

The Madonna and the Harlot: Images of Woman in Tanizaki

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The Madonna and the Harlot—this is an antithesis that will seem unnecessarily stark and extreme to the modern reader, who may well ask, along with Denis de Rougemont (1956): What of the middle ground, woman as wife and help-mate of man? Let us begin by admitting that the dichotomy is offensive to the modern mind, insofar as that mind is liberal, humanist, and perhaps secularist. Let us grant that even within the confines of the traditional Church, the “middle position” is of great importance.

For Protestantism, marriage is the natural and appropriate state of things, an aid to, if not a condition of, virtue. For Catholicism, it is a blessed state hallowed by the sacrament of matrimony, even if distinctly inferior to virginity. For Eastern Orthodoxy, the same is true: the lower clergy may be married but bishops are drawn only from the ranks of monks who are, by definition, celibate, thus giving a certain pride of place to virginity while allowing and sanctifying marriage.

But all this having been granted, it is still true that a number of critics, both Japanese and Western, have applied the Western Madonna/Harlot schema to the writings of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965). Howard S. Hibbett, for example, has written of the “doubtless unconscious link between the usually isolated and antithetical images of woman as madonna or harlot, the sexually pure mother and the degraded, degrading seductress” (Hibbett 1966, p. 932). In another essay, Hibbett says:

Roughly categorized, Tanizaki's heroines fall into two types: the exquisite, somewhat ghostly woman of classical features and old-fashioned reticence, increasingly rare in modern Japan, and the tainted, sensual beauty who adorns herself in exotic garb and who likes Western amenities, if not Western men.

Among the former is the quasi-religious idealized dream figure of Mother in *Diary of a Mad Old Man*; the archetype of the latter is the harlot—not restricted to professionals such as Louise in *Some Prefer Nettles*—who may even go so far as to accept that ultimate degradation, a foreign clientele. The madonna and the harlot are a significantly related pair. As long ago as 1910 (in the first of his *Three Contributions to the Psychology of Love*), Freud discussed the link between these seemingly antithetical objects of male fantasy; in 1912 (“On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love”) he again noted this kind of dissociation between sacred and profane love, between the tender, affectionate feelings and the sensual feelings. . . . (Hibbett 1972, pp. 652–653).

Noguchi Takehiko discusses the same contrastive images of women in two chapters of his *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō ron*, “The ontology of woman,” and “The theme of longing for the mother.” In the former in particular he explores the contrasts between Baudelaire’s use of the sacred-profane opposition and Tanizaki’s, relying in part upon the French poet-critic Pierre Emmanuel’s theory of Baudelairean Satanism.

Applied to Tanizaki’s works, this Madonna/Harlot contrast can be illuminating, as we shall see; but the analogy between Tanizaki and Baudelaire in this respect cannot be pressed very far. The analogy breaks down when we examine the specific characteristics of the Western concept of Madonna/Harlot and attempt to apply it comparatively to the two writers. Here we will attempt such a comparison, beginning with a consideration of Baudelaire’s works. In order to understand these works properly, however, it will first be necessary to place Baudelaire in his cultural context; and for this reason we must look briefly at traditional Christianity’s images of woman.¹

THE CHURCH FATHERS’ VIEWS ON WOMEN

In the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, woman is seen

1. Space considerations and the nature of this paper have made it necessary to abbreviate this discussion somewhat. The interested reader is referred to my dissertation (McCarthy 1975), especially pp. 153–166, for a fuller treatment.

above all in terms of the two opposed extremes noted above, rather than the middle state of wife. Similarly, it is not woman as wife who has captured the imagination of Western man. Rather, there have predominated the two opposed images of woman as sacred, inviolable, and beneficent or as destructive and defiling. This is not due merely to the perversity of writers and artists. The attitudes of the early Church toward sexuality and women provided the terms in which the argument came to be stated.

There is abundant evidence that early Christianity was intensely eschatological: the early Church looked forward to an imminent *parousia*. Thus, a worldly, purely societal matter such as marriage and family life could be of little concern to the pious Christian. It was against such a background of apocalyptic expectation that St. Paul counseled the Corinthians: "It is a good thing for a man to have nothing to do with women . . ." (1 Cor. 7:1), and, "To the unmarried and the widows I say this: it is a good thing if they stay as I am myself; but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. Better be married than burn with vain desire (1 Cor. 7: 8-9). And, finally, "Thus, he who marries his partner does well and he who does not will do better" (1 Cor. 7: 39-40).

