

The God That Failed:
The Literary Trajectory of Shimao Toshio

by

Hiroko Tokumoto

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Department of ASIAN STUDIES

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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Abstract

The topic of this thesis is the literary career of Shimao Toshio, as far as possible considered as a whole. It is my contention that previous scholarship has merely focused on the details of his sometimes riotously surrealistic storytelling, and has almost entirely neglected to ask what was the course of his overall development and the forces which drove his evolution as a writer.

The first chapter covers Shimao's early work, life, and wartime experiences. Drawing on his pre-war writings, which have been almost entirely neglected by previous scholars, I demonstrate that the sense of alienation engendered by his unusual life experiences and upbringing already flourished before he entered the military as a suicide pilot. His military career on the one hand reinforced earlier trends, in that he was never sent on an attack and was thus once again rejected by death, and on the other put him in a unnatural and displaced position, as he unwittingly became almost a deity to the simple islanders among which he was stationed. Marrying an island woman, he took this social displacement along with him in the microclimate of his family for the first decade of the peace.

The second chapter covers Shimao's period of falseness, the time in which he still tried to maintain the unnaturally prominent position his experience on the island had thrust him into. His tensions erupt in his stories, many of which are set in entirely surrealistic surroundings. Any account of his career must explain why he writes precisely this type of story at

just this time: the "dream" fiction is characteristic of this time, and he does not write it before or afterwards. The story "Everyday Life in a Dream" is analyzed as the novelist's *hara no naka* "inner reality" – a fantasy of utter passivity, resenting the present inability of the other, the one above, to take its superior place. (It is most definitely not allegorical of the birth of the writer, but rather of his dissolution.) During this time, the false god is rebelling against his fate, in concealed and indirect way. However, we note that he is also undermining himself in real life, by episodes of poorly concealed infidelity.

The third chapter deals with the stories of retrospective confession he wrote after submitting to the leadership of his wife, which used a realistic mode of narration to relate how inadequate he really had been. They are dry relations of inferiority and internal conflict. "When We Never Left Port," the chief work under analysis here, could well have been subtitled, "Why I Was Never Fit to Become a God."

The fourth chapter deals with *The Sting of Death*, the series of linked stories in which Shimao wrote a history of his fall and his wife's rise. "The Sting of Death" – is sin, but what is the primary sin in Christianity? The pride that leads man to set himself equal to or above god – read here, the pride that leads Shimao to set himself equal to or above his wife. His false pride must be broken before they can live in peace, through a long process of interrogation and humiliation. The end product is a reversal of roles, the symbolic death of incarceration in a mental home, and a rebirth into her milieu. The image of their rotten old bamboo fence being replaced with a

new, white one drives home the reality of the new god in the shrine of the home. Images of darkness and rain are prominent – the bright, male deity is being extinguished and reborn as a follower

Thus Shimaō's career may be seen as a journey that began with him in a false role, sinning against his wife in the same way Lucifer sinned against God. "Beware pride, by that sin the angels fell." However, he has a chance to recompense his sin by sacrificing all his poor shreds of individuality on the altar of his wife's worship. When he does, they for the first time enter a state of solidly founded relative happiness, and his work ceases to show the surrealistic strain it demonstrated before. Indeed, it soon degenerates into something rather mediocre and workmanlike.

Finally, we attempt a very brief comparison of Shimaō and Tanizaki as woman-worshippers. Both are submissions based on blind idealization, but in Tanizaki's case, the submission is made freely – his characters blind themselves with open eyes, so to speak, as in *A Portrait of Shunkin* (where this is literally true). Tanizaki's "mad old man" chooses of his own free will to spend eternity beneath the feet of his daughter in law – he wants it, he schemes to have it, for the good reason that this is what he enjoys. Even in slavery he exercises his own powers of free choice. But poor Shimaō has no such choice. He can merely struggle along, waiting to be put back in his natural position, that of the shadow. Only then is he happy.

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Introduction

Shimao Toshio was born in 1917. A native of Yokohama, his family moved to Kōbe when he was eight. His health as a child was always poor, and at one point he suffered from an illness diagnosed as fatal, but recovered. He was an introvert who showed an early fascination with writing and publishing his works, at first on his own mimeograph machine.

When he was seventeen his mother died, and in 1936 he went to Nagasaki to attend a commercial school. He continued his association with publication there, serving on the staff of one magazine and founding another which was banned immediately upon publishing its first issue. In 1939 he travelled abroad, to Taiwan and the Philippines, while steadily drawing closer to the literary career he desired and away from the business life his father wanted him to follow. He transferred to Kyūshū University and finally graduated in 1943, with a degree in East Asian history. Upon graduating, he published *Yōnenki*, a selection of his works to date.

He was then faced with the choice of being drafted or volunteering, and chose to enter the Naval Officers Candidate School. In November 1944 he volunteered to become commander of a special attack (that is, suicide) squadron of torpedo boats, and was posted to Kakeroma Island off the extreme south of Japan. While there, he became involved in a romance with a local

schoolteacher, Ōhira Miho, who was both a Catholic and by descent a member of the local shamanistic priesthood.

Just before the surrender, his squadron was put on alert, but instead of being ordered to attack, he received the news of Japan's surrender the next day. He returned to Kōbe after demobilization, and married Miho there the next year. They had two children, a son born in 1948 and a daughter in 1950. In 1952 Shimao moved to Tokyo to pursue his literary career, which involved a break with his father, whose financial support had been crucial up to this point. In 1954 Miho had a mental breakdown, precipitated by her discovery of her husband's extramarital affairs. In 1955, after undergoing treatment together, the couple moved back to the southern islands so that she could convalesce. His wife would henceforth exercise a censor's rights over his works, as she gained and maintained the dominant role in their relationship.

One sign of this dominance was Shimao's gradual transformation of himself into something as close to her as possible. He was baptized a Catholic at the end of 1956, and began to involve himself in the study of the culture of Miho's home islands. In 1958, he became the head of the Amami branch of the Kagoshima Prefectural Library.

During the 1960's, Shimao began an extensive series of foreign tours which took him to the United States, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and India. The scope of his work steadily narrowed beginning in the late 1960's, and it came to consist mostly of travel writing and reworking of old material. Miho began authoring her own works during these years, winning a major prize for women writers in 1975. After numerous moves back and forth from

the southern islands to Yokohama to Kagoshima again, Shimao Toshio died in 1986. He is survived by his wife, Miho, and his two children, the younger of which, his daughter Maya, suffered from learning disabilities and is handicapped.

Our topic below will be the literary career of Shimao Toshio – the career, it should be emphasized, not merely the exposition of this or that story loosely correlated to the events of his external life which has characterized Shimao studies up to now. His work, especially the surrealism of his "dream" phase, is often marked by a riot of significant and suggestive detail which is a positive invitation to lose the woods for the trees. Below, we will be consciously trying to avoid this peril in order to produce a coherent explanation of his entire literary trajectory, from the hesitant sputtering of his youth to the burnt-out free fall of his later years.

There have been two major works on Shimao in English, both of which have fallen squarely into the trap outlined above. Both Kathryn Sparling, *"The Sting of Death" and Other Stories by Shimao Toshio*¹ (henceforth "Sparling") and *The Sting of Life: Four Contemporary Japanese Novelists* by Van C. Gessel² (henceforth "Gessel") are much more comfortable in speculation, justified and unjustified, concerning the detail of the story, the paragraph, the sentence, and even (particularly in Gessel) the word, than in attempting an

¹ Kathryn Sparling, *"The Sting of Death" and Other Stories by Shimao Toshio*, Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1985.

² Van C. Gessel, *The Sting of Life: Four Contemporary Japanese Novelists*, New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1989.

overall description of their subject. Both display in various places most if not all of the individual insights necessary to tie their research together, and both fail to assemble the scattered pieces into a whole.

Of the two, Sparling is the earlier, the less ambitious, but arguably the more successful. Her overall remarks on Shimao are confined to her introduction, with his biography and other assorted information:

"[His works] deal with supremely personal, yet always recognizable, experiences, emotions, compulsions, and fantasies of elemental human existence....Although mesmerized by the horrible accuracy of these stories, the reader is warmed by the earnest, committed, almost passionate voice of the narrator." (p. 2)

"There is no escapism in Shimao's fiction. Even the dream and the fantasy are intensified experiences of individual reality....The same preoccupations recur in all six stories [that have been translated]: the plasticity and ultimate meaninglessness of time from the point of view of the individual; confrontation with death and disintegration, both physical and psychological; the face of humanity with its mask removed, the mind reduced to an elemental state; and the possibility of redemption or resurrection, of expiation through self-examination and the act of writing." (p. 7)

Although Sparling is well aware of the role Shimao's life played in his work, there is no structure of change in her overall account, merely a vague listing of characteristics which could as easily be fitted to several other writers. In her notes she is sometimes much more perceptive, but her individual insights lack unity.

The fifty-five pages devoted to Shimao in Gessel suffer from equal flaws, with less excuse. This is compounded by the irritatingly facile touch which mars a good deal of his analysis:

Shimao's imagery is filled with deep pits of despair, with heads that constantly itch from imaginary sores and stomachs that twist with a pain both physical and psychological. And always the wanderers — the metaphorical repatriates who become hallucinatory travelers, searching for some familiar face or doorway from the past but never able to locate them. At times the quest becomes a dream, merging fuzzy reality with surreal fantasy. By the mid-1950's, this metaphor of wandering assumes new dimensions. The characters, now more closely identified with their creator (generally named "Toshio," in fact), find themselves suffocating in marriages that have too much of the mundaneness that fills them with terror. So they begin wandering outside the home in search of new love, a love fraught with some of the dangers of war because of the potential for discovery. And when the inevitable discovery comes, the battle resumes — this time a struggle between a man and a wife who wage their own private war as though their lives depended upon the outcome. As, indeed, they do. (p. 131)

This spew of details insufficiently digested leaves the mind bloated but no better nourished: intellectual junk food. It is little better than an advertisement that the author has read the stories referred to, and an unwitting revelation that he has not understood them very well.

As in Sparling, Gessel tends to overstate the influence that Shimao's career in the special attack forces had on him, condensing his discussion of the period before this time into a mere half-page. This is surely wrong. Shimao *chose* to join a suicide squadron, and so we are justified in assuming

that the tendencies that led him there were the fruit of seeds sown in his childhood and youth. To say that he "continued to carry an armed torpedo around with him inside his head" (Gessel:127-28) may have a certain tinsel glitter to it, but it says nothing about why he wanted it there, what exactly it was aimed at, and what its eventual fate was to be.

In Gessel, the troubles are compounded by a tendency to clutch at straws, some clearly stemming from a lack of familiarity with native idiom. For instance, he connects the final image of "Everyday Life in a Dream" with a famous *haiku* by Bashō which also mentions crows perched on withered branches, entirely forgetting that in Shimao's story the crows are not perched on the branches, but are gripping them tightly in their beaks, tails pointed to the sky (Gessel:147). Thus, an extraordinary and meaningful image is trivialized into a cheap tea-tray scene. He states that Shimao "often" identifies the "other" in his fiction as *taishu* 対手 "foe" (Gessel:148, 164) but my reading of the works that he cites (without specific page references) has uncovered no instance of the use of that rather rare and Sinified compound – certainly it is not one of his "common" usages, and a stress on it obscures Shimao's ambivalent view of the "other," which can excite his wife's suspicions if he ventures into it alone but also restrains her behavior if it intrudes into their family space. He traces the change in Shimao's literature from surreal to realistic to when he "eventually formed a close personal relationship through marriage," (Gessel:148) ignoring the fact that Shimao had been married six years when his first realistic "sick wife" story appeared. He attempts to read several levels of meaning into the extraordinary name of one character, ignoring or not knowing that the use of *kanji* (Chinese

characters) rather than the *hiragana* or *katakana* syllabaries has already closed off all meanings but one to the native reader (Gessel:149) – and then fails to follow up the Biblical antecedents of that one possible meaning to locate their very pertinent overtones.³

At times Gessel's insensitivity approaches the heroic. Probably the most noteworthy example is his discussion of the opening of *The Sting of Death*, the forebodings that came over Shimao when he arrived back from a night with his lover to find the house locked and disordered:

And just what is the logical connection between "Dishes lay untouched in the sink" and "I knew that the day of judgement had finally come"? Should we assume that this man at last will be punished for leaving dirty dishes in the sink? Are we really supposed to accept the shaky association that is made between spattered ink and blood spattered as if at a murder scene? (Gessel:160)

This empty rhetoric and blank incomprehension carries complementary implications for the stability of Gessel's home life and his unfamiliarity with duplicity, but anyone who has spent as much as a few days in the cold

³ The name is Kannō Miichi 神呪巳一 'serpent cursed by God', a stand-in for Shimao himself as central character of "The Melancholy of Homecoming" ("Kisōsha no yūtsu," 1954), and the allusion, surely, is to Genesis 3.14-15: "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (my emphasis) Gessel also fails to remark on the extraordinary name given to the protagonist's wife: "Nasu" ("Eggplant").

companionship of justified paranoia will have no difficulty at all understanding Shimao's mixture of panic and revelation.

For all this, in Gessel as in Sparling, all the basic ingredients for a correct understanding of Shimao scattered on the weedy paths of his over-fertile but under-trained imagination. Again and again he remarks that while Shimao was the god earlier – and a god uneasily conscious of his own frailty – Miho has taken his place as god by the end of *The Sting of Death*.

As Gessel points out, *The Sting of Death* is a title with specifically Christian overtones – I Corinthians 15:55-56, "The sting of death is sin." (Gessel:158) But let us go a bit further. What is the ultimate sin in Christianity? Surely the devil's crime, pride – more specifically, the pride that sets one equal or superior to Deity:

How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!...For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also in the mount of the congregation upon the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)

This gives us one promising opening for further analysis. Having established it, let us leave it for a moment, and turn to opening up another.

The surrealism of his dream stories, and the general incapacity of both the author and his fictional creatures to deal with everyday realities, will have suggested that Shimao was seriously alienated from himself, the outside world, or both. However, "alienation" by itself, without further qualification,

is a hopelessly vague term. Before it can form the other claw of the pincers to extract the basic structure of Shimao's art, we will have to be a little more specific.

Petrovic, in his article on "Alienation" for the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,⁴ gives the following summary concerning alienation from the self (as an example of which, significantly enough, he cites Lucifer):

The term "self-alienation" seems to suggest some or all of the following points. (1) The division of the self into two conflicting parts was not carried out from the outside but is a result of the action of the self. (2) The division into conflicting parts does not annihilate the unity of the self; despite the split, the self-alienated self is nevertheless a self. (3) Self-alienation is not simply a split into two parts that are equally related to the self as a whole; the implication is that one part of the self has more right to represent the self as a whole, so that by becoming alien to it, the other part becomes alien to the self as a whole.
(1/79)

The two parts can be dubbed man's "essence" and his "existence": the self-alienated man is thus "a man whose actual existence does not correspond to his human essence." Furthermore, "if one were to conceive man's essence as something shared by all men, then somebody alienated from man's essence could not be a man in fact." Petrovic discusses several ways to conceive of this "essence," rejecting from the standpoint of absolute truth that which defines it "as an eternal or nontemporal idea of man towards which the true man ought to strive." However, if we abandon truth and turn to the dictates

⁴ G. Petrovic, "Alienation" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol.1, New York and London: Macmillan, 1967:76-80.

of culture, we can see that such an idea was indeed posited by the norms of prewar Japanese society. This suggests the possibility that Shimao might have been alienated from his essence in a culturally-defined, rather than a universal, sense.

This provides us with at least a beginning of an approach. By the end, we must evolve an application of alienation that is flexible enough to fit all the events of his literary life, both the surrealism of his dream stories and the nightmarish attacks of his "sick wife" tales — and last but not least, his swift slide into what might be best called the acolyte of his wife. We will be suggesting below that although Shimao was without doubt alienated, and alienation forms a fruitful concept through which to understand his development, it is absolutely crucial to understand what exactly he was alienated from. Was it indeed societal norms, or something more inner and personal? This is one of the questions we will be attempting to answer in the following.

We will try to prove below that Shimao was not in fact seriously alienated from his role in Japanese society, which he filled in a way that more or less met social expectations. Even his cheating on his wife was not unusual, especially in his milieu. There is simply not enough strain being exerted by his eccentricities to account for the strange nature of his work. Rather, we should look at the position he was in on the island where he was stationed, a position which was maintained by his marrying an island woman. He was put into a superior, leadership, almost godlike status for which the experiences of his childhood and youth had left him totally

unready. But who can resist the Luciferian temptations of mounting to the throne of god, especially when considerable strength and moral force would have been needed to make a disclaimer stick?

This unnatural situation continued for about ten years. Finally, his wife, heavily provoked by his conscious/unconscious actions, rebelled into lunacy and seized the position of dominance. After a transition period he submitted to her as almost a god, a total role reversal, but one which left them in a far more "natural" situation (considering their individual upbringings and psyches) than the previous strained period of his dominance. Following this, he settled down to write conventional/confessional works in which he tended to explore his own inadequacies in realistic detail, rather than expressing his stress and disquiet through surrealism as he did during the time he was uneasily "dominant." He becomes a follower of his wife's southern culture, even withdrawing to live for a while in her milieu, declining as a writer while she took the lead of him in even this sphere. His alienation, in short, was not so much an alienation from societal norms, but a temporary departure from his own true place and position, learned in his childhood and youth, the lot of being weak, passive, and dependent.

In the four short chapters below, we will develop the related and inseparable themes of his sin of pride and his alienation from his proper place. The first chapter will cover his early life and works, so unaccountably neglected by nearly all students of his work. The second will concern itself with his uneasy reign as false god, during which the strain of his position was reflected clearly and unmistakably in the fantasy and surrealism of many of

his stories. The third will review one of his "confessional" stories, written after he and his wife have changed places in the family hierarchy, where he admitted to her and to the world how inadequate he had really been in his role as the island divinity. The fourth and last will be about *The Sting of Death* cycle, in which his false role collapses and his and his wife painfully fight their way to a more natural arrangement. In the conclusion, we will illustrate the particular nature of Shimao's submission to Miho by a brief comparison with the women-worshipping characters of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, whose protagonists often put themselves just as far below their feminine counterparts, but whose psychology contains crucial and illustrative differences.

