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A Decadent Hermitage Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *The Golden Death* as a Dilettante Translation of Artificial Paradise*

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Abstract

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's novella *The Golden Death* (1914) commemorates Japan's participation in the global circulation of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism. A close study of *The Golden Death* shows how the protagonist Okamura's project of building his artificial paradise showcases a chaotic bricolage of European and Asian artefacts and literary masterpieces. Failing to emulate *fin de siècle* writers, the Japanese novella simultaneously reveals the author's inability to formulate a clearly defined aesthetic belief through borrowing Western counterparts. This tragicomic story reflects Japan's unsystematic reception of *fin de siècle* Decadent literature and Aestheticist discourses when the country's literary circles were still under the strong influence of Naturalism.

Keywords: *Fin de siècle* Decadence, *Konjiki no shi*, Modern Japanese Literature, Occidentalism, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

This essay examines the Japanese decadent novella *Konjiki no shi* 金色の死 (1914, *The Golden Death*), written by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886-1965), one of the most prolific writers and a representative aesthete in Japanese literary modernism. Nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature seven times, Tanizaki consciously developed his early career as a transcultural successor of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism. As Nagai Kafū 永井荷風, a notable polyglot writer of the time, describes, Tanizaki is "urban, decadent, and eloquent", the antithesis of the stereotypical Naturalist writer, who can be considered both the Baudelaire and the Edgar Allan Poe of Japan (Ito 1991, 51-52). Tanizaki's work displays an intricate confluence of urban sensibilities and modernist literary trends imported from Europe (52). Nevertheless, what underlies his narrative is somewhat sombre and melancholic – while his

* All quotations from secondary texts have been translated into English.

“cultural aspiration” to the West is undeniable, it displays a hint of slavishness stemming from his cultural complexity regarding Japan’s geopolitical position at the time as a latecomer to Western modernity. Such an attitude manifests itself also in a radical Occidentalism, reducing the West to tangible and visible artforms devoid of historical contexts. As I hope to show, his fictional writings like *The Golden Death* attest to the intricate desire for “possession [of] and participation [in]” the Other’s literary modernity (63).

Unlike the majority of polyglot Japanese writers in the early twentieth century, Tanizaki built his career primarily as a sinologist, and his lack of expertise in European languages and literatures forced him to consult literary works in translation and secondhand criticism. Even with such limitations, *The Golden Death* nonetheless commemorates the Japanese reception of major *fin de siècle* decadent literature, particularly the influence of Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (1884) and Walter Pater’s *The Renaissance* (1873). Furthermore, as Japanese modernist writer Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩 (1894-1965) pointed out, the novella pays zealous tribute to Poe’s novellas “The Domain of Arnheim” (1847) and “Landor’s Cottage” (1849) (Bienati 2018, 350). Since the plots of these stories also revolve around the affluent protagonists’ ambitions for building a utopian garden, *The Golden Death* is often considered Tanizaki’s mimetic recreation of Poe’s works (353). Whereas the narrative frame of utopia-building constitutes a possible comparison, their works belong to the opposite ends of the spectrum at the subtextual level of temperament. The garden in Poe’s works deploys a serene beauty of nature complemented by mysterious Gothic ambiance, wonderment at an invisible spiritual world, and subtle consternations. In his magnificent estate, the protagonist Ellison exalts primitive and uncultivated nature, considering them “prognostic of death” (Poe 1984, 861). Tanizaki’s narrative, on the other hand, almost entirely dismisses the virtue of nature and the sense of apprehension. Rather than contemplating the harmony between nature and artifice, the narrative agitatedly assigns a privilege to manmade artefacts, and as a result nature is deemed a simple prop, a pretext for constructing an amusement-park-like edifice. The pursuit of artificiality ultimately results in the protagonist’s self-destruction, and the utopia also thus semantically vanishes as an illusory dream. In this narrative construct, Des Esseintes’ avid pursuit of artificiality built on the plethora of pleasure-driven *objets d’art* in *À Rebours* provides a congenial model for Tanizaki’s decadent hero.¹ Their passions are equally invested in the dreams of constructing a utopian hermitage *par excellence* for escaping rowdy urban realities. Marked also by a Baudelairean cult of agonistic individualism, these works embody and resonate uncannily with the decadent spirit at the *fin de siècle*.

The rebellion of European decadents against modern mass society belatedly influenced Tanizaki, who was born in the middle of the Meiji-Restoration phase and grew up in the post-Restoration age (1880s-1910s). As a latecomer to the development of a modern nation in the eyes of the West, Japan’s Meiji government avidly implemented the principle of scientific positivism toward the end of the 19th century under the slogan of *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 (Civ-

¹ The argument here dwells on a speculative reading of the texts of Huysmans and Tanizaki. The Japanese translation of *À Rebours* was published by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko in 1962, nearly fifty years after Tanizaki wrote *The Golden Death*. Therefore, Tanizaki would not have accessed the French novel when he wrote the novella or even before he died. However, as Shibusawa notes in his postscript to the translation, the novel expounds on the neurotic humour of the “pleasure principle” unleashed by Huysmans, whose poetic spirit was repressed by daily routines of labour (see Shibusawa 2004, 376). In Tanizaki’s *The Golden Death*, the protagonist’s (as well as the author’s) pleasure principle emanates from the plethora of universal artefacts placed in the utopic garden. The range of artefacts encompasses various historical and cultural sources, and such a chaotic arrangement of the Other’s work reflects the repressed conditions of Japan’s native culture.

ilization and Enlightenment) and *fukoku kyōhei* 富国強兵 (Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Armed Forces) in its national functions and public operations. These dicta aimed at concretizing a utilitarian ideal of the young nation whose development was based on rational thought and empirically scientific knowledge.