The absorption of Neo-Platonist thought with its view of redemption as "the rejection of the body and the flight of the soul from material, sensual nature" (Ruether 1973, p. 3) led to a further diminution of the status of marriage. The perfect or "angelic" life, was seen to consist in a complete transcending of sexuality, the attainment on earth of that celestial state in which "there shall be no more marrying nor giving in marriage." The celebrated dictum that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" should perhaps be seen more as the enunciation of an ideal of *asexuality* than as a declaration of sexual equality, for which St. Paul seems to have had very little enthusiasm.

The denial of sexuality fell with particular force upon women, although of course the same detestation of impurity and admiration for chastity was cultivated by males as well. (The classic expression of the inner conflicts caused by such an other-worldly ideal

is the famous prayer of St. Augustine in his youth: "Lord, give me chastity; but not yet.") Tradition suggested that the woman was peculiarly carnal. She was to man as the body was to the soul, in a favorite metaphor of St. Paul. She was unquestionably the "weaker vessel." In mythological terms, "The woman tempted me, and I did eat."

The hostility of many of the Fathers of the Church (particularly those of the Western or Latin Church) is justly famous. We shall content ourselves with quoting two or three.

Tertullian, admittedly an adherent of the austere Montanist sect, but an extraordinarily influential thinker nonetheless, addresses woman thus:

You are the Devil's gateway.

You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree.

You are the first deserter of the divine Law.

You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack.

You destroyed so easily God's image, man.

On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die (Ruether 1973, p. 8).

And Clement of Alexandria, a far more temperate and liberal man than Tertullian, reminds woman that she should "blush for shame when you think of what nature you are" (Ruether 1973, p. 8).

Finally, we have St. Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate, who writes to a widow contemplating remarriage:

Confess the shameful truth. No woman marries to avoid cohabiting with a husband. At least, if passion is not your motive, it is mere madness to play the harlot just to increase your wealth (Ruether 1973, p. 23).

Ruether succinctly summarizes the position of the misogynist wing of the Church under the aegis of Jerome:

Women in Jerome appear in three roles: the strumpet, the wife, and the virgin, but the image of the wife has almost disappeared between the two contraries of the strumpet and the virgin. Marriage he regards as inherently

polluting and childbearing disgusting. He turns warm toward infants only when he can imagine them, not as the verminous offspring of defiling sex, but as candidates for virginity (Ruether, p. 23).

The figure of the madonna. So much for one pole, that of the natural woman, whom Jerome does not scruple to call "harlot." Countering her is the figure of the virgin, corresponding to the Madonna of our original dichotomy. Technically, of course, the virgins admired by the Church Fathers are not the equal of the Madonna, who miraculously combines in herself both motherhood and perpetual virginity. But she may be looked upon as the archetypal Virgin, the Virginal Ideal (in the Platonist sense), of which all earthly virgins are but imperfect reflections. Because they are imperfect and secondary, Jerome in speaking to them blends admonition with praise, severity with affection:

You must act against nature or rather above nature if you are to forswear your natural functions, to cut off your own root, to cull no fruit but that of virginity, to abjure the marriage bed, to shun intercourse with men and, while in the body, to live as though out of it (Ruether, p. 25).

For the woman who succeeded in living this "angelic life above nature," Jerome had the highest praise, as he did also for the man who was willing to make himself a "eunuch for Christ's sake."

In succeeding centuries, the dualistic view of sexuality, Harlot and Virgin as thesis and antithesis, was not reversed, but on the contrary reinforced.

From the fourth century, if not earlier, the cultus of the Virgin Mary spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Various explanations of its origins have been suggested: often mentioned are possible connections with pre-Christian Mother goddesses—the Babylonian Ishtar, the Phrygian Cybele, the Egyptian Isis—or with the virginal cult of Diana at Ephesus. At any rate, the position of the Virgin Mary in both the Eastern and Western Churches was, prior to the Protestant reformation, second only to that of Christ.

Two dogmas in particular were stressed anciently: Mary's motherhood and her perpetual virginity. The former finds expression in the term *Theotókos* (Greek, literally "God-bearer"; equivalent to Latin *deipara*; compare with Latin *Mater Dei*, Mother of God). This term was already used by Origen in the third century (see Benz 1963, p. 62).

