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# Reading Dazai in Translation: A Paratextual Point of View of *Tsugaru*

JAKE ODAGIRI\*

## 1. Introduction

DAZAI Osamu (太宰治, 1909–1948) is one of Japan’s most celebrated modern authors. Although not widely known outside of Japan, some works, such as *No Longer Human* (人間失格 1948) and *The Setting Sun* (斜陽 1947), have been translated into English and other languages. Also, in recent years there have been several short-story collections published.

One of Dazai’s works, *Tsugaru* (津軽 1944), has received quite a great deal of attention in the field of research. Written and published in 1944, this work not only contains descriptions of war-time Japan, but it also has a unique narrative that encourages diverse readings. In recent research, Katsuya Matsumoto stated regarding *Tsugaru* that “I hesitate to call it a novel, so here I called it a work. It can even be called a travelogue, travel book, gazetteer, or autobiographical novel”.<sup>1</sup> This captures very well the way in which *Tsugaru* can be read in various frameworks. Originally *Tsugaru* was published by Oyama Shoten (小山書店) and was part of a “gazetteer” series but also went through one publisher change while Dazai was alive. In 1947 a publisher called Maeda Shuppan-sha (前田出版社) re-published *Tsugaru* and many changes were made.

For this paper, the main focus will be on the “entryway” of the English translation of *Tsugaru*. First, even though the quality of the translated text will not be a focus point, reviews of the translation will be looked at. Then, the immediate “entryway” will be evaluated; mainly the covers (front and back), table of contents, and other features of the first few steps into *Tsugaru* will be analyzed. Finally, a detailed evaluation of the “Translator’s Preface” will be

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<sup>1</sup> Matsumoto Katsuya 松本和也, “Tabibito, Honyaku, Shōsetsu: *Tsugaru*” 旅人・翻訳・小説家——『津軽』——. In *Dazai Osamu no Jidentekishōsetsu o Yomihiraku: Omohide kara Ningen Shikkaku made* 太宰治の自伝的小説を読みひらく——「思ひ出」から『人間失格』まで, Rikkyō Daigaku Shuppankai 立教大学出版会, 2010, p. 142.

performed to determine how *Tsugaru* and Dazai are presented. Evaluating this preface will give insight into what type of reading filter may be established and subtle influences it may have on the reading of *Tsugaru*.

## 2. On *Tsugaru*'s Translation(s)

*Tsugaru* has been translated into English twice and, coincidentally, both translations were published in 1985. One of the translations is the case study for this presentation: *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp* translated by James Westerhoven.<sup>2</sup> The other, translated as *Tsugaru*, by Phyllis Lyons, is contained within the translator's academic book *The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations*.<sup>3</sup> Lyons reviewed Westerhoven's translation mentioning the "advantage of having two translations of the same work by translators who don't know each other is that you can be sure neither was influenced by the other; furthermore, resemblances between them give a good indication of special features of the original text".<sup>4</sup> Lyons goes on to touch upon the difficulties of translating Japanese texts into English and asks the following questions: "Is there any way truly to render for the general reader the tone of Dazai's prose in English? The words are there, but how to convey to a nonspecialist audience qualities that exist not in the text, but in the reader's experience and heart?"<sup>5</sup> Even with these difficulties at hand, Lyons praises Westerhoven's translation of *Tsugaru* as being "a very important addition to the translation canon".<sup>6</sup>

Reviewing both translations by Westerhoven and Lyons, Amy Heinrich praises Lyons' translation and briefly remarks on Westerhoven's translation:

Westerhoven is addressing a general audience that Lyons's book is unlikely to reach. He has made sensible choices in his translation in this regard, such as converting era names into Western dates rather than footnoting. He includes a brief biography of Dazai and a

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<sup>2</sup> Dazai Osamu, *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*, James Westerhoven, trans., Kodansha International, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations*, Stanford University Press, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Lyons, 'Review: Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp. by Dazai Osamu and James Westerhoven', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3, May, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

discussion of *Tsugaru* warning that the book is autobiographical fiction rather than factual dialogue, as well as providing lists of personal and historical and geographical names. It is a useful and comfortable translation, and if the tone seems lighter than in Lyon's translation, it is nonetheless a valid interpretation, supported by the translator's familiarity with the region.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, Sanroku Yoshida comments on Westerhoven's translation in the following manner:

