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The Novel *Ave Maria*: The Legacy of Cinema in the Construction of Tanizaki's Literary World of Dreams

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Abstract

The aim of my paper is to highlight the influence of cinema and of visual techniques in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's narratives of his Yokohama period (1921–23). Famous novels by Tanizaki have been adapted for the screen, and they are widely studied by critics of the history of Japanese cinema. My perspective is not these filmic adaptations, nor the correlations between text and film. I will focus instead on the impact of Tanizaki's experience of cinematic production during his stay in Yokohama on his narrative style. In Yokohama he actively cooperated with the Taishō Katsuei film company and with the director Thomas (Kisaburō) Kurihara after the latter's return to Japan from Hollywood. The focus of my paper is on the novel *Ave Maria* (1923), which has not yet been studied from this point of view, and on the effect cinematic techniques had on Tanizaki's literary world of dreams. I will examine in particular the references to films and Hollywood actresses, literary descriptions influenced by close-ups and motion pictures as well as the black and white cinema as sensual and aesthetic experiences of light and shadow.

1 "A beautiful dream"

> Going to the cinema is for me like going to buy a beautiful dream. […] I often think of a film as a dream with many details that men have managed to create by means of a mechanical device[1].

This quotation is one of the many passages in which, through the voice of Emori – the narrator and protagonist of the novel *Ave Maria* (1923) – Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886–1965) connects and creates a congruence of film and dreams. I think this concept shows the strongest interaction between Tanizaki's experience of cinema as a filmmaker and screenwriter, and his realization of his world of dreams in literature. The creation of a world between reality and dream is a recurring motif in his narrative, from his early works to the most famous novel of his mature years, *Yume no ukihashi* (1959; *The Bridge of Dreams*, 1963), inspired by the plot and the atmosphere of *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*).

[1] "*Ave Maria*". In: TJZ, 8: 554; all translations in this text are mine, if not stated otherwise.

First of all, I would like to depict the definitions of cinema in Tanizaki's essays; second, I will analyze both the significance of Tanizaki's experience with cinematic production during his stay in Yokohama – where he actively cooperated with a film company (the Taishō katsuei kaisha or Taikatsu)[2] – and its relevance to his narrative style.

In Western criticism, the strong interaction between Tanizaki's experience in the world of cinema during his period at Yokohama and his narrative style has been the focus of recent analyses, such as those by LaMarre, Ridgley or Sakaki.[3] These studies highlight how the cinematic experience has transformed the experience of reality and influenced the writer's perception and sensibility. The overlap between film and text generates a dynamic relation between Tanizaki's cinematic experience and his fictional techniques. Tanizaki developed his theory of cinema in essays written between 1917 and the end of the 1920s. He also wrote several stories in which he refers to watching a film.

The aim of my paper is to deepen this perspective by discussing the novel *Ave Maria*. First, I would like to focus on the explicit references in the text to American films and Hollywood actresses, and then move on to the literary description influenced by the close-up shot and finally to the influence of black and white cinema as a sensual and aesthetic experience of lights and shadows. I will also go into some detail about the legacy of cinema in the construction of *Ave Maria*'s narrative structure and of Tanizaki's literary world of dreams.

I believe this novel to be one of the most interesting of his oeuvre to analyze in this context, even though critics have generally given little importance to this work. In Western literature about Tanizaki and the literary use of cinema, *Ave Maria* is not even mentioned. In addition, Japanese scholars have written very little about it, and only two recent articles highlight some aspects of the many links between this work and cinema. The article by Satō Mioko points in particular to the influence of the film-maker Cecil DeMille (1881–1959) on Tanizaki's story, while Ubukata Tomoko examines how "the shock of the screen" provokes physical sensations in the viewer-narrator, which trigger further narrative fantasies.[4]

There may be a historical reason for this lack of critical interest. Tanizaki had excluded *Ave Maria* from his first "Complete Works" (*Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, Tōkyō: Kaizōsha 1931) and it was not even inserted in the following edition published by Chūōkōronsha in 1957 (Shōwa 32); finally it was included in the 1966 collection (Shōwa 41). The reason for

[2] Between 1920 and 1921, Tanizaki cooperated with the director Thomas Kurihara (1885–1926) on five productions: *Amachua kurabu* (Amateur club, 1920); *Katsushika sunago* (The Sands of Katsushika, 1920); *Hinamatsuri no yoru* (The Night of Doll Festival, 1921); *Tsuki no kagayaki* (The Splendor of the Moon, 1921), *Jasei no in* (The Lust of the White Serpent, 1921). For Tanizaki's Taikatsu film scripts see BERNARDI 2001: 141–165. In 1926, Tanizaki wrote a short essay on Thomas Kurihara: *Kurihara Tōmasu kun no koto*. See TJZ, 22: 192–195.

[3] Cf. LAMARRE 2005; RIDGLEY 2011; SAKAKI 2010.