The second major dogmatic emphasis was on Mary's virginity. Though originally tied to the supernatural conception and birth of Christ, it soon acquired a kind of autonomous meaning and value in its own right. Thus, the Fathers came to argue that the "brothers" mentioned in the scripture must refer to either Christ's cousins or to the children of Joseph by a previous marriage. For to admit that Christ had had true brothers would reflect, not on his own dignity to be sure, but on Mary's perfect virginity. And so the second Council of Constantinople officially declared Mary "*everlasting Virgin*" (Benz 1963, p. 62).

Moving from the realm of theological doctrine to popular piety, we find in medieval Europe the development of a cult of chivalrous devotion centered on the Virgin.² The traditional Western European title, "Our Lady," is a reflection of this mode of thought. Franciscan piety in particular delighted in the use of terms such as "knight," "page," and "jongleur," to refer to the devotee in relation to either God or the Virgin. Thus, there took place a mingling of the sacred and secular. The cult of the Virgin came to be expressed in terms of chivalrous, quasi-romantic love. And the fair lady who was the object of courtly love was apotheosized as all-pure, wise, and compassionate—transformed, that is, into an image of the Virgin herself.

The whole topic is immensely complex and cannot be dealt with in any detail here. It is clear, however, in the writers of the

2. This whole complex subject is dealt with in de Rougemont 1956. The literary and folklore evidence presented there is most useful, even if one does not accept his thesis as a whole. See McCarthy 1975, pp. 161-163, for a critique of de Rougemont's views.

medieval period, that there is a distinction between the two orders of erotic and spiritual love, and yet the vocabulary of the one realm is freely applied to the other. For better or worse, a dualistic view of the flesh, and by extension of Woman, is very much a part of traditional Christianity, and can be seen in both the writings of the Church Fathers and the secular literature, especially of the middle ages.

We can discern a steady and consistent development of the cult of Woman as Virgin from the early centuries of our era through medieval times and on into the modern period. Paralleling this cultus and counterbalancing it has been the equally powerful image of woman as temptress, destroyer, harlot. From the Eve of Genesis and the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse to those contemporary bestowers of pleasure and pain, the voluptuous beauties of a Fellini or the froward nymphets of a Nabokov, woman in her more sinister, ambiguous guise has continued to dominate Western man's imaginings.

In the nineteenth century, however, something rather curious begins to happen to these two images. We have already spoken of the fusion of the vocabularies of sacred and profane love. This level of fusion, expressing religious ecstasy in physical, erotic terms, is very old indeed. But with the romantic and more especially with the late-romantic decadent movement, one sees for the first time the identification of the two poles, sacred and profane, in terms of their essential qualities, and not merely in the language used to describe them.

Mario Praz, in *The Romantic Agony*, details the complex interconnections between the religious and the sexual in the imaginations of nineteenth century artists. Sometimes there is a movement from one extreme to the other, in both the life and art of a particular writer or painter. To take just one of many possible examples,³ Huysmans began by creating an aestheticist *paradis artificiel* in *À rebours*; explored Satanism, which is the conscious

3. For a somewhat fuller discussion see McCarthy 1975, pp. 165-166.

inversion or transvaluation of values, in *Là-bas*; and finished with a series of religious novels, *La cathédrale*, *L'Oblat*, *Les foules de Lourdes*. Huysmans the man ended his days as a lay brother in the Benedictine monastery of Ligugé.⁴

MADONNA AND HARLOT IN BAUDELAIRE

But let us turn now to a substantial and central figure who will provide us with a good basis of comparison for our inquiry into Tanizaki, one whose vision had an unexampled seriousness, breadth, and audacity—Charles Baudelaire. We will not pause to examine his biography in any detail, but it must be observed that his personality seems to have been shaped to a significant degree by the influence of his mother. He was the only son of an elderly father and a much younger mother, and the relationship between the boy and his mother was very close. His mother's remarriage, however, created a gulf between the two, causing Baudelaire to feel rejected and betrayed.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that his lifelong ambivalence toward women was partly the product of this skein of early complexities. In the pattern of extraordinary intimacy followed by disillusion and a gradually growing resentment, we can detect parallels with Tanizaki's own experience, as seen in the different images of his mother given in such works as *Yōshō jidai*, *Seishun monogatari* and *Itansha no kanashimi*, though Tanizaki's feelings toward women were, clearly, different from Baudelaire's.