The translator's preface is the result of extensive fieldwork and research. The approach here is a biographical one, most natural and logical in this case. It should benefit readers interested in the author's biography and its relationship to the work. Of the twenty-seven photographs, including the ones on the jacket, most are visually attractive, but at least three of them show the bleak wintry landscape of *Tsugaru*. These do not well represent the mood or the season of the book. Aside from this minor flaw, James Westerhoven's conscientious and readable translation is an important addition to the rather scanty collection of modern Japanese literature available to the English-reading public.<sup>8</sup>

Other than this paratextual review of Westerhoven's translation, Yoshida does not go into detail on the actual translation of the text; instead the review is mostly focused on Dazai's scandalous life and the semi-autobiographical writing style found in his works.

Finally, Katsuhiko Takeda commented on both translations after using them as textbooks in a classroom. The initial review of the translation, although unconventional, compares translating to cooking and, like food, the "preference for specific words and sentences vary from person to person".<sup>9</sup> However, Takeda's point coincides well with Lyons' comment of

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<sup>7</sup> Amy Heinrich, 'Review: The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations. by Phyllis I. Lyons; Return to *Tsugaru*: Travels of a Purple Tramp. by James Westerhoven', *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Sanroku Yoshida, 'Review: Osamu Dazai. *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*. James Westerhoven', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 60, No. 1, Winter 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Takeda Katsuhiko 武田勝彦, Sando tantō: *Tsugaru o Yomu* 産土耽蕩——『津軽』を読む, *Dazai Osamu* 太宰治 3、Yōyō-sha 洋々社、1987.

being able to compare two translations to find a middle-ground and possibly read some things that were lost in translation. Takeda goes on to explain how both of the translations were received well amongst the students and adds an interpretation that the work could have been called “Return to Take”<sup>10</sup> as a direct reference to the end scene of the fifth chapter and end of the work.

As seen in the reviews, Westerhoven’s translation of Dazai Osamu’s *Tsugaru* has been accepted to the extent of being deemed worthy of “canon” by another translator of the same work. However, as seen in Heinrich’s review, Westerhoven’s translation is more widely available than Lyons’ translation, which is in a research book. This makes Westerhoven’s translation a favorable subject for a case study. Also, Yoshida’s review, which focuses primarily on the visual aspect of the physical copy of the book, raises many questions about the presentation of *Tsugaru* from a paratextual point of view.

### **3. Cover, Title Page, Table of Contents, Introduction: *Tsugaru*’s “Entryway”**

This paper is loosely based on the ideas presented by Gérard Genette in his study on “paratext”. Genette breaks down paratext into two essential features: peritext and epitext. Peritext includes features such as the title or preface of a book. Other elements such as chapter titles or notes within them should also be considered. Epitext consists of outside media such as interviews or conversations with the author, private communications, and so forth. However, Genette does state that “paratext=peritext+epitext”,<sup>11</sup> meaning that in the full sense of the word, paratext encompasses both peritext and epitext. From this point forward, paratext will be used in this sense.

Regarding paratext in translated works, there has been very little research in this field. However, in a recent study regarding paratext in translation, Valerie Pellatt states:

The most visible categories of paratext include the footnote or endnote, the preface and foreword, the introduction and the epilogue or afterword. Less visible, but equally powerful types of paratext are the contents pages, the index, titles and subtitles, chapter

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin, trans., Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 5.

synopses, and blurb on dust jacket and flap. In addition to these verbal paratexts, most publications contain a degree of non-verbal paratext, which may be in the form of illustrations, including photos, tables, charts and diagrams, dust jacket design and also the scarcely visible, but highly influential visual presentation, including fonts, paragraphing and layout. This sums up the range found in a published book, and each of these elements influences the reader to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>12</sup>