Chapter 1

The open fields of childhood

It is often said in Japan that any writer will in the end return to his or her maiden work. This means that no matter how crudely they might be expressed, we will be able to observe elements or problems in a writer's earliest work that he or she is bound to return to sooner or later. Most writers become writers because they have something in their minds or in their circumstances which they are too sensitive to successfully ignore. They begin to write, and continue writing, as a means of self-therapy. If this is indeed true, such problems should be present in their consciousness from the very beginning, and will be reflected in their works throughout their careers.

In the later part of his life, Shimao Toshio often remarked that there had been two incidents in his life which had left a completely unforgettable impression on him. He consistently maintained there was a similarity between these two incidents, and regarded that similarity as dictated by his fate.¹ One of them was his experience with the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, and the other was his military service as commanding officer of a suicide attack unit.

¹ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Shimao Toshio ni yoru Shimao Toshio (Shimao Toshio by Shimao Toshio)*, Tokyo: Seidōsha, 1981:87, 100; Shimao says that his situation in these two incidents symbolizes the whole of his life experiences, in which he habitually makes progress that halts half-way. He also states that what he himself has done has never had much effect on the course of his life.

When Shīmao was six years old, he suffered from an unknown and apparently fatal disease, but unaccountably survived.² He was sent to his parents' home district, Sōma in Tōhoku, to convalesce. Some time later, his mother and siblings came to Sōma to bring him back to their home in Yokohama, and they stayed there longer than they had expected. Finally, his father came to Sōma to bring the whole family back to Yokohama. The day after his father left, the Great Kantō Earthquake devastated the Kantō region. The Shīmao home and business in Yokohama were completely destroyed by fire, but the whole family survived, since they were all in Sōma. Shīmao escaped death twice in this incident: once from illness and the second time from earthquake. More than that, the initial danger of death from illness turned out in the end to be the means of preserving not only his own life, but the lives of all his family members, when the earthquake came.

The conclusion that Shīmao drew at this time was that no fatal accident would ever happen to him. When he returned to Yokohama, he later said, he felt estranged from his school friends, who had all experienced the disaster. It is interesting that instead of feeling happy about having survived, he felt estranged or lonely on account of his missing this crucial moment. During the war as well, though he was on standby alert to carry out a suicide attack, the war ended before he received orders to sail. He had fully prepared himself to die, and on standby alert was as good as dead mentally, merely waiting for physical death to complete the process. However, once again, the fatal moment did not come. He was glad to survive physically, but

² Cf. Shīmao Toshio, *Shīmao Toshio ni yoru Shīmao Toshio*:87, 197; Shīmao says that he has never experienced even a short period of perfect health right from the time that he was born.

bothered at the same time by the thought of troubles to come. The thing that links these two incidents is the feeling that evil or destruction has deliberately spurned him.³ Gradually, he came to feel that some force was holding him back from any climax such as death would have represented. Shimaō has been haunted by these feelings throughout his life.

There is one short story among Shimaō Toshio's early works which seems especially interesting. This is "Open Fields" ("Harappa," 1938), one of the twelve short stories in his maiden publication *A Record of My Childhood Years* (*Yōnenki*, 1943), a collection of his juvenilia which goes back as early as his elementary school days.⁴

None of the stories in *A Record of My Childhood Years* contain dramatic events or fast-paced action. They portray Shimaō's childhood and youth as they were, free from overt interpretation or explanation. Nevertheless, we can detect in them Shimaō's tendency to feel out of place and his sense of estrangement: the theme of alienation, which will recur throughout his career. In "Open Fields," this theme, which is one of the most important facets of his artistic consciousness, develops in distinctive ways. I hope that through examination of the circumstances, people and events that Shimaō relates in "Open Fields," and the protagonist's reaction to them, the early history of this theme in his work will be clarified.

³ Cf. Shimaō Toshio, *Shimaō Toshio ni yoru Shimaō Toshio*:87; Shimaō says that his loneliness makes him feel as if he were a stranger to life.

⁴ Shimaō Toshio, *Yōnenki*, (*A Record of My Childhood Years*). Shimaō published this collection of his early writings at his own expense in 1943 when he volunteered for military service, to stand as his posthumous artistic representative. It was republished by Yudachisha, Tokyo in 1973.

Before further discussion of "Open Fields," let me give a brief synopsis of the story, which has yet to be translated into English. It consists of four episodes.

— 1 —

The protagonist, Kantarō, jumps into a moving streetcar as it is slowing down at a curb. Although last time the streetcar driver had been kind enough to let Kantarō ride to the end of the line for free, this time the driver gives him a violent public scolding. Kantarō is embarrassed at this totally unexpected treatment from the driver. He had had no doubt that they would let him go unpunished in almost all circumstances, because he is only a child. He is ashamed and does not know what to do as he senses the stares coming from the other passengers. He looks for his ticket in his pocket in vain: it has been lost somewhere. Kantarō feels like crying, and throws himself on the mercy of the conductor, saying that he had lost his ticket. The conductor tells him to wait, and then leaves him alone. He neither gives Kantarō a ticket nor does he tell him to get off. Kantarō is on the verge of tears. He actually wants to break into tears, but even the chance for that has been lost. Now he can no longer hear or see anything around him. The next thing he notices is that they have already reached the terminal and he is being scolded even more harshly by the driver.

When he gets home, feeling very miserable, his mother welcomes him with a warm smile. Touched by the warmth of his mother, he cannot hold back his tears any longer. Tears stream ceaselessly down his cheeks. Kantarō wonders why the driver scolded a mere child like him so harshly. He is not able to comprehend the affair, and feels it was a nightmare. On his way to the

ticket agency branch office to hand over the ticket his mother has given him to pay his debt, Kantarō bumps into Tatsu, a mentally retarded boy whom Kantarō is afraid of and always has trouble dealing with. (Tatsu is always giving Kantarō a hard time by making unreasonable demands, sometimes threatening or bullying him.) However, Tatsu is unaccountably reasonable this time, and Kantarō arrives at the ticket office safely. After he hands the ticket to a policeman, Kantarō feels as if a heavy load has been lifted from his mind.

— 2 —

Kantarō often feels very lonely because of the absence of his father, whose work requires him to live away from home. Sometimes he asks his mother when his father will return. He thinks, however, that a family gathering without his father might be more intimate and genuine, though not anywhere near as good as one with total strangers.

Kantarō does not like Ryōkichi, who is one of his few friends, because Ryōkichi is "sticky" (*nebaneba shiteiru*). There are three reasons why Kantarō thinks Ryōkichi is "sticky": he talks like a girl, there is a rumor of an undue familiarity between Ryōkichi and his sister Yoshiko, and worst of all, Ryōkichi talks with the girl Fusae (whom Kantarō admires) in too familiar a tone.

Regardless of Kantarō's feelings, however, his own sister Hideko wants to play with Ryōkichi. One day, Kantarō stops her from going out to see a puppet show with Ryōkichi, and forces her to come with him to a railway bridge. It is a dangerous temporary bridge and children are forbidden to cross it. For no better reason than to make her cry as revenge for her liking Ryōkichi, he starts to teeter his way across the bridge while scaring her by saying that he will die if he falls off. When he hears her screaming and pleading

with him not to cross the bridge, he feels that his ill feeling toward her dissolve. He even hears her screaming with a feeling of ecstasy. He then returns to the riverbank and tries to calm his crying sister. He begins to feel happy about the fact that she likes him so much that she will cry and plead in such a manner for his safety.

— 3 —

One afternoon, some girls, including Fusae, are jumping rope in the fields. Although Kantarō feels a great deal of affection for Fusae, she is too arrogant to notice his feelings. When he is staring at Fusae's never-smiling face with adoration, she happens to drop her comb. When he tells her what had happened, she asks him to keep it for her while she is playing. Kantarō leaps with joy at her words and holds the beautiful comb carefully in his hands. Hoping that she will at least thank him for holding her comb, he wants the girls to stop playing as soon as possible. Fusae is getting excited jumping rope, though, and seems to have forgotten all about the comb. While waiting patiently for her to finish, Kantarō begins to feel that his clothes and hands are so dirty that they are polluting the comb. He decides to go home and wash his hands. Unfortunately, when he rushes back to the fields, the girls have already finished playing and Fusae is looking for him with a very displeased expression. She scolds him, saying that he should never have gone away with somebody else's belongings. Kantarō is completely unable to explain his actions. He feels miserable and fears that Fusae will not like him in the future.

That evening Kantarō cannot enjoy dinner. He feels so bad that he cannot even respond properly to his mother when she requests him to do a

small chore. When he takes a bath with his mother, however, he feels as if his depressed feeling is being washed away with his sweat, and he is quite refreshed.

— 4 —

One day, after buying a puzzle which he had been longing to buy, Kantarō has opened the box and is joyfully looking at the pieces of the puzzle while walking home from school. Suddenly, the mentally retarded Tatsu comes out, snatches a piece of the puzzle from Kantarō's hand, and runs away. Kantarō desperately wants the piece back and searches all over for Tatsu, but with no success. He finally comes to the shop where he bought the puzzle and sees a pile of complete sets of the puzzle in the shop. He feels dizzy. Nobody is around. A voice in his mind eggs him on: "Go for it! Quickly!" Kantarō swiftly exchanges his incomplete set for a new, complete one. He starts running away from the shop as if he was being chased by somebody. He feels too ashamed to go home, where his mother is waiting for him.

* * * *

In the first episode, the protagonist Kantarō has to face the world of adults, represented by the streetcar driver and conductor. Although he had been accepted by this world during his first adventure, he was totally rejected by the same world this time around. Kantarō is not able to comprehend why the world he thought he knew had suddenly changed into something unknown and unexpected. Although the conductor passed him many times, he neither gave Kantarō a ticket nor did he order him to get off. Kantarō's existence was ignored, which underlined the gap between him and the world

of adults. He is forced to recognize that the world which he once believed had accepted him has been transformed into another world in which he is a total stranger. He is physically alienated from the new world, and suffers from this sense of alienation. Since he does not belong, he feels a sense of uneasiness and threat.

The world of adults is a symbol of the incomprehensible outside world, which takes a variety of different forms in other stories in *A Record of My Childhood Years*. A protagonist isolated from the world around him is one of the best-known motifs of Shimao's fiction. In "Sunday School" ("Nichi-yō gakkō," 1937), another short story in *A Record of My Childhood Years*, the protagonist, Gorō, tries with all his might to persuade his mother to believe in Christianity, to which he has devoted himself. He even says that he belongs to God, not to his mother. At this his mother, who up to now has always been caring and gentle, becomes angry with him and turns into a person with whom he can no longer communicate. He regrets what he has said to her, but she does not accept his apology. She has become incomprehensible to him.

In the third episode of "Open Fields," the problem of alienation becomes interpersonal as well as physical. Although Fusae has never paid much attention to him, Kantarō admires her. Therefore, he accepts her request to keep the comb for her in a mood both rapturous and sincere. Her comb is something too precious to hold in dirty hands, but she for her part is too busy jumping rope to notice his devotion. When his consciousness is directed toward her, hers is directed somewhere else: Kantarō does not exist for her, and when she finishes playing and her consciousness returns to him, he is not there. Fusae, upset, does not care why he left the fields, and he

cannot find the words to explain the situation to her. There is no communication between them. Kantarō confines himself in his mind without explaining to her the reason why he had left the fields, and Fusae does not bother to understand or even guess what he is feeling. The two are estranged from each other for reasons that neither comprehends. When we look closely at Kantarō's relationship with others, we realize that his consciousness never meets that of others head-on.⁵ The contact is always oblique, he and the other person working at cross purposes. This is another symptom of alienation which can often be observed in Shimao's works.

We should also point out that as far as physical alienation goes, Kantarō's family has recently been forced by the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 to move into the area where they were living. He is as yet rather new to the neighbourhood and has only a few friends. The mentally retarded Tatsu is the leader of one of the children's gangs in that area, overpowering the others with his physical strength. Kantarō is afraid of Tatsu, and cannot get close to the children of Tatsu's group. He is alienated from the society of his peers in this place. He does not belong there, and does not feel at home. Shimao's heroes are often rootless figures who do not belong anywhere, like travelers who have no place to return to.⁶ In "Open Fields," this tendency is already clear.

Throughout "Open Fields," people are alienated from each other and in consequence hurt others without fully realizing what they are doing. The

⁵ Cf. Yoshimoto Takaaki, *Shimao Toshio (Shimao Toshio)*, Tokyo: Chikumashobō, 1990:8.

⁶ Shimao, who is a born traveler, has a series of works dealing with his travel experiences. He often casts his characters as travelers or wanderers.

Throughout "Open Fields," people are alienated from each other and in consequence hurt others without fully realizing what they are doing. The streetcar driver does not know how much he hurt Kantarō. His sister, Hideko, does not know why her brother does not like her going out with Ryōkichi. Fusae does not even try to guess why he left the fields. In human relationships, the person who gets hurt is usually the one who gives more love or more attention to the relationship, and the depth of the wound is directly proportional to the degree or amount of care given. However, Kantarō is still too young to become conscious of a feeling of alienation, or define his feeling of estrangement. He only senses a gap between his expectation and reality. Furthermore, his hurt feelings are still capable of rapid healing. In the first episode, for example, when he is welcomed home by his mother, he feels himself back in the world again and bursts into tears of relief. In the third episode, his depressed feeling is washed away with his sweat when he takes a bath with his mother. In both cases, his mother plays an important role in healing Kantarō's feelings of alienation, and this image of the healing mother recurs throughout Shimao's writing career. It appears again as N in "Exodus from the Island" ("Shutsu kotō-ki," 1949) or as Miho in *The Sting of Death* (*Shi no Toge*, 1960).

However, it is important to remember that after all the mother is not the person him/herself or a part of him or her. We tend to think that one belongs to one's mother, but this is an illusion. She is one of the others, though she may be the closest other. Should one expand the mother image to include the wife,⁷ however, she would become the most distant other at the

⁷ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Watashi no bungaku henreki* (*My Literary Pilgrimage*), Tokyo: Miraisha, 1966; Actually in Shimao's mind, the image of his mother, who died young,

person to oneself, since both you and she make up a family together; but after all, you are members of opposite sexes with different upbringings. The hero of "Open Fields" does not notice this yet, though. He just thinks "I just want to go home and be beside my mother."⁸ For him, his mother is still the place he belongs to, the place where he can take refuge.

If we look at this story from the standpoint of Shimao's later works, we see that Kantarō is never able to fully relive his feelings of estrangement. By the time he arrives at the ticket office, the reckless boy who jumped into a moving streetcar without a ticket has already been completely forgotten by the world of adults. Although the incident still haunts him, it has already ceased to exist outside his own mind. Again, his consciousness and the outside world are running at cross purposes, even though Kantarō does not notice it. He cannot reconcile himself with the world that he once thought was his, and this clash of realities may be expected to hurt him. In Shimao's works, people are always hurting each other as a result of their indifference, intentionally or unintentionally. Because each character has his or her own intrinsic internal time flow and direction of consciousness, they can barely catch a glimpse of others' consciousness, and it is almost impossible for the consciousness of two people to meet directly at the same time. There is no bridge to connect people directly; they only pass each other by. Shimao has been bothered by this facet of human relationships ever since he was a child, even though he may not always have been aware of precisely what was worrying him. He had

image of his wife, Miho. He even says that he cannot distinguish the memories of his mother from those of his wife.

⁸ Shimao Toshio, *Yōnenki (A Record of My Childhood Years)*, Tokyo: Yudachisha, 1977:119.

experiences similar to those in "Open Fields" when he was the same age.⁹ He probably did not fully understand why his mind retained those small incidents when he wrote the story, but at least he knew that there were certain problems bothering him. In "Open Fields," we have what is still a somewhat hazy depiction of the theme of alienation, which has yet to be pursued further. It is described here only as an incomprehensible difference between the worlds of adults and children.

We have now examined how the protagonist, Kantarō, was alienated from the outside world and from other people. Our next step will be to examine the theme of mental alienation, namely, alienation from himself, in the story.

In the second episode, we learned that Kantarō's father lives away from home because of his business. Kantarō misses him. Because he is in a critical time of life when children form their mental structure, the damage inflicted by the father's absence is almost irreparable. Kantarō thinks the most desirable "family" gathering would be one that is composed of strangers. This is a quite unnatural idea. At least during childhood, one's family members should be the closest, most sympathetic and most understanding persons in your life: in a way, they are a part of yourself. Moreover, a father figure is essential for maturing in a healthy way. Kantarō does not have this foundation, however, and so he desires to have strangers compose his family. Whether he is conscious of it or not, he is alienated from his own family, or rather, in a way he alienates it from him.

⁹ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Shimao Toshio ni yoru Shimao Toshio*:198.

The image of a missing father is a recurring motif for Shimaō. In "Sunday School," it is expressed as God who is supposed to resolve the protagonist's sense of alienation. It is also expressed as death, which never visits the protagonists of Shimaō's war stories, but merely passes by on the way elsewhere. Death might be the solution to all the hero's problems, but it never takes place.

In the second episode of "Open Fields," Kantarō is jealous about his sister's feelings for Ryōkichi. This may be quite a common feeling between a brother and a sister, but his jealousy goes too far. He treats her as if she is his possession. Since she is his sister, a person who is supposed to be close to him, his feeling of estrangement becomes stronger when he learns how she feels about Ryōkichi. He senses a feeling of rejection from a member of his family. The relationship between himself and his family members is very insecure, so much so that every little shock can make it waver.

