
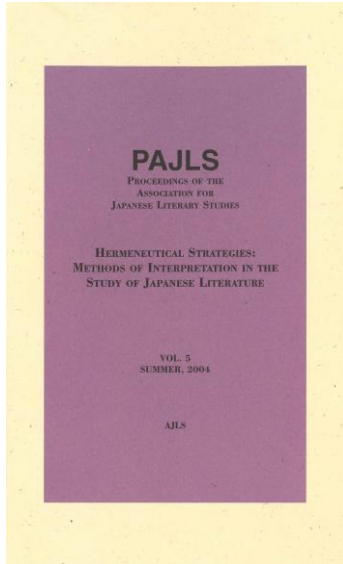


“Japanese Female Writers Watch a Boy Being Beaten by His Father: Female Fantasies of Male Homosexuality, Psychoanalysis, and Sexuality”

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**JAPANESE FEMALE WRITERS WATCH A BOY BEING BEATEN  
BY HIS FATHER:  
FEMALE FANTASIES OF MALE HOMOSEXUALITY,  
PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND SEXUALITY**

Kazumi Nagaïke

Features of male homosexuality are not conclusively limited to issues surrounding male (sexual) desires and their idealization. This is shown precisely in the fact that many (Japanese) women concern themselves so much with depictions of male homosexual subjects, both through writing and reading imaginative narratives concerning male homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Considering the fact that (Japanese) women writers (Mori Mari, Kōno Taeko, Okamoto Kanoko, Matsuura Rieko, to name but a few) pursue particular themes of male homosexuality grounded in imaginative diegesis, it becomes apparent that, in the process of exploring incredibly complex (female) gender formations and relations, male homosexual fantasies can (and should) be positioned as one of the initiating discursive points from which female desires are originated (and are subconsciously repressed). In order to demonstrate that the discourse of female sexuality incorporates male homosexual fantasies into its context, in this paper I shall specifically explore a psychoanalytic approach, basing my primary analysis on Sigmund Freud's famous article "A Child is Being Beaten."

In "A Child is Being Beaten," Freud investigates the complicated structure of female fantasy in relation to female sexual desires, considering the conditions and effects of the degrees and types of female subjectivity. In terms of the narrative which Freud presents,

- 1) on the first level, the child is being beaten by the Father: the impulse of sexual desire is represented as sadistic;
- 2) on the second level, I (the referent) am being beaten by the Father: the impulse of sexual desire is represented as masochistic, and the situation is subjectified;
- 3) on the third level, I (the referent) am watching the child being beaten by the Father: the impulse of sexual desire is represented as scopophilic, and the situation is objectified.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in contemporary Japanese society, the significance of a particular genre of *manga* comic books, called *yaoi*, can be characterized in terms of idealized female fantasies concerning male homosexual relationships.

Freud does not direct his attention to the fact that almost all of his female subjects fantasize the beaten child whom they are “watching” in the third stage as a boy; in contrast, Freud points out explicitly that the beaten child in the first stage could be either a boy or a girl. It seems clear that the structure of fantasies concerning male homosexuality written by Japanese women writers can be analyzed within the framework of the third stage, which clearly manifests sexual desires arising from the female gaze directed at the (sexual) interaction of two men (the boy and the father).

The female desire to watch (or fantasize) male homosexual eroticism, as analyzed by Freud, can be seen in a number of narratives written by Japanese women writers. The following passage from Kōno Taeko’s “Yōjigari” (Toddler-Hunting) clearly indicates the way in which the heroine, Akiko, contextualizes Freud’s theory of women fantasizing male homosexual eroticism:

As the dream world spread out about her, Akiko would plunge herself into it, her pulse beating faster and faster and her skin all moist, and she would reach ecstasy, losing all self-control.

Two figures always appeared in this strange world: a little boy of seven or eight, and a man in his thirties. The details of their personalities and activities varied slightly each time, but the age gap remained constant, as did their relationship of father and child....

