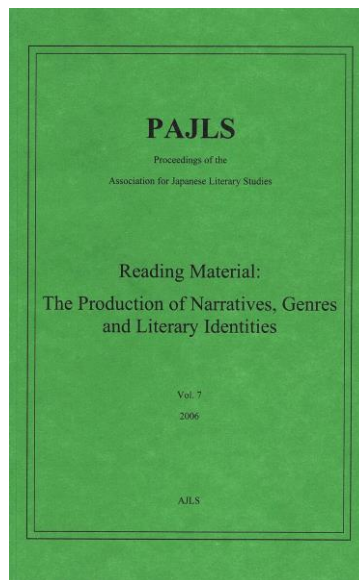


“Aposiopesis and Completion: Yoshiya Nobuko’s
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Aposiopesis and Completion: Yoshiya Nobuko's Typographic Melodrama

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The importance of the mode of dissemination of a work operates on a number of levels, and here I will talk about some of those as they come together in one seemingly minor aspect of the work of popular fiction writer Yoshiya Nobuko – her use of ellipses. In such typographical markings, we see the nexus of historical and material conditions of the readership and reproduction of the text, some of the author's personal interests (which are of course embedded in that history as well), and aesthetic effects.¹

Aposiopesis, which I will use to refer to Yoshiya's use of ellipses, signifies a silence in lieu of completion of a statement, with the sense that the listener would understand the implications of what is missing. That this is an absence whose meaning is still understood, suggests that there is an implied way to complete the sentence and that the listener would understand this drive for completion, in concept if not in language. This concept provides an interesting way to think about the position of the reader and reader community who might do the work at filling in such gaps. In the case of Yoshiya, some of the overlapping reader communities whose inferences we might try to discover are those who identify as “girls” (*shōjo*) and, more generally, the modern reader who already recognizes certain genres and media to which he brings related reading habits.

Yoshiya Nobuko (1896-1973) wrote actively from the 1910s until her death in 1973, serializing her novels primarily in girls' and women's magazines. Once her popularity took off in the 1920s, she went on to become one of the most commercially successful Japanese writers of the twentieth century. Her public persona developed in tandem with her popularity as a writer, and gradually fans came to know of her romantic relationship with Monma Chiyo, a woman with whom she lived for most of her adult life and whom she adopted in order to form a family unit and to be able to pass on her assets.

¹ Some portions of this discussion that focus on the cultural background of the novel and Yoshiya's biography have been published as "Not That Innocent: Yoshiya Nobuko's Good Girls," in Jan Bardsley and Laura Miller eds., *Bad Girls of Japan* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 64-79. An interesting aspect of this lecture that, for better or worse, cannot be replicated in written form was the representation of ellipses in speech. The talk contained many repetitions of the phrase "dot, dot, dot," and this became a topic of our discussion.

Yoshiya first published in the form of reader submissions to magazines such as *Shōjo sekai* (Girls' world) before publishing paid serialized fiction beginning in the late 1910s. Her recollections as a reader of the magazine speak to the ways reading constituted a visual experience, as well as to the importance of newly gendered marketing and audience identification:

The first volume of a magazine that was bought for me was when I was in my third year of elementary school, . . . from Hakubunkan, *Shōjo sekai* – the inaugural issue.

The cover had a picture of a girl among blooming pinks with a dove perched on her hand.

I was so happy to receive the magazine each month that I remember the covers quite clearly.

I suspect the reason I was so pleased stems from the fact that, before, it was my older brothers who would receive a magazine, *Boys' World*, and I would have to steal it to read whenever they happened to leave it sitting unread on a desk.

I remember being so happy that now I could read a girls' magazine and have it all to myself.

Whenever *Girls' World* was delivered from the bookstore, I would spread it out in my hands and savor every corner of it. Taking great care not to soil it, I would neatly pile each issue on my desk and enjoy the way the stack grew higher and higher.

Around that time, the frontpieces were drawn by Ikeda Shōen...with lovely names like *A Doll's Banquet* and beautiful pictures of seasonal flowers appropriate for the month. I would sit gazing at them for a long time.