[4] Cf. UBUKATA 2013; SATŌ 2011.

this choice has been suggested in Tanizaki's preface to the *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* (1957–58)[5], where he outlines the differences between a collection published after the death of an author, and one selected by the author himself, affirming that the author has the freedom to select as he pleases. However, *Ave Maria* is not the only work missing in the collection. Another famous instance is that of *Konjiki no shi* ("The Golden Death", 1914), which was reappraised by Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) in his preface to another collection of Tanizaki's works. Mishima presents his ideas with regard to the reasons that led Tanizaki to exclude the piece and reconsiders its discussion of art, starting from its aesthetic conception.[6]

From the point of view of Chiba Shunji, Tanizaki scholar and editor of the recent *opera omnia*[7], the reason why Tanizaki did not value *Ave Maria* is not clear, but he thinks it would be interesting to analyze his motivations as it has been done for *Konjiki no shi*.[8] In my opinion the main reason is the image that Tanizaki conveys of the world of Yokohama and of the story's protagonist. It is a world that is decayed and peripheral, an unusual vision compared to the Yokohama, the mirror of the idealized West, that he describes in other stories of the same period and in his autobiography *Minato no hitobito* ("People of the Harbour", 1923). This image of Yokohama forms the historical-cultural background which brings the "dream world" of Hollywood films even more to the fore; right from the beginning the protagonist feels the desire to blend the suffering of his real world with the dream of unattainable happiness and beauty.

2 The cultural background

Ave Maria is one of the so-called "Yokohama stories", one of the novels of the period clearly influenced by the culture and the urban space of Yokohama where Tanizaki Jun'ichirō lived from 1921 to 1923. He was forced to leave the city after the Great Kantō Earthquake of September 1, 1923. Before, he had lived in Tōkyō in the most traditional neighborhoods of the *chōnin* culture of the Edo period (1600–1867). In his youth, he had been particularly attracted by the Western culture that had recently arrived in Tōkyō, and was able to enjoy the charm of the popular district of Asakusa, the great leisure center of the Taishō era (1912–26).

"To represent Asakusa" – writes Ito – "Tanizaki chooses the image of a whirlpool, which 'year by year spreads in circumference, sending out frequent waves, growing by swallowing whatever floats within its reach' (TJZ, 7: 82–83). [...] In the whirlpool, traditional class and sexual identities are lost in the jumble. Asakusa rejects the very idea

[5] TANIZAKI 1957–58: 1–4.
[6] MISHIMA 1973–82: 379–395.
[7] *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* 2015–.
[8] Cf. private correspondence, January 2017.

of tradition. Here, there is no meaningful past. Change itself shines as the single value; ceaseless transformation defines the very core of cultures".[9] In his essay *Asakusa kōen* ("Asakusa Park", 1927), Tanizaki defines the district as "the melting pot of all kinds of arts and entertainment in the new era".[10] Among these amusements it is the cinema that absorbed and fascinated the young Tanizaki. And it is his passion for film that led him to Yokohama, where in 1921 he was hired as a writer for the famous film company Taishō Katsudō shashin kabushiki kaisha (then Taishō katsuei or Taikatsu).

The reason for Tanizaki's attraction to Yokohama has been identified in the character of the city as "the anti-Tōkyō" by definition: "For Tanizaki, Yokohama represents 'anti Taishō Japan', and 'anti 'Taishō Japan' in particular is synonymous with 'anti-Tōkyō'."[11] It is the capital, the symbol of modernity and of the transformation process that began with the Meiji Restoration (1867), where the writer was born and grew up, and which he often criticized. Tanizaki did not stigmatize the process of modernization, but rather how it was implemented in the Tōkyō of his time, an approach he saw as being "unnatural" and "non-Western". Tanizaki criticized the superficial modernization that had deprived the city of all that was "good in the old days".

Yokohama, on the contrary, had no past to compare with. It was the "anti-Tōkyō" in the sense that it was considerably different from the capital. "One would have believed to be abroad"[12], Tanizaki writes describing the Yamate area in *Hitofusa no kami* ("A tuft of hair", 1926). And in *Aoi Hana* (1922; tr. *Aguri*, 1963[13]): "Yokohama was just an hour by train from Tōkyō but it gave him the feeling of having arrived at a distant place ..."[14] In *Tomoda to Matsunaga no hanashi* (1926; *The Strange Case of Tomoda and Matsunaga*, 2016[15]), referring to places of pleasure, he states: "It seemed not to be in Yokohama in Japan, but in a tavern in Paris or some other town".[16] Unlike the Tōkyō of his time, an artificial imitation of the West, Yokohama is in Tanizaki's eyes, a true Western venue.

For Tanizaki, Yokohama is the real urban space, as described in the autobiographical account *Minato no hitobito*, and the place of the "desire" that has inspired works of fiction like *Aoi Hana*, *Ave Maria*, *Tomoda to Matsunaga no hanashi*, *Nikkai* ("Flesh", 1923), *Honmoku yawa* ("The Parties at Honmoku", 1924), *Hitofusa no kami*, up to the most famous novel *Chijin no ai* (1924, tr. *Naomi*, 1985). The influence Tanizaki's experiences inYokohama had on his cinema is not limited to this short period of time; the "Yokohama stories" explore themes and settings that he also recreates in his mature works. It is no

[9] ITO 1991: 70.
[10] TJZ, 22: 59.
[11] KŌNO 1998: 68.
[12] TJZ, 10: 505.
[13] "Aguri". In: TANIZAKI (1963).
[14] TJZ, 8: 238.
[15] "The Strange Case of Tomoda and Matsunaga". In: TANIZAKI 2016.
[16] TJZ, 10: 457.

exaggeration to say that the imaginary West of the works of his literary maturity was formed at this particular locus: in Yokohama and its urban context, in a sphere of artistic and cultural intricacies that set the ground for discussion and definition of identity.