*-You’ve been a very bad boy, the father starts. I’m going to have to teach you a lesson.*

*A crash as the father whacks the boy across the face, almost knocking his head off. The child staggers under the blow, and then gets back on his feet straightaway, trying to bear the pain. But he is unable to resist touching his cheek furtively.*

*-Hasn’t Daddy warned you time and again not to do that? I suppose it takes more than one lesson to make you understand.*

*The father issues an order to someone, and an alligator belt is placed in front of him.*

*-Take off your clothes. The child does as he is told, and the father begins whipping his buttocks with the belt....*

*Another lash, and more blood spurts out from another spot: the two streams trickle down the boy’s thigh, as if racing each other. The flow stops halfway down his leg—the blood has already dried. The scene is, after all, taking place in the full heat of the summer sun.*

*-Hit me on my back, Daddy, the boy begs.*

*-I was leaving that till last. There is no hurry.*<sup>2</sup>

Here, critical features of female sexual fantasies are constructed in terms of a totalizing picture of systematic psychological domination. There is no doubt that Akiko's daydream of the father-son relationship manifests the female psychological characteristics which Freud explored as the third stage of the psychological (and sexual) structure of female fantasies—a female referent is watching a boy who is being beaten by his father.<sup>3</sup>

However, I would like to point out the discernible incompatibility between "A Child is Being Beaten" and "Toddler-Hunting" in terms of (un)stated origins of eroticism and sexual desire. In "A Child is Being Beaten," Freud exposes the total convergence of three stages of female sexual fantasies and their relation to female sexual excitement; Freud clarifies the fact that the fundamental components of female beating fantasies are mediated through female sexual arousal. However, while he is sensitive to the mechanisms of sexual pleasure of female subjects, the (sexual) desire and eroticism of the active agents involved in the (three-stage) narrative of the beating fantasy are left untouched. We, the readers of Freud's article, have a right to wonder whether or not the beating father obtains (sadistic) sexual excitement, and the beaten boy obtains (masochistic) sexual excitement. In contrast, Kōno's intent in "Toddler-Hunting" seems to be the creation of a different version of the beating fantasy, which makes the necessary modifications to the text of sexual pleasure, in order to demonstrate the complexity of female sexual identities. In the meta-fantasy narrative of "Toddler-Hunting," Kōno thus enriches the depiction of the beating father and the beaten boy with incestuous, homosexual, and sadomasochistic eroticism. Here, what is important is that the eroticism of the active agents of the meta-fantasy (the father and the boy) is clearly stated. When the beaten boy demands more beating from his father, saying "*Hit me on my back, Daddy,*" the degree of eroticism in the scene is drastically elevated. The father then replies that "*I was leaving that till last. There is no hurry.*" The father's reply to the boy's erotic demand suggests that his (sadistic) sexual pleasure is also driven by this beating interaction. The depiction of eroticism in the beating fantasy in "Toddler-Hunting" is therefore clearly permeated with both the

<sup>2</sup> Kōno, pp. 59-61.

<sup>3</sup> Gretchen Jones points out that, when Kōno wrote this novella, she was not aware of the existence of Freud's article. However, the thematic and structural similarities between "Toddler-Hunting" and "A Child is Being Beaten" are not coincidental; both works suggest the prevalence of unified structures of female psychological ambivalence regarding male homosexual fantasies.

father's sadistic excitement and the boy's masochistic pleasure.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the fact that the characters' (especially the beaten boy's) sexual excitement is clearly stated needs to be explored further, in order to explore the practical reality of Akiko's (female) subjectivity.

Freud's view concerning subconscious female sexual desires, especially the scopophilic drive (I am watching the boy being beaten by the father), seems to function as the starting premise from which Akiko associates her sexual desire with the effects of the scopophilic situation in her fantasy world. It would seem beyond doubt that the theoretical significance of the scopophilic orientation involves endowing women (as creators of this meta-fantasy) with an omniscient perspective that functions to control the (erotic) male-male relationship. This act of 'watching' interactions between men can be viewed as a form of subversive initiation, which disturbs the male-dominated framework of gender roles (what Eve Sedgwick calls "homosocial" contexts). Laplanche and Pontalis summarize Freud's analysis of fantasy narratives as "*stage-setting*."<sup>5</sup> In the same way, Akiko 'stage-sets' her own psychological phenomena, directs what happens on the 'stage' in her own way, and watches the resulting erotic, male-homosexual show as a member of the audience.

However, issues relating to (female) sexualities in "Toddler-Hunting" are complicated to such an extent that they are not limited to contexts of scopophilic desires and pleasures. The textual fantasy concerning Akiko's sexual desires and eroticism definitively engages her as both subject and object of her sadomasochistic orientation. Akiko's actual masochistic tastes are rewritten and reconstructed in the different text of her fantasy world. In any analysis of "Toddler-Hunting," it is important to note that there is a consistently reproduced continuity between the protagonist's sadomasochistic orientation (especially her masochistic inclination) and the various fantasy scenarios presented with regard to the father-son relationship. In order to explore the female psychological mechanisms of Akiko's fantasy world, we need to ask such questions as: Why does Akiko grant the boy the power and authority to seduce his father, as well as the erotic capacity to enjoy this sadomasochistic act? Why is the subject of masochistic desire in the meta-narrative of Akiko's fantasy not a woman like herself? Since these semantic questions may represent characteristic features of psychoanalysis, their answers may also be discovered by means of psychoanalytic concepts

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Rebecca Copeland for her insightful comments regarding the boy's articulation of masochistic pleasure.

