William O. Gardner, Swarthmore College
“Komatsu, Kansai, and Diaspora”

**Abstract:** Through the operation of the novum, a transformative fictive historical or technological development, science fiction and disaster novels produce skewed histories of the past, present, or future: simulations in which one key variable has changed (Suvín, Csicsery-Ronay). In the case of Osaka-based writer Komatsu Sakyō (1931-2011), these simulations have profoundly geographical consequences. My presentation will explore how Komatsu’s SF disaster narratives imagine alternative “Japanese” futures by displacing (and sometimes re-placing) both “Tokyo” and “Japan” at the symbolic center of national identity. This geopolitical decentering is featured in both the biological warfare scenario of Fuku katsu no hi (Resurrection Day, 1964); as well the satiric novel Nihon apachi zoku (The Japanese Apache Tribe, 1964), in which junk-eating mutants from Osaka’s postwar ruins overtake Japan. Similarly, through the submersion of the entire Japanese archipelago and the resulting diaspora, Nihon chinbotsu (Japan Sinks, 1973) and its sequel (2006) posit the decoupling of “Japanese” identity from the geographical entity of Japan. Finally, Shuto shōshitsu (The Capital Vanishes, 1985) stages a simulation of 1980’s Japan in which the capital of Tokyo literally disappears under an impenetrable fog. Komatsu’s novels constantly call into question the relationship between center and periphery, even as they often ultimately reconstitute nostalgic and patriarchal discourses. I will probe how Komatsu’s simulations both reference and transcend an Osaka/Kansai positionality, employing the dynamics of decentering and defamiliarization to question, and sometimes to confirm, broader geopolitical and cultural givens.

Michael P. Cronin, College of William & Mary
“Mastering the Local: Tanizaki and His Critics”

**Abstract:** After moving to Kansai in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) carried out an extended ethnography of the region in essays and novels. Two texts in particular assert Tanizaki’s mastery of local speech and customs: “Watakushi no mita Osaka oyobi Osakajin” (A Personal View of Osaka and its People, 1932) and Manji (1928 – 1930), which in a complicated act of literary ventriloquism, the Tokyo native wrote in the voice of an Osaka woman, assisted by two “dialect consultants.” These texts elicited critical comment from several local figures, who disputed Tanizaki’s characterization of Osakans and his rendering of Osaka dialect. Grounding their critical authority in claims of local authenticity as natives or long-term residents, Tanizaki’s critics advanced an alternative notion of their hometown and its idiom as confusing, corrupted, unstandardized—essentially unmasterable. The writer Uno Kōji (1891-1961) consolidated this discussion of Osaka’s “yayakoshii” character. Oda Sakunosuke (1913-1947) and later Kōno Taeko (1926 - ) take up the notion in their own critiques. The exchange among Tanizaki and his critics provides an opportunity to consider the literary and linguistic politics of local and national, voice and text. This paper examines Tanizaki’s ethnographic impulse and his critics’ nativist response in defining Osaka (its language and its “spirit”) within and against Japan at a pivotal moment for both the city and the nation. It then considers the competing claims of mastery and authenticity, and their relevance to what Oda identified as “Osaka’s potential.”

Mary A. Knighton, College of William & Mary
“The Provincial Writer’s Prison Break: The Case of Kono Taeko”

**Abstract:** Kōno Taeko’s (b. 1926) reputation for sadomasochistic and ghostly tales of female aggression, sexual appetite, and revenge precedes her, epitomized by her Akutagawa Prize-winning “Crabs” (Kani, 1963) and more sensational “Toddler Hunting” (Yōjigari, 1961). What this reputation obscures, however, is what difference Kōno’s Osaka origins might make to better understanding her literary corpus. Admittedly, locating Kōno as an Osaka writer has its limits and must first overcome a few hurdles: first of all, her work’s subject matter and style resist “I-novel” approaches to her biography; in fact, early on she left Osaka for Tokyo, then Tokyo for twelve years in New York. Her “home” was stable, however, in Japan’s literary bundan: she long remained an active member of the Akutagawa Prize Committee. Kōno, we might say, is the sort of writer who seeks to escape a provincial destiny -- or devise instead her own genealogy. Even so, Kōno’s critical studies of Tanizaki, and concern with Tanizaki’s Kansai authenticity, appear to say more about Kōno than it does about Tanizaki. In this talk, I explore Kōno Taeko’s criticism and fiction, particularly Hei no naka (Behind walls, 1962), with an eye to Kōno’s Osaka background and the view of critics such as Okuno Takeo who label her senchūha, the wartime generation. Doing so opens up new readings of Kōno’s fictional world via Osaka and her experiences of war there; indeed, it may even alter the way we look at Kōno’s literary project overall, not least her critical aesthetic of masochism.