There is a group of Shimaō's works called "dream" or "surrealistic" stories in which he uses various metaphors and images to express his deepest feelings of fear, hatred, and hidden desire. They mainly deal with the theme of mental alienation in "dream" settings, and the issue of incomplete sexual relationships is one of their most important components.¹⁰ In "Open Fields," this sexual theme is not given explicit form, but it can be perceived. In the second episode, Ryōkichi is described as being "sticky." There is a rumor about his undue familiarity with his sister Yoshiko. Actually, Kantarō

¹⁰ Cf. Shimizu Tōru, "Kokoromi no michi" ("The Path of Trials") in *Chūō Kōron* (February, 1977); Shimizu suggests that we can observe a castration delusion in many of Shimaō's works, such as "Mukade" ("A Centepede," 1954) and "Asukeetisshu jijoden" ("Ascetic Autobiography," 1951)

happened to witness them in a dark room by themselves. "Their lips appeared lewd in the dim light and Kantarō felt them to be filthy."¹¹ It does not mean, however, that Kantarō hates love relationships or that he accepts only a spiritual love. He loves Fusae and is longing for her attention. One of the reasons why he does not like Ryōkichi is that Ryōkichi talks with Fusae in too familiar a tone. He is jealous of Ryōkichi. We also have to remember that Kantarō desires to monopolize the love of his own sister, Hideko. He unconsciously tries to model his relationship with Hideko on the one between Ryōkichi and Yoshiko. Ryōkichi symbolizes Kantarō's hidden desire: he is Kantarō's alter ego. The relationship between Ryōkichi and his own sister presents the issue of an abnormal sexual relationship. And Kantarō's relationship with Fusae suggests the sign of the issue of incomplete sexual relationship which will very often appear in his "dream" stories.¹²

In *A Record of My Childhood Years*, mothers are always described as caring and thoughtful figures. In the first three episodes, his mother is a shelter where Kantarō can always seek refuge. In "Mother" ("Kaasan," 1940), another short story in *A Record of My Childhood Years*, the hero's mother comes to rescue him when he is playing in a desperate mood while suffering from the measles. In "Sunday School," whenever the protagonist, Gorō, faces a difficult situation, he thinks, "I just want to go home and be beside my mother."¹³ At the same time that she is a caring and gentle mother, she is also an omnipotent figure to him. Gorō thinks that she can handle anything

¹¹ Shimao Toshio, *Yōnenki*:123.

¹² This issue is examined in Chapter 2.

¹³ Shimao Toshio, *Yōnenki*:149.

and he has nothing to worry about if he is with her.¹⁴ In "Arabesque" ("Karakusa," 1948), which also deals with his childhood, the hero's mother tells him not to be like his father. He feels that she is disciplining him in order to make him into her ideal man.¹⁵ In "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor" ("Kōshi no me," 1948)¹⁶, the protagonist, Yurindo, who is apparently an older double of Kantarō, describes his mother as an inseparable part of him. On the other hand, in the final episode of "Open Fields," Kantarō feels that he cannot go home where his mother is waiting for him. He knows that he has done something shameful, and is afraid to tell her what he did, since he has betrayed her expectations. For the first time, he has a secret from his mother. He suffers from a sense of guilt, but it is not because he stole the puzzle from the shop, but because he has betrayed his mother. His mother is no longer a shelter for him. He is now alienated even from her, and he is afraid of his mother's eyes. In later years, Shimao had to face the strict eyes of a mother again, but this time, they would be those of his wife, Miho.

In "Open Fields," Kantarō is estranged. Consciously or unconsciously, the author stresses the theme of alienation so strongly that he burdens Kantarō with the problem. However, Kantarō never touches on issues of sin and punishment in connection with these events. He is not aware of any moral problems. He does not go to the ticket office to deliver the ticket because he thinks it is a sin to ride a train without a ticket. He punishes his

¹⁴ Shimao Toshio, *Yōnenki*:134.

¹⁵ Shimao Toshio, "Karakusa" ("Arabesque") in *Shimao Toshio sakuhinshū* vol.1, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1961:225.

¹⁶ Shimao Toshio, "Kōshi no me" ("The Eyes of the Lattice Floor") in *Shimao Toshio sakuhinshū* vol.1, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1961.

sister, but it is not because he thinks it is immoral for her to go out with a boy whom unpleasant rumors connect with his own sister. He is not sensitive to issues of sin at all. However, this means no more than that he exists in a mental space quite distinct from the Western moral code where a sense of sin entails the sting of conscience. How can feelings of alienation be escaped? This seems to be the only problem Kantro has to solve in these incidents, though he is not conscious of it.

The boy Shimao created in "Open Fields" grows in the same way that the author grows. This growth can be observed directly in the protagonist's relationship with his family. The change in his relationship with his mother in the last episode of "Open Fields" is very suggestive. In "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor," Shimao uses the mother image again, but with an approach given more maturity by the experiences of war.

The hero of "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor," Yurindo, who appears to be another version of Kantarō, already realizes his sexual interests clearly. One day his beautiful aunt is upstairs in bed in his house because she did not feel well. He tries to touch her feet without being noticed, while she is sleeping, but fails. He feels so humiliated that he believes everybody in his house will know what had happened, and that they will talk in whispers about it. He feels that it is a stain which he cannot erase from his life. However, the people around him, busy with their own interests, do not even have enough time to notice such a minute incident: it does not exist for them. Even for the aunt, it seems very possible that she will forget it quickly. The oblique relationship between the inner world of the boy and the adult world, first described in "Open Fields," appeared here again in an even more extreme form. It has developed to the extent of a total incommensurability of value

judgements. Panicked by the thought that his mother will know what he tried to do to his aunt, Yurindo, in spite of himself, plays a lewd trick on Miyo, who is a nanny for his baby brother. Then, he feels his mother, in whose presence he used to seek refuge from his troubles, looking at him with cold eyes because of these two incidents. In reality, however, this change might only mean that he had begun to relate his mother to himself in a different way since being caught performing his mischievous act of naive sexual curiosity. It is not only his mother's reaction, but also Yurindo's sense of guilt, which alienates him. Still worse, his mother is no longer a shelter who can relieve him from the pressure of the feeling of alienation. She now belongs to the world outside his consciousness, one of "the others," even though she remains the closest other. Yurindo is left high and dry with his feeling of estrangement unresolved. That is why the situation here is much worse than that in "Open Fields."

It may be Yurindo's new-found sexual interests that have forced his mother out of his world. He unconsciously relates in his mind his sexual interest to the unstable relationship between his mother and father, parallels to which exist in many of Shimao's works. In real life, Shimao's father seems to have been an unfaithful husband. After the Great Kantō Earthquake, his father moved his business from Yokohama to Kōbe, since the Kantō region had been totally destroyed by the earthquake. Because the business was not stable at the beginning, his father did not bring his family to Kōbe immediately. They lived apart for more than two years. Before and after the earthquake, his father seems to have kept a mistress. Shimao does not talk too much about it, but sometimes makes suggestions which indicate he was aware of his father's misbehavior. We can also observe this situation in his

stories.¹⁷ In "Arabesque," there is a scene where the protagonist has an illusion that maybe his parents will get divorced.¹⁸ In "Ascetic Autobiography" ("Asukeetisshu jijoden," 1951), the protagonist, Yurindo (the same name as in "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor") happens to wake up one night and hears a quarrel between his mother and father. He senses a tense atmosphere:

"I have already given up on you in despair. Your unfaithful affairs with people outside are a sickness." His mother said this in a hoarse, subdued voice, sounding as if she was somebody else. Yurindo had a strong presentiment that something awful would happen. Her words had created an abnormal atmosphere. He became tense in his bed. He felt a chill and his body and legs started shivering. His father was silent. "I can put up with anything if it happens outside the house. You don't know how patient I have been." She paused for a while and started again. "But I can never ever put up with affairs that are carried on inside the house. Never..." He could not hear her clearly. Then, he heard a metallic sound. At that moment, he remembered he had seen her with a pair of scissors during the day. He had an illusion that his mother was saying that she would stab his father with them. Was it really an illusion? It seemed that this kind of incident had happened before. And he had woken up at midnight the last time, too. This was exactly same as the last time. He shuddered. He sensed his mother had grabbed the scissors. It was exactly the same. Was this an illusion? "How vexatious!" She screamed hysterically. He sensed that somebody had stood up. "Stupid! Stop it! You've gone beyond a joke!" He heard his father's excited voice. It sounded as if the two had crashed into each other. Yurindo had a strange feeling as if he was in the

¹⁷ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Bōkyaku no soko kara (From the Bottom of Things Forgotten)*, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1983.

¹⁸ Shimao Toshio, "Karakusa":216.

presence of wild beasts. Soon he heard his mother sobbing. It sounded like a little child crying.¹⁹

Distressed with her husband's unfaithfulness, his mother would naturally be sensitive to anything sexual. When Yurindo performed his mischievous act of naive sexual curiosity with his aunt, therefore, his mother could no longer accept him in her world, since she sensed the beginnings of sexuality in the action. He has to be cast forth.

There is certainly some significance in the word "ascetic" in the title of this story, but its exact meaning is unclear. Was Shimaō recalling his younger days when he was ascetic? Or did he mean that the contemporary him was ascetic, and very far from his father? A few years after he wrote this story, Shimaō himself enacted in reality the scene which his father and mother played in this story before his own children, a curious case of art imitating life. In "Ascetic Autobiography," Shimaō portrays the incident through a child's eyes. However, he soon had to face this issue again through the eyes of an adult on the other side of the issue. That is the world of *The Sting of Death* (*Shi no Toge*), which will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor," on top of Yurindo's sexual interest and his alienation from his mother, we can observe a further development of the theme of alienation in the relationship between Yurindo and his father's employee, Yoshio. It is interesting to compare the way Yurindo comprehends his relationship with Yoshio to the way how Kantarō in "Open Fields" understands others. Before any further discussion, let us take a brief look at what happens between Yurindo and Yoshio.

¹⁹ Shimaō Toshio, "Asukeetisshu jijoden" ("Ascetic Autobiography") in *Shimaō Toshio sakuhinshū* vol.2, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1961:114.

understands others. Before any further discussion, let us take a brief look at what happens between Yurindo and Yoshio.

Yoshio is a clerk working for Yurindo's father. He is always spoiling Yurindo and keeps him company in his play. One day, Yoshio is doing gymnastics on the lintel. Just for fun, Yurindo whacks Yoshio's bottom with a broom. Yoshio clings to the lintel avoiding his blows and asks him to stop it. Yurindo is feeling spiteful towards him for some incomprehensible reason, however, and prevents him from coming down to the ground, swinging the broom even harder. Yoshio tries to jump to the ground, but because he is tired from clinging to the lintel, he jumps badly and hits himself. He falls on the floor groaning. Yurindo now regrets his behavior.

This might be quite a common incident between the son of an employer and an employee. The son of the employer becomes spiteful because he senses the servile spirit of the employee, and consciously or unconsciously, the employee tries to play up to the son, accepting any unreasonable demand. What is extraordinary is the way the son, Yurindo, feels about this situation. Shimao describes his reactions as follows:

Yurindo first asked, "Yoshidon, are you all right?" Then he realized what that question meant and felt ashamed. So he said, softly this time, "Yoshidon, I am sorry." Yoshidon did not respond. He was just lying there quietly with his eyes closed. Yurindo felt ignored by Yoshidon. He thought their broken relationship was something neither he nor Yoshidon could control. It was something that had happened somewhere in "the domain of the gods." At the noise, his mother came to the room. "What happened, Yoshidon? Wake up! Are you all right?" Her adult knowledge made her try to check how badly hurt he was, touching his body. "Is it painful?" Then Yoshidon opened his eyes, letting out a deep, long breath. "I am all right. It is nothing. I am sorry to have worried you."

"What happened?" "I tried to jump off the lintel, and hit myself in the pit of my stomach..." Having seen and heard them in front of him, Yurindo had the feeling that he has totally lost the space he existed in. He was just standing there, feeling as if he was standing in water.²⁰

In this scene, the relationship between Yurindo and Yoshio does not resemble one between an employee and an employer's son. Yurindo regrets sincerely what he has done. Yoshio does not complain about Yurindo at all, since he knows his nature is good. Both of them are well-meaning people who care for each other. However, they are destined to be estranged. Yurindo realizes that in this world there are certain relationships that nobody can control, no matter how good their intention may be. Yurindo is doomed to suffer from a feeling of estrangement which belongs to "the domain of the gods." This is not only a feeling of estrangement, but also of loss. In contrast with Yurindo, Kantarō in "Open Fields" does not realize yet that this kind of human relationship exists, and he believes that he can reconcile himself with the outside world if his intentions are good. Therefore, Yurindo's understanding of his situation implies a major development in Shimao's understanding of the theme of alienation.

In the final chapter of "Open Fields," the protagonist, Kantarō experiences a feeling of estrangement from his mother. This feeling is similar to the one between Yurindo and Yoshio. Both are estranged from someone who should not be estranged from them. Yurindo has to learn that there is a dimension to human relationships which is uncontrollable and incomprehensible. And in that case, how can we resolve this feeling of alienation? Shimao was too young to consider this problem deeply when he

²⁰ Shimao Toshio, "Kōshi no me":210.

after the war, his conclusion is that the problem should be referred to "the domain of the gods" where human beings are helpless.

Shimao must have experienced this feeling of the estrangement which belongs to "the domain of the gods" as existing between his men and himself or the villagers of the island and himself when he was the commanding officer of a suicide squadron during wartime, because this motif, in various forms, appears repeatedly in his war stories. Shimao was stationed on Kakeroma Island, where the people were so isolated and old-fashioned that they seemed to conceive of him as a god, since he was unexpectedly humble and thoughtful. They even believed that they were protected by the spiritual power of "Lieutenant Shimao."²¹ His wife, Miho, over forty years after the war, recalled him on the island and longed to see "Lieutenant Shimao" again, the being who was once a god to her.²² It is interesting to see that "Lieutenant Shimao" and Shimao Toshio are not the same in her mind. Being treated as a god is another way to be alienated. There is no bridge between gods and people. How Shimao developed this motif in his war stories will be examined in Chapter 3.

In "Open Fields," Kantarō feels too ashamed to go home where his mother is waiting for him. And in "The Eyes of the Lattice Floor," his mother senses the beginning signs of sexuality in her son and does not open her heart to him any longer. Those heroes have no place of refuge from their

²¹ Cf. Shimao Miho, "Tokkō taichō no koro" ("When Commanding a Special Attack Squadron") in *Umibe no sei to shi* (*Life and Death by the Sea*), Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1987:166-167, 229.

²² Cf. Shimao Miho, "Kyōtei no tegami" ("Letters at the Bottom of the Box") in *Umibe no sei to shi*:176.

her heart to him any longer. Those heroes have no place of refuge from their feelings of estrangement. Yurindo, who is subject to fits, had his first experience of his illness in such circumstances. One day he came home from kindergarten feeling very sick. He complained of a pain to his mother expecting her to console him, but she refused to. He felt that he had lost something important, something that he had relied on, and he lost consciousness. He did not know that it was a fit; however, his mother did know, and she also knew his illness was caused by her neglect of him. He had no other way in which to turn on his feelings of alienation and fight them except by turning on his own body, transforming his psychological problem into a physical one. Again, in "Arabesque," a fit is the only escape for the hero, who is a grown-up Kantarō or Yurindo, the only way to heal or lighten his sense of alienation. This inclination of Shimao to escape into the world of dreams would later be developed in his "dream" stories.

Now we will proceed to examine how the components discussed in this chapter were developed in Shimao's more mature works.

Chapter 2

Dreams of Release

Shimao Toshio is often regarded as a writer of "I" novels (*watakushi-shōsetsu*). According to Dr. Edward Fowler, the "I"-novel is an autobiographical form that flourished in Taishō Japan, which is narrated in the first or third person in such a way as to represent with utter conviction the author's personal experience.¹ Given this, it seems correct to call Shimao a *watakushi-shōsetsu sakka* ("I-novel writer"). In his war stories, he keeps close to the outlines of his own military experience, while in his "sick wife" stories, he does not merely narrate a history of what actually happened, but also uses the real names of his family members. Thus, as far as these two groups of stories are concerned, the above characterization can be applied.

On the other hand, Shimao has one further group of works which are commonly referred to as his "dream" stories. On the surface, these are totally different from the two types referred to previously. The settings are dreams, or dream-like, and they do not respect the temporal and physical limitations of real life. They are so detached from reality that some people refer to them as surrealistic. It would thus seem that he has created two different kinds of work in his writing career. What are we to make of this fact? Is it a basic

¹ Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988:xvi.

dissimilarity which has been pointed out, or is Shimao perhaps using two different techniques to express a common theme?

Why did Shimao write the "dream" stories in the first place? In his essay *In the Passing of Time*, the author says,

Dreams and reality are not opposite concepts. There are two realities: one exists when we are awake and the other one exists when we are asleep. We do not need to distinguish them.²

The first thing to consider is whether "reality," or in his exact words *nichijō* "daily," which means usualness, and "dream," in his words *ijō* "abnormal," which means unusualness, are coordinate concepts.³ They are of course opposites, but opposites which are not independent of each other. If they were, they would not be an interrelated pair of usual and unusual, but simply two discrete examples of the usual. Furthermore, the unusual has hanging about it an air of the temporary: sooner or later, it will revert to the usual, either by changing or by becoming so much a part of the scene that it is no longer recognized as something out of the ordinary. Much the same can be said about the relationship between dream and reality. We do not dream dreams that are totally unrelated to our reality – the freedom of dreaming is in fact illusory, as even dreams have their borders and rules, which reflect the substrata of reality at a greater or lesser remove. Last but not

² Shimao Toshio, *Sugiyuku toki no naka de (In the Passing of Time)*, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1983:61.

least, we know we have to wake up from dreams sometime: the unusual will dissolve into the usual. We can thus say that dreams are a part of reality, not a contradiction of it.

Memory can also blur the distinction between dream and reality. Shimao points out, in his interview in *Battle-royal in Peace*, that

The dream which I had last night was probably felt as a mere dream, but if I try to remember the dream sometime later, I cannot distinguish it from the experiences I had when I was awake. I have to wonder whether it was a dream, or one of my real experiences.⁴

This is so close to a famous story concerning the Chinese Taoist philosopher Chuang Chou that the resemblance cannot be accidental.⁵ Again, in another remark from *In the Passing of Time*, Shimao states that dreams are crammed with memories of all the past which human beings have experienced since the creation of the world, a concept reminiscent of Yeats and his idea of the

³ The opposite word for abnormal should be "normal," but Shimao uses "daily" instead. Shimao's meaning of "daily" is very interesting and characteristic, and it will be studied in Chapter 3.

⁴ Shimao Toshio, *Heiwa no naka no shusenjō (Battle-royal in Peace)*, Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1977: 28.

⁵ "Last night Chuang Chou dreamed he was a butterfly, spirits soaring he was a butterfly...and did not know about Chou. When all of a sudden he awoke, he was Chou with all his wits about him. He does not know whether he is Chou who dreams he is a butterfly or a butterfly who dreams he is Chou." (A. C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: the inner chapters* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981], p. 61).