In turn, Japan's national leaders openly relegated the value of arts and letters, considering them "leisurely studies" lacking empirical objectivity and pragmatic purpose (Maruyama 2001, 43). This trajectory of the government's stance succeeded in developing a vigorous national polity, as exemplified by its victories in the wars against China in 1895 and Russia in 1905. In the realm of literature, alongside the reformation of the modern Japanese language, naturalism, which was reductively equated to realism, flourished as the vanguard literary style that effectively accommodated scientific observation of social realities. Subsequently, the advent of social and literary cosmopolitanism in the 1910s helped disseminate an increasing amount of European literature in translation, while urban intellectuals were increasingly plagued by a widespread neurosis stemming from the conditions of an indigenous Japanese culture ceaselessly exposed to Western trends and fads. In such a sociocultural climate, *The Golden Death* can be read as a manifest backlash against Japan's renouncing its cultural continuity. Simultaneously, the novella displays an intricate cultural politics that entail a cultural and literary alliance with *fin de siècle* decadence as a galvanizing and radical remedy for Japanese literature of the 1910s.

Given this secondhand exposure to the West, as critics saw it, Tanizaki's fictional works tend to project an oversimplified and fetishized image of European culture (Yoshinori 2005, 242). *The Golden Death* is no exception, representing a phase of the author's intricate Occidentalism. Tanizaki's encounter with the West a few decades later was, as Margherita Long provocatively observes, shaped into a "Western superego" (2009, 17) that dominated him as an imaginable model to follow. With such a subtext, the story features an unnamed narrator who is a writer and the protagonist's friend since school. What the narrative renders is, therefore, according to Tsuboi Hideto, an anti-novelistic story where Okamura accumulates deterministic aesthetic viewpoints (2008, 85), that are later shaped into his artificial paradise consisting of a chaotic bricolage of artefacts. The plethora of art forms in the novella unpacks Japan's unsystematic reception of foreign cultural production. Consequently, in the guise of a utopian space, a cultural autotoxemia arises from the hasty and drastic absorption of foreign cultural productions, combined with the grotesque desire to reproduce classic masterpieces. Through excessive consumption and failed digestion, the story closes with the protagonist's death with the transformation of his own body into an artwork. His abrupt death proves the feebleness of an artificial paradise built on the imitation and transplantation of the Other's cultural productions. Here, the prominent influence of *fin de siècle* decadence can be traced back not only to Baudelaire and Huysmans's *Des Esseintes* but also to Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Where these influences are noticeable, *The Golden Death* constitutes a sort of patchwork of borrowed aesthetic credos and thus lacks a genuine originality (*ibidem*). While the reader strays from a navigated path according to a core aesthetics, the novella's aesthetic promiscuity attests to a transcultural circulation of *fin de siècle* decadent sensibilities that deeply resonated in the Japan of the time when gradual urbanization and mass consumerism began to erode traditional cultural spaces and aesthetic values.²

At this juncture, it is appropriate to revisit Poe's influence on this Japanese novella. Published in his late twenties, Tanizaki's piece is believed to be inspired by Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim". The protagonist Ellison, a young millionaire who inherits his family's tremendous assets, builds a

² Tanizaki's "In Praise of Shadow" eloquently laments that modern technology imported from the West was gradually invading and replacing Japan's traditional values and cultural space (see Tanizaki 2001).

utopic garden filled with the beauty of nature and tranquillity. He intends to create a dream-like space halfway between nature and artifice, aiming to escape the contemporary hustle and bustle. The narrative tone remains consistent throughout the story, maintaining serenity and elusive suspense. In light of the awe before nature and spirits running through “The Domain of Arnheim”, the Japanese novella displays a gaudy bricolage of foreign cultural legacies and a dismissal of stylistic cohesiveness. Therefore, the two stories have only a basic structure in common comprising an embedded narrative and a utopia-building plot. In sum, the novella is an empirically unique failure of *ars combinatoria*, which foregrounds an eclectic and libidinal desire for devouring Western and global artforms in a reductively totalized cluster. There is a radical mishmash of diachronically as well as culturally alienated art forms – architecture, statues, visual arts, literary references, and performing arts – and the consequential autointoxication as symbolized by the protagonist’s death.