Of course the same can be said in the case of any sort of published work (especially within literature). However, when placed within the framework of a translation, the impact will vary greatly. This is especially pertinent when looking at a work that has been translated posthumously: in this case Dazai's *Tsugaru*. Pellatt also raises a set of very intriguing questions regarding paratext in translated works:

A discussion of paratext in translation begs two questions: what are the functions and effects of the paratext of the source text, and to what extent are these functions and effects necessary, retained and of positive relevance in translation. The translator is first and foremost a reader, and interprets the text and transmits the translation thereof according to that interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

As with Genette's fundamental ideas regarding paratext, some of the main questions of paratext are: for whom? by whom? for what purpose? A paratextual point of view will expand the options of how to read a work and interpret its destination.<sup>14</sup>

When analyzing the paratextual aspects of a work, one of the first items that should be



First Edition *Tsugaru*,  
Oyama Shoten 小山書店, 1944

<sup>12</sup> Valerie Pellatt (ed.), *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> For more information of the 'destination' of a work, see: Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, Stephan Heath, trans., Fontana Press, 1977.

noted is the “entryway”<sup>15</sup> of the work itself. This essentially consists of the jacket (the front, back, and spine of the book), title page, table of contents, and introduction (if applicable). In the English translation of *Tsugaru* by Westerhoven, these essential aspects not only set the scene for the reader, but can also establish a filter prior to accessing the main body of the work.

The first edition of *Tsugaru* is a rather simple design which followed the previous books in the same series. It has the series name on the top, number “7” indicating its place in the series, the title, the author’s name, and the name of the publisher on the bottom. There is also a small flower printed in the middle. All of the books in this series have similar illustrations in the middle. It is notable that these illustrations may not necessarily reflect the content of the work itself; however, it can be said that this flower represents spring, in other words, the seasonal setting of *Tsugaru*.

The second printing of *Tsugaru* has a very different overall appearance just on the cover alone. On the top it is written “長篇小説 津軽 太宰治” meaning “Full-length Novel *Tsugaru* Dazai Osamu”. This establishment of *Tsugaru* as a full-length novel has been a very interesting point of debate in previous research as seen earlier. The picture which dominates the center of the cover, although attractive, does not



Second Edition *Tsugaru*,  
Maeda Shuppansha 前田出版社, 1946

coincide with the seasonal setting of *Tsugaru*. That is to say, as previously mentioned, *Tsugaru* is set in the spring and this cover shows a snowy scene. This is a detail that Yoshida also pointed out in regards to the photographs used in Westerhoven’s translation.<sup>16</sup> Also, the two figures on this cover are not necessarily connected to the content of the work itself because there is no such scene depicted within *Tsugaru*.

<sup>15</sup> Or ‘vestibule’ as translated in Genett, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Yoshida, op. cit.

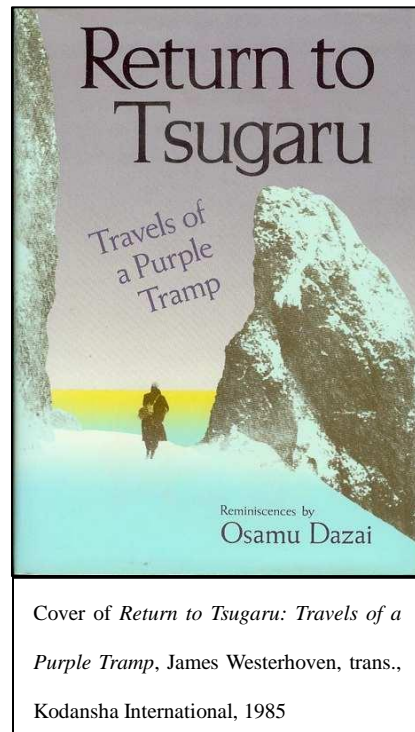
The cover of the English translation of *Tsugaru* has a very different implication. The first thing to be noticed is the translated title. It is translated as *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp* which varies remarkably from the original. In the “Translator’s Preface”, Westerhoven refers to the work as *Tsugaru*, in italics, indicating the translator may not have chosen the English title. From a paratextual perspective, changing the title by adding the “Return to” and the subtitle “Travels of a Purple Tramp” puts this translation into the framework of another work entirely. The subtitle “Travels of a Purple Tramp” directly refers to the text which reads: “むらさき色の乞食”, or “a purple colored beggar” in the original text.<sup>17</sup> This, however, is a running gag within the work itself and the narrator only reveals this “purple tramp/beggar” to the reader. In fact, upon meeting his niece in chapter 4, the narrator is greeted as such:

“How funny you look!” They burst into laughter as soon as they saw my outfit.

“Don’t laugh! This is all the rage in Tokyo.” (Westerhoven, p. 111)<sup>18</sup>

This reaction of the narrator regarding his clothing suggest that he does not present himself as a “purple beggar” to other characters in the work. Bringing this appearance onto the cover of the work indicates that the main character is the “Purple Tramp” and can be considered as out of context.

Although the narrator “returns” to the Tsugaru region, the original text does not indicate this in the title. Being a part of the “New *Fudoki* Series”, *Tsugaru* is sufficient to hint at the



Cover of *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*, James Westerhoven, trans., Kodansha International, 1985

<sup>17</sup> There may be a discrepancy in the nuance of “tramp” and “beggar”. The Japanese word 乞食 has a stronger nuance toward the English “beggar” as to “tramp” which implies a “traveler” or “vagabond”. Translated as “beggar” in Lyons, op. cit., p. 292.

<sup>18</sup> Compare to Lyons: “What strange clothes!” They both immediately burst out laughing at what I looked like. / “Don’t be silly—this is the latest Tokyo fashion!” op. cit., p. 345.



content of the work itself. Calling it “Return to Tsugaru” may be considered a *service* to a non-native speaker that is not familiar with the Tsugaru region or Japan’s geography implying that there will be a *return* to a place called “Tsugaru”; however, the inaccurate translation of the original title suggests it to be the author’s return. The method in which the author, Dazai, is tied into this concept of return is how his name is presented at the bottom right-hand corner of the cover: “Reminiscences by Osamu Dazai”. In the original and subsequent publications of *Tsugaru* there is no indication that the content of the work is a “reminiscence” of the author’s experience. Although it is well-known that the content of *Tsugaru* is based on the author’s travels and experiences, there is not sufficient evidence to call this work a “reminiscence” by the author. Even within the “Translator’s Preface”, Westerhoven says that “the proper approach to this book is to read it not as a travelogue, but indeed as a work of fiction”.<sup>19</sup> This contradictory presentation and reading is evident throughout research of *Tsugaru* over the years.

On the other hand, on the back cover there is a photograph of Dazai, and under this photograph are three quotes. Two are from famous translators, Donald Keene and Edward Seidensticker. The other is from the famous Japanese author Mishima Yukio. Keene and Seidensticker’s quotes heavily emphasize that *Tsugaru* is a non-fictional work. This coincides with the “Reminiscences” that is seen on the cover. Keene, in fact, uses the term “a work of non-fiction” and Seidensticker uses “Dazai’s childhood memories”, possibly referring to the in-work quotes from *Omohide*.<sup>20</sup> Mishima’s quote only reads “An uncommon talent”, not referring to *Tsugaru* necessarily. However, what should be focused on here are the quotes that emphasize the non-fictional characteristics of *Tsugaru*. These, along with the features seen on the front cover, will establish a non-fiction filter for the readers of the English translation of *Tsugaru*.

The next feature that will be looked at is the table of contents. There are “Translator’s Preface”, “Map”, “Introduction”, and the contents of the work, three appendixes, and “Suggestions for Further Reading”. Here, the presentation of the content of *Tsugaru* needs to be looked at. The original version and many subsequent versions of *Tsugaru* follow a very distinct set-up of content as follows:

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<sup>19</sup> *Return to Tsugaru*, op. cit., p. xxvi.