Spiritus Mundi,⁶ and continues that in dreams we are actually experiencing all these memories. Therefore, he believes that we must include dreams as well if we wish to talk about "experiences"; without them, our lives have been robbed of one of their most important aspects.

The logical result of such attitudes is to break down the barrier between dream and reality that ordinary people maintain. When Shimaō wrote a "dream" story, he was not telling empty stories or fantasies but considered that he was narrating "experiences" as real as any in the life he lives while awake. For that reason, there was no real difference between "dream" and ordinary stories in Shimaō's mind. Moreover, his "dream" stories are akin to his other works in keeping close to the concerns of his real life, particularly his intense sense of displacement and alienation. This breaks through over and over again in his dream experiences, symbolized in various thinly disguised ways, such as the condoms he asks his leper friend for, or the big sores which appear on his head, making it itch unbearably and preventing him from contacting others. The dream format frees Shimaō from the irritating temporal and logical restraints of everyday life, thus allowing his suppressed uneasiness to break to the surface. On the other hand, the fact that his dream stories were all written during the period that he played the leading role in his family gives us a clue to the source of the disquiet and alienation they voice.

⁶ "A general storehouse of images which have ceased to be the property of any personality or spirit." (Richard J. Finneran [ed.], *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* [New York: Collier, 1983], p. 493, note 200.12).

Up to now, we have been considering the way in which Shimao conceives of dreams, and the place of his "dream" stories among his other works. Now let us examine one of the most famous examples of his work in this genre, "Everyday Life in a Dream."⁷

The title itself, "Everyday Life in a Dream," is very suggestive. Dreams are properly part of the unreal, temporary, imaginary world which is supposed to be the opposite of the arena of everyday life. To set the one in the midst of the other smears the borderline between dream and waking, real and unreal. Dreams are not dreams any longer, but alternate realities claiming equal time with all other experiences and memories; and on the other hand, these everyday "real" memories begin to be tainted with an aura of unreality. In a way, Shimao is signalling his life during the time he wrote these stories was both unreal and transitional.

This smearing together of unreality and reality is the basic atmosphere of "Everyday Life in a Dream." For example, the protagonist "I" defines his identity by his work. He is a writer – but society does not accept his self-evaluation, since he has not yet published a single work. His status is thus entirely in his own mind, without any outward proof or sign – perilously close to Shimao's situation at the time, clinging to leadership in his family despite his inability to fulfill the demands of that role. However, since both he and the protagonist of the story are convinced of its validity, they have

⁷ Shimao Toshio, "Yume no naka de no nichijō" ("Everyday Life in a Dream") in *Shimao Toshio sakuhinshū* vol.1, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1977; Hereafter identified by page number only.

turned dream into reality, at least for themselves. They exist in an area where the line between the real and unreal has been blurred to the point of invisibility.

"Everyday Life in a Dream" employs various symbols to convey readers into this mixed world of dream and reality, and express feelings of misplacement and alienation precisely and concretely: distortions of the body, leprosy, condoms, and so on. Water, or water-linked symbols such as dampness, often appear. Through a close examination of these signs, we can uncover many aspects of Shimao's dis-ease. However, before proceeding with the discussion, we should provide a synopsis of the story.

"Everyday Life in a Dream" begins when the protagonist, "I," is about to enter the headquarters of a certain charitable organization in the slums. His purpose is to meet a gang of juvenile delinquents in order to get some material to work up into his next story.

"I" is over thirty, but does not have any socially valued skill or talent. Therefore, he has decided to gain status and trust by writing stories. He has managed to write and sell his first story, though it contained no trace of either divine guidance or of satanic inspiration, and has also arrived at the self-negating conclusion that writing stories is a kind of joke. However, he has succeeded in convincing himself that he is a writer, and has lost all other ambitions. Unfortunately, the magazine with his first story has not yet been published, so his social identity is, in a sense, "pending."

When "I" tried to write his second story, he finds nothing within himself left to say. This is why he has come to the building, to get some new material to write with. He is thinking about writing a fictionalized record of the real activities of the gang, which he is considering joining. He muses that as a member of this gang, he would participate in picking pockets and robbery, and even entertains the idea of having a sexual relationship with a young girl. Since he is a writer, he and his reputation will remain unstained, no matter what happens. He might even be lucky enough to be recognized as a practicing "humanist."

Entering the building, "I" is about to take his plunge into this new life when he is called back by the receptionist. Someone is asking for him. It turns out to be a friend from elementary school days, who is suffering from leprosy. The friend says to him, "I've come here to deliver the things you asked me for," which turn out to be condoms. This friend knows that the protagonist's first story is about to appear in a first-rate magazine, but instead of being happy, the idea that a total stranger to his mental life is talking about his work puts "I" under unbearable pressure. He wonders why people with diseases like his friend's are not isolated. While he is thinking this, the leper is checking each of the condoms, stretching them, and saying that the quality was not as good as it used to be. "I" feels humiliated; he takes the condoms, gives some money to his friend, and departs hastily. He rushes into the office to wash his hands with disinfectant, fearing he will catch his friend's disease. Suddenly the door opens, and he sees the leper standing there, rigid, seething with jealous rage. He attacks "I," screaming that everything is false through and through. The receptionist hears the commotion and enters the room, but

the leper grabs her, saying that he doesn't care who he infects. "I" escapes, leaving the young girl to her fate.

After this incident, "I" never returns to the building, and in fact totally breaks off his relationship with the outside world. This ends his last hopes of writing another story. He is always walking somewhere restlessly. Ever since the incident with the leper, countless planes have been flying over him like an invasion of locusts. He is frightened at the thought that something might drop out of them, and begins to feel that the end of the world is approaching.

As days pass, the details of the incident blur, and he cannot remember whether or not the leper actually touched him. He wonders whether he disinfected himself thoroughly. Now, he cannot trust even his own flesh. He feels everything around him is lurching and swaying.

One day, he is restless without apparent reason, and decides to call on a famous writer. However, the magazine with his first story is still not published, so he does not know how he is to introduce himself. He begins to feel it is a great deal of trouble to visit that writer, and gives up on the idea.

He does not know what he really wants to do as the end of the world approaches. He does not want to use the condoms, and in any case has misplaced them. He loses all his friends, and his parents are missing. However, his mother is supposed to be living in a town in southern Japan, said to have been largely destroyed during the war. Suddenly, "I" decides to go to that town to see her.

He is in that unnamed southern town. It is his mother's home town, but her family has died out and there is no place there where he can rest. After wandering about the town, he comes to the train terminal, the last stop on the line, located at the edge of town. He is the last one to buy a ticket. He takes a train going towards the north, at night.

The train is crowded. There is a young girl sitting just in front of him, and he is attracted to her plump body. While imagining her dressed in the flashy kimono of the mistress of a small bar, he feels an overwhelming desire. He forcibly takes a seat beside her and tries to bring their knees into physical contact, believing that this is also her desire. The girl moves her knee away from his. He panics, as if he had been slapped in the face, and then become furious, turning away in a huff. Then, the girl begins to look flustered. She apologizes to him in an extremely intimate tone. As soon as he hears her voice, he is disgusted and comes back to his senses.

He is in his mother's house. The house is derelict to the point of being unrepairable, and the tatami mats are spongy, full of moisture. Then he realizes that he has brought his father along with him by force, and that this has given him an unconscious feeling of restraint on the way there.

His mother looks unexpectedly young and seductive. She is carrying on her back an illegitimate child of mixed blood. The child is big and plump for his age. Out of sentimentality, he says to her, in spite of himself, "Mother, don't worry. This child is my younger brother." His father is silent, looking at them unpleasantly. He exists only as an effect on the atmosphere. He then says, "Besides that kid, there are two girls." This comment of his father

implies that "I" does not know anything, and this gives "I" the impression that his father resembles the iron wall of society. Then, his father speaks again, some awful but unspecified words. When "I" hears them, he wonders if his mother's skin is also his own.

Having tried to reply to his father, his mother performs an action reminiscent of the *fumie* ritual,⁸ to prove there is no falsehood in her words. It would seem to be a good chance for reconciliation with the family, but instead she expresses her true devotion to her Caucasian lover. His father is enraged; "I" shares that rage, but at the same time feels satisfaction at his father's psychological disintegration. His father then tries to whip his mother. Out of an access of heroic passion, he offers to receive the punishment in her place. It is a formidable flogging, and the pain makes him realize that he had taken too indulgent a view of things. After the whipping, his father beats him across the face with a club.

He is outside the house. His teeth are smashed. He feels his mouth is like that of a grasshopper or katydid. He wonders where he is walking, for he has totally lost track of where he is.

A valley with a stream at its bottom seems to run alongside the houses. He does not see the water, but he senses that it is there. People pass by, and they all seem insubstantial, with pale shadows. It is dark, but it is not

⁸ The *fumie* ritual was used by the Tokugawa government to expose secret Christians after the proscription of Christianity in the sixteenth century. In it, the participants were made to trample a sacred picture to prove their rejection of the alien religion.

evening. The sun is high in the sky, but it is still gloomy. Crowds of people walk by.

He has an illusion that students are looking at him from windows. He feels humiliated. Then his inner self whispers, "You are fake. Your case is not 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.' It's more like something ventured, after losing everything."

He arrives at the brothel he had intended to visit and asks the woman to let him stay for the night. There is a child, looking out of the window. The child does not look sick at all, but the doctor has given up hope for him. When "I" picks up the child, the child goes into convulsions. In the woman's room, he finds the magazine in which his first story has appeared. He sees his name in print, and wonders why they failed to send him a copy. He also wonders whether he had given it the title.

His head is itching terribly. Big sores, like soda crackers, have formed all over his head. The itching is completely out of control. With a strange feeling that he might be leaving the human race, he scratches and scratches at the sores. At the same time, he feels a violent pain in his stomach. Because of the pain, he thrusts his right hand down into his stomach to pull out a hard kernel adhering to its bottom. As he pulls, his flesh follows the kernel up, until finally he is turned inside out like a sock. The itching and the pain are both gone, and he is as smooth and transparent as a squid on the outside. He is in a pure, shallow stream, beside which is an old tree bare of leaves. It is covered with crows which are attached to the tree in an extra-ordinary manner, gripping the branches with their beaks and occasionally waving their

tails in the air or spreading their wings. They look as tenacious as scale insects. Resentful, he thinks that he would like to strip the crows from the tree.

* * * *

In "Everyday Life in a Dream," the protagonist "I" does not feel himself worthy of being a member of society without having some special skill. He does not consider himself needed by his fellow man; in short, he feels useless and alienated. Thus, he tries to metamorphosize himself into a writer to gain the trust of society. He hopes thus to be accepted, and in this way to rid himself from his sense of inadequacy. However, it is ironic that in his attempts to recreate himself as a novelist he tries unconsciously to alienate himself from his own reality. He feels he has lost all ambition outside of being a novelist. Furthermore, he believes that novelists never get hurt, which means that consciously or unconsciously, he tries to lose his sensitivity.⁹ Basically, he is trying to become something that he is not, and since Shimao was already a successful writer at the time he produced this story, the reference to writing and writers is evidently not to be taken at face value.

⁹ This conception of novelists can be seen in another of Shimao's short stories, "Ōbasami" ("Big Scissors," 1952). In this short story, the protagonist aspires to throw away his sensitivity in order to write novels. He believes that he can write easily without his sensitivity, but when he does lose it and finds out he cannot write at all without it, it is too late.

The leper friend appears to be a part of the protagonist himself which he is trying to shed. The leper embodies his sensitivity: the fear and hatred in the depth of "I"'s mind. When "I" is going to take the plunge into a new way of life, the leper appears to stand between "I" and the new life he was going to start. Since the leper is a part of himself, when "I" washes his hands in disinfectant out of fear of infection, it signifies he is trying to wash a part of himself out, a part which can never be separated from him, but can only be hidden. This is why the leper screams out that everything is phony. "I" not only fails to escape from his previous alienation, but he also comes to suffer from another type of self-alienation, since now he cannot even trust his own flesh in his fear that he has been infected. Alienated in numerous ways both from the outside world and from himself, it is natural for him to feel that the end of the world is near.

His mother's mixed-blood illegitimate child is another aspect of "I" himself. "I" feels totally lonely when the end of the world seems near, and suddenly decides to visit his mother. Although Shimao writes that there is no particular motivation for this visit, it would not be far wrong to understand it as the protagonist's attempt to escape his alienation by restoring his broken family ties. The child appears in front of him when he tries to mediate between his mother and his father. Being illegitimate, he is alienated from the family; and being mixed blood, he is also alienated from society. He stands as a block to communication between "I" and his parents, another symbol of the alienation he suffers from. To further intensify this feeling, and to underline how ignorant "I" is, his father shocks him with the revelation that his mother has two more illegitimate daughters. The reason

for his shock is that the words recall the existence of his inexpugnable impurity, something he himself does not fully realize yet. Otherwise, it is very difficult to understand the following scene:

My father said something. These were terrible words. When I heard them, I wondered if my mother's skin was not also my own. Those words gave that skin a glimpse of hell. (98)

Here, the protagonist has become one with his illegitimate brother of mixed blood, and his father seems like "the immovable iron wall of society." The father, namely society, knows that "I" is a fake hiding a core of impurity. Therefore, his father has "a faint, chilly smile on his lips" when he agrees to punish "I" in place of his mother. "I" has to realize that he has taken "too indulgent a view of things" when he is severely beaten by his father. In particular, his mouth is smashed, a symbolic punishment for his fakery. He has been occupying a false position, and has now been punished by a real authority who has seen through his pretensions.

"I" then arrives at a house which seems to be a brothel at a hot spring (the streets smell of sulphur), seeking refuge for the night. There, he sees a sick boy looking out the window. This sick boy, who harks back to Shimao's own illness-haunted youth, symbolizes another aspect of "I" himself: "I"'s innocence and good nature, which he is now in the process of losing. Nothing about the boy suggests life – his voice is clear and he is practically weightless. It is as if he is about to depart from the flesh, and what he is looking at out of the window is an empty, frozen rice paddy devoid of life. All these things suggest that the boy, a part of or symbol of "I," is really dying,

past all possibility of help, even from "I" himself. When "I" tries to pick him up, the boy goes into convulsions, which means that "I" has been rejected by one of his own better parts.

After the boy dies, "I" finds a copy of the magazine containing his story. As a confirmed fake, validation of his novelist status does not do him any good: instead, it induces a crisis. His head, which has been itching before, begins to disintegrate, and he feels he is about to leave the human race. He begins tearing off flakes of his own skin, and becomes something totally alien.

All of the three symbols we have looked at, his leper friend, an illegitimate son of his mother, and a sick boy, are alter egos of the protagonist. Whenever he tries to change his situation or communicate with others, they appear between him and the situation and emphasize his powerlessness and ineptitude. He handles the leper clumsily, and the leper denounces him; his efforts to accept his illegitimate brother earn him a beating; and the sick boy he tries to assist dies. They arouse his consciousness that he is an impotent fake, since he is not complete without those other selves, and the feeling of being a fake is very similar to the sense of alienation from oneself.

Earlier we suggested that the reason why the protagonist wanted to be a novelist was that he thought that being a novelist, he would be accepted into the society from which he felt alienated. In the course of the protagonist's attempts to leave some sort of mark on the world, society appears in various symbolic ways. First, the first-rate magazine in which the protagonist's story is to appear symbolizes society. Without its publication, his identity exists only in his own mind. It is very important to him, but it treats him very

casually. Although he has been eagerly waiting for it, it is not sent to him when it is published. It ignores his expectations and existence. He believes that he belongs there, but it does not share his belief. And when it finally does appear, he literally cannot take it – it drives him right out of humanity.

His father, whom he has forcibly brought to his mother's house, is also a symbol of society. It is very significant that his father does not give a sense of being there in the flesh. Because he symbolizes something inanimate, he exists only as an atmosphere. He gives "I" a feeling of restraint. "I" tries to insinuate himself into his father's favor, but his father does not like his grandstanding, and tells him that he does not know anything. His father is another one of those who makes "I" realize that he is a fake. "I" feels his father as "the immovable iron wall of society," and it is true that the father is society itself, which threatens the identity of "I." When "I" tries to be a hero by receiving the punishment in place of his mother, the father destroys his heroic feeling with a vicious flogging. His father, society, makes him realize that "he has taken too indulgent a view of things." Those pulverized teeth can be seen as symbols of "I" himself, who has been rendered toothless and impotent by the retribution of society.

All of those symbols of society appear as something uncontrollable by him, which exerts a silent pressure on him. They remind him of the consciousness that he is a fake and that everything he tries to do will fail.

During his journey to search for release from the sense of alienation from society, the protagonist encounters his alter egos which represent the depths of his psychology: fear, hatred, impurity, and so on. He unconsciously

tries to divest himself of his nature. However, it is impossible to shed a part of yourself. The other selves of him keep coming back at him whenever he tries to be accepted by others, namely the society, which is symbolized by things like the first-rate magazine and his father. Every time he tries to make contact with others for the purpose of escaping from the sense of alienation, his alter egos keep him from doing so.

At the end of the story, the protagonist turns himself inside out in despair like a sock. He is not dead but he is not alive, either. He is just "submerged in a pure, shallow stream." The image is not life affirmative at all, but a state of near-death. Through the story, Shimao keeps employing images of death. These images signal us that the power and potency of the protagonist are insufficient to meet his needs.

The most prominent death image in this story is water. Water often appears as a symbol of purity, but it is also often used as a symbol of death, as in this work. Death and purity may appear quite discrete ideas, but in a way they are closely related. All troubles, anxiety and complications end with death, which can clean and purify life. The Japanese in fact believe that there is a river called *Sanzu no kawa* between life and death. At least in the Japanese mind, water is connected with images of death.

Let us look at how Shimao uses water as a death image. When the protagonist arrives at his mother's house, he notices that the tatami mats are spongy and bulging with moisture. The damp tatami symbolizes the hopeless situation of his mother. The water corrodes his mother's life just as it has the

tatami. This is a life surrounded by death, and that is why he makes the comment, "I hate living like this." (97)

On his way to the house where he asks the woman to let him stay for the night, he feels that there is a valley stream alongside the houses even though he cannot see it. That area is supposed to have been obliterated, and the houses are covered with what looks like steam. It is patently the scenery of death. That is why people walking there "all seem insubstantial, with pale shadows." (100) It is dark there, even when the sun is high in the sky. It suggests that he is on his way to the other world.