Loosely following the narrative skeleton of “The Domain of Arnheim”, *The Golden Death* amalgamates the *fin de siècle* decadence, Gothic, and Romantic literary imaginations. Shaped by the recollections of the protagonist Okamura’s unnamed friend, the first-person narrator reports the man’s peculiar artistic credo and discreet process of developing a private utopia that features an anachronistic palatial edifice and a geometrically-designed garden. In contrast to Ellison’s contemplative and introverted desire for escaping rowdy urban life in “The Domain of Arnheim”, *The Golden Death* produces a daringly romantic, self-serving energy transformed into a corporeal materiality. As the story progresses, the first-person narrator reports his witnessing of the protagonist’s exotic fetishism, as exhibited by the juxtaposition of the Parthenon, the Alhambra, the Vatican, and Asian edifices (Tanizaki 2005, 35). While such an undisciplined representation of history and civilizations caused the author’s abhorrence for his own novella later in life,³ I argue that the *tour de force* of *The Golden Death* manifests itself in the form of materialistic debauchery, concretized by the protagonist’s meticulous construction of an edifice laden with the collection of aesthetic objects and indulgence in the artificial paradise *par excellence*. The overall trajectory of the novella is linear, simple, and yet chaotic for all its disorderly aesthetic schemes. Consequently, all the episodes in the novella are ultimately integrated into the destructive loss of the protagonist’s life. With the unequivocal tone of narrative, Okamura’s actions, his aesthetic views on art, and explicit depictions of objects that adorn his utopia, all drive the tragicomedy. The garden envisioned by Ellison is the world that constitutes an unfathomable mystery, invisible angelic spirits, and a transcendental cosmology closely intertwined with spiritual purity. Towards the climax, the narrative describes in detail Ellison’s boat trip to find the ideal land for his project, suspending the reader until the moment at which “the whole Paradise of Arnheim burst upon the view” (Poe 1984, 869). What the narrative underscores is the uncanny power of nature – “a gush of entrancing melody”, “an oppressive sense of strange sweet odour”, “bosky shrubberies”, “flocks of golden and crimson birds”, and “lily-fringed lakes”, to name a few (*ibidem*). Such a depiction of nature is almost completely bypassed in *The Golden Death*, as the land for the project is blatantly “purchased” in a rather popular resort location (Tanizaki 2005, 34).

³ Mishima Yukio calls *The Golden Death* Tanizaki’s “忌まわしい秘作” (a detestable piece that needs to be concealed) (2000, 201). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. I am aware of an available English translation by James Lipson and Kyoko Kurita (2013). Tanizaki excluded the work from his own complete anthology. However, more than ten years after Mishima interpreted the novella’s significance focusing on narcissism that “achieved the ultimate contempt for intellectual cognition” (214) *The Golden Death* was included in *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshū dai 2 kan* 谷崎潤一郎全集第二卷 (The Complete Works of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō vol. 2) in 1981. The inclusion occurred long after Tanizaki’s death in 1965.

The general profile of Okamura misleads the reader to consider him as a Japanese variant of Ellison in “The Domain of Arnheim”. Indeed, he is an attractive and idiosyncratic maverick, raised by a quasi-aristocratic family blessed with tremendous wealth. Nonetheless, upon a closer inspection, his persona derives from the *fin de siècle* decadent heroes whose narcissism, ennui, and scepticism of mainstream cultural norms drive him to a fatalistic and tragic end. In his youth, he excels in the humanities while developing an insolent self-consciousness as a young aesthete. The unbalanced tendency manifests itself in his excessive passion for European languages and literatures. Thanks to his affluent upbringing, Okamura masters French and German during his adolescence and begins to recite some passages from original texts such as Guy de Maupassant’s *Sur l’eau* (10).⁴ Not satisfied with simple reading, his passion for European literatures manifests in more extraverted actions. His new epistemological journey to the West begins though a bodily and sensorial re-education. In the process, Okamura invests his time and energy into body-building, arguing that “all literatures and arts” are born out of “the human body” (13). Proudly exhibiting his well-contoured body with inner muscles, the man consciously restages the Greco-Roman vision of the body in a highly narcissistic fashion (*ibidem*). The gesture suggests his empathy for the homoerotic fascination referenced in Pater’s chapter on “Winckelmann” in *The Renaissance*.⁵ Meanwhile, as he matures, Okamura increasingly despises science and mathematics, fields that entail objectivity and reasoning. His abhorrence of those academic subjects is not an arbitrary episode, but commonly shared among Japanese anti-naturalist aesthetes of the time who rebelled against the collective valorization of those limited bodies of knowledge. During the 1910s and 1920s, these national objectives began to recede as the victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) proved the success of the Meiji Restoration and its technological advancement. Together with economic development, the rigid objectives of the nation were subsequently replaced with urban commercialism, cosmopolitan ambience, and an increased interest in Western culture and arts. In the context of such social shifts, Okamura mirrors the mindset of a privileged young generation that keenly sensed the vicissitudes of the austere Meiji’s epochal value system. His economic and physical privileges thus further invigorate his narcissism and rebellion against pragmatism (15).

Okamura’s excessive narcissism backed by wealth is a significant pretext in *The Golden Death*. His family’s affluence is synonymous with wine, opium, or hashish for Baudelaire, something that could empower the user “to free himself” while also having an enslaving effect (Baudelaire 1971, 64). What empowers Okamura is, as Ito posits, access to the West and Western products, which signify one’s privilege in terms of political, cultural, and economic power (1991, 61). Furthermore, in culturally fluid Taishō Japan, wealth was a prerogative of those who had access to “the potent other world” (62). Okamura’s self-fashioning through Western attire and objects exemplifies this valence of class-consciousness, also echoing the Baudelairean cult of individualism. Being merely a middle-school student, Okamura hammers out his personal image of a pretentious fashionista by “separating his front hair, carrying a gold watch,

⁴ Maupassant is known as a leading writer of the Naturalist School in France, but he was one of the French authors whose works were most widely read by Japanese students of European literature. Okamura displays his decadent dispositions, and yet his familiarity with Maupassant is a reference to early twentieth-century Japan’s education in foreign language and literature.