At that time, there was certainly nothing like movies or revues for a young girl to go to in a rural town, and perhaps it was because I did not have much opportunity to seek out such pleasures that the single 10 sen issue of a girls' magazine each month could inspire the passion of a girl and give her such immense pleasure.²

Once she begins to submit to such magazines herself, first as a reader-contributor and then as a paid one, she becomes a more integral part of what a number of historians of the *shōjo* have called the "*shōjo no kyōdōtai*" (the girl community) that the new print culture for girls' enabled; she was also one of the people determining its style and content.³

² Yoshiya Nobuko, *Tōshojidai*, Sakka no Jiden vol. 66 (Tokyo: Nihontoshosentā, 1998), p. 33.

³ For example, books by Kawamura Kunimitsu use this term. See *Otome no inori: Kindai josei imēji no tanjō* (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten, 1993), and *Otome noshintai: Onna no kindai to sekushuariti* (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten, 1994).

In considering her style, it is also useful to note that Yoshiya's career coincided with the beginnings of popular cinema, as well as with what I see as a related increase in certain types of visual qualities of print culture. Her novels were adapted into film versions to total over forty movies, and she wrote opinion pieces for cinema magazines. She also wrote "photographic fiction," which I have talked about at the AJLS conference in St. Louis where text is accompanied by posed photographs.⁴

In her prose fiction, the use of exclamatory marks, romanized words, and ellipses creates visual gaps in the flow of *kanji* and *kana* that increase the visual impact of the text beyond or in addition to any drawn illustrations. These effects clearly stem from the qualities of movable type and its relationship to visual possibilities for fictional texts. On the one hand, the move away from calligraphic, or even woodcut engraved characters, to standardized fonts means a loss of a certain visual interest of the text. At the same time, other modern forms of storytelling, including the cinema, photographic illustration, and more cheaply reproduced color illustrations such as those found in the *kuchi-e* that Yoshiya enjoyed as a child, constituted another set of competing media with new visual impact that helps them to outshine the standardized look of the printed word. It is worth noting the variety of visual qualities all found within the category of mechanical reproduction; in the case of a movie or photographs all of the copies of the same work have the illusion of looking the same. With printed words in standard fonts, there is potentially the illusion that all works, once published, look approximately the same. (Perhaps this accounts for the practice of publishing the *genkōyōshi* and photos of authors' studies in *zenshū* anthologies that Jordan Sand spoke of in the keynote address of this conference). It should be important then to look at strategies used by writers, as well as publishers and graphic designers, to distinguish works from one another in terms of surface visual effect and how that superficial look might interact with the plot and content that readers "read" in the more traditional sense. The exclamation point and ellipsis are two tools available for this strategy, and they have, I would argue, a sensory impact beyond their "meaning" as characters.

Most of my examples here are from Yoshiya's novel *Yaneura no nishojo* (Two virgins in the attic). Michiko Suzuki rightly points out that, although Yoshiya is known as a writer of popular fiction, we should not think of this particular novel as *taishū bungaku* since it was one of the few that was not mass media serialized, going directly to book form from Rakuyōdo in 1920; she seems to have felt especially free to write as she pleased rather than catering to the magazine audience.⁵ Still, this novel's formal qualities and themes do stem from and overlap with those of popular fiction. In fact, it is in *Yaneura*, ironically, that she really lets them blossom and plays with these qualities as artistic tools, even moving beyond what she does in the works published in the mass media.

The novel begins as the heroine, a schoolteacher-in-training Takimoto Akiko, is announcing to her dorm mistress, the missionary Miss L, that she will leave that dormitory,

⁴ Sarah Frederick, "Novels You Can Watch/Movies You Can Read: Visual Narrative in 1930s Women's Magazines," *2000 AJLS Annual Proceedings: Acts of Writing: Language and Identities in Japanese Literature*. Fall, 2001. pp. 254–274.