<sup>5</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 14.

such as projection, identification, dissociation, thus providing Akiko with the possibility (and impossibility) of being both the desiring subject and the desired object.

There is a gender-coded reason why the masochistic agent in Akiko's erotic daydream should be a boy. The story's sexual subtext, which the existence of the boy in the meta-narrative seems to provide, implies that Akiko's eroticism originates from her act of simultaneously identifying herself with and dissociating herself from the semantic of the boy. In other words, Akiko is the boy (the boy is her double), but paradoxically Akiko is also not the boy (the boy is her surrogate). Considering that the primary sexual drive of both Akiko and the boy centers on masochistic representations, we can say that the boy is undoubtedly organized as Akiko's alter ego. However, when a distinction between Akiko and the boy is drawn in terms of their gender difference, the structure of their respective sexual realities (and fantasies) becomes more complicated. The conceptualization of gender difference cannot be completely ignored in analyzing the dialectical conflict involved in Akiko's separation from and synchronization with the boy in terms of their differing sexual manifestations.

In that case, a question regarding female psychological orientation arises: Why is this play between two tensions, identification and dissociation, required in order to represent the formation of female sexuality (and fantasy). The discourse of the supposed impersonal subject (the boy, who is dissociated from Akiko's subjective orientation) is closely associated with the female struggle involved in having a (sexual) self which is entirely vulnerable.

Nakatani Katsumi views Akiko's fantasy as representing a female sexual ambivalence regarding her subconscious desire for motherhood and its ultimate failure.<sup>6</sup> However, if we limit our analysis of Akiko's attachment to the boy (both in reality and in meta-fantasy) to a consideration of her refusal of (and desire for) motherhood and reproduction, this risks implicitly essentializing female sexualities within a framework of 'compulsory' motherhood (and the reproductive function). Any discussion of Akiko's masochism (and her male homosexual fantasy) needs to transcend the scope of an essentialized concept of female motherhood. Freud's theory of female sexuality may possibly be read as reflecting the negative attitudes of a man who promotes what he believes to be a curative methodology with regard to the supposedly perverse sexualities (and desires) of women. Freud asserts that women's masochistic preferences are essentially antithetical to the classic female

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<sup>6</sup> Nakatani, p. 31.

sexual complex regarding masculinity; the original and initiatory function of female masochistic desires converges in a totalization of the ambivalence and instability inherent to female sexuality. In such a context, Akiko's masochistic preference may be favorably accepted and smoothly objectified, since no implications of prohibition or taboo are ascribed to what Freud sees as the fundamentally masochistic experience of female sexual identity. Yamauchi Yukito dialectically views Akiko's masochism as an effect of the (inevitable) transition from the female "productive body" to the "pleasure-oriented body;" according to his analysis, Akiko's female body is signified as an unproductive body, which moreover has experienced the aftereffects of tuberculosis. As Yamauchi says, "when 'productive sexuality' becomes 'unproductive,' it becomes apparent that sexuality itself exists purely for freedom and pleasure."<sup>7</sup> Mizuta Noriko also suggests a correlation between sublimation of sexual pleasure and deviation from reproductive function in Kōno's works.<sup>8</sup>

As Yamauchi and Mizuta point out, in Kōno's literature sterilization (and the autonomous female refusal to reproduce<sup>9</sup>) relates specifically to female involvement with a masochistic sexual orientation. However, as psychoanalysts such as Freud and Lacan point out, the establishment of female sexual identity (or female identity itself) never attains a well-balanced order, insofar as it is always signified through the medium of a "lack" (natural castration). Thus, it remains problematic to conclude that Akiko's masochism results from an "unproductive sexuality" which is purely sublimated and integrated into a perverse, but subversive process of sexual pleasure. Rather, as Mizuta suggests, Akiko's masochism should be considered as unraveling the various threads of sexual constructedness; however, this process is not completely positive, since this conceptualization of an emergent female sexuality (Akiko's masochistic pleasure) may yet produce new kinds of repressive texts, which are still trapped in the framework of established gender standards. Thus, we should ask: "Which repressive texts facilitate female psychological imbalance in terms of the authoritative power of the 'phallus' in the Symbolic Order?"