When he gets to the woman's house, he sees a sick boy, who is his alter ego. The dying boy symbolizes the protagonist's virtue. Since the boy is a part of the protagonist, he can "sense" the view outside which the boy is looking at. The view is an expanse of rice paddies, and he hears the roar of the sea. He says to the sick boy, "Hey, kid, you can see the ocean from here. Want me to pick you up so you can see?" Then "the boy goes into convulsions as if he has just been waiting for him to pick him up." (101) The reason why the boy goes into convulsions is very clear. It is because he was forced to face directly the death which previously he had no more than sensed. It is ironical that the protagonist unknowingly forces his alter ego, namely himself, to face death. It highlights how all his attempts to do good to himself or others only end up in failure or ruin.

The water images reviewed so far have not been visible. They are the moisture in the tatami, or the mist covering the houses, the unseen valley stream or the sound of the ocean. They are more feelings than physical

realities, because it is not the protagonist but his mother, the town, or the boy, who is dead or dying at this point. In the final scene, however, the water is visible for the first time, for the protagonist himself has to face death. Inside out like a sock, he is submerged in the pure, shallow stream, perhaps the stream he had sensed before. The death which he had only been imagining up to now has finally enveloped him. Shimao does not tell us whether the protagonist is dead, but we can guess that he is dead or at least is in a death-like or impotent situation.

Other than water images, for the purpose of conveying the idea of death, Shimao repeatedly uses words that give a negative death-like image, such as dark, north, end, last, and so on. The protagonist feels that the 'end' of the world is near. He takes the train heading toward 'north' when he goes to his mother's house. The train station, which is the 'end' of the line, is 'dark' and located at the 'edge' of the town. He is the 'last' one who bought a ticket. The town is 'gray' and 'dark' even though the sun is high in the sky. And his mother's house is 'damp' and 'dark'.

In addition to those morbid images, it is noteworthy that there are no life-affirming images in this story. First of all, there is no scene involving eating. The action of eating is fundamental to life, and if the protagonist has a positive attitude toward life, it is quite difficult to avoid eating scenes. For example, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro makes an excellent contrast with Shimao in this aspect. Tanizaki has often been described as a pleasure-loving, life-affirming writer, and he was also famous as an epicure. He often writes about food in his works, and his protagonists usually enjoy eating. In other words,

Tanizaki's protagonists are fully engaged with life. On the contrary, we seldom find descriptions of food or scenes of eating in Shimao's works. In "Everyday Life in a Dream," there are no eating scenes at all. The protagonist is more dead than alive. The images of sickness are distinctive as well. The protagonist's friend is suffering from leprosy. The protagonist is afraid that he has been infected and feels that his flesh is no longer sound. Later he suffers from violent itching and stomach-ache. The child at the woman's house is dying. There is no hint of recovery anywhere, and all the protagonist's actions are thwarted or futile.

As for other possible life-affirming images, the sexual aspect should not be neglected. We have to remember that the protagonist's leper friend brings him condoms. There is no suggestion of any complete or satisfying sexual relationship in this work. Condoms suggest that the protagonist's potency is frustrated. He feels an overwhelming desire for the young girl on the train, but he totally loses his interest in her as soon as he hears the girl's voice. His desire is extinguished by the possibility of fulfillment. He visits a woman asking for accommodation for the night, but even though he is the resident of a brothel, no sexual relationship develops between them. His mother has an illegitimate child of mixed blood, which suggests an anomalous or unnatural sexual relationship. Everything points to the protagonist existing in an "impotent" state.

Children, the results of sexual relationships, are also abnormal in this story. His younger brother is an illegitimate child of mixed blood. It means that his mother had a sexual relationship which was unfaithful not only to

his father but also to the society of that time. The brother is also described as an albino-like child with a swollen head, who is big and plump for his age. It suggests that there is something abnormal about him. The child at the woman's house is dying, though children should be the symbol of continuing life. Again, these are all symbols of frustration and futility.

We have learned that the protagonist of "Everyday Life in a Dream" is suffering from a sense of alienation, futility, and impotence. He is alienated from society because he is not worthy of society, and he is conscious that he is a fake. He tries many times to escape from the sense of alienation in vain, and Shimao describes the protagonist's desperate feeling using death images, many of them associated with water.

There is another way to read these water images, which does not contradict but compliments their role as symbols of death. This is as signals of the encroachment of female power on the male. Both water and the darkness that negates the sun at one point in the story are correlates of the Yin, the female principle of traditional Sino-Japanese *Inyō* cosmology. Thus, another way to read the dampness, steam, and water that encroaches on and finally enfolds him may be as a sign of the fading of his male Yang power and the growth of a female Yin power that will assert mastery over him. We will see this symbolism expressed more clearly in *The Sting of Death*, discussed in Chapter 4, but it is noteworthy that it may be finding expression even now, during the period Shimao ostensibly dominated his wife.

Finally, let us go back and reconsider the extraordinary dénouement of "Everyday Life in a Dream," the protagonist's transformation into a squid-like

being contemplating a crow-laden tree with resentment. It is here, if anywhere, that we should find the definitive "message" of the story. The key section is given below in Sparling's translation:

On the outside I was like a squid, smooth and blank and transparent. Then I realized that I was submerged in a pure, murmuring stream. It was a shallow stream, apparently in the open fields. Still steeping my body in the murmuring stream, outside I saw an old tree – what kind I do not know – completely bare of leaves, on each of whose thick bare branches perched a crow holding on with its wide open beak. Looking more carefully, I saw that on each and every branch were not one but swarms of crows with their beaks open wide. They looked as persistent as plant parasites. I had the sense that these crows would remain just as they were, in that position, for ever and ever. The only sign that they were alive was the way they occasionally moved their upward pointed tails and softly spread their wings. But they kept right on clinging fast with their beaks to the thick, dry, leafless branches. Still bathing my body, I thought how much I wanted to strip those crows, those scale insects, from the tree. (Sparling:70)

First, let us review the protagonist's condition. He has been transformed into a passive and featureless state, enfolded by the waters which we suggested were symbolic of both femininity and death. It is also noteworthy that both the water around him and the tree above him are key concepts in Shinto religion.

The tree, towering over his passive form, would seem to represent something that is dominant in contrast to his passive state. However, it is dried up and sterile, with a multitude of crows biting into its branches like sap-sucking parasites. The crow, in Japan as elsewhere, is a bird of ill omen, and so given their peculiar method of perching on the tree, it would seem

reasonable to see them as representative of evil forces sucking the life out of their host. By their parasitism, they prevent the tree, the active counterpart of the passive waters, from playing its full role. One is tempted here to read the tree as symbolic of his wife's true position, towering over him in majesty, and the crows as representing the false concepts and ideas that still hinder her from attaining this role. This is no doubt a somewhat speculative and daring reading, but it fits the situation far better than others which have been proposed.¹⁰

¹⁰ Sparling attempts to use concepts from Jungian archetypes and Erich Neumann to read the final episode in the brothel as an encounter with a "Great Mother" figure and rebirth: "physically as a smooth, unindividuated squid in a pure stream, spiritually, as a 'novelist'" (Sparling:162). However, it is an open question whether any of these grand theoretical schemes have validity in the East Asian context (most are so vague that one is at a loss to imagine how their accuracy could be either proved or disproved). It is also very dubious to read Shimao's transformation into a blob as rebirth as a novelist – for one thing, the transformation was precipitated by the discovery that he had in fact attained the "novelist" status he had ostensibly been seeking, and seems more a reaction or rebellion than a confirmation. And how is he to write novels as a formless mass surrounded by water? Sparling, to her credit, does admit that the image is "ambiguous" (Sparling:163).

As mentioned in the introduction, Gessel tries to link the image of the crows with a *haiku* by Bashō, in the process ignoring the very considerable difference between crows "perched" (*tomaritaru*) on branches and crows tightly gripping (*gappuri kuitsuku*) branches with their beaks – the latter phrase is extremely strong, something that would be used of a leech or vampire, consonant with the comparison drawn between the crows and scale insects. Thus, Gessel's final solution – "...Shimao is suggesting...that the seeming solution reached by his narrator, a solution which is little more than self-annihilation, is not a permanent resolution to his dilemma at all, that it is, in fact, a gesture as ephemeral as the crows precariously perched on the withered branches. The inner peace which he has achieved can at any moment be reversed, just as the crows can take flight with any change of the wind" (Gessel:147) – is unacceptable. Rather than underscoring "his complete inability to bring himself into any sort of compromise with the human society that surrounds him" (Gessel:148), it describes in highly symbolic form how that compromise will eventually be

There are other symbols in Shimao's "dream stories" which also seem to express unease at an undeserved or insecure status and a wish to slip back into something more natural and less prominent. To give a single brief example, the culminating image of "A Stone Statute Goes Walking"¹¹ is the precarious ambulation of the stone image of Sakanoue Tamuramaro, the famous general who conquered the Tōhoku region for the Heian court, tottering along unsteadily and complaining in Kansai dialect, "It's tough!" (*tsuro-oma-su*). Sakanoue, a military leader of almost mythic stature and the first person ever appointed *Sei'i Taishōgun* ("Barbarian-suppressing Great General") by the Japanese emperor, was someone who had a full and indisputable right to the sort of high position that Shimao usurped through a combination of his own weakness and the simplemindedness of the islanders among whom he was stationed – yet he still complains, "It's tough!" The implication seems clearly to be that what is tough for Sakanoue will sooner or later prove insupportable for Shimao. It is this plunge from the heights that we must now explore in the following two chapters.

reached (by his reversion to a passive state) and what stands in the way of this resolution (his wife's inability at the present to take the lead).

¹¹ Shimao Toshio, "Sekizō arukidasu" ("A Stone Statue Goes Walking") in *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.1, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1961.

Chapter 3

"What did you do in the war, Daddy?"

The chief topic of this chapter is "When We Never Left Port" ("Shuppatsu wa tsui ni otozurezu," 1964), one of Shimao's war stories.¹ It is the most famous of this category of Shimao's works, and indeed is one of the best-known stories in his whole corpus. It was written after he and his wife had changed roles, a process narrated in *The Sting of Death*, published more than a decade later than "When We Never Left Port" and thus discussed in the following chapter. However, we should keep in mind below that this story was written after the period of tension and social misplacement characterized by Shimao's "dream" stories; in a sense, it was written to his wife, and was almost certainly subject to her censorship. It is an extended *mea culpa*, contrasting sharply with the fairy-tale treatment of the same themes in "The Farthest Edge of the Island": a self-denigrating revelation of inadequacy which might better have been entitled, "Why I Was Never Fit To Be A God."

In November 1944, Shimao Toshio was appointed commanding officer of a special attack torpedo boat unit, 183 men in all, which was stationed at Nominoura on Kakeroma Island further south of Kyūshū. Their assignment was to frustrate the impending American invasion by sacrificing themselves

¹ Shimao Toshio, "Shuppatsu wa tsui ni otzurezu" ("When We Never Left Port") in *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.5, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1976; Hereafter identified by page number only.

in suicide attacks. After a ten-month wait, "finally the moment had come" on the afternoon of August 13th, 1945, and Shimao's unit was placed on standby alert. However, the war ended on August 15th, before any sailing orders were received. Not a single member of Shimao's unit died or was injured, and they never experienced a moment of real combat. The war for Shimao was thus a crashing anticlimax: no enemy, no blood, and no action, merely an extended wait followed by a meaningless dénouement.

No part of the mature Shimao's creative activity has been left entirely unmarked by his wartime experiences, even though one can exaggerate their impact. His first "official" publication, "The Farthest Edge of the Islands" ("Shima no hate", 1946), revolve around them.² It was also during the extreme circumstances of his military service that he had met his future wife, whose illness was later to form the inspiration for his "sick wife" stories. The war focused his sense of alienation, which leaves unmistakable but rather vague traces in the works written prior to it, and drove it to unstable heights by putting him in the position of first an island, and later a household, god.

The protagonist of "When We Never Left Port" is alienated from all of his subordinates and colleagues during his service at a base on a small, isolated island. The geographical circumstances and the uncertain communications during the final months of the war impose a certain alienation from the country for which he is about to sacrifice his life. He even

² Shimao's first published work had actually been *Yōnenki* (*A Record of My Childhood Years*), but it had been printed at his own expense and had been distributed only to friends and family.

despises his own flesh, which ties him to a routine of sleeping and eating despite its impending dissolution, thus existing in a comprehensive field of disharmony which stretches from inside his own skin to the furthest reaches of his motherland. Such an extreme sense of separation is reminiscent of that of Kantarō, the protagonist of *A Record of My Childhood Years*, who is cut off from both his own, children's world and the world of adults, and that of the chief character of *The Sting of Death*, who is utterly alienated from the world around him.

Shimao did not die, but he spent ten months under the sway of the assumption he was momentarily about to end his life. In other words, he experienced death in life. At the same time, the attitude of the islanders displaced him in a different way, raising him above ordinary human life to the status of a divinity. His experiences on the island were a total reversal of the usual framework, one which made death "usual" and life "unusual," divinity "usual" and humanity "unusual." This is also the situation of the protagonist of "When We Never Left Port." He is on standby alert, waiting for the order to cease to exist. Physically he is fully alive, but mentally he is already dead.

This unusual situation imposed radical distortions on Shimao's perception. For instance, he writes in "Exodus from the Island" ("Shutsu kotō-ki") that

I had no confidence in my sense of time during those days. I wondered whether time was moving forward or

backward. Or, it could have stopped. I was growing younger day by day.³

Normal human life is given shape and direction by the unilinear nature of time, which carries the people within it from youth to age to death. By accepting his own death and experiencing a certain translation to divinity, the protagonist has stepped outside the stream of time and has even begun to feel he is drifting backward. Soon, he begins to tire of lingering in this undead state and begins to feel that death has betrayed him. There are certain resemblances with the situation of the protagonist of "Everyday Life in a Dream," who turns himself inside out like a sock and submerges himself in a stream. Both figures are neither alive nor dead; both are reduced to a helpless passivity.

Even though Shimao spent a total of ten months as commanding officer on Kakeroma Island, the narrative of his war stories is concentrated on the forty or so hours between the evening of August 13, 1945, to August 15th. These were the hours his unit was on standby alert to attack, and so he has used this period to represent the essence of his wartime experiences. "When We Never Left Port" is actually the second story Shimao wrote about this period. Prior to it, he had published "Exodus from the Island," which received the Sengo Bungaku Prize (Postwar Literature Prize) in 1950. The two stories are united in content, which was evidently their author's conscious intention; later he put them together and included them as a single unit in

³ Shimao Toshio, "Shutsu kotō-ki" ("Exodus from the Island") in *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.2, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1977:4.

the *Showa Postwar Literature Collection* volume 10 (*Showa Sengo Bungaku Zenshu*, 1966), under the title of "Exodus from the Island."

The story of "Exodus from the Island" opens on the morning of August 13, 1945, and ends at dawn on August 14th. "When We Never Left Port" is set immediately following it, and deals with the events from the morning of August 14th up to the night of August 15th.

Thirteen years separated the writing of these two closely related stories. During those thirteen years, his status and self-image totally changed, and it was inevitable that his attitudes changed along with them. For example, in "Exodus from the Island," Shimaō's attitude towards the conflict is, "We have sacrificed so many lives up to this point during the war. But what a mess it has all been!"⁴ However, in "When We Never Left Port" there are no such expressions. Here, rather than writing about the war or himself in the war, he is concentrating on the war within himself by stressing the fatigue and feelings of inadequacy that possesses the protagonist. His war has shifted its venue and is now taking place in his mind. This is in a way a logical progression: there was neither battle nor death at his base, but both occurred within himself. In "When We Never Left Port," this internal conflict and sense of unworth are what Shimaō is trying to portray.

Let us now commence exploring the ways in which Shimaō elucidates his contradictions and inadequacies here. First, we will turn our attention to the protagonist's relationship with others, especially his subordinates and

⁴ Shimaō Toshio, "Shutsu kotō-ki":5.

colleagues. Next, we will examine the relationship between the protagonist and death. Together they form a comprehensive testament to his own lack of worth and the validity of the new order of rank in his life.

Since "Why We Never Left Port" has not as yet been translated into English, I shall now provide a synopsis of the story.

On the afternoon of August 13th, the protagonist "I," commanding officer of a special attack torpedo-boat unit, receives the order to go on standby alert. Ever since that time, he has been physically and mentally readied for death. However, the actual order to sail has not yet arrived, even though it is already the following morning. The protagonist feels that he has been betrayed by death. It seems to him that his men are not thinking about their approaching deaths at all, and that only he is haunted by the idea. He has been given command over both the suicide-boat squadron and the land defense forces which had the responsibility of repelling the invasion. However, his thoughts are always on the boat squadron, with which he is to sail and die; he feels isolated and alienated when he deals with the land forces.

The sun is already high in the sky, and he does not understand why he has been given another day to live. He has spent a year and a half preparing for only one thing: an attack from which he cannot expect to return. Although he has accepted this as his unavoidable fate, he has always conceived of it as a black wall of cleft ocean, in which he will be sucked under. However, now everything around him seems to have stopped moving. He feels paralyzed and irritated with the delay in the completion of his mission.

Physically, he feels glad that he was allowed to put off his death for a while, but mentally he is dissatisfied.

After the strain of spending the night waiting for the order to sail, all the unavoidable tasks of daily life seem unnecessary and bothersome. Being alive, however, he cannot dodge them, and they anger him. All he can do is telephone headquarters to ask about the progress of the war. Every time he does this, the answer is unsatisfactory, and he feels that they are evading him. The air itself seems to have changed its nature and quality. Frustrated and helpless, he begins to lose his tense readiness for the attack, and goes to sleep in a damp underground shelter.

It is past noon by the time he wakes up. Still in bed, he wonders why the enemy has not approached. He had been put to the test, and then the attack was delayed: he finds it ridiculous. He gets up and leaves the shelter to go into the bright sunshine, and walks around the base. All of his men, including those in the suicide-boat squadron, have returned to their usual routine. They are working out in the sweet-potato fields, chatting, and their faces show no emotion towards him. He feels he is an utterly different person from the man he was the previous day. His energy has fled him, and the temperature of his body seems to have fallen.

