life for a growing middle-class—then, contributes in Sōseki’s fiction to a need to account for their ubiquitous presence. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) and Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), meanwhile, experienced both the ubiquity of domestic servants and their eventual disappearance and replacement with professional domestic workers over the course of their lifetimes. Tanizaki’s *The Maids* [*Daidokoro taiheiki*] (1963) in fact makes explicit reference to this change, while many of those works of Mishima’s which prominently feature servants are set firmly in the past, whether a decade before his birth in the

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<sup>30</sup> Koizumi Kazuko, ed., *Jochū ga ita Shōwa* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2012), 50.

<sup>31</sup> The term *jochū* [女中], in fact, was originally a term referring only to servants from upper-class families before it became the polite general-use term, and much of Sōseki’s fiction thus continues to use the lower-class equivalent, *gejo* [下女], to refer to its maid characters.



early Taishō period—or even revolutionary France—and depict ways of life already noticeably on their way out during the time of the story. Regardless, however, of what exactly each author witnessed along the timeline of domestic service, all of these authors' works share an understanding of the historicity of service, an acknowledgement of the mutability of master-servant relationships, and an appreciation for the impact of servants in the home and family.

For this reason, it is equally vital for the purposes of reading servant characters in these authors' works to understand the extent to which changing conceptions surrounding the family affected the place of servants. In addition, then, to the two major currents—the anecdotal and the labor-historical—which I have thus far identified in scholarship on servants outside Japan, Japanese scholarship offers a wealth of investigations into this connection specifically between servants and family dynamics. Araki Yasuyo, in an article about the relationship between housewives and maids in merchant households in 1927, for instance, identifies two currents in the study of maids in Japan specifically. The first of these, like those I discussed earlier, Araki explains, is “a laborer-based approach, concerning maids' labor terms and conditions [労働者としての側面からアプローチしたものであり、女中の労働条件や実態などについての研究],” while the second comprises “a study of the connection between maids and the development of the modern family [近代家族の進展との関連での女中研究].”<sup>32</sup> Rather than the difference between a history of domestic labor and the study of servants as individuals, then, the discourse in Japan is split instead into a history of servants as workers and the history of servants within

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<sup>32</sup> Araki Yasuyo, “Shōka keiei ni okeru shufu (onna shujin) to jochū no kankei ni tsuite no kōsatsu: 1927-nen no shōka no tsuma no nikki kara [An investigation into the relationship between housewives (female head of family) and maids in the management of the merchant family: from the diaries of merchant wives from 1927],” *Kansai Gakuin Daigaku Shakaigakubu kiyō* 107 (2009): 193.

the family structure. For this reason, uniting these two currents through literary analysis, as I aim to do in the following chapters, involves focusing not on an attempt at recovering servants' experiences through literature but rather probing the specific structural functions of servants within the literary families they serve. These structural functions, I argue, while they may not correlate precisely to the real labor performed by real servants, nevertheless reveal much about conceptualizations of servants' roles in society and are thus strongly indicative of the inextricability of servants from the larger story of daily life in modern Japan.

### **Japanese Approaches to Servants and Servant Characters**

The following chapters are not the first forays into scholarship on the relationship between servants and narrative in Japanese literature. Gary P. Leupp's *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (1992), for instance, observes that, while “[m]uch literature, including *bunraku* and *kabuki* plays, depicts servants in a highly favorable light, as paragons of honesty and loyalty,” they are also frequently “cruelly burlesqued,” depicted as prone to engaging in “gossip” and other such weaknesses as “drunkenness” and “lustiness.”<sup>33</sup> “Many servants,” he adds, “would of course have been illiterate or semi-illiterate,” a trait that contributed to their depiction as “ignorant and uncultured.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Leupp observes that, despite the often derogatory nature of their literary representation, “[t]he education acquired in service was a primary factor in social advancement,” and that, rather than being summarily excluded from literary participation, left at the mercy of their masters' words, some of those once

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<sup>33</sup> Gary P. Leupp, *Servants, Shophands, and Laborers in the Cities of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 106, 109.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

employed as domestic servants (*koshō*), like Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694), Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1656-1725), and Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848), went on to shape literary narrative—and Japanese literature in general—in the most literal way.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, few would look at Japan's most famous poet, greatest playwright, and the author of the wildly popular Edo epic *Eight Dog Chronicles* [*Nansō Satomi Hakkenden*] (1814-1842) and place them in the same group as the innumerable adolescent girls who worked in the kitchens of middle class homes in the subsequent centuries. Gender and time create too great a gulf for the affiliation to stick. That the foundations for so much of Japanese literature, drama, and poetry had their own foundations in service, however, further complicates the picture of servants only at the margins of literature, minor characters whose full potential their bourgeois authors cannot begin to convey. To whatever extent these writers' service experiences informed and haunted their art is an investigation for another time, but the mere fact of this legacy, the lingering question of this potential haunting, is one which implores caution in dismissing the function of servant characters in Japanese literature as if they were simply furniture in their masters' stories, nothing more than human scenery.

The authors I discuss in the following chapters do not share the same servant pedigree as some of their literary predecessors, but, nevertheless, all three of them grew up with, lived alongside, and employed servants. Natsume Sōseki, for instance, lived with servants his entire life, with perhaps the sole exception of his time on a student stipend in England (1901-1903). From a maid he remembers being kind to him as a child, to the young maids he himself employed as an adult—as well as at least one houseboy—Sōseki may have never been a servant

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 120.

himself, but he employed many, some of whom directly inspired some of the servants in his novels.<sup>36</sup> While his servant characters do tend towards silence, their constant presence was something Sōseki had to contend with, and thus their silence in his novels is less a stifling of their voices than an admission that he cannot speak for them in the same way he can speak for his otherwise predominantly middle-class characters. When Sōseki's servants do speak, however, their words carry considerable weight, as they often in fact reveal themselves to be far more knowledgeable about their masters' lives than their masters are of theirs.

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, meanwhile, likewise grew up with maids and employed them in his adulthood, as was befitting his middle-class status. On the other hand, he was also the only of the authors I discuss to have any level of experience as a servant, having worked briefly in his youth as a houseboy before being fired on account of an affair with one of the family's maids.<sup>37</sup> (In light of this experience, it is worth noting that houseboys are in fact relatively rare in Tanizaki's fiction—at least in comparison with the plethora of maids.) Tanizaki's first experience with servants, however, was his childhood nurse, an older woman who features more in his early memories than his own mother and who worked for the family until Tanizaki was a teenager, transitioning into the work of a maid when money became tight.<sup>38</sup> Maids in Tanizaki's fiction are thus intimately bound to the family and home, and so, for Tanizaki, their gradual disappearance in the latter half of his life amounts to the disappearance of a particular vision of home itself. Tanizaki's servants may rarely tell their own stories, but their words, actions, and mannerisms

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<sup>36</sup> Marvin Marcus, *Reflections in a Glass Door: Memory and Melancholy in the Personal Writings of Natsume Sōseki* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 19, 90, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Childhood Years: A Memoir*, trans. Paul McCarthy (New York: Kodansha International, 1988), ix.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

pervade his novels, giving them nevertheless a degree of authorship over the lives and stories of their masters.

For Mishima Yukio, on the other hand, there was nothing nostalgic about the magnitude of servants' power to define the lives and homes of the families they served. This somewhat more paranoid disposition towards servants comes from recognizing the power they wielded within the home—a lesson Mishima surely learned during his own childhood, which at one time included as many as six maids and a houseboy.<sup>39</sup> Unlike Tanizaki's family, sufficing for years with a single elderly nurse/maid, Mishima's family employed so many servants not because they could afford to—they, in fact, could not—but out of a desire to maintain appearances and a way of life which was not strictly within their means. Servants in Mishima's works, likewise, often seem to overpower their employers, even if they do not necessarily outnumber them. As with servant characters in Sōseki's and Tanizaki's fiction, moreover, Mishima's servants do not narrate their masters' stories, though their actions reveal that they are quite aware of their ability to bend and orchestrate them—an ability that Mishima's middle- and upper-class protagonists respond to with both disdain and fear.

The literary trends and life experiences of these authors were far from unique, however, and Japanese scholarship has accordingly identified a great variety of experiences and representations of life with servants. In a series of articles, for instance, Shimizu Michiko explores through fiction many of the same historical changes and discourses on maids which she details in "*Jochū*" *imeeji no katei bunkashi*—from warm, familial master-servant relationships in the late Taishō to early Shōwa novels of Yoshiya Nobuko, to bleak class stratification between

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<sup>39</sup> Damian Flanagan, *Yukio Mishima* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 40.

rural maids and their urban employers as depicted in Yuki Shigeko's 1954 *Jochūkkō* [Maid], to the entirely professionalized, even mechanized, transaction of the daily housekeeper<sup>40</sup> as seen in Matsumoto Seichō's *Atsui kūki* [Hot Air] (1963), the novel that served as the basis for the award-winning 2011 drama *Kaseifu no Mita* [I am Mita, Your Housekeeper].<sup>41</sup> In these articles, Shimizu explores the ways in which literature not only reflected, but in fact actively concerned itself with the status and the depiction of servants. One of the benchmarks by which she assesses the place of maids, specifically, is their relationship vis-à-vis the larger family structure.

The same benchmark also structures Furukawa Yuka's 2011 book *Shiga Naoya no "katei": Jochū, furyō, shufu* [Shiga Naoya's "Family": Maids, Hoodlums, Housewives]. By focusing not simply on "family relationships [家族関係]" but rather on "how the place called home is portrayed [家庭という場の描かれ方]," Furukawa not only attests to the "contributions of characters such as maids, hoodlums, and housewives [女中や不良や主婦が小説に与えた影響]" but also examines the role they play in allowing Shiga Naoya's narrators [語り手] to

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<sup>40</sup> Even the word for "housekeeper [家政婦]" indicates a woman-who-manages-the-house, a designation which carries a level of authority and know-how that was not available to the primarily young girls who served as *jochū*.

<sup>41</sup> Shimizu Michiko, "Yoshiya Nobuko no shōsetsu ni miru Taishō matsu Shōwa senzenki no jochūzō: *Mitsu no hana, Otto no Teisō* wo chūshin ni [Images of Housemaids from the End of the Taisho Era to the Pre-war Years of the Showa Era as Depicted in the Novels of Nobuko Yoshiya: With a focus on *Three Flowers* and *A Husband's Chastity*]," *Kansai Kokusai Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 12 (2011): 101-116. Shimizu Michiko, "Yuki Shigeko no shōsetsu ni miru 1950 nendai no jochūzō: *Jochūkkō* wo chūshin ni [The Image of Domestic Help During the 1950s as Seen in Shigeko Yuki's Novel *Jochūkkō*]," *Kansai Kokusai Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 17 (2016): 73-88. Shimizu Michiko, "Matsumoto Seichō no shōsetsu *Atsui kūki* ni miru kaseifuzō [The Image of the Domestic Maid as Seen in Seichō Matsumoto's Novel *Hot Air*]," *Kansai Kokusai Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 14 (2013): 161-175.

understand themselves as the heroes [主人公] of their own stories.<sup>42</sup> Maids, she argues in a chapter titled “Jochū to iu sōchi [Maids as device],” play their particular part in this transformation by serving, through their sexuality, simultaneously as both the catalyst for the narrator’s maturation as an individual and as something to define themselves against.<sup>43</sup> Novels, Furukawa explains, can often be boiled down to a process by which the narrator or hero attains their desired self-definition. A character struggling to write a novel, for instance, forges their identity as an author equally through both the vicissitudes of failing to write and through the eventual triumph over the written word. Similarly, star detectives need a crime to occur before they can attempt to prove their merit. In stories about young men striving to redefine themselves as adults, then, leaving behind the status of ‘child’ paradoxically requires first giving into the rebellion of youth. In Shiga Naoya’s works, Furukawa argues, this rebellion often occurs on the backs of maids, who drive the story by representing a sexuality forbidden by the family structure. Just as a detective needs criminals and a writer needs writer’s block, that is, Shiga Naoya’s narrators must first succumb to scandal in rebellion against familial constraints before they can then, in turn, reject these youthful dalliances and assert their respectability as men.<sup>44</sup> Through their sexuality Shiga Naoya’s maids thus serve as both the hurdles and the means to the protagonist’s journey, perfectly placed within both the family structure and the narrative structure so as to offer a means of rebellion just safe enough that it will not inhibit the process of conforming to an ideal.

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<sup>42</sup> Furukawa Yuka, *Shiga Naoya no “katei”*: *Jochū, furyō, shufu* [Shiga Naoya’s “Family”: Maids, Hoodlums, Housewives] (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2011), 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228.

This dynamic, whereby servant characters' place within the family works in conjunction with their narratological contributions to the story in order to drive the story forward, is one which I recognize and analyze throughout the following chapters. Likewise, owing in part to the reality of the socioeconomic and cultural changes which gradually erased them from domestic life, the question of the disappearance of servants—as well as their occasionally remarkable invisibility even when they are present—colors much of the scholarship about them. Literary critic Okuno Takeo's *Neeya ga kiete: Engekiteki kateiron* [As the maid disappears: a theatrical theory of family] (1991), for instance, discusses servant characters in works by a number of Japanese authors—including those which feature in my chapters here—and is motivated by the author's nostalgia for the maids of his own childhood [ねえやは純粹に子供の頃だけのなつかしい関係なのだ].<sup>45</sup> Born in 1926—a year after Mishima—Okuno's reflections in the early 1990s harken back to a time that most Japanese could hardly remember. If Tanizaki's witnessing of the end of live-in maids in the 1960s was already enough to provoke nostalgia, so much more was the case for Okuno decades later. Perhaps for this reason, Okuno's text is not an attempt at recovering the stories of his own maids or recalling his experiences with them, but rather an attempt at in some way memorializing the importance of maids through an examination of their importance in literature. By way of background, then, Okuno describes his own experience with maids strictly in terms of literary reference points. The maids in his own household were more

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<sup>45</sup> Okuno Takeo, *Neeya ga kiete: Engekiteki kateiron* [As the maid disappears: A theatrical theory of family] (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1991), 20. I translate the term *neeya* here simply as “maid,” but its literal meaning is closer to “young girl.” Used specifically for referring to servants who looked after young children, *neeya* has the connotation of older sister and was used to refer to young maids, while an equivalent term, *baaya*, referred to an older female servant in the same role (and has the connotation of grandmother).



similar, he explains, to the “lively, hectic group of maids” described in Tanizaki’s *The Maids* than they were to Kiyō, the lifelong servant “more dear than a parent, bound by a promise to share a grave after death,” in Sōseki’s *Botchan*.<sup>46</sup> These maids, nevertheless, “deeply influenced his self-formation [自己形成に深くかかわっているのだ].” They were simultaneously both familial and exotic, “the foreign other who came long distances from the mother country, the sister country [ねえやは妣が国、姐が国からはるばる訪れて来た異人であった],” and their attention and companionship served to counteract any ill-effects stemming from his own mother’s “ambivalence [アンビバレンツ].”<sup>47</sup> He thus mourns the gradual absence of maids from both the home and from literature and the “un-literary living spaces [非文学的な生活空間]” that arose in their place. The absence of maids’ gazes and contributions, he argues, opened up space only for domestic crimes—and stories of domestic crime—like spousal violence and child abuse.<sup>48</sup> In this way, for Okuno, the roles which servants perform in both the home and in literature are singular and priceless, and servants themselves are irreplaceable figures—capable of shaping the very bounds of what a story can be.

### **Servants as Characters, Servants as People**

Whether elegizing servants in their absence or recognizing the weight of their presence, both Japanese and Western scholars have recognized servant characters as a unique and noteworthy presence in modern literature. In order to continue discussing them as such, I turn

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53.

now to the discussion of character more broadly, as the question of what characters actually are is far from settled. In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), the writer E. M. Forster theorizes that “[w]e may divide characters into flat and round.” Flat characters, he explains, “are constructed round a single idea or quality,” whereas, “when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round.”<sup>49</sup> It would seem, then, that the human complexity of these ‘flat’ characters is to some extent denied, but Forster also identifies a “great advantage of flat characters” in “that they are easily recognized whenever they come in—recognized by the reader’s emotional eye” while “we do not remember [the round character] so easily because she [i.e. Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*] waxes and wanes and has facets like a human being.”<sup>50</sup>

The first specific type of flat character that Forster individually discusses at this point, coincidentally, is the servant. Despite servants’ intimate proximity to a wide range of other people and characters—in real life and fiction, respectively—these servants themselves are often alienated from their own complexity. As an example, Forster presents the case of the retainer Caleb Balderstone in Sir Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*, who, “whatever he does... it is to conceal the poverty of his master’s house.” It is as if, Forster explains, “he has no existence outside it, no pleasures, none of the private lusts and aches that must complicate the most consistent of servitors.”<sup>51</sup> As I will discuss to a greater extent in the following chapters, there is here an acknowledgement that, while servants in real life are indeed full, complex human beings, servant characters are often constrained, not out of discriminatory impulses, but rather out of a need for them to fulfill particular literary functions. The narrative, then, may do these characters

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<sup>49</sup> E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1954), 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

some level of disservice, Forster admits, but this “flattening” is what allows these characters to themselves serve the narrative so effectively. It is, furthermore, no coincidence in the particular genre and era of literature which concerns Forster that domestic staff should so frequently comprise exemplary flat characters. As a real-life “supporting cast” in bourgeois family life, that is, servants’ quiet and unassuming service to the narratives of their masters is the logical counterpart to their real-life lives and duties.

Alex Woloch, in *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, discusses further the phenomenon of these secondary types of characters and the service that they do for the narrative. For Woloch, they are not “flat” but rather “minor,” and they perform particular functions in the context of what he calls the “character-system.” In the “character system,” Woloch explains, “[n]one of these characters get elaborated in a vacuum,” and “the space of a particular character emerges only vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out [i.e. Mr. Slope of *Barchester Towers*] or potentially revolve around him.”<sup>52</sup> As part of an integrated and precariously balanced system, Woloch’s character-spaces must reconcile the apparent gaps between Forster’s flat and round characters in order to rationalize their respective functions within the narrative. Characters are flat or round—allegorical or multifaceted—not due to some intrinsic quality, that is, but rather on account of their function within the storyworld. Behind every flat character is thus a potentially round character that has been flattened to serve a narrative purpose, and the modern novel is in fact “conscious of this narrative process, integrating its awareness into the narrative fabric.” Minor/flat/allegorical characters, then, are both necessary to the novel’s structure and problematized within that

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<sup>52</sup> Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 18.

structure, and their flatness, Woloch explains, is thus “a flatness that would seem to go against the basic tenets of realism but, in fact, becomes essential to realism.”<sup>53</sup> These characters, that is, are simultaneously both devalued by the narrative and invaluable to it—and the pressure their presence exerts upon the storyworld cannot be underestimated.

Of course, these binaries—round/flat, major/minor, main/supporting, primary/secondary, active/passive, and even served/serving—are not necessarily carved in stone. These designations, that is to say, are not definitional but rather relational. A character that seems destined to be a major character at first, for example, might turn out to play a relatively minor role, or a flat character may refuse to be passive, instead single-mindedly pursuing the downfall of the main character, manipulating them to serve their own purposes. Not all major characters are round, moreover, and not all flat characters are minor. A main character may be flatly obsessed with a single idea or goal, for instance, while his or her ‘supporting’ characters are forced to grow and adapt to the problems this obsession causes. A troublesome servant, similarly, may create more work for their master than they accomplish, and the reader may have greater insight into the servant’s motivations than how their master feels about it. It is important, then, not to allow value judgements to render these dichotomies more concrete than they actually are. Instead, narrative focalization overwhelmingly determines the way characters are perceived, and so, for instance, Tanizaki’s *The Maids* might at first glance seem to tell the stories of the maids themselves, even as it admits to in fact using them to tell the story of their masters. Conversely, despite Kiyō herself never actually making an appearance in the events of Sōseki’s *Botchan*, so much of the story is colored by Botchan’s anticipation of what Kiyō would think or do in any given situation

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 20.

that, even in her absence, she may perhaps be the story's greatest authority. There is a vast difference in the amount of textual space granted these characters, then, but what both cases nevertheless have in common is that all of these servants play a vital role in structuring the narrative as a whole. For this reason, the servant characters I discuss in the following chapters—while they are generally minor, often flat, and rarely main characters—belong together not because they are servants by definition, but rather because of the similar functions they perform in 'service' of the story.

One such function is described by Woloch as “[t]he strange significance of minor characters” which “resides largely in the way that the character disappears and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing.” This vanishing, he explains, is what allows us to “feel interest and outrage, painful concern or amused consent at what happens to minor characters,” both in terms of “their fate within the story” and “also in the narrative discourse itself (how they are finally overshadowed or absorbed into someone else’s story, swallowed within or expelled from another person’s plot).”<sup>54</sup> The questions of what happens to these characters in the story, that is—whether they live or die, whether they suffer or thrive—and whether the narrative discourse, for instance, either rounds out their stories or denies them closure, both command more attention from the reader than is paid to them by the novel itself. Mere disappearance, then, does not necessarily amount to a loss of significance. Rather, the very noticeability of their vanishing allows these characters to defiantly mark their own demise and leave behind an outsized impression on the reader.

“[T]he realist novel,” Woloch explains, “never ceases to make allegorical (or functional)

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 38.

use of subordinate characters, but it does ferociously problematize such allegory, by more clearly and insistently putting it in juxtaposition with reference.” These characters may become superfluous after serving their allegorical purpose, that is, but “[a]llegorical characterization now comes at a price: the price of the human particularity that it elides.” Readers thus both benefit from the functional contributions of these characters and take exception at their apparent relegation to mere literary device. In this way, “[f]latness simultaneously renders subordinate characters allegorical and, in its compelling distortions, calls attention to the subordination that underlies allegory.”<sup>55</sup> These characters, that is, strike back at their own minoriness precisely by making it ‘majorly’ significant. Even E.M. Forster, before he divides his characters by narrative rank, first identifies in characters in general their equally rebellious and duty-bound tendency to

...arrive when evoked, but full of the spirit of mutiny. For they have these numerous parallels with people like ourselves, they try to live their own lives and are consequently often engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book. They ‘run away,’ they ‘get out of hand’: they are creations inside a creation, and often inharmonious towards it; if they are given complete freedom they kick the book to pieces, and if they are kept too sternly in check, they revenge themselves by dying, and destroy it by intestinal decay.<sup>56</sup>

My work here thus concerns itself with precisely this ambivalence whereby minor characters—and specifically servants—both give themselves over to the creation of the narrative and the character-system and engage in treason against it.

One way in which this will be explored most deeply lies in the very tension between the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>56</sup> Forster, 66-67.

social 'minority' of servants and the potential literary minorness of characters. While these often overlap, it is imperative that they not be equated so simply, as these characters are not mere passive victims at the margins of the story, but are in fact engaged in a constant struggle with their place in the narrative. Just as their primarily functional role marginalizes them in the story, that is, the narrative must contend with the fact that the essential functions which minor characters fulfill conversely make them central to the narrative discourse. Within the broader category of minor characters, servant characters are particularly exemplary of this tension for the simple fact that it mirrors the realities of real life servants, who are likewise in the fragile position of being both marginalized within the household and central to its maintenance. While literary minorness indeed remains distinct from social marginalization, then, there remains significant overlap between servants in general and what it means to be 'minor.'

This very 'minorness,' however, effectively enables servant characters to challenge regimes of literary importance, just as it allows real-life servants to infiltrate the middle- and upper-class spaces of their masters. A similar definition of the 'minor' can be found in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's use of the term "minor literature." For Deleuze and Guattari, that is, minor literature has the potential to precipitate "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation." This potential, however, is not confined only to minor literatures—that is, literatures on the margin, or outside the canon. Rather, Deleuze and Guattari argue, "the revolutionary conditions for every literature" can be found "within the heart of what is called

great (or established) literature.”<sup>57</sup> To be ‘minor,’ by these definitions, then, is to resist marginalization precisely by taking advantage of the creative freedoms available only at the margins.

The minor servant characters I discuss thus represent points of contention within the narrative fabric of the bourgeois novel precisely because they are both minor and central at the same time. For this reason, rather than seeking out works with servant main characters—or even servant authors—I instead focus my discussion here on three canonical, middle-class authors of modern Japanese fiction. All the same, it is important to note that, despite their undisputed canonicity within the realm of Japanese literature, these writers were themselves engaged in a kind of minor literature, writing against a backdrop of Western genres and literary ideologies. While they may not have known much about what it means to be a servant, then, within the world of literature, all three knew what it meant to simultaneously inhabit both the margins and the center. To take into consideration, then, the literary function of their servant characters—characters who both sustain from the center and push the bounds from the margins—would be to provide fertile ground for reconfiguring assumptions about centrality, marginalization, and the distribution of power. As concepts of the nuclear family, gendered labor, and the everyday balance of work and leisure thus underwent extensive changes in 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, the stakes of reconfiguring these assumptions may have gone far beyond the literary, but it was literature which offered a unique arena for testing both the possibilities and boundaries of narratives of all kinds.

As agents of narrative structure, servant characters are thus afforded power far greater

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<sup>57</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 18.



than words like ‘minor’ and ‘supporting’ might imply. Despite any subordination to their masters’ lives and stories, that is, servant characters’ centrality to the discourse allows them to drive—and thrive within—the ironies and idiosyncrasies of the narrative. By focusing on these ironies and idiosyncrasies, then, it becomes possible to, in a sense, give these stories back to servant characters, not by ‘rescuing’ them from their middle-class hegemony, but rather by acknowledging the ways in which they are already central characters in the ‘story’ of how the story is told. My goal here thus is to explore ways of rethinking the place of servant characters within narrative, to draw out their major narrative contributions from stories in which they may otherwise appear minor, and to identify disparities between the narrative weight of those characters and their marginality within the story. Such an alternate literary history—written through narrative analysis itself—thereby refigures the canonical works I discuss in terms of how the presence and depiction of servant characters makes them what they are. ‘Secondariness’ might seem a disadvantage, that is, but it is only such so long as it is unexamined, for this ‘secondariness’ is indeed a primary condition to both the narrative structure and the particular kind of domestic and social life depicted. In this sense, stories primarily about servants have always been available within the canon, so long as we reject the fallacy of valuing stories’ content over the discursive processes which make them possible.

Beyond the question of majority and minority, main characters and secondary characters, my analysis thus requires an understanding of servants in terms of structure and function—both in how they function by themselves, and how they function vis-à-vis other characters. Of course, the following chapters are not the first discussions of characters in terms of literary function. As early as the mid-1950s, David Galef, in *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters*, for instance, discusses a variety of creative ways in which characters make their way

into the fabric of the story through a list of “structural types”—such as “narrators and expositors,” “interrupters,” and “symbols and allegories”—even as he raises the “definitional, even descriptive problem” of “the dividing line between minor and major characters.”<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of function-based character types, however, comes from Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, which lists seven distinct character functions.<sup>59</sup> These seven character functions—the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero—Propp argues, encompass every role a character might play, though they may also overlap in any given character. It is important, therefore, to reemphasize that these are functions, not identities. The princess, for instance, is not necessarily royalty—just the character whom the hero in some way ‘wins’ at the end of the story. Similarly, while “helpers” would seem the most obvious corollary for servant characters, the servants I discuss in the following chapters are just as frequently donors, dispatchers, and even villains. For this reason, rather than determining which function best suits any given servant character, I wish only to draw attention to the utility of looking into a type of character in terms of function, rather than simply by category.

While literary scholarship of late has generally distanced itself from formalist and structuralist conceptualizations of literary function, I argue here that an analysis of characters by function, far from reducing them to cold calculations, can in fact refigure regimes of literary significance, thereby expanding the space allotted to them. A focus on function over description, that is, allows characters to amount to more than simply the culmination of all of the information

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<sup>58</sup> David Galef, *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1955), 11, 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> Vladimir Propp. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott. Intro. Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968).

about them, defining them instead through the totality of their influence and ramifications in the narrative. Ann Cameron, in her book *Sidekicks in American Literature*, discusses one such type of character whose breadth of function far exceeds the bounds of a supposedly secondary position. While technically subordinate in relation to the “hero,” the “sidekick” character, like the servant characters I discuss, is nevertheless centrally important to the structure of the hero’s story. The sidekick, Cameron explains, comprises all at once “the loyal companion, subservient to the hero, the comic relief in the midst of gripping adventure, confidant, messenger, servant, counselor, and aide-de-camp, the lesser of the duo in terms of power or intelligence or bravery or social standing.” While all of these roles are indeed of a supporting nature, however, Cameron also uses the example of Sancho Panza in Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) to explain how the combined weight of all of his sidekick functions in fact elevates his overall place within the narrative discourse, “even to the point of threatening Don Quixote’s preeminence.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Cameron goes on to discuss “striking similarities in the relationship between master and servant” and how “[i]n later American works, this relationship begins to change, as the subservient figure becomes more influential.” Over time, that is, “[t]he figure who may be subservient due to inequalities of power, class, money, knowledge, gender, age, skill, race or nationality, or strength begins to overcome some of these difficulties and to serve in a variety of capacities other than that of servant.”<sup>61</sup>

While of course I agree with Cameron on this point when it comes to real human beings, I otherwise part from her when it comes to characters. Subservience and inequality are most

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<sup>60</sup> Ann Cameron, *Sidekicks in American Literature* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 2, 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

certainly worth overcoming for marginalized people, but, just as Cameron argues that a character like Sancho Panza attains his level of narrative power precisely through the fulfilment of a plethora of supporting functions, I argue that an existence on the margins is not nearly the impediment to a literary character that it is to a living person. Whereas those in power in the real world determine the rules of engagement and have the highest stakes in maintaining the societal structure, in the space of narrative, it is conversely minor characters who determine the structure in which the main characters' stories unfold. These minor characters, then, are not necessarily made lesser by their relative minority. Like Forster's flat characters, in fact, they are often more readily identifiable to the reader—both in their steadiness and in their imperfection—than the lofty 'heroes' they serve. Such is true, at least, of many of the servant characters I discuss in the following chapters. Though servants may not possess the socioeconomic power of their masters, servant characters more than compensate for the difference with their narrative importance, and it is thus through their good offices that we are granted our own humble relationship to the story unfolding in their world.

The question, then, is not whether or not these servant characters are important despite not being centered by the story, but rather what it means to center them in a discussion of the narrative. Esra Melikoğlu, in *Interactive Voices in Intertextual Literature: The Ex-Centric Female, Child, Servant and Colonised* (2004), argues that not only is this re-centering possible, but that it can also be a productive strategy for re-claiming power in the present day. "[T]oday," she writes, "intertextuality/rewriting represents a persistent strategy in revising older texts in order to imaginatively reconstruct the censored/criminalised versions of ex-centric groups in a culture." Members of these groups, then, in order to survive, "must not only find cracks in the

patriarchal world, but also in the patriarchal text, through which to force their entry into them.”<sup>62</sup>

This is not to say, of course, that I believe my discussion of servant characters here will be of some particular use to any present-day servants. What I do argue, however, is that, by reexamining the place of these allegedly subservient characters in literature, it may become possible to reimagine them instead as sources of power, even in the face of otherwise seemingly complete hegemony. While a narrative written by a single author might seem unilateral by definition, I argue that such narratives may in fact produce any number of different voices telling different stories, if only one is willing to listen for them.

Even if their actual words never receive equal billing, then, the formal and dramatic demands of literature grant servant characters a degree of leeway in fiction that their equivalents would rarely see in real life. Thus, having empowered these characters in the name of expedience, canonical literature does not in fact exclude this marginal class, but rather serves as one of the greatest sources of cracks through which it might resist marginality. The functions demanded of servant characters, after all, are far too central to be outweighed merely by preconceptions about their real-life counterparts. “The correspondence between class and service is only approximate,” writes Linda Anderson in her 2005 book *A Place in the Story: Servants and Service in Shakespeare’s Plays*. “[A] character,” Anderson elaborates, “can only be a member of one class at any one time, whereas the kinds of service required of a character may be multiple and conflicting.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Esra Melikoğlu, *Interactive Voices in Intertextual Literature: the Ex-centric Female, Child, Servant, and Colonised* (Marburg, Germany: Tectum Verlag, 2004), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Linda Anderson, *A Place in the Story: Servants and Service in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 19.

All of these texts, then, to some extent, deal with the real life “equivalents” of servant characters—even if only to explain that they were not very equivalent at all. This does not mean, however, that this non-equivalence is without its problems or critics. Bruce Robbins, in *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (1986), for instance, decries the loss of the particularities of servant characters to pure functionality, remarking on what he refers to as the “annoying sameness of these formal manifestations of literary service.” There is a distressing uniformity to servant characters in English fiction, Robbins asserts, that regrettably allows “a critic like Northrop Frye” to “claim, using this figure as a prime exhibit, that the essential forms of literature are independent of their social context.”<sup>64</sup> Of course, Robbins might have found greater evidence of a connection between character functions and social context were he himself looking beyond the particular social context of nineteenth-century English fiction, but, nevertheless, the question he identifies here—of the gap between literature’s representational potential and the demands of its form—remains relevant to my own work on twentieth-century Japan.

There is then, according to Robbins, a nowhere-ness to the literary servant, who is both representational and formal, both marginal and ubiquitous. “At the very heart of realism,” he writes,

...is the scandal of a figure which both stands for the confrontation of the Two Nations and refuses to represent historical and social difference at all, which is merely instrumental, and yet which seems to enjoy an uncanny life of its own, producing effects incongruous with its social position and moments of vision incongruous with literary

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<sup>64</sup> Bruce Robbins, *The Servant’s Hand: English Fiction from Below* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), x.

functionality.<sup>65</sup>

This literary figure, then, both scandalous and conventional, thus calls “to be observed from a global or world-historical perspective”—even if Robbins himself remains focused on English literature. Despite his stated concerns over the lack of particularity in servant characters, moreover, he also chooses to discuss them as a category rather than as individuals, declaring the category of servant characters “too repetitive for treatment by author, just as it is too minor, fragmentary, and marginal to any given text to be treated by work.”<sup>66</sup>

In my own analysis, I depart from Robbins here, dividing my argument principally by author, often focusing on singular works, as well as incorporating, to whatever extent it remains productive, a sense of the historical background in which the works were set, written, and read. Nevertheless, Robbins’ observations of literary-functional commonalities in the character-system of the modern novel, I argue, lend considerable support to the validity and utility of a study of servant characters based on function over type. Whether the folkloric elements discussed by Propp, or the realist novel as read by Robbins, or the romantic literature discussed by so many others, an attention to function provides an opportunity to probe simultaneously both commonalities across disparate works and the subtle differences among seemingly similar ones. As the Japanese authors I discuss navigated so many of these same antagonisms and conflicting ordering systems in their own work, then, this attention to function indeed also allows for new avenues for literary comparison, as well as a deeper appreciation of literary particularities. While Robbins asserts that the literary depiction and function of servants remains relatively static over

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., xii.

the course of history—despite societal changes and individual variations concerning real-life servants—I argue that the distinct history of domestic servants in Japan confers its own literary responsibilities and values onto servant characters. As such, the world of servant characters in Japanese literature is incommensurate with—though not incomparable to—the world of servant characters in the English novels discussed by Robbins, and thus beckons its own close examination.

### **Methodology, Structure, and Caveats**

Each of my three chapters features a single author and several of their fictional works, as well as critical works by the author which illuminate some of the common themes in these works. As I agree with Robbins, however, that something of the narratological peculiarity of servitude in literature is lost when servants' roles are discussed on a per-author basis, my conclusion will seek to draw out the commonalities—and the reasons for any apparent insurmountable differences—between the works of the authors which I discuss. The role of biographical information, similarly, will be limited in the individual chapters, provided mainly when it is necessary to highlight the author's own experience or inexperience with servants. Historical background, likewise, will be presented in broad strokes only when the historical realities of servitude in the relevant historical moment might inform the literary functions of servants, or the impact those functions have on the story. Oftentimes, after all, the times and places in which these works take place are distinct from the time and place of their writing, and even the most autobiographical novels are not autobiographies. Thus, to read more history and biography into them than necessary for understanding the stakes of character functions, I contend, would be to do a disservice to history, to biography, and to fiction. While it is important



then to consider the kinds of conventions and understandings that informed these authors' approaches to servants, my work relies primarily on how they played with and utilized these conventions and understandings, rather than the specifics of how they depicted them.

Rather than spending time, then, on any one author's individual memories and acquaintances with servants, my analysis focuses instead on the ways in which servants are experienced in their individual bodies of work. Sōseki's servants, for instance, make their presences known through both the sounds of their voices and their noticeable silences, and an awareness of the many blind spots and disavowals that keep servants marginal runs throughout his novels. Tanizaki's servants, meanwhile, are troublesome precisely because of how inextricable their presences are from the lives of their masters. Marginal as they may be in a socioeconomic sense, that is, servants in Tanizaki are emphatically at the center of domestic life, and his stories cannot be told without their cooperation. By filling in and navigating the gaps both in the domestic and narrative structure, Tanizaki's servants thus assert themselves as essential collaborators also to the construction and preservation of both. The servants in Mishima's novels, on the contrary, are always assumed to be up to something, not facilitators of the narrative passively, in deference to their masters' stories, but rather actively, directing the stories and character development of their masters. Mishima's servants take possession of narrative—fully aware of the importance of their functional roles—acting as pseudo-narrators and pseudo-writers, orchestrators of the narrative, capable of rewriting and staging their masters' stories. While none of the works I discuss, then, are narrated by servants—(most have third person narrators, omniscient or otherwise)—and rarely follow servants' own stories for long, servants in these works nonetheless play an essential role in their narration. By representing a wide variety of problems and solutions which both drive the story forward and reveal its fissures

and discrepancies, servants in these works both serve the needs of the narrative and challenge its authority.

To sacrifice all of these contested grounds to biographical and historical excavation projects, I argue, thus would be an injustice not just to the literary medium itself but also to the actual historical conditions and authorial motivations under which these works were written. Mishima, for instance, is certainly not writing from his own personal experiences of early nineteenth-century France in his 1965 play *Madame de Sade* [*Sado kōshaku fujin*], and he even goes so far as to stress the play's overt fictionality in his postface.

I have in several instances deliberately altered facts [わざと史実を歪めた] in the lives of the historical characters [実在の人物] of the play. These changes were dictated by theatrical necessity. I trust they will be forgiven, for this is not, after all, intended to be a historical play [別に歴史劇ではない]. Of the six characters, Madame de Sade, Madame de Montreuil, and Madame de Sade's sister, Anne, are historical; the other three were created by myself [私の創作した人物].<sup>67</sup>

Mishima thus divides these characters in his play into actually existing [実在] and created [創作] persons, explaining that his play is not only ahistorical but in fact deliberately so. Although in most cases the division of characters into either representational or purely functional is hardly as clear-cut as Mishima makes it here, I nevertheless embrace this distinction, which implicitly rejects accuracy of historical representation as the principal measure of a character's value.

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<sup>67</sup> Mishima Yukio, *Madame de Sade*, trans. Donald Keene (New York: C. E. Tuttle Co, 1971), 108. Mishima Yukio, "Batsu: Sado kōshaku fujin," in *Ketteiban Mishima Yukio zenshū ketteihan*, vol. 33 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2003), 586.

It can be tempting for character-based projects such as this one—particularly ones in which deprivileged groups are at stake—to set their sights on the impossible mission of uncovering the tawdry ‘truth’ about their subjects’ real-life equivalents, or, perhaps, of identifying some implicit and prescient protest against their deprivileging. I do neither here, however, instead following the lead of Deleuze and Guattari’s “minor literature” in endeavoring to decenter dominant narratives while resisting the urge to install others in their places. Cracks and fissures are present, I argue, even within those narratives either unprepared or unwilling to deal with them, and thus my mission here is not to fill them in, but rather to pry them open a little wider and see how they were formed. If any political project is at stake, then, it is a call to recognize that no structure is impervious to contestation—and that that contestation may even be integral to the structure itself. I thus aim to situate the characters I discuss—both servant and master—explicitly within the literary worlds they inhabit and structure, thereby inviting my reader and the readers of these works to reconsider what these characters mean both to the works themselves and to each other within the storyworld. This is not just a work about servant characters, then, but also an investigation into the literary rewards and the dangers of noticing them, as imagined by literary people who cared about literary stakes.

Consequently, this is also not a literary study of history. Those looking for a comprehensive history of domestic service in Japan would be much better served by works like Shimizu Michiko’s *“Jochū” imeeji no katei bunkashi* or Koizumi Kazuko’s *Jochū ga ita Shōwa*. Instead, the following chapters discuss the literary phenomenon of servant characters and the ways in which said phenomenon allows for the complication of timelines, chronology, and teleological expectations—the structure, that is, not only of fiction, but of all forms of narrative, history included. Whether the ahistorical historical fiction of Mishima, or the nostalgic leanings

of Tanizaki, or the very ‘present’ intimacy of servants in Sōseki, none of the works I discuss yield much in the way of a documentary history of servant labor—least of all from the point of view of the servants themselves. Instead, they altogether tell a story about the inextricability of servants from another kind of narrative—one which might not be able to fill in the gaps in the history of domestic servants but which, nevertheless, might offer a gauge of just how large those gaps must be. I thus wish to embrace a more nuanced view of the interplay between history and literature by asserting that even those characters that remain marginal throughout texts written by authors with no proclaimed desire to somehow rectify that marginality might nevertheless be worthy of a story of their own. This is not to say, of course, that my work here eschews historical context entirely, but rather that the purpose of any historical context provided is more informative than interpretive, and any conclusions henceforth made will not be conclusions about the history of the serving class in early twentieth-century Japan. A text to this effect is one which I would be quite happy to read, but it is not within my scope here. Instead, what I aim to do is to highlight one particular way literature can be re-read and re-energized through the space of one particular subset of characters—and the structural insights which such an endeavor may provide.

First, however, I must clarify something regarding the terminology and the parameters by which I define this subset of characters. While I have already discussed some of the binary terms used in evaluating and labeling servant characters—such as major/minor, main/supporting, round/flat—the term “servant” itself also needs to be qualified. As the most common translation of a variety of terms describing Japanese domestic workers, as well as the word used in Anglophone literary criticism, the word “servant” presents itself as a convenient—and indeed more or less adequate—catch-all term for the types of characters which I discuss. It is important

to note, however, that it also elides a considerable diversity of specific Japanese terms. Rather than servant characters, then, it might be more precise to state that my analysis principally concerns 使用人 [*shiyōnin* (domestic workers)] and 奉公人 [*hōkōnin* (retainers)], or perhaps an assortment of “maids [女中 *jochū*, 下女 *gejo*, 乳母 *uba*, 老女 *rōjo*]” mixed in with a few “houseboys [書生 *shosei*].” All of these designations carry their own cultural and historical specificities which do not always overlap as much as the umbrella term “servants” might imply, and the particulars of domestic service, as I previously discussed, were often divided along gendered lines. Even duties among female servants similarly differed substantially by age. To discuss all of these domestic workers as one single class—either social or literary—would thus constitute a considerable oversight.

Maids and houseboys are often positioned quite differently in these stories and function differently in the narrative discourse as a result. Nevertheless, there are also unexpected similarities and affinities between them which, I argue, enable my analysis and further illuminate both maid and houseboy characters alike. Houseboys and maids often share space in these stories, and those spaces are, conversely, often closed off to their employers, granting these servants a kind of provisional territory within the domestic space. Furthermore, it is not principally the private spaces afforded them which they share—such as the houseboy’s modest sleeping quarters or the maids’ room—but rather those workspaces which their labor brings them into during the course of the day.<sup>68</sup> This contact is notable in the texts I discuss, moreover, for the

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<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting here that these spaces were indeed workspaces from the perspective of domestic servants, rather than living spaces. While they might have had some level of privacy within their own sleeping quarters, these quarters were typically minimal for houseboys and communal for maids, and their movements throughout the rest of the house

fact that it occurs chiefly at times and in spaces in which their masters are generally absent, at best overhearing their servants' conversations from within a closed-off space, or speculating on what their servants might be talking about in secret. Brought together by the nature of their labor, these servant characters thus inhabit functional spaces which are vital to both story and household and yet cordoned off within them, often just out of view. From within these functional spaces, I argue, narrative functionality permits such disparate characters as maids and houseboys to be discussed together in terms of service—both in the sense of their service within the domestic space and with regards to their service to narrative discourse.

Having thus established my focus on the ways in which servant characters serve the narrative discourse—rather than the historical, material conditions of their service—I must nevertheless concede that my analysis is also markedly chronological. This chronological order, however—from Natsume Sōseki, to Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, to Mishima Yukio—was not in fact planned out for chronology's sake, but instead manifested out of a particular storyline regarding servant characters which I trace through these authors' works themselves. This storyline is one which begins with noticing the quiet potential of servants, moves to an acknowledgment of the inextricability of servants from domestic life, and culminates in a realization of servants' incredible latent power. It is the story, that is, of the changing understanding and societal roles of servants in Japan's twentieth century, but, rather than historical record projected onto literary form, this story is one which arises from a close reading of the literature itself. When I ordered

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were dictated by the demands of their work. Just as servants, then, inhabit the physical space in which their employers live in order to manage it for them, servant characters likewise enter the story in order to structure it around their employers' lives.

these chapters, then, I did so along a continuum of an increasingly urgent need to grapple with the power of servants and the roles they play, and it is thus by chance—though not by mere coincidence—that this continuum coincides with corresponding societal changes.

Literature, like characters, is created from the raw materials of human society, but it is distinct from it. The notion that it follows the developments of historical change—indeed, the notion that history itself follows some rational line of developing historical change—only serves to force an artificial framework onto an otherwise highly variable and often contradictory realm. This is not to say, of course, that historical changes do not occur, or even that I do not address certain sweeping historical changes—both in the real world of domestic service in twentieth-century Japan and in the oeuvres of the authors I discuss. Rather, it is merely to warn that my central argument concerns the particular constructive and destructive potential of servant characters—and that this potential is alternately drawn upon or effaced according to the specific needs and conditions of the novelistic narrative form, rather than determined by the political and social condition of real life servants. It is for this reason that my argument will rely primarily on close readings rather than assumptions of representational accuracy, thereby granting the narrative license to speak most freely and audibly about the true ‘character’ of its narration.

## Chapter Preview

In my first chapter, titled “Natsume Sōseki and the Ethics of Representing Domestic Servants,” I engage questions of literary ethics and representation with regards to servant characters through readings of *Botchan*, *I Am a Cat* [*Wagahai wa neko de aru*] (1905-1906), *And Then* [*Sorekara*] (1909), *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* [*Higan sugi made*] (1912), and

*Kokoro* (1914), as well as Sōseki's essay "My Individualism [Watakushi no kojīn shugi]" (1914). None of these works are about servants or told from their point of view, and few of their servant characters are afforded much introduction beyond what is necessary to serve their narratological purpose. Despite their status as strictly minor characters, however, the narrators and non-servant characters in these works approach these servant characters more often with curiosity than with indifference, and the presence of servant characters thus carries more weight than what their positions might imply. In *I Am a Cat*, for instance, maids and houseboys frustrate the feline narrator—often by kicking him out of the kitchen—while the maids in *Kokoro* also police the space of the household, not through force, but rather by representing the possibility of scrutiny in an otherwise isolated domestic environment. In *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, meanwhile, maids and houseboys easily gossip about their masters behind the scenes while the novel's narrators and main characters themselves are often kept in the dark, both with regard to the lives and stories of their servants and in matters concerning the affairs of their own peers. *Botchan*, on the other hand, is unique among these works, as the narrator's long-time servant is in fact ever-present in his conscience and memory, while conversely absent from the events of the story altogether. Lastly, *And Then* features a houseboy—it is in fact the only one of the works I discuss to feature a houseboy more prevalently than a maid—whose relative disinterest in the affairs of the novel's main character contrasts sharply with the degree of curiosity so many of Sōseki's narrators and main characters themselves display regarding the unknowable lives of their servants.

This unknowability of servant characters—the notion that servants may in fact lead full, individual lives outside of the purview of their masters—I argue, gestures to the ethical question of how to represent a type of character themselves defined by the role they play in 'serving' the



representation of others. Sōseki's novels thus question how the presence, absence, words, and silences of servant characters can provide structure to the narrative discourse while also unsettling it through the narratological and ethical question of their incomplete incorporation into the story as a whole. Sōseki, moreover, embraces this conundrum, I argue, by in fact acknowledging in his works the blind spots surrounding servant characters—the blind spots, that is, that always accompany difference, even and especially in an otherwise intimate setting. Thus identifying in Sōseki's works a cautious curiosity towards servants, this chapter posits a representational ethics that admits to and telegraphs the fact—without attempting to rectify it—that some stories might indeed be out of the bounds of others, no matter how close at hand they might seem.

My second chapter, “Building a Home with Servants in the Works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō,” further tackles the issue of how servants and their stories share both physical and literary space with their masters. Inspired in part by the architectural and structural themes of Tanizaki's literary essay “In Praise of Shadows [In'ei raisan]” (1933), I discuss in this chapter Tanizaki's narrative structure as a kind of literary architecture in which servant characters play a particularly foundational role. In contrast to the openly curious approach of Sōseki's novels, Tanizaki's servant characters are more likely to be objectified as both symbolic of—and material to—a particular way of life. While individual servant characters thus often receive more attention in Tanizaki's novels than they do in Sōseki's, this is not due to a greater knowledge of servants' lives and thoughts, but rather a greater investment in their fundamentally functional roles. Thus, through readings of Tanizaki's short story “A Portrait of Shunkin [Shunkinshō]” (1933), as well as his novels *The Makioka Sisters* [*Sasameyuki*] (1943-48) and *The Maids* (1963), this chapter

explores the significance of these functional roles by paralleling servants' contributions to literary structures with their contributions to the domestic structures depicted therein.

Of these stories—and perhaps of all the stories I discuss—“A Portrait of Shunkin” comes closest to being properly narrated by a servant, as it purports to be based on firsthand accounts written by the young male servant of a blind musician. This servant, moreover, not only structures the story passively but also intentionally, arranging both the domestic environment and its legacy to his liking. In *The Makioka Sisters*, meanwhile, maids play solidly supporting roles, passively enforcing the terms of engagement via their presence while actively serving as trusted domestic co-conspirators. Less vital to the concrete maintenance of the home than they are to its more abstract functions and characteristics, these maids are nonetheless inextricable from both the story and the Makioka household itself. *The Maids*, on the other hand, is unusual in that servants are not background characters at all but in fact its main subject matter, as the novel tells the story of a household through a series of anecdotes involving the maids who serve it throughout the years. What all of these stories of Tanizaki's have in common, however, despite the considerable variation in the space afforded their servant characters, is a shared understanding of servants as intimately connected with both a way of life and the possibility of its narration. Tanizaki, I argue, thus recognizes the functional value of servants, presenting them as not only fundamental to the structure and maintenance of the fictional household, but also by extension essential to its representation and the archive of its legacy.

My third and final chapter is titled “Physicality and Presence: Mishima Yukio's Diabolical Maids” and looks at his novels *Confessions of a Mask* [*Kamen no kokuhaku*] (1949) and *Spring Snow* [*Haru no yuki*] (1969), as well as his play *Madame de Sade* [*Sado kōshaku fujin*] (1965). Reading these works in the context of Mishima's essay *Sun and Steel* [*Taiyō to*

*tetsu*] (1968), which confronts the relationship between the physical body, power, and artistic expression, I identify in Mishima's servant characters a subtle, even nefarious authority. While the servants in these stories are neither the subject matter, the heroes, nor the formal narrators of these works, their otherness and functional importance render their intimacy to both family and narrative discourse a source of great power. As fundamental to the maintenance of a home as they are in Tanizaki, Mishima's servants are also talented at navigating the same blind spots they occupy in Sōseki, capable of slipping through the cracks and seizing power over the home for themselves.

In *Confessions of a Mask*, for instance, the narrator recalls the servants of his youth, who police his self-image and dispel his illusions about the world in ways far more violent than the quiet way in which servants in Sōseki and Tanizaki police the behavior of their own masters. It is specifically through their domain over the physical, moreover, that these servants exercise their power, such as when a maid forcibly strips the young narrator after he ventures to try on women's clothing. This physical, embodied presence defines servant characters in *Spring Snow* as well, as an elderly maid manipulates the noble family she serves via her physical proximity to the family's daughter, and a young male servant frustrates his master with the comparative strength of both his body and his convictions. While the family maid in *Madame de Sade*, meanwhile, is far less conniving, the relative ease with which she transverses aristocratic and common spaces is nevertheless perceived by her mistresses as a threat to the story they wish to tell about themselves. Servants, then, are as present in Mishima's works as they are in Sōseki's and Tanizaki's, but in Mishima's works this presence is met not with earnest curiosity or symbolic investment, but rather with trepidation and even fear. The physicality of the servant body and the extreme power that comes from servants' embodied intimacy and unbridled access

to their masters, I argue, thus reveals in Mishima's works an awareness of the true power of these 'minor' characters. Structurally powerful, essential to their masters' ways of life, and capable of moving about in those masters' blind spots, servant characters in Mishima possess not only aims and aspirations of their own but also the means to pursue them.

Taken as a whole, these three chapters thus tell a story about a type of character that commands space in the narrative seemingly out of proportion with the attention that their class, gender, and employment status—as well as a surface reading of the plot—might lead us to expect. From the ethical question of how to acknowledge the contribution of those on the margins, to recognizing the potential of alternative perspectives to produce new narratives and resist domination, this dissertation endeavors to rethink the significance of contributions outside of classist, capitalist, and misogynistic understandings of value by acknowledging the latent power of service as a traditionally undervalued form of (literary) labor. Through an examination, then, of servant characters within a literary space which relies upon and highlights their functional contributions above and beyond the attention paid to real-life servants, it thus becomes possible to illuminate, from within literature, both the discourse on servants specifically and the larger questions of historical, representational, and narrative discourse more broadly. In this way, an investigation into the roles of servant characters across even this small subset of twentieth-century Japanese fiction is thus able to provide fresh—and indeed more productive and optimistic—avenues for rethinking representation and plurality in literature.

## Chapter 1

# Natsume Sōseki and the Ethics of Representing Domestic Servants

During the late Meiji (1868-1912) and early Taishō (1912-1926) periods, when Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) was writing, maids and houseboys were a mainstay in the bourgeois households about which he primarily wrote, and thus nearly all of his novels show signs of their presence, even when those signs amount to little more than traces. In *Kokoro* (1914), for instance, the maid is nearly invisible even with regards to her most basic household duties, as the narrator explains that whenever Sensei needs something, it is “often his wife rather than the maid whom he asked [先生は何かの序に、下女を呼ばないで、奥さんと呼ぶ事があった].”<sup>69</sup> Even though her presence is easy to miss, however, this maid still plays a part in the domestic dynamic so essential that the film director Ichikawa Kon (1915-2008) saw fit forty years later, in his 1955 film adaptation of the novel, to give this maid an actress, a name (糸 Kume), and even a hint of a story of her own. In order to explain, for instance, why Sensei and the narrator are left completely alone in the house, the maid suffers a plot-necessary toothache, forcing Sensei’s wife to accompany her to the dentist after she refuses to go on her own—a sequence that does not occur in the novel.<sup>70</sup> In the novel, rather, the barely-there presence of the maid instead serves primarily to contribute to the overall sense of isolation which pervades *Kokoro*.

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<sup>69</sup> Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro*, trans. Meredith McKinney (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 19.

Natsume Sōseki, *Kokoro*, in *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 26.

<sup>70</sup> Naraoka Tomoko, perf. *Kokoro*, directed by Ichikawa Kon. Nikkatsu, 1955.