3 Tanizaki's philosophy of cinema

In many of his early essays Tanizaki repeatedly attempts to explain what film means to him. One of the constantly recurring points is the comparison between cinema and other arts. In *Asakusa kōen*, Tanizaki states clearly the superiority of cinema compared to other art forms:

> In my opinion the moving pictures are a true art form and the one with the greatest potential for development in the future. They are in no way inferior to the other arts – to drama, of course, as well as to music, literature, painting, or sculpture. The moving pictures, on the one hand, convey realism with a strong dreamlike quality, and on the other hand, they are superior to all other art forms because of the vastness of their range.[17]

Tanizaki's first famous essay on cinema *Katsudō shashin no genzai to shōrai* ("The Present and Future of Moving Pictures", 1917) is the most effective in contributing to the discussion about the reform movement in Japan called *jun'eigageki undō* ("Pure film movement").[18] In his opinion there are three reasons why moving pictures are superior to stage drama: whereas each stage performance can be seen only once by the audience, a moving picture can be shown repeatedly to different audiences in various locations; as a photographic medium, films are better suited to the portrayal of both realistic and fantastic subject matters and allow the author more freedom in comparison to the stage of a theatre.

In the same essay the author is already aware of the "film medium's superiority over all other art forms" and of the "ability to depict both realistic images and illusions".[19] For Tanizaki, cinema is the "true art" because it is both realistic (*shajitsuteki*) and fantastic (*mugenteki*).

Cinema is realistic because it does not appear to be artificial or pretending as theatre does; the characters are so varied that, whether they are realistic or imaginary, they never give the impression of being false. At the same time, cinema's realism suits both realistic and imaginary themes.

Tanizaki describes the realistic effects of cinema in the following passage:

[17] TJZ, 22: 60.
[18] Cf. BERNARDI 2001, LAMARRE 2005, GEROW 2010.
[19] TJZ, 20: 17. Engl. trans. LAMARRE 2005: 68.

> In particular, as a result of the actors being made larger than in life, the distinctive features of their faces and physiques, which would not be thus remarked in a stage performance, are projected with extreme clarity down to their finest detail. […]
>
> The human face, no matter how unsightly the face may be, is such that, when one stares intently at it, one feels that somehow, somewhere, it conceals a kind of sacred, exalted, eternal beauty. When I gaze on faces in 'enlargement' within moving pictures, I feel this quite profoundly. Every aspect of the person's face and body, aspects that would ordinarily be overlooked, is perceived so keenly and urgently that it exerts a fascination difficult to put into words. This is not simply because film images are made larger than actual objects but probably also because they lack the sound and color of actual objects. Rather than a flaw, the absence of sound and color may become an asset.[20]

Tanizaki claims that cinema is an art form that allows "crystallization" – a natural purification that is necessary for art, and hence he sees the possibility that cinema can develop into a higher art form than theatre.

The realism of the cinema technique is such that it reveals details that cannot be seen in reality, thus the image on the screen is not a surrogate for reality, it is the reality in its entirety.

Two further important passages on reality and dreams can be found in his essay *Eiga zakkan* ("Miscellaneous Observations on Cinema"), written in 1921:

> In a sense, moving pictures are dreams made more vivid than ordinary dreams. People like to dream not only while asleep but also while awake. When we go to a moving picture theatre, we go to see daytime dreams. We want to experience dreams while awake. This is probably why I prefer to go to films during the day rather than at night. […]
>
> Even once I've returned home and settled into bed at night, the fantasies continue to play in my mind mingling with my dreams in sleep. In the end, I am no longer sure if it was a dream or a film, but it lingers long in the depths of my memory, as a beauteous fantasy. Indeed, I would have to say that films are dreams people make with machines.[21]

In another passage he describes his feelings in the darkened room of the studio in Yokohama during a projection of a film:

> […] the sudden darkness in a room previously so full of light, and above all, the images of moving objects, so vivid and distinct, that were projected in miniature,

[20] TJZ, 20: 17. English trans. LAMARRE 2005: 67–68.
[21] Both TJZ, 22: 100. English trans. LAMARRE 2005: 121 and 122.

> like glittering jewels on the wall, gradually lulled me into a strange dream state. A world of light, scarcely three feet square, cut off the darkness … as I gazed on it, I forgot that there was any other life beyond this small world.[22]

These quotations reveal one of the features characteristic of Tanizaki's narrative: the blurring between reality and dream. The dream is a link between the past, the memories and their perception. This concept can be traced back to Henri Bergson and his analysis of dreams. In his work *Le rêve* (1901; tr. *Dreams*, 1914) Bergson writes: "When a union is effected between the memory and the sensation, we have a dream".[23] Satō Mioko has recently pointed out how Tanizaki's conceptions of image and film are based on the philosophical assumptions of Bergson.[24] There are many direct references to *Le rêve* in Tanizaki's works, for example, in *Jōtarō* ("Jōtarō", 1914)[25], or in *Itansha no kanashimi* ("The Sorrow of the Heretic", 1917).[26] Tanizaki's quotations indicate that he also knew of other works by Bergson, such as *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889; tr. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 1910). The dream world of Tanizaki's novels is directly inspired by Bergson's works.