⁵ Michiko Suzuki, "Developing the Female Self: Same-Sex Love, Love Marriage, and Maternal Love in Modern Japanese Literature 1910-39," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2002. p. 27.

having been unable to resolve various doubts about her academic motivation and faith in Christ. Most of the novel takes place at the YWCA ("YWA" in the Japanese text) dormitory to which she relocates. The YWA assigns her the only vacancy, a strange "triangular blue room" in the attic. After her quilt is set fire by a lamp one night, her neighbor Miss Akitsu saves her by putting out the fire.⁶ This is the beginning of the friendship between the two women who develop a romantic relationship over the course of the novel. Akiko is a timid and dreamy young woman, who always seems alienated from her surroundings. Miss Akitsu appears a more spirited and rebellious woman who helps draw Akiko out of her shell. Another major character in the novel is Ban Kinu, who had a relationship with Miss Akitsu before marrying, and who, towards the end of the novel, wishes to either renew the relationship with Akitsu or to commit double suicide with her.⁷ After the tension and jealousy surrounding Ban Kinu, Akitsu and Akiko choose to leave the YWA together and find "their own path" together outside the protection of the dormitory attic.

Sometimes ellipsis markers in Yoshiya are used as though exclamation points (and often together with them) to imply that the intended meaning exceeds the word itself. Akiko's first entry into the "attic" (the *yaneura* of the novel's title) demonstrates this type of usage. The attic is where her relationship with Miss Akitsu develops and the site of her coming of age and sexual awakening. In a passage that is partly about language itself, she describes the attic:

What name could she use that would encompass all of that? A word to articulate that strange world! She grasped for a word.

Akiko once more looked up higher and higher into the rafters. And the next instant – a sign flashed across her mind, from out of the many words in her vocabulary, as if it had been carefully hidden away just for this exact moment today – like a golden key suddenly appearing out of a useless old box of toys, that one word – letters appeared to form it, as if written across the sky. Clearly and distinctly –

.....ATTIC.....ATTIC.....ATTIC!⁸

The sequence of passages about the attic signals how important a space it will be and that its importance will extend beyond what can be captured in one language alone. The English "attic"

⁶ I will refer to this character as Miss Akitsu because she is called by her family name throughout (Akitsu-san). Akiko is a given name by which Takimoto Akiko is referred to throughout. This is part of what indicates that the narrative is from Akiko's perspective, and emphasizes that Akitsu is older and more self-assured. However, this choice of translation downplays another aspect of calling Akitsu by her last name; most female characters in fiction from that period are called by their first name unless the position of the narrator prevents that. The use of "Akitsu" adds a level of gender ambiguity that "Miss" cannot express.

⁷ Yoshikawa Toyoko, "Seitō kara 'taishū shōsetsu' e no michi: Yoshiya Nobuko Yaneura no nishojo," in Iwabuchi Hiroko et. al. eds., *Feminizumu hihyō e no shōtai* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1995), p. 132.

⁸ Yoshiya, *Yaneura no nishojo* (Tokyo: Kokushokan, 2003), (Original publication Tokyo: Rakuyōdō, 1920) pp. 50-51. Ellipses and dashes in original. Throughout the novel, Yoshiya uses ellipses markings in six dot increments, which I will preserve. For my own ellipses, I will use the standard formatting, (. . .). "ATTIC" is written in roman letters in this passage.

and the Japanese "*yaneura*" are used at different points, and sometimes the *kanji* for *yaneura* are glossed with the pronunciation *attikku* in *hiragana*. Even so, these extensions into different languages are insufficient and, in the passage quoted above, extra dots and an exclamation point are apparently required to extend this meaning fully.