Even in that isolated atmosphere, of course, the idea that a reasonably well-off couple would not have at least a servant girl is hardly to be imagined. With only the single maid, however, rather than a whole cadre of them, the novel is left devoid of the spacious atmosphere of activity and gossip which servant characters bring to so many other novels, the lack of servant relationships only amplifying the silence within the marital relationship at the center of the home. In fact, the word *gejo* [下女]—the term used for the vast majority of female servants in Sōseki’s novels—only comes up 18 times in total in *Kokoro*, most of those instances within the same handful of scenes, and many of those merely clarifications of how meal trays either enter or leave the room.<sup>71</sup>

Despite this often utilitarian treatment of servant characters, however, I argue in this chapter that Sōseki’s novels in fact invite both a serious and deliberate grappling with the literary contributions of these servants and an appreciation for the complicated ethics of attempting to represent them. I begin with a closer reading of a few scenes in *Kokoro* in which maids do appear, drawing attention to the ways in which the novel’s narrators—both the young student and Sensei—telegraph their cognizance of the effects of servants’ presence in the household, even as they may outwardly minimize or dismiss these effects. Considering, then, how these character-narrators navigate—or refuse to navigate—the implications of these servants as real people with whom they share their homes, I then move on to a discussion of Sōseki’s “My Individualism [Watakushi no kojinchugi]” (1914), a piece in which Sōseki questions more broadly what it

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<sup>71</sup> Servants who seem to exist only to shuffle objects and people in and out of rooms indeed abound in the stories I discuss, as they do in literature in general. See, for instance, the frequent mentions of O-haru bringing food and showing in guests in Tanizaki’s *The Makioka Sisters* (Chapter 2), or the very visible movements of Charlotte in Mishima’s play *Madame de Sade* (Chapter 3).

means to understand oneself and others as discrete individuals, as well as how this intersects with the literary ethics of representing those other individuals. Situating these ethics against a brief discussion of Sōseki's *Botchan* (1906) and the difference in how the novel's main character views the behavior of his educated male colleagues versus that of his lifelong maid, I identify an ambivalence in Sōseki's fiction regarding the novelistic tendency to focus energy on only one or a few individuals, leaving the potential stories of others untold. This question of the limitations of telling other people's stories colors the style and form of Sōseki's *I Am a Cat* [*Wagahai wa neko de aru*] (1905-1906), which uses the perspective of the titular domestic feline and his own ambivalent position between the house's masters and its servants to bring into question just how different the two groups really are. I turn then to another of Sōseki's novels, *And Then* [*Sorekara*] (1909), in which two characters, the main character Daisuke and his houseboy Kadono, show just how similar a servant and his master can be and what those similarities and differences mean for how they conceptualize and understand each other's stories and lives. Lastly, I examine Sōseki's *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* [*Higan sugi made*] (1912) and discuss what is at stake in the representation of servant characters, what contribution these servants make to the telling of stories, and what is lost when their own stories are eclipsed by the stories of their masters. In the end, I argue that, far from relegating servants to purely utilitarian, faceless literary cogs, Sōseki's novels display an ethics of representation with regards to servant characters which acknowledges that their stories are indeed untold, highlights the unexpected depth of their commonalities with their masters, and recognizes their individuality and unique experiences while nevertheless conceding that these stories are inaccessible to a middle-class novelist like Sōseki. Therefore, the most ethical approach for Sōseki is in fact to simply acknowledge that inaccessibility—to draw attention to the gaps and blind spots—rather than to attempt to efface

them by striving to speak on behalf of these characters. Even—or perhaps especially—in those moments, then, when servant characters seem to exist as mere literary devices in their bourgeois masters’ stories, Sōseki’s novels testify to the fact that this is only possible because something has been erased.

### **Now You See Them, Now You Don’t: The Maids of *Kokoro***

In the latter portion of *Kokoro*, for instance, in which Sensei tells the story of his youth, the maid’s existence is only acknowledged when necessary to explain why another event has occurred. Sensei’s friend and fellow lodger, known only as K, has committed suicide, and Sensei’s impulse to inform the maid after finding the body serves to justify the manner in which the landlady comes to learn about what has happened:

We were in the habit of rising before seven, since many of our lectures began at eight.

This meant that the maid got up around six [下女はその関係で六時頃に起きる訳になっていました]. It was not yet six when I went to wake her that day [しかしその日私が下女を起しに行ったのはまだ六時前でした]. My footsteps woke Okusan, who pointed out to me that it was Sunday. “If you’re awake,” I said to Okusan, “perhaps you could come to my room a moment.”<sup>72</sup>

The maid never actually makes an appearance, and Sensei’s plan to wake her serves only to explain where he was going when the sound of his footsteps awakens Okusan instead. His brief mention of the maid in this passage in fact provides only an almost suspicious level of detail (it’s just before six in the morning on a Sunday), and an irrelevant taste of Sensei’s and K’s day-to-

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 218-219. *SZ*, vol. 6, 269-270.



day class schedules (ostensibly on days other than Sundays) which contributes little to Sensei's account other than to create further emotional distance from the death of his once intimate friend, already identified only by an initial.<sup>73</sup> With a clarity that reads like a detective report—"and sir what time did you say you found the body?"—the maid appears at this point in *Kokoro* not so much as a character but as a time-keeping device, as an inanimate part of the scene, or, at the very least, as an apparent disclaimer that of course Sensei would not take such a ghastly matter to the mistress of the house directly.

The first half of *Kokoro* however is slightly more generous in terms of the narrative real estate afforded the maid, while still far less generous than the novels which I discuss in the rest of this chapter. Even the character Kume who takes her place in Ichikawa Kon's film sees significantly more screen time, even if much of that extra space is simply on account of the visual nature of the medium.<sup>74</sup> At the same time however, this maid's function in the story is

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<sup>73</sup> Komori Yōichi identifies the contrast the novel strikes between Sensei's use of an initial to detach himself from his friend after his suicide and the young narrator's refusal at the beginning of the novel to do the same to Sensei himself. Whatever considerations Sensei himself might have had in choosing to refer to his friend as only "K," the young narrator establishes early on that he sees it as a way of artificially creating a degree of emotional distance. Atsuko Sakaki, *Recontextualizing Texts: Narrative Performance in Modern Japanese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 43-45.

<sup>74</sup> In the opening scene of the film, Sensei asks Shizu to accompany him to K's grave. She tells him to go alone [お一人でいらして], ostensibly because she does not want to leave the house empty [うちが空になりますもの]. "Won't Kume be here? [糸がいるじゃないか]" he asks, before Shizu dismisses him, telling him that she "has work to do anyway [仕事もありますし]." The maid's presence—or rather, the assumption of her presence—even though she is not physically in the scene and possibly not actually in the house, is a deafening confirmation that Shizu simply does not want to accompany her husband on the visit to K's grave. (This scene, which is not part of the novel, also greatly changes the audience's perception of Sensei's solo visit to K's grave, which in the novel has a shame-filled, clandestine air that indicates Sensei would likely never dream of allowing his wife to come along.)

neither negligible nor entirely removed from the functions servants perform in Sōseki's other novels. Though it is true that she is scarcely mentioned, those instances where her presence (or absence) is acknowledged beyond her function as a tray transportation system are all the more significant for a few qualities that they share—namely, the ways in which the text takes pains to remove her from the story, or rather, to justify her removal. While the maid in Sensei's testament is only present to justify Sensei's movements on a single fateful night, the text equally takes pains to justify the other maid's absence from Sensei's later home with his wife.

In contrast to the close-knit family of choice that Sensei describes as falling apart after K's death, his relationship and home life with his wife is described by the narrator as demure and lonely, the narrator going so far as to unabashedly assume his own entrance into their lives to be a welcome reprieve for both of them. Because of this—and perhaps because this is simply the story the narrator wishes to tell—the maid's additional presence within the household is downplayed almost to the point of absence. “The two of them lived there with only a maid for company [先生の宅は夫婦と下女だけであった],” the narrator explains, “and I generally found the house hushed and silent when I arrived [行くたびに大抵はひそりとしていた].”<sup>75</sup> The house is so quiet, the narrator explains, that he often forgot that Sensei's wife, Shizu, and the maid were even there. The maid, in fact, does not ‘speak’ once in the text. The only hint that she might ever speak at all occurs when the narrator notes the faint sound of Shizu having a conversation with the maid from down the corridor—but even that quickly quiets down: “[A]fter a while [Okusan's] voice ceased, and a hush fell on the house [ひとしきりで奥さんの話し声

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 18. *SZ*, vol. 6, 25.

が已むと、後はしんとした].”<sup>76</sup> Sensei’s wife may be Shizu (静, “Quiet”), but it is the maid who is silent.

The maid’s silence is highlighted in a scene in which Shizu herself most clearly speaks her mind. The young narrator is at Sensei’s house, staying with Shizu, in order to keep watch after a series of burglaries in the neighborhood. With no burglar in sight, however, Sensei’s wife takes advantage of the situation to confide in him about her marriage troubles, her husband’s misery, her loneliness. The narrator, like so many in *Kokoro*, is speechless: “I did not speak.

Sensei’s wife also fell silent. There was no sound from the maid’s room [下女部屋にいる下女はことりとも音をさせなかった]. All thoughts of burglars had vanished from my mind.”<sup>77</sup>

The maid is assumed present, in the maid’s room, the text confirms, but her presence is only acknowledged in order to amplify just how silent the house really is. Just as the narrator ceases to worry about burglars, moreover, he is not concerned that the maid might in fact be quiet because she is listening to them—and there is no acknowledgement of the fact that the subsequent hush might also indicate just how far their conversation might carry. This quietude is not the quietude of a mostly empty house, but the hush of a household that has quickly fallen silent. The maid’s participation in the domestic silence is not lost on the narrator, who in fact seems highly aware of the maid’s presence in the house, maybe especially at those times when she is silent or absent. He notes, for instance, that even when Sensei arrives home, it is his wife who greets him at the door alone, and he speculates that perhaps the maid “failed to appear” because she “must have

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 33. *SZ*, vol. 6, 44-45.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 38. *SZ*, vol. 6, 51.

been dozing in her room [下女だけは仮寝でもしていたとみえて、ついに出て来なかった].”<sup>78</sup>

This failure to answer the door, moreover, is neither the first nor the last time that the maid is a bit lax in her household duties in service of the narrative. As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, for instance, Sensei often explicitly asks his wife to handle duties that would rightfully be the maid’s, and Shizu for her part also insists on doing work that would normally fall to the maid to do. This deviation from the norm is unusual and uncomfortable enough that the narrator sees fit to comment on it:

In Sensei’s house, when a meal with informal guests had progressed to the point where the rice was served, his wife dismissed the maid and served us herself [奥さんは傍に坐っている下女を次へ立たせて、自分で給仕の役をつとめた]. This was the custom [仕来り]. The first few times I dined there, it made me feel rather awkward, but once I grew more used to it, I had no difficulty handing her my empty bowl for refilling [始めの一、二回は私も窮屈を感じたが、度数の重なるにつけ、茶碗を奥さんの前へ出すのが、何でもなくなった].<sup>79</sup>

The maid’s relief from meal service emphasizes the aimlessness of Shizu’s domestic loneliness and her consequent enthusiasm over being able to offer something to her husband and their

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 41. *SZ*, vol. 6, 56.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 69. *SZ*, vol. 6, 89-90. The specification that Shizu’s “custom [仕来り]” of serving the meal herself applied specifically to informal guests [表立たない客に対する], like the narrator, is a significant one. This removal of the maid from the equation reaffirms for the narrator his intimacy with the family, as does the subtle reminder that he visits often enough to become used to even this unusual way of doing things.

young friend. Later, in the same scene, after the three have finished their meal, the maid reappears:

[Okusan] called the maid and had her clear the table, then ordered ice cream and fruit to be served [奥さんは下女を呼んで食卓を片付けさせた後へ、改めてアイスクリームと水菓子運ばせた].

“I made it myself,” she explained. Sensei’s wife was at such loose ends, it seemed, that she could take the time to make her own ice cream for guests [「これは家で拵えたのよ」用のない奥さんには、手製のアイスクリームを客に振舞うだけの余裕があると見えた]. I had several helpings.<sup>80</sup>

The maid serves here only in her capacity as a tray transportation system, meant only to remove the mess so as to properly present Shizu’s homemade ice cream. By choosing when to allow for the maid’s mediation in their meal, Shizu is able to nurture simultaneously both a feeling of casual intimacy and a sense of pomp and circumstance. Both her dismissal of the maid and her homemade ice cream thus emphasize Shizu’s isolation and loneliness, these domestically awkward actions serving to characterize Shizu and set the tone for much of the story. The presence of the maid in *Kokoro* is easy to miss, her labor in some ways made superfluous by the boredom of the leisured and lonely housewife, but the fact that she is missing is part of the story. And yet, her silence is not an oversight of the narrator’s story, or a slight against her significance, but rather necessary for telling the story of *Kokoro* at all, given that its events are able to unfold as they do, be interpreted as they are, only so long as the maid is only barely there.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. *SZ*, vol. 6, 90. Original text states two helpings, rather than “several.”

## Mmaids are People, too: Class and Individualism

In *Kokoro*, maids appear and disappear according to the needs of its narrators in positioning themselves as the protagonists of their respective stories. Sōseki, in “My Individualism [Watakushi no kojinhugi],” a famous address given to students at the Gakushūin, explains how he first came to see himself as the main protagonist of his own story.

...but I found a belief that I could get my hands on, the conviction that I was the single most important person in my life [自己が主], while others were only secondary [他は賓である]. This has given me enormous confidence and peace of mind...<sup>81</sup>

While it would be easy to interpret Sōseki’s suggestion here as remarkably egotistical—and surely many have—my argument in this chapter, especially as it pertains to Sōseki’s approach to his servant characters, hinges instead on the fact that, despite Sōseki clearly being the main [主] character of his life, others are not necessarily *lesser*, but are instead honored guests [賓] in his story. Though translated above as “most important” and “secondary,” the relationship between the words 主 and 賓 is in fact that of a master of a house and his formal guest, rather than the straightforwardly hierarchical matter of “primary” and “secondary.” If secondariness were intended, the better counterpart to 主 might instead be 従, as in the relationship between masters and servants, or even 客, an option that would maintain the host-guest dichotomy, but with a much clearer sense of rank. Sōseki’s language, therefore, rather than reinforcing the primacy of the individual, in fact implicitly rejects the idea of an unproblematically important central

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<sup>81</sup> Natsume Sōseki, “My Individualism,” trans. Jay Rubin, *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, eds. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 252. Natsume Sōseki, “Watakushi no kojinhugi,” in *SZ*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 446.

protagonist surrounded by subservient inferiors. Sōseki thus, seeking to reconcile the potentially egotistical requirements of modern individualism with the social, ethical imperatives which he wished to uphold, encourages listeners in “My Individualism” to see themselves as the center of their own stories, but only with the condition that they also recognize that their peers, too, are their own individuals with their own stories, worthy of respect. To be at the center of one’s own story, then, is conversely to be also a guest in the stories of others. Sōseki thus affirms the social and cultural importance of aspiring to individualism in modern Japan, but the individualism which he promotes is one that also respects others’ individualities—a collective, ethical individualism.

Much thought has been given in recent scholarship to the role of ethics in the reading and writing of literature. In Dorothy Hale’s “Aesthetics and the New Ethics: Theorizing the Novel in the Twenty-First Century,” for instance, she discusses how literature equips readers to approach a more ethical viewpoint via what she calls the “aesthetics of alterity.” Despite, that is, a long history of reading novels as empathetic windows into the minds of other people—a literary peeping considered to be at the center of literature’s ethical work—Hale traces a more recent theoretical turn towards celebrating inscrutability—not transparency—as the modern novel’s primary contribution to ethical consciousness. “[W]e come to self-consciousness about our pretended certainty through the confrontation with alterity, an experience of the other that surprises us in its intractability, its refusal to conform to what we imagine we know.”<sup>82</sup> Our desired recognition of characters as monological, knowable presences in literature is thereby short-circuited by the fact that, in reality, characters often confound the reader, their motivations

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<sup>82</sup> Hale, 899.

and actions not always explained to the extent that readers might feel they know them as themselves.

The egotistical nature of an ethics that recognizes humanity in others only so long as those others are known—and thereby not truly ‘other’ at all—thus must give way to an ethics in which it is instead “[i]ncomprehension of the other” which “yields knowledge of the self” as “we are made to recognize our operative interpretative categories as our own ‘regime of the norm.’”<sup>83</sup> Hale argues then that this newly “felt recognition of the limits of our ways of knowing opens up the possibility that we might change for the better, that we might actively try to judge less and undergo more.”<sup>84</sup> In the practice of reading specifically, moreover, this “undergoing” manifests most clearly in terms of identification with and yearning for characters who we come to see over the course of a story as real people with lives, hopes, and desires more or less revealed to us. Hale goes on to discuss further unexpected ethical side effects of this sort of reading process. “First, the modern novel’s commitment to the creation of autonomous characters positions any act of narration as a potential encroachment on the existential freedom of those characters,” she explains, and, since a story cannot help but in some way or another be narrated, “literariness” is always and already “itself inimical to novelistic mimesis.” For a reader expecting that each of a novel’s characters be recognized for their agency and autonomy, then, any constraints of “their functional positionality seems like a restriction of their subjective potentiality, a limit to the full freedom that they have a right to enjoy beyond their representation by and in the novel.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Hale, 901.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Hale, 903.



While on the surface few characters are more constrained in their representation than the often minor servant characters I discuss in this and the following chapters, in a way reminiscent of Hale's "ethics of alterity," the reader of Sōseki's fiction is invited by the structure of the text not only to notice but to take offense at the limits put on the fullness of their representation, to heed even with regards to these mere servants the cautionary instructions of Sōseki's "My Individualism" for ethically encountering the individuality of others. The particular strength of doing so in literature, moreover, is that, through the frustrating obfuscation of any given character's individuality, the reader can more freely take account of what exactly is truly unknown or incomprehensible in the other. Literature, in other words, allows us to reframe and more fully explore the tricky reality of other people in the safety of an aesthetic situation wherein the individual ego is already more distressed by the difference of the other than dismissive of it.

Christopher Weinberger, in his article titled "Triangulating an Ethos: Ethical Criticism, Novel Alterity, and Mori Ōgai's 'Stereoscopic Vision,'" recognizes a similar invitation to appreciate the inscrutability of others in Mori Ōgai's "The Wild Goose [Gan]" (1911). Published between Sōseki's *And Then* and *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, the two novels which I focus on most heavily in the latter half of this chapter, Ōgai's novella features a curiously near-omniscient character narrator recounting his ostensible friend's failed romance and, like Sōseki's novels, a cast of characters made up of middle-class individuals surrounded by servants. Regarding its reception by critics, Weinberger cites the general consensus that the novel "represents an interesting and insightful failure to achieve an objective perspective in fiction."<sup>86</sup> In ethical terms, however, this is not a failure at all, but instead a reminder of the fallibility of

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<sup>86</sup> Weinberger, 266.

centralized, “objective” perspectives which presume a privileged knowing. The implausible way the narrator of “The Wild Goose” moves in and out of the minds and motives of characters, then, rather than a flaw in the narrative, is a feature which “gives us access to the lives of others in ways that invite identification, and...allows us to reconsider the prejudices or blindnesses through which we first approached them.”<sup>87</sup> This is accomplished, that is, not by allowing the easy projection of the reader’s mind into those of the characters, but instead by making the reader critically aware of the impenetrable individuality and interiority of those characters. Sōseki, I argue, undergoes a similar project in his fiction, as he presents us with houseboys and maids that his main characters—his “privileged perspectives”—wish to know and cannot know. Though Sōseki, unlike Ōgai, does not provide access to the inner lives of these characters, what he does instead is highlight the fact that access is denied. The ethical approach thus becomes a rejection of the assumed ‘knowing’ of the privileged perspective of the self in favor of the constant encounter with true, unknowable alterity—an individuality which recognizes the individuality of others, an ethics as necessary in fiction as it is in real life.

### **Individualism, Alterity, and Where Individuals Meet Characters**

In “My Individualism,” in fact, Sōseki touches upon the potential correlation between living persons and characters by equating himself with a character from one of his own novels who famously contests for control over the narrative centrality of another—the character of Redshirt [赤シャツ] in Sōseki’s *Botchan*. Botchan, the titular main character of the novel, complains about Redshirt, a fellow teacher at Botchan’s new job, as follows:

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 273.

Dropping foreigners' names one after the other in a conversation was a bad habit of Redshirt's. [...] Everyone has his own specialty [人にはそれぞれ専門があったものだ], and being a teacher of mathematics [おれのような数学の教師], I hadn't the faintest idea what the difference between Gorki [ゴルキ] and Turkey [車力] was. He should have made allowances for that [少しは遠慮するがいい].<sup>88</sup>

Redshirt cares little for the talents of others and fails to provide space for dialogue with others, to the point that even those great writers whose names he mentions become no more than empty signifiers, a mere string of sounds. Redshirt's is the loneliest of individualisms, one without even the indication of the voices of others. That Sōseki would in any way identify with this character is striking then, but it is also worth qualifying. Sōseki explains:

No doubt you have read my novel *Botchan*. When I wrote *Botchan*, many people asked me who the model for the character nicknamed “Redshirt” might have been. It so happens that I was the only one in Matsuyama Middle School at the time to have a university degree, so if you're going to try to find living models for each of the characters [もし「坊ちゃん」の中の人物を一々実在のものと認めるならば], then Redshirt must be me [赤シャツは即ちこういう私の事にならなければならぬので]—a cheering thought indeed!<sup>89</sup>

This digression is both the speech's most specific reference to Sōseki's work as a novelist and also a moment in which Sōseki, unprompted, self-deprecatingly associates himself with one of

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<sup>88</sup> *Botchan* 67. *SZ*, vol. 2, 286-287. The translation takes liberties in order to maintain a rhyme. The Japanese original actually reads 車力 [*shariki*] (cart driver), so a more literal translation would be “can't tell the difference between Gorki and a cart driver.”

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 247. *SZ*, vol. 11, 439.

his own most troublesome secondary characters, one whose refusal to recognize and respect talents and experiences other than his own serves as a major source of aggravation for the main character, Botchan. Sōseki's explicit—if noncommittal—association of himself here with a character completely disrespectful of the individual strengths of his “guests” is a good example of the good-humored self-deprecation which colors “My Individualism.” Of course, this is complicated by the fact that it is actually Botchan who is most commonly associated with Sōseki, given other autobiographical details of Sōseki's life which more closely mirror Botchan's and the typical default equation of first-person narrators with their authors. It is all the more impactful, then, that Sōseki would assert that elements of Redshirt's character may fit his biography as well.

Even more importantly for my purposes here, however, Sōseki's comments also suggest the specifically literary consequences of modern individualism. Just as Sōseki was faced with the negotiation of a foreign—but necessarily morally and ethically palatable—modern individualism, he also tasked himself with the navigation of newly-introduced ‘Western’ literary modes against the backdrop of a classical, ‘Chinese’ literary canon.<sup>90</sup> The myriad ways in which the language, the structure, and the plots of his novels have been affected by this literary conundrum have been discussed considerably elsewhere, but little attention has been paid to the effects specifically on the structural roles of his novels' characters in regards to one another.

The world of individuals always places one person at a time as the central personality, but the form of the modern novel, while it also often structures its cast of characters around a central main character, also has the ability to question this forced centrality of the individual by the very

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<sup>90</sup> The concept of individualism, as confronted by Sōseki, was generally understood as opposed to the concept of collectivism. For this reason, Sōseki chooses to strike a middle ground in “My Individualism” in which the newly-imported concept of individualism can still be reconciled with a sense of responsibility to society as a collective.

act of exposing the ways in which individuals are themselves written by the stories written about them. Redshirt's contextless and alienating Western name-dropping represents the worst case scenario of an 'individual'-centered worldview, one which denigrates and leaves behind those who should be respected as peers for their own individual abilities. Sōseki's individualism and his novels, however—as can be seen by Botchan voicing his distaste for Redshirt's behavior—do attempt to answer to the blind spots inherent to both modern individualism and novelistic form. This is not to say that Sōseki is so radically utopian as to attempt to remedy this discrepancy by proposing new social or literary forms in which all are included equally (after all, even his own “individualism” was tailored specifically to the space within the prestigious, male, educated walls of the Gakushūin). What Sōseki does do in his novels, however, as I will demonstrate via close readings of the structural positioning of his servant characters, is to acknowledge and thematize the fact that these forms are insufficient to represent all characters equally. Not only does he draw attention to the limitations of storytelling, but he also makes those limitations themselves part of the story. If the living individual must defer to other members of his society as honored guests and their specific talents as worthy of his attention—while nevertheless remaining steadfastly primary in his own personal story—then the constellation of characters in a text also becomes something more intricate than the straightforward story of a singular main character. Redshirt, after all, were he a stand-up 'individual' in Sōseki's real-world milieu, should have made some effort to include Botchan in the conversation. As a secondary character in the novel, on the other hand, it is precisely his antagonistic, corruptly 'individualistic' attitude which provides much of the external conflict which drives Botchan's own, 'main' plotline. In the form of the novel, that is, disregard for one's “honored guests” is not a problem to be painstakingly edited out, but far more often a productive structural mechanism. The question of center and

secondary is not a societal conundrum that Sōseki attempts to address and remedy through literature, but an ever-present character dynamic inherent to novelistic form which Sōseki's novels insist on making visible. A character who is 'left behind' by narrative focus, that is, is not only significant for the ways in which he or she dutifully upholds the main thread of the story, but also for how his or her exclusion from that main story is remarked upon and questioned by the text.

The question remains, then, as to how to understand the structural positions and roles of characters in juxtaposition with our readerly experience of them as recognizable people. In order to do so, however, I argue that we first need to think about them specifically in their capacity and function as characters. In his book *The One vs. the Many*, Alex Woloch challenges readers to think about characters not as living individuals depicted in texts, but instead in relation to how they function structurally within a given narrative. Characters are not people, that is—though we might recognize them as such—and they are constructed in order to serve specific functions within the narrative, in what Woloch refers to as the “character-system.” Woloch seeks to reconcile the apparent difference between characters as individuals and characters as literary device—“[b]y interpreting the character-system as a distributed field of attention,” thus “mak[ing] the tension between structure and reference generative of, and integral to, narrative signification.”<sup>91</sup> The space between individuals and characters is not one which the writer must fill, that is, but a gap through which stories might take shape. The seeming incompatibility of a world that recognizes all as singular individuals and a literary form that requires that specific important ‘individuals’ be predetermined, therefore, is not a failure of literary form, but a

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<sup>91</sup> Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 17.

potentially rich arena for narrative signification—as much so today as it was in Sōseki’s time.

Arguing, then, that the textual positioning of characters in relation to one another is far more than

perfunctory, Woloch explains that “all characters are potentially overdelimited within the fictional world—and might disrupt the narrative if we pay them the attention they deserve.”<sup>92</sup>

Characters, that is, are a product of their textual position—as well as the textual position of other characters in the character-system—and so when one character or another proves central, the others necessarily form a constellation around him. Sōseki’s minor characters represent something special, however, in that they do not give into secondariness so easily, instead begging the attention of readers, narrators, and even other characters, willing that the importance of their role in upholding the story not be neglected or forgotten—that they be recognized and honored as guests. Stubbornly memorable minor characters, in fact, abound in Sōseki’s works. The character of Kobayashi in *Meian* (1916), for instance, perhaps comes most prominently to mind, as he carves his way into Tsuda’s and Onobu’s story when they refuse to pay his story the attention he believes it deserves. The fact that such characters are often lower-class (like Kobayashi) and/or female is of course no coincidence, and while Sōseki does not frequently opt to focus on their stories, neither does he let the de-privileged nature of their stories go entirely unremarked. These characters’ struggles to increase the weight of their stories and to gain a voice is in fact integral to Sōseki’s novels, and examining any one of such rude narratological house guests would open up a new set of questions and structural dilemmas.

In “My Individualism,” in fact, Sōseki, in qualifying his own self-centeredness, hints at the existence of all those thorny questions, explaining that

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

...if society is going to permit you to respect your own individuality [自分がそれだけの個性を尊重し得るように、社会から許されるならば], it only makes sense for you to recognize the individuality of others and respect their inclinations [他人に対してもその個性を認めて、彼らの傾向を尊重するのが理の当然].<sup>93</sup>

Sōseki's individualism, that is, is one which both recognizes each individual as a potential center and which cautions explicitly against the potential for the self to attempt the erasure of others. He warns his audience away from this kind of individualism:

So let us suppose you are fortunate enough to collide with something you think is good, something you like, something that matches your personality. You go on to develop your individuality, all the while forgetting the distinction between yourself and others [自他の区別を忘れて], and you decide that you are going to get this fellow or that fellow into your camp even if it means dragging him into it [どうかあいつもおれの仲間引き摺り込んでやろうという気になる].<sup>94</sup>

Sōseki cautions against the sort of individuality which forces the absorption of other individuals into a privileged narrative of the self, one which, like Redshirt's in *Botchan*, disparages the perspectives, beliefs, and talents of others. On one occasion in the story, for example, in the midst of a fishing trip, Redshirt gives Botchan his own take on ethics and the endurance of the individual—a philosophy greatly at odds with Sōseki's "Individualism" and one which Botchan himself interprets in negative terms after having his own remarks shot down:

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<sup>93</sup> "My Individualism," 255-256. *SZ*, vol. 11, 451.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 255. *SZ*, vol. 11, 451.



Redshirt laughed at this remark. I wasn't aware that I'd said anything funny [別段おれは笑われるような事を云った覚えはない]. I'd only said what I'd firmly believed up to that moment [今日ただ今に至るまでこれでいいと堅く信じている]. When you come to think of it, the vast majority of people encourage you to be bad [わるくなる事を奨励しているように思う]. They seem to believe that, unless you are, you won't succeed in life [社会に成功はしない]. On the rare occasions when they see a person who is straightforward and honest, they look down on him as being green, or no better than a kid [坊っちゃんだの小僧だのと難癖をつけて軽蔑する]. When they teach you ethics [倫理] in primary and middle school they tell you not to lie but to be honest. It would be better not only for the world at large but the individual himself [世のためにも当人のためにもなるだろう] if, instead of this, they had the courage to instruct you in methods of lying, the art of disbelieving people, and schemes for imposing on<sup>95</sup> others [人を乗せる策]. Redshirt had laughed at me for being innocent [おれの単純なの]. What can you do in a world where innocence and frankness [単純や真率] are laughed at? Kiyō would never have laughed at me at a time like this. She would have admired me for speaking the way I did [大いに感心して聞いたもんだ]. Kiyō was far and away a better person than Redshirt [清の方が赤シャツよりよっぽど上等だ].”<sup>96</sup>

Botchan is repulsed by Redshirt's dog-eat-dog, individual-scheming-individual philosophy, and it is, remarkably, to his dear old servant Kiyō—hardly the prototype for the modern Meiji

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<sup>95</sup> More accurately, 人を乗せる might be translated as “deceiving others.”

<sup>96</sup> *Botchan*, 73. *SZ*, vol. 2, 292.

individual—that Botchan turns for a counterexample of the kind of person he would much rather strive to emulate.

Of course, Botchan’s idealism at times makes him equally as negligent and unyielding as those he decries. As Reiko Abe Auestad discusses in *Rereading Sōseki: Three Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Novels* (1998), “Botchan is neither willing to read between the lines or capable of recognizing implicit codes of collective self-deception, and as a result he gets himself into trouble.”<sup>97</sup> As an example she cites Botchan’s reaction to the school’s code of conduct, which he deftly perceives as an incredibly lofty standard, forcing the headmaster to explain that “his request [for exemplary and correct conduct] is not to be taken that literally, but as an expression of his wishes” and that indeed “[s]ome lapses from the ideal will be tolerated.”<sup>98</sup> Botchan’s inability to interpret and internalize the network of unspoken norms into which he enters is thus as substantial a source of his frustration and the novel’s humor as are Redshirt’s more openly self-serving antics. Therefore I am not arguing that Sōseki is advocating for any one character as the ‘proper’ way to approach the world. After all, neither a world of Redshirts nor a world of Botchans would function all that well. Instead, I wish to acknowledge the fact that a peripheral servant character like Kiyō, who appears in the story only through Botchan’s unilateral sanctification of her—is nonetheless presented as someone a person would be honored to know and whose thoughts should be worthy of respect and authority. Representing a constant, a kind of middle ground in a comedy of extremes, Kiyō is a maid whose presence, no matter how peripheral and incomplete, is deeply longed for.

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<sup>97</sup> Reiko Abe Auestad, *Rereading Sōseki: Three Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Novels* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 169.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

In her article on maids in Sōseki's early novels, Shimizu Michiko compares the image of Kiyō in *Botchan* with that of O-san in Sōseki's chronologically previous novel *I Am a Cat*, identifying the two maids as seemingly opposite caricatures both of which nevertheless would have resonated with readers at the time of publication. As opposed to O-san, who the cat describes as a crass, uneducated lowlife, Kiyō, meanwhile, is herself descended from a respectable family, her very name meaning "pure [清]," and is described by Botchan as a selfless mother figure, reminiscent, Shimizu argues, of a pre-Meiji tradition of domestic service which indeed treated maids not as employees but as family.<sup>99</sup> Kiyō, who has served Botchan's family for as long as he can remember, represents a more sentimental and nostalgic family life and loyalty, one which, like Kiyō herself, last seen fondly waving goodbye to Botchan on the train heading for his uniquely modern job as a school teacher, already seems further and further away, absence felt and grieved far prior to death. The great tragedy of Botchan's otherwise comedic story then is that, while Kiyō is in no way a major character in the story, she is hardly an insignificant presence for Botchan. Botchan's story, in fact, extends outward from Kiyō's story via the familial bonds of domestic service, and it is for this reason that the act of conveying that story back to Kiyō comprises so much of Botchan's motivation for telling it. Kiyō may not be a major presence in the events of the story, but she is the audience and the muse that makes the story possible.

Kiyō is a sterling example of Sōseki's many unforgettable minor servants. She does not qualify as a 'major character' in the same way that Botchan or even Redshirt do, but her role in raising Botchan and her death at the end of the novel serve as the framework for Botchan's entire

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<sup>99</sup> Shimizu Michiko, "Sōseki no shōsetsu ni miru jochūzō: *Wagahai wa neko de aru, Botchan wo chūshin ni shite*," *Kenkyū kiyō* 15 (2014): 64.

story. Kiyō is not the kind of minor character who disappears from the story, but one whose disappearance *ends* the story. In the end, we know little about Kiyō besides what Botchan sees in her, but her presence is nonetheless central and vital to the novel. Kiyō's 'own' story is never the focus of the narrative, but Botchan reassures his reader that, even as a lifetime maid waiting and dying outside of the proper events of the story, she is nevertheless someone far more deserving of deference than the more typically 'individualistic' Redshirt, or even the idealistic Botchan, whose privileged places in the narrative meanwhile are taken for granted. Kiyō's death outside the events of the story is thus in some way inevitable, but it is also a personal tragedy for the story's narrator, a tragedy made possible by the very class-based mandates of modern life that have thrust Botchan into the world of individuals and thereby, ironically, left behind the woman who made him the 'individual' he is.

### **I Am, You Are: Maids in the Dialogic Space of *I Am a Cat***

In contrast to the close one-to-one relationship between Botchan and Kiyō, Sōseki's *I Am a Cat* is replete with both masters and servants, if for no other reason than the fact that the narrator is a cat, and a cat naturally splits its attention between anyone attempting to read and the tantalizing smells of the kitchen. One maid, however, stands out in the story above the rest. This maid, O-san, is depicted by the cat none-too-flatteringly as a sort of arch-nemesis, frustrating the feline narrator at every turn. Of course, first-person character narrators are at the mercy of novelistic conflict themselves and are thus often frustrated with their circumstances, but at the point at which that character's narration itself becomes frustrated—as it does in *I Am a Cat*—the narration also becomes deceptive, as the cat struggles to maintain the illusion of narrative control. O-san presents such a frustration, then, not only because she refuses to let the cat steal

food from the kitchen, but also because he cannot fully understand or empathize with her—and thereby cannot adequately account for her in his narrative. More so than even the fact that he is a cat, it is thus his status as a homodiegetic character-narrator, confined to his own perspective, which denies him both the narrative omniscience and authority which he desires. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, even Sōseki's non-feline characters struggle with the incomprehensibility of maids, and, while the cat attempts to surmount this barrier with bravado and bluster—that is, by positioning himself as if he himself were the master—O-san nevertheless remains his most intimate mystery. All he can do in the end, then, is insist upon their difference, on O-san's otherness, leaving him capable of defining O-san only negatively against his understanding of himself. Before I discuss some of the more specific constraints O-san places upon the cat's narration, however, I must say a few words more generally on the question of representational accuracy and mystery as it relates to the novel.

Much has been written about deceptive narrators, and this particular unnamed cat is no exception. For instance, as Sari Kawana discusses in her article "A Narrative Game of Cat and Mouse: Parody, Deception, and Fictional *Whodunit* in Natsume Sōseki's *Wagahai wa neko dearu*," the circumstances surrounding the cat's death at the end of the novel are in fact rather suspicious, and, to the extent that the text hints that the cat may have been murdered, the comedic prose of the novel is cut abruptly short by the possibility of foul play. Kawana references other famous instances of unreliable narrators in the mystery genre to argue that "in the world of detective fiction, the supposed sincerity of the narrator can function as a deceptive, misleading clue that is designed to baffle the readers and prevent them from solving the mystery

at hand.”<sup>100</sup> It is not the maid who Kawana suspects in the end, however, and, in the absence of a conveniently blamable butler, the most likely suspect, she claims, is in fact the master himself. This master, Kawana argues, acts as Sōseki’s “literary double” and takes it upon himself to create a “narrative vacuum” whereby the cat’s invasive and critical perspective on his domestic existence is summarily eliminated.<sup>101</sup> The cat spends the bulk of the novel either transcribing without comment potentially embarrassing private conversations or remarking dismissively on avowedly serious human matters, and his perspective thus challenges the notion of what and who is really story-worthy. There is no overarching ‘plot’ to *I Am a Cat*, not because the cat does not want to tell one, but rather because the scattered bits of human life he witnesses—no matter how important these matters might seem to humans—simply do not constitute a cohesive, singular story. The kind of insider perspective afforded this cat is thus a unique one, a satirical one, which opens up angles on the narrative which might not be afforded by a human’s-eye-view. This perspective is, therefore, as James A. Fujii argues, also a transgressively spatialized and dialogic one:

The narrating cat signifies the absence of temporality in a work from which genealogical links to the past have been erased—from the cat and all the other characters who parade through Kushami’s study. The self-referential first-person delivery effectively foregrounds the role of narration, but the use of a cat that lacks filial connections and social position disrupts expectations of “reliability” the reader seeks in a participating narrator-character. It is not particularly important that we know Kushami’s ancestry, as

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<sup>100</sup> Sari Kawana, “A Narrative Game of Cat and Mouse: Parody, Deception, and Fictional *Whodunit* in Natsume Sōseki’s *Wagahai wa neko dearu*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 33.4 (Summer 2010): 4.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

the events take on meaning only in the context of these spaces. Sōseki's use of a first-person participating narrator cat placed in and bound to the timeless present with the other characters whom he observes, effectively disallows any editing, selecting, and arranging of scenes and events; that is, this scheme militates against the imposition of a single, monologic order to the depicted events. The conjunction of spoken language and present aspect engenders a kind of equality that permits different voices to interact freely with one another while denying the cat an omniscience that freedom from temporal coordinates binding the characters would confer.<sup>102</sup>

The effects of this denial of plot-omniscience—the lack of a definitive sequence of events marked by clear cause and effect, limited or dubious insight into motivation and intent, happenings neither confirmed nor denied—often manifest in so many of Sōseki's texts as a detective-baiting paranoia, but in *I Am a Cat* this paranoia is absent, the crime occurring not at the beginning where it can be probed and solved, but at the end when it can assure that it is never spoken of again. The narrator himself dies, and with him, his authority over the story's closure—indeed his authority over the stories of the other characters—has died as well. The question can be asked, then, of how much authority he really had in the first place. For the duration of the novel, that is, the illusion of a dominant plot centered on the exploits of a singular individual (in this case, the cat) gives way in fact to the mundane chatter of a domestic space in which a Bakhtinian multitude of voices are actively present, prior to any attempt at the investigative

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<sup>102</sup> Fujii, "Between Style and Language," *Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 113-114.

violence of imposing a concise narrative upon them.<sup>103</sup> The notion of this concise narrative—the monologic, in Bakhtin’s terms—is thus undermined by the environment of disjointed chatter which Bakhtin calls the dialogic space, wherein meaning is created not by a single voice, but rather in the space between voices.

Not all novels are afforded the luxury of this sort of dialogic space, however, and the question of how some characters get a story and others appear in that story—how, as I discussed earlier, some individuals are centered while others form a constellation around them—is at the crux of my discussion of the literary roles of servant characters in this and subsequent chapters. I contend, then, that in Sōseki’s work in particular this issue of the unevenness of literary representation is one deemed itself worthy of the reader’s attention—that the claustrophobic limitations of the story are understood as an ineffable part of that story, a part upon which Sōseki invites the curious reader, if not the solution-minded detective, to cast appropriate suspicion.<sup>104</sup> The question of how truly the narrative can represent its characters and make them known, then, is just one such limitation, but it is the limitation which I argue the relationship between servant characters and narration brings into stark relief. Previously in my discussion of *Kokoro*, I thus took up this invitation to suspicion by exploring the potential motivations and consequences of the inclusion or exclusion of servant characters from different scenes and perspectives, but already in his earlier novel *I Am a Cat* it is clear that the question of what the narrator can see or is willing to mention at any given time is of constant concern even to the narrator himself.

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<sup>103</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982).

<sup>104</sup> Sōseki, that is, not only rejects the notion that the goal of a narrative is to provide all the answers, but in fact structures his novels to raise even more questions, thus rewarding readers’ potential for curiosity, rather than their distaste for ambiguity.



Sōseki's narrators, that is, are not only constrained in what they are able or willing to represent—as, after all, all but the most omniscient narrators are—but they also reveal themselves as self-reflexive narrators, keenly aware of these constraints, sometimes more or less open about them and sometimes more defensive about them, sometimes selectively aware and other times cursed to be aware despite themselves—but nevertheless they are aware, and chronically so.

With these constraints in mind, I now return specifically to the case of the cat, who idles his time away observing the household, fancying himself a scholar. To the cat, these constraints are far from welcome, and he attempts to efface them in favor of pretensions at authoritative domestic exposé. For this reason, I argue that this feline narrator, like so many others of Sōseki's, conversely manages only to reveal his frustration at these constraints—and the narrative deception to which they drive him. After all, even if we suppose that it is the master who ultimately brings about his lowly demise—as Kawana postulates in her article—it is the master that the cat sides with nevertheless, while it is the presence of servants, and everything they represent, that frustrates him the most. That is to say that even the cat, with his appeal to monologic authority, finds himself confronting a confounding otherness in servants. This is clear from the very beginning of the novel, and, played as it is for comedy, the way in which the cat distances himself from the servants does not carry the same pathos that it does in some of the stories I discuss later, but, nevertheless, the literary alienation, or estrangement, which characterizes the cat's encounters with maids and houseboys, firmly establishes incomprehensible otherness as their very nature. The cat, for his part, knows exactly who he is:

I am a cat. As yet I have no name. I've no idea where I was born. All I remember is that I was miaowing in a dampish dark place when, for the first time, I saw a human being. This human being, I heard afterwards, was a member of the most ferocious human species; a

*shosei* [然もあとで聞くとそれは書生といふ人間で一番獰悪な種族であつたさうだ], one of those students who, in return for board and lodging, perform small chores about the house. I hear that, on occasion, this species catches, boils, and eats us. [此書生といふのは時々我々を捕へて煮て食ふといふ話である] However as at that time I lacked all knowledge of such creatures, I did not feel particularly frightened. [然し其當時は何といふ考もなかつたから別段恐しいとも思はなかつた] I simply felt myself floating in the air as I was lifted up lightly on his palm. When I accustomed myself to that position, I looked at his face. This must have been the very first time that ever I set eyes on a human being. The impression of oddity, which I then received, still remains today. First of all, the face that should be decorated with hair is as bald as a kettle. Since that day I have met many a cat but never have I come across such deformity. The center of the face protrudes excessively and sometimes, from the holes in that protuberance, smoke comes out in little puffs. I was originally somewhat troubled by such exhalations for they made me choke, but I learnt only recently that it was the smoke of burnt tobacco which humans like to breathe.<sup>105</sup>

In these first lines of the novel, the houseboy is thus described as a different “species [種族]” from other humans. Furthermore, even at the time of writing, much of the cat’s knowledge of *shosei* is qualified as hearsay—he states that he “heard afterwards [然もあとで聞くと]” what sort of human this was and that he “hear[s] that [といふ話である]” *shosei* are in the habit of eating cats, thereby admitting that, if this is in fact the case, he has never had occasion to witness

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<sup>105</sup> *I Am a Cat*, 3. SZ, vol. 1, 5.

it and confirm it himself. These servant characters, that is, although up close and personal from the very start of the cat's life, are still relatively inscrutable to him, like figures of legend.

Maids pose no less of a problem than houseboys. For instance, after the cat makes his way onto the property for the first time, he observes:

I did not know it then, but I was in fact already inside the house where I now had a chance to observe further specimens of humankind [書生以外の間人]. The first one I met was O-san, the servant-woman [下女], one of a species yet more savage than the *shosei* [前の書生より一層亂暴な方]. No sooner had she seen me than she grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and flung me out of the house.<sup>106</sup>

Again, O-san represents a “species” of human, and a “savage [亂暴な]” one at that. The question, then, of where these savage humans rank in the overall hierarchy—at least according to the cat—comes into play when another maid, employed by the neighbor, is described as being beneath her own household's cat, Tortoiseshell, who has fallen ill. The mistress expresses her worries about the cat to the maid:

“That's bad. If she doesn't eat she will only get weaker [どうも困るね、御飯をたべないと、身体が疲れるばかりだからね].”

“Yes indeed, madam. Even me, if I don't eat for a whole day, I couldn't work at all the next day [そうでございますとも、私共でさえ一日御をいただかないと、明くる日はとても働けませんもの].”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 4. SZ, vol. 1, 7.

The maid answers as though she recognized the cat as an animal superior to herself [下女は自分より猫の方が上等な動物であるような返事をする]. Indeed, in this particular household the cat may well be more important than the maid [実際この家では下女より猫の方が大切かも知れない].<sup>107</sup>

The implicit hierarchy here is worth noting, because, while the feline narrator of the novel otherwise tries so fervently to assert himself as on par with (or even superior to) his master and his master's scholarly human friends, his musing here that, in this other household, the maid might actually be inferior to the cat, implies that on some level he does acknowledge that, in his own household, he in fact is below the maid. Though he would never say it in so many words, then, the cat's narration nevertheless reveals his own condescending attitude towards the maids as a farce meant to reify a distinction not nearly as clear-cut as he would like it to be. He may not understand servants, that is, but that lack of understanding does not necessarily mean that there is nothing there to understand, and, whether the cat likes it or not, whether he can actually relate to the servants or not, he has no choice but to accede to the fact that cat and maid are not all that different, occupying the same space in a hierarchical, if potentially mutable way.

This acknowledgement, of course, does not efface the irreconcilability of difference or lead to any real generosity or fairness in the representation of servants on the part of the narrator, and O-san is in fact described in the following scene as a being just as uncanny as the *shosei* above. Watching the master examine his face in a mirror, squeezing and manipulating it in what the cat gathers must be some kind of act of “sorcery [何のまじないだか分からない],” the cat notices also something in the master's face reminiscent of O-san. He reflects:

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 50. SZ, vol. 1, 59.

It would, I think, be proper if I here devoted a few lines to describing [紹介する] the face of my master's female servant. It is a tumid face, a face like that bulbous lantern made from a dried and gutted blowfish [穴守稲荷から河豚の提灯] which someone bought while visiting a fox god's shrine, and then, when visiting this house, unloaded on my master [みやげに持って来てくれた]. Her face is so malignly puffy that both her eyes are sunken out of sight [あまりふくれ方が残酷なので眼は両方共紛失している]. Of course the puffiness of a blowfish is evenly distributed all over its globular body; in the case of O-san's mug, the underlying bone-structure is angularly fashioned so that its overlying puffiness creates the effect of an hexagonal clock far gone in some dread dropsy [元来の骨格が多角性であって、その骨格通りにふくれ上がるのだから、まるで水気になやんでいる六角時計のようなものだ]. If O-san were to hear these comments, she'd be so actively angered that I deem it prudent to resume my interrupted account of my seemingly sorcerous master [御三が聞いたらさぞ怒るだろうから、御三はこのくらいにしてまた主人の方に帰るが].<sup>108</sup>

Not unlike the way he described the *shosei* earlier, O-san takes on a grotesque countenance, more blowfish lantern than human. The cat's vividly dehumanized descriptions of the members of the household, however, rather than actually diminishing these characters, serve instead to draw the reader's attention to the absurdity of these images. The satirical nature of these words coming from a cat overturns any comfort the reader might have with the customary dehumanization of servant characters, conversely inviting a closer identification with these human servant

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 315. SZ, vol. 1, 346.

characters than with the cat who cannot comprehend them. There is something in the gap between how the cat presents the world and how we habitually understand it that is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's concept of alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in theatre, which he defines as "various attempts to act in such a manner that the spectator is prevented from feeling his way into the characters," thereby allowing "[a]cceptance or rejection of the characters' words" to be "placed in the conscious realm, not, as hitherto, in the spectator's subconscious."<sup>109</sup> Brecht poses the stakes of alienation as the forging of "new methods of presentation" in which "[a]ll events in the human realm are being examined" and "[e]verything must be seen from a social standpoint."<sup>110</sup> In this way, then, the narrator of *I Am a Cat*, alien as he is to the interplay of human emotions that surrounds him, makes an excellent vehicle for such emotional alienation, his exaggerations of the difference of servants in fact leading the reader to the reflexive conviction that, actually, servants, different though they may be, must in fact be more human, at least, than the cat is saying.

The cat's staging of these colorful characters, then, is indeed reminiscent of Brecht's revolutionary theatrical aesthetics, and it is true enough that the literary mode of these descriptions is satirical, bringing the ironies of domestic life into the conscious realm. There is, however, also in this passage a complex web of relationships described that are themselves based on empathy. The humor comes as much from the cat's tracing of these messy affective lines—in this case, the resemblance between the faces of the master and his maid, and the hypothetical of how the maid might react to her own representation—as it comes from the correlation of the

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<sup>109</sup> Bertolt Brecht, "On Chinese Acting," trans. Eric Bentley, *The Tulane Drama Review* 6.1 (Sept. 1961): 130.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

human countenance with a blowfish lantern. The above passage is remarkable, that is, because it exists not as a direct observation of O-san, but as a recollection of her in service of instead describing the way the master looks as he observes himself in a mirror. The act of “sorcery [まじない]” in question, therefore, might be the strange ritual the cat observes as the master slaps his puffed out cheeks in self-examination, but it could just as well describe the transformation that allows master to be read as servant. The cat’s description of O-san, that is, is a once-removed description of the master as much as it is an actual description of O-san herself: “From my ransacked memory the sudden truth emerged. His is the face of O-san [この時吾輩は何だかこの顔に似たものがあるらしいと云う感じがした。よくよく考えて見るとそれは御三の顔である].”<sup>111</sup> Moreover, despite ostensibly describing the master, the cat actually empathizes not with the master here but with the absent O-san, who he acknowledges would be emotionally affected—that is, “actively angered [さぞ怒る]”—were she to hear the cat describing her in such an unflattering way. The end result therefore is not in fact a lack of sympathy for the maid, but rather an active empathy, a second ‘first look’ at a character that might otherwise fade to caricature, and a description, moreover, that on a very concrete level sees no difference between her and the very master of the house. To this effect, then, while a kind of Brechtian alienation indeed colors the way the cat describes the household staff, another similar concept, that of the literary function of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization, or “making strange”), provides even further insight into the cat’s descriptions. Alexandra Berlina summarizes Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* as follows:

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<sup>111</sup> *I Am a Cat*, 315. *SZ*, vol. 1, 346.

[Alexander] Potebnia (or at least Potebnia as Shklovsky understood him in 1917) argued that literature simplifies perception by explaining the unknown by means of the known. Shklovsky, on the other hand, was then, and remained, interested in how literature complicates perception — often by presenting the seemingly known as if it were unknown — and in how the complication of perception can further cognition. Of course, literature can both simplify and complicate. But the latter seems to be its specialty: while it can hardly outcompete good nonfiction with respect to simplification and clarity, fiction and poetry can be particularly effective in stimulating complexity, questioning what has gone unquestioned, and making real what has become unreal through repetition.<sup>112</sup>

The above moment, then, in which the servant is introduced only as a descriptive proxy for the master, is paradoxically also the moment in which the servant becomes noticeable, becomes real, visible and present, and the burden and consequences of representing her—her anger, her intersection with the social and character space of the household—are most explicitly acknowledged. Rather, therefore, than contributing merely to a sense of Brechtian alienation, whereby initial feelings of empathy might be circumvented in favor of some sort of dehumanized ‘truth’ about domestic humanity, the strangeness of the servants in the eyes of the cat narrator instead opens a gateway to recognize humanity even in those who middle-class society renders invisible and, as a consequence, deems perpetually unknowable. As amusing as it is, moreover, for a cat to not understand servants, there lies underneath this humor the far more distressing fact of the seemingly insurmountable barrier of understanding between human masters and their

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<sup>112</sup> Alexandra Berlina, “‘Let Us Return *Ostranenie* to Its Functional Role’: On Some Lesser-Known Writings of Viktor Shklovsky,” *Common Knowledge* 24.1 (2018): 23.



equally human servants. As *I Am a Cat* thus frames this impasse as akin to a difference in species, the prospect of knowing and representing the other is revealed not as a simple task to accomplish but instead as an impossibility to recognize and to mourn.

In the rest of this chapter, I will be discussing further this balance between the ethics of representation and the knowability of others in terms of the master-servant dialectic in Sōseki's fiction. Just as the cat recognizes that there are gaps in his understanding of what makes the houseboy tick, or that a maid can have quite the will of her own even if she never enters center stage, Sōseki's other narrators also acknowledge and contend with this dynamic whereby those most intimate to the service of the household—and in service to the narrative—are not rendered visible in it in the same way, or for the same reasons, as their masters. Just as the cat is frustrated by the servants—whether by the fearful rumors about them or their refusal to grant him a pass on his inability to catch rats—Sōseki's other narrators are equally frustrated by what to do with or say about servants. The manufactured distance between the cat and the servants, whereby he emphatically associates himself with the upper echelon of the domestic space despite his equally impactful contact (and conflict) with those who work in its kitchen, is played for comedy in *I Am a Cat*, but, in many of Sōseki's other novels, these frustrations of representation trade their comedy for tragedy and their punchlines for gut-punches. I will later examine one of the more tragic of these relational impasses in my discussion of *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, but first I turn to another servant who, like O-san, is all too similar to his master and yet whose representation within his master's story—and the possibility of that representation—presents a problem for that story.

## Unofficial Narratives and Designated Allegories in *And Then*

The houseboy Kadono, from Sōseki's *And Then*, I argue represents a foil for the main character, Daisuke, precisely by precariously occupying an uncannily similar space alongside his bourgeois master. Kadono is designated as an allegorical character, defined by all those qualities which Daisuke disavows in himself, while simultaneously throwing into question whether Daisuke is indeed worthy of being the character around whom all other characters are arranged and by whom they are defined. By presenting Daisuke's thoughts on the difference between himself and Kadono, only to leave open in the end the possibility that Kadono himself might have his own—very different—thoughts about Daisuke, the novel thus questions the hierarchical assumptions that separate the hero of a story from an ostensibly flat, allegorical character.

Having entered service in Daisuke's home more to relieve his own family of the burden of his unambitious freeloading than to actually help Daisuke—even stating in his job interview that he was “basically lazy [根が怠惰もんですからな]” and can only make promises “on not being too lazy [成るべく怠けない様にして]”—Kadono is presented as a more or less worthless servant whose skill set ranges from unnecessary (carrying water in for a bath despite Daisuke having running water [風呂は水道があるから汲まないでも可い]) to lackadaisical (“maybe” doing the cleaning [掃除でもしませう]).<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Daisuke accepts the unconventionality of their relationship and the conditions of Kadono's employment, understanding that he himself occupies an ill-defined position in relation to what a master should be.

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<sup>113</sup> *And Then*, 7. SZ, vol. 4, 321.

This houseboy always used the respectful term *Sensei* in addressing Daisuke [此書生は代助を捕まへては、先生先生と敬語を使ふ]. At first, Daisuke had protested with a wry smile, but Kadono had always answered, oh, yes, yes, but Sensei—and so Daisuke had been forced to leave the matter as it was; eventually, it had become a custom so that now, with Kadono alone, Daisuke felt no qualms about passing off as Sensei [此男に限って、平気に先生として通してゐる]. It was only when he began to keep a houseboy that Daisuke realized there were no other appropriate forms of address to use toward a master like himself [実際書生が代助の様な主人を呼ぶには、先生以外に別段適当な名称がないと云ふことを、書生を置いて見て、代助も始めて悟つたのである].<sup>114</sup>

Much like the narrator in *Kokoro*, who also refers to his chosen mentor and object of identification by the ill-fitting title of *sensei*, thereby defining their relationship to each other, Kadono likewise sets the terms for his relationship with Daisuke by forcing him into a language that unsettles his own identity and adds a performative aspect to their domestic economy. While Daisuke accepts unproblematically that Kadono is a houseboy regardless of the quality of his service, Daisuke himself is also hamstrung into a designation which he, like Kadono, fails to truly embody. For not the first time in the novels I discuss here, then, the title of *sensei* is imprecisely attributed to a man whose relationship with another is more ambiguous and less codified than the title implies. Further complicating matters, Daisuke himself addresses Kadono

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 3. SZ, vol. 4, 315.

with the polite suffix *-san*, an honorific unusually respectful for a servant.<sup>115</sup> The dynamic between Daisuke and Kadono, not unlike that between *Kokoro*'s narrator and his own 'Sensei,' thus takes on the quality of a charade, a comedic domestic drama which unfolds principally in the first few pages in the novel and sets the ironic framework through which the reader gains a perspective on Daisuke that he himself lacks. This sense of perspective provided by Kadono's navigation of his role in the domestic space, moreover, I argue, opens up gaps in the story which destabilize the hierarchy between the dominant narrative centered on a main character—a notable individual—and the disavowed perspectives and blind spots which are always already—but never fully—absorbed within it.