One of the points that brings Tanizaki's thought close to Bergson's, and which is found also in *Ave Maria*, is the concrete view of the cinema as the technical device used to project animated images. This position finds its place within the rich context of film-making and film theory that fed the cinematic imagination of the period. Like Bergson, Tanizaki rethinks the foundations of the image (neither "thing" nor "representation") and its relation to movement.

What I would like to stress here is that regarding the contemporary debate Tanizaki was also aware of the Western viewpoint. In particular, I would like to highlight two points: first, Tanizaki's reflections were considered important for the reforms advocated by the *jun'eigageki undō*; second, these reflections fit into a theoretical debate with a very clear position that was uncommon, even in the West: the recognition of the artistic value of the "seventh art", moreover, of its superiority compared to other classical arts. The superiority of the medium of cinema is due not only to this philosophical perspective but also to technical innovations.[27] According to the quotations above, it is the novelty of the cinematic medium that attracted Tanizaki. The attribute of the medium that intrigued him most is its ability to portray both realistic (*shajitsuteki*) and fantastic, dreamlike (*mugenteki*) images in an equally convincing manner. With regard to the realistic depiction, Tanizaki

[22] TJZ, 22: 102. English trans. LaMarre, 2005: 123.
[23] Bergson 1914: 20–22.
[24] Tanizaki International Shanghai Symposium, Shanghai, 20–22 Nov. 2015.
[25] TJZ, 2: 357.
[26] TJZ, 4: 388.
[27] Cf. *Eiga no tekunikku*, TJZ, 22: 113–120.

was fascinated by innovative techniques such as the close-up shot, which he praised in *Katsudō shashin no genzai to shōrai*:

> In particular, as a result of the actors being made larger than in life, the distinctive features of their faces and physiques, which would not be as remarkable in a stage performance, are projected with extreme clarity down to their finest details.
>
> Every aspect of the person's face and body, aspects that would ordinarily be overlooked, are perceived so keenly and urgently that it exerts a fascination difficult to put into words.[28]

Images exceed the dramatic action, are imposing at times and, as is usually said, "jump out of the screen".

4 Ave Maria

Now I would like to examine how Tanizaki's philosophy and aesthetic of cinema are reflected in *Ave Maria*. The fourth chapter of the novel deals with cinema and dreams: the film which the narrator-protagonist analyses in the text interrupts the thread of the story, forming a separate sequence. As this work is not well known and has not been translated into Western languages yet, I shall provide a brief outline of the context in which this sequence is intertwined.

Ave Maria is actually a series of letters and has the unusual feature of being a first-person narrative in which the narrator and the protagonist tend to coincide. In place of a narrator who introduces and orders the series of letters, it is the protagonist Emori who takes on the role of narrating voice – indirectly, through the mediation of Sayuriko, the recipient of Emori's letters. This is evident from the beginning, when she is addressed as "My adored Sayuriko", but the epistolary nature of the narration is not immediately revealed. Although it is clear that the letters are addressed to a woman, the narrator-protagonist, who is obviously writing a letter, does not appear in the first chapter. The section could also be a diary in which the writer, although he is addressing others, is speaking to himself. Indeed, at the precise moment in which the narrator-protagonist reveals the literary form that frames his narration, he casts doubt on its very validity. The word "letter" is inserted in these terms: "I haven't decided yet whether to send you this letter. Even if I did send it, you wouldn't read it; but rather than talk to myself I find more comfort in having someone like you to talk to".[29]

In the following chapters, it becomes more and more obvious that the reader of the letter is merely a conventional narrative device. The first letter to Sayuriko is well

[28] TJZ, 20: 11–22. English trans. LAMARRE 2005: 67–68.
[29] TJZ, 8: 528.

motivated and plays a decisive role regarding the storyline. However, as we continue reading, we increasingly have the feeling that the correspondent is writing for himself. The presence of Sayuriko as the addressee provides continuity to a story that is broken and fragmented.

In the first chapter, Emori, the narrator-protagonist, introduces himself as being in a bleak phase of his life. Abandoned by his lover, he is leaving the places where he lived with the woman, as well as "hateful Tōkyō" and "the Japanese" to move to the Western district of Yokohama.

The story oscillates between the world of fantasy and the reality of Yokohama of the 1920s. The protagonist interweaves the threads of his life with those of the world of the shows in Asakusa, the images of Western movies, and the faces of the most famous American actresses. In the opening chapter, he conjures up theatre pieces as a means of expression for his artistic inspiration and an opportunity to stage the roles of his favorite actresses.

