



# Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu (Princeton Legacy Library)

*Alan Stephen Wolfe*

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Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) is one of Japan's most famous literary suicides, known as the earliest postwar manifestation of the genuinely alienated writer in Japan. In this first deconstructive reading of a modern Japanese novelist, Alan Wolfe draws on contemporary Western literary and cultural theories and on a knowledge of Dazai's work in the context of Japanese literary history to provide a fresh view of major texts by this important literary figure. In the process, Wolfe revises Japanese as well as Western scholarship on Dazai and discovers new connections among suicide, autobiography, alienation, and modernization. As shown here, Dazai's writings resist narrative and historical closure; while he may be said to serve the Japanese literary establishment as both romantic decadent and representative scapegoat, his texts reveal a deconstructive edge through which his posthumous status as a monument of negativity is already perceived and undone. Wolfe maintains that cultural modernization pits a Western concept of the individual as realized self and coherent subject against an Eastern absent self--and that a felt need to overcome this tension inspires the autobiographical fiction so prevalent in Japanese novels. *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan* shows that Dazai's texts also resist readings that would resolve the gaps (East/West, self/other, modern/premodern) still prevalent in Japanese intellectual life.

Originally published in 1990.

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