<sup>20</sup> *Omohide* 思ひ出, originally published in the literary coterie magazine *Kaihyō* 海豹, 1933. It was then included in Dazai’s first short story collection *Bannen* 晩年, 1936 (Sunagoya Shobo 砂子屋書房).

目次	序編	一 巡禮	二 蟹田	三 外ヶ濱	四 津輕平野	五 西海岸
	三	元	壹	叁	二九	三三

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Although this is followed relatively closely in the English translation, there is a relatively large variation: the general structure is broken by not including the “本編 (Body)”. In other words, by not including the “Body” in the translation there is no clear break in the narration between the “Introduction” and the “Body”. This break is important to the structure of the source work because the narrative tone widely differs between them.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the table of contents page, the layout is unclear to where additional details added by the translator (and by the publisher/editor) begin and where the work *Tsugaru* itself begins. In other words, this table of contents page is presented as very unorganized and can possibly confuse a reader not familiar with the source work.

In conclusion of this section, it is important to note that the “entryway” of the English translation of Dazai’s *Tsugaru* can be very misleading. These misleading features are especially present in the non-fictional tone the cover page beginning with the translated title and the highly suggestive “Reminiscences by Osamu Dazai” in the bottom right-hand corner. As will be discussed in detail in the next section, this non-fictional mode of presentation contradicts what portions of the “Translator’s Preface” argue. However, *Tsugaru* is a very

<sup>21</sup> The same can be said about each individual chapter. Uno Kōji read *Tsugaru* as a collection of 5 different short stories. See Uno Kōji 宇野浩二, “Dazai Osamu” 太宰治, *Shōsetsu no Bunshō* 小説の文章, Sōgei-sha 創芸社, 1948.

complex work with highly suggestive features that it *is* non-fiction. Therefore, by considering these various details, the “entryway” of the translated *Tsugaru* is constantly changing its perspective from fiction to non-fiction and this filter is possibly adopted by the reader.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. On the “Translator’s Preface”: Establishing a Reading Filter

Translator’s prefaces or notes are a common feature of translated works not only in English but in works translated into Japanese as well. A preface, originally included for clarity, is now expected to be included in a translation. However, it is important to be critical of these prefaces because they can be highly suggestive on *how to read* the translated work.

In many Japanese novels there is a section at the end of the book called “*kaisetsu* 解説” or an explanation (perhaps even a type of epilogue). For example, even a recent edition of *Tsugaru* contains an explanation by Katsu’ichirō Kamei dated August, 1951.<sup>23</sup> This is an outdated explanation and, as stated previously, can be highly influential to establishing a filter for reading.<sup>24</sup> This is especially the case when it is not written by the author.

Regarding prefaces and paratext, Genette states that the “*original preface*”, written by the author, “has at its chief function *to ensure that the text is read properly*”.<sup>25</sup> This raises more questions than it answers because who is to determine a *proper* or *correct* reading of a work? Even if the preface is written by the author, there is room to be skeptical about the content of said preface. Some other functions of the preface include: reading order, contextual information, statements of intent, themes, novelty and tradition, importance of the text, and so on.<sup>26</sup> There are other prefaces Genette mentions such as revised and posthumous prefaces.<sup>27</sup> The latter posthumous preface is what will be focused on in the case of *Tsugaru* because of its biographical style. Another important feature that will be considered is that of authority and

<sup>22</sup> Lamarque and Olsen have suggested that there should be an established distinction in the mode of reading to avoid the readers constantly needing to change the fiction/non-fiction perspective to appreciate a literary work. See Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 284–285.

<sup>23</sup> Kamei Katsu’ichirō 亀井勝一郎, *Kaisetsu 解説*, in 太宰治『津軽』, Shinchō Bunko 新潮文庫, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> See: Saitō Minako 齋藤美奈子, *Bunkokaisetu Wandārando 文庫解説ワンダーランド*, Iwanami Shoten 岩波書店, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Genette, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> See Genette, *op. cit.*, ch. 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

credibility within a preface.