Perhaps more than any other poet of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire expresses an awareness of the hidden connections between apparently opposed values. He tries always to see the beauty that is in evil, and the banality of what passes for good. In his prose writings, which are less well-known than his poetry, shocking paradoxes abound: he speaks of the dandy with his "serious devotion to the frivolous" as "the last gleam of heroism

4. See the article on Huysmans in the *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century*.

in times of decadence.”⁵ For the poet in his more irreverently aphoristic moods, God is “a scandal—a scandal that spreads.”

Most significant for our present purposes are his declarations on erotic love. “The unique and supreme pleasure in love-making is the certain knowledge that one is doing evil. Men and women know from birth that in evil lies all pleasure of the senses” (*My Heart Laid Bare*, p. 157). This is a statement, at once abstract and direct, of an obsessive theme of Baudelaire: the link between evil, sin, disease, madness and death on the one hand and passionate love and physical pleasure on the other. His own tragic affliction with a venereal disease that ravaged both his body and his mind must have reinforced his conviction of the fatal nature of pleasure, and given it a certain personal poignancy. But the origins of his beliefs are surely older than his malady, and are philosophical-religious rather than merely pathological. For in Baudelaire that Western dualism which we have discussed above reaches its logical extreme.

Invoking the doctrine of Original Sin (that favorite of the Jansenists, the “Calvinistic wing” of French Catholicism), the poet traces the corruption of sexuality to its ultimate source, in the following passage *contra* Voltaire:

In his *Lord Chesterfield's Ears*, Voltaire pokes fun at that immortal soul who nine months dwelt amidst excrement and urine. Like all idlers, Voltaire hated mystery. He might at least have detected, in this choice of dwelling-place, a grudge or satire directed by Providence against love—and thus, in the method of procreation, a sign of Original Sin. After all, we can make love only with the organs of excretion.

Being unable to abolish love, the Church sought at least to disinfect it, and thus created marriage (*My Heart Laid Bare*, p. 186).

Note that Baudelaire does not deny the assertions about the sordidness of man's origins. He turns them, however, not against

5. Charles Baudelaire, *My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings*, pp. 56–57. Further references to Baudelaire's works will be made by name and page number within the text; see References for full publication details.

the doctrine of the soul, but against "love," or "the method of procreation." How Augustinian Baudelaire is in this horror of the very organs of sexuality! Their association with the excretory functions as well as the involuntary nature of male arousal were sources of intense horror, fleshly symbols of sin itself, to the fourth-fifth century Father (see Ruether 1973, pp. 12-13).

At the end of the passage the poet, with a hyperbole which is all the more pardonable as a counterbalance to de Rougemont's "conjugal Christianity," proclaims: "Being unable to abolish love, the Church sought at least to disinfect it, and thus created marriage." With such a view of sexuality, it is not surprising that Baudelaire should have had a low opinion of women. His thrust is similar to that of Jerome, although his rhetoric, as well as his context, is different:

Woman is the opposite of the Dandy.
That is why she should be regarded
with disgust.
Woman is hungry, and she wants to eat;
thirsty, and she wants to drink.
She feels randy, and she wants to be
Fine characteristics!
Woman is "natural"—that is to say,
abominable (*My Heart Laid Bare*, p. 176).

Baudelaire's perfect dualism, in which woman is made to represent the material, the bestial and the demonic, is summed up in the following metaphor of the ascent and descent of the human (or rather, male) soul:

In every man, and at all times, there are two simultaneous yearnings—the one towards God, the other towards Satan.

The invocation of God, or spirituality, is a desire to ascend a step; the invocation of Satan, or animality, is a delight in descending. To this latter one should relate one's enamourments with women, one's intimate conversations with animals—dogs, cats, etc. The pleasures derived from the two kinds of love correspond in nature to the loves themselves (*My Heart Laid Bare*, p. 181).