⁵ In this episode, Okamura does not make a clear reference to Pater’s *The Renaissance*; however, later, he refers to Pater’s statement on music as the purest art form in the context of appraising the absence of meaning in music and its pure materiality of sound effects that do not entail any methodological process of understanding (Tanizaki 2005, 23). Tanizaki appears to accentuate the physical beauty pursued by Greco-Roman cultures and the pure materiality of music alluding to Pater.

smoking a cigar, and even wearing a diamond ring” (Tanizaki 2005, 15). These conspicuous items not only affirm his affluent economic status but also overturn standard norms and values associated with socially exemplary youth. As he grows older, Okamura indulges his “picturesque” dandyism with a seventeenth-century kimono and androgynous makeup (18-19). His daring, marked by confidence in physical beauty and aesthetic sensibility, echoes those of *fin de siècle* decadent heroes such as Oscar Wilde’s Dorian Gray and Gabriele D’Annunzio’s Andrea Sperelli in *Il piacere*, among many others. From the onset of the narrative, *The Golden Death* displays these performative elements, likened to those representative of European decadents and aesthetes. With his “excessively arrogant, fashionable, and selfish personality” (Tanizaki 2005, 15), Okamura belongs to the same genealogy of superfluous decadent heroes whose fatalistic nature drives them to devastating self-destruction.

Going through an insolent youthful phase, Okamura awakens to his aesthetic creed based on the supremacy of sensory beauty in art. What galvanizes his belief is Pater’s *The Renaissance*, above all the chapter on the “School of Giorgione”, which underscores the sensory nature of music. In the essay, Pater endorses the essence of music for its capacity of transmitting beauty to the audience without requiring any intermediary knowledge or faculties for comprehending it (23). In *The Golden Death*, the first-person narrator alludes to Pater’s famous dictum on music as the ideal form of art, which realizes a “perfect identification of matter and form” (Tanizaki 2005, 23; Pater 1998, 88). The passages relevant to Okamura read as follows:

Art [...] is [...] always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the ‘imaginative reason’, that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol.

It is the art of music which most completely realizes this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. (Pater 1998, 88)

Quoting these well-known passages almost verbatim, Okamura explains to the narrator that the sensory nature of music remains free from any reason or thought (Tanizaki 2005, 23). The following episode concretizes the same point further, by harshly criticizing German Enlightenment thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s essay on the ancient sculpture *Laocoön and His Sons* (1766). In the essay, Lessing eulogizes John Milton’s blindness and states that the absence of the physical apparatus can maximize the workings of the “eyes of mind” (Tanizaki 2005, 20). Through contemplation of Laocoön’s excruciating facial pain and physical posture, Okamura continues, Lessing asserts the artistic notion of “an implied moment”, a liminal phase when a subsequent action and emotion are conceived by a transfixed visual intensity. Such an “implied” meaning expressed in art vexes Okamura, as it lacks substantial clarity. Unless the art form itself galvanizes the recipient’s sense of immediacy, he argues, beauty does not prove its value:

I hate such an idea as imagination that is tantalizing and irritating. Beauty does not convince me unless it manifests itself in front of me and offers the form that is visible, tactile, and audible. Unless I savour the boisterous feeling of beauty that has no space for imagination but directly strikes me with the light of arc lamp, I cannot be satisfied. (27)

Here, Okamura’s claim radically reduces art to a mere sensory stimulant. His oversimplified formula of art could be considered a sign of Tanizaki’s immature interpretation, which also

reveals Japan's hasty receptivity to Western art theories. In any case, his protagonist disputes Lessing's advocacy of positivistic intellectualism, passed down from the Age of Enlightenment through an apparently incomplete and crude wrangling.

While Okamura's argument regarding the essence of art remains incomplete, the second half of *The Golden Death* narrates the concretization of what he believes to be genuine art. The massive project he launches is located in the countryside of the Hakone region, about 100 km southwest of Tokyo. Escaping busy urban life in a region where nature abounds, he purchases a vast acreage on top of a plateau and constructs a manmade landscape that includes a lake, fountain, waterfall, and hill that imitates Ellison's garden, utilizing the beauty of nature. This space is used to build a gigantic "heaven of art" where Okamura wields a radically eclectic vision of an artificial paradise that exhibits architecture from various civilizations and historical periods:

Around the strangely sharp ridge akin to the painting of the Southern School, the Chinese-style castle echoes poems from the Tang Dynasty. Around the fountain in the flower garden, the Greek-styled rectangular pavilion stands surrounded by stone columns. At the corner of the cape sticking out to the lake, there is a palatial-style cottage of the Fujiwara Period with the banister over the water. Inside the windy forest, the marble bathhouse of ancient Rome is filled with sparkling hot water. [...] Each residence displays the faces of the four seasons, imitating the image of the Parthenon, following the ambience of the Phoenix Hall, or tracing the style of the Alhambra, and appropriating the palace of Vatican [...]. (35)