It can be argued that a preface, even if not an “*original preface*” by the author, can influence a *proper* reading. However, the *proper* reading is a very subjective matter. Based on the “Translator’s Preface” alone, what can be interpreted as the *proper* reading, or a filter for reading, set for *Tsugaru*? Firstly, there are 18 pages of information contained in this preface. It begins with a basic explanation of the Tsugaru region of the north-eastern island of Honshū. There is quite a comprehensive amount of information regarding the “backward” nature of the Tsugaru region; however, the preface does not cite any materials it may be referring to for this information. Even in the extensive appendixes offered toward the end of the volume, there are no references to where this “backward” nature of Tsugaru came from. For example, the preface contains a section as follows:

(...) until recently Tsugaru was generally considered one of the most hopelessly backward regions of Japan, and its people, country bumpkins lacking in most of the redeeming graces of civilization—starting with language and manners, to name just two.<sup>28</sup>

Although this information may be relevant to a reader interested in learning about the Tsugaru region, it does not cite any academic sources and implies that the author of this preface is an authority on the topic. Furthermore, within *Tsugaru* itself, there is enough information presented about the region that giving another account of it in the preface comes off as redundant. This is, in fact, a major theme in *Tsugaru* and the narrator’s struggle of being a native to the Tsugaru region but also having features of a city-dweller from living in Tokyo for many years.

Next, the preface shifts into a biography and an overview of the production of *Tsugaru*. An important attribute of *Tsugaru* is that it, unlike the majority of Dazai’s works, is not a stand-alone work. As previously mentioned, it was the seventh volume in a “new gazetteer” series. An issue that researchers still face to this day is what the ultimate goal of this series, the “新風土記叢書” or “New *Fudoki* Series”, actually was. In the translator’s preface, there are references to the “purpose for which this book was commissioned” and if the author “had done

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<sup>28</sup> *Return to Tsugaru*, op. cit., p. xii.

what he was paid for”.<sup>29</sup> However, there is no documentation explicitly stating the purpose of *Tsugaru* being anything other than one volume in the aforementioned series. This information remains a mystery to this day—the author/publisher relation is very unclear and, furthermore, *Tsugaru* was printed during wartime, during a paper crisis, which accents the unclear “purpose” of *Tsugaru*. Regarding the inception of *Tsugaru*, there is a great deal of mixed fact and fiction within the translator’s preface. When presented in this manner, before even entering the actual content of *Tsugaru*, a filter is created; and when reading the work itself, this mode is “unsatisfactory” as argued by Lamarque and Olsen:

it means that the reader of a literary work has to be seen as involved with a constant change of perspective, implying a constant change in the premise of the literary appreciation of the work.<sup>30</sup>

The solution for this problem is to establish a distinction between fact and fiction even if “some propositional content might be factual in nature it might none the less serve a fictive purpose”.<sup>31</sup> This stance, when applied to the preface or to the content of *Tsugaru*, will clear up the mixture of fact and fiction in the presentation of information.

There is a shift into a lengthy biographical account of Dazai’s life. On the one hand, this information can be read as interesting facts about the author and aspects of his life that remain points of interest to this day. For example, a *suicidal Dazai* and the legend that has formed around his eventual “love suicide” death in 1948. However, the main question that should be asked regarding this detailed biography is: Is it necessary to know this information in order to read *Tsugaru*? Even for a reader not familiar with Dazai and his legend, this information can be misleading when reading *Tsugaru*.<sup>32</sup> The preface even goes to the extent of providing a detailed list of names which are not presented within the work itself. The majority of names in *Tsugaru* are given only as a single letter; e.g. N or S and so on. Revealing the names of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Lamarque and Olsen, op. cit., p. 285. Here Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is being used as a case study and a counterargument is presented against John Searle, “The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse”, in *Expression and Meaning*, 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 284.

<sup>32</sup> Regarding this legend, Matsumoto Katsuya calls it the “太宰神話” or “Dazai Legend”; see Matsumoto Katsuya 松本和也, *Shōwa Jūnen Zengo no Dazai Osamu: “Seinen”, Media, Tekusuto* 昭和十年前後の太宰治——「青年」・メディア・テキスト, Hitsuji Shobō ひつじ書房, 2009.

actual people on which these characters were based does not enhance the reading. It can be said that blurring or simplifying certain information, such as a name, can vice versa *enhance* the reality in a fictional work.