His role of an abandoned lover at the beginning of the story has already been reshaped, due to the memories of the narrator, mingled with fantasies. His eye seems to be that of a camera that forever captures the lights and movements of those scenes in the dressing room of a theatre, layered in his memory like a montage:

> I saw the moving red lips and white teeth of the actresses. These radiating images were perceived as blossoms which are opening that moment. Everybody clapped their hands in a rhythmic wave and tears came to my eyes, as I was overwhelmed by this beautiful kaleidoscopic image.[30]

Describing the details of the woman he loves or of other actresses is like an act of peeping; the description equals the perception of details in the focus of a film camera:

> I imagine the two wrinkles that form between your eyebrows… the limpid jewels of your large eyes dimming the downward turn of your lips in a frown.[31]

Or:

> I imagined these women as girls, and the places where they were born. I imagined mothers and nurses that shook their warm breasts, their nipples held in those adorable lips, gently supporting the baby's soft bottom.[32]

Emori is dreaming of the world of theatre, of writing a play, and of being the director of the performance, giving concrete shape to his dreams by directing the actresses. At the

[30] TJZ, 8: 520.
[31] TJZ, 8: 521.
[32] TJZ, 8: 523.

end he recognizes that there is no chance of bringing his script on the stage because, in reality, it lives only in the world of his fantasy: "It is the world of my imagination, in which the figures move in a kaleidoscopic vision of my mind"; "It is nothing but a world of uncertain visual contours, but, compared to the reality of every day, who could say which is the more vague?".[33] And eventually, the protagonist seems not to recognize that the play could represent "his script" and concludes: "I prefer, then, the staged scenario of my fantasy to enjoy the drama alone, imagining myself as the creative director of the leading roles".[34] The dream of the narrator is always linked to the possibility of representing the beauty of the young women.

From the brightly-lit world of Asakusa, the place of beautiful women and "theatrical fantasies", Emori comes to his new home in Yohokama. He has moved from the West he has dreamed of in his youth to a real West that is quite different from the world of his imagination. The Yokohama depicted in *Ave Maria* is surprising: it does not correspond to the modern fashionable Yokohama described in his autobiographical story *Minato no hitobito*, nor does it have the appeal and fascination of *Aoi hana*. The description of his Western-style house immediately gives the impression of decadence, neglect and abandonment, and his former illusion soon clashes with reality. In the second chapter, the moods expressed in the first chapter are replaced by the description of his surroundings: his new Western house where he lives with two foreigners, Nina and Mrs. W. It is a dilapidated environment accentuating his sadness as an abandoned lover and failed writer. When his feelings for Nina begin to grow, he becomes aware of the unbridgeable gap between them. His inability to establish a love relationship with a woman represents his condemnation to solitude.

As the story progresses, the state of dilapidation turns out not to be the exception but the rule. The deterioration of his environment mirrors the poverty and the changed conditions of the resident Westerners. Tanizaki refers in particular to the Russian community. The Western characters in the story – young Nina and the child Vasilij – are all Russians who live in such destitution that it is said "in Yokohama the Japanese are generally better off than the Westerners."[35] There is a clear difference between people who "have been in Yokohama for a long time" (in the decades after the opening of the port) and the Russian immigrants from Siberia in the 1920s.[36] Another of Tanizaki's stories set in Yokohama, *Hitofusa no kami*, describes the destitution of the Russians and, through the

[33] TJZ, 8: 524.
[34] Ibid.
[35] TJZ, 8: 534.
[36] Many White Russians who fled after the October Revolution found refuge in the Western quarter of Yokohama.

character of Mrs. Orloff who lives in better circumstances, Tanizaki emphasizes the poverty of most of the Russian families living in groups of "five or six in a room".[37]

Here the Western houses of the foreign concession in Yokohama seem to be a symbol of the shattered dream of modernity. Tanizaki dedicates several pages to the description of his shabby bed full of bugs and the poverty which dictates Tanizaki's daily life and that of his foreign neighbors: "I hit rock bottom. Before I moved in, even poorer people lived in these apartments […]".[38] The conditions of the Westerners living in Yokohama that Tanizaki describes, certainly have a historical basis, but at the narrative level his descriptions play a symbolic role.

In *Ave Maria* the West has two sides: the brilliant, fascinating and unreachable world of the Hollywood actresses (white Americans) and the nearby real world of the 1920s Yamate neighborhood, evident in the descriptions of the life of the residents who arrived from Eastern European countries and Siberia (white Caucasians). Tanizaki depicts the differences between these worlds as if he is describing the differences between human bodies, between racial and physical features. These "foreign" human bodies seem to be fascinating; they approach an ideal of beauty which, even if it is tied to ethnicity, is reprocessed by the author's aesthetic sensitivity. In none of Tanizaki's other stories we can find such a strong emphasis on the difference of skin color as in *Ave Maria*. When Emori describes the fascinating Nina, he conveys an implicit feeling of inferiority, inherent to Japanese men with regard to white women; he stresses persistently and repeatedly the contrast between his yellow skin and the Russian woman's white skin.

For Tanizaki "white" is a symbol charged with multiple meanings and it recurs in many of his works, from *Shisei* (1910; *The Tattoo*, 1962; *The Tattooer*, 1963) to *Fūten rōjin nikki* (1962; *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, 1965).[39] In *Ave Maria* "white" is associated with the body of the Western woman, but also with the dirty, smelly feet of the Russian boy Vasilij who loves to wash them with white Western soap. Numerous childhood memories allow Emori to identify a continuous pattern in the awareness of this attraction. The protagonist traces this passion back to a childhood memory: hearing Gounod's *Ave Maria* he recalls the image of the Virgin he saw on the wall of the "deserted semi-dark" room in which his grandfather lived.[40] In *Yōshō jidai* (1955–56; *Childhood Years: A Memoir*, 1988), Tanizaki writes:

[37] TJZ, 8: 567.