All the architectural structures are copies lacking authenticity and originality. According to Matthew Potolsky, literary imitation in decadent texts not only "read more like bibliographies than fiction or poetry" but also "thematize them" (1999, 236). In the passage above, the plethora of copies holds its own end, thematically reifying the ambition for opulence. The exhaustive list of renowned buildings and landscape designs reminds the reader of Des Esseintes' obsessive collection, which spans from literary magnum opuses and exotic perfumes to plants that stimulate his neurotic senses. In the massive garden, the multitude of exhibits constitute a sort of hodge-podge, described by Mishima Yukio as "the confused dreams and styles" revealing the vulgarity and ugliness of modern Japanese culture (Mishima 2000, 214). The nightmarish scenery staging "an amusement park-like space" (215), Mishima continues, is not only the failure of Tanizaki but also reveals the artistic and intellectual poverty of 1910s Taishō Japan. The same assortment of chaotic artwork keeps unfolding as the narrator moves forward into the property. A closer inspection of each sculpture reveals that all of them are mock masterpieces, like architectural designs borrowed from various historical ages and cultures, from China's Ming Dynasty through contemporary France. One of those pieces catches the narrator's attention: an imitation of August Rodin's *The Eternal Idol*, a sculpture that copies the face of Okamura himself (Tanizaki 2005, 36). Here, the narrative reveals a glimpse of the novella's overarching theme: the transformation of the artist into the artwork itself.

The final part of the novella reveals what the protagonist – and likely Tanizaki himself in the 1910s – envisions as the ideal form of art. The narrator tells the reader that two years later, he is once again invited to Okamura's massive property in Hakone. Welcomed by Okamura in the guise of a Roman citizen wearing toga and sandals, he observes a series of copies of sculptures such as Michelangelo's *Bound Slave*, *Apollo of Piombino*, and Polykleitos's *Doryphoros* from ancient Greece (40). Like Virgil, who guides Dante through the Inferno (41), Okamura continues the tour of the floors decorated by all the other artefacts from various styles and ages. They include statues displaying Count Ugolino's agonistic cannibalism, a melancholic Victor Hugo, Satyricon flirting with a Nymph, a man in despair, and the kissing couple of Botticelli's *Primavera* (*ibidem*). In the garden, there are *tableaux vivants* of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *The Source*, Giorgione's

Venus, and Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Nymph*. The exhibition displays the subjects of each painting, including real naked girls with blond hair and blue eyes (42). This living artwork suggests that Tanizaki's fascination with exoticism was inspired by his French predecessor, which became popular in Japan as *katsujin-ga* 活人画 (living human picture), a theatrical entertainment introduced to Japan in 1887.⁶ In his next stopover at the bath house, the narrator sees the marble interior surrounded by another imitation of Roman murals and mucosal reliefs. On the oval-shaped floor, the expressions of a myriad centaurs echo Okamura's own laughing and crying faces. In the bathtub, numerous mermaids wear glittering leotards that resemble tails and fins (43-44). Once again, such artifice merely exhibits an assortment of imitations. Without any coherence or unity, the entire property realizes the pan-world view of civilization in the name of "art" (*geijutsu* 芸術) (44). And yet, the nonsensical collection of art pieces is not entirely unlike Poe's "The Domain of Arnheim", whose finale unravels Ellison's "Paradise" by virtue of the profusion of architectural variants, natural landscapes, plants, and flowers:

[...] unspringing confusedly amid all, a mass of semi-Gothic, semi-Saracenic architecture sustaining itself as if by miracle in the air; glittering in the red sunlight with a hundred oriels, minarets, and pinnacles, and seeming the phantom handiwork, conjointly, of the Sylphs, of the Fairies, of the Genni, and of the Gnomes. (Poe 1984, 870)

The incantatory listing of images might be what Tanizaki intended to emulate. Ellison's garden paradise in the passage is governed by an ineffable serenity and sense of integration. All the elements stand against a quaint background of natural beauty, implicitly blending them into the ambience as the narrator's vision and sense of smell are invoked in the scene. The resulting sense of awe subtly fuses Gothic and Romantic images without any unsettling sense of disorder.

Despite its similar narrative strategy of juxtaposition, such an elegant and elusive amalgamation of nature and manmade structures is not present in *The Golden Death*. During the final phase of the property tour, the narrator becomes a stunned spectator to Okamura's ultimate art. After squandering all his money on an extravaganza of copied artwork and buildings, Okamura finally utilizes his own body and assumes the guises of various characters. To this end, he performs a dance with Russian theatrical costumes designed by Léon Bakst that turns out to be Pan (lesser Greek god with a semi-human upper body and goat legs) and the fairy of roses. By painting his body black, Okamura then assumes the guise of a slave who appears in the dance of Scheherazade in *One Thousand and One Nights*. Dissatisfied with these costume plays, he ultimately resorts to transforming his own body into "art". Surrounded by handsome men and women dressed as Buddhist disciples (Bodhisattva and demons), Okamura plates his body with gold and becomes Tathagata Buddha (*nyorai* 如来 in Japanese), or "the one who has thus come" or "the one who has attained enlightenment". He excitedly guzzles liquor and insanely dances the night away, alluding to Dionysiac Bacchanalia. At the end of the exuberant festival, the story concludes abruptly. The next morning, Okamura is found dead on the floor, as the gold plate around his body has prevented the skin from breathing. The narrator reports the death as follows:

⁶ *Katsujin-ga* in Japan was initially performed by Western actors in the late nineteenth century. It was later re-introduced by children's writer Iwaya Sazanami (1870-1933) after returning from Germany in 1902. See chapter *Katsujin-ga to taiwa* 活人画と対話 (Tableau Vivant and Dialogues) (Tomita 1998). Later in the Taishō period (1912-26) through the post-WWII period of the 1950s, *katsujin-ga* became a popular attraction in the form of *gakubuchi-shō* 額縁ショー (picture-frame show), where nude models posed to illustrate famous historical episodes or paintings.

Everyone including Bodhisattva, Lohans, evil ogres, and rakshasas wept, stayed down on their knee at the golden corpse. The scene actualized the image of the Buddha who enters Nirvana, suggesting the fact that he keeps dedicating the body to his own ideal of art even after he died. I had never seen such a beautiful corpse of a human being. I had never seen the human death so cheerful and solemn as his that is absolutely free of the shadow of 'sorrow'. (Tanizaki 2005, 46)

Alongside this description, the narrator extols Okamura's body as an artwork that is precarious, illusory, and fated to evaporate with his death: he was "a genuine artist" who obsessively invested all his energy and passion in art (*ibidem*). As foreshadowed by his contempt for scientific studies, Okamura's efforts are diametrically opposed to rationality, objectivity, and pragmatism. Consciously appropriating *fin de siècle* decadents' pursuit of aesthetic ideals, Okamura wagered his life for art for art's sake. Finally, the narrator concludes his friend's memoir by raising a question: "[D]o people in our society consider the man [like him] in high esteem as an artist?" (*ibidem*) The answer is not given by the narrator and is thus provocatively left to the reader.

Whereas its reductive depiction of aesthetics is undeniable, *The Golden Death* attests to Tanizaki's strong affinity with *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism through the narcissistic protagonist who wagers his life for art. The novella commemorates the author's fascination with the decadent leitmotif of the connection between nature and manmade artificiality. Here we recall the same valence of fascination in Richard Gilman, who succinctly interprets Des Esseintes's Baudelairean traits and creative impulse in *À Rebours*: his human drive that "carr[ies] on at its most artificial [...] [and] 'invented' [ways]" and attitudes "refractory to imposed moral and social obligations" (1980, 105). The virtue of his daring thus lies in the ability to replace life with artifice, which is underpinned by "the distinctive mark of human genius" (*ibidem*). The rebellious artistry of the prodigy is a notable attribute passed down to the protagonist in *The Golden Death*. Both Des Esseintes and Okamura are undoubtedly audacious mavericks, whose temperaments are quite foreign to Poe's pensive and rather introverted Ellison in "The Domain of Arnheim", even if these works might be considered eremitic literature.

Indeed, the surface plot of *The Golden Death* could be taken as a case of literary adaptation, since Tanizaki borrows Poe's utopia-building project as an archetypal narrative frame. However, unlike Ellison's ideal world of serenity inhabited by sacred spirits, Okamura's artificial paradise more clearly inherits the legacies of Baudelaire and Huysmans, who envisioned the paradise as the effects of stimulants consumed for escaping the unbearable pain and boredom of reality. In lieu of wine, opium, or hashish, the abused stimulant for Okamura is wealth – for granted, presumably from the labouring classes under the Meiji Restoration. The pretextual condition of wealth provides him with an exquisite space filled with nightmarishly vivid artefacts that mirror an ecstatic and yet delusional inner world, as narcotics mirror for Baudelaire. Similar to Baudelaire's cry, "Anywhere! anywhere! provided that it is out of this world!" (1975, 39), *The Golden Death* embraces the same urge; Baudelaire's modern man abuses narcotics while Tanizaki's abuses wealth. Okamura can take refuge only in the artificial paradise, a macabre universe where the roles of the artist, the artwork, and the recipient are all assumed by Okamura himself. It actualizes not the sustainable materiality of paradise, but rather cynically embodies, as Mishima states, "the ultimate contempt for intellectual cognition" (Mishima 2000, 214) at the cost of his life.

Nearly every artistic statement in *The Golden Death* consciously relates to decadent elements, including imitation, dandyism, artificial paradise, art for art's sake, and sensory stimulation and indulgence. Simultaneously, all his actions and beliefs appear as harsh indictments of scientific positivism, mass mediocrity, and reflect a personal determination to distance himself from the collectivism of modern society. This valence of psychic reactions is of course nothing new in Japan; however, *fin de siècle* decadent discourses presented them as a new literary mo-

tif and style, galvanizing the creativity of Aestheticist writers. This is particularly the case, as pointed out by Regenia Gagnier, who correlates the emergence of decadent literature with most non-Western traditions that are in conflict with modernization while undergoing processes of change (2015, 12). To the same extent, in light of Désiré Nisard, Paul Bourget, and Havelock Ellis, who viewed decadent individuals as a decomposed social element of an organic whole, Tanizaki, at least in his early career, found decadent literature an effective avenue for resisting “the collective imposition of identity” (18) typical of the new nation.