The tone of the preface then shifts into analyzing *Tsugaru* following this lengthy biographical information regarding Dazai's personal life, beginning with the following:

If this survey of Dazai's career has emphasized his personal problems at the expense of his artistic achievements, it is because the facts surrounding the composition of *Tsugaru* may provide a clue to the origin of these problems—not so much by what the book says, as by what it tries to hide.<sup>33</sup>

There is, in fact, very little information surrounding the author's intentions behind *Tsugaru*, even though this is a topic frequently brought up in academic discourse. This passage, as well as much of the following portion of the preface, relies heavily on two elements: first, the content of the work itself and, second, work done by Shōichi Sōma, a very well-known biographer and researcher of Dazai. The latter, Sōma, is referred to at the end of *Return to Tsugaru* in the “Suggestions for Further Reading” (p. 189) as “Sōma Shōichi. “*Tsugaru ni tsuite*”. Afterword to *Tsugaru* (...).”<sup>34</sup> The content of this afterword was later included in Sōma's 3-volume biography of Dazai.<sup>35</sup> Comparing the content, it is obvious that *Tsugaru*'s translator was strongly influenced by Sōma's work. This stance of reading *Tsugaru* as a fictional-non-fiction is expressed in the aforementioned Sōma afterword:

However, before *Tsugaru* is a gazetteer, it is a literary work. It is a type of ‘fictional world’ created with the materials of *Tsugaru*'s people and climate to investigate the origins of the author's life, and to find the proof for his own existence within. I cannot deny the stance to evaluate *Tsugaru* as a literary autobiography; however, it is difficult to agree with the contents presented as a narrative of facts. I repeat that *Tsugaru* is a novel.

<sup>33</sup> *Return to Tsugaru*, op. cit., p. xxii.

<sup>34</sup> Sōma Shōichi 相馬正一, “*Tsugaru ni tsuite*” 「津軽」について, in Dazai Osamu 太宰治, *Tsugaru* 津軽, Tsugaru Shobō 津軽書房, 1976.

<sup>35</sup> See Sōma Shōichi 相馬正一, *Hyōden Dazai Osamu 評伝 太宰治*, Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1982–1985. The section referred to is in Volume 3. Later this biography was edited into a 2 volume set in 1995.

To ignore this simple premise and attempt a study of *Tsugaru* would result in a futile effort separated from the intentions of the author.<sup>36</sup>

One of the more evident features of this influence is in how the content of *Tsugaru* is tied in strongly to the author while maintaining the fictionality of the work. Switching between a fictional mode and historical (factual) mode by using the pronoun “narrator” or the author’s name “Dazai” presents a paradoxical reading. In other words, it presents a reading mode/filter of *Tsugaru* as a fictional-non-fiction. Touching upon the reunion with “Take” in chapter five, there is a paradoxical explanation given in the preface:

This is no doubt how Dazai wished *Tsugaru* to be read, and it is certainly the most aesthetically satisfying interpretation of the book. It gives an almost cathartic effect to the narrator’s search for Take and to Take’s emotional outpouring in the concluding pages. Unfortunately that final passage, which is as it were the key to the appreciation of *Tsugaru* and has deservedly become a *locus classicus* in Dazai’s work, is ninety percent fiction. Unfortunately, that is, for those who assume that Dazai’s account of his wanderings is completely true.<sup>37</sup>

Up until this passage, the preface for the English translation of Dazai’s *Tsugaru* has suggested heavily that the work *is* true; that is to say it is presented as a true account. This sudden shift of tone in the preface, between the fictional narrator of the story and the actual writer of the story, runs the risk of being not only confusing to a reader but also establishing a filter for reading. Then a detailed account of what really happened between Dazai and Take is provided although this is not narrated in the work. Westerhoven then asks: “If the last, most celebrate pages of *Tsugaru* are fiction, what guarantee do we have that the other pages are closer to the truth?”<sup>38</sup>

Regarding the English translation of *Tsugaru*, there was a book review published on June 6th, 2015, in the English newspaper The Japan Times. This article generally praises the work itself while criticizing the translator’s shifting focus on reality and fictionality in that the “introduction is merciless in its examination of this issue, as though he were rummaging

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<sup>36</sup> Translated from Sōma 相馬正一, op. cit. (1976), p. 209.