Previously, the enemy aircraft have never missed a single day in their raids, but today they have not yet come even though it is already afternoon. The world seems to have changed. The protagonist cannot adjust to the shift, and has trouble dealing with outside things smoothly. He is afraid of death but at the same time attracted by it. He hopes the night will come soon and

surround him with its darkness, a token of death, which will hide his fear and immaturity.

At dusk, the villagers come near the base to entertain the troops. Since the unit is still on standby alert, only the officers go to see them. The villagers apparently know about what happened last night, and look at the officers as if they are already dead. The protagonist has thought that he knew almost all the villagers, but many of the faces seem strange at first. When he observes more closely, though, he realizes that he knows them after all: his unstable mental condition is alienating everything from him. However, their songs and dance work against this by giving him the illusion that he is attending an unrestrained celebration. At sunset, however, he is compelled to bring the festivities to a close. With that, the bridge he believed existed between him and the villagers vanishes. He is as estranged from them as before, in the same way he is estranged from death. He feels lonely.

He begins to feel that daily life after the delayed attack is becoming truly unbearable. Only death can release him from all of the past. If he is able to sail tonight, he will complete his life with dignity. Otherwise, there will be nothing left but to degenerate and rot.

Around midnight, there is finally word from his superiors. However, it is not the command to attack, merely an order to come to headquarters tomorrow, August 15th, at noon. He feels they are laughing scornfully at his tension. Becoming very sleepy, he goes to sleep in the shelter. Around dawn, he woke up, and went out the north gate of the base. There, Toë, his girlfriend and future wife, is sitting on the sand as if she had been sitting

there all night. He reassures her, and tells her to get some sleep at home. Returning to the base, he too goes back to sleep.

He wakes up late in the morning of August 15th, and goes to the headquarters on foot. Walking towards the village, he feels himself light both physically and mentally. Away from the base and alone, he realizes he is a mere youngster without any deep commitments in life. During his walk to the headquarters, he enjoys a sense of total freedom from responsibilities. There are no villagers to be seen in the village, and all the pigs have been slaughtered long ago. The smell of the rice paddies and the hot wind of summer remind him of how Japan used to be in the old days, when he was in elementary school. His sensitivity returns, reawakened by the stable and organized surroundings. He sees an old couple working out in the fields and talks to them, "How hard you work! The harvest will surely be good." They look at him silently, as if he were their son. Walking through the hills, he hears the singing of some nameless bird. He enjoys it, and begins to nourish the illusion he will escape to somewhere. Then suddenly the idea that the war has ended comes into his mind, and in spite of himself, he smiles. The possibility of survival excites him, and he senses something feminine surrounding and enfolding him. It feels as if Toë were following him. He soon calms down, thinking about the chances of being transferred to a more advanced base.

When he arrives at the village where the headquarters is located, he notices it is different. The rice paddies had always been empty and abandoned before, but now there are many people out harvesting the crop. He feels the

nonchalant expression on their faces as a threat. Next, he sees some people digging carelessly around the foundations of an anti-aircraft gun. The work is very disorganized, and suddenly the idea that Japan has really surrendered to the enemy hits him. Otherwise, these scenes are inexplicable. He cannot help smiling. At headquarters, his superior officer tells him that Japan has surrendered unconditionally. After the emperor's speech on the radio, and a meeting with the commander, he is called back to the office of the commander of the special attack forces. The commander tells him to be prudent and not to ignore the ceasefire by sailing to attack. He has no idea of doing so, and feels odd that his superiors are worrying about it.

He does not know how to tell his men about this drastic change, and so hesitates to go back to the base directly. Instead, he visits two friends from the Naval Officers Candidate School. One of them says that he is envious of his status with the suicide-boat squadron. The other says that he hopes to enter university again and get a lot of reading done.

Finally, he cannot avoid going back to his base. He returns by boat and is welcomed by K., an ensign. He orders K. to gather all the personnel, and tells them about the surrender. Some faces show relief, and some express resistance. Urging prudence, he feels he is behaving falsely. He forcibly continues, "We are still on standby alert. We will leave the fuses on our torpedo boats unremoved."

He feels a terrible weariness and lays down on the bed. He has nothing further to worry about, but is terribly lonely. He had forbidden himself to even imagine the possibility of survival, but a world where people survive

has now become normal again. Its values fade away, and the sense of fulfillment, which he had expected to enjoy, slips through his fingers. Death has departed by itself, not in obedience to his will. He feels empty, and his energy has dried up.

At the evening dinner table, all the officers look at each other with suspicious eyes. They are told that some commanding officer in Ōita performed a suicide attack with eight other planes after the ceasefire. One senior officer vents his anger and repeatedly praises this officer for his bravery. The protagonist cannot endure this, and says to him, "If you have really decided to do something, you should do it quietly without saying anything." A coldness comes over the group, and the protagonist goes back to his room to lay down on the bed.

As he is about to fall asleep, a petty officer comes into his room. He is drunk and begins talking as if confessing his most secret thoughts. He says that the protagonist should feel happy, being the son of a rich man. With a university education, he has been promoted much faster than the petty officer had. The officer continues by saying he is not suited to the military and plans to return home after the end of the war to devote himself to the study of new inventions while farming. When the protagonist says, "That sounds good, but I don't know what I shall do myself," he asks him if he is thinking about whether he can return alive, continuing with, "The ones who should take responsibility for this war are not petty officers but real ones, because of the privileges they have enjoyed."

The protagonist becomes depressed. He feels discipline is starting to collapse. He can easily imagine his men killing each other. He gets up, and brings his sword into his bed. Although he has with difficulty reached a situation where survival is possible, it seems there will still be many difficulties before he can be sure of it. He used to miss Toë every night, but now his heart is calm. Holding the sword, the will to resist begins cautiously to build in him, and he wishes he could have had such a feeling before. Thinking that tomorrow he will order his men to remove the fuses from the torpedo-boats, he goes to sleep.

The protagonist of "When We Never Left Port" is described as existing "in frozen time." (52) With time frozen, nothing happens or changes, and all movement stops. There is, of course, no interrelationship between people. Each is isolated in his or her own life, caught in the moment. They have neither the hope nor the energy to change the situation; they are no longer human beings, but more like ghosts. The protagonist, trapped in such a situation, is just waiting for his sailing orders. His time has frozen when he received the order to go on standby alert. Since that time, he has been thinking only about the moment that he will die. Although his physical life persists, his mental world is already pervaded with death. Therefore, he is powerless to have any relationship with others: he is even alienated from his own physical reality.

In this story, all the characters, with the exception of the petty officer who appears in the last scene, are described through the protagonist's eyes. Since the story is written in the first person, their lives are never seen from the inside. Nobody, including the protagonist, actually talks until the war ends; the action is confined entirely to an inanimate outer world and a scarcely less rigid and dead inner one. Since the protagonist does not talk to others, his opinion and understanding of them seems more like an exercise of his imagination – they never come into contact, are never placed on the same level. The death-spell of the war confines him in his inner world, with nothing to contemplate but his own end.

Near the beginning of the story, there is a scene where the protagonist feels he has been left isolated, his "divine power" (*jintsūriki*) stripped away (51), when he is surrounded by members of the land force. They are just as much his men as the personnel of the torpedo boat squadron are, but he feels no attachment to them. This contrasts with his strong feeling of solidarity with the members of his suicide boat attack squadron, with whom he is to die. There is a huge gap, death, between him and the land forces: they are alien to his considerations and are described as "clumsy neighbors." (51) But what is the root of the connection he feels with the members of the squadron? Again, it is death, the death in action which they will share. It appears that it is only death that makes it possible for the protagonist to relate to others, and which gives him his "divine power." Without it, he is "a mere youngster without any deep roots in life." (63) Because he shares the "divine" aura of impending death as captain of the special attack force, he compels the respect

of the land forces and is able to control them. However, when the suicide attack is put off and all his comrades are asleep, his "divine power" weakens. This makes him feel uneasy, and he no longer feels comfortable in the presence of the soldiers whom he has hitherto controlled by that means. The power is derived from imminent and inevitable death, and so when death is delayed, it begins to weaken.

It is interesting to note that there are no actions or words of the land force described in this scene. They appear, but are depicted only as shadows. Surrounded by them, feeling their pressure, the protagonist "cannot help thinking that he is the only one who is sensitive to the coming of death." (50) Again, he has alienated himself from persons in the outside world, and again death plays a key part.

Although the protagonist feels a certain attachment to the members of his special attack unit, it would appear they do not share this feeling. He senses this, but tries to convince himself that they are related through their common fate, eventual death in battle. However, this seems to be nothing but an illusion of his. They are not obsessed by death in the way that he is, otherwise, it would be impossible to imagine a life-affirming scene such as that where they join the members of the land force "working together in the fields of sweet potato, chatting and laughing under the sun." (55) They are able to go back to their daily routine of survival after the attack is delayed, buoyed up by the life-force within them. The protagonist cannot; he is more dead than alive, with the chill of death already upon him. This creates an

obvious gap between him and his men, and promotes their mutual alienation.

The villagers who have come to entertain the soldiers who are soon to depart on their suicide attack are also foreign to him. This is because he is in a mental situation where "he cannot accept even natural phenomena as they are, such as the passage of time or the changing of the weather." (57) The villagers have "flesh which is self-assured that it will have another day." (56) Although they wish only well to the soldiers, and even bring them some rice cakes from their limited supply, he cannot feel close to them. On the contrary, they do not even appear to be human beings. To him, they "seem to be heads and bodies of mass-produced dolls." (57) Almost dead himself, he sees them as imitations of life. The alienation is to a certain extent mutual, since the villagers look at the soldiers "as if they were already dead." (56) Death maintains the distance between the protagonist and them. It is symbolic that when he sees off the villagers who are returning by boat, the protagonist feels that "he is left alone on this side" (59) – as if he were a soul deposited on the far side of Styx, incapable of ever returning. He cannot help but "feel everything around him strange and unfamiliar as if it were someone else's affair." (57) This is why he cannot recognize the villagers' faces at first, even though they are supposed to be familiar to him. Dedicated to life, not death, they are of a different species from him.

The face, of course, is one of the chief signalling-points between the inner person and the outside world. Thus, characteristically, the protagonist thinks that nobody, including the members of his special attack squadron,

shows their feelings concerning him on their faces. However, this is as likely to be caused by his own behavior as by theirs. Communication breaks down over the gulf created by their different attitude towards death.

The protagonist is to dedicate his life to his country. Since he is going to sacrifice what is usually held to be man's most precious possession, one feels he should at least have some trust or attachment to the recipient of his gift. However, he has no such feelings. He displays no sentiment at all when he learns that Japan has surrendered unconditionally, only a strange feeling of freedom. Moreover, he does not seem to trust the headquarters, which should have been considered the local representative of the power and glory of the country. At the outset of the story, we are told that he feels empty because "the execution of his suicide attack will be decided by the enemy's caprice or his headquarters' hasty judgement." (50) Note that the two are equated – his own side treated on a level with the enemy. He also tells us that he feels uneasy because the decision is not to be made by some more awesome authority. He wonders whether the headquarters knows by now that the island the squadron is to defend is of no strategic value. (62) With no trust in the judgement of his superiors, he mentally criticizes the headquarters for breaking its promise by not sending him sailing orders. (56). In a military situation, especially on such a small and isolated island, the prestige of the headquarters should be the same as that of the country. Therefore, his criticism of them may be read as indirect criticism of the state for which he is to sacrifice his life: it does not want his sacrifice, it has refused to post him to a useful spot, and even then has refused to give him the order to sail and die.

It is clear by now that the protagonist does not belong anywhere. He is able to feel united with neither his men nor the villagers. They are nothing but shadows or puppets to him. Neither can he repose his trust in his superiors at headquarters, for they evidently do not want him, and their lack of interest reflects the attitude of the nation to him. He is utterly isolated, and in spite of his position, impotent and ineffective.

As soon as the war ends and the shadow of death lifts, his men begin to work their way back into his consciousness. The petty officer, their most vocal representative, tells him, "You don't understand how much we have struggled so far." (74) This is the very first comment made about him by others in the whole story. For the first time he has to face others without the "divine power" he had borrowed from impending death.

At the end of the story, there is a scene in which he feels disappointed. However, he is disappointed not because he cannot die for his country but because he is condemned to life and to a long process of facing the difficult business of getting along with others. He was not afraid of his planned death before, but now he is afraid, of being killed without notice. Afraid that discipline will break down and his men will attack him, "he put his sword in his bed." (76) The basis of his authority, the threat hanging over them all, has vanished with the surrender. Since in fact he has no power or authority that might properly be called his own, he fears that the people he has previously dominated will turn on him and try to depose him from his false position of authority. The situation here is highly reminiscent of that within his family before he and Miho changed roles.

Up to now, we have been examining his relationship with others. We have shown that for most of the story he is confined within his own inner world, obsessed by the thought of death, the final alienator. Nobody really exists for him, and even his own existence is a temporary affair, subject to cancellation at any time. Now we will consider his inner world, the driving force in his alienation from everything outside him.

As we have seen, at first his inner world is constricted by the thought of death. However, as he finds a chance to break the siege of alienation which hems him in, his inner world begins to change. The story contains two scenes which seem to act as metaphors of this inner journey: the first is the short walk to the headquarters and the second is his visit to two friends from the Naval Officers Candidate School. A close examination of these two scenes may help reveal the way his mind works, for these are the occasions when he is brought face to face with the possibility he might live, and has to decide what to do with the life he has received.

"The protagonist feels totally unburdened, both physically and mentally, as soon as he goes out the gate of the base." (63) He realizes his immaturity and rootlessness. When he passes through the village whose inhabitants had entertained the officers before, all the people have gone to some unknown place, and all the pigs have disappeared. "He remembers a rumor that the villagers were to kill themselves when the enemy landed." (64) This is the country of the dead. He muses that "he is not able to prepare for anything in the realities of life, and death would probably visit him

suddenly and take him away to the other world, even though he is not ready." (64)

While he is lost in these morbid thoughts, the smell of rice paddies and the mid-summer wind take his mind back to the old Japan of his youth where "nature was rich and life was protected in a firmly united society." (64) He feels his sensitivity revive, and through this memory which links the present scene with a past in which he lived and was happy, begins to orient himself again towards life.

Then he sees an old couple working quietly in the fields. At this, he opens his mouth for the first time in the story, and says, "How hard you work! The harvest will surely be good." (65) This is also the first time he has really paid attention to anyone else. The old couple look at him as if he was their son, and he feels that the woman's eyes "are the essence of the caring gaze of the villagers." (65) She is obviously an evocation of the mother image. He passes on, and runs up the hill path, sweating; he hears a nameless bird singing "as if it is proud of its freedom," (65) and enjoys it. This marks his passage into the domain of life.

Walking by himself in the mountains, his consciousness merges into nature. He has the illusion that he is running away somewhere. Then suddenly, the thought that the war has ended hits him, the logical last step of his mental resurrection. It was as if he had "caught a lost dream by the tail." (66) His values have now entirely inverted themselves from what they were when he set out, so now he cannot stop laughing at the thought. He is to

survive after all; he is physically excited and feels feverish, in contrast to his chill while under the sway of death.

The protagonist also begins to feel at this point that something feminine is enfolding him. He compares it to his girlfriend: "it is as if Toë is following him." (66) This image of being enfolded by something feminine is very evocative. Before, he used to sleep in "a damp and dark underground shelter" whenever he was tired. The shelter is a fairly obvious womb symbol: every time he is tired or hurt, he retreats to his mother to heal himself. But this time, he does not need to go underground, which is also a death image. There is also Toë who can heal his hurt soul. Toë, who fills the mother's role here, is a symbol of life and, as his prospective wife, of the future. The image of himself being enfolded by her is a sign that his happiness will come with surrender to her: it is analogous to the water which enfolds the squid—Shimao at the end of "Everyday Life in a Dream."

The headquarters had suggested he come to them by boat, but he had refused because he wanted to feel the ground under his feet. This short walk of one hour marks a major change in his inner world. He starts in the domain of death and is led back to his innocent youth. There he re-encounters his caring parents and restores his feeling of family. Then, he reconciles himself with nature; his energy and the warmth of his body come back to him. With the hope to survive, he feels Toë with him, a symbol of future life and a pointer to the form it must sooner or later take.

The other scene we should examine closely is his visit to two of his friends from the Naval Officers Candidate School. He has received the news

of the surrender, but hesitates to return to the base because he does not know how to inform his men of this development. They might become angry at the surrender and try to execute a suicide attack regardless of orders, or they might turn on him in their rage. Faced with these unpleasant possibilities, he walks unthinkingly to the room of his friends. His conversations with them are inner as much as outer: they are different aspects of his mind discussing the situation with each other.

The first friend is very brave and valiant. He says that he is envious, since he knows that the protagonist is going to carry out a suicide attack even without orders from headquarters. This friend is a reflection of the protagonist's heroic death wish, which longs to end everything neatly with a final act. However, the gun which the friend is polishing while he talks is disassembled. It seems to suggest that no attack will in fact take place, in spite of the wishes of the owner. The second friend is hoping to return to the university and get a lot of reading done there. He reflects that part of the hero which longs to get back to the scholastic routine that formerly gave his life a pattern. Having seen these friends, he returns to the base. His change of attitude is final: we now know that he will never execute an attack, no matter what pressure his men exert. Death is no longer what he is aiming for, and he has renounced the power he had derived from it.

There are three occasions in this story where the protagonist feels that something is "trying" (*kokoromiru*) him. The first time, this is the unimaginable attack which is to take place. The second time, it is the wait for the order to sail. Shimaō leaves it unclear what is trying him for the third

time, but it would seem to be the consequences of his turn from death to life. Every time he faces a trial, he becomes conscious of being a fake. When he was being tried by the impending attack, it never did come to pass, and he was left feeling like a fake commander lacking a glorious death. When he was being tried by the passage of time waiting for the sailing orders, he could not keep keyed up to battle pitch in his mind. And at the last trial, he heard his inner voice saying that he was cheating his men ordering them to leave the fuses in their boats, which would keep them a state of unnecessary tension and pressure. The sense of being a fake is a very common one for Shimao, as we have seen previously. However, the third time it is slightly different. Instead of feeling himself a fake in death, now he feels a fake in his new life. He cannot immediately face the end of all that has held his men together and given him authority over them, so he gives them a false order to leave the fuses in the boats. This is a confession that he is susceptible to the temptation to prolong his dominance by unfair or fraudulent means.