The poet does not merely rail against women, however; he often makes hymns to their power and beauty. He is a prodigal heir of the courtly love tradition, with this great difference: for him, beauty and the good are radically dissociated. For Baudelaire, woman's beauty is always physical, not intellectual or spiritual, and as such is linked with darkness, sin, and death. The women he worships are Madonnas, but fearful, Satanic ones. The inversion of values demands a language not of tender eroticism but of bestial violence, not sacred images but blasphemous ones. This poetry is related to that of Crashaw in the same way that a black mass is related to the Christian liturgy.

Nor is it a matter of language only: the "divine" figures who appear in Baudelaire's poetry have infernal qualities, they appear as half-angel, half-demon. This is surely an attempt on the poet's part to effect a harmony of two very disparate tendencies: affirmation of life and its joys, and a conviction of the evil, destructive nature of the life of the flesh. This dichotomy had tormented Baudelaire since his childhood: "While still quite a small child, I had in my heart two opposite feelings: a horror of life, and an ecstatic joy in life" (*My Heart Laid Bare*, p. 200).

The poem *À une Madone* can be viewed as an expression of the new union of opposites that Baudelaire succeeded in forging from the fires of his inner conflict:

For you, Madonna, mistress mine, I fain
 Would build an altar deep within my pain,
 And hollow where my heart is most forlorn,
 Remote from wordly needs and looks of scorn,
 A niche of bright enamel, gold and blue,
 Where, glorious Statue, you will stand. For you,
 A metal trellis wrought of Verse sublime
 I cunningly would star with crystal rhyme,
 And this will crown your head impressively;
 Then, mortal Madonna, of my Jealousy
 I will design your Cloak, without contrition,
 Barbarous, heavy, stiff, lined with suspicion—
 A sentry-box to cage your charms; my fears

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Will make it shine, in place of pearls, with tears!
My quivering Desire will form your Gown,
Desire that rises high and then dies down,
Poised on a peak, then pausing in a vale,
Enfolding all your body, flushed and pale
My deep respect will fashion and complete
The satin slippers humbled by your feet—
Slippers like faithful moulds whose soft embrace
Will bear an imprint nothing can efface.
And should I fail, art being my only boon,
To carve your Footstool from a silver Moon,
The Serpent in my entrails, I instead
Will place beneath your heels. Crush, as you tread
(Triumphant Queen, you, with redemptions great!)
That monster huge with venom, gross with hate.
And you will see my Thoughts like Candles shine
Before the Queen of Virgins' floral shrine,
Casting reflections on the ceiling's blue,
With flaming eyes for ever watching you.
Then, as you are revered and loved by me,
Your Incense, Myrrh, and Benzoin, I will be,
And up to you—white snowy peak, my goal!—
Will rise, in Vapour, my tempestuous Soul.

Lastly, your role of Mary to complete,
And so that love and cruelty may meet,
The seven deadly sins—infernal joy!—
I, a remorseful torturer, will employ
As sharpened knives. A callous juggler, I
Will aim at your deepest love to crucify
And plant them in your Heart, quivering, aching,
Your suffering Heart, your heart that gushes—
breaking! (*Flowers of evil*, pp. 96–97)

In this poem, the sacred and the profane are brought forcibly together. The Madonna is “mortal” and her “charms” physical, since they can be “caged” by “jealousy” and “suspicion.” But the manner of the poem is that of exaggerated chivalrous-devotional poetry, and the specific images used are those traditionally associated with the cultus of the Virgin. Reference is made to an “altar” and “a niche of bright enamel of gold and blue” (Marian

colors). The silver moon which should form a footstool for the Madonna recalls the vision in the Apocalypse of "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head." The serpent appears because Mary is often shown crushing the devil in that form beneath her feet. The seven deadly sins which are as "sharpened knives" are a transmutation of the seven swords that pierce the heart of the Mater Dolorosa in Catholic iconography.

What we have in *À une Madone* is neither conventional devotional piety (it needs hardly be said), nor gross parody, nor a casual use of religious imagery for mere decorative, "aesthetic" effect; but the expression of an impulse of the soul to divinize the object perceived as evil and destructive, or to reveal the hidden presence of evil in the sacred itself—the process may work in either direction. *À une Madone*, then, in addition to being a splendid poem, is a classic hymn of Satanism.

True Satanism requires, firstly, a strong background of seriously held religious belief, and, secondly, the will to rebel against and profane that belief. (In Europe, it has been Catholicism, with its conservative views on faith and morals, that has given rise to much of that Satanism that rises above mere mummery.) When we take up the question of Tanizaki's "Satanism," it will be helpful to recall these two criteria just stated.