What the artificial paradise displays in *The Golden Death*, then, are the candid records of how Japan experienced the influx of Western culture and civilization in the early twentieth century. Its Occidentalism, or rather its infatuation with the West, lacks a cohesive consumption of European artefacts, and is complemented only by the crude materiality of art. Such a consumption of art can be ironically equated to an atavistic return to mass consumerism. The novella’s *tour de force* lies in its contempt for the Japanese self, a foregrounded “artist” who failed to digest the West and its artefacts. Japan might have belatedly participated in Western cultural and literary modernity, for which the author could not help admitting retrospective shame; even so, the novella epitomizes a metaphorical *res gestae*, which suggests the un-documentable reality of consuming the Other’s art.

There are also points of disjunction in *The Golden Death* with *fin de siècle* decadent literature. The novella implicitly charts the obsolescence of Japanese literature while commemorating the advent of anti-naturalist discourses “as a leading challenge to the entrenched presence of Japanese Naturalism”, which reductively insisted on “the unity of literal and literary truth” (Ito 1991, 31). Through writers returning from Europe and the United States, notably Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922), Ueda Bin 上田敏 (1874-1916), and Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), the following generation represented by Tanizaki gained substantial exposure to Western literature in translation. Through possession and consumption, like his protagonists, Tanizaki admired the West as a somewhat essentialized totality (63). Consequently, Western artefacts in *The Golden Death* indicate the author’s exotic fetishism; his proclivity for the cultural Other is not a fiction but rather the essentialized practice of Occidentalism. In this regard, Okamura’s fanatical degree of collection is almost derivative of the hermitage dreamed of by Des Esseintes, but this is not necessarily a pejorative deficiency of creativity *per se*. The distastefully copied artworks in Okamura’s vast property prompt an autotoxemia of the Other’s cultural production, even if Tanizaki originally only intended to display his erudition at the time. Likewise, the plethora of imitative paintings and sculptures mirrors the negative tendency shared among Japanese writers of the time. In light of Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*, it could be a sign of a criminal tendency that resorts to “disseminating counterfeit copies [...]” (1993, 32). However, once the act becomes a stoic labour, as Okamura’s project suggests, the act of replicating artwork can signify a conscious mimicry of *fin de siècle* decadent heroes. The gigantic ambition rooted in the misanthropy of Des Esseintes is unmistakably prevalent in Okamura’s characterization. While both are heirs to fortunes passed down from their families, Des Esseintes’ feebleness in physique, hypochondria, and melancholy are completely foreign to Okamura. Like Des Esseintes, the Japanese protagonist does not display outright abhorrence for the masses and the bourgeoisie, setting social conditions aside from his concern. Yet both pursue the secluded life of a hermit, and their escapist urge to create an artificial paradise is a notion that derives from Baudelaire.

The allegorical death of Dorian Gray also resembles Okamura’s death as the sign of decadents who are unable to meet social and moral standards. Mishima, who was an avid reader of Wilde, interprets Dorian Gray’s death as an existential impasse – playing dual roles simultaneously as the object of beauty and the subjective spectator (Mishima 2000, 210). The twofold agency

of being both artist and artwork is not sustainable; once the beauty intended by the two is achieved, one of them loses his *raison d'être*. The same fate awaits Okamura when he becomes a Buddha by gilding his body.⁷ When the sensory faculties fail, the body (the material foundation of beauty) also stops existing as such and turns out to be a mere object that continues to exist, regardless of the creator's presence or absence. Mishima sums up this point as the novella's thesis:

Art is entirely something sensual. However, its objectivity is ultimately guaranteed neither by [the subjective] feeling nor receiving. Since it is guaranteed by being felt as well as being received, the ultimate condition of sensual creativity exists only in the death of the self. (211)

This theory formulated by Mishima looks at the Japanese novella from a phenomenological viewpoint of art and an aesthetic of reception. In fact, the philosophical duality of subject and object was one of the *literati's* concerns and fostered an epochal literary trend. Tsuboi argues that *The Golden Death* is built on the genre called *bunshin shōsetsu* 分身小説 (novel on one's double or alter ego), which recalls Okamura's identification with the artwork in the narrative of creating an ideal doppelgänger (Tsuboi 2009, 81). The double used to be a popular leitmotif in the literature of the Taishō period (1912-26), reflecting sociocultural instabilities and the specific neuroses of erudite urban individuals.⁸ While participating in this literary trend, however, Okamura remains an advocate of *fin de siècle* decadence – the man becomes his art's double, and is then killed by the art itself. Like Dorian Gray, Okamura embodies decadent dilettantism and epicureanism whose ludic enterprise rejects all social and moral obligations.