In the final scene, when the hero goes to sleep, he decides to tell his men to remove the fuses from their boats the first thing in the morning. He has decided to stop being a fake and to tell them the truth, no matter what the consequences. Discipline may become worse than before; they may even mount a violent challenge to his authority. However, he is now ready to face those opposed to him. He has regained his free-will, and has at last returned to life both in soul and body. Again, the analogy from real life is where Shimao accepted the superior position of his wife and fell back into a secondary role, allowing her to oversee his writing, moving to her part of Japan, and becoming a specialized servant of the culture of her native region.

In the story analyzed above, he makes plain for her and for us that his entire reign as a "deity" was hypocrisy and error.

Chapter Four:

Crisis and Resolution

As we have mentioned, "Liuteneant Shimaō," the deity come from the mainland to protect the village, was a false figure constructed from a composite of the villagers' expectations and his own weakness. Shimaō was able to keep up this fantasy until 1954, when his wife began to develop signs of mental illness. The degeneration of his godly status, and the beginning of a reversal into a more natural arrangement for both of them, is the theme of *The Sting of Death*.¹

The Sting of Death is only one part of a larger group of works entitled "sick wife" stories (*byōsaimono*), all of which take their plots from real life: his struggle with his wife's mental breakdown. Most of them concentrate on the relentless attack Miho makes on Shimaō, probing and denouncing his unfaithfulness in every conceivable way, on every occasion, suitable or unsuitable, without telling us any other details such as the other woman's name or the exact details of their relationship.

Shimaō's "sick wife" stories are divided into two groups according to the content and the time of writing. One group is called the "hospital" stories (*byōinki*) and the other is *The Sting of Death*. The "hospital" stories describe

¹ Shimaō Toshio, *Shi no Toge (The Sting of Death)*, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1977; Hereafter identified by page number only.

the lives of Shimaō and his wife when they were in the mental hospital together. All of them were written when his wife's condition was still very serious, and had shown no sign of recovery. Some of them were even written while they were still in the mental hospital together. Thus, at least on the surface, they were diary-like records of what had actually happened. In his magazine article, "Postscript to a Prayer to My Wife", Shimaō stated why he had written "hospital" stories:

I could write nothing better at that time,...in fact I wrote them with an entirely different goal in mind. "A prayer to my wife" – I suppose the prayer must be addressed not to my wife, but to God. But to me, my wife was God's way of testing me...writing out lives honestly as they were seemed to help her recover...I would be willing to write absolutely anything if it would give my wife some comfort.²

Thus, the "hospital" stories were written in the hope of an immediate therapeutic effect on his wife;³ and given the motivation expressed for their composition, they are perhaps not as honest as they present themselves to be. Shimaō often stated that he usually did not write about an event he has just experienced – he would wait until he understood what the event really

² Shimaō Toshio, "Tsuma e no inori: hoi" ("Postscript to a Prayer to My Wife") in *Shimaō Toshio hishōsetsu shūsei* vol.5, Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1973: 68-69; originally published in *Fujin Kōron* (September 1958) as "Yomigaetta tsuma no tamashii" ("The Revived Soul of My Wife").

³ Cf. Shimaō Toshio, *Shimaō Toshio ni yoru Shimaō Toshio (Shimaō Toshio by Shimaō Toshio)*, Tokyo: Seidōsha, 1981:233.

meant to him.⁴ For example, "Open Fields," which deals with his childhood, was written when he was twenty-one years old, and "When We Never Left Port" was written seventeen years after the incident. However, the "hospital" stories were written while he was still in the midst of with the incident. The situation was totally different. He had neither time nor room in his mind to consider what the crisis meant to him when he wrote those stories.

The Sting of Death is different from the "hospital" stories, though it deals with the same incident. Its first chapter was written in 1960, five years after the happenings recounted therein. His wife had largely recovered by that time from her mental breakdown and he was the curator of Kagoshima Prefectural Library, Amami branch. They had managed to return to a normal life, mentally and physically, and even financially. It is important to remember that Shimao had already brought the nightmare to a close when he started writing *The Sting of Death*. He no longer needed to write to help his wife's recovery. Then why did Shimao have to write *The Sting of Death*? There must have been some powerful reason behind his persistence in remembering such a painful topic.

Shimao's wife, Miho, who appeared as Toë in "When We Never Left Port," started to show symptoms of mental disorder in 1954, eight years after they had married. The direct cause was the discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness to her. She had been deeply devoted and obedient to him, but upon this shock she changed into a totally different person, a severe cross-

⁴ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Heiwa no Naka no Shusenjō*(*Battle-royal in Peace*), Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1979:36-37.

examiner, who began an endless series of interrogations and accusations. Her condition only worsened despite various treatments and several hospitalizations, once even together with her husband. Because of this, he had to quit his job as a high school teacher and in the end, the family had to move to Amami Ōshima Island, near her home island, in the hope that the familiar surroundings would help her to recover. This occurred exactly a year after she started suffering.

During the days that he battled with his wife's mental disorder, Shimaō thought of death many times. Both his wife and himself made many gestures in the direction of suicide. Even their little son says, "I've already seen too much. What's the point in living?" (211) However, every time she tries to run away from him or kill herself, he prevents her from doing so; and whenever he tries to end his life, she begs him not to do so. They never allow each other to withdraw from the battle, which gives their threats a somewhat histrionic character. Although they are hurting each other, they still need each other. His behavior is the cause of her madness, but his presence is necessary for her to recover. She must redefine their relationship in a way that is more natural to them both, no matter how different it might become from what it was before. As for him, with a sense of guilt that reminds him that his faults have driven her to madness, he can never let her go, even though his alter ego sometimes tempts him with thoughts of escape. Death could solve all their problems, but they prefer for it to remain on the sidelines as it did during the war, rather than taking center stage.

This situation is somewhat reminiscent of that during the war, when he waited in vain for the order to carry out a suicide attack. In a way, his struggle with his wife was a second war, and like many second wars it had been triggered by the unsatisfactory outcome of an earlier encounter. Yoshimoto Takaaki, one of the most famous Japanese critics, who often writes about Shimao, calls this family crisis the "battle-royal in peace" (*Heiwa no naka no shusenjō*).⁵ Okuno Takeo, another Japanese critic who is a close friend of Shimao and writes extensively about him, says that this family crisis caused by his wife's illness was an "accident" for Shimao.⁶ This is extremely unlikely, or at the most, if it was an accident it was one of the sort that is subconsciously sought, if not actually prepared.

In fact, Shimao had sensed something was happening, and there is a strong probability that his insecurity and sense of role alienation was subconsciously making sure that it did happen. Just before his wife's mental breakdown, Shimao wrote stories such as "Onihage" ("Onihage," 1954)⁷ and "The Melancholy of Homecoming" ("Kisōsha no yūutsu," 1954),⁸ which contain predictions of his coming family crisis (and we have seen less certain hints as early as "The Farthest Edge of the Island," as related in Chapter One). He "volunteered" for this crisis in the passive manner characteristic of him,

⁵ Cf. Shimao Toshio, *Heiwa no Naka no Shusenjō*:13.

⁶ Okuno Takeo, *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.4, *kaisetsu*, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1962:296.

⁷ Shimao Toshio, "Onihage," in *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.3, Tokyo: Shōbunsha 1962.

⁸ Shimao Toshio, "Kisōsha no yūutsu" ("The Melancholy of Homecoming") in *Shimao Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.3.

by continuing in a course of action (keeping a lover) while not taking sufficient means to either make the action safe (such as leaving his wife) or keeping it secret (hiding his diary, falsifying his financial records). Therefore, I do not regard it to be an "accident" but rather "God's way of testing him," as he put it. But which God was he talking about here? What did this whole incident come to mean to him? Through an examination of the circumstances, characters, and events in *The Sting of Death*, and the hero's reaction to them, the meaning should come to light.

Before any further discussion, we will have to review the plot of this series of stories. *The Sting of Death* narrates the particulars of the lives of Shimaō and his wife between the time she showed the first symptoms of mental disorder and the time she was hospitalized with her husband. It consists of twelve chapters and each chapter was published separately as an individual work over a period of seventeen years before being collected and published together. This thesis will concentrate on the events of Chapter 2, "The Sting of Death" ("Shi no toge")⁹ and Chapter 12, "Until the Hospitalization" ("Nyūin made").¹⁰ Chapter 2, which has the same title as the story as a whole, relates the beginning of this crisis. Chapter 12 is the last chapter, and so we can observe the stage of development which had been reached by the end, as well as the changes in Shimaō himself in comparison with Chapter 2. Between these two chapters, his wife's endless accusations of

⁹ First published in *Gunzō*, September 1960.

¹⁰ First published in *Shinchō* October 1976.

him for his unfaithfulness are described in various ways. The synopses of Chapters 2 and 12, and an outline of the other chapters is provided below.

(Chapter One)

The husband, Toshio, is a writer. He also works twice a week as a temporary lecturer for night-time classes at a high school, since it is difficult to make a living solely as a writer. He lives with his family in a small house in Koiwa, Tokyo that he has had his father purchase for him. His wife, Miho, is from a southern island. When he was stationed there during the war, they met and fell in love. Although she had a fiancé at that time, she broke the engagement and married Toshio after the war. She is very obedient and hardworking. They have been married for ten years and have two children, Shin'ichi, six years old, and Maya, four. Toshio is having an affair with a member of a literary group he is involved with, and often stays away from home at night. Miho senses his behavior is odd, and discovers what was going on by hiring a private detective. She tries to convince herself that he was having the affair in order to write good novels, that at least his soul still belongs to her. However, one day she learns from his diary that even that is not hers. This begins her open accusations directed at him, the first of which lasts three days and nights.

Chapter 2 – "The Sting of Death"

The story begins with Toshio noticing that an alarm clock which had stopped long ago is running again. His reaction is to imagine that his wife's will has penetrated it. It rains all day long, and he envisions a scene: all the shutters are closed. Someone comes into the house with muddy shoes on and examines the bodies of a family suicide.

He had to find a writing job, but after his wife's relentless cross-examination concerning his past affairs, he feels too defenceless and vulnerable to venture out in public. A deep-seated change has occurred in Miho; she no longer cares for anything and no trace remains of their old trust. Time passes. Sometimes his optimism begins to return, but there is always the worry that as soon as they are back to normal, something will set her off again. He begins to feel as though the two of them are huddled close together under the heatless rays of an eclipsed sun.

Finally he makes up his mind to leave the house. Ironically, he has to visit a magazine to refuse an offer to do an article which would take him too far from home. While talking with his friend Z, Toshio realizes that he is no longer worrying about his uncertain health: the important thing is to get his wife's trust back. During the three days and nights of her interrogation, he has found something in her that he does not want to lose. On his way home, the rays of the sun above his head seems to flicker and dim. Feeling that he has been exiled from humanity, he rushes home until the decaying bamboo fence around their home comes into view.

When he arrived home, all the doors are open. The sight of the front gate standing ajar strikes terror into his heart. Miho is gone, and the children do not know where she is. He searches for her in vain. Suddenly it occurs to him that Miho has gone to kill the other woman: he is possessed by the image of her wringing the neck of a chicken with a faraway look in her eyes. His ego has been obliterated without a trace, and the burden of guilt for the lies in the past made him feel justified in his choice to go to the woman's place. However, Miho is not there either. He is left blank and frozen, as if he had exhausted all his body heat. When he confirms that his old lover is alive, a strong sense of disappointment, as well as a welling-up of desire, assails him. He explains to her what is happening in his family and tells her both that he loves her and that he will not see her again. As he leaves, he fantasizes that the woman is thinking of a fitting punishment for such a coward as he.

Despite his break with her, he regrets his visit to the woman. Miho is not home. When she finally comes back, she says she is practically a living corpse but has made up her mind to leave. He responds by thinking that if his life has any value, it lies in restraining her from suicide. Over and over Miho cross-examines her. She commands him to tell her everything, and when he admits that he had spent ten thousand yen to pay for his lover's abortion, Miho slaps his face. Instinctively, he slaps her back; but the children begin to cry, he gets disgusted with himself, and they stop their struggle. He tells her that he has now awakened from his directionless nightmare, and

asks her to stop digging up the past. Beside his wife, who is sleeping as if temporarily dead, he feels at last that he had regained some freedom.

Their life continues that way for some time. His wife's condition is sometimes a little better, but then comes a relapse. Her tenacity and abnormal sensitivity mean that he comes to assume that she has positive knowledge of every single fact surrounding him. He feels that his surroundings are full of eyes, ready to pass judgement. Both of their children become used to their scenes.

At last, he runs out of money. Thus, he sets out with the whole family to collect payment for a previous article. All the way, Miho pictures the other woman beside him, and wanders dangerously on the edge of an attack. When they come home, the first thing they notice is the bamboo fence in front of their house, thoroughly rotten, on the verge of collapse, an unpleasant symbol of conditions inside the house. He can only agree with his wife to replace it with a board fence, which will cost more than half the money he had received. This does not prevent another attack. Now, he feels their policy is to focus on his wife and children; his job is to act simply as support for them. He thinks that her attacks are becoming gradually more frequent, and at such times, he becomes as agitated as her. The number of things he is forbidden to do increases. Unless he succeeds in creating a new attitude free from the influence of the past, there is little hope that he will be able to rebuild his life.

He cannot go on cancelling his night school classes, so he leaves home with his wife and children to go to school one night. On the train, she

becomes agitated at the sight of any and every woman, and he cannot soothe her. As a last resort, he decides to leave his family at her uncle's while teaching, because she is normal when she is with people outside the immediate family. While teaching, he is bothered by the image of himself submitting to his wife's cross-examination, and feels dissociated from reality. He is not able to complete his classes. On the way home, Miho again starts showing signs of an attack. They need a place to relax, yet what awaits them is their cramped house, where she can devote her attention to her attack in privacy. She begins to look like a horrible monster.

While walking home, a cat comes up to them and followed them home. They decide to name it Tama (the name of their dead cat) and keep it. When they go to bed, she tries to arouse him to test his love, but he is so tense physically and emotionally that he is prone to react in the wrong way. Afterwards, Tama quietly crawls under their bedcovers. At first he resists it (he does not like animals in general), but then submits, and notices strength pervading his body.

The carpenter replaces their bamboo fence with a white board fence in three days. His wife remains unstable, constantly refreshing her bad memories. She says it is not revenge, and that she does not understand what is going on herself. She has a fit, calling out that demons are visiting her and telling her bad things. Then Maya comes in and said, "Birdie died." She goes out. One of the chickens has stuck its head in the water and almost drowned, but when Miho grabs it and presses its neck, it revives. Watching his weeping wife, he can only think that their troubles are his fault. However, he

soon succumbs to the temptation to strike back at her in defense of himself. Then, staring into his father's eyes, his son Shin'ichi says, "I hate Daddy. I'm fed up with him." Toshio is devastated. It is raining outside. His wife is not soothed easily, and tells the children that she may die. Shin'ichi replied, "I've already seen too much. What's the point in living? I'll die too." Later she makes her husband write out an oath that he will not see the other woman. She explains in detail how she had him investigated. Looking back on his past and his friends, they seem different from what he had taken them to be; he no longer understands what he had seen in the world, or how he has interpreted it. He feels exhausted, empty, body and soul. At this point, his wife says, "Now that Toshio has finally developed some sense, I can die in peace." He cannot sleep. When he looks out the window, he sees the newly erected white board fence, which had soaked up rainwater and swelled with the moisture.

(Summary of intervening chapters)

On New Year's Eve, they receive a telegram from his former lover. It had read, "I will come and discuss how to remove Miho tomorrow." Since that day, they received threatening notes. Finally they decide to sell the house and go to his parents' hometown, Soma, in Tohoku. When he comes home after buying souvenirs for his relatives, Miho is furious because the woman did come to see them. That night, they leave. On arrival, they visit his relatives and pay visits to the graves of his parents and grandmother. Toshio submits a job application to a local high school. However, Miho's frequent

cross-examinations make it impossible for them to stay long. They decide to come back to Tokyo after ten days in Soma.

The ten-day stay in Soma only worsens Miho's condition, so he begins considering moving to her home island in southern Japan. However, he feels destruction was near and finally convinces her to see a doctor. She is hospitalized and diagnosed as having symptoms of mental disorder. However, soon she tries to escape from the hospital and is told she will be discharged by the end of February.

Since their house has been sold, they move to Sakura-cho at the beginning of April. They rent a big house, in the annex of which the landlord's sick sister is living alone. Miho's cousin, K, decides to quit her job to take care of the children. Toshio takes Miho to another hospital to have her examined, and they are told to enter hospital as soon as there is a room for them. The children have gone to K's boarding house and Toshio and Miho are left by themselves. Then suddenly his old lover comes to visit them with compensation money from Toshio's friends. Miho loses her senses and grabs the woman. The two women start to grapple with each other and Toshio is ordered to help Miho. Finally the police come and take the woman away. They are summoned by the police the following morning and told to submit a written explanation and pay two thousand yen compensation.

His job as a part time high school teacher had already ended and they have nothing to do but visit the hospital twice a week. Meanwhile, the landlord asks them to move because his sick sister is afraid to live with them.

At last they decide to send the children to her aunt's care in her home island, and move back there themselves after Miho is discharged from the hospital.

Chapter 12 - "Until the Hospitalization"

It has been raining since morning and Shin'ichi's school picnic has been cancelled. It is his first school picnic and he has been looking forward to it. Grouchy at the cancellation, Shin'ichi does not obey his parents. Toshio spansks him, holding him under his arm. Somehow, a strong hatred arises in Toshio and he keeps hitting him, even using a stick. Miho starts to cry, saying that she will leave him with Shin'ichi because she is afraid that he will hurt their son. Toshio shares her fear. His wife glares at him, and says that he should be ashamed. Soaking wet outside, he is numb emotionally and physically.

Two days after the quarrel, at midnight, Shin'ichi develops a fever. Miho accuses Toshio, "Because of that woman, you have lost your house and now you have made your own son sick." It is first diagnosed as a cold but later turns into measles. His wife does not give up grilling her husband, and he becomes impatient. However, when the attack is finished, he somehow feels unsatisfied as well as relieved. He only remains empty because of their uncertain future.