Feminist psychoanalysts cannot but agree that women's psychological response to the negatively established paradigms of female sexuality is symbolized by such terms as prohibition, taboo, guilt, and shame. Transgression of the patriarchal property law is never allowed to

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<sup>7</sup> Yamauchi, p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Mizuta, p. 241.

<sup>9</sup> The issues of reproduction and sterilization in Kōno's literature (exemplified by Akiko in "Toddler-Hunting," Yūko in "Kani" [Crabs], Ukiko in "Fui no koe" [Unexpected Voice], and Fumiko in "Aritakaru" [Ants Swarm]) can be explored in terms of the value and validity of female "body" discourse.

women, who are not endowed with the penis/phallus, the symbol of patriarchal dominating power; since the realm of sexuality is originally signified and conceptualized in terms of a penis/phallus-oriented construction, female sexuality is never represented as a signifier within the patriarchal power structure. The following passage suggests that Akiko seems to take the initiative in her sadomasochistic play with Sasaki, her lover, and to be distanced from any guilt feelings regarding her enjoyment of her 'perverse' sexual orientation:

The night before, Akiko had wanted to add a little variety to their usual routine, and she'd looked round frantically for something to help. Finally, she hit upon a pearl necklace.

"They're not real," she'd said, handing them to him.

"Hmm. Hey, not bad." Sasaki dangled the necklace from his fingertips to tantalize her.

Then, gripping it tightly, he circled around her. Akiko was already so aroused she felt as if every nerve in her body was concentrated in the flesh of her back.<sup>10</sup>

Akiko's masochistic involvement is apparently explored in relation to her subjective sexual desire; therefore, it reflects the dynamics of (female) gender configurations, which show the possibilities of reinterpreting and reshaping the dominance of gender myths. However, when a woman takes the initiative in sexual acts and actively enjoys a form of masochistic 'pleasure' which is unrelated to the female reproductive function, such characteristic aspects of the female masochistic inclination become problematic. In other words, in attempting to cage up female masochistic sexuality in the subconscious, women's subjective orientation and ideological position as (sexually) active agents are displaced. Women's characteristic perspective related to their own sexual identities (and desires) should not be signified and articulated within the context of the patriarchal system; when this occurs, the psychological development of female masochism can never escape complicity with the imbalanced scenario created by established gender-oriented mechanisms. Thus, when female masochism is closely associated with the notion of female subjectivity—i.e. women's original intention of enhancing their sexual pleasure through active involvement in sadomasochistic acts—elements of prohibition and taboo are immediately activated.

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<sup>10</sup> Kōno, p. 62.



Women's act of integrating their own sexuality (in terms of a masochistic orientation, in Akiko's case) may thus paradoxically be interpreted as a (conscious or subconscious) submission to the inevitable tension of prohibition and taboo consistently attached to any discourse involving the autonomous aspects of female sexuality. The following passage discloses Akiko's psychological ambivalence, after becoming involved in the reality of sadomasochistic play:

As she soaked, Akiko would keep an eye on the changing-room, which she could keep in sight because the separating doors had been drawn back. Were there any cute little boys with their mothers? Wasn't even one going to come over and join her?...Today, as a result of last night's wild abandon—closer in fact to an act of self-annihilation—Akiko longed more than ever for a little boy to appear.<sup>11</sup>

Here, we should ask why Akiko desperately craves for an interaction with little boys after her experience of sadomasochistic play? As indicated in the following quote, Akiko's seemingly vague answer to this question is that little boys represent a purifying process:

Little boys inhabited such an infinitely wholesome world—Akiko always had the impression that it restored and purified her. Its simplicity was so all-encompassing that anything out of the ordinary about her could pass without notice there. Little boys went along with her in her games—sometimes they almost seemed to egg her on.<sup>12</sup>

Akiko develops this emphasis on the purification process associated with boys precisely because she is still subconsciously subject to the taboo against initiating enjoyment of the 'perverse' desires and pleasures of 'pervasive' sadomasochistic play. Thus, while Akiko seems to indulge in her sadomasochistic orientation with Sasaki on the conscious level, she still subconsciously attempts to balance the ambivalent features of female sexualities (sexual pleasures) through the mediation of these boys' identity as a purifying force.