<sup>37</sup> *Return to Tsugaru*, op. cit., p. xxiii.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. xxv.

through a magician's papers in search of secrets never to be shared".<sup>39</sup> This issue between the work and the intention of the author is addressed by Peter Lamarque in the following:

Literary works have authors, of course; they are the product of a creative act (a real act from a real agent) but the constraints on interpretation, and the determination of coherence and value, that serve to characterize the literary work, are independent of the individual author's will.<sup>40</sup>

The preface for the English translation of *Tsugaru* can be very misleading in the sense that it suggests the author's intention(s) *can* be read in the work. However, as has been mentioned multiple times, there is very little information about Dazai's intentions surrounding *Tsugaru* and how it *should* be interpreted or read.

Finally, another misleading feature of the "Translator's Preface" is the authoritative nature of presentation. In other words: the translator as an authority on the translated work. This can be deceiving because, firstly, the translator has (probably) gone to extensive lengths in order to deliver a translation; secondly, the order in which the information in the preface is presented. In Genette, the order in which the information is presented becomes an important factor on *how to read* a work of literature.<sup>41</sup> When placed at the beginning of a book, there is an indication that this is where the reading should begin. This is very closely tied into the "entryway" as argued earlier where the readers are being subtly influenced before ever starting the work itself by verbal and visual suggestions. A stronger suggestion will be the authoritative nature in which information is presented by what can be considered as a reliable source; e.g. a translator. However, as has been discussed, the "Translator's Preface" to the English translation of Dazai's *Tsugaru* contains information that is not necessary in order to read *Tsugaru* and also presents information that may establish a *fictional-non-fiction* reading filter.

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<sup>39</sup> Matt Treyvaud, "Osamu Dazai's travel guide 'Return to Tsugaru' is more concerned with people than place" <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/06/06/books/book-reviews/osamu-dazais-travel-guide-return-tsugaru-concerned-people-place/> (accessed October, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Lamarque, *The Philosophy of Literature*, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> Genette, op. cit., p. 218.



## 5. Conclusion

In Genette's paratextual context, the "entryway" for a literary work can be heavily influenced by visual items such as the cover, title, table of contents, preface, etc. In the case of Dazai Osamu's *Tsugaru* there is a considerable deviation from the original work which will almost undeniably have an effect on the manner in which it is read. Beginning with the translation of the title from *Tsugaru* to *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*, it can be said that the English translation is a different book completely. Furthermore, on the front cover of the book the verbal and visual cue "Reminiscences by Osamu Dazai" and quotes from well-known translators/researchers/authors on the back cover change the mode in which *Tsugaru* is read. In other words, it shifts the mode of reading from (possible) fiction to non-fiction. However, this is contradicted within the "Translator's Preface" which presents *Tsugaru* as a kind of hybrid between fiction and non-fiction. Even readers familiar with issues such as the "Watakushi-shōsetsu 私小説" or "I-novel"<sup>42</sup> in Japanese literature may be influenced by the outward appearance of *Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp*.

In regards to the "Translator's Preface", there is a tradition in the inclusion of this kind of preface. However, even in the traditional sense, there may be misleading and possibly incorrect or outdated information included in the preface. When placed at the beginning of the book, the preface serves as a part of the "entryway" and can potentially establish a filter for the reader. This means that when designing the layout of the book, the placement of information that could essentially affect the entire reading of the work needs to be deeply considered. For example, instead of having the preface placed at the beginning of the book, it could be placed toward the end of the volume as a type of *supplemental* reading for readers who might be interested.

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<sup>42</sup> For more information see Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, Stanford University Press, 1996.