

Setting sun by dazai osamu: a family battle that affects a whole nation

[Family](#)



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Close inspection of *The Setting Sun* by Dazai Osamu allows one to see a particular family battle changing times that are affecting a whole nation of people. Paralleled in many ways by the author's own reality, we see how this deep message is more than just a fiction story. As a nation, Japan had just surrendered to the U. S. ending their participation in WWII. With the end of this battle, a new one on the home front began. In a sense, the tradition of Japan died with the war; there is a definite passing of a generation/era of people. The country is now caught in a state of shock as they try to piece together new lives. This is by no means a simple task when tradition is pulling from one side and an influx of modern ways and ideas are pulling from the other. Through the analyzation of Mother, Kazuko, and Naoji, the notion of a nation struggling to grasp a new modern identity while coping with the decline of a social order that has stood strong for so many years is unfolded from beginning to end creating mixed feelings of hope and depression for the people of the setting sun.

Due to WWII, Kazuko and her mother must leave Tokyo and establish residents in nearby village. Kazuko's brother, Naoji, has been fighting in the war and upon its conclusion, comes home to his sister and mother with a terrible drug addiction. Naoji has an artist friend who acts as a mentor/drinking buddy. The death of the mother shows the passing of a generation, and the suicide of Naoji exemplifies the feelings of depression and hopelessness that float over Japan. Kazuko becomes the heroin of the story when she creates a positive experience in the middle of this chaotic time. She bears a child which acts as a symbol for a fresh start and new hope during a time when that is just what is needed.

The beginning scene of the novel is a great description for the type of women that Mother was. By explaining how she eats her soup or “wee wee’s” in the garden, we can see that she is looked at by her children as being a good aristocrat. She had class, but was not afraid to act in her own ways. Eventually people were forced to take care of her due to her failing health, but never once do you see her attitude change to the negative. As she began to die, she never complained at all about her condition. She is among the last of a generation of good aristocrats; her ideals and morals about how life should be lived are dying with her, while the ways of the new times are rushing in with the new aristocracy. “Victims. Victims of a transitional period of morality. That is what we both certainly are.” She takes pride in the fact that she has allowed her children a connection to the good of the old days while they attempt to handle the transition into the modern world. This is evident in the way that she treats Naoji on his arrival back home. He receives the same amount of love as Kazuko even while he blatantly disrespects and defiles his body and culture. Her death creates a new life in Kazuko, while playing a part in the ultimate death of her son. Her role in dying sums up her role in the novel, “as her pulse was being taken by the nurse, watched over by Naoji and myself, her two children, my beautiful mother, who was the last lady in Japan.”

Kazuko has lived with her mother from beginning to the end. She has treasured the time spent with last of the true aristocrats. When the war has ended, she has to deal with so many issues that a feeling of despair seems to lurk over her character. She makes it clear that love and revolution are what makes the people go, “Before the war, even during the war, we were

convinced of it. Since the defeat, however, we no longer trust the older and wiser heads and have come to feel that the opposite of whatever they say is the real truth about life they (revolution and love) are so good that the older and wiser heads have spitefully fobbed off on us their sour grapes of a lie.” Feeling alienated by her own class of people (due to their actions), she looks to Naoji’s artist friend Uehara for a sense of belonging and passion. She writes a series of letters proclaiming her love for him. In the end, she is able to have a child by him. This act in the novel takes us into a deeper issue. Modernity is once again made evident with the role of Christianity in the novel. The birth of her child symbolizes the rebirth that you can have in Christ, as well as symbolizing the rebirth of a nation. As Kazuko witnessed the deaths of her mother and brother, it is surprising yet relieving to see her character end the novel with a new positive hope. This child is her way to cope with the coming age, and it is her gift of life to the child that also allows her to handle the deaths of the very family that has made her who she is for so many years.

Naoji has developed many more thoughts and feelings on the state of his nation compared to his other family. Mother only looks at the past, Kazuko looks at both wondering what to do, and Naoji takes an active role in saying to hell with all of them. The reasoning for such strong feelings can be noticed at once in the novel. The fact that we know he does not like the present aristocracy, that his mother’s people are the only true ones, makes us dig for an answer as to why. Some of these feelings appear to have come from fighting and risking your life for a country and people, only to lose and have them turn their backs on you. Deep resentment is built up do to this, and as <https://assignbuster.com/setting-sun-by-dazai-osamu-a-family-battle-that-affects-a-whole-nation/>

a way of coping with it, Naoji takes to drugs and eventually alcohol. Getting caught up in Marxist theory and ideas of Christianity are the first signals to the incoming modern world. The way Naoji handles these and the dying of the old aristocrats (his mother) is a very good explanation for his habits. The friends that he makes are just as superficial as his hourly lovers. Naoji is depressed at the fact he fought for what he believed in, and since it failed, he wants nothing to do with the new world that is entering. He seems to appreciate the new ideas and thoughts that make up modernity, but the powers at be that determine how those ideas will be filtered down become his enemy. Knowing all this, we understand why he decides to spend the rest of his days in drunkenness and sexual pleasure. The fact that he was born into a family of aristocrats eats at him. He is ashamed of the class he makes up because of what they have turned into. They have in a sense taken away his pride, leaving him naked to the new cold world, “ Merely because we were born into such a family, we are condemned to spend our whole lives in humiliation, apologies, and abasement, like so many Jews.”

This aristocratic family parallels the country it resides in. Being able to carry honor and class for so many generations, and now, to have it all stripped away leaves the both in a state of shock and disarray. The old die off with the memory of what was held deep in hearts. The new, fresh minds of the day are rotting away in bars and brothels with physical pleasure being the method of choice as opposed to mental pleasure; there are also those like Kazuko, who are able to witness the full picture and make a critical decision on her own about what to do. As we saw, she chose life as her answer. Not only is she making the most of what is left of hers, but she is also bringing a

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new one into the world with the hopes that it can bring back the honors of an aristocratic family that seems to be no more.