[38] TJZ, 8: 583.

[39] For a discussion on the color "white" as a symbol in Tanizaki's oeuvre cf. ORSI 1998: 4–8.

[40] This process recalls synesthesia which, as LaMarre has shown, is typical of Tanizaki's early works. Its use makes the opposition between Western modernity and Japanese tradition all the more complex: "The synesthetic moment is one of encounter with foreignness, and the emphasis falls on the hybridity of the encounter. The mixing of the senses entails a mixing of cultures." LAMARRE 2005: 33.

> Gazing with inexpressible reverence into the Virgin Mother's eyes, so full of tenderness and mercy, I felt I never wanted to leave her side.[41]

In the essay *Ren'ai oyobi shikijō* ("Romantic Love and Sexual Desire", 1931) Tanizaki notes that Western men often see the figure of the Virgin Mary in the women they love, representing the image of the "eternal feminine". This is a Western idea which did not exist in modern Japan, but which he nevertheless finds in the culture of the Heian period when a man could bow to a woman paying her greater respect than to himself.[42]

The white face of the Virgin conveys superiority and an aura of sanctity, of divine presence: all the references to "white" refer back to this archetype in the author's mind. It becomes a symbol for absolute beauty – a beauty that transcends the boundaries between East and West, a synthesis all the fascinating faces ever seen, as Emori's words reveal in *Ave Maria*:

> Who can deny that since I moved to Yokohama this summer and saw the faces of Western girls from dawn till dusk, my childhood-image of Maria has reemerged from the depth of my memories before I even realized it? Nina, Bebe Daniels, Gloria Swanson – I perceive vaguely the reflection of Maria in each glance, in each of those women's faces and I look at them now as I venerated then the Queen of Heaven.[43]

The face of the Virgin Mary in the darkness of the room, the white of the light that projects the faces of American actresses in black and white films onto the screen, Vasilij's white feet against the dirt of his body – all that evokes the white face of the Madonna of Tanizaki's childhood-memories which he saw in the semi-darkness of the *tokonoma* and which he will extol in the novel *Ave Maria* as the ideal of classical Japanese beauty.[44]

At the end of *Ave Maria* it seems that now the perception of the senses, the "truth" of the mind matters rather than the reality of the places and the human bodies. "For Tanizaki, from the beginning, fantasies, including the fantasies of 'race', Westernization and orientalism, were clearly fantasies and as such neither to be suppressed by the state nor confused with reality".[45]

We have proof of this at the end of the novel, when reality gains its fullest symbolic power and the ideal of beauty takes human form in the crippled body of Sofia, a lame girl.

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[41] TJZ, 17: 64.

[42] Cf. TJZ, 20: 239–78.

[43] TJZ, 8: 601.

[44] The white that attracts Tanizaki is the one that "thickens" in the shadow, as he writes in *In'ei raisan*, and not the shiny white of porcelain or of the walls of the Western houses that he dislikes. M. T. Orsi notes that in *In'ei raisan* the latter kind of white represents an ideological rejection of the West, with a negative overtone. Cf. ORSI: 8.

[45] PINNINGTON 2007: 89.

The cruel reality of Emori's experience of the life in Yokohama penetrates into his Hollywood fantasies ("I have to try and take these fantasies seriously in order to live") and, almost as a counterpoint, the crippled body of Sofia becomes an ideal of perfection: "Each time I look at Sofia's face, this poor lame child, I cannot help but recall the image of the Madonna".[46]

5 The Affairs of Anatol

The poverty and sadness of the life of the protagonist of *Ave Maria* contrast strongly with the dream of Hollywood beauty. The film that Emori and Nina are going to see is an American film by Cecil B. DeMille, *The Affairs of Anatol*, with Wallace Reid, Gloria Swanson and Bebe Daniels. DeMille's film was launched in Los Angeles in 1921 and was immediately an enormous success, thanks to the fame of the actors and actresses. The story comprises sensual and seductive tales of love set in lavish surroundings, with fashionable clothes and sumptuous interiors. The settings are sometimes bizarre and always have an exotic, almost oriental touch.

The Affairs of Anatol represents the crisis of moral values and sensuality freed from traditional moral ethics. The women are beautiful lovers and no longer faithful wives and devoted mothers. The male protagonists are vacuous, but rich and successful. The film presents to the spectators a world of winners, which is actually a world of dreams.

The film starts with the narrator-protagonist of *Ave Maria* explaining that the director has been inspired by a work of Arthur Schnitzler, but admits that there is no trace of the original play throughout the film, whether intentionally or not. The characters are called Anatol and Max, and in the American version they are portrayed as carefree wealth-loving young Yankees. The film's attraction lies in how it manages to transform sad stories into a lovely dream:

> The Austrian Anatol is melancholic, but every time he crosses the Atlantic he immediately turns into a happy young man. Whatever author they deal with, be it Schnitzler, Dumas or Balzac, the Americans end up interpreting the text as they please, following their own tastes. It makes me angry to think that the film is based on Schnitzler's original. But when I consider that the Americans engage lots of lovely actresses, use marvelous, almost extravagant costumes and sets, sparing no expenses, and use their own ideas to create a luxurious play and to transform it into a film, and when I think that all this contributes to the creation of a beautiful dream made for me, then I guess, all things considered, that it will be an unsurpassable beautiful dream. When I watch those scenes I think that America is today's Roman Empire. The Romans exceeded all limits and reached the greatest

[46] TJZ, 8: 601.