On the other hand, within the context of the transcultural reception of *fin de siècle* decadence, *The Golden Death* affords another angle of interpretation. As a young *littérateur* of the 1910s, when Japan's modernization was synonymous with Westernization, Tanizaki could not help questioning the fate of the country's indigenous aesthetics. This self-reflexive inquiry is prevalent in his acclaimed essay "In Praise of Shadows" (1933), where he reflects on the effects of modern technology (electricity, appliances, and gadgets) on his quotidian space and public life. In lieu of technological benefits, as the traditional Japanese lifestyle is eroded by Western cultural products, its indigenous aesthetic values (as symbolized by the ubiquitous presence of shadow) are also dismissed as obsolete. The advent of a new material reality forced Tanizaki to embrace his homeland's defeat from "having borrowed" modern civilization and cultural values from Others (Tanizaki 2001, 21). Although the essay was written nearly two decades after *The Golden Death* was published, it still testifies to Tanizaki's sense of inferiority in terms of East-West cultural politics. Therefore, given the protagonist's servile obeisance to Western artwork in *The Golden Death*, Tanizaki ultimately disowned the novella and excluded it from his official anthology (Mishima 2000, 200).

The trope of imitation running throughout *The Golden Death* also underpins his abhorrence of the novella. The adaptation of Western literature was a widely employed literary strategy in early twentieth-century Japan, as prominently exemplified by Morita Sōhei's 森田 草平's infamous *Baien* 煤煙 (Sooty Smoke) (1909) based on Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il trionfo della morte* (1894) and others. Whereas the stylistic adaptation of Poe and Baudelaire was Tanizaki's initial tactic, *The Golden Death* implicitly underwent a semantic shift later in his career.

⁷ An anonymous reviewer of this essay keenly pointed out that the fate of gilded Okamura is akin to the death of Des Esseintes' jewelled tortoise, as a result of the owner's attempt to embellish its natural body. An imposition of artificiality on nature seems a common decadent impulse.

⁸ The major writers of the Taishō Period, including Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花, and Kajii Motojirō 梶井基次郎, wrote novellas featuring doppelgängers in the conventions of psycho thrillers.

As suggested by his rejection of the novella, the scheme of adaptation turned out to be an imitation – not an intentionally creative act of emulation, but as a fiasco lacking cultural and historical authenticity. Thus, Tanizaki may have regretted the gaudy imagery of the artificial paradise, finally amounting to nothing but a space filled with incoherent artefacts in the form of petty mimicry. His protagonist dreams and dies for an illusory paradise that negates the author's indigenous cultural roots and identity. All the copies in *The Golden Death* mirror a melancholic compromise, concealing the author's psychic dissimulation intertwined with an obsequious display of fascination with the West. The avalanche of imitations merely exhibits an ironic fruit of creativity, implicitly suggesting Tanizaki's (and Japan's) plea for recognition by the Western Other. Such an issue of hierarchical cultural formation recalls Homi K. Bhabha, who spoke in the 1990s on behalf of post-independence India and other post-colonial nations. Without any history of being colonized, however, Japan had a legitimate reason for imitating the principles of *fin de siècle* decadence and Aestheticism as though they were sovereign authorities while following them as progressive models that could modernize the obsolete Japanese prose narrative. Thus, such assimilative attitudes involved a dual process of imitation, which is prevalent in *The Golden Death*. The overall narrative frame borrows the motif of *fin de siècle* pessimism and misanthropy, along with the creation of an artificial paradise as a psychosomatic refuge. In addition to the borrowed archetypal framework, the image of the entire paradise also constitutes an assortment of European artefacts, literally knocked-off objects. To Tanizaki, who never travelled or studied overseas, the fanatical degree of mimicking the Other appears to be a neurotic, an almost masochistic reaction to the West (Ito 1991, 54-55).⁹ From the political angle of Bhabha's view, the act of mimicry in *The Golden Death* falls into what he considers "ironic compromise" (Bhabha 1994, 122), which implicitly disavows a harmonizing effect of the narrative while carefully masquerading the presence of Otherness. In this regard, Okamura's utopic space enacts a locus of cultural negotiation, masochistically repressing his nativist sensibility in the guise of "paradise".

The strange form of exuberance in *The Golden Death* testifies to cultural politics and utilizes the belated advent of modernity in Japan. With mimicry of the West, the repressive act of imitation needed a psychological outlet: the fictional novella that empirically unifies the subject and the object of art. Tanizaki's later rejection of his novella is not surprising because all the imitations mirror the desperate Japanese self, pathetically wrestling with the absence of its vigorous identity. To this end, *The Golden Death* is not self-indulgent nonsense; the random and discursive collection of foreign artworks effectively stage historical as well as cultural aphasia. Its artistic impasse can be bridged only by the bricolage of dilettantism made of incongruous collections of art. Showcasing the nonsensical layout of copied masterpieces derived from incoherent historical and cultural backgrounds, *The Golden Death* readily repudiates the provenance and authenticity of its own worldview. Yet, the preminent irony is that even if the novella reveals Japan's partial and selective reception of *fin de siècle* decadence, the notion of decadence still holds paramount importance as the lynchpin of a discursively formed narrative.

⁹ Tanizaki's fascination with sadomasochism stems from his exposure to *fin de siècle* decadent sensibilities as well as to works by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, as was the case among many Japanese writers of the early twentieth century. Also, Tanizaki's lynchpin, Nagai Kafū (1879-1959), who stayed in the United States and France in 1903-1908, played a significant role for Tanizaki. His works such as *America monogatari* あめりか物語 (American Stories) (1908) and *Furansu monogatari* ふらんす物語 (French Stories) (1908) introduced him to the aestheticist literary sensibilities of the West.

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