MADONNA AND HARLOT IN TANIZAKI

We have dwelt at length on the Western Madonna/Harlot schema not only because of its intrinsic interest but also because of its frequent application to Tanizaki's works. Certainly ladies of the demimonde decorate the author's pages often enough, from the traditional courtesans and geisha of *Hōkan*, *Hyōfū* and *Oiran* to the Eurasian prostitute of *Some Prefer Nettles* and the ruthless kept woman of *Jōtarō*. The figure of the Virgin Mother too was of some significance to Tanizaki, even though it is by no means prominent in his fiction (the story *Ave Maria* being exceptional).

Nakamura Mitsuo, in his *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō ron*, points to the

emotions of reverence and awe that the author felt as a child on seeing the picture of the virgin venerated by his grandfather (p. 152). Minami Hiroshi, in his psycho-literary essay *Bosei kara no tōsō*, makes the same point. The comparisons suggested in these sources give insights into aspects of Tanizaki's view of women as objects of desire and adoration.

The bodhisattvas to whom Tanizaki's female characters are sometimes explicitly compared in the texts (e.g., *Manji*, "A portrait of Shunkin," or *Diary of a Mad Old Man*) present a kind of analogy to the figure of the Virgin. These bodhisattvas too are divine or semi-divine transcendent beings, lending a radiant dignity to their mortal counterparts who form the other term of the comparison. But the analogy breaks down when examined in the light of the characteristics we saw as preeminent in the figure of the Virgin: maternity and virginity. For the bodhisattvas are, in fact, neither virginal nor maternal, and certainly not both at once; nor are they even female!

All of the major bodhisattvas appear in the sutras as male, though their gender is so de-emphasized as to give them a slightly androgynous quality. And in the Pure Land sutras it is specifically stated that any female devotees who attain rebirth and thus become bodhisattvas are at once transformed into males so that the Pure Land may remain undefiled. Now it is true that Kannon, whom Westerners call "the goddess of mercy," often appears in female form, but this is by way of expediency, concession to human weakness, "skillful means" (*upāya*); even in such cases the transformed bodhisattva is very different from the Virgin as she is traditionally conceived. His/her principal attribute is compassion, for the sake of which the bodhisattva may compromise even purity itself, as in the traditional promise to the young Shinran that Kannon would become his consort if he should be unable to keep his monastic vows of celibacy.

Moreover, the bodhisattva is never represented as a mother. The Koyasu Kannon, who appears dandling a child on her lap, is not its mother, but merely one who bestows progeny on devout

couples. So the intricate contrasts of sacred/profane, pure/defiled that Baudelaire could play upon in his poem are not available to Tanizaki, nor is there any evidence that he attempted to achieve these non-Buddhist effects. Instead, he used the image of Kannon, or of the Buddha's footprints, etc., as a general sign of the numinous, the sacred, the transcendental. And if one quality were to be singled out above all others in connection with these Buddhist holy beings, it would surely be compassion, mercy, or gentleness rather than purity *per se*.

Another Buddhist motif provides us with a better, more informative contrast in analyzing Tanizaki's works. This is the metaphor employed by Mishima Yukio in his brilliant essay on Tanizaki, and alluded to in both Hibbett (1972) and Noguchi. Mishima chooses to analyze the Tanizakian woman in terms of the contrasting images of *jibo* ("the compassionate mother") and Kishimojin (a demonic mother goddess of Buddhist mythology). This pair of images seems more useful in discussing our author than the Madonna/Harlot one above. It has, in the first place, the advantage of being a Japanese concept (at least by adoption at a very early date, via Buddhism) rather than a Western one. More importantly, it places emphasis on force and gentleness, cruelty and compassion, rather than on chastity and wantonness. This latter sort of opposition is not nearly so important for Tanizaki's literature as is the former.

In fact, Tanizaki's treatment of virtually all women in his fiction is colored with eroticism. The image of the mother, far from being the immaculately asexual one suggested by "Madonna" or "Virgin Mother," is redolent of the flesh. His most vivid memories of his own mother center on highly physical things: the incredible whiteness of her skin glimpsed through the mists of the family bath; the odor of her carefully oiled hair and of her full, well-proportioned body; the feel and fragrance of her kimono as it brushed against the child's face in the narrowness of a *jūn-rikisha* (see McCarthy 1975, pp. 10-14).