> heights of entertainment. And these lavish films are magnificent dreams produced by means of the wealth of an empire.[47]

These words are uttered in accordance with the general attitude of that time: in contrast to European films which were considered politically and socially involved and d'élite, American films were popular because they symbolized modernity, progress and freedom.[48] Going to see an American film meant to relax and to escape from everyday reality instead of thinking about challenging themes.

> Hollywood dominated the world's screen time by excelling in what Marshall McLuhan defined as a chief cultural function of movies, that is, in 'offer[ing] as product the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams'. American movies served as an imagined utopia, a utopian site for wish fulfillment where dreams came true, impossible ideas and actions were magically attained.[49]

For Tanizaki as an author, cinema is the medium in which women are idealized. The figure of the *femme fatale*, which is so typical of his early stories, is appreciated in American films and in the Japanese films of the 1920s: "The way of representing women was learned from American and European major films in the 1920s. […] Modeled on western actresses such as Mary Pickford, Greta Garbo, Clara Bow, Marlene Dietrich, Gloria Swanson, and Joan Crawford, the modern girls cut Japanese-style long hair short, wore western dress, and enkindled eroticism".[50] The introduction of the *femme fatale* helped to transform the cinema into a place of dreams. In *Ave Maria*, too, the protagonist exploits and enhances the illusory nature of the cinema.

The quotation at the beginning of my paper continues in a very interesting way:

> Before, everybody could not help but to dream on his own, but since the introduction of this kind of technique many people can gather in one place and dream together. The images that are projected are nothing but reflections of reality […] To what extent is the dream inspired by the film, to what extent is it a product of my imagination?[51]

The projected images of the American film are reflections of reality that creep in the spectator's mind where they merge, and the imagination creates new dreams. Yet the boundaries are not clear and we cannot determine whether these dreams we are generating are inspired by the movie or whether they are a product of our imagination.

[47] TJZ, 8: 555.
[48] Cf. TOSAKA 2003: 221–222.
[49] Ibid.
[50] IMA-IZUMI 1998: 127.
[51] TJZ, 8: 554.

However, it is not only an individual experience; as quoted above, the cinema is the place where "many people can gather […] and dream together". While Emori is watching the film with Nina, a young Russian woman he met in Yokohama, film and reality begin to merge and enter the scene of the film:

> In the world of my imagination, it is as if you, Bebe Daniels, Gloria Swanson and I were all alive and we were entering into [the fictional reality] of a movie.
>
> You and Karen Landis, are walking down arm in arm a Hollywood avenue. You turn right into an alley with a bakery on the corner. In what frame have I seen that bread shop?[52]

Watching this film becomes a physical experience for the narrator of *Ave Maria*, when he becomes aware of the beam of light coming from the projector, whizzing over his head like a "comet".

> Suddenly, a bright animated object, a flaming arrow appears above my head. It collides with the darkness and emerges in a halo of fire as a soul of a dead man. Only this flame is alive. I look at it, transfixed. The light of that fire gradually takes shape and outlines a clear white square. On the screen the symbol of Paramount appears, then the handsome young Anatol.[53]

This quotation is taken from one of the most important passages that show Tanizaki's interest for the technical equipment of the cinema and for the lighting effects that can be perceived both in the images of the film and inside the safe, self-contained space of movie theaters. For Emori, however, the figment of his imagination seems to be more important than the fictional world of the film. In fact, the dream in his mind seems to pass beyond the film, when he expresses his disappointment to see Wallace Reid, as if the actor in the film did not live up to his expectations.

> In the expression of his face, however, there is something that does not coincide with my illusion. There is something that threatens to destroy the dream I am visualizing. I am annoyed that his eyelids droop a little and there is something unpleasant both in his gaze and in his mouth. As a Don Giovanni he is not very refined.[54]

A little later, Emori describes the beginning of the film, focusing in detail on the scenes, but we have to consider that he actually reflects his recollections of those scenes. In fact, when he describes the feet of Anatol's wife, he ends abruptly, switching to his fantasies about

[52] TJZ, 8: 554.
[53] TJZ, 8: 556.
[54] TJZ, 8: 557.

Gloria Swanson's feet, which could be seen in another movie called *Why change your wife*?, directed by DeMille as well.

Fantasies on feet are reminiscent of Tanizaki's famous obsession with feet. It is no coincidence that in *Ave Maria*, the narrator appreciates the presentation of feet by DeMille, in other words that he and DeMille have the same propensities!