Hardly the first decadent, leisured youth to attempt to combat the threat of difference with open disdain, Daisuke finds himself insisting that he feels only pity for Kadono, whose “skull was crammed with the brains of a cow, for he could follow but half a block down the avenue of conversation that ordinary people walked [此青年の頭は、牛の脳味噌で一杯詰つてみるとしか考へられないのである。話をすると、平民の通る大通りを半町位しか付いて来ない],” a boy who “gave the impression that his nervous system [神経系] was a network of coarse straw [恰も荒縄で組み立てられたるかの感が起る].”<sup>116</sup> Daisuke contrasts this claim of Kadono's constitutional stupidity against his own “uniquely keen speculative powers and acute sensibilities [特有なる細緻な思索力と、鋭敏な感応性],” but this contrast—and its hierarchy—ultimately falls flat for the reader, as the novel also explains that Kadono doesn't

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 8. SZ, vol. 4. 323.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 8. SZ, vol. 4, 322.

suffer half the “anguish [苦痛]” Daisuke does, but is in fact rather “unconcerned [平気にのらくらしてゐる]”—and even in possession of a sense of irony that Daisuke lacks entirely.

Not only was he unconcerned, he tacitly understood that this very idling conferred upon him a claim to kinship with Daisuke and he was apt to behave more than a little triumphantly [しかも此のらくらを以て、暗に自分の態度と同一型に属するもの的心得て、中々得意に振舞たがる]. Moreover, playing up his body’s dogged strength, he would close in on the sensitive points of his master’s high-strung nature [其上頑強一点張りの肉体を笠に着て、却つて主人の神経的な局所へ肉薄して来る]. Daisuke, in turn, regarded his own nerves as the tax he had to pay [払ふ租税] for his uniquely keen speculative powers and acute sensibilities [細緻な思索力と、鋭敏な感応性]. It was the anguish that echoed from the achievement of a lofty education [高尚な教育の彼岸に起る反響の苦痛である]; it was the unwritten punishment dealt to natural aristocrats, those designated by heaven [天爵的に貴族となつた報に受る不文の刑罰である].<sup>117</sup>

Via his physicality and his unrelenting confidence despite his lack of “sensitivity [神経系],” Kadono further “taxes [租税]” Daisuke by highlighting the irony that his lazy and dimwitted idling is ultimately just as idle as Daisuke’s intellectually nervous idling. The reader, then, is let in on the joke that, when Daisuke questions “to what end the youth ventured to breathe and subsist [代助は此青年の生活状態を観察して、彼は必竟何の為に呼吸を敢てして存在するかを怪しむ事さへある],” he is in fact echoing perfectly the concerns of his own family,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. *SZ*, vol. 4, 323.

which begrudgingly continues to support him financially despite his self-absorbed indolence and unwillingness to heed their advice.<sup>118</sup>

Nevertheless, Kadono does manage to breathe and subsist, and even thrive, both physically and emotionally more vital than his master. He is in good company; the rest of the novel's cast of characters, in fact, all feel far more alive than the protagonist himself. In an article titled "Camellias and Vampires: Reading the Spermatic Economy in Natsume Sōseki's *And Then*," for instance, Miyazaki Kasumi argues that Daisuke's lover Michiyo draws her liveliness and livelihood from Daisuke at his own expense, extracting her vitality from him in the mode of the vampiric woman. Kadono too, albeit in a different manner altogether, also stakes his own claim on Daisuke's life force through an exemption from—and even the possible receipt of—the alleged mental "tax [租税]" Daisuke pays to maintain his performance of the role of leisured bourgeois intellectual.<sup>119</sup> Daisuke can thus only maintain his privileged status at the center of the narrative via a pay-off to this servant who he claims only to pity—but who he is forced to adapt to and who could easily overpower Daisuke, if only he were not so lazy. The servant Kadono thus remains peripheral to the story and in fact even disappears over its course, but the force with which he enters it, unperturbed by the same anguish that grants Daisuke a supposedly coveted central role, reveals the potential for untold stories to always threaten to break through.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 8. SZ, vol. 4, 322-323.

<sup>119</sup> Miyazaki Kasumi, "Camellias and Vampires: Reading the Spermatic Economy in Natsume Sōseki's *And Then* (2008)," trans. Kristin Sivak, eds. Reiko Abe Auestad, Alan Tansman, and J. Keith Vincent, *Reading Sōseki Now*, special issue of *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 29 (2017): 230-244. In Japanese as "Tsubaki no hana to kyuuketsuki—supaamatikku ekonomii kara yomu *Sorekara*," *Journal of the Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, Yokohama National University, The humanities* 10 (2008-02): 44-34.

In the opening scenes of *And Then*, in fact, Kadono's story breaks through into Daisuke's time and time again, to the extent that the first-time reader might fairly assume that Kadono will be a central character throughout. Much of the opening of the novel, for instance, consists of a series of brief scenes and memories characterizing the two and their domestic dynamics, as well as Kadono's relationship with an additional housekeeper. Before long, however, all of these appearances grow less frequent, and Kadono's place in the novel apparently fades away to more or less non-existent. I have already discussed a few of the short scenes in which Kadono features prominently, but I would like to turn now to a closer analysis of a few others, with an eye towards how they complicate the possibilities and power dynamics of what is privileged in novelistic narrative versus everything that fails to "make the cut."

When we first meet Kadono, he appears bearing "newspapers, placing them, neatly folded, beside the cushion [新聞を畳んで持つて来た。四つ折りにしたのを座布団の傍へ置きながら] and beginning loudly [仰山な声で話しかけた], 'It's really something, isn't it, Sensei, this business! [先生、大変な事が始まりましたな]'"<sup>120</sup> Kadono is referring to an article in the paper detailing the ongoing matter of a school principal under pressure to resign for reasons that are either unclear or uninteresting to both Kadono and Daisuke but, given Kadono's assumption that Daisuke will know exactly what "business" he is talking about, have clearly served them at least as an ongoing point of small talk. Kadono is "gleeful [嬉しがってゐる]" over the possibility that the principal may be forced to resign, whereas Daisuke "calmly continued to eat his toast [代助は落付いた顔をして麴麴を食つて居た]," not particularly

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<sup>120</sup> *And Then*, 3. SZ, vol. 4, 315.

enthused about the topic.<sup>121</sup> Unsure as to why Kadono is even interrupting his breakfast with the talk of the town, Daisuke asks:

“Do you stand to gain in any way if the principal resigns [君は何か儲かる事でもあるんですか]?”

“Oh come on, Sensei, you shouldn’t joke like that. A fellow doesn’t get excited over something just because he might gain or lose.”

Daisuke continued to eat. “Do they want to get rid of the principal because they really hate him, or is there a question of profit involved—do you know [君、あれは本当に校長が悪らしくって排斥するのか、他に損得問題があつて排斥するのか知つてますか]?”

“No I don’t know about that. How about you, Sensei, do you know [何ですか、先生は御存じなんですか]?”

“No, I don’t know either. I don’t know, but there’s no chance that people today would stir up all that trouble if they didn’t think they were going to get something out of it [今の人間が、得にならないと思つて、あんな騒動をやるもんかね]. They’re just making excuses [ありや方便だよ、君].”

“Is that right?” Kadono’s face showed some concern [稍真面目な顔をした].<sup>122</sup>

With that, the conversation is dropped, and with it the question of what anyone stands to gain, or even whether the principal will actually resign. The only real commentary Daisuke offers is his cynical assumption that there must be something besides the official narrative—whatever that

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. *SZ*, vol. 4, 316.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 3-4. *SZ*, vol. 4, 316.



may be—that would explain why anyone should care so much. This question of official narrative is the one I want to identify here, because throughout this conversation, the official narrative represented by the newspapers in fact waits “neatly folded [四つ折りにした]” on the floor, unread by either Kadono or Daisuke. Whether Kadono glimpsed a headline or was just reminded by the physical presence of the newspaper itself of the ongoing scandal, neither he nor Daisuke are in any rush to read it. The answers they can barely feign interest in may in fact be contained within those newspapers, but Kadono and Daisuke are far more concerned with idle gossip around Daisuke’s breakfast table than with local politics. Furthermore, the reader’s attention as well is turned inward, towards the dynamic between the two fictional characters, rather than to the real-life events indicated by the story, as the passage alludes to the forced resignation of Matsuzaki Kuranosuke (1865-1919) from the Tokyo Commercial School in the months prior to the story’s own publication, a story previously covered in the same *Asahi Shimbun* in which *And Then* itself was later serialized.<sup>123</sup> The domestic space is therefore doubly enclosed, as both the world outside Daisuke’s sitting room and the newsprint outside the text of the story are decentered in the narrative in favor of the domestic chatter of idle household small talk.

The following short scene is yet another snapshot of domestic small talk, this time between Kadono and Daisuke’s elderly housekeeper. Immediately after another disparaging comment about the state of Kadono’s intellectual faculties in comparison to his physical strength, the story cuts away to a brief conversation between Kadono and said housekeeper—an unusual

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<sup>123</sup> Matsumura Tatsuo, Saitō Keiko, et al, eds., *Nihon kindai bungaku taikei 26 Natsume Sōseki shū 3* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1990), 585. *Asahi Shimbun*, April 4, 1909, page 3. May 6, 1909, page 2. May 7, 1909, page 2.

occurrence in a text in which the perspective otherwise adheres strictly to Daisuke's immediate vicinity. The text records:

Not only Daisuke, but also his old housekeeper was finding things much easier these days [代助ばかりではない、従来からゐる婆さんも門野の御蔭で此頃は大変助かる様になつた]. Consequently, the old woman and the houseboy got along exceedingly well [その原因で婆さんと門野とは頗る仲が好い]. They talked a great deal in the absence of their master [主人の留守などには、よく二人で話をする].

“I wonder what on earth Sensei plans to do, eh, Auntie [先生は一体何を為る気なんだらうね。小母さん]?”

“When you get as far as he has, you can do anything. No need to worry [あの位になつて入らつしやれば、何でも出来ますよ。心配するがものはない].”

“I'm not worrying. It just seems like he ought to do something [心配はせんがね。何か為たら好きさうなもんだと思ふんだが].”

“Well, he's probably planning to find a bride first and then to take his time looking for a position.”

“That's not a bad idea. I sure wish I could spend my days reading books and going to concerts like that [あんな風に一日本を読んだり、音楽を聞きに行つたりして暮して居たいな].”

“You?”

“Well, I don't care if I read or not. I just wish I could play around like that [あゝ云ふ具合に遊んで居たいね].”

“You know all those things were decided in your previous life. Nothing you can do about it [夫はみんな、前世からの約束だから仕方がない].”

“Is that the way it is [左様なものかな].”

This was how their conversations ran [まづ斯う云ふ調子である].<sup>124</sup>

This typical conversation between Daisuke’s housekeeper and Kadono is in fact so mundane that to excerpt it here in full feels almost counter to its everyday insignificance, counter to the fact that it is presented principally as a mere sample of the sort of conversation that might occur between the two servants “a great deal [よく]” of the time, and not anything particularly pertinent to *And Then*’s larger story of Daisuke’s tumultuous affair with his best friend’s wife. I have indeed excerpted it however, for two reasons: 1) because to disregard as irrelevant a rare inclusion of the private speech of servant characters in my present discussion of the place of servant characters in the novel would, besides being obviously ironic, serve only to reify several problematic standards for who and what is (and is not) relevant to the story, and 2) because this very problem, these politics of significance, are in fact laid bare in the conversation itself, as the two characters discuss a kind of class-based predestination which summarily makes one person a master and another a servant. The ethical implications and relative justice of this reality are furthermore neither affirmed nor critiqued, but rather left unresolved in a casual half-question: “is that the way it is [左様なものかな].” The roles of master and servant are presented here as paradoxically both predetermined and arbitrary, both ill-defined and rigid. This conversation—an aside in which two servants simultaneously accept and question what sort of previous life story leads to one’s present social status—might be the only instance of any kind of servant-led class

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<sup>124</sup> *And Then* 4-5. SZ, vol. 4, 317-318.

critique to be recorded as direct speech in the text, but the narrator, by indicating that it is but one example of the sort of conversation the two servants would have frequently, implies that such a discussion is not actually unusual, that in fact many such conversations and ideas are merely going unrecorded.

The text hardly goes so far as to explicitly question the stratification of a class-based society, but it does tease at the possibility of a story other than Daisuke's and satirize the arbitrariness of his leisure. Kadono does not see in Daisuke a man of intellect and untapped potential, destined for a steady position and marital bliss, but rather someone who for some reason or another gets to “play around [遊んで]” all day. Of course, complex socioeconomic and sociopolitical forces are responsible for such disparities—at least as much as any prior life shenanigans—but the point stands that this passage, rather than effacing these disparities by refusing to call attention to the experience of servitude, instead acknowledges, while it does have a lot more to say about Daisuke's no-strings-attached, guaranteed story-worthiness than it would be able to say about his servants, that does not mean that his servants do not have lives and relationships of their own. The systematic exclusion of the servants from the kinds of lives that turn into novels is not bemoaned here, that is, but neither is it ignored. Instead, *And Then* establishes early on this caveat that there are indeed servants operating in the blind spots of the bourgeois text, and that their outsideness is itself present within the narrative, while their apparent difference from their masters is, conversely, often illusory and over-stated. After all, the fact that the reader knows exactly what Daisuke thinks of Kadono (but only broad strokes of what Kadono thinks of Daisuke) is a result of the narration's focalization through Daisuke, but the irony created by the gap between Daisuke's distancing of Kadono and the truth of their similarities is equally an effect of that narration.

This is in sharp contrast, moreover, to the fact that Daisuke is never permitted to voice his thoughts aloud, in his own voice, while the servants, for their part, do in fact speak together aloud of their thoughts on Daisuke. Unlike Daisuke, however, whose thoughts the narrator leaves open to the reader's criticism, the conversations between the servants are presented as quotations, without any editorializing or commentary by the narrator. While the reader is thus presented to a greater degree with Daisuke's inner thoughts, Kadono's words are presented without qualification in a way that implies his insights can, more so than Daisuke's, be taken at face value. It is this interplay, then, whereby servants understand the lives of their masters on a deeper level than assumed while also being exempted from the scrutiny placed on major characters, which allows servant characters to serve as incisive commentators and qualifiers of these masters' stories, thereby asserting a measure of control, on the structural level, over stories that, technically speaking, are not 'theirs.'

### **Blind Spots and Spectacle: The Distribution of Narrative Attention in Sōseki's Fiction**

In *Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative*, James A. Fujii argues that Sōseki's novels, *Kokoro* specifically, maintain their privileged place in the Japanese canon at least partially due to their adeptness at concealing imperialist, colonialist blind spots through the magic of storytelling. He furthermore identifies the strength of *Kokoro*'s longevity in part in the way that it "differentiates [the narrator] from the protagonists of *shizenshugi* literature...expressed as a break between Sensei, for whom 'truth' is primary, and the student, whose concern is representation (here, storytelling)," arguing that *Kokoro* is thus

ultimately “a text about representation.”<sup>125</sup> While Fujii’s focus is on the stakes of representing (or not) the colonial reaches of Japanese empire, he also addresses the representation of the experience of class in modernity:

...[T]his work owes its place in the canon to its contribution to the installation of what would become the central figure in modern Japanese fiction—the isolated, bourgeois figure who will quickly come to outgrow the confines of “class” to stand for the whole of Japanese society. Such disregard of contention-ridden difference (class) is not fortuitous, and it does not simply reflect the appropriation of values implicit in Western literary practices (romantic and realist literature). Modern Japanese narratives that come to occupy what we can only metaphorically call the heart of the canon observe a kind of social contract to occlude such differences as class and competing political interests in Japanese society—that is, the serious consideration of alterity, whether it be conceived in domestic or international (but only non-Western) terms.<sup>126</sup>

I argue however, that, even if *Kokoro* does not acknowledge class difference, others of Sōseki’s novels, like *And Then*, for instance, do in fact acknowledge that such class dynamics—and the effacement of these class dynamics—are at play. Moreover, the acknowledgement of such blind spots and class differences, in *And Then* at least, comes notably via the observations of Kadono, the servant, as he remarks on his ostensible superiors. “Mr. Hiraoka is more fashionable [ハイカラ] than I thought,” Kadono muses, observing Daisuke’s childhood friend and romantic rival:

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<sup>125</sup> James A. Fujii, *Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 147.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

“He almost puts us to shame, looking like that [あの服装ぢや、少し宅の方が御粗末過る様です].”

“Oh, not really. Nowadays, everybody looks pretty much like that [近頃はみんな、あんなものだらう],” answered Daisuke, straightening himself.

“Well, you sure can’t tell by looks any more, can you [全たく、服装丈ぢや分らない世の中になりましたからね]. You might be wondering who some gentleman is, then he walks into a shack [何処の紳士かと思ふと、どうも変ちきりんな家へ這入てますからね].”

Daisuke did not bother to answer and returned to his study [代助は返事も為ずに書齋へ引き返した].<sup>127</sup>

Daisuke, a perfect example of the “isolated, bourgeois figure” described by Fujii, has no response to Kadono’s musings about the performativity of class, and the text thus acknowledges what it cannot acknowledge—that disparity is easy enough to see if one knows where to look, but the question of who is able and willing to speak of this disparity is constrained always by the individual’s perspective, and not every ‘individual’ is allowed to speak, heard when they do, or warranted a response. Sōseki’s novels might not be seen as deep dives into the politics of class difference and the ironies of the emerging Japanese middle class, but, through a character like

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 101. SZ, vol. 4, 436-437.

Kadono, he is nevertheless able to acknowledge the existence of a perspective and a problem to which he, like Daisuke, might not—and perhaps cannot—have an adequate response.<sup>128</sup>

There is a parallel, furthermore, between the effacement of servant perspectives and Fujii's discussion of the Westerner who appears on the beach with Sensei in the opening chapters of *Kokoro*, only to disappear before the text even endeavors to engage with the international ecosystem—and the specter of imperialism—which he represents. This movement, from apparent centrality to seeming irrelevance, is not unlike the particular way in which servant characters too routinely disappear over the course of Sōseki's novels. This “appearance that has baffled critics over the years,” Fujii explains of the Westerner in his Japanese attire, “alerts us to the text's refusal to admit any meaningful consideration of events outside of Japan's borders. Only because he is noticed by the student does the Westerner become visible in the text, but the abruptly truncated appearance serves only to signal an absence from the work.”<sup>129</sup> In my own analysis, I may take a substantially more affirming approach to Sōseki's often brief acknowledgements of the world outside his texts, but the literary mechanism of these noted absences nevertheless remains the same. Whether the text acknowledges only to abandon such oversights and characters out of cowardice, or out of negligence, or in fact out of an ethical humility, is a question that needs to be asked, I argue, on a case-by-case basis and answered ultimately at the discretion of the reader, but, in the case of servants at least, I do contend that the

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<sup>128</sup> Of course, it is also possible that responding to Kadono would, in Daisuke's mind, grant too much credence to Kadono's observations in general, or entrap Daisuke into admitting in this specific instance to the performative nature of his own class status. In any case, whether Daisuke actually has no response or is simply unwilling to respond, the fact remains that the implications behind Kadono's observation are allowed to linger with the reader, uncontested.

<sup>129</sup> Fujii, 138.



marked invisibility of Sōseki's servants presents as much a well-considered nod to their independence and their possession of interiority as it does a negation of those things.

When Kadono is not making trenchant societal observations or serving as a literary foil for his master, he too largely disappears, sticking around mostly to fulfill the various domestic duties typical of servants. In stark contrast to the opening chapters, in fact, which seem to indicate that Kadono will feature nearly as prominently in the narrative as Daisuke, for the rest of the novel, 'serve' is all he really does. He conveys messages, relays calls, and brings in the tea, all while seemingly blissfully unaware that Daisuke is even part of a larger, more dramatic story. If he is aware that something is amiss at all, he is being remarkably—and perhaps uncharacteristically—circumspect about it, as there is no indication that he has any hand in spreading rumors about the affair or even gossiping about it with the maid, as one might otherwise expect. There is something to be said then, for a servant character that does not recognize that his master's life is all that novel-worthy, for whom the day-to-day of domestic life prevails over novelistic drama. Even if Kadono does gradually fade from the story, then, the fact that he does not seem to care much about the story in the first place works to substantially lessen the blow of his exclusion. In fact, Kadono seems baffled at every turn by Daisuke's actions and oblivious to his affairs, simply engaging in dutiful small talk to help drown out Daisuke's inner turmoil, or, like the maid in *Kokoro* when the narrator visits in Sensei's absence, napping entirely through Michiyo's clandestine visits.<sup>130</sup>

Further emphasizing Kadono's intimate externality to Daisuke's story, moreover, the novel highlights his "surprise" at Daisuke's erratic actions in the few late scenes in which he

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<sup>130</sup> *And Then* 228, 234. *SZ*, vol. 4, 586, 594.

appears. When, for instance, Daisuke is up earlier than usual due to insomnia, Kadono is “startled [驚ろいて]” by his presence and comments “[w]hy Sensei, you sure are early,” and, when on another occasion he asks why Daisuke is going out so late at night, Daisuke answers “[t]o a surprised Kadono [驚ろいた門野]” that he’s going “nowhere.”<sup>131</sup> When Daisuke sets out on an impromptu trip to see Michiyo at her home, Kadono is taken off guard by the sound of Daisuke’s footsteps and his unannounced departure, “dashing out” to ask in his surprise [驚ろいた様に云った] where Daisuke is going, if maybe he needs to do some shopping, and if so, if Kadono, perhaps, can help.<sup>132</sup> Notably, then, it is not Daisuke’s erratic behavior itself which flusters Kadono, but rather the possibility that he himself may have in some way lapsed in his duties. Daisuke brushes him off, however, and Kadono says nothing more. Later still, when Daisuke briefly emerges from an anxious stupor as Kadono appears to announce the arrival of one of Daisuke’s friends, the text states that “no sooner had [Kadono] spoken than he stopped and looked at Daisuke in amazement [驚ろいた様に代助を見た].”<sup>133</sup> Kadono is not privy to the major plot events and internal musings which constitute the main narrative of *And Then*, and his surprise at even Daisuke’s atypical behavior furthermore indicates that he has given Daisuke’s private affairs little consideration. Beyond the simple fact that Daisuke’s demeanor is out of the norm and without clear explanation, Kadono does not seem to think he is witnessing anything all that worthy of further investigation. Even at those times when he demonstrates any real “curiosity [好奇心]” towards Daisuke’s plans, he at most gets slightly annoyed [少し愛想を

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 240, 250. *SZ*, vol. 4, 601, 613.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 153. *SZ*, vol. 4, 497.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 252. *SZ*, vol. 4, 616.

尽した様な具合で] by his master's coy non-responses and refusal of his services, “stalk[ing] back to his own room [自分の部屋へ引き取つた]” in his frustration, only to return minutes later, seemingly unaffected, to ask Daisuke if he needs to order a rickshaw.<sup>134</sup> If such occasions nag at Kadono, or indeed so much as remain in his memory much beyond their moment, any concern over what they might mean is confined to unrecorded gossip within those inner parts of the household meant for houseboys and maids—and always outside the text.

There is in the text, however, some indication that such conversations indeed may be occurring, and, moreover, that Daisuke himself may even be conscious of this possibility, much as *Kokoro*'s narrator is aware of the maid's constant presence as a potential audience even in a perfectly silent house. The text at times acknowledges moments where “Kadono and the old woman seemed to have been gossiping in the morning room [門野と婆さんは茶の間で世間話をしてゐたらしい],” or draws attention to Daisuke's awareness of the fact that being overheard is indeed a possibility (albeit one which he is not all that concerned about).<sup>135</sup> In the same breath, for instance, Daisuke both decides that “Kadono would be something of a nuisance [門野が少し邪魔になるが]” if Michiyo comes to visit him in his house and also that “he thought they could manage so that their conversation would not carry into the houseboy's room [話のし具合では書生部屋に洩れない様にも出来ると考へた].”<sup>136</sup> Daisuke is keenly aware, that is, of Kadono's potential to somehow interfere with his plans, but he is also confident that he nevertheless should

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 152. *SZ*, vol. 4, 496.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 155. *SZ*, vol. 4, 500. Notably, however, even this “gossip [世間話]” does not indicate servants who are secretly discussing Daisuke's salacious private affairs behind his back, but rather two people engaging in idle chatter that can be heard easily throughout the house.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 201. *SZ*, vol. 4, 555.

be able to quash this threat and keep the full story safely out of Kadono's reach. The possibility of having private matters overheard by a servant is thus a possibility the text acknowledges, even if it does so only to quickly negate it. It is important to note, moreover, that Daisuke's brief concern over the possibility, rather than indicating any actual deception or even inquisitiveness in Kadono, instead reflects Daisuke's own paranoia and the self-involvement that characterizes his affair with Michiyo. Daisuke, that is, simply assumes that his life is interesting enough that Kadono would naturally want to spy on him. The text, however, never gives any indication that Kadono is as interested in unraveling the mystery of Daisuke as is Daisuke himself, and in fact, in the following scene, Kadono's rather noncommittal interest in Daisuke's affairs is juxtaposed with Daisuke's own burning curiosity as to what Kadono is thinking. As much as Daisuke assumes Kadono must be interested in what he can glean from eavesdropping on his master, that is, it is in fact Daisuke, not Kadono, who cannot resist eavesdropping:

Just as [Daisuke] was about to pass through the morning room [茶の間を抜け様とする拍子に], he heard the words, "Sensei's pretty crafty, somehow [何うも先生は旨いよ]." It was Kadono talking to the old woman.

"What do you mean, crafty [何が旨いんだ]?" Daisuke stopped and looked at Kadono.

Kadono answered. "Oh you're out already, Sensei. That was quick [やあ、もう御上りですか。早いですな]." Given this greeting, Daisuke could not very well repeat, what do you mean, crafty [何が旨いんだと聞かれもしなくなつたので]. So he went

straight back to his study, sat in a chair, and rested [其儘書齋へ歸つて、椅子に腰を掛けて休息してみた].<sup>137</sup>

The most indication in the novel that Kadono might be at all invested in Daisuke's personal life—or, at least, in whatever makes him so “crafty”—is thus confined to moments like these in which it is Daisuke who is on the outside looking in, left to wonder more openly over what Kadono is thinking than Kadono ever seems to wonder about Daisuke. This gap in Daisuke's knowledge, furthermore, translates to a gap in the knowledge of the reader as well, given the fact that, as I have discussed, while the narration follows Daisuke's thoughts, it explores Kadono only through his spoken words and actions. Both Daisuke and the reader are thus left with little choice but to push down their curiosity over what Kadono means by “crafty,” with Daisuke moreover resigned to the fact that, unless he wants to embarrass himself by insisting upon an answer—and thereby admitting he cares what a mere servant thinks of him—Kadono's full opinion of him must remain a mystery.

Daisuke's insecurity here over what his houseboy thinks of him thus draws a stark contrast to his earlier easy conviction that, even if Kadono was interested in snooping around his affairs, Daisuke could easily keep him in the dark. In the end, Kadono foils Daisuke's plans not by interfering with them, but in fact by not caring about them enough to satisfy Daisuke's narcissism. Unlike the image of the conspicuously silent, potentially eavesdropping maid in *Kokoro*, Kadono is the sort that will “take advantage of his master's absence [主人の留守を幸ひと]” not by planning or plotting or digging into Daisuke's private affairs, but by “singing biwa songs at the top of his lungs [大きな声で琵琶歌をうたつてみた],” the kind of servant who,

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 78-79. *SZ*, vol. 4, 409.

rather than asking any questions about where Daisuke was and what he was doing, betrays only “a puzzled expression [妙な顔をして]” when Daisuke suddenly arrives home and asks him to shut the door so that he can be alone.<sup>138</sup> Kadono, simply put, has his own life, and Daisuke’s adventures, no matter how consequential to Daisuke, often amount, for Kadono, merely to interruptions to that life.

That Daisuke has a rich inner life outside Kadono’s immediate knowledge—one that is apparently interesting enough to make him the protagonist of a novel—nevertheless fails to make him interesting enough to Kadono to be worthy of further investigation, and certainly not worthy of comment. The dramatically novelistic import of Daisuke’s affairs and mental vacillations is lost on Kadono, and Kadono seems no worse the wear for this ‘loss.’ While Kadono, like so many other literary servants, remains peripheral to the story of *And Then*, an external foil for Daisuke made less and less necessary as the story retreats farther and farther into Daisuke’s head, Daisuke’s story is no less peripheral to Kadono’s existence than Kadono’s is to his. Kadono spends his time belting out the words to different stories entirely in carefree solitary biwa performances, and his disinterested confusion over his master’s story thus reveals both the shakiness of perspective and the selectiveness of representation. To Daisuke, Kadono should naturally be interested in his affairs, while, to Kadono, these affairs are of passing interest at best, only relevant so far as they determine when Kadono should order a rickshaw or prepare for guests. That the novel represents Daisuke’s story in full while often setting Kadono aside altogether, then, is a problem of representation unlikely to bother Kadono himself nearly as much

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 129-130. *SZ*, vol. 4, 469-470.

as it may bother the concerned reader. In a world of isolated individuals, *And Then* is perhaps not Kadono's story, but then, for Kadono's part, there is no *And Then*.

The last time we see Kadono, he is clearing the tea service just as Daisuke rushes out, in the midst of internal panic, with the hasty and unlikely excuse that he's going to go get a job [門野さん。僕は一寸職業を探して来る].<sup>139</sup> Considering the lengths the text goes to in the beginning to make it clear that Kadono and Daisuke share a common aversion to such a pursuit, the text comes full circle from the opening scenes between the two to this final one. The personal communicative gulf between Daisuke and Kadono remains, but so does the reminder of their fundamental similarities. The principal difference between them in the end is that Daisuke's "head [is] completely burnt away [自分の頭が焼け尽きる迄]" as his main character anxieties overcome him on a train ride circling Tokyo, while Kadono simply remains at home, undoubtedly confused, and likely still cleaning up the tea.<sup>140</sup> The story of *And Then* may leave Kadono's own story behind, then, but this very non-involvement haunts the text, serving to relativize the actual importance of Daisuke's most sordid secret affairs. Kadono blissfully sleeps through these affairs—a tendency that itself makes Daisuke "envious" at the colorfully described sight of the houseboy's "innocent nostrils [無邪気な鼻の穴を見て羨ましくなつた]," unaffected by the scent of lilies and the affair with Michiyo which they have come to represent.<sup>141</sup> In sharp contrast, then, to the master's and servant's nearly equivalent visibility in the opening scenes of the novel, Kadono becomes gradually absorbed into the background as the text focuses instead on representing the minutiae of Daisuke's own experience. Kadono's kinship

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 256. *SZ*, vol. 4, 621.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 257. *SZ*, vol. 4, 622.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 51. *SZ*, vol. 4, 375.

and reciprocal identification with Daisuke, however, indeed never truly go away, and, lurking within the irony that the narrator brings to the story in spades are the ineffable indications of Kadono's own story—the story, that is, of the day-to-day, of the undramatic and blissful ignorance of any real story at all. While Daisuke's dramatic life might be the focus of the novel, then, and Kadono's is perhaps not the most interesting story that could possibly be told, Kadono's side of the story—a cycle of everydayness wherein the stories of others are often inaccessible and generally not any more exciting than his own—reminds us of the distinctly literary nature of the very division between major and minor characters.

### **Glancing Blind Spots in *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond***

Kadono is never fully absorbed into Daisuke's story, nor particularly absorbed by it, and the novel thus draws attention to the incomplete absorption of servant characters into and within their masters' stories. This lack of absorption, moreover, serves to relativize the very importance of these masters' stories. Another of Sōseki's novels, *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, in turn mourns for this absorption. Replete with the stories of a number of memorable main characters—from the aspiring amateur detective Keitarō, to the brooding recluse Sunaga, and various family members and friends in between—*To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* comprises a compendium of competing stories. Bridging the gaps between all these main characters, however, is also a second, nested world of maids and houseboys, servants whose presence colors many of the novel's most pivotal scenes. *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* may not be the story of the maid Saku, or the houseboy Saeki, but their presences in the intimate spaces of their masters' lives—and indeed, in the fabric of the novel's narrative structure—serve to mediate the novel's most dramatic revelations nevertheless. In novels like *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, moreover,



rather than letting these characters fade away into the background as with the tray removal systems of novels like *Kokoro*, Sōseki foregrounds these ostensibly ‘minor’ characters as worthy of readers’ attention in their own right, not by providing them with their own stories, but instead by drawing attention to the fact that their stories are indeed missing—and that the absence of these stories is worth mourning. Rather than simply allowing some characters to rise unproblematically to the surface as others sink below, Sōseki thus lays bare the limitations faced by any given author—and perhaps by the modern novel as a whole—regarding what kinds of stories can be told.

Undertaking a study of minor characters in *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, therefore, is not as simple a task as it may at first appear, as the distinction between major and minor characters is not always clear, and this ambiguity has vexed both readers and scholars since the novel was first serialized. Early critical focus centered, for instance, almost exclusively on the character of Sunaga, with the entire first section of the novel, starring the character of Keitarō, ultimately dismissed as inferior. While few scholars and readers would so readily dismiss Keitarō today, it was not until comparatively recently that Keitarō attained the level of attention customarily paid by scholarship to ‘major’ characters.<sup>142</sup> That such a divide should have arisen among readers is perhaps not surprising, however, as the question of who is minor and who is major is not clear-cut even in the eyes of the characters within the novel themselves.

When Sunaga is first introduced, for instance, it is simply as Keitarō’s hopelessly leisured friend who has achieved nothing, despite his middle-class birth and education. Keitarō,

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<sup>142</sup> Yamamoto Yoshiaki. “*Higan sugi made kara Sunaga no hanashi*’ made: Sōseki hyōka no tenkanki no bunseki [From *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* to Sunaga’s story: an analysis of the turning point in Sōseki criticism].” *Sōseki kenkyū* 11 *tokushū Higan sugi made* (1998): 136-150.

meanwhile, finds it impossible to secure for himself the sort of employment and respect he believes is owed him due to his own status as a member of the middle class. Accordingly, right alongside Keitarō's fading middle-class aspirations, his initial apparent position as a main character also proceeds to gradually fade away in favor of this far less vigorous Sunaga, the "soldier's son who nevertheless detested the military," who "had majored in law, yet had no interest in civil service or business," and "was a rather backward type [退嬰主義の男]," or "at least he seemed so to Keitarō."<sup>143</sup> Sunaga, as Keitarō sees him, is unwilling to grasp at the sort of individuality Keitarō himself considers paramount, or to take his rightful place at the center of a great story—and yet Sunaga does become a major character, eventually eclipsing Keitarō entirely. Taken together, the two characters balance each other out, embodying two seemingly opposite approaches to conceptualizing the meaning and path of one's life. As Keitarō, for his part, searches both for a job and for a sense of life's mystery, he is stymied by Sunaga's apparent indifference to his life—a life that strikes Keitarō as simultaneously both embarrassingly aimless and enviably mysterious. As the rest of the novel leaves Keitarō behind to follow Sunaga, however, it reveals that Sunaga in fact yearns for the very same mundanity which Keitarō fears, as he is haunted by matters of family, romance, and intellectual life which paralyze him with their complexity, plaguing him with their mystery. Whereas Keitarō fears that life might be bland, Sunaga yearns for a life as simple as he believes it must be for other people.

Sōseki's characters often compete for narrative space, and *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* is no exception to this. What is however exceptional about the novel is this way in which the competition has expanded outside the novel itself and into the critical discourse. While the

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<sup>143</sup> *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 39. *SZ*, vol. 5, 42.

novel makes no effort for its own part to focus explicit attention onto a sole major character, literary expectations throughout the years have now and again yearned for such familiar exclusivity. As Keith Vincent points out in his article on parody in *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, there is something about this novel in particular that has bothered many a critical reader, inspiring them to exclude or deride portions of the story in favor of restructuring it around a central individual.<sup>144</sup> The structure of the novel, however, rejects this leveling—after all, it is logically unlikely that an entire half of a novel would be some kind of accident, and, in any case, the title of the novel itself establishes its subject as a rough time frame in which events occur, rather than the revelation of an individual experience comprised of various events. *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, Vincent explains, thus “reject[s] the notion that visual evidence suffices to know the ‘truth’ of a person or situation,” and “by employing multiple narrators and putting them into dialogue with each other...rejects the possibility of a single, authoritative *narrative* account.”<sup>145</sup> While it is relatively uncontroversial to suggest that a novel might not reveal the whole truth of its minor characters, *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* takes the question of the limits of literary representation a step further, challenging the assumption that the representation of even major characters is necessarily complete and unproblematic. Not only, furthermore, does this unsettling of narrative authority draw the reader’s attention, but it also gives rise to an anxiety that is felt within the novel itself as Keitarō “realizes only belatedly that the detective

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<sup>144</sup> J. Keith Vincent, “Playing and Parodying the Detective in Sōseki’s *Higan-sugi made*,” *Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies* 10 (2009): 32-33.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

novel of which he thinks he is the protagonist is actually being written by someone else” and, likewise, “Sunaga fears that he has been written into someone else’s story.”<sup>146</sup>

These anxieties played out in the critical reception of the novel even, if not especially, while Sōseki himself was still alive. Yamamoto Yoshiaki’s article in the 1998 special issue of *Sōseki kenkyū* discusses this reception at length, demonstrating how, despite a lack of consensus regarding who the main character of *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* should rightfully be, the basic assumption that either Keitarō or Sunaga must fill this role was unquestioned. The perceived injustice of neither character fully ‘owning’ his own story was treated as a flaw of that story, and critical allegiances were divided between which side either appeared more closely to represent an authentic, naturalistic and universal humanity, or which seemed more likely to represent an autobiographical Sōseki in disguise. Both regimes of relevancy determined the critical response to the novel, but regardless of where any given critic or scholar may have fallen on the spectrum, there was a mutual assumption that the novel must reveal the truth of something, whether that be the autobiographical or universal, or some combination of the two. Some, like Tokuda Shūsei (1872-1943), praised the novel for the way it so “brightly [明るくて]” and witfully bounded between penetrating insight and more removed observation [如何にも明るくて、人生に突込んで行かうとしては忽ち離れて了ふ、あの機知に富んだ描写], while others, like Suzuki Miekichi (1882-1936), conversely admired it for the seriousness with which Sunaga’s portion of the novel, at least, undertakes what he calls its “psychological autopsy [心理解剖].”<sup>147</sup> Yamamoto, in his *Sōseki kenkyū* article, goes on to trace the genealogy of these

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>147</sup> Yamamoto, 139, 142-143.

positive and negative summations of the novel and its parts right up to Sōseki's death—a death which forced a critical reconstitution of what was previously seen as a divided and divisive novel into a complete and cohesive whole. (After all, the only thing that would be worse than a fragmented narrative would be a fragmented national author.) It was thus only with the author's death that the novel could be salvaged and its characters rearranged into a more palatable constellation, anchoring its representational ambiguity by fashioning for it a new, more unifying main character—that of Sōseki himself.<sup>148</sup> Only by rearranging the constellation of characters around Sōseki himself, then—by making Sōseki the main character and the characters themselves all facets of the author—could the lack of a clear main character in the novel itself be remedied.

The novel's minor characters, on the other hand, do not inspire the same need for reconciliation, as their secondariness is structurally assumed, even required, and the presence of many minor characters of varying narrative weights is to be expected in a way that the presence of multiple main characters is not. Minor characters' contribution to the plurality of the text, then, is uncompromised precisely because it is naturalized. While the reader's expectations for a single, authoritative narrative are unsettled by the competing and coexisting perspectives of the novel's major characters, its minor characters remind us that, even in novels without a stark shift in main characters, point of view, and narration, there are always any number of characters who might offer a different perspective, if only they were allowed to do so. The minor characters in Sōseki's *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* do not in fact provide different perspectives, remaining structurally minor—(the story could not be reinterpreted to actually be the story of the

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

maid Saku, for example, in the same way that Keitarō's and Sunaga's primacy can be debated)—but, extraordinarily, these characters' very minorness is itself made relevant to the story. Though their perspectives are not presented, that is, the novel nevertheless acknowledges that, whatever perspectives servant characters may have on the events of the novel, those perspectives must remain a mystery. Like in the case of Kadono in *And Then, To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* thus acknowledges the potential for alternate versions of the story—and different stories altogether—just out of the scope of the narrative. In light, then, of everything the debates about the novel's major characters reveal about its challenge to a singular perspective, to ignore the unrealized perspectives of the novel's servant characters would be to ignore the questions of narrative plurality which Sōseki's novel treats as imminently remarkable. The story is still not about these minor servant characters—minor characters characteristically 'disappear,' after all, the resolution of their conflicts not a matter for novelistic closure—and yet *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* is a novel which actively invites us to notice—and to care about—the lack of closure afforded these minor characters. After all, even the novel's major characters find themselves frustrated by the inaccessibility of servants' stories, allowing this very inaccessibility to become part of the story itself.

### **The Servants Will Talk: Family Stories and Servant Voices**

One of the ways in which the novel draws the reader's attention to the incompleteness of servants' stories is by depicting situations in which the major characters themselves become invested in the convergence of theirs and their servants' lives. One prominent example of this is when Keitarō, made curious by rumors about Sunaga's potential marriage to the woman he had earlier seen visiting his house, "happened to hear...some talk about Chiyoko's marriage

arrangements...from the houseboy, Saeki [書生の佐伯から聞いたのである].”<sup>149</sup> This potential lead, however, only furthers Keitarō’s frustration, given the fact that “[o]f course, houseboys are not in a position to know completely the behind-the-scenes circumstances of an affair before it is brought to a conclusion [尤も佐伯の様なもの、まだ事の纏まらない先から、奥の委しい話を知ろう筈がなかった].”<sup>150</sup> The houseboy’s comparatively limited access to the stories of his masters—incomplete and imperfect, but still more intimate than Keitarō’s own—therefore presents not just a necessary precaution against rumors, or an impassable divide between servants and masters, but in fact a frustrating hindrance to Keitarō’s own knowledge. The ability of servants to catch bits and pieces of family secrets—due, ironically, to the family’s willingness to overlook their presence and disregard their potential to form their own opinions on the matter—thus poses a stark contrast to how Keitarō is caged out of all of the juicy information he so craves. Because of this, moreover, Keitarō’s best source of information is inherently tainted; what might be suitable for the gossip of servants is designated off limits for Keitarō by class and propriety, regardless of the heat of his desire for it. “[I]t would have been a disgrace to Keitarō if it became known that he had pried into the family’s affairs by pursuing information from no more than a doorkeeper [高が玄関番の書生から家庭の内幕を聞き出したと云われては自

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<sup>149</sup> Saeki is the houseboy for Sunaga’s uncle, Taguchi, whose house Keitarō is directed to in his search for a potential work reference. Keitarō’s first meeting with Saeki is highly contentious, as Saeki insults Keitarō by answering the door only to refuse to announce him to Taguchi. While there is no clear indication, then, of exactly when Keitarō heard talk of a potential marriage from Saeki, the increase in cordiality between them indicates that Keitarō’s visits to the Taguchi household have become at least semi-frequent in the interim.

<sup>150</sup> *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 192-193. *SZ*, vol. 5, 201-202.

分の品格に拘わる]” who might not even “know as much as his words laid claim to [口程詳しい事情を佐伯が知っている気遣がない].”<sup>151</sup>

Keitarō’s Saeki dilemma is not the only instance in the novel where servants’ access to the stories of their masters comes to these masters’ attention. On another occasion, Chiyoko “happen[s] to glance into the servants’ room [下女部屋を覗いて見ると], where in undertones the kitchen maid was talking over the brazier [ひそひそ何か話していた] with a rickshaw man patronized by the family...probably,” she thinks, “giving him a detailed account [細かに語っているらしく思われた]” of recent events while “the other maid was wiping trays in the living room, readying teacups in preparation for visitors [茶の間で来客の用意].”<sup>152</sup> Chiyoko’s observations and suspicions here reveal a contrasting dichotomy symbolized by one maid who prepares the stage for her employers, establishing a space for them to converse, and another who spreads gossip about them behind their backs. Contrary to Keitarō’s conviction that the houseboy Saeki is unlikely to have a detailed [詳しい] understanding of the situation, Chiyoko here assumes that the servants must indeed know enough to provide “a detailed [細かに] account.” It is not clear if this discrepancy is due to the differences between the positions of maids and houseboys, or whether the difference is simply that Keitarō is hungry for salacious details and Chiyoko is paranoid that something embarrassing will get out. What the novel does reveal, however, is precisely what it cannot reveal—the question that is, of how much servants know and what they think of it all. Regardless, then, of just how much any given servant does or does not know, the fact of the matter is that not only do they possess some level of insider knowledge

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 180. *SZ*, vol. 5, 189.



of the story but also that their masters are both fully aware that their servants share in this knowledge and completely unaware of the extent of it. Some of these minor characters may not be afforded so much as a name, but their bounded position within the story nevertheless allows them to remind us that stories are not the ‘possession’ of any major characters, but rather the fragmented property upheld by all characters in the character-system.

This less stratified and hierarchical distribution of narrative labor can be seen also in moments when even household duties themselves blur together, such as on one occasion during Chiyoko’s account of the death of her infant cousin. As Keitarō listens, the novel re-tells her story, explaining that “[i]t was customary for [the baby] to be fed by a maid apart from the family, but Chiyoko took the maid’s role that evening [宵子だけは別に下女がついて食事をするのが例になっているので、この晩は千代子はその役を引受けた].”<sup>153</sup> The novel further reinforces again the fluidity of these roles within the family when, later, among those attending the baby’s cremation are Sunaga and Chiyoko, and the baby’s mother, but also “the maid Kiyō, the one who had actually looked after the infant [宵子の守をしていた清という下女].”<sup>154</sup> The roles of servants and masters are, in this instance, not tied to identity and class, but to interpersonal and domestic function.<sup>155</sup> This shift in the function of domestic care (from the mother to the maid to Chiyoko), furthermore, has the narrative function of placing Chiyoko in a

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<sup>153</sup> *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 176. *SZ*, vol. 5, 184.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 185. *SZ*, vol. 5, 194.

<sup>155</sup> With regards to the matter of the fluidity of domestic roles, it is worth noting that the “domestic roles” in question are those gendered female. A male head-of-house is less likely to do the work of a houseboy, that is, than his wife is likely to share a workload with the maids. (See also, for instance, Shizu in *Kokoro*.) For a more in-depth discussion on the plasticity of the line between masters and servants and what it means for the telling of domestic stories, please see my discussion on the relationship between *The Makioka Sisters’* Yukiko and O-haru in my chapter on Tanizaki.

position to witness the whole sequence of the baby's death—thus serving the needs of the story by enabling Chiyoko to recount it later to Keitarō.

*To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* calls the reader's attention to the distributed nature of its story in scenes like these by highlighting this fragmented, character-based aspect of storytelling—all while never attempting to 'rectify' in any way that fragmentation. It is the position of the text not to speak for every one of its characters, or to allow each of them to speak, but instead to remind us that any one of them could speak—or might already be speaking amongst themselves—even if the reader does not hear them. The reader instead is left to wonder, alongside the novel's major characters, about what these characters might know and what they might have seen—and to acknowledge that something is indeed missing from the text because we do not hear them, because we do not follow them. The tension and struggle between the novel's characters for the spotlight, for narrative authority and representational centrality—to be an axis for the novel's focalization, even if not necessarily its focus—then, is not in fact an obstacle to be overcome, but rather a key feature of the story the novel tells about the mechanisms and limitations that determine how—and whose—stories are told.

### **Maid Problems and Missing Pieces in *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond***

Servant characters like *And Then's* Kadono and *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond's* Saeki provide their masters with both comparative foils and a means for the circulation of information, two functions which make their presence as essential to the narration of their masters' stories as real life servants were to the maintenance of their households. Whether allowing a character to establish one's position through comparison—as with Daisuke and Kadono, who I discussed earlier, or Sunaga and Saku, who I will discuss shortly—or by acting as

vehicles for the circulation (or obfuscation) of information within the novel itself—as in the cases of the gossiping servants and their eavesdropping masters—servant characters dictate the terms of the story, even when they are unable to speak. Were these servants absent, *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* could not possibly exist in the form that it does—none of its stories, major or minor, could be told in the first place. Whether by providing sources of essential conflict for the main characters, by conveniently disappearing from the story, or by giving others a point of comparison, the novel’s servant characters prop up the very narrative structures which make the major characters major. Without these minor characters, there are no major characters either, no masters without servants, and thus, while they are not the subject of the story, they are in fact vital to its existence.

Within any story there is another story that could be told about the way the story is told, and Sōseki’s *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* tells a story of a world filled with stories. Rather than mere background fodder for the self-contained stories of their individualistic bourgeois masters, then, the novel’s servant characters are in fact the essential characters of an underlying structural ‘story’—and potential storytellers in their own right. This potential, moreover, perhaps especially because it is unrealized, does not escape the author’s notice, nor that of his characters. Contrasted with the structural and representational import of these servant characters, the elision of their own stories creates a tension in the novel that, paradoxically, draws greater attention to them than they might otherwise be afforded. The very fact that minor characters are minor, therefore, gives rise to many of the novel’s major conflicts—a crisis of representation as novelistic crisis. Nowhere is this clearer than in Sunaga’s struggle with the minorness of maids, which arises because, despite his every effort, he cannot in fact abide the minorness of maids.

Sunaga is particularly fond of contemplating his maid, Saku. After returning early and alone from a vacation in Kamakura—which he left abruptly upon the arrival of Takagi, a potential rival for Chiyoko’s affection—he idly observes Saku as she goes quietly about her duties. In reflecting on their differences, Sunaga focuses not on their positions in society or even their personalities, instead reducing her to “the aspect of womanhood represented by her [作が代表して僕に見せて呉れた女性のある方面の性質]” and deciding, ultimately, that “[t]here’s no need to give a detailed account of Saku [作の事をさう一々云ふ必要もない],” who is only relevant in terms of the role she plays in his own situation [つい前からの関係で].<sup>156</sup> Saku symbolizes for Sunaga a feminine, un-individualized, working-class simplicity in contrast to Sunaga’s own male, upper-class conundrums of life as a modern individual. Comparing himself to the quiet girl, Sunaga finds himself “jolted by the thought of why my own mind was as complicated as a painting done in thick oils [自分の腹はなぜこうしつこい油絵のように複雑なのだろう]” next to her “figure...like a morning glory drawn with one stroke of the brush [作の姿を見て、一筆がきの朝貌].”<sup>157</sup> Much like Daisuke’s assessment of Kadono’s coarse, rope-like nerves, Saku, according to Sunaga, is simple, unhindered by the inner conflicts that trouble him as a master, as a major character. Saku is associated with simplicity, with legibility, forming a sharp contrast to Sunaga’s own frustrating complexity and inner turmoil. The irony to this, however, is that if Sunaga’s estimation of her was indeed accurate—if Saku really was such an

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<sup>156</sup> *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 256-257. *SZ*, vol. 5, 269-270. Saku, in the Japanese text, retains a level of agency absent from the English translation, as rather than simply “representing” an aspect of womanhood to Sunaga, she in fact “shows” it to him [僕に見せて呉れた]. Saku is thus both the object of Sunaga’s gaze and an active participant in his self-evaluation, and her effect on her master is not entirely passive.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 263. *SZ*, vol. 5, 277.

open book—Saku should not garner so much of his attention in the first place. Nevertheless, this scene is itself proof that she does draw his attention, and thus, instead of fading demurely into the background, Saku’s presence and her labor in fact confound Sunaga at every turn. Saku, in Sunaga’s mind, might not be particularly complicated, but she complicates things for Sunaga, and the text reproaches Sunaga for pretending otherwise, challenging the adequacy of his evaluation of his maid.

Although the story of *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* is never about Saku, she, as her name [作] implies, ‘makes’ herself as essential to its telling as her actual physical and affective labor is to the running of the household. As Sunaga struggles to explain the vicissitudes of his inner life, Saku’s physical, domestic proximity invites Sunaga to contrast his fraught mind with the apparent straightforwardness of Saku’s outward form. This comparison serves to characterize both of them simultaneously—albeit at Saku’s expense—effecting a miniaturization of Saku’s own potential individuality and interiority in service of emphasizing the depths of Sunaga’s own. In order to maintain this separation, Sunaga must avert the risk of any potential identification with her via an emphasis on the opacity of her physical labor over the possibility that she too may have a mind of her own. This seemingly stark differentiation of the two characters by Sunaga, however, is ultimately undermined by Sunaga himself, who finds himself unable to stop wondering about Saku—not just about her presence and her appearance, but also about how she might feel.

Sunaga is distracted from his task of differentiating from Saku during a brief moment in which Saku herself is distracted from serving. Chiyoko has stopped by to visit Sunaga, and Saku passes in and out of the room, bringing tobacco and, later, ice cream. It is not tobacco or ice cream that draws Sunaga’s attention, however, but the contrast between Saku and Chiyoko.

Each time I couldn't help comparing the two young women, one who accepted as her lot in life the position of a humble maid, as though she had been born back in the feudal age when strict class distinctions existed [階級制度の厳重な封建の代に生れたように、卑しい召使の位置を生涯の分と心得ているこの作], the other endowed with enough pride to behave as a lady in no matter whose presence [どんな人の前へ出ても貴女としてふるまって通るべき気位を具えた千代子]. Chiyoko took no more notice of Saku's existence than she would have of any other woman's [千代子は作が出て来ても、作でないほかの女が出て来たと同じように、なんにも気に留めなかった]. On the other hand, Saku, after she stood up to return downstairs, did not fail to look back at Chiyoko from the head of the staircase [作の方ではいったん起って梯子段の傍まで行って、もう降りようとする間にきつと振り返って、千代子の後姿を見た].<sup>158</sup>

Saku's momentary pause on the way to her next task reads to Sunaga as a silent betrayal of a personal interest in Chiyoko (beyond what is necessary simply to serve her), and this pause not only forces Sunaga to take notice of Saku in a context outside her duties as a servant, but also to reflect on the somewhat archaic system which distinguishes the two women. Unlike when he was drawing a categorical line between himself and Saku, Sunaga re-categorizes Saku specifically as a woman—not just as an “aspect” of womanhood which she shows him, but as a woman with her own thoughts and feelings. Sunaga, moreover, feeling that he “couldn't help comparing the two young women [比較しない訳に行かなかった],” sympathizes in the end not with Chiyoko, a woman of his own class, but rather with Saku who, “though she had stated quite defiantly she

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 267. SZ, vol. 5, 281.

had no need to think because she had no subjects to think about, was now presented with the elegant and poisonous question of one Chiyoko [材料がないから何も考えないと明言した作に、千代子というハイカラな有毒の材料が与えられた].”<sup>159</sup>

Now faced himself with the problem of Chiyoko, Sunaga assumes here that Saku—the same Saku he previously associated with the utmost cognitive simplicity—must have similar feelings towards Chiyoko as Sunaga himself felt in Kamakura in the face of his more virile male rival, Takagi. In this brief moment, in which Saku puts her functional role as a maid on hold for the duration of a glance, her place in the character system is thus put into question. The same Sunaga who asserted that Saku is nothing like him, explicitly characterizing himself in contrast to her, now projects onto Saku his own conundrums and relationship problems. Assuming his own nervousness about the question of Chiyoko to apply to Saku as well, Sunaga’s double standard calls attention to the utilitarianism of when and how minor characters are minimized within the character system. When Sunaga needs an ‘other,’ Saku is that other; when he needs to universalize his struggles, they must plague Saku as well. Despite the irony, however, in the position Sunaga takes here, the narrative function of the servant girl as a foil for Sunaga is not overtly challenged. For Sunaga, that is, it is natural that Saku can be both intimate to his knowledge and indiscernible to his intellect. Sunaga is both like Saku and above Saku, and Saku thus fulfills the role of many minor characters in the bildungsroman of “stand[ing] for particular states of mind, or psychological modes, that the protagonist interacts with and transcends.”<sup>160</sup>

This is not to say, however, that *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* as a novel should be generically classified as a bildungsroman. Sunaga himself, after all, like so many of Sōseki’s

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Woloch, 29.

characters—(*And Then's* Daisuke being a shining example)—is in fact far less concerned with his personal growth than he is with his frustrating stagnation. I do, however, wish to identify the potentials and compulsions of the bildungsroman as ever-present within the minds of *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond's* characters. The siren song of the bildungsroman lurks in the background of Keitarō's story, for instance, as he struggles with his perceived failure to succeed properly along a bildungsroman-like trajectory. For Keitarō, it is not the maid who he must transcend, however, but rather Sunaga, who he sees as someone stubbornly refusing to live up to his full potential. Sunaga could easily have everything that Keitarō struggles to achieve, and Keitarō's frustration with Sunaga's refusal to do so casts doubt on the value of Keitarō's own aspirations. Both characters rely on their estimations of others' lives to determine the worth of their own, and the novel's refusal to crown a sole main character—as well as its acknowledgement of the unrealized potential of even minor characters—renders this quest for objectively heightened self-worth ultimately futile. *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* thus exposes the fact that, in a narrative regime wherein some stories are legitimate and others incomplete, anxieties over which is which—and the judgments that individuals make upon their own stories and the stories of others—can come to constitute the story itself.