Next day , it is still raining. It is the day Miho visits the hospital and they ask K to take care of Shin'ichi. On their way, they stop to pay for their baggage to be sent to the island. He feels that it is a departure to a new life but soon realizes that nothing important has been settled. Somebody screams

that there are pieces of a body of a person run over by a train, but he does not feel like looking. He feels it is himself, and thinks that there is an unbridgeable gap between before and after such a brutal death. Afterwards, anything is possible, but you are not forgiven until the point of death is passed. His wife is reading a story entitled "A Wife Who Turned into a Fox" and does not notice the accident.

The treatment takes a long time. While waiting for her, he thinks that her attacks are her way to show her sincere devotion to him. He goes to another department to check the result of his phlegm test, but starts feeling uneasy away from his wife. He does not care about his own health now. The doctor tells his wife that because of her upbringing, she lacks the training to endure feelings of jealousy or hatred. Now, she does not know whether to forgive her husband. She still tells the doctor that besides her parents, her husband is the only person who understands and loves her.

They feel relieved knowing that they are going to be hospitalized together soon. Her attacks still continue, however, and he cannot do anything because the cause is in his past. He is no longer able to take this physically and tries to collapse before she does. His wife's attacks are becoming more frequent, and he wonders what it means. He feels as if he is in a minefield. Recently, he has been more hysterical than she is, and it appears as if their roles have been reversed. She is now more calm than he is and reproves him for his ugly behavior.

Afraid that Maya would catch the measles, he takes her to the doctor to have an injection. He knows that her parents' unconcern makes her

frustrated and twists her nature, but he cannot do anything. She seems to know that her father cannot be too much help.

By mistake their baggage, which was supposed to have been sent to the island, has been sent to a boarding house. He is disappointed and tired and feels that that is his fault. At night, he takes care of his sick son, who seems not to mind being taken care of by his father. He has a dream, in which his son is asking him some favor.

The doctor diagnoses Shin'ichi as having pneumonia. The family is left by themselves again. Shin'ichi's fever is extremely high and it makes his mother swear not to have any more attacks. Toshio cannot believe that.

Miho finishes sewing two nightgowns in a day and it makes her husband believe that everything was over. However, it is only his illusion. She returns to the attack right away, and is backed up by a scolding from their son. He yells over and over again, "Shut up! Shut up! You, stupid!"

Next day, their son's fever starts to drop. However, his mother is still showing signs of an attack. She asks him to tell her 'everything' but it is impossible. His mental fatigue makes everything around him appear grotesque. But asleep, his wife looks innocent and pure. While thinking over their past, he has a strange feeling that he should feel happy now.

Next morning, they notice that Maya has a fever, but it lasts only a day, the day Miho visits the hospital. On their way, she again starts a cross-examination. After having confessed everything he remembered, he feels he resembles a transparent squid. It is raining and as chilly as mid-winter. He

finds himself so stiff that he cannot listen to her at all. It starts hailing. Even when they arrive home, she does not improve, and Maya's fever goes higher again.

The family is by themselves again, and Miho restarts the endless cross-examination. Next day Maya starts showing the symptoms of measles. Her doctor tells him that his wife wants to get back all his letters to the other woman. It was impossible – quite apart from the contents, it would involve contacting her again, which would certainly have drastic consequences. However, Miho will not give the idea up. Maya's condition worsens. Irritated by Miho's persistent commands, in spite of himself he violently tears his clothes in the rain. As if she is a mirror to reflect his hysteria, Maya's fever keeps going up. Miho is getting worse day by day, but he does not know what to do. She says that she should not have married him and asks him to send her back to her old fiancé.

The situation gets worse on her next visit to the hospital. She slaps him in the face in public and he slaps her back. Nobody else exists for them any longer. He cannot control himself and tries to avoid her. His wife is reckless now, and talks about the woman in front of others. She is rigid and does not eat at all. Finally, as a last resort, they ask to be hospitalized quickly, and it is set for the day after tomorrow. Maya's fever is coming down now. After their parents' hospitalization, Shin'ichi and Maya will be taken to the island.

On their way to the hospital, Miho does not show signs of an attack and this makes him feel dissatisfied. At last, in their isolated room, he thinks that

he had probably been searching for a place isolated from every other relationship. The isolation rooms look like a barracks.

Since the hospital does not provide bedding, he had to go home to pick it up. On his way home by himself, he suddenly feels that he was totally free. Everything around him looks lively and familiar. He thinks that he wants to do some work. However, he remembers his wife's clinging gaze. She does not have anybody else but him and has been betrayed by him. Her shadow grabs his soul and will not let it go. She is waiting for him in the isolation room. There is nothing else for him to do but live in the isolation room with her. He feels guilty enjoying the freedom outside by himself. There is no fear that she will escape, and he feels relieved. At home, the children are relaxing; he feels himself a stranger. He rushes back to the hospital, feeling uneasy about being separated from his wife. He can hardly wait to see her face, even if she cross-examines him. He wonders whether they might be able to start a new life in the isolation ward. The only thing he is still worried about is how to convince her to give up trying to get his letters back.

As we said in the introduction, the "sting of death" is sin, and the sin in question is that of pride, the false pride that leads fallible man to set himself above Deity. And the deity Shimaō has been outraging for the past decade is none other than his wife. Both have been alienated from their proper role – he is above who should be below, she is below who should be above. Let us now look at how the revolution which will put things to rights begins and proceeds.

The most important process is the breaking of Shimao's false self-image. This is accomplished in several ways, both open and symbolic. The most obvious of these is the relentless attack his wife maintains on him, regardless of common sense or reasonable limitations. It is important to note that despite backsliding and the occasional desire to defend himself, from the beginning Shimao validates her attacks. In Chapter 2, instead of being angry at her initial attack, he feels that "he has found something in his wife that he does not want to lose." (30) She controls his movements almost without effort; and even when he does violate her wishes for a purpose that furthers their relationship – breaking off with his lover – he feels terribly guilty. This process is still not entirely complete in Chapter 12, but the general direction is firmly set. When Miho makes the irrational charge that his unfaithfulness is responsible for the sickness of their son, he feels it somehow right when her criticism ceases. Finally, he is willing to give up the whole world to devote himself to her, and is possessed by feelings of guilt at the freedom he enjoys on his trip outside to fetch bedding for their hospital room. His attempts to resist, to justify himself, are feeble and quickly squelched – one notices particularly that he never seriously considers the course of action that would seem natural to many men in his situation, that of running away entirely.¹¹ Instead, his attitude is that of a new convert: "But now I've wakened from that directionless nightmare." (49; Sparling:92) And like a convert, he finds

¹¹ Cf. Mishima Yukio, "Matekina mono no chikara" ("The Power of Something Demonic") in *Bungakukai* (December 1973).

his strength in the humiliations that assure him he has not been forgotten by his God:

"When my wife called me a miserable bastard, I would mentally assume the proportions of one....But when the words 'beast, miserable bastard' were flung at me, accepting them, I found surprising new strength....'You haven't the guts to kill yourself.' I blushed with shame at the thought, but as I kept repeating these words under my breath, inexplicably I felt calmer. (44; Sparling:87)

After such a long siege of insecurity on the heights to which he always, in his heart, felt alien, it is a positive relief for him to know that he is finally where he belongs.

Acceptance of his wife's new role is also indicated by the acceptance of her surrogates. One of the chief of these is the cat, an animal which Shimao had not liked before. We recall that the family discovers a cat in the street and Shimao agrees to their keeping it to please her. The cat attempts to crawl into bed with them, and Shimao at first tries to reject it. However, after he gives up and allows the cat its wish, he is flooded with a mysterious strength. It is the strength of submission, exactly the same as he feels when he gives in to his wife directly, but this time mediated through an animal whose presence is a symbol that her will is henceforth to prevail over his.

Another symbolic reversal and victory/defeat occurs at the same time as the cat arrives. This is the replacement of the old fence around their house with a new, white board fence. The rotten and decaying condition of the old bamboo fence is, as Gessel notes, a fairly obvious symbol of their old way of living (Gessel:160), but the symbolism seems to go deeper than that. It is a

bamboo fence, thus traditional and conventional, in the same way that the old situation in the house, where the man ruled and the wife submitted, was traditional and conventional. It is replaced at Miho's demand with a new, white board fence which is unconventional and makes the house stand out from its neighbours, just as the new order inside will be sharply distinct from the common run of Japanese households. The old fence is openwork and allows vision in and out; the new one is solid and forms a total barrier to the outside, another symbol of a new and distinct social position and exclusion of the ordinary order of things. We might even, without stretching things too far, consider the replacement of the fence to be analogous to the installation of a new god in the temple of the family, for the raw wood of the construction is identical in color to the ropes used to mark off sacred spaces in Shinto shrines.

The weather forms another symbolic stage upon which their roles are reversed. As we remember from Chapter 1, Shimaō is associated with the day and the sun, and Miho with the night and darkness.¹² All through *The Sting of Death*, the sky is cloudy, the sun is obscured, the weather is unnaturally cold, and the rain is almost literally endless. The sun has been obscured, and darkness reigns – in one scene from "The Sting of Death," he even has the illusion that the sun has been eclipsed. In Chinese cosmology, which Shimaō

¹² Cf. Shimaō Toshio, "Shima no hate" ("The Farthest Edge of the Island") in *Shimaō Toshio Sakuhinshū* vol.1, Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1961.

was doubtless familiar with from his studies of ancient China,¹³ and in its native reproduction in the form of *Inyō* thought, darkness and water are correlates of the Yin or female principle. The never-ceasing rain that conquers the heavens is symbolic of the overthrow of the male Yang principle and the dethronement of Shimao from his false position of leadership. Allied to this is his physical degeneration by the end of the series of tales: now it is he that collapses before she does, he that is more hysterical, he that is properly criticized for bad behavior.

The destruction of Shimao's position is accompanied by numerous signs that Miho's powers have increased, and indeed that she has become superhuman. Right at the beginning, he feels that her will has entered the broken clock on his desk and set it running, symbolically commencing a new age with a new definition of time. In her criticism of him, she displays what he feels is an omniscient familiarity with every one of his secrets. During one of her fits, she claims that the *Unima* – that is, a demon – is informing her of things that she does not wish to know – clearly, in context, the news of her husband's misdeeds. At the beginning, he remembers how she looked when wringing the neck of a chicken, but this soon extends to an apparent ability to resurrect, as she brings the drowned chicken back to life again. She defines his space by forbidding him to go into areas she associates with his former lover. Even minor details point in this direction – the clearest of these being

¹³ Shimao studied East Asian history at Kyūshū University from 1940 to 1943. His thesis topic was the Uigurs during the Yuan dynasty. He was particularly interested in the *Kojiki*, the standard mythological account of the founding of Japan, and the *Kojiki* was one of the two books he brought to the island with him.

the title of the book she is reading when their train passes over a dead body, "A Wife Who Turned into a Fox." The fox, of course, is a strongly numinous animal in Japanese mythology, an exacting deity particularly prominent in Inari worship, which has the power to reward and punish its devotees.

In Chapter Two, we suggested that the culmination of "Everyday Life in a Dream," where the protagonist turns himself inside-out into a squid-like creature submerged in a pure stream, was a symbolic expression of his desire to shed his active and positive qualities in favor of a mute and featureless passivity. We also suggested, with somewhat less assurance, that the tree being victimized by crow-parasites, which aroused the remaining force of his resentment, probably stood for Miho, who should ideally have taken the dominant "outstanding" role but was still hindered by outside interference which sapped her strength. This hypothesis receives strong support from the last story of *The Sting of Death*, where after making a complete confession to his wife, for the hundredth time, Shimao feels that he has turned himself into "something like a transparent squid." He has ultimately attained in reality the situation that he had fantasized years before: with his *hara no naka* ("interior of the stomach," a phrase used to describe one's deepest and most honest thoughts) utterly exposed, he has finally found his proper place.

Conclusions

We have now concluded our review and analysis of the literary career of Shimao Toshio. It is time to sum up what has been uncovered, and illustrate it with a few brief comparisons.

In the first chapter we covered the hitherto rather neglected influences found in Shimao's early life and chronicled in his pre-1944 writings. We pointed out how his illnesses, brushes with death, and family experience implanted patterns in him which he was to reenact in his own life. Finally, we reviewed his military career, and his interaction with local society on the island where the unit he commanded was stationed. There, he was put in the position of a deity, and when he left to return to civilian life, he carried this role with him in the microclimate of his own family by means of his marriage with an island woman.

We should stress here that in emphasizing the two factors of his earliest training and his reception on the island, it is not intended to entirely discount the peculiar stresses consequent on his role as a suicide pilot. However, these may well have been given too large a place in the past, and there is room for a contrary view. It is becoming harder every year to realize this, but Shimao's expectation of death cannot have been much more acute than that of ordinary members of the Imperial Forces, or even the civilians who had made preparations to commit suicide when the island he was stationed on was invaded. In the summer of 1945, being Japanese was a

suicide mission. The real significance of Shimao's position may have been that it carried with it a privileged position, with special treatment, reinforcing the way the islanders treated him.

In the second chapter we discussed the "dream" fiction which characterizes his period of false dominance over his wife, concentrating particularly on the story "Everyday Life in a Dream." The imagery there cannot be reduced to an entirely simple and unitary scheme, and indeed its luxuriance has led many off on false trails. However, an overwhelming impression of frustration, alienation, and futility is produced, and the final image is fairly obviously symbolic of himself returned to the state he felt was naturally his, one of passivity, formlessness, and featurelessness. We also briefly noted expressions of status unease in others of these stories, giving the example of the complaint of the statue in "A Stone Statue Goes Walking."

In the third chapter the topic was "When We Never Left Port," a retrospective re-evaluation of his career on the island which emphasizes not the fairy-tale aspect fronted earlier but his inner weakness, degradation, and general lack of worth. Shimao's fiction after his "fall" was largely written to and censored by his wife-deity, and this story may best be understood as a confession that the changes that have taken place in their relationship are right and just, and that his tenure in positions of superior status was a mistake from beginning to end. As befits this relatively prosaic and straightforward mission, the style is plain and open.

In the fourth chapter, we covered the crisis in the relationship with his wife which culminated in the destruction of his own godly status and the

conferral of such a status on his wife, as related in the retrospective collection of stories entitled *The Sting of Death*. We pointed out that much of the imagery there revolves around this status reversal, sometimes in a very subtle form. We also drew attention to the fact that Shimaō seems to have drawn strength and satisfaction from his debasement, finally feeling himself turned into the "transparent squid" familiar from the final scene of "Everyday Life in a Dream."

Thus Shimaō Toshio's literary career can be understood as largely shaped by the strains of his wartime status alienation and the process by which it resolved itself. This does not explain the fact that he was a writer – he produced compulsively from a very early age and would doubtless have continued no matter what. However, all of what makes him more than an average literary hack derives from his rise and fall as the god of his island and wife. Without it, it would be difficult to conceive of him occupying so much as a footnote in modern Japanese literature.

The inability of Sparling and Gessel to deal satisfactorily with the work of Shimaō Toshio, the disjointed nature of their critique and the lack of any clear description of his development, can be traced directly to their failure to identify what we might call his literary trajectory. Before it commenced (before the war) Shimaō was a writer of no special competence; after it had effectively terminated (in his later years), he authored a number of travel sketches and other equally forgettable works from the literary standpoint. When we identify what drove Shimaō above the average, our appreciation of him is enhanced, for we can better imagine the strains under which he wrote

and are more capable of seeing him as a whole, rather than a collection of interesting bits and pieces.

Shimao's "natural" role as the acolyte of his godlike wife is on the surface reminiscent of the attitudes present in many other modern Japanese writers, notably Tanizaki Jun'ichirō. Nevertheless, to posit such a comparison immediately arouses feelings of resistance. The two writers should share common traits, but one feels an instinctive distaste about setting them together. Why is this so?

To illustrate Tanizaki's woman-worship, we might briefly cite two works: *A Portrait of Shunkin (Shunkinshō)* and *Diary of a Mad Old Man (Fūten Rōjin Nikki)*¹ In the former, the climax occurs when Sasuke, the servant/ student/lover/slave of the *koto* teacher Shunkin, voluntarily blinds himself rather than shame her by seeing the disfigurement inflicted on her by a jealous suitor. In the latter, the Mad Old Man of the title spends a good deal of his time plotting ways to obtain ink prints of his daughter-in-law's feet so that he can have them carved on his tombstone and thus be delightfully trampled for all eternity. Why are these images so touching, or at least lively, when Shimao's superficially similar submissions leave a vaguely squalid aftertaste?

It would seem that this impression derives chiefly from the conspicuous absence of a strong life force or positive spirit in Shimao and the characters which stand in for him in his fiction. In Tanizaki, Sasuke makes

¹ Cf. Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1968.

his own conscious decision to sacrifice something of great value to him – his eyesight – to ease the pain of the woman he loves. His long training in subservience may make the sacrifice appear somewhat less than a pure act of free will, but it is a dignified and optional action. The Mad Old Man is an even better example of free choice. He will place himself under his daughter-in-law's feet precisely because he considers that this will give him more pleasure than anything else. He is the very reverse of passive in all his actions, and any absence of dignity is more than made up by his overflowing vitality even in planning his own subjection. But when we turn to Shimao, this heroic or mock-heroic light dies just as the sun fades and the gloom advances in *The Sting of Death*. The transparent squid that appears in both this story and "Everyday Life in a Dream" is an unconsciously brilliant characterization of his inner self. In his fall, Shimao gives an impression, not of a Lucifer or even a Sasuke, but rather of a dying duck in a thunderstorm. One feels that his sacrifice was much less significant, for there was nothing much in him to be offered up; his resilient pettiness robs him of dignity; and his blatant inability to fill a superior place makes his renunciation of a master's role resemble a passive, gravity-driven fall. Allied to this is the irritating small-ness of his wife and adversary, Miho, her relentless spite and vengefulness. They are to Tanizaki's characters like thin and squeaking ghosts to full-blooded human beings.

In the end this is the most lasting impression one receives from Shimao Toshio's fiction – the drained inability to soar beyond the everyday mire. He was, it would seem, a rather mediocre writer made extraordinary by circumstances rather than by any qualities specifically his own. This does not

mean that his fiction is worthless – especially in his "dream" stories, the efflorescence of his subconscious can be fascinating, and as I have said, an appreciation of what was driving him helps considerably in understanding and appreciating him – but even at its best, it remains crippled by the disproportion between the potentially epic situations and the inadequate and dwarfish actors who represent the limits of his creative power, in life as in art.

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