And if the mother is a more erotic figure than the Western

Madonna, the courtesans, dancers, and kept women are (despite their roles as tormentresses) usually more sympathetic and human than the classic whore-figure of Western decadent writers. Once again we may turn to Baudelaire for a contrastive example:

Some of these latter—specimens of an innocent and monstrous fatuity—display in their features and boldly direct glances an obvious pleasure in existence (“Why?” one could well ask). Sometimes they unintentionally fall into attitudes of an audacity and nobility that would enchant the most sensitive sculptor—if only the sculptor of today had the courage and intelligence to find nobility everywhere, even in the mire. At other times they are shown prostrate in desperate attitudes of boredom, in the indolent stupors of cafe existence, filled with a masculine cynicism, smoking cigarettes to kill time with the resignation of oriental fatalism; ostentatiously sprawling on divans, with a skirt tucked up before and behind in a double fan, or balanced on stools or chairs: heavy, gloomy, stupid, garish, their eyes glazed by brandy and their foreheads bulging with petulance.

We have descended to the bottom of the spiral, to the femina simplex of Latin satire. Sometimes we see depicted, amidst an atmosphere in which alcohol and tobacco have mingled their reeks, the inflamed emaciation of phthisis, or the curves of adiposity, that hideous health of the idle. A foggy and gilded chaos without a trace of the chastities of indigence is filled with the gesticulations and writhings of macabre nymphs or living dolls from whose infantile cheeks gleams a sinister brightness. Behind a counter laden with bottles of liquor lounges a bulky Megeara, her head swathed in a dirty scarf that throws on the wall a satanically pointed shadow, provoking the reflection that everything dedicated to Evil is condemned to wear horns . . .

. . . nothing but the inevitable spectacle of the vice—the glower of the demon at ambush in the gaslight; nothing but pure art—that is to say, the peculiar beauty of Evil, the horrible. In fact, let me repeat in passing, the general feeling inspired by all this Gomorrah is more saddening than entertaining. What gives these pictures their special beauty is the richness of their moral content. (“The Painter of Modern Life,” p. 69)

Contrast this with typical descriptions of Tanizaki heroines of the cruel or exploiting sort. The portrait of the apprentice geisha in “The Tattooer” is voluptuous and rather decadent, but there is not a trace of the vulgarity and grossness of Baudelaire’s bawds:

She seemed only fifteen or sixteen, but her face had a strangely ripe beauty, a look of experience, as if she had already spent years in the gay quarter and

had fascinated innumerable men. Her beauty mirrored the dreams of the generations of glamorous men and women who had lived and died in this vast capital, where the nation's sins and wealth were concentrated (Hibbett 1965, p. 109).

The same could be said of Nan-tzu in *Kirin*, who is marked by a cruelty as refined and exquisite as her personal beauty. Or of Shunkin, or O-nui, or any of the long procession of destructive females in Tanizaki's fiction. Even a not-very-refined teenaged mistress like Aguri is endowed with charms of captivating delicacy:

Her long slender fingers—so soft they seemed made only for pleasure. . . . Once in Nanking he had looked at a singsong girl's fingers resting gracefully on the table like the petals of some exquisite hot-house flower, and thought there could be no more delicate beauty than a Chinese woman's hands. . . . If the singsong girl's hands were hot-house flowers, hers were fresh young wildflowers . . . (Hibbett 1965, p. 125)

Woman is natural—that is to say, delightful! replies Tanizaki to the misogynist woman-worshiper of France.

As can be seen from the above, Tanizaki's "harlots," unlike Baudelaire's, are never ugly, never without a striking kind of beauty. And, although the author has been called a "Satanist" and has read enough of Baudelaire, Huysmans, Poe, Wilde, *et al.*, to indulge in declamatory odes to Evil, one does not feel, it seems to me, the deep sense of sin, the torturing guilt over sexuality that is so much a part of the Western Christian, and more especially, Catholic "Satanists." Satō Haruo, Tanizaki's old friend and literary contemporary, was right: Tanizaki's Satanism is an elaborate pose, not an essential part of his art.