In the case of Keitarō, and to Keitarō's chagrin—the universe seems far more willing to provide Sunaga with what Keitarō desires, despite Sunaga's refusal to abide by the terms of Keitarō's autobiographical proclivities. While Keitarō cannot find a position, Sunaga has been offered many and passed on them all. Sunaga, similarly, is content to be peripheral to the stories of those around him, telling Keitarō during their first meeting all of the neighborhood gossip that comes to mind in order to keep his friend entertained. Sunaga tells the stories of these minor others, the mere gossip of neighbors, in lieu of the salacious personal story Keitarō expects he is



hiding. For Keitarō, the possibility that Sunaga truly is situated on the outskirts of all of this drama seems ultimately unfathomable, and he begins “to suspect that Sunaga, who had long been in this place rampant with such real-life novels [実地小説のはびこる中に年来住み慣れて来た須永], might likewise be playing part in a drama of his own [人の見ないような芝居] but feigning innocence.”<sup>161</sup> Despite Keitarō’s wishes, however, the stories Sunaga recounts—and indeed, Sunaga’s own story as well, as I will discuss shortly—persist in concerning principally the everyday dramas of the lower classes of ordinary people surrounding him rather than the ostensibly dramatic life of his bourgeois individual self.

The irony that Sunaga’s substitution of others’ stories for his own is also characteristic of Keitarō’s own portion of the narrative—obsessed as he is with uncovering the secrets of others—naturally escapes Keitarō completely. Sunaga’s story, however, is not being withheld from Keitarō out of a sense of mystery, but rather because of Sunaga’s own lack of understanding of that story. The reader and Sunaga himself, in fact, both have to wait until Matsumoto, Sunaga’s uncle, is willing to tell Sunaga what his story is missing—or rather who his story is missing. This missing link is a character whose very minority keeps Sunaga from understanding his own individuality, a character no less than his biological mother. His mother, as it turns out, was herself a maid in his house, and it is her erasure, before the events of the novel even begin, which becomes central to the plot of Sunaga’s story. Sunaga’s story, that is, is not just contingent on his biological mother’s disappearance, highlighting the tragedy of that disappearance, but also one

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 48. *SZ*, vol. 5, 51. It is important to note that this alleged secret drama of Sunaga’s is specifically described as one that “people cannot see [人の見ないような],” rather than one that they simply do not know about. What frustrates Keitarō, then, is not just that he does not know the depths of Sunaga’s personal story, but also that he cannot witness it for himself.

that acknowledges, at the same time, that without that tragedy Sunaga perhaps has no story at all. This woman, whose gender and social position have already pushed her out of the story by the time it begins, does not exist in the story in order to form a contrast with a more erudite protagonist, as with Saku, or to simply fill in the domestic spaces servants inhabit. Neither is she there to tell her own story. Any stories she could possibly tell have already been foreclosed. Rather, it is the quest for—and the impossibility of—her recovery which determines her importance to the text. Sunaga’s story, that is, cannot be completed without the belated acknowledgment of a minor character, a maid, who had to disappear in order for his story to even begin.

Alex Woloch refers to the “strange significance of minor characters” as “resid[ing] largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing” when “they are finally overshadowed or absorbed into someone else’s story, swallowed within or expelled from another person’s plot.”<sup>162</sup> In Woloch’s schema, therefore, it is primarily the fate of these minor characters that they ultimately give way entirely to the stories of major characters. As I have already discussed in my analysis here, however, servants’ haunting presence—or their pregnant absence—in Sōseki’s fiction is not simply an obvious effect of their textual position but often the material of the story itself. In Sōseki’s work, even when these characters do give way, their absence and their silence are marked, and the role they play in enabling other characters’ plots is laid bare. Sōseki, that is, does not allow his strong-willed individuals the luxury of forgetting the fact that, even if the written novel requires that some characters be miniaturized, they themselves can only be centralized through the effacement and

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<sup>162</sup> Woloch, 38.

denial of other narrative possibilities. If, then, the narrative's struggle to complete itself is one which must necessarily leave in its wake incomplete stories, it is all the more significant that Sunaga's own story completes itself with the discovery of his biological mother's—this maid's—own disappearance, her own incomplete, unknown story. Sunaga feels a need to seize his past and the circumstances of his birth and life in order to make his story whole. But when it happens that his own biological mother was among the forgettable multitude, the same Sunaga who so willingly miniaturized his maid Saku must in the end himself be left unsatisfied by narrative's propensity to subsume minor players within the stories of major ones. Even as a major character in *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, it is Sunaga's need to reconcile one of these ubiquitous minor character disappearances—one which quite literally led to his existence—which actually becomes one of the driving forces behind Sunaga's own plot and its need for closure. The disappearance of Sunaga's servant mother is thus not so readily accepted as mere narrative necessity, but is rather acknowledged as an unfillable, glaring absence, as a blemish upon the completeness of the main character's story which nevertheless allowed for his particular life story to unfold. Whether or not a story can accept the disappearance of one of its characters, that is, the character of Sunaga himself cannot. If Sunaga is to thrive fully in his circumstances, he must accept that the disappearance of his biological mother from his story itself is part of that story, and yet her disappearance torments him nevertheless. This emphasis on his story is important, moreover, because it is not the actual maternal loss that bothers Sunaga—after all he adores his father's wife, the woman he has always known as his mother—but rather the possibility that the truth about his biological mother might represent the missing link in his tortured identity.

When he finally questions Matsumoto about his mother, Sunaga learns that she had died “from some post-natal complication or from a disease,” but Matsumoto’s “memory was too sketchy to give an account detailed enough [これも詳しい話をしてやるほどの材料に欠乏した僕の記憶],” and it took only a “few minutes” for Matsumoto to inform him that he didn’t know how old she was when she had died, what she looked like, or where she was buried.<sup>163</sup> The story of Sunaga’s biological mother is in fact the lack of a story, and thus, much to Sunaga’s dismay, he realizes that he must resign himself to never knowing, that he will “have to be content to remain in the dark [分らないでもよござんす]” so long as his dear adoptive mother is the only person who might be able to tell him more—so long, that is, as the story exists only in an inaccessible space, guarded closely by another minor character who Sunaga does not wish to hurt by asking her to tell it.<sup>164</sup> The incompleteness of the biological mother’s story itself thus becomes part of the story—a blind spot in the narrative’s reach becomes the narrative’s concern.

*To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* is full of such marked blind spots. Chiyoko’s and Sunaga’s relationship, for instance, is a relationship composed of two perspectives that can never intersect. Matsumoto, summing up the story in the end, explains that “I’ve heard about that last incident between them—from both of them [両方から聞かされた]. It certainly didn’t come from any misunderstanding on either side [あれは誤解でも何でもない]. Each of them believes in what they took each other to be, and the way they believe it is so natural that the collision they had is probably quite reasonable as well [両方でそう信じているので、そうしてその信じ方

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<sup>163</sup> *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 295-296. *SZ*, vol. 5, 312-313.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* *SZ*, vol. 5, 313.

に両方とも無理がないのだから、極めてもっともな衝突と云わなければならない]。”<sup>165</sup>

The two characters have thus shared their respective stories of how their relationship—and potential future marriage—fell apart with this third character, but rather than repeating these stories back to the reader, Matsumoto merely states that the two are at an impasse, that the important thing about their viewpoints is not what they are but the fact that they do have them—and that they cannot coexist as part of the same coherent narrative. Not every potential story in a novel can be told, shared, reconciled, or given final authority as truth over all others. Sunaga’s struggles with the pressure he feels to marry Chiyoko and his uncertainty over his feelings are fundamentally at odds with Chiyoko’s easy conviction that it should not be so complicated at all. These perspectives are fundamentally incompatible, and, yet, both of these perspectives coexist despite the lack of communication—despite, as well, not being fully communicated by the novel itself. It is, after all, this very lack of communication of their perspectives which gives rise to Sunaga’s and Chiyoko’s incompatibility in the first place, and thus, without these missing, conflicting, contradicting stories, there is in fact no story at all. As a whole, then, *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* is a story about incomplete stories, failed stories, unsatisfying stories, and forgettable stories. Sōseki, like Matsumoto, does not attempt to ‘fix’ blind spots precisely for the reason that to do so would be to effectively erase and confirm the inferiority of incomplete stories and to impose upon the reader a singular, subjective narrative hegemony—something which Sōseki himself cautions against in “My Individualism” and avoids in so many of his novels.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 281. SZ, vol. 5, 297.

## Representation or Speculation: The Self and the Other in Literature

At this juncture, in order to underline further Sōseki's approach to individual-centered stories and the multitude of other stories which they exclude, it is worth returning all the way back to *I Am a Cat*, to the scene in which the cat observes his master looking in the mirror and remarks that he looks in that moment exactly like the maid, O-san. The cat's takeaway from observing his master's self-examination is thus:

All studies undertaken by human beings are always studies of themselves. The proper study of mankind is self [凡て人間の研究と云うものは自己を研究するのである].

The heavens, earth, the mountains and the rivers, sun and moon and stars—they are all no more than other names for the self. There is nothing a man can study which is not, in the end, the study of the self [自己を措いて他に研究すべき事項は誰人にも見出し得ぬ訳だ]. If a man could jump out of his self that self would disappear at the moment of his jumping. Nor is that all. Only oneself can study one's self. It is totally impossible for anyone else to do it [しかも自己の研究は自己以外に誰もしてくれる者はない].

Totally impossible, no matter how earnestly one may wish either to study another or to be studied by another. [...] Yet that true self of yours cannot conceivably exist in the truth preached at you by some other person, or in the Way some other man expounds, or in ancient books however heaped upon you [人の説く法のうち、他の弁ずる道のうち、乃至は五車にあまる蠹紙堆裏に自己が存在する所以がない]. If your own self exists, it is your personal phantom, a kind of doppelganger [あれば自己の幽霊である].<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *I Am a Cat*, 316-317. *SZ*, vol. 1, 347-348.

Not only, then, are Sōseki's novels composed of a multitude of competing voices, each with its own potential story, but the individual "self" itself is also the product of an ironic, lonely, but paradoxically always dialogic cacophony. One cannot find one's "self" in a book written by someone else, no matter how well that book may be written, no matter how well it has stood the test of time, so how can one speak with authority of the selves of others? "Truth" may be the stuff of the *shizenshugisha*, the Naturalists, but individuals are creatures not of truth but of perceptions, constructions, reflections and meditations—phantoms at the edges of representation. They are dialogic, performatively scraped together out of the totality of others they interact with and the space they occupy, always accompanied by their own doppelganger—an appearance of selfhood reflected back at them. The literary burden then, for an author like Sōseki, shifts away from a calling to capture and document discrete and knowable individuals, to an ethical literature which acknowledges its own myopic limitations and blind spots and does so while maintaining the dignity and multiplicity of stories untold, even if that means not venturing to tell them. The ethics of representation thus (re)presents a conundrum whereby the most ethical representation is in fact the tacit acknowledgment that truly representing the other is impossible. Claiming to represent those whose stories one cannot know must always be an effort of speculation, often an imposition, perhaps even a violence against them, and the closest the modern egoistic individual can get to true empathy, to true identification, with those from disparate backgrounds is the recognition of the role these others serve in one's own story—and the concession that their lives and stories might not be ours to fully comprehend.

No novel could possibly tell every story of every character that could possibly be told, or even all aspects of a single character. Every text as well as textual position has its blind spots, but Sōseki is a novelist aware of the dangerous potential for the unknown stories of others to be cast

as inferior or consumed by the stories of an unreflectively egotistical individual. Sōseki himself experienced what it means to feel inferior, peripheral, when he studied in England and encountered racial difference and prejudice, but—much like those characters in his novels who insinuate themselves into, enable, or even take possession of their masters' stories—Sōseki took possession of English literature, carving out a space for himself within its theory, and even gaining theoretical ground from his own exclusion. In works such as *The Miner* [*Kōfu*] (1908) and *Light and Darkness* [*Meian*] (1916), Sōseki delves further into the stories of the lower classes, and into the subjectivity of women—(into, that is, the individuality of those so often excluded)—but, even in those works in which Sōseki told stories primarily about men like himself, his minor characters call attention to their vital, destabilizing roles in the lives of the major characters and in the life of the story. Sōseki's novels betray an understanding that while he cannot speak for all of his characters, he can at least call attention to how much they might potentially have to say—as well as to what may still be heard from within the stories which they serve.

Sōseki, in this way, makes room for the incomplete stories of servants within the form of the bourgeois novel, allowing their untold stories to leave traces upon the stories of his major characters. Sōseki's novels, without ever claiming complete knowledge over the events they recall or the secondary servant characters they depict, represent texts in which the stories of those who are not privileged in the narrative cannot be effaced from the stories of those who are privileged—the minor not in fact excluded, but rather recognized as the honored guests of the major. Servant characters in Sōseki's novels—whether frustrating his main characters, standing in contrast to them, decentering their stories, or even telling stories about them—thus inhabit a literary world in which the possession of narrative authority and centrality is understood to be



tenuous, ambivalent, and available for scrutiny—and the very silence of the periphery has a story to tell.

## Chapter 2

### Building a Home with Servants in the Works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

In his 1924 novel *Naomi* [*Chijin no ai*], Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965) tells the story of a man, Jōji, who adopts and grooms a young woman, Naomi, to suit his ideal of the exotic, Westernized modern girl.<sup>167</sup> As in so many of Tanizaki's stories, the young woman rises all too well to her role, not only becoming more bold in her behavior and dress but in fact subjugating her lover with impunity, grooming him in turn to submit gladly to her needs and whims. The East-West divide of aesthetics and gender that characterizes power dynamics and conflict in Tanizaki's fiction is blatant and typical in *Naomi*, but less typical is the extent to which the novel's drama unfolds principally on the battlefield of the domestic space. Upon realizing, for instance, that he has become ungrounded and is in danger of losing control over his relationship, Jōji subsequently attempts to backpedal, to reign in his liberated modern dream girl. Positing that perhaps a simple change in address could serve as a potential avenue for regaining control, Jōji reveals an assumption that from the proper domestic architecture, a proper domestic relationship should naturally follow.

If Naomi wouldn't agree to have a child, I had another resource. We'd move out of the "fairy-tale house" at Ōmori and set up a more sedate, sensible household [もっと真面目な、常識的な家庭]. I'd lived in our strange, impractical [奇妙な、甚だ実用的でない]

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<sup>167</sup> The English translation is given the name of the character Naomi, but the novel's actual title, *Chijin no ai*, translates literally to "a fool's love."

artist's atelier because I was drawn to it by the alluring idea of the *simple life*; but there was no doubt that the house had contributed to making our lives disorderly. It was inevitable that a young couple living without a maid in such a house would get selfish, abandon the simple life, and fall into careless ways. To keep an eye on [監視する] Naomi while I was out, I'd hire a maid and a cook. No more "Culture Homes [文化住宅]"—we'd move to a pure, Japanese-style house, suitable for a middle-class gentleman and just large enough for a husband, wife, and two servants [女中]. I'd sell the Western furniture we'd been using and buy Japanese-style furniture instead. I'd buy a piano for Naomi. We could ask Miss Sugizaki to come to the house for Naomi's music lessons. We'd have Miss Harrison come for the English lessons, too. Naomi wouldn't have to leave the house anymore.<sup>168</sup>

Jōji's plan to recapture Naomi within a world of his own design requires a curtailment of the very same Western aesthetics which initially drew him to her. This cultural return, however, is not total; exceptions are made to allow women to come and go with English and piano lessons, ambassadors from the outside world who might allow Jōji to still cultivate the refined modern woman he desires, if only in the safety of captivity. A distinctly non-Japanese piano would be accommodated, but only in the further interest of keeping Naomi inside. The Japanese-style house he imagines is not a fortress keeping out all outside (Western) threats, then, but rather a spatial authority meant to establish the terms of engagement within its walls. Naomi would not be prevented physically from leaving—rather, the very nature of the house would preclude the

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<sup>168</sup> Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Naomi*, trans. Anthony H. Chambers (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 166-167. *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Chijin no ai in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1967), 213-214.

possibility. It is, after all, Jōji contends, only “natural [自然]” that these precautions would erase for Naomi any real opportunity to leave home [自然彼女が外出する機会がなくなる].

This deceptively simple solution arises from the fact that there is “no doubt” for Jōji that the house bears responsibility for their “disorderly [自堕落]” lives [この家のせいも確かにある], and he thus concludes that it was in fact “inevitable [已むを得ない]” that it should have affected their personalities and dynamic as it has. Equally at fault, notably, is a lack of servants: “[A] young couple living without a maid in such a house [こう云う家に若い夫婦が女中も置かずに],” he asserts, is bound to “get selfish, abandon the simple life, and fall into careless ways [お互に我が儘が出て、シンプル・ライフがシンプルでなくなり、ふしだらになる].”

For the purpose of surveillance, then, if nothing else, he vows to “hire a maid [小間使い] and a cook [飯焚き]” as would befit a “pure, Japanese-style house [純日本式].” The distinct lack of servants in Jōji and Naomi’s modern domesticity is thus identified as a major oversight, one responsible for leading to a sense of selfishness and decadence borne, ironically, of the modern ideals of matrimonial self-sufficiency and the concept of a “simple life [シンプル・ライフ].” Even as Jōji confronts the wholly modern problem of leaving his wife at home while he commutes to work, the potential of a Japanese-style home complete with servants offers a kind of sanctuary, as if servants were as foundational to a happy Japanese-style home as the house’s physical foundations themselves.<sup>169</sup> Of course, nothing comes of Jōji’s plans, and Naomi maintains her power over him until the end, but, nevertheless, the ideal home Jōji constructs, if

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<sup>169</sup> For more on the lifestyle changes associated with suburban life as they relate to the novel, see Kota Inoue’s “Uneven Space of Everyday Modernity: The Colonial Logic of the Suburb in Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s *A Fool’s Love*,” *Japan Forum* 27.2 (2015): 189-212.

only mentally, is that of a household marked and managed by servants.

In this chapter, I focus on this intersection between servants and the concept of home as depicted in Tanizaki's fiction, briefly summarizing first the changing nature of both the Japanese household and of domestic architecture in the early twentieth century, as well as the central role servants played in many of these changes. Tanizaki himself grew up with servants in the home, and so I briefly discuss the role servants play in Tanizaki's reflections on his own life before turning to a discussion of Tanizaki's 1933 essay "In Praise of Shadows [In'ei raisan]," in which he discusses his aesthetics of the Japanese home and how these aesthetics might be preserved in literature. Drawing upon scholarship on the question of nostalgia in Tanizaki's work, I then look to his "A Portrait of Shunkin [Shunkinshō]" (1933) for a case study on how the creation of the discrete space of the home overlaps with the narration of a story, as well as the role the servant character Sasuke plays in both acts of construction. Expanding on these commonalities between domestic and literary structure, I then turn to the logic of the archive as a means for conceptualizing the contribution of servant characters to the preservation, through literature, both of a particular way of life and of a way of writing about it.

I carry this question of preservation and of the maintenance of domestic spaces forward into a reading of Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters* [*Sasameyuki*] (1943-1948), in which I identify the collaborative effort of servants and the influence of their presence on the events of the story, as well as the permeability of servant/master roles within an equally permeable domestic space. Next, I discuss Tanizaki's *The Maids* [*Daidokoro taiheiki*] (1963), which chronicles the lives of a family through an accounting of the maids that have served them over the years. As a novelistic 'archive' employing maids as its primary organizing principle, *The Maids* tells the story of a disappearing way of life through changes in the nature of domestic labor and in the concept of

the ideal home. Posed as an alternative national archive which privileges Japan's private domestic spaces over its participation on the world stage, I argue that this archive exploits the close relationship between servants and narrative discourse in the interest of creating and preserving a form of 'history' grounded in the everyday. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the delicate balance in Tanizaki's fiction between dreamy nostalgia and boundary-pushing decadence, arguing that servant characters, both by featuring in these stories and by taking part in their realization, play a crucial part in this dichotomy.

### **Building Space for Servants: Domestic Labor, Aesthetics, and the Japanese Home**

Nishikawa Yūko, in a 1990 article titled "The Changing Form of Dwellings and the Establishment of the *Katei* (Home) in Modern Japan," discusses the changes undertaken by both the Japanese home and the concept of home in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries—changes, that is, that occurred over Tanizaki's own lifetime. Even the language surrounding the concept of the home, she argues, "describe[d] not only family systems but also the abstract or ideal dwelling space that contains each of these concepts of family" and that, therefore, "[t]he plans of houses can... be read as a language describing the lives of past inhabitants."<sup>170</sup> The resonance with the previously-quoted passage from *Naomi* is clear—Jōji after all purports to be able to dictate the terms of Naomi's life through the restructuring of her home—and Nishikawa

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<sup>170</sup> Nishikawa Yūko, "The Changing Form of Dwellings and the Establishment of the *Katei* (Home) in Modern Japan," trans. Mariko Muro Yokokawa, *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal English Supplement* 8 (1995): 4. Originally published in Japanese as "Sumai no hensen to 'katei' no seiritsu" in *Nihon josei seikatsushi*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1990).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

goes on to discuss the place of servants within these spaces, from the factual details of the size and location of their living spaces to the more abstract issues of their status within the household and the terms and conditions of their employment. She discusses in particular the surprise of Alice Mabel Bacon (1858-1918), an American foreign advisor who lived in Japan in the early Meiji period, at the fact that her own servants, though she “admired their loyalty, their initiative, and their competence,” had “acted as if the high social position of their mistress gave them a high social position too.”<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, Nishikawa argues, Bacon recognized the interwoven nature of the lives of householder and servant in a household in which “the complicated and cumbersome housework” was entirely “dependent on manual labor” and that “this labor” was “not a contractual relationship between employer and employee, but rather a strong tie based on the exchange of devoted service for favor and protection.” This collaborative approach to the maintenance of the home meant, moreover, that rather than living a life entirely apart from her servants, the wife of the household herself, at least in Bacon’s estimation, functioned “as little better than a chief servant.”<sup>172</sup>

The ambivalence of Bacon’s evaluation that the servants seem to estimate themselves greater than servants and the mistress less than a mistress belies her more astute observation that the master-servant dynamic, as she witnessed and partook in it, was more familial and cooperative than authoritarian and managerial, and furthermore intimately connected to the needs and maintenance of the home. Servant, master, and the very concept of a household itself thus cannot be readily separated from one another, and are each defined through a collaborative process based on an unspoken understanding of what it takes to manage a house. It is only later,

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

as modernity brings to Japan a different configuration of domestic life, that servants come to be placed through employment agencies and trained at specialized schools in the cities rather than hired through interpersonal connections with those in one's home village and taught on the job.<sup>173</sup>

The sharing of physical space between persons within the house transformed as well. Citing an architectural design competition in 1917, Nishikawa identifies in the winning design a novel plan for a corridor within the house, rather than running along the outside of the house, which created “an intimate space for the family alone...by closing out guests and maids and other outsiders.”<sup>174</sup> Whereas, for instance, moving between rooms had previously often required moving through other rooms—always starting from a maids' room just off the kitchen—the addition of an internal corridor allowed—and mandated—servants to move about the house without entering rooms unless explicitly required to perform some task therein. These changes were slow, with most existing homes still structured to require maids to move through the house along the same routes as any other member of the family, but, increasingly, newly built houses began to reflect a clearer boundary between spaces meant for servants and those designated for the nuclear family. Such subtle changes compounded at the time, eventually leading Japan to embrace the sort of highly Westernized “Culture House” which Naomi and Jōji inhabit—with no room for maids whatsoever. These changes, however, were not met without resistance. As exemplified, for instance, by Jōji's anguish over their “disorderly” living conditions—and in much of Tanizaki's later fiction and essays—these changes in both the domestic architecture and in ways of inhabiting it stirred an equal and opposite desire for a return to the domestic spaces of

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 25.



years past. This longing for prior domestic architecture entailed, moreover, not just a taste for the architecture itself, or even some desire to be closer again to one's servants, but rather a wish to resurrect wholesale the way of life signified by the architecture and by the particular domestic relationships which it structured.

Scholars have expressed much interest in the spatial characteristics—and the narrative architecture—of Tanizaki's often highly nostalgic fiction. In a short essay titled "Tanizaki's Sentimental Education," for instance, Edward Fowler remarks on the nature of Tanizaki's literary spaces, arguing that "Tanizaki rejects the omniscient in favor of a limited point of view and places his narrator-hero in a confined, ahistorical world liberated from chronological time."<sup>175</sup> Pretensions at historical accuracy, that is, are eschewed by Tanizaki in favor of structuring a discrete world with its own particular set of rules and norms for both the relationships between his characters and the possible paths of their stories. This calculated combination of restricted point of view and discrete literary space, moreover, sets the terms of engagement in a way not unlike how the architecture of a house, regardless of the historical moment in which it is inhabited, always structures the daily lives and relationships of those living inside. Fowler expounds on the connection between the physical spaces of the home and the ways in which they color and define domestic relationships. Of Tanizaki's youth he writes,

Tanizaki, the eldest son, led a spoiled life. But although a young tyrant at home, he was a shy, timid child once he stepped out the door. His old nurse, the only house servant to stay on with the family in its years of poverty [...], took him to school for two years and waited the whole day in the hallway, never out of his sight, until it was time to take him

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<sup>175</sup> Edward Fowler, "Tanizaki's Sentimental Education," *Monumenta Nipponica* 35.4 (1980): 480.

home. Because Tanizaki had a nurse to mother him, [Tanizaki's mother] was more of a companion, someone who would take him on excursions or to the theater. Such a relationship, however, apparently also bred a certain distance. [...] Among Tanizaki's earliest memories is the time when he awaited his parents' return from vacation. They arrived in the evening, and his nurse carried him downstairs to greet them.<sup>176</sup>

Not only is Tanizaki's relationship with his loyal nurse described as more familial than his relationship with his natural family, but the differences between those relationships are also defined specifically in terms of space, by distance, and by the orientation of their bodies relative to one another within both public and private spaces. The young Tanizaki himself, for instance, changes drastically at the threshold of his house, going from relentlessly bold to perfectly timid. His relationship with his mother, meanwhile, is defined by their recreational excursions into the outside world, rather than any sort of domestic familial bond—the distance between them echoed all the more by the expansiveness of the theater space, where they direct their attention not towards each other but towards the performance. All the while, it is his nurse who indulgently conveys him from one point to another and, in doing so, serves to facilitate and mediate all the competing aspects of his life, forming the matrix of his memory both of home and of mother. Nevertheless, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it is the fate of this servant character too to fade away into the fabric of the story, as Tanizaki's focus stays resolutely fixed upon the distant figure of his mother. Despite—or perhaps because of—the distance between them, Tanizaki's more nostalgic fiction in fact idealizes both his mother and the concept of motherhood more broadly. The space of the home is thus transformed into a dream world, rich with memories but

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 481.

shaky on history, nostalgia driving a literature that serves as the last dwelling place of an idealized, naïve—and consequently, perverse—innocence.

Critics contemporary with Tanizaki often took issue with this nostalgic dreaminess, criticizing his “seemingly cavalier attitude” toward “the question of what one ought to make with one’s life.” Finding his work thus seemingly devoid of meaning or message, they frequently “look[ed] askance not only at Tanizaki’s art but also at his ethics... dismiss[ing] him as an intellectual lightweight.”<sup>177</sup> What Fowler argues, however, is that what such a moralistic, ethical judgment of Tanizaki’s subject matter overlooks is how the “carefully structured narrative” of even such a brazenly nostalgic story such as “Longing for Mother [Haha wo kouru ki]” (1919) allows him to pull off a sort of “sentimental coup”—one made possible only by an awareness of the true transformational potential of literary practice. “[I]n evoking timeless memories,” Fowler explains, the story exercises a powerful spatial manipulation, bringing Tanizaki’s mother, no matter how distant in reality, “as near to one as the home and heart.”<sup>178</sup> Not only, then, does the architecture of the home and the servants who share its space have the power to set the terms within its walls—as Jōji articulates in *Naomi*—but the narrative architecture, as well, the literary plot (*suji* [筋]), has an equivalent ability to reorganize the domestic space and the character system as a means to its representational ends.

This feature of Tanizaki’s writing, especially as it relates to the contribution of servant characters, is at the center of the stark contrast between the respective households in two of his novels: the bourgeois-focused *The Makioka Sisters* and his more maid-focused novel, *The Maids*. I will turn to an in-depth analysis of this contrast shortly, but, first, in order to further elucidate

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

the connections between space, servants, and nostalgia in Tanizaki's writing, I would like to discuss two other famous works of Tanizaki's—the literary essay “In Praise of Shadows” and the short story “A Portrait of Shunkin.” Both published in 1933, these two works, I argue, mutually set the stakes for reading the spatial dynamics, domestic dream worlds, and complex relationships between master, home, and servant in Tanizaki's writing.

### **Writing Shadows on the Walls: Servants, Aesthetics, and History**

The first text, Tanizaki's “In Praise of Shadows,” is one of his most well-known works, an essay in which Tanizaki lays out a nostalgic aesthetics of the quintessential Japanese home based on the interplay of light and shadows. This is a home, not of bright lights and airy ateliers, but of shadows and grime. A self-Orientalizing meditation on the loss of Japanese domestic aesthetics at the behest of Western modernity, “In Praise of Shadows” has been interpreted throughout the years as anything from a weighty rebuke of impending cultural extinction, to a playful mockery of its own seemingly uncritical nostalgia.<sup>179</sup> I am concerned here, however, not with whether or not Tanizaki took any real offense at his bathroom light fixtures, but rather with the ways in which he attempts to recapture this aesthetics of shadow and grime by translating the phenomenon of lived architectural space onto the possibilities of literary expression. The overarching conceit of Tanizaki's essay—that the traces and shadows left in the home by both

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<sup>179</sup> See, for example, E. G. Seidensticker, “‘In Praise of Shadows’: A Prose Elegy by Tanizaki,” *Japan Quarterly* 1.1 (1954): 46. Morita Hiroko, “In Praise of Shadows, by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki,” *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 13.1 (1978): 95-100. Margherita Long, “Tanizaki and the Enjoyment of Japanese Culturalism,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 10.2 (2002): 431-469. Thomas LaMarre, *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and “Oriental” Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2005).

natural elements and human inhabitants are the source of its beauty—echoes my earlier discussion of the ways in which domestic space both structures the lives of its inhabitants and testifies to the sorts of lives which they live. “The quality that we call beauty [美と云うものは],” he argues, “must always grow from the realities of life [生活の実際から発達する], and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty’s ends [いつしか陰翳のうちに美を発見し、やがては美の目的に添うように陰翳を利用するに至った].”<sup>180</sup>

This relationship between beauty and life, that is, is reciprocal. The rooms of a Japanese house are not made dark because darkness is beautiful, but rather are dark by architectural necessity, and that darkness therefore must also, by necessity, be understood to be beautiful. That beauty, moreover, is the product of a cooperative process on the part of the house’s residents, rather than the singlehanded intention of an architect or interior designer. Shadows, after all, are not objects which can be mounted on a wall or placed in an alcove, even if they can in fact be intentionally invited into a space. “Such is our way of thinking,” Tanizaki writes, “we find beauty not in the thing itself [物体] but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates [物体と物体との作り出す陰翳のあや、明暗にあると考える].”<sup>181</sup> This aesthetic interplay, demanding as it does sensitivity to the proper arrangement of multiple objects in space, requires the full understanding and cooperation of all those living in a home. As much effort as it might take to keep a bright, Western-style house looking

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<sup>180</sup> Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (Stony Creek, CT: Leete’s Island Books, 1977), 18. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, “In’ei raisan” in *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshū*, vol. 20 (Tokyo: Chuo Koronsha, 1968), 534.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. *TJZ*, vol. 12, 546.

sufficiently bright and hygienic, it takes an equivalent sensibility to preserve the shadows cast through the space of a traditional Japanese-style house—and over the course of its history. Commenting on the different ways Western and Japanese housekeeping might treat even the same objects, Tanizaki writes that, while the Westerner “polishes [metals] to a fine brilliance...we object to the practice [ピカピカ光る様に研き立てるが、われ／＼はあゝ云う風に光るものを嫌う]” and “begin to enjoy [these objects] only when the luster has worn off, when it has begun to take on a dark, smoky patina [却って表面の光りが消えて、時代がつき、黒く焼けて来るのを喜ぶのであって].”<sup>182</sup>

Such an aesthetic does not, however, entail simple neglect, but rather a conscious embrace of a kind of care that only time itself, given the space to do so, can undertake. For this reason, the maintenance of beauty in Tanizaki’s illustration defaults in fact to the domain of servants, who must nurture it precisely by knowing when to do no ‘housekeeping’ at all. Rather, it is by understanding their role as members of a household with a shared aesthetic purpose, having been trained, not in the latest standards of hygiene, but in a sense of aesthetics and tradition, that servants are brought into a silent—albeit carefully cultivated—understanding of their role in aesthetic cooperation with the rest of the household. Tanizaki thus laments the destructive power of a servant too keen on serving. “Almost every householder has had to scold an insensitive maid [心得のない下女] who has polished away the tarnish so patiently waited for [折角さびの乗って来た銀の器をピカピカに研いたりして、主人に叱られることがある

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 10. *TJZ*, vol. 12, 526.

のは、何処の家庭でも起る事件である].”<sup>183</sup> Servants in Tanizaki’s aesthetics of the domestic space do their work, that is, with the expectation that they will cooperate not only with the needs of the members of the household, but also with the flow of time—which must be given the space to do its own part—and with the particular kind of beauty that only time and human use can impart.

Just like the tarnish wiped away by the all too industrious maid, moreover, Tanizaki’s aesthetic of shadows cannot be brought back so easily. The shadows, after all, have already been dispelled by the light in ‘civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*),’ and Tanizaki himself in fact expressed disinterest in a wholesale return to the domestic realities of the past.<sup>184</sup> He concludes his essay instead with a proposal that the aesthetics of shadow, dialectic, and beauty which manifest in permeable, ethereal—but nevertheless mundane and practical—spaces might be instead cast into the world of literature.

I have written all this because I have thought that there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature or the arts, where something could be saved [たとえば文学藝術等にその損を補う道が残されていはいはしまいか]. I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing [既に失いつゝある陰翳の世界を、せめて文学の

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. Tanizaki does not specify why maids so often polish away this tarnish despite its aesthetic appeal, but there are likely a few factors at play. The most basic of these is that these maids, having come mostly from poorer, rural families, are most certainly unfamiliar with silver and the aesthetic values surrounding its maintenance. (In this sense, it is worth noting in general the distinctly classed nature of the domestic aesthetics outlined by Tanizaki.) While these maids, then, may be committing the faux pas of operating according to the norms of a modern, Western aesthetics, it is also possible that their own, just-as-Japanese backgrounds predispose them less to the pursuit of aesthetics than to the preservation of valuable objects.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 48.

領域へでも呼び返してみたい]. In the mansion called literature [文学という殿堂] I would have the eaves deep and the walls dark, I would push back into the shadows the things that come forward too clearly, I would strip away the useless decoration. I do not ask that this be done everywhere, but perhaps we may be allowed at least one mansion where we can turn off the electric lights and see what it is like without them [まあどう云う工合になるか、試しに電燈を消してみることだ].<sup>185</sup>

Tanizaki's architectural proposition becomes, then, in the end, not in fact a manifesto on building codes at all, but rather a meditation on whether literature might be capable, via its own internal 'architecture,' of preserving those beautiful ambiguities which modernity marks for elimination. The sort of household aesthetics which Tanizaki waxes nostalgic about might not be recoverable after all, but literature, he suggests, might serve as a way to archive these aesthetics and all they entail, allowing literature in turn to cast a shadow space between the reality of modernity and the alternative possibilities which it occludes. Both of the novels I discuss in-depth in this chapter take up this call to function as a shadow archive, taking stock of their light and their shadows in a manner that combines the same weighty seriousness and contrary humor of "In Praise of Shadows" itself. *The Makioka Sisters*, for its part, acts as a time capsule of a dying way of life, while *The Maids* serves as a chronicle of those who so often occupy only the shadows of the story. Before I discuss these novels however, I turn first to Tanizaki's "A Portrait of Shunkin," which makes literal (and literary) the aesthetics described in "In Praise of Shadows," taking these aesthetics to their most extreme ends.

Tanizaki's "A Portrait of Shunkin" is the story of a blind musician, the titular Shunkin,

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 42. *TJZ*, vol. 12, 557.



and her servant Sasuke, who later becomes her pupil. William Atkinson, in an article titled “Wrapping the Hole in the Middle of It All: Tanizaki’s Narrative Packages,” summarizes their relationship as follows: “Sasuke’s family had worked for Shunkin’s for generations, so he is a hereditary servant with all the social distance that such a relationship implies.” He adds, however, that their “teacher-student relationship...laid over the mistress-servant one,” works to solidify Sasuke’s role as a somewhat “typical Tanizaki protagonist, taking his pleasure in his abject submission to a woman who is more powerful than he.”<sup>186</sup> This power differential is compounded by the fact that Shunkin’s blindness renders Sasuke’s role in serving her that much more all-encompassing. He is “not just her guide in the street” but responsible also for attending to her most basic needs, like looking after an “infant,” who “he has wrapped himself around...between her and the outside world.”<sup>187</sup>

Sasuke will eventually lose his sight, but at the beginning of the story he can still see, and he uses his sight to care for Shunkin in the interest of making her dependent upon him. Like so many men in Tanizaki’s fiction, however, Sasuke also takes equal pleasure in submitting to Shunkin’s authority as his teacher, and his “constant access” to his mistress is mobilized thus not to usurp her—as in the case, for instance, of so many of Mishima Yukio’s servants, whom I discuss in Chapter 3—but instead to empower Shunkin to better exert her own authority over him.<sup>188</sup> When Shunkin is later disfigured in a mysterious assault—one which Sasuke himself may in fact be responsible for—Sasuke responds by blinding himself so as not to have to look at his mistress’ newly scarred face. With Sasuke henceforth now needing Shunkin—who is

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<sup>186</sup> William Atkinson, “Wrapping the Hole in the Middle of It All: Tanizaki’s Narrative Packages,” *College Literature* 30.3 (2003): 44.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

accustomed to navigating the world without sight—to care for him and Shunkin no longer willing to show her face in public, their already intense and insular relationship compounds, taking on an even more claustrophobic veneer and plunging them into a domestic darkness occupied only by each other and their unspoken power dynamic. In a too literal parody of the aesthetic vision outlined by “In Praise of Shadows,” Shunkin and Sasuke, blind in a world of shadows, hide their unconventional mistress-servant relationship away from the scrutiny of the outside world, content to live in a detached microcosm bearing its own internal logic. Sasuke, meanwhile, undeterred by any potential public outcry over the perversity of his relationship with Shunkin, translates the extreme insularity and internal logic of their relationship specifically into the realm of the literary. After all, much of the story, the narrator explains, is sourced from an account attributable to Sasuke himself.<sup>189</sup> Sasuke can thus be considered, potentially, the source of yet another framework around his relationship with Shunkin, further encapsulating the two of them in their own private literary mansion. In the end, “A Portrait of Shunkin” reads as a story of enmeshment and sensory deprivation, suspending both characters and reader in a place filled with carefully cultivated shadows. Atkinson, speaking of Tanizaki’s aesthetics, concludes his article:

As so often in the realm of Japanese aesthetics, the shadowy and incomplete is more representative of the fleeting world than the stark clarity of a one on one, signifier to signified, relationship. Tanizaki’s texts are themselves floating and evasive. Refusing to be pinned down, they form an infinite series of signifiers, parcels that can never be finally

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<sup>189</sup> Anthony Hood Chambers, *The Secret Window: Ideal Worlds in Tanizaki’s Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 63.

unwrapped.<sup>190</sup>

The structuring spatial metaphor of Atkinson’s argument—that of layers of wrapping—is not unlike my own focus on the complex interplay of architectural aesthetics and interpersonal space in Tanizaki’s fiction. A clear barrier, whether the actual walls of the domestic space or the literary structure of the storyworld, separates out a discrete ecosystem with its own rules, history, and functions. The particular roles which servants play in maintaining all of these structures in Tanizaki’s fiction, moreover, are as essential to it as their roles in maintaining the house itself.

In *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki’s Fictional Worlds*, Ken K. Ito discusses how Sasuke cultivates beauty, as he “envisions” it, by mobilizing blindness to partition off a “perceptual world” for himself and his mistress. “Sasuke,” Ito argues, “conceives of beauty in terms of distance,” but, “[i]f distance is part of Sasuke’s aesthetics...he also has a contradictory side that simultaneously tries to narrow the gap between himself and the object of his desires” as another “part of him wants to share Shunkin’s world as much as stare longingly at it from below.”<sup>191</sup> The servant’s self-satisfaction, that is, is entirely dependent on his subservience, but these same aesthetic sensibilities that beckon his subservience paradoxically tempt him to draw ever so tentatively closer to a position of equality—or at least of equivalence, uniformity—with his master. One strategy that Tanizaki employs, Ito argues, for navigating these apparent contradictions is a sort of “world building” whereby time and setting are muddled in a way that “brings into being a far-off world with a different set of possibilities” via a series of “overlapping

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>191</sup> Ken K. Ito, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki’s Fictional Worlds* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 176-177.

dichotomies.”<sup>192</sup> In order for this world to come into being, however, it must first separate itself from the outside world, and thus Tanizaki’s story references its concrete historical and physical setting only so far as it reinforces the very irrelevance of “national” and “world” history to the insular aesthetic world of the blind musicians, servant and mistress.<sup>193</sup> Even after their deaths, as Anthony Hood Chambers emphasizes in *The Secret Window: Ideal Worlds in Tanizaki’s Fiction*, when they are buried together up in the hills above the rapidly modernizing city of Osaka, the isolation of their gravesite serves to maintain “the distance between Sasuke’s hermetic world and modern Japan,” long after that world itself has disappeared. The city thus eventually moves on without them, but, in doing so, it also permits their world to remain untouched, self-contained and independent.<sup>194</sup> Chambers also notes, however, that “Shunkin and Sasuke are not equal partners in constructing and maintaining their ideal world.”<sup>195</sup> This enduring world belongs in the end to Sasuke, and Sasuke is the one who establishes its rules. While far more aggressively and overtly intentionally than any servant in the texts which I discuss for the rest of this chapter, Sasuke nevertheless constructs a domestic world whereby he also gains control over the bounds of the narrative—the servant the master of both home and story. While Jōji, in *Naomi*, sees a maid as a way of mediating his and Naomi’s relationship into something more palatably traditional—her watchful eye performing surveillance on Naomi whenever Jōji must necessarily leave the house—Sasuke, conversely, mobilizes his intimacy with his mistress and the guidance

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 181-182.

<sup>193</sup> Chambers, 55. Chambers discusses this rejection of the story’s larger historical context in *The Secret Window: Ideal Worlds in Tanizaki’s Fiction*, commenting on how “[b]y spanning the turbulent years of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji, the setting of ‘A Portrait of Shunkin’ demonstrates the degree to which Shunkin and Sasuke are unmindful of the outside world.”

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 57.

of his sight over her in order to entomb them together forever. While one story explores the role of servants' oversight in the interest of domestic bliss and the other in the context of a twisted entrapment, both stories reveal the existence of a complex web—and an awareness of such—that connects home to inhabitant and master to servant.

If domestic spaces, relationship hierarchies, and narrative and world-building are thus intimately connected in Tanizaki's fiction, servants are often the glue that binds all of these elements together. *Naomi*, for instance, credits servants with facilitating particular domestic ways of being, "In Praise of Shadows" reaffirms the necessity of a shared sense of domestic purpose and aesthetics between master and maid, and Sasuke's actions as both narrator and orchestrator in "A Portrait of Shunkin" reflect the complex relationship between service and power in matters of both domestic living and narrative framing. In the interest of further exploring the complexities of these interactions, my focus turns now to *The Makioka Sisters* and *The Maids*, which I juxtapose in order to explore the full range and flexibility in servants' roles in both the homes and the stories which they serve. Inspiring in part my reading of these novels in concert with each other is Akira Mizuta Lippit's *Atomic Light: Shadow Optics*, in which he analyzes Tanizaki's literary and architectural sentiments in terms of the archive. Referring to Tanizaki's reference in "In Praise of Shadows" to his hope for the creation of a "literary mansion," Lippit argues:

Tanizaki conceives of literature as a residence, private and public, individual and national, imaginary and material—a fantastic mansion or archive. A shadow archive and an archive of shadows, the literary architectonic demands a resistance to excessive illumination.

Against the drives of light and exposure, Tanizaki imagines a shadow archive, a literary archive of the Orient. To write literature, in Tanizaki's idiom, is to extend darkness, or at

least to increase shadows, to introduce a visible darkness without light. A peculiar but precise logic permeates Tanizaki's discourse: to write is to expand darkness, to inscribe darkness, which forms in the end an archive. The archive is possible only as such a shadow architecture.<sup>196</sup>

Lippit identifies in Tanizaki “a complex theory of writing and interiority, secrecy, and visibility” which he argues, along with his other focus on works by Sigmund Freud, comprise “two acts of secret writing, two forms of shadow writing, which seek to protect two archives under assault in the 1930s.”<sup>197</sup> In the case of Tanizaki, the “assault” which Lippit refers to is the Japanese experience of war leading up to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, a series of events which, while contemporaneous with his life, often seem insignificant in Tanizaki's fictional worlds—when they bear mention at all. The works I discuss here are hardly exceptions to this rule, but, while they indeed skirt the topic of their larger historical context, they are nevertheless determined by it, taking place well within the shadow of international war. Rather than an oversight, however, it is precisely the dim, mundane domesticity of these novels which comprises an archive wherein an alternative logic still operates, allowing for the preservation of a world that history might otherwise lose—even as that world must be relegated only to shadows, preserved as a shadow of itself. As an ‘archive’ both preserves content and proposes a structure which makes sense of that content, so do Tanizaki's servants both determine the narrative structure and serve as its material, constituting the building blocks for a new kind of domestic national story. If Tanizaki's domestic stories serve then as an archive, his servant characters

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<sup>196</sup> Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light: Shadow Optics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

serve in the capacity of both archivists and archival material in Tanizaki's domestic spaces and in his literary mansion, carrying the burden of Tanizaki's characteristic irony-laced nostalgia and upholding simultaneously both the essential functions of life and the requirements of story-telling.

### **The Porosity of Home: When Nostalgic Spaces Meet Modern Living**

The nostalgic tendencies of Tanizaki's writing are most readily apparent in works like *The Makioka Sisters*. Serialized from 1943 to 1948, the novel tells the story of the declining fortunes of the wealthy Makioka family as they struggle to find a suitable husband for the third of four sisters, Yukiko, whose fateful combination of antiquated, hesitant femininity and more modern willfulness has made the task nearly impossible. Too meek by modern standards yet too selective to settle for just any husband chosen by her family, Yukiko turns down one prospect after another—and is herself turned down in turn—putting her family in a considerable predicament. Her two older sisters, Tsuruko and Sachiko, meanwhile have their hands equally full with the youngest, Taeko, who they resist allowing to marry before Yukiko, despite her tendency to rack up scandals and overeager suitors while she waits. If Yukiko exists as a shadow of a passé feminine ideal, Taeko, with both her seductiveness and her ambition and confidence, embodies all the hopes and fears for the true modern girl. The distance between the tight-lipped eldest sister Tsuruko and the young, flamboyant Taeko is a vast one. In a historical period of less rapid change than the pre-war Shōwa era, the microcosm of all the frustrations, resentments, jealousies and longings represented by the novel's single generation of sisters is one which might otherwise stretch over four full generations.

While Sachiko and her upper middle-class sisters face changing standards of beauty and

marriage customs as their greatest challenges, for the maids in the novel, meanwhile, the early Shōwa period's messy combination of nostalgia and rapid change comes into play most prominently in terms of class and labor. Just as the definition of a good marriage was in flux, the value of different types of women's work, as well as discussions about the role of the housewife, were becoming ever more contentious. Itani, the family's hairdresser, for instance, depicts ideal modern domestic womanhood specifically in terms of the forced obsolescence of maid servants.<sup>198</sup> Remarking on the industriousness of modern housewives, she broaches the subject with Sachiko:

“Mrs. Makioka—not to change the subject, but have you noticed how young wives—of course you're young yourself, but I mean *younger* wives, women in their early twenties who have only been married two or three years—have you noticed how clever and scientific young wives are these days—in managing their houses, and bringing up their children, and whatever they do [経済のことでも、育児のことでも、実に科学的で、頭の好い方が多いので]? It makes me think how fast times are changing.”<sup>199</sup>

Itani goes on to mention by way of example one such young wife she knows, who, “had no maid, but everything was beautifully in order [女中もいないのに実によくその辺が片附いていまして].”<sup>200</sup> Her house is meticulous, Itani explains, filled with foreign furniture, with money

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<sup>198</sup> Itani herself represents another porous layer in the Makiokas' lives. As a hairdresser with her own salon, Itani's relationship with the Makiokas toes the line between public and private, as well as the boundaries of class. Though far from a servant, she is nevertheless in the service industry, and thus it seems fitting that she should approach the facilitation of the novel's plot (i.e. the task of finding Yukiko a husband) with a degree of uncompromising professional fervor.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 74-75.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 76.



neatly budgeted for things like gas and light and Western clothes—the very antithesis of the shadowy aesthetics of Tanizaki’s “In Praise of Shadows.” What makes this such an impressive achievement in Itani’s eyes, moreover, is the notable absence of a maid.<sup>201</sup> This modern housewife not only manages all of this but in fact does so all on her own, keeping her house clean, efficient, and bright. On the far opposite end of the continuum from this ideal modern home, meanwhile, is the Makioka family’s own Osaka house, which Tsuruko will soon leave behind to follow her husband’s job to Tokyo. The text describes the Makioka’s Osaka house, itself exemplary of a dark and dreary aesthetics marked by shadows, as such:

The house was built in the old Osaka fashion [純大阪式]. Inside the high garden walls, one came upon the latticed front of the house. An earthen passage led from the entrance through to the rear. In the rooms, lighted even at noon by but a dim light from the courtyard [わずかに中前裁の鈍い明りがさしている昼も薄暗い室内], hemlock pillars, rubbed to a fine polish, gave off a soft glow [つやつやと拭き込んだ樺の柱が底光り]. Sachiko did not know how old the house was—possibly a generation or two. [...]. They were deeply attached to the old place [その家には特別な追憶を持っている]. Sachiko sensed that much of her sister’s love for Osaka was in fact love for the house, and, for all her amusement at these old-fashioned ways [昔気質を可笑しがる幸子でさえも], she felt a twinge of pain herself—she would no longer be able to go back to the

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<sup>201</sup> Itani’s comments here are not unmotivated. Though she works as a hairdresser, Itani also enjoys matchmaking on the side and has made it her personal mission to find Yukiko a husband. The suggestion in her comments, then, is that perhaps Yukiko too should prepare for marriage by learning how to be a modern housewife. Ironically, part of this involves being able to do the type of work that a maid would typically do—something that Yukiko, as I discuss later in this chapter, actually seems quite prepared for.

old family house. She had often enough joined Yukiko and Taeko in complaining [蔭口をきく] about it—surely there was no darker and more unhygienic house in the world [あんな非衛生的な日あたりの悪い家はない], and they felt thoroughly depressed after no more than three days there, and so on—and yet a deep indefinable sorrow came over Sachiko at the news [that her sister would be moving to Tokyo and leaving the Osaka house behind]. To lose the Osaka house would be to lose her very roots [大阪の家が全然なくなると云うことは、幸子としても生れ故郷の根拠を失ってしまうのであるから、一種云い難い淋しい心持がする道理であった].<sup>202</sup>

The Osaka house is as full of contradictions as it is of shadows. It is old enough that no one knows how old it is, and yet they estimate that it has only been around for “possibly a generation or two [恐らく一二代前の先祖が建てて].” Likewise, the sisters hold it in such fond regard that it represents for them everything they love about Osaka, despite the fact they themselves refuse to live there and cannot understand how their eldest sister can stand it. The Makioka family house is markedly “unhygienic [非衛生的]”—nothing like the home of the modern young housewife, who gets along without even a maid.

This house, in fact, requires a servant even after the family members themselves have left, and thus they have little choice but to employ “an old man who had long before worked in their father’s Hamadera villa,” affectionately known to the family as “Otoyan,” to stay behind in the house as “half renter and half caretaker [家族に留守番かたがた安い家賃で住んで貰うこと

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 99. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 160-161.

にした].”<sup>203</sup> Despite the years that have passed since his regular employment under the Makiokas’ father, Otoyán’s loyalties remain with the family, and, in the absence of the family, he remains bound to the house itself, agreeing to provide the family home with the deeply discounted labor which it requires. “With [his] son working in a large department store, Otoyán no longer had any particular responsibilities,” the text reads, and so “[h]e frequently visited the Osaka house [始終出入りをしていた関係].”<sup>204</sup> The main setting of *The Makioka Sisters*, Sachiko’s house in Ashiya, where her two younger sisters also prefer to live, meanwhile lies at neither extreme—neither the scientific dwelling of the New Woman nor a musty museum of familial sentiment. It is far from the kind of household that renders servants altogether unnecessary, but neither does it require a servant all by itself, even in the absence of any human masters.

Sachiko’s Ashiya house, rather, strikes a balance between these two extremes, a middle ground that becomes apparent from the very first time a servant appears in the story. The sisters are dressing in preparation to go out when Sachiko announces that she is feeling unwell and asks Taeko to go downstairs [下へ行って] and request for her a vitamin B injection, a recent medical intervention which for the Makiokas “had become a family institution [癖になってしまつて].”<sup>205</sup> Instead of going downstairs, however, Taeko opts to shout “from the head of the stairs [階段の降り口まで出て行ったが、降りずにそこから階下を覗いて]” for “anyone [ちよっ

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 100. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 162.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 163.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

と、誰か]” to bring their mistress [御寮人] an injection.<sup>206</sup> Accordingly, soon after Taeko’s brash demand, the maid O-haru appears, “[bringing] the medical equipment in on a tray: a sterilized hypodermic needle, a vitamin concentrate, alcohol, absorbent cotton, adhesive tape.”<sup>207</sup> The very architecture of the house thus combines with a shared understanding of family custom [癖]—(after all, Taeko’s is a request that she expects any [誰か] of their maids could fulfill)—in order to facilitate the delivery to the sisters of a veritable medical arsenal. The Ashiya house may not be the scientific household of the industrious modern housewife, but nor is it the depressing, unhygienic family relic in Osaka. This main setting of *The Makioka Sisters* sits, rather, in a space in between—a porous, Japanese-style house through which a voice can travel, summoning from the shadows a servant with a uniquely modern assortment.

If the Ashiya house thus serves as a threshold between a more traditional way of life and the ways of modernity, then, that threshold is the domain of servants. *The Makioka Sisters* is a novel in many ways about thresholds, about permeability and transitional states, and that permeability, in fact, characterizes both the house itself and the roles and relationships of those within. One character that often puts this permeability on display is Taeko, as can be seen, for instance, when she opts to yell for the maid from the top of the stairs, rather than going through the motions of actually finding her. In doing so—and having O-haru actually respond—Taeko thereby draws attention to the capacity for sound to carry throughout the house. In another scene later in the novel, Taeko’s predilection for exposing the house’s permeability is accompanied also by the exposure of her body.