The physical sensation becomes more intense when the image of the actress appears, in particular with regard to the light reflected on the face of Nina, the woman next to him:

> In the moment when her picture appears, I have the feeling that the expanding light beam transforms into an immense pillar of fire, because the body of the woman is as white and as translucent as snow. Everything is white, the dress, the face, the hands, the feet; the intensive light blazing like silver on the screen surface. I am looking at Nina who is next to me, her face standing out in the dark because of the reflections of the silvery light! As if it were suddenly bright daylight, the body of Bebe Daniels appears. Nina, your figure is now bathed in the light of the American vamp's skin! Her white soul washes you with light.[55]

The dynamic tension between fantasy and film has an impact on the reality of his life at that moment: on the one hand he is attracted by the seductive presence of the person sitting next to him; on the other, he immerses in the filmic reality of the actresses in the movie. In his imagination Emori is watching now Bebe Daniels, waking in her bed; this becomes almost a sexual experience: "I do not envy your lover because even if I do not touch your skin, in my own country, it is enough to kiss the dazzling light that emanates from your body".[56]

Comparing the film, *The Affairs of Anatol*, and Tanizaki's description in the novel, it is very interesting to note which scenes the writer decided to describe. There are four: Gloria Swanson's feet; the cheerful world of dancers and theatres; the sudden appearance of a white statue behind the curtain of the stage; finally, Bebe Daniels' appearance in a theatrical position on the stage with her shining white body.

The theme of white feet and white skin is central to Tanizaki's reflection in *Ave Maria* and is an important link to DeMille's film. For the writer the fetish is both "an image that generates truths, and an appearance that produces essences"[57]. White is a symbol full of multiple meanings in his works, as I have already mentioned.

Many childhood memories allow the protagonist to find continuity in the awareness of this addiction: "The white thing changed continuously. At one time, you were the

[55] TJZ, 8: 560.
[56] TJZ, 8: 561.
[57] Cf. LAMARRE 2005: 315.

'whiteness', even Nina and Bebe Daniels were the 'whiteness' and now, it is the soft body of Vasily".[58] The concept of "whiteness" coincides with its ideal of female beauty, with "the epitome of perfect beauty": "White = woman. And, she is not only the mother of my body. Is she not the mother of all things that are in me? My art, my thoughts, my ideal?"[59]

While the title of the novel *Ave Maria* is linked to a childhood memory, the white skin motif originates from the DeMille films.

The sudden appearance of a white statue behind the curtain of a stage is another proof that some of Tanizaki's narrative motives can be traced back to Hollywood films of that period. It can be found in *Ave Maria*, as well as in *Aoi Hana* and in *Chijin no ai.* In *Aoi hana* the protagonist is walking around Yokohama with his beloved Aguri and imagines her as a white and perfect marble statue:

> […] when he thought of Aguri, his head became a dark room with a drawn curtain of black velvet, just like the curtain a magician uses for his magic tricks – in the centre of the dark room is a marble statue of a naked woman. Was that "woman" really Aguri? He thought it really had to be her. The Aguri he loves must be that woman – she must be that statue in his head – the person that moves and lives in this world is Aguri, the woman who is now walking by his side in the foreign quarter of Yamashita chō. In her body wrapped in soft flannel he can see the shape of a woman and visualize the female statue under that clothing. He clearly recalls the marks of the elegant chisel, one by one.[60]

In *Chijin no ai* Naomi's body is repeatedly admired for the whiteness of her skin, and this becomes even more evident when the woman's absence triggers the protagonist Joji's imagination:

> […] when I expanded my daydreams by following the lines of her lips or her feet, others parts of her body – ones I hadn't seen in reality – came miraculously into view, like an image on a negative, until, suddenly, a figure resembling a marble statue of Venus appeared in the depths of my bewildered heart. My head was a stage wrapped in a curtain of black velvet, and on the stage stood a single actress, named Naomi.[61]

What does this image of a white body that suddenly appears behind a black curtain of a stage mean? It is the contrast between black and white, between light and shadow. It is Tanizaki's fascination with film and with the projection of the light beam in the dark room. It is the culmination of his aesthetic conception, illustrated in the famous essay *In'ei raisan*,

[58] TJZ, 8: 595.
[59] TJZ, 8: 597.
[60] TJZ, 8: 237.
[61] TANIZAKI 1985: 221.

to which we can put in context the image of "a faint, white face" in the darkness. Physical images and sensations are intertwined in the man's sensory perceptions when he is faced with the often overwhelming beauty of the female figure.
Admiring the image of Bebe Daniels on the screen, Emori, the protagonist in *Ave Maria,* comments:

> At that moment I had the impression that those feet, which were only two or three *shaku* away, were trampling on my face. Here again were her feet, veiled in silk, which I saw as often as those of Gloria Swanson. Oh, who knows when I'll stop writing things like this! My dream is not a Paramount film. It is only a "Fool's paradise".[62]

The film he is watching recalls the footage of other films and produces new fantasies that merge with the conscious act of his writing. "Fool's Paradise" is a title of another film by DeMille. Emori admits that he does not remember how the plot of the film developed because his imagination is always generating new images without any relation to the plot of the script.

Films and dreams are surpassing reality in constructing an idealized image of the woman. In *Ave Maria*, references to film, actors and techniques are part of the plot – they are intertwined with it. While, on the surface, the function of the chapter dealing with film is not immediately evident, it conjures up the "white" linked to the beauty of the Western body, evoking eternal beauty. Films, like dreams, have a link with eternity. It is the protagonist himself who finally offers this interpretation to the reader: "For me, everything becomes an expression of eternal beauty and holds a place in my heart".[63]

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Title
TJZ	*Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* 谷崎潤一郎全集. 30 vols. Tōkyō: Chūōkōronsha, 1981–83

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[62] TJZ, 8: 562.
[63] Ibid.

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