The beaten boy implies a subtext in which Akiko's psychological ambivalence toward her own sexuality must be projected onto his erotically charged body. Melanie Klein views such projective identification as a self-defense process of the unconscious, which "projects" the psychological confusion and anxiety caused by its split and repressed ego onto the other, in order to restore its own mental balance. In this context, the act of projecting repressed impulses which the subject cannot control onto the other represents the very basis upon which the (homosexual, masochistic) boy's significance emerges in Akiko's male

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<sup>11</sup> Kōno, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Kōno, pp. 67-68.

homosexual fantasy. Akiko projects the repressed components of female sexuality (especially her initiatory masochistic pleasure) onto the boy, and thus attempts to escape from the dilemma of dealing with her own sexual repression through identifying with and dissociating from the boy, who is now erotically endowed with female (masochistic) sexuality. Kaja Silverman analyzes the epistemological impact of the boy in the male homosexual formation of female fantasies as a sexual “surrogate” in the following way:

By turning herself in fantasy into the “whipping-boys,” the female subject is in turn given imaginary access to this “borrowed” femininity through the image of the male body. Femininity is thus both radically denatured, and posited as the privileged reference point by means of the curious relay that is set up between these two versions of the beating fantasy.... Though her identification with the “whipping-boys” in phase 3, the girl establishes an imaginary connection not only with a feminized masculinity, but with that difference.<sup>13</sup>

As Silverman points out, insofar as the boy is signified in terms of a “borrowed femininity,” ‘its’ gender difference is blurred (the boy is/is not a man/woman); this figure thus incorporates divergent sexual components. For women, the boy is an idealized and subversive sexual “surrogate” which acts to balance female sexual ambivalence. In the context of the meta-narrative of Akiko’s fantasy, the boy therefore constitutes a surrogate by which Akiko can balance her conflicting impulses regarding masochistic sexual pleasure and its relation to automatic psychological functions of prohibition and feelings of guilt. The fantasy of a male homosexual, sadomasochistic interaction both re-inscribes and nullifies Akiko’s access to the means of masochistic initiation in terms of the following process:

- 1) Akiko’s ambivalent, uncontrollable female sexualities are projected onto the boy in the meta-narrative.
- 2) The boy who is involved in an erotic sadomasochistic relationship with his father represents an initiated body which is sexually desired by Akiko, as well as a figure with which she can identify and thus synchronize her own masochistic sexual pleasure with his; the boy’s masochistic pleasure in the meta-fantasy thereby needs to be clearly articulated and is definitively synchronized with Akiko’s masochistic pleasure in reality.

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<sup>13</sup> Silverman, pp. 203-204.

3) However, at the same time, Akiko is paradoxically eager to distance herself from the erotically sexed body of the boy, since any clear recognition of subjective female sexual pleasure needs to be deactivated, consciously or unconsciously. And such a dissociating process from the erotically desiring (and desired) body is successfully accomplished, simply (but in a sufficiently complicated fashion on the subconscious level) because the clearly established gender difference between them (Akiko as a biological female and the boy as a biological male) brings the distance between them into sharp relief.

The female fantasy of male homosexual, sadomasochistic conduct explicitly contains elements of objectification and subjectification of female sexual identity which clearly reflect the disavowal and repression of the female sexual ego in reality. In the process of smoothly organizing her sexual mechanisms, Akiko imaginatively represents her masochistic pleasures and displaces their relation to any potential feelings of guilt and repression. Akiko is consequently required to bring her sexual ego into conformity with the prevailing standards of the patriarchal social structure by both identifying with and dissociating from the sexually constructed body of the boy.

Freud's "A Child is Being Beaten" thus provides a number of significant starting points from which we can analyze the contexts of female sexualities and fantasies. However, Freud's discussion of female fantasies of male homoeroticism should be explored more deeply, precisely because the subtexts of these narratives contain more complicated, subversive issues regarding female sexualities than Freud could ever have expected. For example, female fantasies of male homosexuality should (or could) be considered in relation to such topics as the correlation between fantasy and female sexuality, women's misogyny, female desires for bisexuality (and androgyny), the meta-fictional structures of male homosexual fantasies, issues concerning pornography directed at women, and so forth. Psychoanalytic discourse provides a theoretical space in which issues of gender are de-textualized and re-textualized, so it can undoubtedly still serve to inspire feminist and gender studies. However, in following this inspiration we must not simply apply ready-made psychoanalytic principles; instead, we must challenge, explore and develop them, in order to search for new approaches with regard to formations of gender and sexuality.

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