Of the four sisters, Taeko had always been the most open and direct—to put her case

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 5. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 7.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 23. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 31-32.

favorably, the most modern—but lately that directness had been strangely transformed into a certain rudeness and vulgarity [無作法な柄の悪い言語動作をちらつかせる]. It bothered her little to display herself naked [人に肌を見せることは可なり平気で], and sometimes even before the maids, she would bare her bosom to the electric fan, or she would come from the bath looking like a tenement woman.<sup>208</sup>

Taeko, often ostentatious and vulgar in a way unbecoming her family and class, has no qualms about leaving her yukata open [帯ひろ裸の浴衣がけで] and baring her breast, even with the maids in the same room [女中達のいる所でも]. Regardless, it is not Taeko’s nakedness itself which bothers her sisters, but rather the brazen lack of feminine modesty which accompanies its display. “[O]pen and direct [はっきりして]” to the extreme, Taeko thus actively and obstinately shuns both interpersonal and physical boundaries, as well as class boundaries, acting like a “tenement woman [長屋のおかみさん]” and thus—perhaps worst of all—surely giving the maids the impression of a woman unbecoming the reputation of the Makioka family.

The same account of this far too “modern [近代的]” behavior goes on to recall an occasion upon which Taeko goes so far as to rebuke O-haru for following Sachiko’s instructions to close the door to the bathroom while she bathes.

One evening Sachiko noticed that the door to the kitchen was half open. Through the trap door between the heater and the bath [風呂の焚き口から風呂場へ通じる潜り戸], also five or six inches open, she caught a glimpse of Taeko in the tub.

“Would you please close the door to the bathroom, O-haru [ちよっとお春どん、

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 264-265. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 435-436.

風呂場の彼處締めなさい?"]”

“Leave it open, leave it open [いかん／＼、締めたらいかん!]” shouted Taeko [妙子が湯槽の中から怒鳴った].

“You left it open on purpose [おや、此處は開けとくのでございますか?]” asked O-haru in surprise.

“I left it open to hear the radio [そうやねん。うち、ラヂオ聴くのんでわざと開けとくねん].”<sup>209</sup>

In fact, Taeko has left open not just the bathroom door but many doors throughout the house, creating a path for music to travel through the house all the way from the parlor [應接間] to the bath. Layers of rooms have thus been peeled back to allow for Taeko’s bathtub symphony experience, and, similarly, the scene itself contains multiple layers acknowledging the permeable space of the Makioka house.

In the midst of all this, meanwhile, caught between one sister catching a glimpse through an open kitchen door and another sister visible through yet another, is O-haru, at a loss as to which sister’s request to heed. Though she has been put in charge of the domestic space in this instant, she has also been put in a no-win situation, wherein she must necessarily disobey one of her mistresses in order to obey the other. Caught, then, at a crossroads between two conflicting configurations of the domestic space, O-haru faces a household’s pecking order in peril even as loud music obliterates the boundaries of the house’s walls.

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 265. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 436-437.

## Making a Family Work: Sharing a Home with Masters and Servants

If Taeko actively draws attention to the porosity of the architecture and physical space, Yukiko reveals the porosity and interchangeability, not of the house's architecture, but of the roles played by all of its residents. Paralleled, for instance, to the scene in which O-haru brings the vitamin injections to Sachiko, there is another, later scene in which it is Yukiko who prepares the injection, being that she is “thoroughly familiar with the procedure [馴れた手つき].”<sup>210</sup> As it turns out, this common household task, one that Taeko demands some servant or another do in the beginning of the novel, turns out to be one that Yukiko does quite often. This is far from the only time in the novel, moreover, in which Yukiko's role in the family parallels that of a servant. At other times she acts as a governess for Sachiko's daughter Etsuko, or even as a nurse—compounding the already ambiguous position she occupies within the family. Though her unmarried status—as well as her lack of urgency in remedying it—is the central point of conflict for the other sisters, Yukiko fulfills a number of vital roles in the Makioka household which make her continued presence just as indispensable as it is embarrassing. Representing in the novel what Onoe Jun'ichi calls a “shadowlike existence [陰翳的存在],” Yukiko holds the family together, both in the sense that arranging her marriage provides them with a persistent sense of purpose, and because of the way she mediates the relationships and functioning of the household as a whole.<sup>211</sup> Roles within the household are just as interchangeable and permeable as the house itself, and, of all the people who call it home, it is Yukiko who finds her role most regularly in a

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 5, 23. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 7, 32.

<sup>211</sup> Onoe Jun'ichi, “*Sasameyuki* to tomoni (shōzen): senchū sengo no Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (sōnenki Tanizaki Jun'ichirō ron) #8 [Tanizaki's Wartime and Makioka Sisters (cont.): Scholarship on Tanizaki's Later Period #8],” *Nihon daigaku geijutsu gakubu kiyō* 40 (2004): 36.

state of indeterminate flux. Of particular interest for my purposes here, then, are the myriad ways in which Yukiko slips into the role of servant.

In addition to the moment I previously discussed, in which the text describes Yukiko as well-versed in the same task a servant does in the beginning of the novel, one of the novel's first indicators of Yukiko's ambiguous status within the family concerns her relationship with Sachiko's daughter, Etsuko, to whom Yukiko acts as a sort of nursemaid.

When Taeko began making dolls in the room assigned to her and Yukiko, Sachiko arranged to move Yukiko into Etsuko's room, a six-mat Japanese-style room on the second floor. Etsuko slept in a low wooden baby bed, and a maid had always slept on the straw-matted floor beside her [今まで夜は女中が一人その寝台の下に寝床を敷いて悦子に付き添って寝ていたのであるが]. When Yukiko took the maid's place, she spread two kapok mattresses on a folding straw couch, so that her bed was almost as high as Etsuko's [悦子の寝台とほぼ同じ高さに寝床を敷かせて寝るようにした].<sup>212</sup>

This new sleeping arrangement, which begins with Taeko turning a shared bedroom into her personal workshop—and thus serves as yet another example of Taeko's often unconventional use of domestic space—has an equally transformative effect on the role of her sister, Yukiko. By rejecting both public/private and interpersonal boundaries, Taeko's personal repurposing of a previously communal space effectively thrusts Yukiko herself into a space otherwise occupied by a servant. Yukiko, the text explains, both literally and figuratively takes the place of the maid [女中の代りに], and, in sleeping beside Etsuko, relieves the maid also of her duty to attend to her.

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<sup>212</sup> *The Makioka Sisters*, 26. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 37.



The relationship between Yukiko and Etsuko is delineated specifically through the physical space of the house. Both the size of the room and the relative height of Yukiko's pile of mattresses—higher than the maid's customary place on the floor, yet only roughly as high as her young niece's bed [ほぼ同じ高さ]—serve to establish the ambiguous position Yukiko fills within the domestic space. From sleeping beside her to helping her with her homework, Yukiko takes on a variety of tasks with regards to Etsuko which a family of the Makioka's ilk might otherwise have to hire servants or tutors to do. The only thing certain, in fact, about Yukiko's position in the family is that it is indeed an unusual one, and, as such, Yukiko's relationship with Etsuko contributes to rumors [噂] that the reason for Yukiko's delayed marriage might in fact be that “Sachiko did not want to lose a good governess [幸子が雪子を家庭教師のように扱っていて、手放したがるものだから]” whose “devotion when Etsuko was ill was something Sachiko or even a professional nurse could never have imitated [母親でも看護婦でもとてもこうは行くまいと思えるほど献身的に介抱に努めた].”<sup>213</sup> Taeko, then, might be the ‘working woman’ of the family, but, when it comes to ‘women’s work,’ Yukiko is a sort of jack-of-all-trades—a maid [女中], a governess [家庭教師], and a nurse [看護婦], all rolled into one.

Sachiko, for her part, steadfastly denies the rumors that she is essentially employing Yukiko, but, even so, there seems to be some truth to the rumor mill's assessment of the situation. Upon Yukiko's eventual departure to stay with Tsuruko in Tokyo, for instance, Etsuko's behavior sours, creating considerable havoc in the household and confirming just how valuable

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 27. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 38-39.

Yukiko's companionship and tutelage truly were.<sup>214</sup>

O-haru slept with Etsuko after Yukiko left. Not half a month later, however, Etsuko took a dislike to her and drove her out in favor of O-hana, and in another half month O-hana was driven out in favor of O-aki, the scullery maid [半月ばかり立つと、悦子はお春を嫌い出してお花に代らせ、又半月ばかり立つと、お花を嫌い出して下働きのお秋に代らせた].<sup>215</sup> Etsuko was a bad sleeper for a child. As always, she talked excitedly for a half hour or so after she went to bed. Unlike Yukiko, the maids would not listen to her, and it annoyed her to have them go to sleep first [女中達だこの二三分間の相手が勤まらず、いつも悦子より先に眠ってしまう].<sup>216</sup>

Etsuko's annoyance with this series of maids—these poor substitutes for Yukiko—eventually escalates to the point that she barges into her parents' room in an outrage:

“I have not slept a wink,” she complained loudly, bursting into tears. “That O-haru. There she is, snoring away. I hate her. I detest her. I am going back in there and kill her [sic] [お春どん癪やわ。グウグウ鼾かいて寝てるねん。嫌い！大嫌い！悦子お春どん殺してやるわ].”<sup>217</sup>

Such is Etsuko's displeasure with these inadequate maids that, in the days and weeks following her outburst, Etsuko undergoes a full-fledged nervous breakdown and a series of fits which leave her family at a loss as to what to do. Desperate for any intervention, they have little choice but to

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 106. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 172.

<sup>215</sup> The order in which Etsuko runs through her maids is telling, with Spring (お春) quickly giving way to Flowers (お花) only for Flowers to be driven out in favor of Fall (お秋). Clearly, Etsuko is quite ready to see snow (雪子) once again.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 114. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 185.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 114. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 186.

settle for giving her vitamins and sedatives and otherwise catering to her nervous compulsions until either she grows out of it, or Yukiko returns.

If Yukiko thus often finds herself serving in the maid's role, O-haru, the actual maid, also slips into Yukiko's role from time to time. When Sachiko and Taeko, for instance, decide to hold a private moon-viewing party in Yukiko's absence, O-haru accompanies them, preparing ink so that each of them may write a poem commemorating the occasion. Naturally, the elephant in the room is the missing third sister, and so the sisters take turns in their poems expressing how much they miss Yukiko, wistfully noting the lack of Yukiko's "shadow [影法師]" in the moonlight beside theirs, mourning her absence. Less expected, however, is the fact that O-haru too is invited to write her own poem, which she does "with surprising readiness, though in a tiny, awkward hand [直ぐ筆を執って案外すらすらと...ひどく小さな拙い字で書いた]."<sup>218</sup> Rather than reference the shadows, however, or the movement of the clouds, or what Yukiko might be seeing in Tokyo, as the others' poems do, O-haru's poem simply states that "[t]he autumn moon shows itself, [t]here among the clouds [名月や雲の中から見え初めぬ]."<sup>219</sup>

Whereas the sisters' poems are overcast with the shadow of their absent sister, O-haru's poem focuses rather on the brightness of the moon. As a servant used to herself fading into the shadows of the household, O-haru hereby declares her affiliation with the moon in contrast to Yukiko's shadow—eminently capable of casting its own shadows, sometimes disappearing altogether, yet brightest when the shadows dissipate. In this way, O-haru both makes a claim to her place in the family and acknowledges the impact of Yukiko's absence. Yukiko, meanwhile,

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 113-114. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 184-185.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 114. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 185.

remains present in the form of a shadow—an absent presence—and thus, in this poem signed by O-haru (“Spring [はる]”), Yukiko is the unspoken winter’s “Snow [雪]” which should rightfully trail the “autumn moon [名月].”<sup>220</sup>

Another, analogous scene in which O-haru both replaces and signifies the absence of Yukiko also appears much later in the novel, when Itakura, a photographer friendly with the family, offers to take a family picture after Taeko’s dance recital.

“Let me take a picture of the whole family [そうですねあ、一つ撮らして貰いましよかなあ]. Suppose you line up with Koi-san [Taeko] in the middle.”

“What order do you suggest?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Makioka behind the chair. And now Miss Etsuko on Koi-san’s right.”

“We must put O-haru in too [お春どんも入れて貰い].”

“O-haru will fit in to the left.”

“If only Yukiko were here [東京の姉ちゃんがいやはったらええのになあ],” said Etsuko.<sup>221</sup>

In filling an empty space to the left of Taeko, O-haru thus appears to take Yukiko’s place in the family photo as Itakura arranges them around the furniture in the parlor. The parlor furniture, moreover, has itself been rearranged in a rough approximation of a traditional theater space for the purposes of the dance recital, during which Taeko has performed a dance notably named

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 184-185.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 167. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 273.

“Snow [雪].”<sup>222</sup> With the memory of Taeko’s performance still hanging in the air, O-haru thus joins the family photo as both a placeholder for Yukiko and as a replacement, in a room already cast in Yukiko’s shadow.

While the maid O-haru fills in as a member of the family, the text also shortly notes that the photographer, Itakura, has his own habit of “sometimes behaving almost as if he were a servant [主従].” Itakura, it explains, “had somehow become very close to the Makioka family [此處の家庭へも何となく入り込んでしまった形], on the best of terms with the maids [女中たちなどにも満遍なく愛嬌を振り蒔き].” Of course, it later comes out that Itakura has been taking advantage of this intimacy in order to secretly pursue an affair with Taeko, but, in the meantime his attention and affiliation is performatively with the servants, as Itakura even “liked to tell O-haru that he would have Sachiko talk her into marrying him [今に御寮人さんをお願いしてお春どんをお嫁に貰うのだなどと冗談を言っていた].”<sup>223</sup> As someone known to act like a servant from time to time, Itakura therefore chooses to insert O-haru into the family picture—specifically next to Taeko, whom he himself wishes to be ‘next to’—thus rendering the maid a stand-in, not just for Yukiko, but for himself as well. In this way, Itakura effectively takes advantage of O-haru’s ability to stand in for others in order to elevate his own status and affirm his suitability as a potential member of the Makioka family.

O-haru thus serves both as a proxy and placeholder for members of the family and as a kind of family member herself, but it is nevertheless Yukiko, the servant-like mistress, to whom her fate is particularly wedded. When, for instance, Yukiko, at the end of the novel, is finally

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 161. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 262.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 166. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 273.

ready to be married, O-haru abruptly announces that she too would like to have “two or three days off...after Miss Yukiko was married [雪子娘さんの輿入が済みましたら]” on account of the fact that “her [own] family had found her a prospective husband [見合いの話があるらし< ].”<sup>224</sup> The parallels between the middle Makioka sister and the maid O-haru thus persist throughout the novel, right until the very end. Only, after all, with both Yukiko’s and O-haru’s marriages secured, does the narrator comfortably announce that “[t]hus the future was settled [そんな工合に急に此處へ来て人々の運命が定まり].”<sup>225</sup>

### **No Room for Secrets: Rumors, Gossip and Maids**

As is the case with many of Tanizaki’s servant characters, the role O-haru plays in the Makioka family goes beyond mere servitude. Given the sharing of both physical space and household duties with her employers, O-haru’s role in the novel is predicated on the permeability and mutuality of domestic life. Just as Taeko can listen to music in the bath or shout instructions from the top of the stairs, after all, Yukiko can serve as a nursemaid and O-haru as a substitute sister. At the same time, O-haru herself is responsible for maintaining this way of life, as her presence both polices the behavior of the family and fills in the gaps between them. By playing a vital role in both enabling and regulating domestic communication in particular, then, O-haru, much like Yukiko, also serves as a kind of glue for the family. While I have discussed thus far domestic permeability primarily in the context of the physical space itself and in terms of the roles played by individual residents, highlighting the porosity of the house’s architecture as well

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 529-530. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 881.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 530. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 881.

as the capacity for servants to stand in for family and for family to act as servants, I turn now to the highly permeable, highly contested way in which the novel confronts the role of servants in maintaining the flow of information and the transmission of stories.

As I previously addressed in my chapter on *Sōseki*, servant characters have a habit of talking amongst themselves and about their employers, engaging in both idle chit-chat and more involved gossip. *The Makioka Sisters*, of course, is no exception, and, in fact, the novel's first focused description of O-haru occurs at a point when Sachiko learns, much to her surprise, that the maid has told Etsuko about Yukiko's upcoming *miai*, which they had meant to keep secret from Etsuko. Sachiko questions O-haru about the matter:

“O-haru, what did you tell the child today?” Sachiko could not remember having spoken to the maids about today's meeting, but it must have been through her carelessness that they guessed the secret [特に彼女達に知られないように気を付けていなかった程度]. She owed it to Yukiko to discover how [雪子の手前、自分がお春を糺さねばならない責任を感じた]. “What did you say?”

O-haru did not answer. Her eyes were on the floor, and her whole manner was a confession of misconduct [「悪うございました」と云うことを恐縮した体つきで示した].

“When did you tell her?”

“This morning.”

“And just what did you have in mind?”

[...] Someone always had to see Etsuko across the national highway on her way to and from school, and the task was usually O-haru's [お春の役]. Under Sachiko's questioning, she let it be known that she had told the whole story to Etsuko on the way to

school that morning. O-haru was a wonderfully good-natured girl [平素はひどく愛想のよい女], and when she was scolded she wilted so dismally [俄然気の毒なくらい萎れてしまう] that it was almost amusing [可笑しみを誘った].<sup>226</sup>

The text here explicitly describes O-haru as being “like a member of the family [殆ど家族の一員のように親しまれていて].” In fact, the Makiokas have treated O-haru “more affectionately” from the start [この女だけ初めからの呼び癖で、特別に「どん」付けにされていた], and, as such, she is afforded both the responsibility and leniency that that entails. Though the text does not record O-haru’s response to Sachiko’s inquiry verbatim, it subsequently becomes clear that she in fact happened to overhear Sachiko talking about the arrangement over the phone in the foyer. Thus informed, then, of her own failure to keep quiet, Sachiko quickly changes tactics from scolding O-haru to agreeing to share the blame. “I was wrong to let you overhear that telephone conversation [注意が足らなんだかも知れん] but you did overhear it, and you should have known well enough that it was secret,” she tells O-haru, “You should know that there are some things you talk about and some things you do not [話してええことと悪いことと].”<sup>227</sup>

By suggesting that O-haru should know what needs to be kept secret without needing

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 37. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 56-57. The question of what warrants O-haru’s particular level of familiarity is an interesting one, moreover, as it is ostensibly on account of her seniority [上女中を勤めているので], and yet the text states that the Maikokas have been referring to this one maid in the same atypically familiar manner since the very beginning [この女だけ初めから]. Regardless, however, of whether it is her three years of service or her “good-natured”—or more accurately, “pleasant [愛想のよい]”—demeanor which charms her employers, it is nevertheless sufficient to make them more willing to forgive her scruples.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 57.



explicit instruction, Sachiko hereby alludes to an unspoken understanding regarding O-haru's participation in the household, conceding that, while it is natural that she should end up overhearing any number of private matters discussed within the home, a servant of her experience should know better than to spread them about. "When did you come to work here, O-haru? [あんた、いつから此處の家にいるのん]" Sachiko asks rhetorically, "Not just yesterday, you know [昨日や今日奉公に来たんやあれへんのに]." Yukiko, too, chimes in, reminding O-haru that it is "not only this time...you have always talked too much [あんた一体いつも口数が多いて]. You are always saying things you should have left unsaid [云わんでもええことおしゃべりするのん、悪い癖やわ]." <sup>228</sup> The family thus concurs that, while they ideally should be able to trust O-haru, her tendency to talk makes that a naïve expectation, and yet, neither can they realistically keep her in the dark or expect her complete silence at all times. Consequently, after rebuking O-haru, they dismiss her, only for Yukiko to stress the insufficiency of that rebuke.

"She *will* go on talking, no matter what you say to her [いつも云われてる癖に、何と云うおしゃべりやろ]." Sachiko studied the face in the mirror. Yukiko was obviously upset. "But it was careless of me [やっぱり私が不注意]. I should have tried to talk over the telephone so that they could not understand [電話かけたりする時に何とかあの人等に分からんような言い方もあってんけど]. I never dreamed they would tell Etsuko."

"It is not only the telephone. For ever so long I have noticed how you talk with O-haru there listening [お春どんの聞いてるところで]."

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 57.

“And when have we done that?”

“Any number of times. You stop talking when she comes into the room [話してるところへ這入って来ると], but when she goes out you begin again in the loudest voices, and there she is just outside the door [出て行ってまだドアの外にいるのんに]. She must have heard any number of times [あれ聞えてたに違いない思うててん].”<sup>229</sup>

Such loud, private conversations have become routine, the novel clarifies, with the family increasingly more and more worried about Yukiko’s marriage prospects. While the sisters and Teinosuke are careful to talk after Etsuko has gone to bed, however, O-haru’s duties as a servant continue to bring her repeatedly in and out of the room. The text explains:

Occasionally O-haru would come in from the dining room [食堂を通過して這入って] with something to drink, and, since the dining room was separated from the parlor by three sliding doors [その食堂と応接間の境界は三枚の引き戸になっていて] with openings large enough to admit a finger between them, a conversation in the parlor could be heard quite distinctly [可なりよく聞える] in the dining room. Late at night, when the house was quiet, it was necessary to talk in particularly low voices to avoid being overheard, and there was no doubt that they had not been as careful as they might have been.<sup>230</sup>

By addressing with Sachiko her concerns over their late night conversations, Yukiko identifies a major issue with how her family conceives of the privacy of the domestic space. Sachiko’s

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid. Though it is unclear in the translation, Yukiko’s displeasure is directed in large part not at Sachiko but at Teinosuke, who in fact has the loudest voice in the house.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 38. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 58.

resolve, Yukiko argues, to be more circumspect about her phone conversations in the house's relatively more public foyer means nothing if she forgets that even their ostensibly private spaces are highly permeable.<sup>231</sup> The boundary between the parlor where they converse and the dining room through which O-haru frequently passes, after all, is not only thin enough to permit sound, but in fact permeable to her body as well—the gap between the Japanese-style sliding doors “large enough to admit a finger [指が入れられる程透いている]” even when O-haru is not passing freely between. Just, therefore, as there is little boundary between O-haru and the rest of the family in terms of their loyalties, roles, and affections, the very architecture of the house also constitutes a space which, while perhaps separating them symbolically and hierarchically, does not always separate them functionally.

Even that hierarchical separation, moreover, seems flipped at times. The sisters, after all, are seemingly just as mindful of their behavior around the maids as the maids are concerned with their comportment around their mistresses. After admonishing Sachiko for allowing O-haru to overhear their conversations, Yukiko goes on to explain that her main concern about being overheard is not that the maids will spread rumors outside the household, but rather about what the maids themselves might think of her failure to find a suitable match.

“We are not to talk about it in front of them. It is not that I dislike these meetings—you know that—but there they are, watching and telling each other I have failed again [そのつどあの人等に、又今度もあかなんだのかいな思われるのんが辛いさかい].”

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<sup>231</sup> Sachiko eventually decides that their private home phone—which the maids generally answer—is far too public in general, opting instead, ironically, for the privacy of a public phone. Later in the novel, she has a second phone installed in her husband's study—which is safely located outside the house entirely, in a detached building out in the garden. *Ibid.*, 55-56, 124. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 89, 199.

Yukiko's voice was choked, and a tear drew a line over the face in the mirror.

“You know perfectly well, Yukiko, that we have always been the ones who do the refusing. You know that. The other side has always been ready and waiting, and we have not been quite satisfied ourselves.”

“Do you suppose the maids think so? They will only think I have failed again, and even if they know the truth, they will say... [けど、あの人等はそない思うてくれへんもん。今度もあかなんだ云うたら、あの人等きつと、又断られた思うやろうし、思わんまでもそんなにきまったあるさかい.....そやさかい]”

“I think we should talk about something else. We were wrong, and it will never happen again. See what you are doing to your face.” Sachiko wanted to retouch [her] face, but she was afraid she would only invite more tears.<sup>232</sup>

In the end, then, it is not the potential indiscretion of the maids that most worries Yukiko, but what they might think of her. Concerned that the maids might see her as a failure and in turn speak badly of her [噂云い触らす]—even if only among themselves—Yukiko opts for begging her sister for discretion around the maids, rather than swearing the maids themselves to secrecy. In this way Yukiko reveals a degree of respect for the maids as people with opinions, who she wants to have a positive opinion of her—and not just because they might otherwise spread unflattering rumors. The sisters have gotten too careless with the maids, have neglected the boundaries that should keep their roles and business clearly defined. Even the way in which Yukiko refers to “them [あの人等]” indicates a level of respect above and beyond what would be expected given the difference in class status, further emphasizing the variability and

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 39. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 59-60.

permeability of domestic roles and distinctions within the Makioka household. Nevertheless, for Yukiko, while it is one thing to share servants' work, she insists to her sister on drawing the line at having to worry that they are looking down on her. Regardless of whether or not the family indeed ever manages to police what they say around the maids, however, or if any of their maids really do think badly of them, the very fact of Yukiko's anxiety over making a favorable impression on the servants indicates one more way in which the presence of maids like O-haru carries significance in the domestic domain far beyond the confines of simple service. Much like the theoretical maids fantasized about by Jōji in *Naomi*, O-haru's presence in the Makioka household serves to police and regulate domestic life at least as much as her labor facilitates and eases it.

### **Setting Terms and Telling Stories: Managing Emotional and Narrative Labor**

The ambivalent role that O-haru plays in maintaining domestic harmony arises again much later in the text, when Sachiko has taken Etsuko and O-haru to visit Tsuruko in Tokyo. Though generally enjoying the trip, Sachiko is shocked when she receives a sudden letter from Okubata, a long-time suitor of Taeko's, who has noticed that Itakura has been making regular visits to the Ashiya house while Teinosuke is at work and Taeko is home alone. Taken aback by this news but unsure if it warrants cutting her time in Tokyo short, Sachiko considers whether she could get away with sending only O-haru back home, where the maid's presence might curtail any potential impropriety until Sachiko can return. Upon considering all her options, Sachiko concludes,

The step least likely to arouse suspicion, then, would be to send O-haru back immediately.

She need tell the girl nothing. O-haru's presence in the Ashiya house [妙子の側にお春

がいてくれたら] would impose certain restrictions [牽制する] on Koi-san even if it did not entirely keep her from meeting Itakura [板倉の来訪を防止する].

But Sachiko hesitated again. O-haru was such a talker [ひどく口の軽い女].

There was no telling what rumors [噂] she would start if she became suspicious. A clever girl [割に気の廻る女], she might guess why she was being sent back early [自然考え付くかも知れない]. And, on the other hand, she might allow herself to be bribed. For all her cleverness [愛想が良くて如才がない代わりに], she yielded easily to such temptations. She would be no problem [直ぐ丸め込まれる] at all for a talker as persuasive as Itakura. Sachiko concluded that she could entrust the mission to no one [他人].<sup>233</sup>

O-haru, as Sachiko measures her, is clever but gullible, a prolific talker but easily out-talked, and ultimately, Sachiko decides that, wanting this done right, she has no choice but to do it herself. Despite the fact, however, that Sachiko indeed decides they should all return early from Tokyo after all, her initial consideration of O-haru for the job remains significant. Just as Jōji, for instance, muses over the possibility of hiring maids to keep an eye on Naomi, Sachiko's thoughts on sending O-haru back to the house to keep an eye on Taeko are also predicated on the simple premise that the presence of a maid would fundamentally alter the rules of engagement. O-haru need not confront anyone—nor even know exactly why she is being sent back—in order to exert significant pressure over the domestic space. Rather, the mere presence of the maid would be expected to regulate the domestic dynamic and carry with it an implied code of conduct.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 239. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 390-391.

O-haru's influence on the social space is again highlighted later in the novel at a point when Taeko, having fallen ill, is convalescing in a private hospital, and Okubata, no longer writing letters informing on Taeko's other suitors, has instead himself shown up unannounced. Yukiko, meanwhile, the only family member present at the time of Okubata's arrival, is taken aback by this unexpected and unwelcome visit. Wondering how he might have found them, she initially suspects O-haru [最初お春が大分疑われたのであった], the ever-so-talkative maid that she is, but, given Okubata's previously demonstrated propensity for spying on Taeko, she eventually absolves O-haru of any direct guilt. The more pressing issue regarding O-haru, after all, is what message her persistently accommodating presence in the sickroom might be sending to Okubata.

Ignoring [Okubata's] attempts at conversation, [Yukiko] withdrew to the next room, and, putting on a kettle in place of the gruel O-haru was heating, made him a cup of tea. She thought of having O-haru serve it [その茶をお春に持って行かせようとしたが], but reconsidered when it occurred to her that O-haru's good nature might cause trouble [愛想のよいお春が擱まると面倒である]. "You may go, if you like, O-haru," she said, "I can manage by myself, I think." She went back into the smaller room after she had served the tea.<sup>234</sup>

Yukiko elects to serve the tea herself, both because she worries that O-haru's hospitality will make Okubata feel too welcome and because she wants to keep an eye on things herself. As Yukiko again takes on a servant's task in serving Okubata, O-haru, for her part, seemingly confirms Yukiko's worries about the potential for Okubata to take advantage of her "good nature"

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 442-443. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 735-736.

by repeatedly delaying her departure in order to listen in on Okubata's dramatic tales from the other room.

O-haru does eventually leave, however, quickly rushing back to the house, in fact, to report to Sachiko about Okubata's abrupt appearance. As if snapping out of a daze, O-haru is suddenly keenly aware that Yukiko's dismissal entails a silent request to raise the alarm, rather than an altruistic impulse to give her some time off. Yukiko herself, meanwhile, is left to have an awkward conversation with Okubata, hoping that he will of his own accord come around to the conclusion that he is imposing on her time and space. Having O-haru leave, moreover, is key to sending this message. Without a maid to provide normality—via formality—to the exchange, Yukiko's perfunctory service implies that Okubata is not in fact a welcome guest, but rather a boorish imposition. Tending to Taeko in the hospital, Yukiko finds herself in a situation removed from the norms of propriety that would otherwise be established within the domestic space. Left floundering as to how to send a message, then, it is only through the management of O-haru's services—both by sending her away with an implied message to Sachiko and by attempting to convey to Okubata, through O-haru's absence, that they are ill-prepared for guests—that Yukiko endeavors to communicate to Okubata his breach of the social contract.

The Makioka family's approach to Okubata changes dramatically, however, after they begrudgingly resolve to pursue a marriage between Taeko and Okubata. While this is perhaps not an ideal match, Taeko has become increasingly unpredictable, and so, in the interest of avoiding any further scandal, Taeko's sisters decide that a marriage to Okubata might be for the best after all. Given this about-face on Okubata, O-haru too receives a new mission.

Okubata called at the hospital again, and O-haru, alone with Mito [the nurse], telephoned Ashiya for instructions. "Be less cold than last time," answered Sachiko. "Smile



pleasantly and invite him in [こないだみたいに虐待せんと、どうぞお上り下さい云うて気持よう扱うだけなさい].”<sup>235</sup>

O-haru takes this new task to heart, even ordering food and saké for Okubata to enjoy during repeated, hours-long visits to Taeko’s bedside. This drastic change in his reception is not lost on Okubata.

He was thoroughly delighted, and talked on until after nine o’clock. But Taeko was annoyed. Such kindness was quite uncalled for, she said [お春どん、あんな餘計なことせんかてええのんに]. If you were the least bit kind to the man, he took advantage of you. O-haru found it hard to understand why she was being scolded [自分が何で叱られたのやら、お春にはさっぱり呑み込めなかった]—after all, [Taeko] and Okubata had been chatting most agreeably until but a moment before.<sup>236</sup>

O-haru is reasonably confused, the narrator explains. She has been told how to behave towards Okubata, but not why or to what end, and so she is confused as to why she is being scolded simply for successfully entertaining a man who Sachiko has told her to entertain and whose company Taeko seems to enjoy. The family has opted not to inform O-haru of the message and outcome they expect her behavior to encourage, and this refusal to bring O-haru fully into their confidence regarding their plans effectively causes their attempts to use her as a chess piece to backfire. Clearly proud of how well she entertained Okubata according to Sachiko’s instructions, O-haru is taken aback by the conflicting feedback from Taeko. By telling O-haru what to do but not to what ends she is doing it, the Makiokas thus end up only inhibiting O-haru’s ability to

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 458-459. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 762-763.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

structure and manage the situation in the interest of keeping the whole story under wraps.

There is a stark difference between dismissing O-haru on Okubata's arrival and asking her to entertain his visits, but both scenes nevertheless testify to the fact that O-haru's service (or lack thereof) is quintessential for determining the social contract of the space in which it takes place. As such, O-haru often serves in the capacity of a liaison—a kind of diplomat—between the Makioka family and its outside affairs. In this particular instance, however, the fact that O-haru is not treated as an equal collaborator actually serves to limit her effectiveness.

When O-haru and the Makiokas are on the same page, however, she is indeed capable of serving as a reliable agent of the family and an effective tether between domestic and public life. In this way, O-haru, through her presence, is capable not only of setting the terms for the domestic space, but also of allowing for the willful extension of those terms into public and semi-public spaces. This ambassadorial capacity is dramatized quite literally during an episode early on in the novel, in which O-haru leads the charge on a daring rescue expedition. Heavy rains have quickly given way to a flash flood, and, with Etsuko stranded at school, Teinosuke resolves to rescue her. O-haru, meanwhile, although initially instructed to stay home, insists on coming along. In the end, her insistence is fortunate, as Teinosuke reports to Sachiko just how essential she proved to the mission, almost single-handedly enabling them to forge a clear path between the house and the school.

After thanking the principal and Etsuko's teacher, [Teinosuke] started back with Etsuko and O-haru over more or less the same route. It was then that Teinosuke was glad O-haru was with him [その時になってお春が一緒にいてくれたことが非常に役に立った]. She had astonished everyone when, mud and all, she fell upon Etsuko in her delight at seeing that the child was safe; and on the way back she walked upcurrent to shield

Teinosuke [帰りには彼女が流れの先頭を切って、貞之助を庇うようにしながら行った]. The water was two or three inches higher and the current much swifter than when they had crossed but a short time before. Teinosuke had to carry Etsuko on his back. He found that it was extremely difficult to walk, and if O-haru had not been there to divide the current for him, he would have been in danger venturing even one step into it. The task was not an easy one for O-haru, who was sometimes in water to her waist [先頭を切るお春の方も、深い所では腰の邊まで漬かってしまうので容易なことではなかった].<sup>237</sup>

O-haru, at her own peril, hereby cuts a path between public disaster and the safety of home—a home which itself remains entirely untouched by the flood waters. By dividing the violent current with her body, O-haru thus shields Teinosuke with her body, giving him her “shadow” to follow in as if it were a guiding light [お春が激しい水の勢を体で割いて進んでいくその蔭に添いながら行くのでなければ]. It is O-haru, then, who acts as Teinosuke’s protector, who leads him, who not only demonstrates her devotion to the family but even takes the head of that family under her wing, as if she indeed outranked him.

This dramatic flood rescue indicates in O-haru an almost superhuman ability to return stability to the family in the event of a crisis—in this case by quite literally forging for its youngest member a safe path home. These events, however, while perhaps the most dramatic example of this ability, are hardly the only or last scenarios in which O-haru serves as the principal connection between the family and the outside world. Just as she casts a shadow of

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 173. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 284.

safety for Teinosuke, that is, her presence also casts a shadow on the Makioka household at large. Take, for instance, the more personal disaster of Taeko, who, despite all the family's best efforts to set her on a better path, eventually becomes more or less estranged from them. Estrangement aside, however, Taeko's presence is still expected at formal family functions, and Sachiko, who wishes to keep an eye on her younger sister regardless, is thus troubled by the sudden reminder that she is living somewhere well out of her sight. It is all the more fortunate, then, that O-haru has in fact taken it upon herself to keep a close watch over Taeko, even if—despite all of Sachiko's prior concerns over O-haru's ability to keep a secret—she only conveys what she knows to Sachiko after significant prodding.

It happens while Sachiko is on a theater outing with Teinosuke, Etsuko, and O-haru, who are in the process of crossing a busy street when Sachiko is thrown off-guard by a sudden glimpse of Taeko and Okubata passing by together in a taxi. The couple passes by quickly, and only Sachiko and O-haru, who have been cut off from Teinosuke and Etsuko by a red light, are focused towards the oncoming traffic at the time. Sachiko therefore feels safe assuming that her husband and daughter have not seen Taeko, but she is certain that O-haru has—and just as certain that O-haru should stay quiet about it, especially to Teinosuke, who would undoubtedly be displeased with this new development. In fact, Sachiko's first instinct, before demanding that O-haru tell her what she knows, is to swear the maid to silence.

“O-haru, you are not to tell Mr. Makioka or Etsuko,” said Sachiko in consternation [まっすぐに口止めをした]. Noting the change in Sachiko's expression [顔色], O-haru nodded with great seriousness and looked at the ground [ひどく真剣な表情をして、「は」と答えたきり俯向きながら歩いていた]. Sachiko deliberately held back. She wanted her heart to be pounding a little less violently [幸子は動悸を静めるために]

when she overtook Teinosuke and Etsuko, a block or so ahead. Always in a crisis she felt the tips of her fingers go cold. She clutched at O-haru's hand.

“O-haru.” She had to say something [黙っていると餘計息苦しくなる]. “Have you heard rumors about Koi-san? She hardly ever seems to be at home any more.”

O-haru only nodded [お春はまた「は」と答えた].<sup>238</sup>

With little time to ask further questions and preoccupied with calming her pounding heart, Sachiko attempts to ground herself by clutching O-haru's hand and continuing on to the theater, resigned to wait until after the play's first intermission to pull her aside and ask her what more she knows.

O-haru explains that she had been seeing Okubata routinely taking the bus in an area far from his home and had become curious as to whether he might have another house nearby. This curiosity getting the better of her, she eventually asks him where he lives, and he confirms that, yes, there is indeed a nearby house. When she later runs into Taeko in the same area, O-haru's interest is piqued, and she goes looking in the direction Okubata indicated, only to find not only the house itself, but also that she can hear, over the sound of a phonograph playing loudly through an open window, a faint woman's voice which she takes to be Taeko's.<sup>239</sup> In this way, O-haru recounts to Sachiko, in bits and pieces, how she alone came to know where Taeko was staying.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, it is often the case that servants are in the business

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 367-368. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 611-612. The English translation actually more forcibly silences O-haru than does the Japanese text, in which she responds verbally, if only with a simple “は。” Sachiko, meanwhile, is struggling (and ultimately failing) to keep herself silent, both with regard to her pounding heart and the questions she is anxious to ask.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 369. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 615.

of knowing more than their masters think they do—and even knowing more than their masters. In this particular instance, however, it is not just O-haru’s knowledge, but also her own voice, which is conveyed through the text. While the text does not quote the bulk of her account directly, it does, in scattered parentheticals, nevertheless make room for her voice by, for instance, defining the term that she uses to describe the underpass on the way to where Taeko is staying—(“*mambō*,” a “dialect word that survives only [among some people] in the Osaka district [これは現在關西の一部の人の間にしか通用しない古い方言である]”). Meanwhile, in another parenthetical, the text provides color and context to the quality of her narration, explaining that—perhaps on account of her occupational requirement to perform and reflect many different roles—“O-haru, when she told a story, had a way of mimicking the conversation that brought it vividly to life [お春の癖で、こう云う話をする時は一々その人の口調を真似て、當時の會話を克明に再演して見せるのである].”<sup>240</sup>

Taking this exploration of O-haru’s distinct voice and the impression it makes upon the Makiokas even further, yet another parenthetical even quotes O-haru directly, asserting the depths of her knowledge by confirming that she remembered even the song she heard playing from inside the house where Taeko was staying: “Yes,” O-haru said, “that’s right, that’s the record—um you know, the one Daniele Darrieux sings in *She Returned at Dawn*—it was that song [そう云ってお春は、そうそう、そのレコードはあれでございます、ほら、あの、ダニエル・ダリュウが「暁に帰る」の中で謡いました、あの唄でございます、と云った

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 368-369. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 613-615.

りした。]。”<sup>241</sup> By including these parentheticals that contextualize, color, and even record O-haru’s speech, the text thus sanctions O-haru’s ability to set the terms of the story, grants authority to her knowledge of the space in which that story unfolds, and endorses her accuracy in telling it.

For this reason, the family thenceforth deputizes O-haru to look in on Taeko and report back to them. Later, moreover, near the end of the novel, when Taeko, unbeknownst to her family, has started seeing yet another man, Miyoshi, and become pregnant by him, it is O-haru who the Makiokas entrust with handling the ordeal. Still estranged from Taeko but unable to let this potential scandal go unaddressed—not when they are finally so close to securing a marriage for Yukiko—they elect to move Taeko out to a health resort in the country to give birth to the baby in secret. O-haru, then, is to act as a kind of go-between, tasked with checking in on Taeko and keeping the family abreast of any developments.

[Sachiko] gave O-haru detailed instructions [條々を云い含められた]: Taeko was to be in Arima for several months, under the name Abe; O-haru was to call her Mrs. Abe and not Koi-san; for liaison a messenger would be sent from Ashiya, or O-haru herself would come back, and no one was to use the telephone; O-haru was to understand that Miyoshi and Taeko were not to see each other and that Miyoshi was not to be told where Taeko was staying; and O-haru was moreover to watch for strange letters, or telephone calls or visitors.<sup>242</sup>

Sachiko, having briefed O-haru on this airtight plan, however, is wholly unprepared for O-haru’s

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid. The English translation reads “[y]es, she even remembered the record,” exchanging the direct speech in the Japanese for summary. In the interest of clarifying my point, therefore, the above translation is mine.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 504-505. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 842-843.

subsequent confession that this news of Taeko's pregnancy is, in fact, not news to her at all. This new development, O-haru explains, though so new and alarming to Sachiko, has actually been known amongst the maids for some time. Indeed, the very secret which Sachiko has only just learned and had never suspected—and is now mustering all her energy to contain—has already been an open secret in her own household for some time. The maids became aware of it, O-haru admits, since before even the family's recent trip to Tokyo to meet Yukiko's prospective husband. The passage continues:

I suppose I can say it now. All of us [わたし等は] saw that Koi-san's stomach was big even before going to Tokyo." Hearing this, Sachiko was shocked. "You... how did you know?" she asked [あんた、何で分かったん、と、幸子が聞くと]. "O-teru noticed first. She was like, 'hey, is there something weird about Koi-san... maybe? [何やこいさんの様子がけったいや, そうと違うやろか]' But we've only talked about it amongst ourselves. We haven't told anyone else," O-haru said [でも私等だけでそない申しておりましたので、誰にもしゃべったことはございません、とお春は云った].<sup>243</sup>

Sachiko has just finished painstakingly tasking O-haru with the utmost secrecy, only to find out that her maid has already been keeping this secret for some time—even from Sachiko herself. Not only O-haru, moreover, but all of the maids were in on the secret, and still Sachiko heard nothing. In this way, *The Makioka Sisters* thus reveals the existence of a separate—and perhaps more extensive—domestic system of unspoken allegiances and secret knowledge which servants manage and inhabit within the household as a whole.

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid. Translation mine, as the published translation mediates O-haru's speech, instead of quoting it directly.



Secrets in fact seem to float about in the maids' quarters in *The Makioka Sisters*, through the walls and down the streets, governed by unspoken agreements and family loyalties. In the end, conceding to both their inability to keep secrets from their maids and their need for their maids to be in on their secrets, the family grants O-haru explicit authority over all communication with Taeko, entrusting her with maintaining the desired narrative surrounding the youngest sister's absence. A long way from the early pages of the novel, wherein the family worries over what the maids might think, by the end of the story the responsibility for the maintenance of the good name and affairs of the family effectively comes to rest on O-haru's shoulders. Even before finding out that the maids already know of Taeko's pregnancy, therefore, the Makiokas are already resigned to the fact that they cannot keep their maids in the dark. "[I]t would be impossible to keep the news from O-haru and the other maids [お春以下の女中たちが知るようになるのは防ぎ得ないとして]," the family realizes, "[b]ut they should make absolutely sure that it spread no farther [嚴重にそれ以外にひろがらないようにしよう]."<sup>244</sup>

The maids in *The Makioka Sisters*, then, are both at the epicenter of the family's domestic scandals and, at the same time, the very last line of defense of the family's reputation and the internal stability of its way of life. They are an intimate part of the family, but also on its periphery, a layer between the household and the outside world as thin as its walls but as important a structuring presence as those walls themselves.

### **Literary Work vs. Housework**

Thus far, I have discussed many of the ways in which the Makioka household's way of

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 503. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 840.

life is predicated on the presence of servants—how they inhabit the family, determine the narrative, and connect the family to the outside world—and identified some of the delicate, unspoken codes and structures that enable them to do so. Notably absent from these considerations of servants' work, however, is any sort of actual housework. If anything, the character I have discussed most in terms of servants' 'work' is Yukiko, who is, technically at least, not a servant at all. The question arises, then, of how much actual serving these servant characters do. When the novel does discuss O-haru in terms of her usefulness around the house, in fact, it is clear that, were it not for the other forms of labor which O-haru performs, she probably should have been fired long ago. When Tsuruko remarks on O-haru's industriousness in assisting her family during a typhoon, for example, Sachiko actually corrects her:

To go with the beer, Sachiko offered her sister a review of O-haru's faults [ビールの肴に、幸子はひとしきりお春の店卸しをした].

It was not unpleasant to have one's maid [自分の使っている小間使] praised, and Sachiko, not wanting to unmask O-haru [人の缺點を吹聴するにも及ばない], always listened quietly when she heard something flattering about the girl; there were few maids who enjoyed such a good name [お春ぐらい外で評判のよい女中も珍しかった]. O-haru had a clever way with people [交際上手で萬事に如才がない]. She was most liberal in giving away her own things and the Makiokas', and her generosity made her very popular with tradesmen and craftsmen who were in and out of the house. Sachiko was often surprised, moreover, at the way in which Etsuko's teachers and her own friends came out of their way to [send word to her about] what an admirable maid

she had [実に感心な女中さんだと、わざわざ傳言をして寄越す].<sup>245</sup>

While graciously accepting all of this praise from people outside the immediate family, however, Sachiko is far less circumspect with Tsuruko about what she perceives as O-haru's many failings. To her sister, she describes O-haru as "an unmanageable girl [あのような手数のかかる厄介な娘]." O-haru's problems, Sachiko confides in her sister, are moreover so substantial that even O-haru's own family, far from being proud of the young girl, in fact entreats Sachiko to "continue to put up with all the embarrassments and inconveniences [何卒御迷惑でも御辛抱なすってお使いただきますように]."<sup>246</sup> O-haru's family has even told her, she tells Tsuruko, that "she need not pay O-haru anything, and she need not be afraid to scold the girl [お給金などは戴かずとも宜しうございますし、どのようにお叱り下さいまして結構でございます]" as they fear O-haru would "only [take] advantage of kindness [あの娘はちょっとでも甘えさせましたらいけませぬので]."<sup>247</sup>

Whether or not the text offers any real support for O-haru's apparent duplicitousness, however, it does describe her as fundamentally uncleanly—a personal quality which might seem disqualifying for someone theoretically meant to help around the house.

Unlike the other maids [奉公人たち], who had baths every night, O-haru would loll about the maids' room and presently go to sleep without even undressing. She had no objection to wearing the same dirty underwear for days on end. One simply had to take off her clothes and lead her to the bath, or pull out all the dirty underwear and stand over

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 230. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 377-378.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 378.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 378.

her while she washed it. All in all, she was more trouble than a baby [自分の娘を仕付けるよりも手数が懸かる]<sup>248</sup>. The other maids, more directly her victims than Sachiko, were soon complaining. The closet was full of dirty clothes, they said; and when in desperation they took out O-haru's laundry and did it themselves, they were astonished to find in it a pair of underpants that belonged to Sachiko. In her reluctance to do her laundry, O-haru had apparently even taken to borrowing Sachiko's underwear [あの人は洗濯するのが面倒臭さに、お上のものまで穿いていたのだ].<sup>249</sup>

A long cry from a hygienic modern household which sparkles due to the solitary efforts of an industrious housewife, the Makioka household is one in which the full cooperation of the household is required just to keep one of the maids minimally clean. O-haru has little interest in her own personal hygiene, and, while there are, evidently, other maids willing to cover for her, they receive little credit for doing so. The neighbors who praise O-haru are unaware of the concentrated effort that goes into keeping her presentable, and neither does the novel recognize these more conscientious maids with larger roles in the story.

While O-haru indeed contributes a socially stabilizing effect when the Makiokas need to maintain propriety and appearances, as in the matter of Okubata, the maid herself is a mess—impressive from the outside but, within the private space of the house, a source of daily frustrations and never-ending liability. While serving, moreover, as in the case of Taeko's semi-

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<sup>248</sup> The Japanese text describes O-haru as being more trouble than “Sachiko's own daughter,” which the English reinterprets as “a baby.” O-haru, however, apparently old enough at seventeen to need to “borrow” underwear rather than diapers, is perhaps as difficult as Etsuko (to whom she is closer to age than she is to Sachiko)—but still probably less trouble than a baby.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 379.

estrangement, as a buffer between the family and the outside world, O-haru pays far less mind to the internal division between servant and family and their respective spaces, even littering the floor of the maids' room with the mistress's undergarments. Nevertheless, none of this disorder is apparent outside the family, and thus O-haru also serves as a mirror of the Makioka family as a whole, just barely managing to keep up appearances—no matter how futile the effort—while everything falls apart.

This sense—both of futility and an empathetic approach to domestic chaos—is further reinforced by the fact that Sachiko, even after venting her frustrations, admits that, despite their abundance, none of O-haru's faults is too great for her to overlook. While indeed, she explains, she has on occasion attempted to send O-haru away only to have O-haru's family send her right back, she concedes that, in the end, she cannot actually see herself ever sending the maid away for good.

“After five [sic] years I almost think of her as my daughter [そら、六年もいられて見ると、自分の娘と一緒にやわ]. She may be a little tricky [狡い] at times, but she has none of the touchiness [ひねくれたとこ] you expect of a stepchild. And she does have her good points [人徳がある]. Even when she seems more trouble than she is worth, I can never be really angry with her [素直で、情愛があつてつくづく厄介な女や思いながら憎む気イせえへんねん].”<sup>250</sup>

Despite her faults, then, Sachiko assures, O-haru is there to stay, and her relatively minor position within the novel notwithstanding, the O-haru Sachiko describes is a distinctly ‘round’ character, made more real by the depths of both her faults and her strengths. In addition to the

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 233. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 382.

proportionate extra narrative space her literary roundness affords her, then, O-haru has also grown to be part of the family, and while she is perhaps of more help symbolically and spatially than she is in respect to any form of concrete domestic labor, her place in the family is nonetheless essential.

The way in which O-haru fits into the family portrait, reflects their image back at them, and connects them to the outside world, reveals a maid whose most valuable labor power is directed not at her everyday duties but at the subtler ways in which she contributes to the maintenance of the family. O-haru may be lackadaisical with regards to housekeeping, but she responds to crises, flash floods, typhoons, and drama with a diligence and determination that the Makiokas have come to depend on. Far from pursuing cleanliness, O-haru instead thrives in disorder, standing out and rising to the call when things are at their messiest. O-haru, that is, may be grimy—but she is grimy in the same, affectionate way in which Tanizaki’s “In Praise of Shadows” lauds grime, and thus her function in the household is more about the mark she leaves on it than any blemishes she might remove. The domestic presence and labor of maids like O-haru, then, might not necessarily be the most efficient way to run a household, but it is nevertheless fundamental to the sort of shared history, purpose, and family narrative which *The Makioka Sisters* celebrates, satirizes, and mourns.

By contrast, the novel offers a glance across the Makiokas’ hallowed garden at a different sort of maid—the kind employed for a short time by their neighbor, Mrs. Stolz. Mrs. Stolz, a German who has been living for some time in Japan with her husband and children, takes to her own housework with a level of meticulousness that might seem at first glance the very model of modern household efficiency. Instead of a model, however, Mrs. Stolz’s story in fact serves as a cautionary tale, as her harsh and demanding approach to her already quite capable maids in the

end causes only discord among them. Mrs. Stolz's lofty aspirations for efficiency and cleanliness thus backfire dramatically, her zealous pursuit of domestic maintenance proving disastrous for the cultivation of domestic peace. Unlike, moreover, the Makioka household, whose maid problems are hidden from the outside world, this Stolz family drama plays out in full view.

From the second-floor veranda one looked down at the back of the Stolz house whether one wanted to or not, and without meaning to spy, Sachiko saw almost as if it were being played on a stage for her how furiously Mrs. Stolz and the maids worked [婦人やアマの働き振りだの臺所の様子だのを、手に取るように知ってしまった]. She had often admired the kitchen utensils, always arranged by size around the stove and the cook's table, and always as polished and shining as weapons in an armory [それらが孰れも綺麗に研かれて武器のようにぴかぴかしていた]. The cleaning, the laundering, the cooking were so regular [正確] that the Makiokas had only to glance next door to know what time it was [隣家の人達のしている仕事を見れば時計を見る必要がない程であった].<sup>251</sup>

A hyper-efficient house, however, does not necessarily make a home, and while shining silverware might seem clearly preferable to hidden stockpiles of dirty underwear, Mrs. Stolz's performance of modern domestic industriousness nevertheless fails to translate to a desirable living situation. In an echo of Tanizaki's commentary on overeager silver-polishing in "In Praise of Shadows," Mrs. Stolz's exacting standards effectively serve only to polish all of the warmth out of her home. O-haru's cleanliness issues, on the other hand, might not be ideal, but neither do

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 250. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 411.

they diminish her value to the family or stop the Makiokas or the other maids from viewing her fondly. In light, then, of her own approach to her maidservants, Sachiko's opinion of what went wrong in the Stolz household is revealing:

There had once been an incident involving the two young Japanese maids—the two who had preceded the maids now in the Stolz house [一度幸子の家との間にちょっとした事件を惹き起こしたことがあった].<sup>252</sup> To Sachiko they had seemed models of willingness and industry [骨身を惜しまずによく働く寔に忠実な人々], but Mrs. Stolz had disagreed. She was really too stern [餘り激しい], they sometimes complained to Sachiko's maids. Determined to show by her own example that not a moment of the day need be wasted, she would push them on to another job as soon as they had finished one. It was true, they admitted, that they were better paid than if they worked in a Japanese house [日本人の家庭に雇われるより], and that they learned many useful things [家事についていろいろ為めになることも教えて貰う], but they scarcely had time to breathe the whole day long. Admirable housewife though Mrs. Stolz was, she was not easy to work for [全くうちの奥さんは主婦としては偉い奥さんで敬服させられてしまうけれど、使われる身になっては遣り切れない].<sup>253</sup>

Not only, then, do these highly accommodating maids frustrate Mrs. Stolz far more than O-haru's more obviously objectionable behavior ever bothers Sachiko, but also the maids, for

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<sup>252</sup> The word used for Mrs. Stolz's "maids" is アマ, which implies a maid in the foreign sense. Despite this usage, however, Mrs. Stolz's maids are indeed Japanese [アマは若い日本人の女が二人いた], and, as such, the disconnect between Mrs. Stolz's demands and what her maids themselves consider high standards is linked all the more strongly to cultural differences in priorities and aesthetics, rather than in effort or skill.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 411-412.



their part, freely voice their own complaints about Mrs. Stolz—even to others outside the family. As frequently throughout the novel as Sachiko raises concerns about O-haru talking too much, there is little evidence of O-haru actually ever spreading damaging rumors—at least outside of the family’s own kitchen. After all, it is highly improbable that Sachiko would receive as many compliments as she does if her maids were even half as talkative as those who once worked for Mrs. Stolz. In contrast to O-haru, then, who is considered by her own step-mother incompetent enough not to deserve payment, Stolz’s maids might appear far more worthy of praise (and in fact do get paid far more for their efforts), but the emotional labor of cooperating with Mrs. Stolz to uphold an aesthetic of domestic industriousness is ultimately more than they can take. A general breakdown of communication results, and in the end the two maids, excellent though they were, have little choice but to declare their last straw and leave to go elsewhere.