Thus, reversing Baudelaire, we may say that Tanizaki's *Go-morrah* is far more entertaining, or entrancing, than saddening; its special richness is by no means its moral content, which is meager indeed, but its passionate and courageous exploration of inner obsessions and curious quirks of the human soul, together with its frank delight in the outer world of the senses. Woman is the central figure both of that outer, sensual realm and the inner,

obsessive one. As such she is a being of great complexity, combining power, coldness, and terror with inviting voluptuousness and divine beauty. She is not always sufficiently individualized—there is something about her of the abstract, universal, archetypal, which no doubt distorts her being-as-person. But she is never reduced to mere moral allegory or theological abstraction. She usually has idiosyncratic, if not individual, traits, winsome or terrifying as the case may be. She is not the Whore of Babylon or the Scarlet Woman of the Apocalypse, but one of the charming, if destructive, demimondaines of Edo fiction or a violent but irresistibly lovely *dokufu* (“venomous woman”) à la Takahashi O-den or Hanai O-ume.

Let us turn then to Mishima’s suggestive *jibo*/Kishimojin contrast, in place of the Madonna/Harlot. Kishimojin (Skt., Haritī) was, according to the Kishimokyō and the thirty-first section of the Sarvastivadin Vināya, a wicked demoness whose custom it was to steal the children of the inhabitants of a certain district and then kill and eat them.⁶ At last the terrified villagers appealed to Sakyamuni the Buddha for aid.

The Buddha, employing his mystic powers, took hold of Kishimojin’s son Piyaṅkara, and hid him in the bottom of a begging bowl. The demoness had many children (10,000 according to one account), but Piyaṅkara was the youngest, and the apple of his mother’s eye. Having vainly sought her child for seven days, the demoness heard of the wonder-working and all-compassionate sage Sakyamuni and hastened to him for aid. The Buddha, however, was far from sympathetic: how was it, he asked, that one who took pleasure in devouring the children of mortals, who have so few, could be so distraught over the disappearance of only one of her own myriad offspring?

Kishimojin understood what the Buddha was aiming at, and swore that if her son were restored to her never again would she harm the children of others. To test her, the Buddha showed

6. See Mochizuki 1932, Vol. I, entry under “Kishimojin.”

her Piyañkara, stowed in the bottom of his bowl. After having exhausted all her magic arts in the attempt to free him by her own power, the demoness awakened to her wickedness and helplessness. Taking the Three Refuges and vowing to keep the Five Precepts of the lay Buddhist, Kishimojin at last recovered her lost child. By one of those gentle ironies in which religious legend abounds, she becomes the patroness of children, of childbirth and child rearing, as well as a protectress of the devotees of the Lotus Sutra.

Now it will be noted that the demoness was remarkable for her ferocity and heartlessness; she represents not eroticism so much as dominance and destructiveness. And the *jibo* ("compassionate mother") is not a figure of virginity but of fruitful human motherhood, of tenderness, compassion, maternal love. Finally, and most significantly, the destructive goddess and the compassionate mother are transformations of a single being, different aspects of one and the same entity. Kishimojin's conversion into a motherly, compassionate figure at the end of the legend is prefigured in her relationship with her son. Tenderness and cruelty are contradictory traits to be sure, but by no means mutually exclusive. It is only by an act of religious faith and the making of a spiritual vow that Kishimojin is able totally to transform the one into the other.

For Tanizaki, too, the being Woman has various faces, or wears various masks. The two poles are demoness-seductress and maternal comforter. The one is destructive, the other protective. Both are in some degree erotic, and the contrast between them is not essentially one of purity and lust.

In the best of his characterizations, of course, Tanizaki skillfully avoids the dangers of over-simplification in depiction of one pole or the other. He shows his readers the middle ground between cruelty and compassion, the area in which elements of both combine to form the reality of human emotion.

GLOSSARY

<i>dokufu</i> 毒婦	Kishimojin 鬼子母神
<i>Hōkan</i> 「俗間」	Koyasu Kannon 子安観音
<i>Hyōfū</i> 「颯風」	<i>Manji</i> 「卍」
<i>Itansha no kanashimi</i> 「異端者の悲しみ」	<i>Oiran</i> 「華魁」
<i>jibo</i> 慈母	<i>Seishun monogatari</i> 「青春物語」
<i>Jōtarō</i> 「饒太郎」	<i>Yōshō jidai</i> 「幼少時代」
<i>Kirin</i> 「麒麟」	

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