In the end the maids said they thought it best if they went looking for new jobs [それならお暇を戴きましょう]. Go, then, retorted Mrs. Stolz [宜しい、どうぞ出て行って下さい]. Sachiko, hearing the story from O-aki, sought to intercede, but the maids were firm: much though they appreciated her kindness, they would rather she said nothing [いいえ、有難うございますが、此方さんの関係したことではないのですから、何も仰らないで下さい]. Their resentment went beyond the morning’s incident. They worked as hard as they could, and yet Mrs. Stolz, not even a little grateful, told them in every other breath how stupid they were [私達は随分一生懸命に働いているつもりなのですが、うちの奥さんはそれを少しも認めて下さらないで、二た言目にはあなた方は頭が悪い／＼と云われます]. It was true, they supposed, that they were not as bright as she, but when she had other maids she would begin to appreciate how diligent

they had been [それは成る程、私達はとてもあの奥さんの頭の良さには敵いませ  
 んけれども、私達がどれだけ忠實な、役に立つ人間であったかと云うことは外の  
 人を雇って御覧になればお分かりになる時があるでしょう].<sup>254</sup>

The maid's prediction of vindication proves accurate, as Mrs. Stolz does in fact eventually admit her mistake in driving the maids away. Her realization, however, comes far too late, as by the time they have resolved to leave her employment, not even Sachiko's offer of mediation can convince them to stay. Taken alongside the description of O-haru's prodigious laziness and the love that the Makiokas have for her regardless, this account of a major breakdown in maid-mistress relations highlights the unspoken relational and aesthetic concerns which govern the roles of servants in the novel. Simply keeping the house clean is not enough; servants in *The Makioka Sisters*, rather, are responsible first and foremost for maintaining the home as concept, as a domestic narrative—long before the daily demands of domestic hygiene even come into consideration. Maids in Tanizaki's fiction perform a variety of forms of affective and narrative labor in the context of the home, complicating both labor hierarchies and prescriptive treatises on the ideals of the modern family. If as much is apparent in *The Makioka Sisters*, however, it is that much more earnestly and openly explored in the next novel I discuss, Tanizaki's playful love letter to the role of servants in the home and in the family, his 1963 novel, *The Maids*.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 251. *TJZ*, vol. 15, 412-413. The entirety of this conversation is in fact composed of fragments of maids' speech which have been mediated by the narrator in the English translation. The effect is that in Japanese the conversation feels more gossipy and immediate than it does in translation. This particular passage, moreover, provides one of the few examples in the text of how the maids speak with the Makiokas when they are neither discussing serious family matters nor being scolded in some way. (It is also worth noting that the one time we do see a maid truly gossiping, it is not behind Sachiko's back but in fact with her, and the maid in question is O-aki—not even the supposedly overtalkative O-haru.)

## Archiving Servants: Making History with Maids

Tanizaki's *The Maids*, or *Daidokoro Taiheiki* [*Chronicle of the Kitchen*], is an account of all the various maids who, throughout the years, pass through the household of a family by the name of Chikura. Loosely tied to the recollections of the head of the family, Chikura Raikichi, *The Maids*, much like *The Makioka Sisters*, draws considerably on Tanizaki's own experience of domestic life in the years surrounding the Second World War. Unlike *The Makioka Sisters*, however, which can be summarized as a story about a family's struggle to find a marriage partner for their younger sister, *The Maids* is a far more difficult novel to summarize. Its title evokes the fourteenth century *Chronicle of Great Peace* [*Taiheiki*], a historical epic about two warring factions both claiming the imperial throne, and, much like this namesake, *The Maids* comprises a mix of diligent reportage and literary embellishment. A loose collection of character sketches jumping around in time and place, *The Maids* focuses briefly on one or more characters at a time before moving onto the next, sometimes returning to elaborate on some particular maid, or to provide context for a particular incident, only to, at other times, neglect to conclude a particular storyline or brush past another character altogether.

Similar to *The Makioka Sisters*, on the other hand, this 'chronicle' likewise takes place in a period in which the norms of domestic life were in constant flux—(that is, before, during, and after the Second World War)—and yet this historically cataclysmic backdrop, just as in the insular pre-war domesticity of the Makioka family, seems remote to the point of near insignificance. Although the everyday domestic archive represented by this 'chronicle' is indeed proposed as distinct from the national archive, the narrator is able to make this distinction in the first place only by self-consciously arranging the story along a loose chronology and rough

periodization, overtly opposing it to those parallel events which it has taken pains to designate unimportant. Rather than narrated alongside national and world history, *The Maids* is thus juxtaposed explicitly against national and world history, with the storytime defined instead according to which houses the family lived in—and which maids were with them at the time. Even while making reference, then, to the wartime context, the narrator thus establishes the family's houses themselves as a primary organizing principle for the novel. “Although it's rather complicated [話が大變ややこしくなりますが], I'd like to add a note here reviewing the various addresses of the Chikura household, which moved several times after the war,” the narrator explains, before proceeding to list those specific addresses in enough detail that they might be pinpointed today.<sup>255</sup> If it is this series of addresses, rather than the national historical context, which designates periods in the family's history, the affairs of the family's maids, in turn, give context to these addresses.

It was during the Nakada period that Ume's epileptic seizures, the Great Fire of 1950, and Sayo's lesbian affair all occurred [梅の癲癇事件や、二十五年の熱海の大火や、小夜の同性愛事件がありましたのは、この仲田時代でした].

In around 1955, a bus began running out of Nakada, and as the number of inns and geisha houses increased, the area around their home was transformed into a pleasure quarter—an inhospitable environment [住みにくい土地] for Raikichi and the others—so they sold the villa and moved up the mountainside to Narusawa in Izusan, just about halfway between Atami Station and Yugawara Station, where they live to this day [今日

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<sup>255</sup> Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *The Maids*, trans. Michael P. Cronin (New York: New Directions, 2017), 111. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Daidokoro taiheiki* in *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, vol. 19 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1966), 316.

に及んでいます]. Sada’s wedding dates to this period in Narusawa [定が結婚しましたのはこの鳴澤の山荘時代です].<sup>256</sup>

Situated under the umbrella of the Shōwa era [昭和時代] and everything it encompasses on the national level are thus the Chikura family’s own eras, such as the Nakada period [仲田時代] and the mountain-house-in-Narusawa period [鳴澤の山荘時代]. Even the Great Fire of 1950—or “25,” as it reads in the original, according to the Shōwa calendar—is reattributed to the era of the family’s Nakada residence and thus the family’s own history, abstracted from the national history denoted by the Shōwa period itself. Additionally, the text puts the ostensibly far less newsworthy matters of Ume’s epilepsy and Sayo’s affair with another maid on equal footing with this major disaster, and the Great Fire, no matter how devastating, in the end carries far less weight in the grand scheme of the “Nakada period” than the maids who actually lived and worked in Nakada. Functioning, then, like a sort of serving-class version of the Japanese emperor-based calendar, or perhaps like the roving capital seats of ancient Japan, maids in Tanizaki’s novel attach to the various houses the family occupies as part of the fabric of their history, thereby defining that history. This does not mean, of course, that the household escapes its historical context altogether. The specter of war is indeed present in the text, just not in the typical sense of standard-issue wartime shortages or via the threat of airstrikes and forced conscription. The national historical context does enter the text—and the family consciousness—but only in terms of its effect on the availability of maids.

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937 makes an appearance, for instance, but only in reference to the fact that, Hatsu—the family’s longest-tenured maid and recruiter of so many

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 111-112. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 316-317.

others—came to work for Chikuras in the year prior. Reflecting on the effect of the war on Hatsu’s love life, the text muses about the possibility that, were it not for this incident, her relationship with her boyfriend might have worked out in the end. To read only *The Maids*, the loss of potential matches for the Chikuras’ servants would seem Japan’s most devastating wartime casualty.

Perhaps the other girls too, would have made good matches [良縁] with their boyfriends [ボーイフレンド]. The world was changing, though, and no longer the place for such matters. In the end, none of those relationships survived [一つも實を結ばずにしまい]. Over the next two years, the boyfriends were drafted one by one and went off to war [一人減り二人減りして戦争に驅り出されて行きました]. Every household suffered from a shortage of help as maids returned to their hometowns [女中たちが暇を貰って帰って行くのに困っていました]. Thanks to [Hatsu], however, the Chikura household could still beckon [呼び寄せる] any number of girls from Kagoshima. Far from being inconvenienced [思いの外不自由しないばかりか], they had so much extra help [餘裕さえある程] that they could send girls out to lend a hand at their friends’ houses.<sup>257</sup>

The narrator here chooses to brush past the reality that these potential marriage prospects are lacking precisely because they are too busy dying on the battlefield, preferring instead to celebrate the Chikuras’ relative surplus [餘裕さえある程] of maids and how helpful those maids are, even as they are seeing their families and lovers sent off to war. Far from a dark, ghoulish disregard for human life, however, this blasé attitude towards the national situation in

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 27-28. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 227.

fact betrays a far more authentic concern for domestic life—a concern which in fact nationalizes the importance of the novel’s archive of the everyday. Hatsu’s story is not significant because of what it reveals about wartime, but rather the war is significant for the effect it has on Hatsu and the other maids. Thus, with praise for the well-connected and loyal Hatsu [初のお蔭で] and pride over their ability to help their neighbors maintain some level of normalcy, the Chikuras trade the dark clouds of intractable national loss for a concerted effort at defending and preserving the everyday as an alternative national archive. If *Naomi*’s Jōji yearns to cultivate a harmonious marriage via maids, and the Makiokas entrust their maids with maintaining a proper state-of-affairs, the Chikuras’ actions here express a desire and a hopefulness that, even in a world plagued by devastating loss and encroaching feelings of futility, at least the balance of their own domestic world might be carefully preserved.

In order to talk about how that world is preserved, however, I must first say a word on the narrator of *The Maids*. Though not identified as any particular member of the Chikura family, the narrator is clearly a person living within the storyworld, who is close enough and on good enough terms with its major players to be aware of even the most scandalous things that occur in their home. Based on the way the narrator speaks about the maids, moreover, and clearly communicates with the Chikuras, it is reasonable to assume that they are either very close acquaintances of a similar class background, or even family. Motivated as they are by the need to record and preserve life as it was with maids in it, it is furthermore likely that the narrator also employed maids in their own household. The question of why the focus is on the Chikuras’ maids, rather than any maids employed by the narrator, is an open one. What is apparent is that they are not only personally acquainted with the Chikuras, but are in fact a trusted confidant who—considering they later express concern over what maids may think of the book but not

what the Chikuras will think—might actually have the family’s permission to publish even the most salacious details surrounding their domestic servants. Regardless of who exactly the narrator is, they clearly align themselves with the mission of recording life as it was lived with servants, have a nostalgic appreciation for that life, and are on friendly, or perhaps familial, terms with their subjects.

This element of shared domestic purpose and loyalty displayed by the narrator characterizes much of *The Maids* itself, as the lines between served and servant blur into a kind of extended family. Just like Sachiko in *The Makioka Sisters*, who harbors affection for O-haru as if she were her own daughter, Raikichi’s wife Sanko expresses similar sentiments regarding the girls working in her home. The very fact, after all, that the family is even worried about their maids’ marriage partners—especially when marrying would bring an end to their service—attests to a depth of their relationships greater than mere labor transaction; and this sense of familial connection drives much of the Chikuras approach to their maids. Sanko, for instance, in defending her indulgence of her maids fraternizing with the young men who frequent the house, explicitly references her maternal responsibilities.

Sanko was comparatively liberal with the help and, if anything, too patient [割に寛大で、物分りがよ過ぎる方で]. She was looking after other women’s daughters [他人の娘さんたちを預かっている], so it wouldn’t do to make any mistakes [間違い],<sup>258</sup> but it was her principle to tolerate such friendships [交際ぐらいいは大目に見ると云う主義], and

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<sup>258</sup> Translated as “mistakes,” the Japanese text here reads 間違い. While this ‘impropriety’ is assumed sexual in nature, the implication is not of any specific worry—that the maids might get pregnant, for instance—but simply that it was important to Sanko to keep things proper in general. The text is thus careful to explain that Sanko is not actually permitting anything untoward—even if her treatment of the maids might indeed seem too “liberal” to outsiders.



soon two or three more young men from Kansai Electric were accompanying Terada on his visits. Eventually, Etsu, Haru, and Mitsu all had boyfriends from Kansai Electric.<sup>259</sup> Sanko thus understands herself as being responsible for “looking after other women’s daughters [他人の娘さんたちを預かっている],” and, despite the narrator’s admittance that there may be some level of overindulgence on her part, the text nevertheless concedes that, in the end, there was no harm done. Whatever one may think of Sanko’s abundance of empathy [物分りがよ過ぎる] for her maids, no significant trouble or scandal ever came of it.

However—while I don’t mean to defend Sanko here [讃子のために辯護する譯ではありませんが]—neither Hatsu nor the other girls ever got into real trouble, even when out of the master’s sight [主人の目を盗んで]. [...] The maids believed Sanko [讃子を信頼し], and Sanko trusted the maids [讃子も彼女たちを信じていたらしく], and as far as Raikichi could tell, neither side had betrayed that trust [信頼を裏切る]. Not that there weren’t one or two exceptions among all the people they employed over the years, but in general the maids had depended on Sanko’s liberal nature without taking advantage of it [讃子に甘える気持はありましたけれども、圖に乗って讃子を欺くことは先づ先づありませんでした].<sup>260</sup>

If Sanko plays the part of the ‘cool mom’ with the maids, then, Raikichi too asserts a somewhat paternal affection for the maids in his employ—(even if, as in a scene I will discuss later, it is the threat of his less-than-fatherly ‘affections’ that eventually prompts one of his maids to bar the door to the maids’ room). Regardless of how their relationship with their maids stacks up against

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 27. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 226.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 226-227.

actual blood relations, or whether or not the maids themselves also see Sanko and Raikichi as parental figures, the point remains that the Chikura family receives far more from employing maids than simply a bit of help around the house. Consequently, the narrator cites the parental nature of both Raikichi's and Sanko's approaches to their maids as part of its justification for the couple's otherwise disproportionately extravagant reliance on maid labor.

You might think there was no need to employ so many maids for a household of women (except Raikichi), but these were pampered young ladies who had grown up in luxury [贅澤に育ったお嬢さん], and they couldn't have managed without at least that many servants [奉公人].<sup>261</sup> Besides, Raikichi liked to have a lot of maids around—he said it made the house bright and lively [家の中が派手で賑かな方が好き]. As a result, many, many maids have worked for the Chikura household over the years [その時代から今日まで]. [...] After the war, they split their time between that villa [in Atami] and a house in Kyoto, and the number of maids multiplied—the wife, Sanko, was a soft touch [お人好しで、人間が甘く出来て], the sort who would take on any number of girls if asked to [頼って来られると何人でも拘え込む].<sup>262</sup>

In addition to Sanko's caring nature, Raikichi's appreciation for the liveliness maids bring to a home, and how the family can hardly conceive of going about life without them, this passage echoes the close connection I have already discussed between maids and the actual house itself. After all, buried amongst the Chikuras' justifications for having so many maids is the simple fact they have two entire residences to maintain.

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<sup>261</sup> Literally, “there would be far too many inconveniences [不便なことが多うございました].”

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 205.

A close connection thus persists, not only between maids and masters, but also between the maids and the houses themselves. It is not, the text explains, as if Sanko and Raikichi are blindly determined to amass as many maids as they can, but, rather, that these maids “multiply [いよいよ殖えました]” over the years, as if springing of their own accord from the many residences the family occupies. This mutual inextricability of maids and houses is therefore not merely the result of a utilitarian calculation of how much labor is required, and Raikichi even goes so far as to cite maids’ ability to liven up the home as justification enough for their presence. Having thereby established maids’ indispensability to a happy home, the passage continues by reinforcing the pseudo-familial bonds between Raikichi and Sanko and their servants, before—albeit more covertly—attempting to reestablish a degree of distance between them.

So I really couldn’t count the number of girls who helped out in the kitchens of the Chikura household [千倉家の台所を手傳ってくれた娘さんたち] before the move [from] Atami. Some worked there for less than a month [二三日から一箇月足らず], while others stayed six, seven, even ten years or more. Whenever Raikichi meets a girl who was with the family for a long time [長い間家族同様], he treats her just as affectionately as he would his own daughter [全く我が子に対するのと気持の上で少しも變りはありません]. He even let some of the young maids who were far from their hometowns hold their engagement ceremonies at the house [田舎が遠いので、千倉家で結納を取り交して]. A few who were married and settled nearby still drop by to visit from time to time [遊びに来る若奥さんも二三人]. It’s just as they say: “Close

strangers are better than distant family [遠い親類近い他人と申しますが].”<sup>263</sup>

Familial as they may be, the Chikuras’ maids nevertheless still fit the bill of “close strangers [近い他人]”—like neighbors or friends—even if they are indeed preferable to family living far away. While the functional boundaries between family and domestic servants are thus often malleable, the extent to which they are malleable varies from maid to maid. Any individual servant may be present for as little as two or three days [二三日から] or for many years, and it is natural that familial sentiment towards each maid would be highly dependent on her tenure. Among the maids employed over the years in the Chikura household, the distance between masters and servants thus might range from those who stop by to visit for years to come, to those who simply factor into the vague, undetermined “number of girls who helped out in the kitchens [台所を手傳ってくれた娘さんたちは何人になるか数え切れません].” Given the retrospective nature of *The Maids* itself, with its frequent reminders that the way of life it depicts is already in the past, Raikichi’s fatherly approach to his former maids is surely also colored by his nostalgia, which seeks perhaps not to dissolve the class boundaries between master and maids, but rather the temporal distance between Raikichi’s own present-day household and his nostalgic longing for a household made lively by maids.

Nostalgia thus factors heavily into how the Chikuras’ maids are remembered and treated by their masters in the present day. Despite the wistful sense of comradeship and affection the novel professes for the maids of days-gone-by, *The Maids*, in its various anecdotes, betrays no small measure of anxiety over the all too permeable lines between masters and servants. As much as their enduring connection with the young women who were once their maids tethers the

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 9. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 205-206.

Chikura family to a past way of life, the anecdotes themselves often reveal a level of trepidation over the same domestic permeability between maids and masters I discussed in connection to *The Makioka Sisters*. The intimacy of the domestic space—defined as it is by the presence of maids—thus essentially renders the stories of the masters’ lives inextricable from the stories of servants, complicating the distance necessary for maintaining clear hierarchies.

An extreme example of these collapsing hierarchies, explored later in the novel, features a maid named Yuri, who rises to the enviable position of personal maid to Hidako, a famous actress. The elevated position of her mistress quickly goes to Yuri’s head, “as though her status was the same as the star’s [恰も自分が飛驒子と同等の地位にあるような気持になるとみえまして].”<sup>264</sup> Rather than resisting the maid’s rise to power, however, Hidako in fact contributes to accelerating the collapse of the maid-mistress hierarchy because, “having overcome childhood poverty to reach her present position [幼い時から苦勞をし抜いて今日の地位を築き上げた],” she “was rather softhearted and compassionate to those she employed and found it hard to let them go even if they became an inconvenience [人情に脆いところがあつて、一旦雇い入れた者には不憫がかかり、困りながらも追い出す気にはなりません].”<sup>265</sup> Empathy and even a degree of comradery thus paralyze Hidako, whose childhood experiences have led her to identify with her maid, rendering her unable to unselfconsciously assert her authority over her. The situation therefore ultimately proves untenable, and, far from keeping the peace, Hidako’s overindulgence of her maid serves only to reverse the polarities of the relationship altogether, with the actress offering to cater to the maid’s every whim as if it was she who was the servant.

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 138. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 343.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 139. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 343.

It is only by chance—upon the tragic workplace death of Yuri’s miner father back in her hometown—that this unusual arrangement comes to an end at all. Lest the reader think that it is a sense of filial duty that pulls Yuri back to her hometown, the novel takes pains to attribute her leaving to a financial settlement from her father’s employer that makes Yuri comparatively wealthy, and thereby able to maintain the sense of status to which she has grown accustomed.<sup>266</sup>

The Yuri incident may represent an extreme example of the ways in which issues of class are complicated by the intimacy of maids and masters, but *The Maids*, like *The Makioka Sisters*, is in fact rife with subtler examples of the permeability of maid-employer relationships and the fragile ecosystem which they facilitate. In its earliest pages, for instance, the novel remarks on the role of language in structuring and complicating the domestic milieu. Referencing class assumptions as they relate particularly to regional dialect, the narrator comments on the irony that, just as Raikichi’s modern-coded Tokyoite speech has been heavily influenced by the traditional-sounding Osaka dialect of his wife and the provincial-sounding Kagoshima dialect of his servants, the servants themselves must conversely use the Tokyo vocabulary in order to do their shopping at the grocer’s.<sup>267</sup> If the status conferred by Raikichi’s standardized speech is thus threatened by his proximity to the provincial speech of his servants, his servants likewise showcase a potential for upward social mobility through their own easy acquisition of standardized speech—which their very labor as servants has required them to adopt.

Another similarly linguistic venue through which the novel explores the delicate balance of domestic life is the question of how masters address their maids. Not only do names and honorific usage contain considerable information about interpersonal dynamics, but the changing

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 141. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 346.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 10. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 207.

norms and rationale for this usage are also often one of the first indicators of shifts in the larger social structure. To the extent that the novel, with its few consistent characters and loose chronology, chronicles any kind of overall ‘plot’ development at all, it is this question of names and the proper address of maids which it traces from beginning to end. The novel begins:

The world has become quite complicated in recent years [近頃は世の中がむづかしくなって参りまして]. We no longer call the household help [家庭の使用人] “maids [女中],” and we can’t simply address them by their given names, as we did in the old days—“O-hana,” or “O-tama.” Now we must say politely, “O-hana-san,” “O-tama-san.” The Chikura household is rather traditional [至って舊式] and followed the old style until recently, but last year, after some criticism, they too started using “-san.” I’m sure the current maids will scold me for not following the new etiquette, but it just doesn’t feel right [どうにも情が移りません], and since this story begins before the war, around 1937, I will call them “maids” [やはり「女中」と云う稱呼を用い] and refer to them simply by name [呼びつけ], and I beg their indulgence in advance [前以て御諒承を願っておきます].<sup>268</sup>

The novel thus begins with an act of supplication towards any maids who may read it—having made the assumption that maids may in fact read it—and an acknowledgement that, for them, the domestic sphere and way of life depicted therein is already outmoded, even offensive. This indictment of the previous way of life, moreover, is retroactive; it is not only the maids of today [現在の女中さん方] that would reject the antiquated terminology, the narrator explains, but

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 7. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 203.

even those maids who appear in the story themselves [話の中に出て参ります女中たちも]. At the same time, the narrator is unapologetic in his apology, making it clear that the only reason he ever modified how he addressed his maids in the first place was because of pressure from others [注意する人がありました]—and the only reason he would even consider doing so in the novel would be to avoid being “scolded [叱られる]” by present-day maids.<sup>269</sup>

What this passage makes clear first is that the power structures that define the events of the novel have already been upturned prior to its writing, and second that, in the estimation of someone like Raikichi, this is a transformation which compromises the integrity and sanctity of the home itself. The story thus begins with an announcement that the world has “become quite complicated” and that the types of ‘maids’ it describes have disappeared from the domestic scene. After airing a variety of grievances over the social changes whereby live-in maids became professionalized ‘helpers,’ the narrator proceeds to describe the Chikuras’ various maids, more or less chronologically, but occasionally jumping around to follow a single maid over the course of several years. In this way, the discourse time of the novel is retrospective and nostalgic, revealing a narrator opposed to but also somewhat resigned to change. There is a resultant push-and-pull among memory, reflections, and digressions that creates the impression of a kind of memoir. In the storytime, on the other hand, events are divided into either eras based on houses inhabited by the Chikuras, or by the presences of particularly memorable individual maids. Before the narrator is willing to speak of these individual maids, however, they insist first on the

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<sup>269</sup> Of course, part of the irony of the narrator’s apparent capitulation to changes in appellation is the fact that, even as he apologizes for using the ill-favored word “女中” in reference to the female domestic servants of the past, this apology itself is directed at the “女中” of today [現在の女中さん方].



disclaimer that they will be preserving the forms of address used to refer to them before such things got so complicated:

Back in the Meiji era, people called maids by all sorts of demeaning terms.<sup>270</sup> How times have changed! Now some of them object even to “maid-san [女中さん],” and so we’re careful to say “helper” or something like that [「メイドさん」だとか「お手伝いさん」だとか、いろいろ呼び方に苦心するようになった]. When addressing maids by name, people today drop the old-fashioned “O” at the beginning and add the more up-to-date “-ko” at the end, to make them “Hanako-san” or “Tamako-san.” Raikichi hates that too. He says, “If one is going to use ‘-san,’ then it should be ‘Hana-san’ and ‘Tama-san.’ ‘Hanako-san’ and ‘Tamako-san’ sound like waitresses, and my house is not a café [カフェの女給を呼ぶみたいだ、己の家はカフェじゃないんだからな!]”<sup>271</sup>

The idea that the simple act of changing how one addresses one’s maids can turn a house into a café might seem a blatant act of hyperbole borne of a bitter old man’s nostalgia for the old ways, but it is nevertheless revealing in terms of the ways in which it opposes women in domestic service to the work of women in the non-domestic service industry. Just as the casual address preferred by the narrator brings maids closer to family, polite address in a public setting carries with it the aura of loose women and modern decadence. Recall that, long before he considers fixing his relationship by moving into a Japanese-style house and hiring a maid, Jōji first meets Naomi while she is working at a café. The delicate balance of roles and lives which define the

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<sup>270</sup> The specific examples translated here as “demeaning terms” are “下女” and “下婢.” For context, the former is in fact the term most commonly used in Natsume Sōseki’s (1867-1916) writing, while the latter is more common, for instance, in the earlier works of Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943), such as in his 1911 novel *The Family* [Ie].

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 8. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 204.

historicized, politicized space called ‘home’ in these novels, is thus one which paradoxically ties the polite address of women working in public spaces to vulgarity, while the overly casual address of female domestic servants is associated with a fading—but infinitely more respectable—way of life.

The battle over naming rights is one which runs throughout *The Maids*, as, for example, when one maid insists on using her own given name, Gin [銀], rather than the name Ume [梅], which Sanko wishes to assign her.<sup>272</sup> The practice of giving maids a kind of *nom du guerre* upon their entrance into service, the narrator explains, began because they believed “it was discourteous to a girl’s parents to use her real name [本名で呼んでは親御たちに悪いと云う昔風の考から、假の名前で呼ぶようにしていた].” Times have changed, however, and rather than accepting a new name in avowed deference to her parents, Gin insists instead on asserting personal ownership over her own identity: “My name is Gin, so that will do [あたしは銀が本名ですから、銀で構いません],” she insists, “Please call me by my real name [本名で呼んで下さい].”<sup>273</sup>

In this way, the power to define themselves and their place within the family comes to rest with the maids rather than with their masters, and, moreover, it is not only their identities within the home which these maids seize control over, but even the physical space of the home itself. Of course, that a maid should have some level of control over the physical space of the home is to be expected and desired—(as taking care of the house is the very reason for her employment)—but maids in Tanizaki’s novel exercise control far beyond what is necessary

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 97. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 301.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 97-98. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 301-302.

simply for maintaining the home, indeed going so far as to frequently overrule their masters in defining the domestic space. In particular it is Hatsu—the first [初] and one of the longest serving of any of the Chikuras’ maids—who most clearly establishes her authority over the space of the Chikura family home. Despite the sense of permeability which saturates much of a lifestyle defined by maids, Hatsu’s position of power from within the maids’ room stands as one of the few relatively firm thresholds within the domestic space.

I don’t know what Hatsu thought of Raikichi, but once, when Raikichi came to the maids’ room in the middle of the night to wake her up for some reason, he found the sliding screen firmly wedged shut with a stick (Hatsu hadn’t made the stick herself; it had been there before). Once he woke her, Hatsu removed the stick and came out in her nightclothes; still, it seems she took some precautions against Raikichi. That was the only time he came to wake her in the middle of the night, so I don’t know if she was always so careful [from that point forward].<sup>274</sup>

While brushing past the suspiciously vague reasons for Raikichi’s late-night wake-up call [何かの用事が出来て] and Hatsu’s apparent need for “precautions” against him [磊吉を警戒していた], this anecdote nevertheless establishes the primacy of the maids over their own space. The stick secures the door from the inside in a way which no key could open, and the narrator assures the reader that this stick is no mere temporary precaution, but seemingly a fixture of the maids’ room. While, as I mentioned earlier, Raikichi acts for the most part, like Sanko, more or less parental towards the maids, this one incident does indicate that that might not be the whole story. Nevertheless, this failsafe only seems to come into play this one time, as the passage declares

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 33. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 232-233.

that, with the exception of this incident, approaching the maids' room late at night was not a regular habit of Raikichi's. Generally speaking, Hatsu is indeed unchallenged in her ultimate control over who does and does not enter the maids' room—to the point that her masters seem to have little authority over the room whatsoever, even if they do technically have the right to show up at their rooms late at night.

It is not, moreover, only with regards to the room itself that the passage reveals gaps in the Chikuras' domestic purview. Like in those of Sōseki's novels, which I discussed in the previous chapter, *The Maids* admits in moments such as these to substantial blind spots on the part of masters regarding the lives and thoughts of their maids. Not only do they not know whether or not their maids always saw fit to keep their door wedged shut [それからもずっと戸締りを怠らずにいたかどうか分かりませんが], but they are also unaware even of what the maids actually think of them [初は磊吉をどう思っていたか知りません]. Neither the physical space of the maids' room, nor the metaphorical space of the maids' lives, is entirely open to their masters—at least, not to the same extent that the lives of the masters are so often transparent to their maids.

The maids' room might as well be Hatsu's own separate household for all the say and oversight afforded Raikichi and Sanko, and perhaps the clearest demonstration of the total power Hatsu wields over her little part of the house is her frequent habit of welcoming other girls into it, even without the Chikuras' prior approval. Whether they simply have nowhere to go and need somewhere to keep their things for a while [行くところがないままにひと先ず初の女中部屋へ荷物を下す者], dislike their own place of employment [奉公先が気に入らない], or are looking for life advice [身の振り方を相談に来る], young girls come from all over Japan to stay in “Hatsu's room [初の女中部屋].” The text explains:

Hatsu took any number of such girls under her wing and let them stay with her in the maids' room—and since the family couldn't simply ignore them [放っておく譯にも行かず], they had to consider each case and help guide the girls in the proper direction [それぞれ考えて然るべき方面へ捌いてやらなければなりません]. At times there would be three or four girls staying in the room with Hatsu and not enough bedding for all of them, but Hatsu, generous to a fault [気前のいい初], would nonchalantly set out the mattresses meant for houseguests [お構いなしにお客布団を全部引っ張り出します]. Sanko was dumbfounded each time she did it [讚子が毎度閉口しておりました].<sup>275</sup>

Like O-haru in *The Makioka Sisters*, so generous as to give away even the family's own belongings, Hatsu's unrelenting hospitality flips the tables on her masters. Hatsu, with her open-door policy, exerts final authority over who enters the house, and the Chikuras are left with little choice but to simply accommodate these itinerant maids as if they were their own guests—quite literally allowing them to sleep on the guest futons—and to offer them their own guidance and assistance. The family thus finds themselves going out of their way to accommodate Hatsu's inclinations, much like how the Makioka family learns to accommodate O-haru's blatant disregard for her own personal hygiene.

Such an accommodation is no small task. To speak nothing of the burden put on the masters of the household, the very maids' room itself struggles to contain the teeming masses who take up residence within its walls, and, despite its small size, the room bursts with activity.

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 16-17. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 214.

I've called it the maids' room [女中部屋], but it was only four and half mats in size, or about seventy-five square feet. Often, there were seven or eight girls sleeping in there, crammed together like sardines [鮪のように折り重なって寝る]. You can't imagine the noise [その騒ぎと云ったらありません].<sup>276</sup> The more senior maids, Haru and Mitsu, would be almost pushed out of the room [どこかへ放り出されてしまって]—pressed up against the wall, their legs splaying into the hallway [壁に押しつけられたり板の間へはみ出したり]—while the other girls from her village clustered around Hatsu [初を中心に], jabbering away in their incomprehensible [譯の分らぬ] Kagoshima dialect, so that you'd swear you were in a bustling fish market in Makurazaki [とんと枕崎の魚市場へでも行ったような賑かさ]. Raikichi called these gatherings in the maids' room “the Kagoshima Prefectural Association [鹿児島縣人會].”<sup>277</sup>

The maids' room is thus “bustling [賑やかさ]” with activity, reminiscent of a busy fish market [魚市場], or perhaps a boisterous political gathering. Overflowing its borders, spilling out into the hallway, the maids' “room” is only barely contained by its four walls and four-and-a-half tatami mats. Not only have the Chikuras lost control over the room, but even the hierarchy of senior and junior maids is turned on its head, with two of the more senior maids pushed so far to the periphery as to almost be pushed out altogether. The maids' room is a space in which the normal rules of hierarchy have ceased to apply, and yet, chaotic as it is, the maids' room has a

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<sup>276</sup> Translated here as “noise,” the word 騒ぎ implies a great degree of hustle-and-bustle, beyond just the auditory, and reinforces the passage's fish market imagery, as well as the comparison of the girls themselves to piles of fish.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 17. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 214.

‘master,’ and that master is unequivocally a servant. “Needless to say, Hatsu always took the lead [いつも仲間の音頭を取って牛耳っていますのは申すまでもなく初でした],” the text explains, “The others in the group seemed to defer to her [初には一目置いているらしく], falling in line with whatever she suggested.”<sup>278</sup>

Whether through a stick in the door or limbs spilling out of the doorway, Hatsu sets the terms for the maids’ space, thereby forcing the larger household to accommodate her provisional authority as the price it pays for the service of its maids. In the following chapter, I will discuss Mishima Yukio’s much darker take on the everyday authority necessarily relinquished to servants by their masters, but, in Tanizaki’s *The Maids*, the irony of this dynamic is presented with a sense of fondness and good humor. The Chikuras may be shut out of their maids’ lives—and even much of the domestic decision-making—but the nostalgic nature of the novel and their genuine affection for their maids mean that this symbolic exclusion from the maids’ room indeed causes them little anguish. If anything, they even seem to respect their maids’ privacy, as well as the privacy of their designated space. For this very reason, the only substantial glance by the Chikuras into the unspoken privacy of the maids’ room comes not at their own behest, but rather in the form of a man named Nitta.

A snooping golf pro and amateur photographer, Nitta at one point happens upon the house when the family is out, only to find that the door to the maids’ room has been left open—the threshold between maids’ and masters’ spaces left unsealed. Hazarding a glance within, Nitta catches sight of none other than Hatsu, under-clothed and hopelessly unaware of Nitta’s arrival.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid. The Japanese text describes Hatsu as even more authoritative than does the English translation, with “everyone following her orders [誰もその命令に従っている]” to “do that [ああしろ]” or “do this [こうしろ].”

After only the briefest hesitation, Nitta seizes this opportunity—and the camera he happens to have with him—in an attempt to capture the sight.

Shocked, Nitta started to run away, but—Wait! Wait!—realizing that he would certainly never again see such an amazing “nude show [こんな素晴らしいヌード・ショウ],” he changed his mind and returned. Taking out a camera that, by luck, he happened to have with him and shoving aside the piled-up thighs [折り重なった太腿の間へ割って這入り], he pulled the sleeping Hatsu out and patiently [根気よく], from left and right, assiduously [頗る丹念に] took photo after photo of her.

The next day, after developing the film [それを現像して来まして], he showed the negatives to Sanko [讃子にだけ内證で見せたものでした], saying “Madam, I’ve got something good to show you!”

“When did you take these?!” Sanko said. “I can’t have such pranks!” And with that she hastily seized the negatives. As a result, Raikichi never got to see them, but according to Sanko, Hatsu’s body was even more seductive in photos [讃子の話だと、寫真に寫った初の肉體は一層魅惑的だったそうです].<sup>279</sup>

Why Nitta so enthusiastically presents Sanko with the illicit photographs—or assumes she would be anything but horrified by them—is unclear. Perhaps he thinks Sanko might like a window into what her maids are like while she is away, or misjudges her sense of humor, or is simply proud of his photographic artistry. Regardless, Sanko is indeed horrified by this documentation of Nitta’s accidental voyeurism, and the result is that the photographs end up suppressed, unseen by

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 18. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 215-216.



Raikichi and absent from the rest of the novel's documentation of the lives of the family's maids. Despite taking the trouble in the first place to risk photographing the vulnerable Hatsu, Nitta in the end clandestinely [内證で] reveals the photos only to Sanko, and the novel gives no further indication that they ever do surface, even against Sanko's wishes. The only mark Nitta's photographs leave upon the text at all is Sanko's odd comment to the narrator that Hatsu's body is indeed quite "seductive [一層魅惑的]." Of course, whether Sanko explicitly described Hatsu as such, or whether it is simply the impression the narrator got from what she did say, is a matter for debate, but this acknowledgement by the narrative discourse of withheld seduction adds an aura of mystery to the missing photographs, ensuring that both the narrator and the reader are well aware both that the photos existed, and of the gap they leave in the novel's documentation of its maids.

Not only the novel's act of literary exposé, then, but also the act of withholding exposure(s), contributes here to the allure of the seemingly impenetrable maids' room. Nitta's missing photos, in the methodical way in which they are taken, represent an almost anatomical study of Hatsu's naked body, extracted from the maids' room and manipulated from side to side [初の體を右から左から] for better documentation. Like a similar scene in Tanizaki's *The Key* [*Kagi*] (1956), which Atsuko Sakaki discusses in her book *The Rhetoric of Photography in Modern Japanese Literature* (2016), the photos are both fetishistic and intimate, both invasive and oddly public.<sup>280</sup> As such, they are one of the novel's greatest promises of a truly intimate glance at a maid—and, yet, the intimacy of this particular glance is one that was neither known

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<sup>280</sup> Atsuko Sakaki, *The Rhetoric of Photography in Modern Japanese Literature: Materiality in the Visual Register as Narrated by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Abe Kōbō, Horie Toshiyuki, and Kanai Mieko* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2016), 52-53.

about nor consented to by the maid herself, and which is wholly unsuitable for public view. As an unrecoverable record of an once-in-a-lifetime sight, the noted absence of the photos is at odds with the rest of the otherwise revelatory mission of the novel.

Nitta's photos are not, by far, the only 'inside view' into the lives of maids which the novel fails to present to the reader. Despite all pretensions about bringing to light the stories of maids, Tanizaki's novel in fact comprises an archive that does not illuminate the lives of maids, so much as it acknowledges the shadows that maids cast upon the homes which they serve. Tasking itself thus, not with the accurate representation of maids, but rather with recording the impressions they leave behind, *The Maids*, in the end, has no need for a forensic documentation of Hatsu's flash-exposed body. Even from the outset, the narrator makes clear that the fragmentary nature of the novel, far from detrimental to its project of chronicling the maids who passed through the Chikura household, is indeed an essential feature.

Now then, from here on, I am going to select from among all the maids who've worked in the Chikura household—from the days in Tantaka-bayashi until the move to Atami—a few who, for various reasons, made an unforgettable impression. I want to lay them out on the cutting board [俎上に上せて記してみよう], as it were, and record my memories of them. I'll try to describe them accurately [実際にあった人たちのことを、その通り記載するのが本意はあります] but, after all, my intention is to produce a novel, so I may embroider things a little [幾分の潤色を加えていないとは申せません]. Please bear this in mind; it would be a terrible insult [甚だ迷惑いたします] to Raikichi and to the people who served as models for the other characters if you were to take the events

recorded here as exactly true from start to finish.<sup>281</sup>

Much like the fourteenth century *Taiheiki* whose name it evokes, the mission of Tanizaki's *The Maids* is not simply to record the facts of history, but rather to preserve its 'impressions' through literature. In the interest of telling the story of the Chikura family's life with maids, the novel therefore focuses not just on documenting the lives of these individual maids, but rather on preserving the traces of the vanishing way of life which they signified. In pursuing this mission, *The Maids* thereby exemplifies precisely the kind of shadowbox archive which Tanizaki found possible only in literature, creating a domestic diorama out of the stories of servants and archiving a particular kind of Japanese domestic aesthetic which is extant only in memory by the time of the novel's writing.

Consequently, the narrator ends the novel by explaining that domestic servitude has indeed long since morphed drastically from the intimate, familiar phenomenon of his memory. Instead, it has been replaced with a far more perfunctory, transactional—and thus hardly story-worthy—occupational workforce, and so, regrettably, this particular literary mansion must soon close its doors to future guests.

Well then, it's about time to draw this long chronicle to a close [さて、長々つづきました太平記の物語も、この邊で終わりを告げることになります]. Mind you, various young women have come to take care of things in the kitchen more recently, thanks to a classified ad in the *Weekly Shinchō* [週刊新潮の「掲示板」などのお蔭で], and so Raikichi and the others have not been inconvenienced, I am happy to say [磊吉たちは幸いに不自由することがありません]. In fact, many of the applicants [希望者] are

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 11. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 208.

proper young ladies from good homes [相当な家庭の、優秀なお嬢さん]. These women are what is now called “helpers,” however, not the “maids” of old, so it wouldn’t do to include them in this chronicle [太平記の中に加える譯には行きません].<sup>282</sup>

The narrator thus assures, in case anyone was worried, that the housework still gets done just fine—maybe even better than ever—in the world that has replaced “the ‘maids’ of old [昔のよ  
うな「女中」や「女中さん」]” with “helpers [お手傳いさん].” No longer, however, is the house lively with the girls of the “Kagoshima Prefectural Association,” and no longer is the home and family defined by its maids as much as by its members. Even the “-san” honorific which Raikichi once so forcefully resisted has become perfunctory.<sup>283</sup> The transformation is so total that it would be anachronistic even to include the Chikuras’ present-day domestic help in the novel, and so, the narrator explains, in order to preserve the very integrity of his “chronicle [太平記],” he has little choice but to acknowledge that the world it chronicles has vanished entirely.

In the end, *The Maids*, much like “In Praise of Shadows” and *The Makioka Sisters*, can only quietly withdraw its initial protest against the tides of history, thereby, paradoxically, ensuring the necessity of its own continued existence as an archive of that history. While

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 168. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 372-373. It is worth noting here that, unlike the reference to newspapers I discussed in relation to Sōseki’s *And Then*, which refers to the kind of story that might have shared the same pages as Sōseki’s serialized novels themselves, the *Weekly Shinchō* [週刊新潮] mentioned here as a venue for classified ads seeking maids was in fact a contemporary competitor with the *Sunday Mainichi* [サンデー毎日], the weekly magazine in which *The Maids* was first serialized. Unlike Sōseki’s novel, which relativizes the significance of the news and domestic small-talk by locating them within the same space, this discrepancy here has the effect of further alienating this new world of professionalized maids from the world of the novel, which symbolically now has to leave its own literary “home” in order to acquire this new kind of domestic help.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. *TJZ*, vol. 19, 372.

acknowledging the end of the novel's world, *The Maids* also steadfastly cordons it off and safeguards it to the bitter end. Noriko Mizuta Lippit references this archival drive in Tanizaki in terms of the grotesque, reflecting on how “[i]n most of his works, especially those of his middle period, Tanizaki fastidiously excluded the social, economic, and political life of Japan, creating a literary space untouched by the forces of life in modern Japan.”<sup>284</sup> The result is neither ahistorical nor apolitical, “not merely an exercise in decadent aestheticism,” Mizuta Lippit writes, but rather the mechanism of his “efforts to overcome alienation.”<sup>285</sup> By positioning his servant-filled households against the national stage of modern Japan, Tanizaki thus expands the boundaries of both. The novels I have discussed here are emblematic of the drive to fill these spaces, particularly with a record of the contributions of domestic servants—and everything that accompanies them. While ignoring neither historical change nor the inescapability of that change, Tanizaki's novels nevertheless insist on providing a space within the archive, wherein a world defined by servants is still legible. For Tanizaki, the twin demands of building a narrative and building a ‘home’ are thus intertwined, even inextricable from each other, and the key building blocks of this world are servants.

This ‘home’ which Tanizaki builds in his stories is not the sort of idealized nativist structure that “In Praise of Shadows” admits is a kind of nostalgic fantasy, nor are his servants merely romanticized caricatures of a once humble lower class. Instead, this image of home takes the form of a challenge to the present-day social order, posed via the creation of a far more socially ambiguous space. As Gregory Golley argues, in an article revisiting the seemingly

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<sup>284</sup> Noriko Mizuta Lippit, “Tanizaki and Poe: The Grotesque and the Quest for Supernal Beauty,” *Comparative Literature* 29.3 (1977): 224.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

reactionary nativism of much of Tanizaki's later work, "Tanizaki's traditionalist fiction...increasingly sought to question the essential foundation of Japanese culture by playing dangerously with the images and motifs that seemed to embody it." In order to do so, however, "these texts had, first, to prove their own legitimacy by implicating themselves in the workings of the very universe of belief they sought to question."<sup>286</sup>

Tanizaki's literature is far too intensely engaged with the complexities of power dynamics to simply conclude in the end that they should be essential, prescriptive, and unquestioned. Golley goes on to compare Tanizaki's work with the proletarian movement in literature, which, "rather than distance itself from commodification, harnessed the revolutionary potential contained in the phenomenon of commodified culture." This is analogous, he argues, to techniques by which Tanizaki, in works like *Some Prefer Nettles* [*Tade kuu mushi*] (1928), "removes the spatial and class boundaries of traditional culture by making it available—in commodified form—for consumption by a mass audience."<sup>287</sup> By doing so, Tanizaki thus opens up a particular experience of culture and way of life not only for preservation within the archive, but also for engagement by readers of all individual and class backgrounds. Rather than a mere experiment in pure bourgeois nostalgia, Tanizaki's domestic stories exploit servant characters in order to open up new literary living spaces for his readers, regardless of whether these spaces resemble any world they themselves ever inhabited.

For Tanizaki, this intervention into making the inaccessible widely-available occurs chiefly on the level of plot—not 'plot' conceived of as a titillating tale (though of course

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<sup>286</sup> Gregory L. Golley, "Tanizaki Junichiro: The Art of Subversion and the Subversion of Art," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 22.2 (1995): 378.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 387-388.

Tanizaki wrote many such tales)—but rather ‘plot’ as a creative, structural feat. As Golley explains, “in response to Akutagawa’s disagreement over the importance of plot, Tanizaki clarifies his position, defining ‘interesting plot’ as a narrative structure that is not simply ‘novel’ or ‘strange’ but one that has a kind of ‘structural excellence’ or ‘architectural beauty.’”<sup>288</sup> This “architectural beauty,” furthermore, which I interpret perhaps more literally than Golley in my analysis of Tanizaki’s domestic milieus, is not a rarified artistry incomprehensible to the unrefined sensibilities of the layman, but rather a lovingly-designed space into which the reader is invited, welcome to look around and appreciate both the objects therein and the shadows which they cast.

As I have discussed in this chapter, the roles that servant characters play in Tanizaki’s novels are many, but their contribution to and inhabitation of these “architectural” structures—and the ways in which they welcome in Tanizaki’s readers by facilitating and enlivening both the domestic and narrative space—is a matter story-worthy all on its own. Servants in Tanizaki are part of the home, part of the story, part of a particular way of experiencing domestic life, and they thereby serve as vessels and archivists of a way of life that was already more literary than historical by the time these stories were written. Tanizaki’s servant characters, in short, are constitutive of an aesthetic and historical environment which renders them not only a significant part of the story, but also storytellers in their own right, casting long shadows over the literary worlds and the ways of life which they both inhabited and defined.

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 389.

## Chapter 3

# Physicality and Presence: Mishima Yukio's Diabolical Maids

Domestic servants are a common presence in twentieth-century Japanese fiction—as they were in twentieth-century Japan—whether as main characters or as mere background mentions, sometimes easily forgotten and other times unforgettable. In my previous chapters, I investigated the significance of servant characters on both extremes—both the quiet presences of Sōseki's servants and the impactfulness of Tanizaki's boisterous maids—by considering the degree of narrative attention paid to these characters, and have touched upon the question of gendered and class-delineated narrative labor. I have also focused on the dynamics of storytelling and the circulation of stories in a domestic setting, as well as what it means for us as readers to pay attention to an often minor class of characters—especially when that attention is at odds with the narrative weight that they are given in the texts themselves.

In this chapter on a selection of works by Mishima Yukio (1925-1970), I explore the radical potential of servant characters as powerful loci of narrative agency. Beginning with an analysis of Mishima's semi-autobiographical *Confessions of a Mask* [*Kamen no kokuhaku*] (1949), I discuss the ways in which its narrator recollects the role of maids in shaping his childhood and, particularly, the influence they had on how he relates to his body. In this vein, I then turn to a discussion of Mishima's own philosophy on the connection between the body and literature in his 1968 essay *Sun and Steel* [*Taiyō to tetsu*]. This exploration of Mishima's thoughts on the connections between the body, art, and eroticism then feeds directly into my analysis of the novel he published in the following year, *Spring Snow* [*Haru no yuki*] (1969), in which servant bodies orchestrate and tell all manner of tales, rebelling against their masters and



taking control over their circumstances. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the embodied presences of servant characters find inroads into the narrative (and into quiet rebellion) through a reading of the role of the servant Charlotte in Mishima's 1965 play *Madame de Sade* [*Sado kōshaku fujin*].

It is difficult to say with an author like Mishima, whose fervent right-wing politics and dramatic suicide constitute much of his legacy, whether his literary legacy is overshadowed by his fanaticism or whether that fanaticism does in fact cast its shadow so absolutely over his literature. Perhaps for this reason, Mishima inhabits the ambiguous space of indisputably canonical (and highly exportable) modern Japanese author, as well as the easily dismissible position of commercial writer and the stigma of 'right-wing lunatic.' It is precisely for this reason, however, that I elect to read in Mishima's work a kind of from-the-ground-up 'revolutionary' politics which might seem more recognizable as characteristic of the left. My reason for this is simple: more so than a conventional liberal-conservative continuum, the defining characteristic of revolution is that it occurs from underneath and from within, via the knowledgeable exploitation of fissures already present within the system it seeks to upend. The 'counter' to culture is not a re-invention of culture as such but a demonstration that an alternative is already present, that the detonation codes have already been written and that it is not the revolutionary but the society that has made the revolutionary necessary, which has prescribed its own demise. That which is so intimate that it is trusted not to rebel has the element of surprise, and that surprise manifests often all the more strongly as threat, conflict, and anguish within the narratives of those dependent upon the status quo than it might in more straightforwardly proletarian literature. The domestic working class thus appears in Mishima's works as just that—

a threat, a source of conflict, of manipulation, perhaps not of open revolution, but at least as a force for rebellion—and therefore as a confirmation of the fragility of the power of its ‘masters.’

Mishima himself had experience and a vested interest in the issue of class and its various fragilities and ambiguities. As Masao Miyoshi discusses in *Accomplices of Silence*:

Upper-class experience is no doubt a fact of Mishima’s personal life. But in [*Confessions of a Mask*], the life style of privileged families—with their numerous servants and regular summer vacations—is not so obtrusively center stage as it often is in later works. [...]

And yet even in this novel, there is already at work an extraordinary sensibility regarding class distinctions. The boy’s sexual response to the nightsoil man, for instance, is not just one example of a rich kid’s romantic sympathy for the poor and underprivileged; there is something more psychological here, resembling masochistic identification.<sup>289</sup>

At the same time, Mishima often approaches the aristocracy in a “downright vulgar” way—his choice to write a play about the family of the Marquis de Sade alone stands testament to this—and Miyoshi describes some of his serialized novels as “almost like fan magazine exposés on the semi-scandalous lives of movie stars.”<sup>290</sup> There is a tawdriness to the way in which Mishima’s reader gazes openly upon the inner lives of characters who themselves are concerned explicitly with keeping those inner lives hidden away and sanitized, and in fact novels like *Spring Snow* often feel more than enough like a literary peep show, or soap opera drama. That exposé often occurs through the means of a perpetually present servant class that is uniquely positioned to observe and inform—and even to intervene—in the ways in which its masters’ stories are

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<sup>289</sup> Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 155.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-156.

narrated and how they unfold, both within the inner circle and in how they are leaked to the outside world. I have discussed this function previously in terms of a kind of literary servitude, though in the previous two chapters there was little need to challenge the assumption that one can serve both master and story. The conflicts of Mishima's literature, however, are embroiled within the mechanisms and machinations of a literary servitude which creates messes instead of cleaning them, and throws matters into disarray without ever tidying up. The themes of Mishima's most famous stories are often prefigured and refracted by the ways in which servants brazenly occupy the literary space, and that occupation is often an explicitly violent one, antagonistic as it is to their masters' 'plots.'

### ***Confessions of a Mask: From the Mouths of Maids***

In Mishima's semi-autobiographical *Confessions of a Mask*, servants represent a shaping presence in the domestic sphere and thus in the developments of the narrator's youth. Kou-chan, the novel's exhaustingly and claustrophobically introspective main character and narrator, obsesses over the theory, the psychology, and the sexology which he believes provide the tools for synthesizing his complex identity and experiences into simultaneously both a narrative of sexual development and a taxonomy of sexual orientation. What he ends up with, however, is an all the more convoluted means for anguishing over his inability to define and reveal his 'truth.' As such, *Confessions of a Mask* forms a meta-narrative, a story about writing a story, a story which Kou-chan endeavors (and ultimately fails) to transcribe onto himself. It is not an I-novel and in fact, in Miyoshi's words, seems to "mock the Japanese literary preoccupation with the personal I-novel," replacing the I-novel's pretenses of bare-faced honesty with a more underhanded "calculated aura of exposure meant to deflate the slightest suspicion of

dishonesty.”<sup>291</sup> Although the crushing pressure *Confessions of a Mask* places upon the centrality of the ‘I’ would be enough to make a more exemplary I-novel—what with its third-person pretensions of objectivity—break into a sweat, its primary burden is literary over revelatory. Instead of freeing him from his mental anguish, or serving as some sort of universalized commentary on the human condition, the self-consciousness and convoluted trappings of interpretation through which the narrator struggles to create coherence throughout the novel ultimately leave him lost in the sea of discourse he has poured for himself. This quagmire is best exemplified by a pair of images which bookend the novel—the “glittering, threatening reflections [きらぎらと凄まじい反射]” coming off a spilled beverage, as Kou-chan takes in the form of an attractive sailor at the end of the book, and his ostensible earliest childhood memory of the “reflection or...ray of light” illuminating the wooden washbasin he was bathed in as a baby [反射のためか、それともそこへも光がさし入っていたのか、なごやかに照り映えて].”<sup>292</sup> Keith Vincent, in *Two-Timing Modernity: Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction*, discusses these two “reflecting [反射]” images in terms of the way in which the novel as a whole “asserts a sort of transcendence of linear temporality” that allows for the coexistence of both “a linear temporality of cause and effect, and a circular one of predetermination,” which together combine to accommodate narratives of both sexual history and sexual identity.<sup>293</sup> Narrative thus becomes a process whereby meaning is created through a self-reflexive process that asserts its own already-meaningfulness, and, moreover, one in which

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>292</sup> Mishima Yukio, *Confessions of a Mask*, trans. Meredith Weatherby (New York: New Directions, 1958), 3, 254. *MZ*, vol. 1, 176, 364.

<sup>293</sup> J. Keith Vincent, *Two-Timing Modernity: Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 190.

the continuity of the narrator is proclaimed to extend beyond the constraints of both first-person revelation and third-person omniscience. I will argue here that this dissemination of narrative authority, the consequence of the competition between self-reflection and self-assertion, extends even further, beyond the narrator alone and onto his supporting characters as well, just as delicately as it hovers between the narrator as creative storyteller and the narrator as straightforward confessor.

With this contention in mind, I turn now to a number of servants who act in the opening chapters of *Confessions of a Mask* in order both to facilitate and frustrate the narrator's attempts to narrate himself, in ways in which few other characters in the rest of the novel ever get a chance to. Via the power of their physical proximity to the sickly, homebound boy, they represent a worldly, vulgar authority distinct from the detached, grandmotherly sentiments and expectations by which Kou-chan is otherwise surrounded, as well as a departure from the more cerebral 'experts' Kou-chan vigorously defers to in the construction of his self-image. In a novel in which the only people who ostensibly get the privilege of telling the narrator who he is are literary figures and sexologists, the servants of his younger years nevertheless manage to make serious inroads into the process. It is one of the young narrator's servants, for instance, who first informs him that the captivating picture of the young man dying beautifully in his picture book is actually Joan of Arc—a woman—and thus it is a servant who brings about one of his earliest crises in the world of gender, sex, and violence.

I had several picture books about that time, but my fancy was captured, completely and exclusively, only by this one—and only by one eye-opening picture in it. I could dream away long and boring afternoons gazing at it, and yet when anyone came along, I would feel guilty without reason and would turn in a flurry to a different page. The watchfulness

of a sicknurse or a maid vexed me beyond endurance. I longed for a life that would allow me to gaze at that picture all the day through. Whenever I turned to that page my heart beat fast. No other page meant anything to me.<sup>294</sup>

Kou-chan exhibits an early obsessiveness with the picture that anticipates the same obsessiveness with which he turns his gaze later inward. However, at this juncture, in sharp contrast to other places in the text, he is also hyperaware of the defining capacity in the gaze of others, terrified, without even understanding why, that one of the servants might glean more from witnessing his obsession than he is ultimately able to glean from the picture itself. Servants—sicknurses and maids [看護婦や女中のお守り]—in this passage represent a kind of passively policing patrol, the threat of whose gaze is ambiguous but very real. The true nature of this threat is realized soon enough:

But one day my sicknurse happened to open the book to that page. While I was stealing a quick sideways glance at it, she said:

“Does little master know this picture’s story?”

“No, I don’t.”

“This looks like a man, but it’s a woman. Honestly. Her name was Joan of Arc.

The story is that she went to war wearing a man’s clothes and served her country.”

“A woman . . .?”

I felt as though I had been knocked flat. The person I had thought a *he* was a *she*. If this beautiful knight was a woman and not a man, what was there left? (Even today I feel a repugnance, deep rooted and hard to explain, toward women in male attire.)

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<sup>294</sup> *Confessions of a Mask*, 12. *MZ*, vol. 1, 182.

This was the first “revenge by reality” that I had met in life, and it seemed a cruel one, particularly upon the sweet fantasies I had cherished concerning *his* death. From that day on I turned my back on that picture book. I would never so much as take it in my hands again.<sup>295</sup>

The horror of finding out that such a beautiful young man is actually a woman is so intense for Kou-chan that only the safe distance of many years can undo the trauma inflicted upon him by the servant’s brash conveyance of that knowledge. Kou-chan’s amorphous fears are realized and the image which bewitched him is demystified and profaned under the scrutiny of his sicknurse, who opens to the page and allows Kou-chan only a final sideways, stolen glance at a picture which he had previously cherished so close at hand. What the older Kou-chan terms a “revenge by reality [現実からの復讐]” in his retrospective narrative is to his servant simply reality, common knowledge (and maybe a hint of admiration for a woman who seized control of her own story) which replaces Kou-chan’s self-indulgent fantasies and violent musings with only confused disappointment and a misplaced dogmatism about gendered clothing.

Later, however, inspired by the sensuous gaudiness of the female magician Shokyokusai Tenkatsu, the young Kou-chan himself sneaks into his mother’s wardrobe so as to try out women’s clothing, only for his brilliant plan and the euphoric rush of his costuming to be brought to a tragic end after he excitedly reveals himself to the women in his family:

I assumed a solemn air and, dressed like this, rushed into my grandmother’s sitting-room.

Unable to suppress my frantic laughter and delight, I ran about the room crying:

“I’m Tenkatsu! Me, I’m Tenkatsu!”

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid. *MZ*, vol. 1, 183.

My grandmother was there sick abed, and also my mother and a visitor and the maid assigned to the sickroom [病室づきの女中]. But not a single person was visible to my eyes. My frenzy was focused upon the consciousness that, through my impersonation, Tenkatsu was being revealed to many eyes. In short, I could see nothing but myself.

And then I chanced to catch sight of my mother's face. She had turned slightly pale and was simply sitting there as though absentminded. Our glances met; she lowered her eyes. I understood. Tears blurred my eyes.

What was it I understood at that moment, or was on the verge of understanding?

[...]

The maid grabbed me and took me to another room. In an instant, just as though I were a chicken for plucking, she had me stripped of my outrageous masquerade.<sup>296</sup>

Kou-chan's foray into female clothing is thus brought to an abrupt end by a maid, who with no ceremony to speak of strips him of what was for him a transformation blurring the boundary between masculine and feminine, between Kou-chan and Tenkatsu, one which offered to obliterate many of the walls and intellectualizations which he later uses to cage himself in. In the span of mere moments he moves from the conviction that, in crystal clarity, "I could see nothing but myself [私自身をしか見ていなかった]" to the realization that, conversely, this apparent clarity was but "outrageous masquerade [不埒な仮装]." This demolition of his "masquerade [仮装]" via the brusque hands of the maid, moreover, prefigures the narrator's later attempt to remove his own mask [仮面], an act which confounds him at every turn, but one which the maid accomplishes as if it were any other household chore. His fascination with female dress does

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 19. *MZ*, vol. 1, 188.



persist past this incident, but it is met with further derision from a servant—this time a houseboy [書生] who takes him to see a film:

Once I went with our student houseboy to see a film version of the operetta *Fra Diavolo*. The character playing Diavolo wore an unforgettable court costume with cascades of lace at the wrists. When I said how much I should like to dress like that and wear such a wig, the student laughed derisively. And yet I knew that in the servant quarters he often amused the maids with his imitations of the Kabuki character Princess Yaegaki.<sup>297</sup>

Just as the sicknurse repulses Kou-chan with the picture of Joan of Arc performing maleness, a houseboy steps in to destroy any attraction Kou-chan might have felt towards the performance of femininity by men. The houseboy laughs [軽蔑したような笑い方をした] at Kou-chan's desire to dress in court costume and wig, thus furthering Kou-chan's own pathologization of such. It is this pathologization that makes the event noteworthy enough to be featured prominently in his self-narrative. The novel *Confessions of a Mask* is ultimately the story of the pathological as identity formation, and the houseboy's open derision thus exerts a powerful force on the narrator's self-definition. The implications of this pathologization resonate all the more forcibly, given the added insult that the houseboy himself is not at the mercy of the same standards, known as he is for his own imitations of female characters. It is the fact that the houseboy's own female performance is done for the amusement of the maids within the maids' room [女中部屋で] which sanctions it within the realm of heterosexuality in a way not afforded to Kou-chan's more self-expressive performances. Thus the same maids who so hastily plucked away Kou-

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 19. *MZ*, vol. 1, 188-189.

chan's brilliant accoutrements are permitted to take pleasure in the houseboy's crossdressing without any sense of irony or shame. This lack of internal conflict, which Kou-chan sees modeled by the servants around him, further cements his own sense of aberration, as servants in *Confessions of a Mask* present themselves as an authoritative and policing presence in the realms of the physical and the sexual.

Perhaps then it is no surprise that Kou-chan quickly grows paranoid and distrustful towards his servants. One passage in particular conveys a level of purposeful power play between Kou-chan and one of the maids [女中].

One day I would bully a maid to tears, and the next morning I would see her serving breakfast with a cheerfully smiling face, as though nothing had happened. Then I would read all manner of evil meanings into her smiles. I could not believe them to be other than the diabolical smiles that come from being fully confident of victory. I was sure she was plotting to poison me out of revenge. Waves of fear billowed up in my breast. I was positive the poison had been put in my bowl of broth, and I would not have touched it for all the world. I ended many such meals by jumping up from the table and staring hard at the maid, as though to say "So there!" It seemed to me that the woman was so dismayed at this thwarting of her plans for poisoning me that she could not rise [毒殺の企図が破れた落胆に立ちもやらず], but was only staring from across the table at the broth, now become completely cold, with some dust floating on its surface, and telling herself I'd left too much for the poison to be effective.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 24. *MZ*, vol. 1, 192-193.

It is probably a fair assumption that the maid is not actually trying to poison Kou-chan. Instead, this passage details the theatricality of Kou-chan's process of pouting over his food, reading into the maid's behavior, and searching her face for some sign of mirth or ill-intent [勝算から来る悪魔的な微笑], some window into an inner being wound as tightly as his own sense of identity and purpose. The narrator normalizes his self-directed paranoid analysis via the assumption that the maid is just as diabolically calculating about domestic service as he is about self-analysis, making her a formidable rival in some kind of domestic spy-vs-spy. Her intimate access to his food, and therefore the health of his body, her ability to poison it and potentially get her revenge [復讐], or even wage a rebellion by toppling him from the inside, gives her an unequivocal upper hand. Kou-chan may be able to make her cry, but if those tears translate directly to poison in his soup, there is little he could do about it, besides, perhaps, starve to death. Of course, this subversion is all in Kou-chan's mind. In every way that matters, both in the events of the story and in the mind of the maid herself, Kou-chan never loses his class-given authority and the power to harass a woman of lower station without reproach as he taunts her for her failed valiant attempts simply to feed him: "So there! [それみたことか]."

Scenes such as these reveal, not actual subversions or conscious rebellions by servants, but rather the psychological impact of the fear of such upon those masters whose positions of power require the surrendering of much of their control; and it is often on the site of the body where this surrender occurs. The path to this maid's revenge is through Kou-chan's stomach, just as a maid "plucks" his female dress from his body, just as the sicknurse so casually re-genders the body of Joan of Arc. For a character obsessed with the development of his identity as a product of his intellectual mind, Kou-chan sure is plagued by servants' authority in the realm of the body. All of these instances in Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* thus entail feelings about

and fears of duplicity and betrayal, prefiguring a tendency of servants in Mishima to threaten order and frustrate desire. Mishima's work tacitly acknowledges the power servants are allowed over their masters due to the requirements of service itself, demonstrating the ways in which that embodied power threatens the unassailability of their masters' carefully-crafted narratives and challenges the actual tenacity of their supposed authority.

### **Presence, Threat and Power: Mind and Body in *Sun and Steel***

It is not only through their ambiguous smiles and enforcement of gender binaries that Mishima's maids set the terms of their worlds and their masters' worlds. I have identified the implication of servants' domain over the physical through reading these passages in *Confessions of a Mask*, but Mishima's critical interventions are just as useful for understanding the significance of servants' markedly embodied existence within the home and family. The concept of domesticity already carries with it an overdetermination of the appearance and function of the body within the domestic space. Whether the sexualization or desexualization of the housewife body, the physical labor of housework, or the nourishment of the body at mealtimes, the home is a space ultimately bound to both the reality and fictions of the body, and few authors have been more concerned with the intersections of the body and its environs than Mishima Yukio.

In his essay *Sun and Steel*, Mishima lauds an ontology based on the body yet harmonious with the mind, one which forges a new kind of language with its own means of expression. "Of late," he laments,

I have come to sense within myself an accumulation of all kinds of things that cannot find adequate expression via an objective artistic form such as the novel. [...] I have groped around, therefore, for some other form more suited to personal utterance and have come

up with a kind of hybrid between confession and criticism, a subtly equivocal mode that one might call “confidential criticism.”<sup>299</sup>

Peter Abelsen, in his article “Irony and Purity: Mishima,” analyzes this “confidential criticism [秘められた批評]” at length, focusing on a duality similar to that of the subjective and the objective in Romantic Irony. However there is a difference, he argues, in that in confidential criticism “the subjective side entails images that are sensual, violent and morbid at the same time, while the ‘criticism’ does more than counteract these images—it shows a convergence of various philosophical ideas which is in itself most telling with respect to the Mishima phenomenon.”<sup>300</sup> Writing at a time still within the critical shadow of I-novel discourse, Mishima imagined an ‘I’ that was not in fact hidden away and in need of scandalous revelation, but was rather ‘hidden’ in plain sight, plainly physical, one which revealed itself in the space of the body. Mishima explains:

The “I” with which I shall occupy myself will not be the “I” that relates back strictly to myself, but something else, some residue, that remains after all the other words I have uttered have flowed back into me, something that neither relates back nor flows back.

As I pondered the nature of that “I,” I was driven to the conclusion that the “I” in question corresponded precisely with the physical space I occupied [占める肉体の領域]. What I was seeking, in short, was a language of the body [「肉体」の言葉].<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Mishima Yukio, *Sun and Steel*, trans. John Bester (New York: Kodansha International, 1970), 7. *MZ*, vol. 33, 506.

<sup>300</sup> Peter Abelsen, “Irony and Purity: Mishima,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30.3 (1996): 656.

<sup>301</sup> *Sun and Steel*, 7. *MZ*, vol. 33, 506.

Whether he actually achieved this language of the body—and whether or not it is even an accomplishable ideal—is, of course, up for debate. Gavin Walker, for instance, in his essay “The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio,” is critical of *Sun and Steel*, describing the way it “figures a complex set of aporetic schemas that interact and co-determine each other between the work and the figure of Mishima, as well as between the role of critique and its limits in relation to this space,” arguing that the essay is responsible not for providing a clarifying language but instead for constructing an untouchable authorial myth that “continually elide[s] the approachability of ‘Mishima,’ serving to continue a mythic discursive circuit of representation, and setting up dangerous limitations for critique.”<sup>302</sup>

It is precisely this illusion of unapproachability, however, that I argue is illuminated (and contested) by the position of servants in Mishima’s texts. *Sun and Steel*, Walker continues, enacts a “domination” that “is not a self-domination, or a domination of social-historical circumstances” but rather “represents an attempt to dominate and control the conditions of reception underlying a given reader’s critical grasp of this rhetoric itself.”<sup>303</sup> The ‘antagonist’ of *Sun and Steel* is thus the thought of the narrative left in the hands of the other, a world wherein neither words nor body are capable of centralizing and maintaining a coherent self-sameness. The ability of servants in Mishima’s works to frustrate the quest for a sense of cohesive identity, to stir up their masters’ stories, therefore reveals within them a brutish power closer to the embodied authority Mishima seeks for himself.

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<sup>302</sup> Gavin Walker, “The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio: Limits and anxieties in the autofictional machine,” in *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture*, eds. Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent (New York: Routledge, 2010), 165.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

Mishima's attempt at accounting for this physical-literary dilemma was a recipe of time spent at the gym plus time spent pumping up his writing, an attempt which he argues placed his "fetish for reality and physical existence and [his] fetish for words on the same level" whereby "the identical origin of the formal beauty of the wordless body and the formal beauty in words" might allow him to "start to talk of the ideas of the flesh and the loquacity of the body [肉体の思考と饒舌について私が語り始める]."<sup>304</sup> Physicality, after all, was the centerpiece of the "age of the *samurai*" which so captivated Mishima, an age in which "the men that had been [the Court's] servants now became warriors," loyalty and physical labor were seen as the path to enlightenment, and "[t]he many chores that monks have to perform around the monastery are no less important than meditation" in their pursuit of *satori*.<sup>305</sup> In more secular terms, Mishima explains, "it seemed to me that the flesh could be 'intellectualized' to a higher degree, could achieve a closer intimacy with ideas, than the spirit [精神よりも肉体のほうがより高度に観念的であり得、より親密に観念に馴染み得るように思われた]."<sup>306</sup> (This, of course, is bad news for anyone who spends all their time nose-deep in books, though it could possibly hint at why the prospect of deep cleaning the bathroom is so appealing when one must be writing.)

The idea-privileged realm of writing, assumed abstracted from the physical, however, was indeed Mishima's realm. This made it all the more pressing for him to find a way to reconcile these two worlds, just as he found it necessary to reconcile the light of criticism with the vulgarity of barefaced confession. This quest to unite the intellectual and the physical eventually leads Mishima to the conclusion in *Sun and Steel* that ideas and the body must occupy

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<sup>304</sup> *Sun and Steel*, 18-19. *MZ*, vol. 33, 515-516.

<sup>305</sup> Abelsen, 673-674.

<sup>306</sup> *Sun and Steel*, 16. *MZ*, vol. 33, 514.

together a paradox—one in which they are simultaneously both entirely foreign and so intimately connected to each other that the mind is forced to manifest upon the body psychosomatically, and vice versa. Mishima explains:

For ideas are, in the long run, essentially foreign [異物] to human existence; and the body—receptacle of the involuntary muscles, of the internal organs and circulatory system over which it has no control—is foreign to the spirit, so that it is even possible for people to use the body as a metaphor for ideas, both being something quite alien to human existence as such. And the way in which an idea can take possession of the mind unbidden, with the suddenness of a stroke of fate, reinforces still further the resemblance of ideas to the body with which each of us, willy-nilly, is endowed, giving even this automatic, uncontrollable function a striking resemblance to the flesh.<sup>307</sup>

It is this involuntariness, this stored potential energy and this stroke of fate, which I argue characterizes the uneasy stalemate between the aristocratic and bourgeois characters and the servant class in Mishima's literature. The constant presence of the servant body constitutes not precisely servant agency itself—nor the sort of romantic ideal that one might be able to 'save' servants from the subjugation of their servitude—but it does allow for a perpetually open conduit for energies with their own internal workings, which may threaten to upset the balance of power even while operating well within its bounds. The body functions much like the mind—whether mundane, profane, or ecstatic—and is thus for Mishima a site of both transformative creativity and the potential for violence. That Mishima's servants are so often defined by the strength of their physical presence, and their intimacy and knowledge of the body, situates servants in his

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.



novels as fleshy nodes of latent destructive power coexisting within the very spaces wherein maintaining the appearance of power is tantamount to actually wielding it. Servants' affinity with the body gives them reign over a more immediate and authentic existence—and thus a more inspired and expressive one—than that afforded their philosophically-inclined masters. The suffering of these masters arises from their failure to follow what Mishima terms a “healthy process of development” whereby words and reality “can often work together without conflict, even in the case of the born writer, giving rise to a highly desirable state of affairs in which a training in words leads to a fresh discovery of reality” or, more accurately, a “rediscovery [再発見]” of reality dependent upon having previously “possessed the reality of the flesh still unsullied by words [肉体の現実を、まだ言葉に汚されずに所有していたこと].”<sup>308</sup>

Regardless of how one might feel about the idea of pure, unthinking servants as either an ideal or as a literary image, to be pure and unthinking, for Mishima—or at least, to be initially free of the tyranny of words—is to possess a kind of enviable power, an unpolluted knowledge. Servants in Mishima, for that reason, are simply—and erotically—dangerous.

Whether or not Mishima's own physical body ever spoke the poetry he wished to compose, the most loquacious bodies in Mishima's body of work are those of his servants. Through their own unproblematic connections to their bodies and the physicality of their labor they become narrators of fate in ways denied to their more cerebral and decadent masters. This is not to say, of course, that Mishima Yukio was some champion of domestic laborers everywhere. In fact, the immediate, violent presence of these bodies—their sexuality, their mobility, their intimacy—speaks not to proletarian sentiment but rather to bourgeois fantasy and fragility. In

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<sup>308</sup> *Sun and Steel*, 9. *MZ*, vol. 33, 508.

order to be served, one must grant the servant a level of access to one's mind and body that cannot be trusted even to one's closest peers, and thus, in the sense that servants' physical labor guides the day-to-day lives of their masters, their loquacious bodies act as the narrators, the plotters, of their masters' stories.

The domestic proximity of servants in twentieth-century Japan—an intimacy that was emotional, physical, and thus potentially devastating—finds its treacherous extreme in the ways in which so many of Mishima's servant characters threaten the authority and self-determination of their masters. Servants, entrusted implicitly both with the tawdry and mundane details of family politics and daily life, were often as potentially dangerous as they were indispensably helpful, and thus the potential consequences of the physical presence of servants and the myriad questions surrounding the visibility of their bodies and labor proved fertile ground for much of Mishima's fiction.

### **Keep Your Servants Close (and Closer and Closer): Iinuma and the Question of the Houseboy as Both Friend and Enemy**

The potential power afforded servants in the realm of the physical shows up perhaps nowhere more clearly than in Mishima's 1969 novel *Spring Snow*. The novel, which takes place in the early Taishō period (1912-1926), tells the story of the Matsugaes and Ayakuras, two aristocratic families navigating both the impending obsolescence of their way of life and a scandalous affair between their young heirs, even as the Ayakuras attempt to arrange a marriage between their daughter Satoko and an imperial prince. Far from masters of their physical bodies, the novel's aristocratic characters are so caught up in the world of ideas, fantasies, and philosophies abstracted from their own physicality—condemning their bodies as profane and

surrendering them to the hands of others—that this in effect bars them from ever truly achieving the enlightenment they desire.

Take, for instance, Matsugae Kiyooki, the introverted, introspective young master in *Spring Snow*, in comparison to his swarthy servant Iinuma Shigeyuki, whose “flesh” is described as “a distastefully coarse and heavy vessel... for his overpowering spirit of loyalty [押しつけがましい忠実は、そういう厚い重い煩わしい肉に護られていた].” Iinuma’s body, with its “matted tangle” of chest hair and its “rough-skinned, pimpled cheeks,” the text explains, represents a “direct physical affront [彼の肉体そのものが清頭に対する非難に充ち]” to his master, Kiyooki, and it is not only the reader who is informed of this affront, but also Iinuma himself who is aware of the power of his flesh.<sup>309</sup>

...Iinuma stood there, a virile figure with his matted chest showing through his open kimono. In truth, he secretly regretted that his body did not correspond to the purity of his zeal [自分には清らかな心に照応する肉体が与えられていないことを彼は悲しんだ]. On the other hand, Kiyooki, whose body he saw as a sacred vessel, lacked the single-minded purity required of all true men [あのような清麗な白い清い肉体の持主の清頭には、男らしいすがすがしい素朴な心が欠けていた].<sup>310</sup>

The dichotomy elucidated in Mishima’s *Sun and Steel* is instructive of the divide between Kiyooki and Iinuma. “Purity” of body and “purity” of zeal are divided between the two, neither of whom can attain self-realization without the other. When Iinuma is ultimately forced to leave the service of the family due to a sexual relationship with a family maid—an affair which I

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<sup>309</sup> *Spring Snow*, 162. *MZ*, vol. 13, 172.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. *MZ*, vol. 13, 84.

discuss in depth later in this chapter—this unfortunate parting from his master only widens the schism between the servant’s pure physicality and the tightrope performance of Kiyooki’s aristocratic decorum. The farewell is painful, but, while it brings Iinuma to tears, bowing and beseeching Kiyooki’s forgiveness and continued patronage, Kiyooki, “deciding that noblesse oblige [貴族的な態度] was the best course,” opts to “[choose] his every word with care and an eye to its suitability for the occasion” and “made it patently clear that in a situation such as this, the emptiest words were those that aroused the strongest emotions [何ら感情の裏付のない言葉のほうが、人を一そう感動させるという現場をありありと示した].”<sup>311</sup> Between Iinuma’s tears and Kiyooki’s empty platitudes, Mishima’s attention to the dialectic of mind and body is thus evident in this exchange, and with it the latent power and pathos of the domestic servant body. Immediately prior to Iinuma’s departure, for instance, the relationship between Kiyooki and servants writ large is described as overwhelmingly oppressive and prohibitive, and so perhaps it comes as no surprise that Kiyooki would express relief at their eventual disappearance:

Now there was nobody left in the world who was privy to his innermost feelings. No further obstacle would prevent him from disguising his emotions. The devoted servants, ever at his elbow, with their customary words: “Please leave everything to us. We know just how the young master feels,” had been removed [『若様のお気持ちはよく分かっております。お任せください。』と不断に語っている、あの[腹心]どもの目も身辺から払い去られた]. Not only was he happy to be free of that master conspirator,

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 162-163. *MZ*, vol. 13, 172-173.

Tadeshina, but also of Inuma, whose loyalty had become so intense as to threaten him with suffocation [ほとんど肌をすりつけるまでに親密になった忠実さ].<sup>312</sup>

I will also discuss this “master conspirator [大嘘つき]” known as Tadeshina shortly, but first I would like to emphasize that, for Kiyooki, the servants’ violence lies not in their potential rebellion per se, but rather in their offers of unwavering loyalty, in their attempts to empathize with him, in their understanding gazes, in their devotion and their promises of anticipating his needs. It is this devotion and loyalty through which Inuma in particular represents a shadowlike presence in Kiyooki’s life—a constant, silent haunting. The scene of Kiyooki’s and Inuma’s parting highlights their connection:

Inarticulate as ever, Inuma merely stood there crying. By his very silence he was trying to tell Kiyooki something. Their relationship had lasted some seven years, beginning in the spring when Kiyooki was twelve. Since his recollection of his thoughts and feelings at that age were rather vague, he had the general impression that Inuma had always been there beside him [記憶の遡るかぎりそこには飯沼がいるように思われた]. If his boyhood and youth cast a shadow [少年期がかたわらに落とした影], that shadow was Inuma, in his sweaty, dark blue, splashed-pattern kimono [汚れた紺緋の濃紺の影だった].<sup>313</sup>

Inuma’s presence follows Kiyooki wherever he goes—the master’s existence commensurate with that of his closest servant. The novel makes it clear furthermore that much of Inuma’s power is potential, implied, rather than active or activated. More sleeper agent than servant, he

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 160-161. *MZ*, vol. 13, 171. Literally, “loyalty that had become so intimate as to nearly chafe against his skin.”

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 161. *MZ*, vol. 13, 171.

holds power over Kiyooki through polite inaction, rather than open rebellion. After a rift opens between them, Inuma and Kiyooki find themselves sitting together in Kiyooki's room. Inuma's attention is trained on a copy of a menu from the Matsugaes' recent feast, and Kiyooki's attention is trained on Inuma. "Kiyooki kept staring at him, one expression succeeding another on his face," the text reads, "[o]ne moment his eyes seemed full of contempt, the next brimming with pathetic appeal [蔑みをあらわしたり哀願を湛えたりして、落着かなかった]." The distance between them is great, and Kiyooki yearns more than anything to bridge it, but he is met only with Inuma's "insensitive deference [無神経な遠慮]." Inuma is being nothing but accommodating towards Kiyooki, but for Kiyooki, who wishes for connection, Inuma's respect in fact strikes him as its own cruel rebellion. "If only Inuma had been capable of forgetting the master-retainer relationship at the moment," the text explains, "and had put his hand on Kiyooki's shoulder like an elder brother, how easily he could have started to talk [主従の別も忘れて、彼が兄のように清顕の肩へ手をかけて訊いてくれたら、どんなに喋り易かったことであろう]." <sup>314</sup> It would take no more than a touch to break the physical and psychic barrier between the master and servant, but, given that no such touch is imminent, that fact alone is enough to agitate Kiyooki. Inuma's otherwise all-encompassing gift of physicality thus fails to translate across the boundary of master and retainer, summarily denying Kiyooki the connection he seeks. This barely-there barrier of social propriety, while it holds tight, is already enough to unsettle Kiyooki's emotions—emotions which might make themselves known if only Inuma could simply look up from the menu and lay his hand on Kiyooki's shoulder.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 139. *MZ*, vol. 13, 149-150.

In this way, the balance of power continues to shift until Kiyooki, having “turned Iinuma into his confidant [自分の腹心にしてしまい],” finds that he has nurtured a “mutual understanding...probably too deep for master and retainer [この主従はお互いをこんな風に理解すべきではなかった]”—a “mutual understanding,” that is, which forces Iinuma away but also enables Kiyooki finally to neutralize “the power that had dominated him for so long [彼ののしかかる力を無力にしてしまった].”<sup>315</sup> It is difficult to take the text at its word, however, as Mishima describes Kiyooki more as a jilted lover than as someone whose servant is simply quitting his job. Reflecting on the difference between his failed romance and Iinuma’s own more promising relationship, Kiyooki fumes. “Nothing could be more insulting [非礼]: the young master betrayed by a woman and left to grieve; the retainer believing in a woman’s fidelity and going off triumphant [意気揚々].” Sharply contrasted, then, to Kiyooki’s feeling of betrayal, is Iinuma, “quite secure in the conviction that today’s farewell had come about in the line of duty [全く彼自身の忠実の一直線上の出来事だと、信じて疑わない]—a presumption that Kiyooki found galling.”<sup>316</sup>

Closeness and intimacy, in Mishima’s novels, are thus both the risks and the requirements of employing servants. Servants are often more trouble than they are worth, their ‘service’ in stirring up familial drama and driving plot often eclipsing any notion that they are actually doing anything to make their masters’ lives easier. For a household like the Ayakuras, then, plagued also by a dire financial situation, the necessity of employing servants is fiscally burdensome as well, the maintenance of class status requiring the maintenance of servants

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 161-162. *MZ*, vol. 13, 172. Literally, “had made him powerless.”

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 162. *MZ*, vol. 13, 172.

regardless of economic means. A social and socioeconomic necessary evil, the text lists in addition to Satoko's dowry "the money that would have to be disbursed regularly for the traditional seasonal gifts to all the retainers of the imperial household [宮家の御家来衆]" as yet another "appalling sum to consider" for the financially strapped (but publically prestigious) Ayakuras.<sup>317</sup>

The physical presence of servants and the financial and functional maintenance of such thus represent an uneasy balancing act—one which spills over in the novel time and again. The swan song of Inuma's story, for instance, comes in the form of an exposé he writes in a right-wing newspaper, decrying the degradation of values in the family he once served, condemning Kiyooki's father for his "brazen disloyalty to His Majesty the Emperor" and "lack of reverence toward his own father, one of the pillars of the Meiji Restoration."<sup>318</sup> The Marquis, upon reading Inuma's article and not knowing everything that transpired prior to Inuma's departure, is of course "enraged at this evidence of [Inuma's] disloyalty to the family [飯沼の忘恩に激怒した]."<sup>319</sup> Kiyooki's reaction, however, is, if anything, fond:

If the article provoked the Marquis to fury, it aroused misgivings in his son. He noticed at once that Inuma had made a point of appending his name and address to it... [...] Up to then, Kiyooki had had no idea where he was living. And now the thought struck him that Inuma had written this in the knowledge that he would incur the stigma of someone dead to all sense of obligation, because he had wanted Kiyooki to read it at all costs and know where he was, without seeming to inform him directly. [...]

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 151. *MZ*, vol. 13, 162.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 353. *MZ*, vol. 13, 361.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 352. *MZ*, vol. 13, 361.



All at once, he felt a rush of nostalgia at the thought of Iinuma [急に飯沼が懐かしくなった]. To have his awkward devotion once more, to mock it playfully [あの不器用な情愛にふたたび接して、それを揶揄してやること]—he could think of nothing that would cheer him more in his present mood [一等慰めになるような気がした].<sup>320</sup>

Kiyoaki concludes that the letter must have been meant as a message to him, one as familiar and supportive as it is cold and admonishing towards his father. Emotional intimacy is implied by the offer of Iinuma’s physical address, and the issues of status and shame raised for Kiyoaki’s father are eclipsed for Kiyoaki by what he sees as an enduring personal devotion, albeit one which he finds almost quaint. This is not the first time in the text that a servant’s access to family secrets—and their weaponization of such—is juxtaposed with otherwise warm domestic feelings and the assumption that a servant’s actions must always be in service to something or someone, no matter how warped they might be from the everyday demands of family life or status. Iinuma’s letter serves only to remind Kiyoaki that he is still nearby, however, and fails to result in an actual physical meeting. “However,” Kiyoaki decides, “to try to see [Iinuma] now while his father’s anger was at its peak, would be to court further reprisals, and his sense of nostalgia was not strong enough to make him want to run that risk [会おうとするほどの懐かしさはなかった].<sup>321</sup> A further unpleasant side effect of this correspondence is a reminder of another servant, Tadeshina, the maid [老女] responsible in the first place for orchestrating the domestic scandal behind Iinuma’s exposé. This Tadeshina, the “master conspirator [大嘘つき]” mentioned earlier, is the maid of Kiyoaki’s illicit lover Ayakura Satoko and the co-conspirator behind their affair.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 353. *MZ*, vol. 13, 361-362.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 353-354. *MZ*, vol. 13, 362.

Iinuma's article serves to remind Kiyooki of his former servant's continued indelible presence on the periphery of the family, and, although Kiyooki elects not to go see him, "[o]n the other hand," he thinks, so long as he cannot meet Iinuma, "arranging a meeting with Tadeshina would be far less dangerous." After Tadeshina had both facilitated his and Satoko's affair and brought about its ruin, "however, he could only think of her with indescribable disgust [この老女に言いしれぬ忌まわしさを感じていた]" and was "convinced that some twist of character made her derive a peculiar pleasure from betraying all those without exception whom she had brought together [この女は自分が手引をして逢わせる人たちを、のこらず売って快とするような性格の持主にちがいがなかった]... like those people who would tend their gardens scrupulously just for the pleasure of tearing up their flowers once they had bloomed."<sup>322</sup> This image of the servant who tears up, who takes aesthetic pleasure in the crushing power of care and intimacy, is the one that I turn my attention to now.

### **Service, Weaponized: Tadeshina in *Spring Snow***

The way in which *Spring Snow* draws particular attention to the physical appearance of servants like Iinuma and the occupation of space by their bodies serves to delineate both their literary roles and their inroads to authority over their masters' stories. Tadeshina, the elderly maid-cum-mastermind behind two aristocratic families' worth of prime domestic drama, purposefully and ingeniously takes advantage of her privileged proximity within family goings-on, effectively and quite literally—through blackmail—claiming ownership over the family

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 354. *MZ*, vol. 13, 362.

narrative, manipulating and sheltering the illicit love story between the retiring aristocratic youth Kiyooki and Tadeshina's own beautiful, headstrong charge, Satoko.

Kyo Kou, in his article “Mishima Yukio no sakuhin ni okeru jochū-zō no keifu: ‘ryōriban no onna’ kara Tadeshina made [A genealogy of the depictions of maids in the work of Mishima Yukio: From ‘the woman cook’ to Tadeshina],” traces a genealogy of the ways in which Mishima's maids assert themselves within his stories, often acting as puppeteers pulling the strings behind the scenes of the domestic family. He identifies two types of maids in Mishima's fiction, one “cerebral [精神的]” and represented by the elderly Tadeshina—“knowledgeable in worldly affairs and full of cunning, a witch who administers tragedy [世故に長け奸智に富み、悲劇を司る魔女]”—and the other by the younger maid Miné, described as “corporeal [肉体的],” who elopes with the houseboy Iinuma and gives birth to the protagonist of *Runaway Horses* [*Honba*] (1969), the second novel in Mishima's tetralogy.<sup>323</sup> I do not interpret the mind-body distinction as so clear-cut in my own analysis, both for reasons which I have already discussed regarding Mishima's own conceptualization of mind-body duality and also on account of portions of the text which I will discuss presently, but, regardless, Kyo Kou's identification of the flesh-that-begets and the intent-that-orchestrates as being both within the domain of the servant class points to something characteristic of servants in Mishima—their central role in creating the conditions for narrative.

Few servants, however, choose to manipulate the narrative as overtly as does Tadeshina, who exemplifies the servant made powerful precisely because she is unseen. Tadeshina is not

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<sup>323</sup> Kyo Kou, “Mishima Yukio no sakuhin ni okeru jochūzō no keifu: ‘ryōriban no onna’ kara Tadeshina made [A genealogy of the depictions of maids in the work of Mishima Yukio: from ‘the woman cook’ to Tadeshina],” *Kōhon kindai bungaku* 19 (1994): 133.

even named in her first ‘appearance,’ instead entering only as a voice “familiar [聞き覚えのある]” to Kiyooki, speaking over the phone from the Ayakura home, her voice carrying across the night from “distant Azabu [遠い麻布の夜].”<sup>324</sup> When later in the text we first ‘see’ her, she is making sure not to be seen. Satoko and Tadeshina are patronizing the theater on Kiyooki’s invitation, with Kiyooki himself spending the first half of the performance watching Satoko instead. When it comes time for intermission, Kiyooki brings his friends and foreign guests to meet Satoko, and Tadeshina carefully withdraws:

Tadeshina had retired to the shelter of a pillar with all sorts of deprecating gestures.

Judging from the tightness of the embroidered plum-colored collar of her kimono, one would gather that she had decided to treat these foreigners with circumspection [恭しく柱のかげへしりぞいた老女蓼科は外国人に対して素直な心をひらいてみせない決心を、その梅の刺繍のついた半襟の固く合わせた衿元に示していた]. Her attitude pleased Kiyooki, who was thus spared her high-pitched acknowledgment of his introduction [清顕はそのため蓼科が、声高に招待のお礼などを言わないことに満足した].<sup>325</sup>

The maid’s first appearance then is one in which she calculatingly arranges her own pointed ‘disappearance,’ a gesture that might be outwardly respectful [恭しく] but is hardly understood

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<sup>324</sup> *Spring Snow*, 52. *MZ*, vol. 13, 65.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. *MZ*, vol. 13, 78. Translated as “high-pitched,” the word 声高 in fact describes Tadeshina’s voice simply as ‘loud.’ This is significant, moreover, as occurring just prior to the theater trip is the phone call where Kiyooki hears her “familiar” voice over the phone all the way from “distant Azabu.” The novel thus gives the impression that Tadeshina’s voice, unusually for a maid, is somewhat commanding and powerful, even when disconnected from the authority conveyed by her body.

by Kiyooki as so benignly humble. Instead, this is a ‘disappearance’ meant to be noticed—one announced “with all sorts of self-deprecating gestures”—that serves only to draw Kiyooki’s attention to how her very presence might have changed the tone of the scene otherwise. Similarly to how she arranges her ‘disappearance,’ Tadeshina also arranges her clothes, wrapping them tightly around her body not to hide within them, but rather in order to, symbolically, keep others out. Aware of this potential, and thereby strategically extracting herself from the situation, Tadeshina, ever the puppeteer, exercises control over it in a way specifically meant to give the impression that she is ceding control.

Tadeshina in fact always maintains control over her body, notably even at those times when others attempt to inhibit that control. In another scene shortly after the trip to the theater, Kiyooki calls Tadeshina to his room to ask her privately if a letter he had sent Satoko on a whim—and had quickly regretted writing—had been properly burned without opening, as he had requested. Having “urged on her [すすめる]” a considerable amount of alcohol, and then “plying [her] with more [すすめる],” Kiyooki acts as if to prime Tadeshina’s body for his purposes. Even so, though he has to some extent ‘stolen’ Tadeshina’s bodily autonomy from her through willful intoxication, Tadeshina replies to Kiyooki coherently and simply, with the only obvious physical or mental manifestation of her drunkenness being the glowing of her face “through [her] layer of white makeup with a shade of snow-covered plum blossom.”<sup>326</sup> Kiyooki, however, is not so unaffected:

The sake he had drunk combined with something else to provoke Kiyooki to rashness.

Tadeshina, despite her self-abashing manner and excruciating courtesy, had a certain air

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 74-75. *MZ*, vol. 13, 85-86.

about her that put one in mind of the proprietress of a brothel, albeit one with an ancient and honorable reputation [あたかも何千年もつづいた古い娼家の主のよう]. An unmistakable distilled sensuality seemed to cling to the very wrinkles of her face. And having her so close at hand aroused Kiyooki's natural willfulness [官能の煮凝りをその皺の一つ一つに象嵌した風情が、かたわらにあって彼の放恣をゆるしていた].<sup>327</sup>

Kiyooki is effectively drunk on Tadeshina's demeanor, her bodily proximity, as well as simply relieved when she tells him (falsely) that the letter has been burned.<sup>328</sup> Even though Tadeshina's reassurance turns out to be a lie, in this scene, through both her words and her body, acting as if she has indeed lost control, Tadeshina offers precisely the catalyst she needs to encourage Kiyooki to willingly pursue an affair with Satoko. The consummate performer, Tadeshina recruits Kiyooki to her plan precisely by making him think the plan was his all along.

The reasons for why Tadeshina wishes to encourage this affair are complicated. Much later in the text, it is revealed that Satoko's father, the Count Ayakura, in a fit of spite eight years prior, had made Tadeshina promise that Satoko would not be a virgin bride for any match arranged for her by Kiyooki's father, the Marquis Matsugae. The Count himself, however, has completely forgotten this order by the time of the story, and, in any case, he had stipulated at the time that the groom should not know that Satoko was not a virgin—a fact at risk of being betrayed a bit too readily when Satoko becomes pregnant by Kiyooki. This consequence would be in greater conflict with Tadeshina's plans, however, if Tadeshina was merely following through on the Count's order out of a sense of duty. Rather, Tadeshina has identified an

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 77. *MZ*, vol. 13, 89.

<sup>328</sup> Tadeshina is lying about destroying the letter; Kiyooki later learns with some mortification that Satoko indeed read it and was quite amused by his intended insults.

opportunity to exact revenge on the Count with his own request of eight years prior, throwing it back in the face of a man who, “when his wife had been pregnant with Satoko, had favored Tadeshina with his attentions [蓼科に伯爵のお手がついた],” falling prey time and again to “Tadeshina’s unruffled composure, her deferential flirting [一糸乱れぬ振舞、恭謙な媚態],” and “the evident pride she took in her exhaustive knowledge of sexual technique [閨の教養においては誰にもひけをとらないという矜りが丸見えなの].”<sup>329</sup> The Count, like Kiyooki, once found himself at the mercy of Tadeshina’s physicality, and the now elderly Tadeshina, as Takamatsu Sanae argues in her essay “Shiroi kamen no onna, Tadeshina [The woman in the white mask, Tadeshina],” finds purpose in her desire to reassert her importance and influence to the Count, lest he forget her.<sup>330</sup>

Tadeshina exhibits both an energetic bodily sensuality and a terrifying capacity for plotting and directing this family drama. She is catalyst and conductor; Takamatsu describes her as the “narrator [語り手]” of the story, as all of the events of the novel play out according to her script.<sup>331</sup> In addition, Takamatsu observes how Tadeshina “appears first on the scene of Kiyooki’s lie [清顕の嘘の場面で初めて登場し]” and then “makes her exit in a drama of her own staging [自分が打った大芝居に姿を消す],” thereby identifying an intrinsic association between Tadeshina’s character and theatrical performance.<sup>332</sup> It is thus Tadeshina’s dominion over the physical—with her own body as her instrument, and the bodies of those around her also

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 303-304. *MZ*, vol. 13, 315-316.

<sup>330</sup> Takamatsu Sanae, “Shiroi kamen no onna, Tadeshina [The woman in the white mask, Tadeshina]: Mishima Yukio Houjou no umi kenkyū [Mishima Yukio *Sea of Fertility* studies] (2),” *Hirosaki Daigaku Kokugo Bungaku* 28 (March 2007): 28.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 17.

hers to possess and direct—which greatly informs my discussion of the importance of servants’ distinctly embodied narrative weight and the power that this gives them over their masters’ stories.

Tadeshina’s domestic proximity—her physical proximity and her proximity to the physical—is thus, as I hinted at earlier, something of which she is highly aware, made all the more insidious because, by the time anybody notices, Tadeshina already effectively owns their stories via the potential for blackmail and manipulation. Nowhere is this more apparent than when she first becomes aware of Satoko’s pregnancy. Artfully playing the part of Satoko’s faithful servant and confidante, Tadeshina tells Satoko,

“It wouldn’t do to mention this to anyone. Please don’t give your nightgown to the maid to wash under any circumstances. I’ll take care of it myself, so that nobody will know [お召し物の汚れも私が内々で始末いたしますから、決してお次へお下げになってはいけません]. And from now on, I’ll make all the arrangements for your food. I’ll see to it that you eat only what agrees with you so that your maid won’t suspect a thing [お次に気取られぬように、お口に合うものを差上げるように取計らいます]. What I’m telling you is only for your own good. So it will be best to do exactly as I say [お姫様大事で申し上げることでございますから、これからは蓼科の申すとおりに遊ばすのが一番でございますよ].”<sup>333</sup>

While sounding absolutely benevolent, ready to do anything to prevent Satoko’s secret from being revealed, the text also explains that “Tadeshina was filled with delight” over the fact that

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 265. *MZ*, vol. 13, 276.



“she was the only one to have received this initial sign,” and it “dawned on her: this was just what she had been waiting for. Now Satoko was in her hands!”<sup>334</sup> While there is no indication that it was part of her initial plan, Tadeshina thereby takes advantage of Satoko’s pregnancy— itself resulting from an affair she herself facilitated. Claiming exclusive control over both the clothes that cover Satoko’s body and the food that nourishes it from the inside, Tadeshina expresses her delight at having completely claimed stewardship over Satoko’s body [ずっと聡子の体に注意を向けることを怠らず], at having the girl entirely at her mercy, and it is precisely Tadeshina’s long-term physical proximity to Satoko—she was also the first to notice Satoko’s first menstruation a full two years before Satoko’s own mother—which has given her this power over her mistress.<sup>335</sup>

Tadeshina is not immune to blackmail herself, however, and she soon realizes in the wake of pressure from both Kiyooki and the family that she is in over her head. In the end, Tadeshina attempts suicide and confesses her part in the affair, and Satoko gets an abortion, cuts her hair, and decides to become a nun, thereby reclaiming her bodily autonomy in one of the limited ways allowed her in her situation. This, however, leaves the family with little choice but to tell the imperial family that Satoko has become mentally ill and to annul the engagement. Tadeshina, meanwhile, is sent to a hot spring resort by the family to allow time for her body to heal from her suicide attempt and for the situation to blow over.<sup>336</sup> Whether Tadeshina returns to

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Tadeshina’s place of convalescence is not unlike the sort of place where Taeko is sequestered to have her baby in secret in Tanizaki’s *The Makioka Sisters*. It is worth noting then, the difference between how O-haru participates in the family’s mission to contain the scandal,

her domestic domain afterward is unaddressed in the novel, but there is no reason to believe that she does not, her attempted suicide having earned her the sympathetic pardon of the family.

Despite the lack of clear indication, however, on whether Tadeshina ever returns to service, she is nevertheless removed from the story for the final chapters, which deal more with the now ill and dying Kiyooki's relationship with his friend Honda, a relationship which will drive the rest of the tetralogy of which *Spring Snow* is only the first part. Satoko's and Tadeshina's stories, however, indeed come to an end, with Tadeshina apparently triumphant, having effectively brought both noble families to pain and ruin.

### **Passing Notes: The Matter of Miné**

I earlier touched briefly upon another, quieter domestic drama orchestrated by Tadeshina, the affair between Inuma and a household maid, Miné, which leads to Inuma's acrimonious parting from the family. I examine this affair now in more detail in terms of how it showcases and amplifies the themes of embodiment and physical intimacy which I have discussed thus far, arguing that, while the novel is indeed primarily about the love affair between Kiyooki and Satoko, it is this second subplot affair, which both begins and reaches its conclusion within the first half of the novel, that lays bare the power negotiations underpinning the novel as a whole. This love affair—if it can be called that—is born not of romance but of lust and manipulation, and the novel treats it as an illicit roleplay, a trial run for how Tadeshina aims to use Satoko's and Kiyooki's own secret relationship to bolster her power over them. Given the way in which

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whereas in *Spring Snow* it is Tadeshina herself who represents the scandal that must be contained.

both Miné and Inuma all but disappear from the story after their part is played in these plans, it would be easy to see them—and Miné especially—as passive victims in a story which needs them but is never about them. I will demonstrate, however, that this brief interlude of an affair, as neatly as it might seem to be tied up in the space of a handful of chapters, in fact has ramifications for the entire structure within which the story occurs.

Through the machinations of the superior maid Tadeshina, Miné, a seemingly minor character, becomes the conduit and receptacle for the agonies and antagonisms of the men and women around her. Rather than a passive victim, however, she also absorbs this violence into herself and transmutes it, acting as alchemical agent even in her passivity and silence, all while the phantasmic and semiotically-charged spaces in which the affair unfolds replace desire with horror and prefigure the tetralogy's themes of love, revenge—and the vicious, karmic cycles of both. Despite hers and Inuma's eventual expulsion from the family and the main story, Miné possesses an easy power over both the physical and the narrative that none of her masters can ever hope to achieve. After all, Miné quite literally gives birth to the protagonist of the tetralogy's second installment, her body thereby enabling the continuation of the story beyond the very bounds of the novel itself.

I have already discussed Inuma, the houseboy, in terms of the way his pure physicality and dedication to duty is contrasted with Kiyooki's softer, vaguer sensibilities. In addition to this, the novel is clear on the remarkability of Inuma's undying loyalty to Kiyooki's family line, far stronger than any such sentiments held by Kiyooki himself. Inuma is the only member of the household, for instance, who still makes a point of visiting the family shrine, where he “pour[s] out his heart to Marquis Matsugae's renowned father, whom he had never known in his lifetime [ついにこの世で会うことのなかった偉大な先代に、心の中で語りかけるのを常として

いた].”<sup>337</sup> His “frustration” with the lazy elegance of the present family is described as so “gnawing in its intensity [こうした挫折の歯噛み]” that it “can, over a long period, be transmuted into a kind of religious fervor,” a “burning fanaticism [飯沼の中にあまりにもしばしば、こんな飢渴].”<sup>338</sup> Furthermore, “[o]f all the retinue in the Matsugae household [松枝家の大ぜいの使用人の中で], only Iinuma was possessed by this fervor, something intangible yet quite apparent as soon as one looked into his eyes [こうも無礼なあからさまな飢渴を、目に湛えているのは飯沼一人であった].”<sup>339</sup> Iinuma represents a loyalty to the family that exceeds the bounds of retainership and makes him the true steward of the legacy that originally gave the family its power. This of course would already be enough to challenge the domestic hierarchy, but the effect is compounded by the fact that the very scene in which he pays his respects at the family shrine ends curiously with the following passage:

Then, suddenly, at the height of his ardent outpouring [真剣な祈りの最中に], as he was getting warmer and warmer [体が熱してくるにつれて] despite the chill morning air swirling under the skirt of his hakama [凜とした朝風をはらむ袴のなかで], he began to feel sexually aroused [股間が勃然とする]. He immediately snatched a broom from its place under the floor and began to sweep out the shrine in a frenzy of energy [狂気のように].<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> While translated as “renowned,” the meaning of “偉大な [*idai na*]” is closer to “great,” and in fact Iinuma’s objection stems from the fact that he feels the late Matsugae is not properly “renowned” for his “greatness.”

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 70. *MZ*, vol. 13, 81-82.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. *MZ*, vol. 13, 82.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 73. *MZ*, vol. 13, 84.

Iinuma is obsessed with the family traditions, the need to keep them pure and clean, and yet in the midst of his prayers his passion manifests first and foremost with an erection [股間が勃然とする], forcing him to sublimate his sexual desire—a sexual desire which cannot be fully sublimated into hero worship and the ethos of generational respect—into domestic labor, into his capacity as a servant. The reason for this sudden arousal, furthermore, is complicated by a seemingly innocuous description of the route Iinuma takes to the family shrine:

He walked along the path that led past the maids' quarters at the rear of the main house [母屋の裏の女中部屋の前] and through the grove of Japanese cypresses.<sup>341</sup>

Later, Kiyooki challenges Iinuma on the meaning of this route:

“To reach the shrine, you have to pass the rear wing of the house [母屋の裏手], don't you? Which means, of course, that you walk right past the windows of the maids' quarters [当然女中部屋の格子窓のところを通る]. And on your way every morning, you've also been exchanging looks with Miné [みねと顔を見合わせ]. And finally, just the other day, you slipped her a note through the lattice. Or so they say. Is it true or isn't it? [その窓格子から、みねに附文をしたそうじゃないか]”<sup>342</sup>

It is true, and Iinuma's reaction confirms it. Kiyooki explains that he has heard the rumors from Tadeshina, who, via her privileged access to family gossip, has “happened to hear that the maids are convinced that when you go to the shrine every morning, you have more on your mind than mere devotion [別の目的があつてのことだそうだね].”<sup>343</sup> In determining the significance of

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 71. *MZ*, vol. 13, 82.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 79. *MZ*, vol. 13, 90.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 78. *MZ*, vol. 13, 89-90.

this discovery, I would like to identify two things at play here: 1) a route initially described as leading past the maids' quarters is in fact a permeable space between that route and the maids' room, and 2) just as the written word, in the form of notes, transgresses that leaky barrier, the revelation of this information to the reader is diffused through gossip and through its close-guarded possession by the servant characters, outside the bounds of the narrator's—and thus the reader's—purview.

Knowledge of the story thus filters to the reader like gossip notes passed through a fence, both notes and gossip being the sort of information implicitly confined to a space in which it is permitted to circulate but then expected to dissipate after serving its purpose. Notes are meant to inform, to notify, to request—to do many of the things common to all manner of writing—but, characteristically, represent a type of writing not meant to be preserved.

Appropriately, then, the text never does record precisely what was in Iinuma's note [附文] in the same way that it transcribes Satoko's and Kiyooki's scandalous letters [手紙], but, at the same time, no meaning is lost due to this omission, as the significance of these notes lies not in their content but in their form—much of their social meaning is created in the act of passing them, not by the words which they contain. Less refined and never sealed, notes and gossip [噂] form a kind of under-story, outside of official record and best destroyed before their very format allows them to break the confines of the spaces for which they are intended. Iinuma's first thought, for instance, when Tadeshina and Kiyooki bring up his route past the maids' quarters, is to worry whether “Miné had laughed at his note and showed it to everyone [自分の附文をみねが笑ってみんなに示したのか]” or whether it “had come to light some other way, causing her great

shame [それともそれが計らずも人目についてみねを悲しませたのか].”<sup>344</sup> The notes passed through the lattice thus represent a written medium marked by unspoken expectations of secrecy and the paranoid fear of exposure. They are as confidential as they are volatile, as capable of conveying romance as they are of begetting violence. Moreover, the very practice of glimpsing one’s lover through the hedges or passing notes through lattices, of romantic possibilities hatched in permeable spaces, traverses as well the temporal space of romantic tropes going back to *Tales of Ise* [*Ise monogatari*] (9-10<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Tale of Genji* [*Genji monogatari*] (11<sup>th</sup> century), locating Iinuma’s and Miné’s affair as well within the inherited polysemic, phantasmic space of literary allusion, albeit in a context that carries with it little of the pathos of its courtly antecedents. In this way, yet another permeable space arises in the text—a permeable space between the conventions of high literature as represented by the novel’s masters and the messy circulation of gossip mastered by its servants.

The affair between Miné and Iinuma thus becomes a high-stakes battleground within the novel, and Tadeshina its commander. She, like so many servants in Mishima’s works, fulfills a sort of sage-like role, serving as font of knowledge and manipulating it to her advantage, thereby taking charge of the story, not by telling it but by orchestrating it. She acts in the mode of not only an actress, but also as a puppeteer, and a director, and serves means rather than masters. Both of the named maids in *Spring Snow*—Tadeshina and Miné—betray a certain subversiveness that, perhaps paradoxically, is not so at odds with their appearance of submissiveness, and such contradictions and paradoxes abound in the affair between Iinuma and Miné, forming its very impetus.

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 80. *MZ*, vol. 13, 92.

Thus, under the force of Kiyooki's and Tadeshina's insistence on assisting Iinuma in the consummation of the affair with Miné, "[Iinuma's] shameful pursuit of pleasure... become[s] inextricably bound up with loyalty and service to his master [何か自分が久しく恥じていた快樂が、急に公明正大な、忠実や誠心と結びつけられたような気がした]," and it is this loyalty which is at stake as Kiyooki and Tadeshina ultimately ensure Iinuma's continuing subservience by forcing him to profane that which he considers most sacred.<sup>345</sup> They determine that the tryst should occur in the family library, a room that has fallen into disuse with the new generation but which held both "the Chinese classics that had belonged to Kiyooki's grandfather [祖父から受け継いだ漢籍]" and "the Western books that the Marquis had ordered from Maruzen out of the desire to appear intellectual [知的虚栄心から丸善に注文して蒐めた洋書]." To Iinuma, "the library was the most hallowed place in the house, sanctified [この邸うちでもっとも神聖な部屋になっていた]" by its preservation of the family's legacy.<sup>346</sup> Iinuma's truest compatriot in its continuing dedication to the Matsugae family, the library stands as the ideal liminal space between the ideals of loyalty and service upheld by Iinuma and the frivolous and decadent lifestyle of the living Matsugaes. Just as Iinuma's physicality binds him to this duty, moreover, the library itself takes the form of a kind of body. Even the key to the library, for instance, is described in the novel as looking "torn and naked [...] like a ravaged body [何と裸で羽根をむしられて、残酷な姿]," a symbol of the boundary between the profaned world and the library's sacred interior that prefigures the way in which Iinuma, in his tryst with Miné, is

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 81. *MZ*, vol. 13, 93.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 102. *MZ*, vol. 13, 115-116.



“[d]riven to savagery by his fantasies” into being “brutal with the girl [幻想によって残酷になり].”<sup>347</sup>

Once inside the library alone with Miné, Iinuma finds himself, for “[w]hatever the reason... fixed on the dirty gray snow he had seen shoveled into piles along the outside wall of the library [書庫の外側の腰板に掻き寄せられていた汚れた残雪の色が浮かんでいた]” and thus “consumed with the need to violate Miné in the corner that was closest to the dirty snow [そしてみねを、何故かしら、ちょうどその雪と壁で接した片隅で犯したいと思ったのである].”<sup>348</sup> The library’s thin walls, entombing books as dead and mildewed as the unfrequented family graves, titles illegible in the dim light filtering in from the outside, join forces with the faint sounds of the rats that live in the ceiling to create barely-there boundaries between inside and out, the sacred and the sacrilegious, warm bodies and cold keys, marking the library as a permeable space in which romance is staged as horror and the cycles of manipulation and degradation that drive Mishima’s tetralogy are given dress rehearsal. These servants, the maid Miné and the houseboy Iinuma, are co-opted to serve as catalysts of scandal and decay, deployed in the service of narrative and ‘plot’ towards the downfall of an era.

Miné, far from enthusiastically consenting to her part in the affair, simply “let[s] Iinuma have his way without offering any resistance [なすままに委せていたが].”<sup>349</sup> This submissiveness, however, consists of more than simple acquiescence, in fact transmuting itself into its own form of defiance, as “the meekness of her submission only tormented Iinuma the more, for her gentle manner bespoke a quiet understanding of himself as someone very similar to

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 103, 106. *MZ*, vol. 13, 116,120.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 106. *MZ*, vol. 13, 120.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 106-107. *MZ*, vol. 13, 120.

her [この素直な屈服に、飯沼は自分と同類の者のやさしい行き届いた理解を感じて、心を傷つけられた].”<sup>350</sup> Iinuma, even as he effectively assaults Miné, is himself confronted in turn by a silent body that testifies to some unspoken truth. Miné reads the situation very differently from Iinuma, exuding “gentle compliance [やさしさ]” rather than resigned acquiescence and feeling “cheerfully promiscuous [尻軽な朗らかな娘]” rather than servile. As so often the case with servant characters, Iinuma’s summation of Miné serves to characterize Iinuma himself rather than Miné, and she is thus absorbed into him not by surrendering to him but rather by foiling his expectations of her. Moreover, Miné is acting not on the instructions of Iinuma but instead on those of another maid, Tadeshina—powerful beyond the scope of any other character due to her proximity to the family yet unfettered by the baggage of its reputation—who has brought her here and is ostensibly the one who “had briefed her down to the last detail so that she would be clear on every point, and all that was required of her in this brief moment was to act without hesitation [何か彼女にわからぬところで周到に用意された、この細い時間の隙間に、いそいで身をひそめなくてはならぬ].”<sup>351</sup> Miné’s loyalties are divided between her masters, her own desires, and respect and deference to a higher-ranking servant, and she is thus just as motivated by her ideals as Iinuma, the difference being only that “[s]he saw her role in life as that of someone who was ready to give her body freely to soothe and comfort [みねは自分の存在がその隙間にぴったり適合しており、そこへ素直に敏速に身を埋めれば足りる

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 107. *MZ*, vol. 13, 120.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 106-107. *MZ*, vol. 13, 120. While translated as “act without hesitation,” the Japanese original’s “身をひそめなくてはならぬ” in fact emphasizes the physical, literally stating that Miné “must quickly conceal her body.”

ことを知っていた]。”<sup>352</sup> Even in this moment of apparent complete physical vulnerability, Miné demonstrates a complex and contradictory interiority and physical self-possession at odds with the carefully circumscribed role she is meant to play in that time and place [その隙間], exhibiting even in her submissiveness a force of will that puts her, effectively, in charge.

The matter of Miné thus demonstrates the ‘leakiness’ of power, history, and story, and how that which ‘serves’ can also be used to usurp, how the proximity and intimacy necessarily granted to the subservient can transmute power back into the fragility it is meant to obscure. As if the characters themselves are aware of this—and everything indicates that they indeed are—the servants in Mishima’s novel are always up to something, not facilitators of the narrative passively, in deference to their masters’ stories, but rather actively, weaving not their own stories necessarily, but creating the very conditions of possibility for—and directing—the stories of their masters. Mishima’s servants thus take possession of narrative, becoming narrators in the sense that they are pseudo-writers, orchestrators of the narrative, capable of rewriting and staging their masters’ stories, just as Miné refigures her own assault as a triumph and her loyalties as perfectly divided between her predominantly male superiors and another woman of the servant class. The subplot with Miné thus qualifies the terms of the love affair between Satoko and Kiyooki and the permeable and ambiguous spaces in which it is both born and consummated, hatching a kind of cyclical time and a permeability of space and class that serves both as the substance of the novel and as the downfall of its characters, revealing the dangers of intimacy’s

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 106-107. *MZ*, vol. 13, 120. Again, there is even greater emphasis in the original on the body as an object, stating that “it was enough that, obediently and quickly, she should bury her body in the moment.”

mobilization towards subversion, and exposing the horror of power's fragility always so close at hand.

### **Revolting Servants in *Madame de Sade***

Mishima's body of work, of those I discuss in these chapters, is one of the more frustrating in terms of assigning any sort of chronology to its depiction of domestic service. The story of *Spring Snow*, for instance, is set in a nostalgic aristocratic Japan that is already in the past at the time of writing, much like Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters*, which itself describes a way of life actively fading away even over the course of the several years it took Tanizaki to complete the story. The extravagant world in which Mishima places *Spring Snow*'s domestic intrigues in fact would have been mostly foreign even to his first readers, not just because they were not necessarily of the aristocratic class, but also because that extravagant world was one of Mishima's own imagination, an aristocratic Japan of the author's fantasy, projected back onto an era prior to his birth. Furthermore, just as I discussed in my introduction that the ways in which the relative temporal freedom of literature can complicate the potential correlation of its characters with a historically-delineated demographic, the next work I discuss also presents an additional spatial complication on account of being set in early nineteenth-century France—and thus having little to do with 'Japanese servants' at all.

Mishima's 1965 play, *Madame de Sade*, tells the story of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) from the point of view of the women in his life, both historical and as fictionally imagined by Mishima. At the center of the story are de Sade's wife (Renée) and mother-in-law (Madame de Montreuil), who disagree fundamentally on what must be done about Renée de Sade's dilettante husband. Renée, for her part, remains faithful to the end—or to the near end—puzzling

her mother with a loyalty that puzzled Mishima himself into exploring her story via the stage. My attention turns away from these characters, however, to Madame de Montreuil's housekeeper [家政婦] Charlotte, who seems to be the only character in the story without all that much puzzling to do. Quite contrary to Sunaga's estimation of his maid Saku as being too simple to have much to puzzle over in Sōseki's *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, Madame de Sade's Charlotte has no need for puzzling simply because all of the pieces are readily available to her. Rather than keeping her on the outside of the thorny matters assailing her mistresses, Charlotte's position as a servant enables her to move in and out of permeable information boundaries, physically unhindered by the sense of propriety which keeps her mistresses in the dark, which in the end condemns them to impotence and obsolescence. Mishima, in a postface to the play, announces his intent to insert "the servant [召使] Charlotte [as a symbol] for the common people [民衆を代表して]," thereby imbuing Charlotte with a signifying power beyond that of a single character, and beyond that of her specific profession, as well.<sup>353</sup> To be "common [民衆]" in the context of the play's setting during the French Revolution, moreover, was not to exist in an indeterminate background but rather to be part of a collective capable of exercising great power. As if to counteract the threat of her lower-class status, then, Charlotte's status as "common" is not levied against her but in fact actively questioned by the other characters in the play in order to distance her from these threatening masses, as they defensively assert that a servant to nobility must be naturally inclined to be somewhat noble herself, to be complicit with nobility, simply through proximity and exposure, as if nobility is something a person can catch.

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<sup>353</sup> Mishima Yukio, *Madame de Sade*, trans. Donald Keene (C. E. Tuttle Co, 1971), 107. *MZ*, vol. 33, 585.

Late in the play (Act 3), after Charlotte's former mistress, the Comtesse de Saint-Fond, is reported killed in the melee of the revolution, Charlotte dons black, ostensibly in mourning for her. Seeing this, her current mistress, Madame de Montreuil, questions her loyalty:

MONTREUIL: There hasn't been any death in our family [私の家]. Why are you in mourning?

CHARLOTTE: Madame... [はい.....。]

MONTREUIL: I know why. You're showing how faithful you are to your former employer [主人] by observing the anniversary [命日] of Madame de Saint-Fond's death. That's it, isn't it? I admire your intention, but why should you be so faithful to a woman you once disliked enough to leave?<sup>354</sup>

Montreuil invokes a connection between employed service and devotion—one that might feel familiar to *Spring Snow's* Inuma—questioning whether Charlotte was really loyal enough to mourn her former mistress as if there was a death in her current mistress's family [私の家]. Any protest Charlotte might wish to lodge, however, is abruptly cut off, as Montreuil seizes an opportunity to decry what she sees as the recent degradation of the social order more generally:

CHARLOTTE: Madame... [はい.....。]

MONTREUIL: “Madame [はい]” is no answer. A woman of your age [お前のような年寄] shouldn't answer like a girl fresh from the country [山出しの娘]. It's been nine months since the Bastille fell, and the more unsettled conditions have become, the more careless and insolent you act. There's been something positively insubordinate [気儘]

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<sup>354</sup> *Madame de Sade*, 86-87. *MZ*, vol. 24, 308-310.

about you ever since the paupers of St. Antoine marched on Versailles shouting for bread. I can't believe that, having lived in this household for more than twenty years and acquired a taste for extravagance from watching us [見よう見まねで], and having even saved a little money of your own, you are now ready to join [仲間入り] the paupers brawling their way through the streets. Saint-Fond's death seems to have inspired you. I can see you'll end up imitating her and pretending to be one of the masses, a sham, and dying for it... [贋ものの、まがいものの民衆になって死ぬがおち] You've put yourself in her place and you're mourning the death of a gaudy imposter [きらびやかな贋ものの死]. Am I right?

CHARLOTTE: (with conviction): Yes, Madame.

MONTREUIL (laughs): Very well, if that's the case. Wear mourning or whatever you please. As long as the mourning and grief are both fake [その喪服も哀悼も贋ものなら], wearing black isn't especially unlucky.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you, Madame.

MONTREUIL: Tell me, did you like the late Madame de Saint-Fond?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, Madame.

MONTREUIL: Better than you like your present mistress?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, Madame.

MONTREUIL: Dear me. One never heard such answers before the Revolution. People have all become excessively frank [正直になりすぎた] ... I think there's someone at the door.<sup>355</sup>

Charlotte, while outwardly perfectly compliant and complacent, openly transgresses upon her mistresses' space and authority by symbolically bringing acknowledgment of a death associated with the revolution into their home and by “frankly” [正直に]—with nothing more than yet another “Yes, Madame [はい]”—voicing her preference for her previous mistress directly to the woman to whom she is expected to defer.

Even more remarkably, Charlotte takes ownership of her own insubordination so firmly that Madame de Montreuil is left with no real recourse but to let the matter pass. Charlotte, in fact, by agreeing without protest to her mistress's suggestion that her mourning is merely performative, effectively diffuses the accusation, leaving Montreuil little choice but to permit Charlotte to parade the revolution throughout her home, showcasing her difference and the ambiguity of her allegiance. Montreuil can only express her impotent disappointment, not that Charlotte is out of line as someone of her status, but rather that she should “answer like a girl fresh from the country [山出しの娘],” rather than like a woman who has “acquired a taste for extravagance from watching us [見よう見まねで贅沢もおぼえ],” accusing Charlotte not of being unfit to nobility, but instead of being a “sham [贋ものの、まがいものの]” of a commoner, just as her former mistress was an “imposter [贋もの]” taken for a “radiant prostitute

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.



[輝やける娼婦]” in her final moments.<sup>356</sup> The only way for Montreuil to attempt to retain control over her servant at this historical juncture of violent, sweaty class upheaval is to attempt to secure her within a class wherein the Madame still possesses some level of authority, a class wherein she still might be able to set the rules even as it quickly becomes more and more impossible to assert authority over society writ large. Only by first allowing for the falsifiability of class performance can the Madame hope to recapture Charlotte within the class structure she understands. As a family fixture and long-time confidante, that is, Charlotte’s servitude can only be maintained via the concession that she is not simply a servant at all.

The physicality of Charlotte’s mourning, the way she wears her allegiances on her body, has the effect of making her a vessel of discord in the static space of the play, which occurs entirely in one claustrophobic room. The entire play, in fact, consists of almost motionless bodies amidst a flurry of dialogue, a characteristic which brought on a slew of negative reviews when it was staged in London in 2009 that even Judi Dench performing in the role of Madame de Montreuil could not stem.<sup>357</sup> This relative lack of action and the absence of set changes render it even more striking just how often Charlotte moves to and from the stage, bringing people in and showing them out, even disappearing entirely at times for reasons never explained and thus left up to interpretations ranging from the perfectly innocuous to the revolutionarily nefarious. When Renée’s sister, Anne, for instance, arrives for a visit, she is affronted by Charlotte’s absence. “ANNE: What’s happened? Charlotte didn’t even come to the door. I wonder if she’s pretending

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 82. *MZ*, vol. 24, 305.

<sup>357</sup> “Mixed Reviews for Dame Judi Play.” *BBC*, March 19, 2009, sec. Arts & Culture, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts\\_and\\_culture/7952393.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/7952393.stm), accessed February 24, 2016.

to be one of the common people [民衆気取] and joined her friends [仲間] in a march on Versailles for bread.”<sup>358</sup>

Charlotte’s occasional disappearances—in part because they require the conspicuous movement of a live actress—would moreover be difficult to miss during a live performance, even if they are not always clearly marked within the text. In a play in which comparatively little movement occurs, Charlotte’s movements no doubt would strike the audience as particularly significant whenever they might occur. For this reason, unlike in the case of the disappearing minor servants I discuss in my Introduction and Chapter 1, Charlotte’s disappearances are often noted by her mistresses only to be emphatically dismissed as a mere nuisance, as if by doing so they can negate both the narrative upset of disappearing minor characters and the revolutionary upset of a servant shirking her duties to join a political march. It would be difficult to argue that Charlotte is a minor character in Mishima’s play so long as it remains the onus of her mistresses to keep her in view, to keep her as close at hand and as involved as possible, lest her minorness allow her to undermine the very system which her service supports. Here again, Charlotte’s class status—and with it her structural position in the story—is questioned, her intimacy with a noble family taken to mean that she must only be “pretending” if she chooses to associate instead with the “common people,” even if those common people are in fact her “friends.” The character of Charlotte, whether common or noble, provides a sense of a space and a France outside of the noble parlor—a France of which her mistresses are harshly critical, despite their apparent unwavering faith in the maid herself. This faith is made excessive, moreover, by dramatic necessity, as Charlotte eventually becomes entrusted with the story in its entirety, as a surrogate

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<sup>358</sup> *Madame de Sade*, 78-79. *MZ*, vol. 24, 302.

for the theatrical audience, capable of bearing witness to her mistresses' domestic tribulations while maintaining an arm's length from the fallout of these tribulations themselves.

Unlike some of Mishima's other servants, however, Charlotte's witness is not malicious or even all that willful. In fact, at the beginning of the play (Act 1), when Charlotte first shows the Comtesse de Saint-Fond and Baronesse de Simiane (another friend of the family) into the parlor—the women have arrived to aid Madame de Montreuil in clearing the name of her son-in-law, the Marquis de Sade—she is embarrassed to overhear their frank and private discussions about de Sade's proclivities. She quickly moves to extract herself from the situation.

SAINT-FOND: You needn't run away, Charlotte. After all, you worked for me before you took service here, and you are fully acquainted with the details of my private life [私の生活の裏表は一部始終知っているお前]. You have heard the rumors whispered behind my back [陰口を囁かれ], and you know my reputation of being a devil in the flesh. It's true I don't use a whip or sweets like the marquis, but I have reaped a full harvest of the weeds that grow on Cythera's isle [恋の島]. Madame de Montreuil found the right person for her business. She knew no other woman could associate herself so intimately with “what happened,” and share the experiences of the marquis as though they were her own. My wicked reputation has always intimidated Madame de Montreuil so much that she has never let me near her. But under the circumstances, apparently, she had no choice but to send for me.<sup>359</sup>

Not only is Charlotte not excluded from the conversation, but in fact she is welcomed there, as they assure her that they have no secrets from her. Saint-Fond goes on to explain the sort of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 8-9. *MZ*, vol. 24, 245.

woman she is, the kind of reputation she has—things Charlotte surely already knew on account of her prior service to her—and the audience thus comes to know Saint-Fond through the way she presents herself to Charlotte. In this way, Charlotte serves to mediate the conveyance of information outside the immediate household—and to the audience—by playing the role of an acknowledged and trusted audience herself. It is, moreover, not only figuratively but literally as well that Charlotte serves to transport information outside of the household.

Delivering messages is a standard enough task for a maid, and so when Montreuil tells Charlotte that she will have her deliver two letters, Charlotte replies agreeably and moves to leave the room before the Madame tells her to “[w]ait here. Every second counts.” What follows is a curious scene (in Act 1) in which Madame de Montreuil proceeds to write her letters while Charlotte, with nothing to do but wait, becomes a captive audience for Anne to describe her visit to Venice—a trip which has just been revealed, prior to Charlotte’s entrance, to have been in the company of the Marquis de Sade himself. Charlotte thus proceeds, through her polite attempts at interested inquiry about the trip, to call attention to the strange obfuscation of the story.

CHARLOTTE: How was your summer in Venice, mademoiselle?

ANNE: Marvelous. (In dreamlike tones.) Danger, tenderness, death, turbid canals. And when the canals overflowed, so much water in the Piazza di San Marco you couldn’t wade across.

CHARLOTTE: I wish I could go somewhere like that once in my life.

ANNE: Every night there was the noise of a duel, and pools of blood left in the morning mists on the little bridges. And the pigeons, a sky full of pigeons... The crowds of pigeons walked proudly and disdainfully over the Piazza di San Marco as long as nothing

bothered them, but when frightened they rose up in flocks, with a powerful beating of wings... I gather they burned his portrait somewhere.

CHARLOTTE: Pardon me, mademoiselle? Whose portrait?

ANNE: The sound of bells, bells across the stagnant waters. And innumerable bridges, as many bridges as pigeons... Then there was the moon. A red moon rose up from the canal, and when it shone on our bed, the bed turned crimson, as if with the blood of a hundred virgins. A hundred...

CHARLOTTE: The gondolas and the boatmen's songs must have been lovely.

ANNE: Gondolas? Boatmen's songs? Yes, I suppose that is what Venice means for most people.<sup>360</sup>

Charlotte's easy assumption that Venice must be about those things Venice is about to "most people [世間の人たち]," her approach to the conversation as polite small talk ("I wish I could go somewhere like that once in my life [一生に一度でもそんなところへ行ってみたいものでございますわ]"), her brief interlocution to ask what portrait the Baronesse might possibly be talking about, and her final return to a platitude about gondolas and boatmen's songs establishes Charlotte as neither a naïve audience nor a particularly engaged one, but rather as one which both absorbs and reveals ironies and discrepancies. The words of her mistresses are thus filtered through her presence, allowing her to contest their points of view and values not by actively refuting them, but simply by being present within their space. As an audience, then, while we learn more of the tawdry details of Anne's time with the Marquis de Sade in Venice in Act 2, the seed of doubt is planted already during this earlier conversation—a conversation which occurs

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 35-36. *MZ*, vol. 24, 268-269.

only on account of the fact that Charlotte's presence is explicitly requested by her mistress to deliver letters, to deliver information, at a moment's notice.

Despite this unerring—if occasionally exasperated—confidence that the ladies have in Charlotte and all its potential to unseat the hierarchy between servants and masters, Charlotte ultimately remains in control of how and when she observes the situation. It is as Montreuil and her sister Anne discuss the latest “gossip [噂]” about Saint-Fond in Act 3, for instance, that Charlotte appears “in mourning” and “eavesdrops [立ち聴く]” from the edge of the stage.<sup>361</sup> To some extent, Charlotte's mourning of the fallen woman, this noble who played about on the streets like she belonged there, is a greater form of subterfuge than any actual plotting against her mistresses could be. I discussed earlier Montreuil's reaction to Charlotte's appearance in mourning clothes, but equally of note is Charlotte's “eavesdropping” from outside the immediate space of the parlor. Charlotte's mourning is public, visible, worn on her body, but she is also invisible as she takes in her mistresses' opinions of the woman she is mourning.

According to a “Study Guide” produced for the aforementioned 2009 performance, the deceased Saint-Fond, “[b]y bringing her explicit and blasphemous story onto the stage...brings the spirit of de Sade into the private space of Montreuil's salon,” and it is this legacy Charlotte perpetuates through the presence of her mourning body.<sup>362</sup> In fact, the last time we see the Comtesse de Saint-Fond alive (Act 2), she makes a curious point of summoning Charlotte and giving her explicit instructions to “[t]ake a good look at my face. I doubt I shall ever visit this house again, and I am particularly anxious that you, who will probably see only the faces of

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 81. *MZ*, vol. 24, 304-305.

<sup>362</sup> Sophie Watkiss, *Study Guide for Madame de Sade by Yukio Mishima* (Donmar Warehouse, 2009), 28. <http://www.donmarwarehouse.com/~media/Files/Madame%20de%20Sade.ashx>, accessed February 14, 2016.

respectable, God-fearing people [立派な正しい方々の顔] for the rest of your life, remember the face of a dissolute woman [不身持というものがどんな顔をしているか、よく見覚えておくんだね].”<sup>363</sup> Impressing upon the maid the essence of her character, Saint-Fond ensures that her legacy will remain behind her, explicitly through the careful memory of her face. After Saint-Fond’s death, the spirit of de Sade himself is also inherited through similar means by Charlotte, in an unbroken chain of mourning—a heredity of dissolution—ultimately granting Charlotte power over the very man around whom her mistresses’ worlds revolve.

Mishima’s play, as I noted in my Introduction, is not purely a ‘historical’ play, for the characters of the Comtesse de Saint-Fond, Baronesse de Simiane, and Charlotte are entirely fictional, and the timeline is altered significantly enough to keep other characters alive beyond their historical time.<sup>364</sup> One other significant historical alteration occurs at the end of the play, when Mishima relocates and reattributes the historical Renée’s final farewell to her husband, giving the role of sealing his fate to the character of Charlotte instead. In the historical account,

[p]rior to her husband’s release, Renée enters the convent of Sainte Sainte-Aure, which was run by Augustinian nuns, and was a particularly devout community. It is here that Alphonse travels after he is freed, and asks to see his wife of twenty three years, with whom he hoped to spend the rest of his life. But in an aboutface as absolute as the fervour of her previous devotion, Renée refuses to appear. She sends a messenger saying she never wants to see him again. In his play, Mishima observes unity of place, setting this

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<sup>363</sup> *Madame de Sade*, 57. *MZ*, vol. 24, 286.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

scene in Madame de Montreuil's salon. Religion is represented through the onstage presence of Simiane, who has become a nun.<sup>365</sup>

This shuffling of character actions according to the play's domestic setting bestows upon Charlotte, the servant, the final say. Rather than a simple messenger delivering Renée's refusal to see him, de Sade is greeted instead by someone intimate to the women, one whose report on him bears serious weight. The audience too 'sees' de Sade only through Charlotte's eyes. There is no actor who plays him—he exists in the play only in the words of the women who know him, and it is Charlotte who assures that he never reaches the stage. At the very end of the play, Charlotte comes back from greeting and keeping the Marquis de Sade waiting at the door. Renée asks her, “*after a long pause,*” to “[t]ell me how the marquis looks, Charlotte.”

CHARLOTTE: He is waiting outside the door. Shall I show him in [お通しいたしまし  
ようか]?

RENÉE: I am asking you how he looks.

CHARLOTTE: He has changed so much I hardly recognized him. He is wearing a woolen coat with patched elbows and a shirt with a collar so dirty—excuse me for saying so—I took him at first for an old beggar [物乞いの老人]. And he's become so stout! His face is puffy and looks deathly pale, and his body's grown so fat that his clothes are too small for him. I wonder if he can even get through the door. His eyes keep darting about nervously, and his jaw shakes a little. You can see when he mumbles [何か不明瞭に物を仰言る] that he's only got a few yellowish teeth left in his mouth. But when he gave his name, it was with dignity [威厳を以て]. He said, “Have you forgotten me,

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<sup>365</sup> Watkiss, 23.



Charlotte?” Then, pronouncing each word distinctly [一語一語を区切るように], he said, “I am Donatien-Alphonse-Francois, Marquis de Sade.”

*All are silent.*

RENÉE: Please ask him to leave [お帰ししておくれ]. And tell him this: “The marquise will never see him again.”<sup>366</sup>

It is not ultimately Charlotte’s choice whether the Marquis de Sade is admitted to the parlor, but she is given full creative control over the image of him conveyed to the room and to the audience, asserting a level of ‘ownership’ over de Sade to go along with the ‘insolent’ nature her employers accuse her of inheriting from Saint-Fond. De Sade never makes it to the stage, and this scene is the closest he ever gets. Able to present himself neither to his wife nor the audience, de Sade’s fate is sealed by his depiction in the words of the servant Charlotte, who narrates the final moments of his story—and the final moments of the play—with a description of his now sickly body like that of an “old beggar,” a body ill-suited to both her mistresses’ presence and possibly even to fitting through their door. This servant, who brings in the spirit of the Revolution via her dress, who conveys messages to the outside and guests into the room, whose body and presence is accepted almost as a fixture of the room even as she is considered in some way part of the family, who would have probably even been a sort of second “mother figure” for Anne and Renée, here delivers the final message of the Marquis de Sade, her words becoming the final image Renée is willing to accept of her once beloved husband.<sup>367</sup> The image Charlotte paints is contrary to the romantic, tragic hero Renée once saw in her dilettante husband, and hearing Charlotte’s narration of this incongruity is all she needs to declare an end to their

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<sup>366</sup> *Madame de Sade*, 106. *MZ*, vol. 24, 325-326.

<sup>367</sup> Watkiss, 34.

relationship. Just as Charlotte pokes a series of holes in Anne's romantic tales of Venice, then, she also obliterates the romantic image of de Sade himself through her dispassionate description of his appearance. In the end, Mishima's *Madame de Sade* is thus the story of an aristocratic downfall in which the extravagances of the body undergo a transfer and bring about the end of an era and the end of a romance—and it is the servant, Charlotte, barring the front door, who has the final word.

In the end, Charlotte both destroys and inherits the legacy of Saint-Fond and de Sade, of depravity and beauty and romance, in a world in which the nobility is falling apart and losing its grip on all these same things. Before all this, however, already in Act 1, the women ask themselves if it is not some inheritance of the Marquis' which comprises his depravity, a noble right to tawdriness that itself is fading away with the changing times.<sup>368</sup>

MONTREUIL: Are you suggesting that morality is for coachmen and stable boys [道徳は車夫馬丁のもので], but not for the nobility [貴族のものではない]? The misconduct [不身持] of the nobility has never before been so subjected to public criticism [世間の非難を浴びやすい]. Nowadays people believe that the aristocracy should serve as the model of morality.

SAINT-FOND: I can't agree. The common people have become bored with morality [民衆は道徳に倦きて], and they'd like to enjoy for themselves the immorality that hitherto

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<sup>368</sup> *Madame de Sade* 15. *MZ*, vol. 24, 251.

has been the exclusive prerogative of the nobility [貴族の専用だった悪徳を、わがものにしたくなったんですわ].<sup>369</sup>

As the common people, like Charlotte, threaten to inherit bodily pleasure and immorality along with the political and socioeconomic equality they seek, the nobility simultaneously lose their own right to the depraved extravagance to which they are accustomed. Once excused for whatever cruelty and decadence they pleased—from promiscuity to murder—the nobility are now expected to behave impeccably, and to face imprisonment and disgrace otherwise.

Montreuil mourns the requirements this now puts upon her, referring to a prior incident where “it was left to me, like the nursemaid of some son too troublesome for his parents to handle, to throw cold water on Alphonse’s affair with Colette, the actress, and force a separation.”<sup>370</sup> As servants, through their intimacy with noble families, thus inherit the ‘fortunes’ of status their masters and mistresses once laid exclusive claim to, the nobility themselves are left scrambling like “nursemaids [乳母]” to police the behavior of their own.

### **Presence: The (Right) Place at the (Right) Time**

Servitude is hardly the image we have of agency. It in fact seems to imply its exact opposite, absolute subordination to the needs and wills of others. As I have discussed, however, servants in Mishima are powerful in their service, threatening the dominant narratives in the most literal sense, antagonistic to the stories his main characters wish to tell about themselves; and they accomplish this not through open rebellion against the system, but from their place

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 10. *MZ*, vol. 24, 246.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 13. *MZ*, vol. 24, 249.

within it. Functionally intimate to the narrative discourse and, through the presence of their bodies, physically intimate to the bodies of their masters, servant characters leave their mark both in the domestic space and in the space of the storyworld itself. In her 2015 book, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler, responding to populist movements far more recent than the French Revolution, discusses the ways in which marginalized and subjugated bodies assert themselves via physical presence in space. She writes:

... [W]hen the body “speaks” politically, it is not only in vocal or written language. The persistence of the body in its exposure calls that legitimacy [of the state] into question and does so precisely through a specific performativity of the body. Both action and gesture signify and speak, both as action and claim; the one is not finally extricable from the other.<sup>371</sup>

Butler’s concern is with the political performance of bodies in public space (e.g. sit-ins, marches, and other forms of assembled protest), and her work focuses on the regimes of power that structure public engagement, but public space is not the only place of politics, and the presence and the needs of the body also manifest according to private, domestic power structures as well. Even the nuclear family, for instance, as one of the foundational structures of private modern life, constitutes a space in which bodies and their relationships to one another are both highly contested and overdetermined. Despite all the illusions it creates around itself of apolitical intimacy and mutual support, the nuclear family too is a contested ground, ostensibly equally accessible to all members but nevertheless delimited by a variety of firmly entrenched power structures. If the space of the nuclear family, similarly to public space, is never free of the

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<sup>371</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 83.

performance of a multiplicity of identities and subject positions, then the private domestic structure and its hierarchies of status, power, and access are equally dependent upon the compliance (and threatened by the non-compliance) of the bodies within its domain.

The appearance of these structures in a specifically literary context such as Mishima's thus magnifies the particular politics of visibility, exclusion, positionality and power that I have discussed in my previous chapters. The questions of who and what can be represented in literary space, what it means to co-exist within a space, what is limited by blind spots in knowledge and perspective, and whether the text admits to these blind spots or attempts to efface them, are not in fact questions to be answered, but rather a series of ongoing negotiations of what it means to take part in a larger structure. To only bemoan these limitations under the guise of a politics of equal representation would in fact require a delegitimizing of any modes of being not already conceived within normative discourse as 'powerful.' The 'reclaimed' servant is allowed to be powerful, but only so long as she stops serving, is alienated from service as such, so long as she is not a servant at all.

Presence, however, and the intimacy that it entails, are powerful in Mishima's fiction, and his servants exact immense pressure upon the narrative, simultaneously driving the story forward and frustrating the stories his main characters would prefer to have told, throwing a wrench in how they wish to 'present' or 'represent' themselves. Some servants pose physical or epistemological threats, like those in *Confessions of a Mask*, others, like those in *Spring Snow*, are conniving in their intimacy with the body—far too close for comfort—and some, like Charlotte in *Madame de Sade*, are the bodies that bear the hallmarks of protest, irreconcilability, and revolution. Mishima's servants are neither romanticized nor ignored, neither coddled nor pitied, and are secondary to his main characters only if one considers conflict secondary to

novelistic structure. If servants in Mishima's fiction thus have so much power over the particulars of how the story unfolds, then it becomes possible to reread his works as in fact being the 'stories of servants'—in every sense of the phrase—just as much as they are stories about their masters. While Mishima's servants might at times disappear from the room, from history, or even from the prose itself, the politics of their service, and the power of their subversion, is deeply embodied and ever-present.

## Conclusion

### Serving Characters: Representation and Relationships in Literary Structure

“I can’t run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not any more. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn’t make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions.”<sup>372</sup>

In J.M. Coetzee’s 1999 novel *Disgrace*, Lucy reprimands her English professor father, David, for what she perceives as his self-centered ignorance of her personal autonomy, refusing to be relegated any longer to a supporting role in his life story. Her objection is complicated, however, by the fact that, from the reader’s perspective, Lucy does indeed actually enter the novel only partway through—a fact of which she, as a character in the storyworld of that novel, is naturally unaware. From her intradiegetic perspective, it is rather her father who has crashed into her life, having moved in with her after losing his job on account of his sexual misconduct with a student.

Lucy’s complaint is striking in part precisely because David is indeed the ostensible main character. The narration of the novel is focalized through him, and it begins and ends with his experiences. Lucy’s objection, nevertheless, is not to the structure of the novel itself but rather to

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<sup>372</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 198.

her father's treatment of her as a side note to his more important life. By specifically putting her objection into literary terms, Lucy professes her authority over her own life via the very language of her father's profession, an act that, though it may do little to change her actual position within the narrative, calls attention both to the provisional nature of minor characters and to the fact that they are specific to literature. There are no minor characters in real life.

Systemic disparities and marginalization, class and social disempowerment, poor representation and invisibility—these are the hallmarks of real life that make people or groups of people appear minor from historical, societal, and personal perspectives, but whereas marginalized humans still exist as complete persons, minor characters exist only in the pages of stories that are not their own. The servant characters I discuss are all of this sort of 'minor,' while also representing a group of people who, historically-speaking, are likewise relegated by society to their own air of minoriness. Even in Tanizaki's *The Maids*, discussed in Chapter 2, those maids themselves only brush the status of main character within individual anecdotes that make up the novel, which is otherwise very much about the household of their employers.

In this distinction, however, is also support for the fundamental contention behind my work here—that servant characters, minor as they may be, representative as they may be of an economic and socially disempowered group of people, achieve a place of subtle but far-reaching power in these novels. This power is precisely *contingent on* their minor status, rather than seized despite it, as their functional positions allow them to stake a claim on the very narrative discourse that provides structure to their masters' stories. The structure that allows main characters to be main characters in the first place is thus in the hands—and mouths, and bodies—of servant characters, who thereby, like Lucy in *Disgrace*, set the terms for their own literary representation. These characters challenge not just their own marginalization, but also the very



structures, tropes, and conventions that allow main characters to feel central.

In *Flat Protagonists: A Theory of Novel Character*, Marta Figlerowicz discusses a literary phenomenon defined by truly lackluster main characters. These “flat protagonists,” she explains, “are also characters to whose representation these novels devote the majority of their narrative space.” They “hardly need to fight for this narrative exposure,” and indeed “are also major characters in the further, related sense that their representation changes significantly in the course of the novel.”<sup>373</sup> On the other hand, while minor characters might take up narrative space seemingly disproportionate to their supposed minorness, Figlerowicz’s flat protagonists conversely “draw attention to themselves by being somehow simpler, less influential, and more restricted in their self-expression than they themselves, or the novels’ implied readers, would have assumed or expected.”<sup>374</sup> From my own analysis, I recall as an example of this phenomenon Sunaga’s diminishing estimation of his maid Saku in Sōseki’s *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, which, following Sunaga’s abrupt pivot to musing what Saku might think of Chiyoko, has the effect in the end only of underlining the fact that both Sunaga and the reader are actually denied access to Saku’s mind. While literature is often lauded for its ability to, in Figlerowicz’s words, “complicate our view of the world by making us focus on more kinds of people than we

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<sup>373</sup> Marta Figlerowicz, *Flat Protagonists: A Theory of Novel Character* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11. While the representation of characters changing over the course of a novel might seem incompatible with a diagnosis of flatness, Figlerowicz explains that it is not the actual defining qualities of the character that change, but rather how those qualities are presented to the reader. A character that at first seems dedicated and ambitious, for instance, may seem simply stuck in her ways by the end of the novel, just as a character that turns out to be hopelessly naïve might have initially seemed capable of changing the world. While the overarching qualities which make these characters flat thus do not change, the ways in which these qualities are presented and interpreted do continue to evolve over the course of the story.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

might otherwise have the mind to attend to,” she explains that it can also present us with “the inverse perspective of a person who wants to be the object of other people’s attentiveness, and who seeks insight about herself from her environment.” If novels may provide representation to the underrepresented, they can also “highlight the mimetic difficulty of representing, or even acknowledging, how few experiences and concepts a single person holds out toward others compared to the breadth of the surrounding world.”<sup>375</sup>

Like Coetzee’s Lucy, Figlerowicz thus calls attention to the ironies of literary divisions of major and minor—that they do not exist with regards to real people, and also that they are products of a structure that cannot fully suppress the humanity of minor characters any more than it can force a major character to be interesting. In fact, as David Galef argues in *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters*, a minor character can be round just as easily as the major characters discussed by Figlerowicz prove to be flat, and these round minor characters may in fact “in their paucity of detail invite the reader’s elaboration” and “curiosity” in a way even a “well-drawn flat character” cannot.<sup>376</sup> This complicates the very distinction between major and minor, Galef grants, which is “compounded by the level of importance that some minor characters achieve, either as symbols or as plot necessities.” One of the most often confounding things about minor characters, according to Galef, is the fact of minor characters’ specifically structural contributions to such elements as “plot, theme, space, and action.”<sup>377</sup> Despite what Galef refers to as the “gray fuzz” introduced to literary analysis by readers’ elaborations and extrapolations with regards to these minor characters, the ability of minor

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>376</sup> David Galef, *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1955), 3.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 11.

characters to attract the attention, imagination, and sympathy of readers cannot be separated from the essential functions they perform in the novels we read.<sup>378</sup> Galef describes a number of such specific functions and types—many of them reminiscent of my own analysis of the functions performed by servant characters in the novels I discuss—but the fact remains that minor servant characters, through the very proximity to literary structure that their minorness affords them, beckon more attention, investment, and even respect than we might readily give their real-life corollaries.<sup>379</sup>

Lest the culmination of attention denied these real-life corollaries leads us to substitute fervent indignation over the minorness of servant characters for any actually meaningful reconciliation of historical and socioeconomic oversights, I once again emphasize that characters are not people. Indeed, it is the very fact that they are not people that gives them their power. When Charles Crittenden asks, for instance, in his article “Fictional Characters and Logical Completeness,” what differentiates characters and real people, he arrives at the conclusion that, while both characters and people may be “logically complete”—that is, that we may imagine there is more to them than we might see—“it does not follow that they must be *ontologically* alike.” The difference between people and characters, in Crittenden’s estimation, is simply the

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 16-21. Galef’s listed character types are divided by function into “structural types” and “mimetic types.” Among the structural types are narrators and expositors, interrupters, symbols and allegories, enablers or agents of action, foils and contrasts, doubles or doppelgängers, and emphasizees. Mimetic types, on the other hand, include eccentrics, friends, enemies, acquaintances, family, people (as in, “the populace”), chorus, upper and lower classes, background, and what he calls the “subhuman” characters of animals, objects, and places. The prior category contains designations determined primarily by characters’ position vis-à-vis the narrative discourse, whereas the second category describes how characters relate to one another. Individual characters, generally speaking, are composed of at least one type from each category.

“very great difference indeed...between what is merely talked about, and what is actually present in the world.”<sup>380</sup> The irony when it comes to minor characters representing marginalized people is that these characters only exist so far as they are part of the discourse, whereas those they represent are so often relegated to the margins precisely by being barred from that discourse.

The editors of *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, expanding in their introduction upon the concept of the ontological incompleteness of characters, likewise identify the difference between people and characters primarily in the degree to which characters invite us to think about them and their place in their fictional worlds.

Obviously, the reception of characters is quite different from the direct encounter with real persons: Readers, listeners, or viewers focus on media texts, activate media knowledge and communication rules, they cannot interact with the represented persons but can think about their meaning, as well as about causes and effects, and they can shift their attention from the level of what is represented (Sherlock Holmes) to the level of presentation (the words of the book, the actor’s performance). The symbolism and the communicative mediation of characters mark fundamental differences to the observation of persons in reality.<sup>381</sup>

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to do much of this kind of work, shifting from the question of who gets represented in a story to the question of what roles they play in its

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<sup>380</sup> Charles Crittenden, “Fictional Characters and Logical Completeness,” *Poetics* 11 (1982): 344.

<sup>381</sup> Jens Eder, Fotis Jannidis, and Ralf Schneider, eds., *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media* (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter, 2010), 11.

presentation. I argue that a similar shift is recognized also within the works I discuss. In Sōseki's fiction, for instance, I have illustrated the ways in which servant characters mark gaps in the narrative, which call attention both to their underrepresentation in stories and also to the limitations this places on their masters' 'mastery' over their own stories. Similarly, in Tanizaki's fiction I have identified the collaborative role servants play in the task of presenting their masters' stories, filling in the gaps in their knowledge, authority, and history. In Mishima's fiction, furthermore, it is as though the servant characters themselves have become aware that they are inscrutable to their masters *and* that they have been endowed with power over them, capable of foiling the manner in which their masters might otherwise wish to represent themselves.

Not being real, then, can in fact be a great boon for minor characters, whose ability to move on the level of literary structure—like Charlotte in Mishima's *Madame de Sade*, moving freely on and off the stage—permits them a level of power that reality might not grant their real-life equivalents. A story about servant characters, for instance, with servant main characters, might feature servants either serving, failing to serve, or rebelling against serving. Regardless of which fate ultimately befalls these hypothetical characters, however, it would be a fate determined at the mercy of the story's structure, much as the reader of Sōseki's *And Then* knows Daisuke's life will spin out of control long before it actually does, or Tanizaki's *The Makioka Sisters* promises Yukiko's hand in marriage whether she likes it or not, or that Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* dooms Kou-chan to compulsively and endlessly re-examine and 'confess' himself. These novels do not, however, tell us whether Kadono ever goes on to attend school, or if O-haru ever brings her family to visit the Makiokas after she gets married, or what the servants who so influenced his youth might think of Kou-chan as an adult.

The difference here lies in the connection between these minor servant characters and the

structure. As Gary Saul Morson explains in *Prosaics and Other Provocations: Empathy, Open Time, and the Novel*:

The characters go on responding to circumstances according to their will, choosing actions on the basis of their limited knowledge. But we, who can see the whole pattern, who may even have read the work before and can in any case guess what a good author would do, know what they will choose. The characters freely choose what the structure predestines them to choose.<sup>382</sup>

Minor characters, however, are not bound to the same sorts of predestination as main characters are. They characteristically disappear from the story, as illustrated by Alex Woloch's *The One vs. The Many*, but even that disappearance only solidifies their escape from some predetermined end. While the supporting servant characters I have discussed may be denied closure within their respective novels, they need only to assist in bringing their masters' stories to a close before they are free to go. One might, for instance, imagine a happy life awaits Kadono, or O-haru, or Kou-chan's family maids after the story ends—even if they themselves, through their roles as foils, enablers, facilitators, and manipulators, have sometimes wittingly, sometimes unwittingly, left little room to imagine the same for their masters.

While it may seem squarely in the realm of Galef's "gray fuzz" to speculate on what might happen to any given character after they are done being a character, my point is not the speculation itself, but rather to point out the lack of any indication of these characters' fates prior to speculation. Though I have taken pains to steer away from any explicit "gray fuzz" in my analysis, thinking about characters in terms of representation necessarily requires acknowledging

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<sup>382</sup> Gary Saul Morson, *Prosaics and Other Provocations: Empathy, Open Time, and the Novel* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 53.

the ways in which readers correlate characters to real persons living real lives. Elizabeth Fowler, in *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing*, notes that even “[l]iterary scholarship itself speaks of characters as if they were real people and, just as frequently, warns us that they are not.” “Students often notice the apparent contradiction,” she continues, “and make their teachers aware that we lack a theoretical account of the relation between the literary character and the human being.”<sup>383</sup> In an attempt to address this gap, Fowler introduces the concept of “social persons”:

Social persons are models of the person, familiar concepts of social being that attain currency through common use. The viewer and reader rely on them as ways of understanding figural representation, whereas the artist relies on them as compositional tools or guides. Yet in an important sense they are not “there,” not in the picture at all, but only in our minds and in the air of culture—phantoms of the cognitive process of perception. As conventional kinds of person, social persons are very much like literary genres, because they depend upon the recognition of convention.<sup>384</sup>

Just as the literary structures of different genres, in Morson’s estimation, predestine their major characters to their appropriate fates, Fowler’s social persons are similarly created through a dialogue between the reader and conventional understandings of the divisions between human beings. Thus, by thinking of servant characters as another genre of social person—just as the

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<sup>383</sup> Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 5. Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider in fact divide literary studies’ perspectives on the existence of characters into four major categories: semiotic theories that define characters as signs and structures, cognitive approaches that examine the ways characters exist in the minds of readers, philosophical considerations of characters as abstract objects, and lastly the philosophical position that characters do not exist at all. Eder, et al., 8.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

categories of mother, neighbor, merchant, etc. also constitute social persons within literature and life—it becomes possible to think simultaneously both of the literary structural conventions in which individual characters take part, and of the connections between the representation of servant characters and the actual existence of real-life servants. “Social persons,” Fowler writes, moreover “depend not only upon their contexts of topoi and institutions, but also upon their positions in networks of social relationships.”<sup>385</sup> As social persons, servant characters are formed not just through their indexical relation to real persons, or even just as agents of literary structure, but also through their relationships with all the other characters with whom they interact and whose stories they serve. The question of representation, in the political sense of how a group of people is depicted and to what degree they recognize themselves in that depiction, thus constitutes a fourth facet—that of how characters interact with the reader.

David Fishelov, in his article “Types of Character, Characteristics of Type,” posits a distinction between what he calls the textual and constructed levels of character as an expansion upon E.M. Forster’s flat/round dichotomy. A character can be either flat or round on the textual level while also being either flat or round on the constructed level. The textual level, Fishelov explains, constitutes how “a character may be limitedly or extensively represented and referred to in the text” and entails such questions as “whether the given character has a proper name” or “whether his consciousness is presented to us,” while the constructed level “is a product of various complex constructing and integrating activities that involve the reader’s experience and knowledge of the world.”<sup>386</sup> It is this latter level that the reader engages in asking the question of how well a character represents a type of person in the world, while the former is confined to the

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>386</sup> David Fishelov, “Types of Character, Characteristics of Types,” *Style* 24.3 (1990): 425.



degree to which the character is represented in the text itself. In writing about servant characters, with an eye to their structural contributions and the ways in which these structural contributions imbue them with influence beyond their humble station, I have thus arrived at the conclusion that these characters are frequently “textually flat” but “constructionally round”—a category that Fishelov refers to as “type-like individuals.”<sup>387</sup> These are often, Fishelov explains, characters whose “flat” fixations and associations with a single idea are complicated by eccentricities that invite the reader to “presuppose some *psychological depth* of an individual—an element of which a mere type is deprived.”<sup>388</sup> Much of the experience of reading Tadeshina in Mishima’s *Spring Snow*, for instance, entails wondering what could be motivating her single-minded thirst for control, and Sunaga’s insistence on Saku’s simplicity in Sōseki’s *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* strikes the reader as false even if the novel does not provide any proof that it is. Similarly, the various maids in Tanizaki’s *The Maids* feel like the main characters of the story precisely because they are defined by the sorts of eccentricities that so often come of deeply-held values, desires, and traumas—even if all the reader might ever know of them as individuals are those eccentricities themselves.

For this reason, a lack of elaboration on the thoughts and lives of characters can in fact have the unexpected effect of making them feel more real and relatable than other characters exhaustively described. This is a function explicitly of these characters’ relationship to the narrative discourse, or what Alan Palmer calls the “plot-forming process” in his article “The Construction of Fictional Minds.”<sup>389</sup> “[R]eaders,” Palmer explains, “read the plot of a novel as

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 426.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 430.

<sup>389</sup> Alan Palmer, “The Construction of Fictional Minds,” *Narrative* 10.1 (2002): 42.

the combination of the concrete expressions of the embedded narratives of all of its various characters: the thoughts they think and the actions they take.” Since “the narrator cannot give the reader continued and total direct access to the minds of all the characters,” the reader is left with no avenue but to “infer their continued mental processes from all the available evidence,” no matter how scarce or unreliable that evidence may be.<sup>390</sup> In the case of minor characters, whose minds are often closed off but whose actions continue to drive the narrative, Palmer explains that “the reading process is very creative in constructing coherent and continuous fictional consciousnesses from a minimum of information.”<sup>391</sup>

The question remains, however, of what these reading processes have to do with the question of representation when it comes to groups of people so often represented in art only by minor characters. The answer, I argue, comes in the space between literature’s ability to force us to imagine fictional consciousnesses obscured by a lack of textual attention and the temptation to empathize with these characters, onto which we have projected our knowledge and experiences. As Suzanne Keen acknowledges in *Empathy and the Novel*, the nature of this experience will vary by reader, and readers may have reactions to characters that their authors never planned for, but in fact, much of the social value of literary representations lies precisely in this lack of expectation or enforcement of a ‘right’ reaction. Keen explains,

I argue here that the very fictionality of novels predisposes readers to empathize with characters, since a fiction known to be “made up” does not activate suspicion and wariness as an apparently “real” appeal for assistance may do. I posit that fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers’ feeling empathy without experiencing a resultant demand

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 44.

on real-world action. This freedom from obligation paradoxically opens up the channels for both empathy and related moral affects such as sympathy, outrage, pity, righteous indignation, and (not to be underestimated) shared joy and satisfaction.<sup>392</sup>

That a reader thus freed from the need to act on their empathy in the real world, permitted to imagine the fullness of humanity in a character, might in itself constitute a net-gain for the real people represented by said character is a questionable proposition. Readers may feel bad for Kadono when his dilettante master speaks down to him, or cheer on the many servants in *The Maids* as they assert their chaos and control in the household, or get fed up with *Spring Snow*'s Kiyooki right along with Iinuma, but none of these feelings is likely to lead to real outrage on behalf of real people in real positions of service. As Anna Lindhé explains in her article "The Paradox of Narrative Empathy and the Form of the Novel, or What George Eliot Knew," not only does readerly empathy not necessarily translate to empathetic action, but it also often requires the suspension of empathy for other characters. "[I]f literature creates an understanding of the Other," Lindhé argues, "it simultaneously creates an Other—or the Other's Other—towards whom less favorable feelings may be directed."<sup>393</sup>

While I agree with Lindhé that this indeed challenges the idea of the consumption of literary characters as an ethical activity in and of itself, I also see this restructuring of empathy as part of the key mechanism by which the servant characters I discuss assert themselves in their respective texts. Lindhé goes on to identify the empathetic battleground between characters specifically as residing in "the narratological tension between story and discourse." There is a

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<sup>392</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>393</sup> Anna Lindhé, "The Paradox of Narrative Empathy and the Form of the Novel, or What George Eliot Knew," *Studies in the Novel* 48.1 (2016): 21.

“sacrificial dimension,” she explains, “at the heart of the novel itself” whereby narrative discourse directs the empathy of readers from one character to another, even at times at the expense of the character who in fact suffers more from the events of the story itself.<sup>394</sup> The same sacrificial dimension is at work in the examples I discussed earlier. After all, Kadono may be just fine, while the reader knows that Daisuke is spiraling out of control. The Chikuras face the loss of their entire way of life, but it is easy to react with amusement over their domestic workers’ newfound insistence that they be spoken to with respect. Kiyooki literally dies in the end, but the unfairness of Inuma’s abrupt dismissal takes up more narrative space and has greater ramifications, arguably even well into the second book of the tetralogy.

Of course, in many of the novels I discuss, these structural transfers of allegiances from masters to their servants occur not due to a greater depth afforded the servants themselves, but rather due to the novels’ emphases on the personal failings of the masters. The frustrations the reader may feel with the main characters are what drive the reader, in the case of Sōseki’s novels, to note that we do not know what the servants think, or to realize that Tanizaki’s main characters would be lost without their servants, or to eagerly anticipate how Mishima’s servants will foil their masters next. The ways in which readers relate to individual characters are thus determined not by the relative weight of their textual portrayal, but rather by how these characters relate to one another within the character system. While the reader’s temporary allegiances to servant characters may not inspire the openly fuzzy feelings of empathy that one might feel for a main character—or perhaps any empathy at all—they are impactful precisely because they operate on the structural level, thrusting these servant characters into a place of narrative importance far

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 33.

greater than the designation of “minor character/servant” might indicate. By structuring the story, that is, servant characters also structure the readers’ response to that story and its characters, creating the means and terms for empathetic attachment, even if they do not necessarily insist on shifting the balance of that attention to themselves.

In raising the question of representation, of characters’ relationships to real individuals, it is easy to fall back on matters such as historical accuracy, the degree of psychological depth, or open appeals to consider the plight of the servant. Prioritizing these matters, however, often requires overlooking the real ways in which characters serving the structure are allowed to effectively set the terms and lay the foundation for their own representation. A closer look at the relationship between these characters and the role they play in the literary structure thus reveals servants with thoughts and priorities of their own, who are not only vital to the story but also capable of asserting themselves within it. It would be unethical and unnecessary, therefore, for Sōseki, Tanizaki, and Mishima themselves to have set out to depict servants as ‘heroes’ of the discourse. Whether any one of them meant for their servant characters to advocate for themselves from the margins is irrelevant, and to focus on this lack of clear intention would be to once again sacrifice what these texts offer on the altar of the context that they skirt. After all, as James Phelan explains in *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative*, an awareness of sociohistorical context can enable readers to reject an author’s literary world just as easily as it can provide the means for understanding it. As an example, he juxtaposes two very different ways of reading Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813):

Reading *Pride and Prejudice* in the authorial audience requires one to know such things as social conventions about visiting among the upper classes, social codes about feminine

delicacy, what it means to have one's estate entailed, what it means to be the daughter of a gentleman, what it means to get one's money by trade in that society, and so on. One can always read the novel to see how it is using these codes and one can always read against those uses. One might, for example, note the way that servants are used and treated in the novel and develop a critique about how Elizabeth's happiness and good fortune is juxtaposed with and dependent upon a working class that Austen herself takes for granted. Such a reading could go on to undermine any positive evaluation of both Elizabeth and the implied author.<sup>395</sup>

Phelan is not advocating, however, for either of these readings in particular. Rather, he is cautioning against the temptation to privilege external historicization over “the internal logic and affective structure of the whole progression [plot].”<sup>396</sup> The qualities of the literary “transaction itself,” Phelan argues, “more than the conditions under which the transaction is produced,” are the means by which authors not only follow but also confront and play with the literary and historical conventions that they inherit and inhabit.<sup>397</sup>

Like Phelan, I have tried throughout these chapters “to construct a narrative about the development of the variety of forms of progression with particular emphasis on the uses of character within progressions.”<sup>398</sup> Servant characters' place in the structure, the functions they play in the stories of their masters—and the ways in which they rebel against these structures and

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<sup>395</sup> James Phelan, *Reading People, Reading Plots: Character, Progression, and the Interpretation of Narrative* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 208-209.

<sup>396</sup> Phelan defines “progression” as “plot,” or what I have alternatively referred to as “narrative discourse” or “literary structure.”

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

functions—attest to the complexities of domestic service as loudly as any work that would aim to center servants within the story itself. If political representation within art requires both that those represented recognize themselves within it, and that the audience at large experiences empathy for those characters, then even minor characters—and maybe especially minor characters—whose roles are primarily structural present new ways for thinking through how characters relate to real people and how real people might relate to characters. Those at the margins of society, and those at the margins of stories, are often those who form the foundations of that society or that story. To recognize the self, both in these characters, and in the roles they play in enabling the mechanisms of society and economics, is to recognize new routes for identification, and new ways of rewriting our narratives of power and authority.

Having thus far emphasized the separation of literary analysis and historical context, I must now turn explicitly to history. In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses Karl Marx’s concepts of History 1 and History 2, wherein History 1 is the dominant history, as defined by the reproduction and naturalization of capital, while History 2 constitutes “an element of deep uncertainty” within “the intimate space of capital.”<sup>399</sup> A similar dynamic exists between servant characters and the stories they serve. If the story as defined by its main characters—those the story is about—can be equated to History 1, reading these stories through the ways in which their servants intervene in and reframe them constitutes a kind of History 2. As Chakrabarty explains,

...Marx appears to suggest that entities as close and necessary to the functioning of capital as money and commodity do not necessarily belong by any natural connection to

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<sup>399</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 64.

either capital's own life process or to the past posited by capital. [...] Capital has to encounter in the reproduction of its own life process relationships that present it with double possibilities. These relations could be central to capital's self-reproduction, and yet it is also possible for them to be oriented to structures that do not contribute to such reproduction. History 2s are thus not pasts separate from capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic.<sup>400</sup>

The servant characters I have discussed, similarly, are also essential to their masters' stories while nevertheless insisting on interrupting them, reframing them, and hinting at the possibility of stories outside of them. It is, in fact, the worker, Chakrabarty explains, who best exemplifies the potential of History 2, who "embodies other kinds of pasts" that "enable the human bearer of labor power to enact other ways of being in the world—other than, that is, being the bearer of labor power."<sup>401</sup> Just as capital cannot reproduce itself without the worker, the middle-class stories I discuss in the preceding chapters cannot operate without their servants. Both Chakrabarty's worker and my servant, moreover, are made minor/supporting/secondary by way of a structure dependent upon their very labor. Having thus begun this conclusion with the insistence by Coetzee's Lucy that real life does not have minor characters, I fall back now on the fact that it does, however, have servants. As characters and people made minor by the structure, these servants are in fact the denizens of the structure, agents of the structure. By pointing out its gaps, filling them in, and even offering their own alternatives, servant characters both serve the story and mount a challenge to it, allowing for new ways of thinking about authority, power, and representation from within the very same hegemonic forms which we take for granted.

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 66.



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