In terms of plot development, most of the book is uneventful, but Akiko's life is tinged always with pathos and emotional intensity because of the controlled gaps and close-ups on that emotional state; the combined use of "!" and ellipses work to create a sense of eventfulness in the absence of major plot movement. Mary Ann Doane in her discussion of *Electrocuting an Elephant* notes that a sense of contingency was emphasized through "ellipses" as erasure of "dead time," an elision that is "the condition of a conceptualization of the 'event'."⁹ In fact, there is not necessarily an event or even "dead time" that is elided in the phrase ".....ATTIC.....ATTIC..... ATTIC....." (or similar passages such as ".....jealousy....."), but the ellipses serve to highlight the word itself, as the significant concept in play, while also implying that those words have a meaning and location in time beyond themselves. Doane comments that in early film "the limits imposed by both the frame and the length of the reel resulted in the necessity of conceiving the event simultaneously in terms of structure, as a unit of time, as not simply happening, but a significant happening that nevertheless remained tinged by the contingent, by the unassimilable."¹⁰ Discovering the attic room (and the word for it) is made into a significant event that temporarily seems to stop time because of Akiko's surprise and delight, but the ellipses also suggest a sense that the "attic" is not yet fully represented. A passage on the next page confirms this, again with the use of ellipses:

Even before the concept itself, the very syllables "yaneura" were so attractive, conveying an ingenious beauty with their sound. And the word even included within itself symbolic references, evoking meanings of beauty and desire. For example, (rose) – (coral) – (first love) –(.....).....¹¹

The final ellipses suggest that the story of the attic is not yet over, and provide a forward motion and anticipation to a narrative that is not moving fast in terms of conveying plot. This whole sequence of reflections on the attic captures the place as a rich, significant thing, a sort of frozen symbol. But it also overfills the word(s) (the English "attic" and the Japanese "*yaneura*") with excess implication in a way that suggests potential change in their standard meaning, as well as forward movement to the story. It is this excess space that the relationship between the two young women enters and seems to fill rather naturally. Readers are invited to complete the statement, with that completion as a potentially dramatic act. The textual interest that these markings create for the reader provide, I would argue, an alternative to the standard drive for plots in adolescent girls' melodrama of the period – the marriage plot.

⁹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), pp. 159-60.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 141.

¹¹ *Yaneura no nishojo*, p. 52. The words mean "rose," "coral," and "first love."

Just as in many melodramas with marriage plots, a kiss is an important moment in the narrative.¹² The two young women sleep together in the attic:

In this cramped, blue, triangular room, that one bed of such rare beauty was enough. And so that one beautiful place to sleep was all the two used night after night.

.....Akitsu's linen pajamas have the soft scent of magnolias.....and unnoticed that scent of the magnolia flower was transferred to the flannel sleeves of Akiko's own sleepwear.....so like a magnolia to slip its fragrance into the bedroom during the night.....their arms were resting as if entwined.....the hearts in each of their breasts softly ticking.....as if their two souls had disappeared into a tender dream without beginning, and without end.....a soft, pliant kiss.....a kiss like trembling and melting into a damp, red petal.....softly, tenderly flowing, sinking and surfacing, disappearing and melting into the replete then ebbing undulation.....¹³

Interestingly, the final ellipsis is doubled from six dots to twelve (the only instance of this that I can find in the novel). Here ellipsis is clearly both a matter of excess and elision.¹⁴ In much melodrama, a kiss is a culmination and resolution of the romance narrative with the woman kissing either the man to whom she becomes betrothed, or the one she would rather be with. And to some extent resolution appears here as well, as the nature of Akiko and Akitsu's relationship becomes a physical one. But the kiss that exceeds the physicality of the kiss itself, melting and disappearing into dots, both outdoes its purpose as resolution and chooses not to state the content of that resolution.

This is not prudish self-censorship I would argue, but works partly within the genre of girls' fiction romance and probably Yoshiya's own vision of romance between women whereby it retains a certain "purity," a concept of purity that she displays in both her fiction and non-fiction writings. Yoshiya does push many of the usual boundaries by having the women stay together in the end, and the eroticism of the above quote goes beyond that found in most *shōjo shōsetsu* of the 1910s. But rather than either avoiding the erotic, or making it utterly concrete, the strategic use of gaps and emphases (both typographical and narrative ones) creates its own sensory excitement.

The ellipses at the end of the passage produce a sense of extending beyond that moment and invite the reader to complete what is unsaid. In talking about early film, which as I have said

¹² Definitions of melodrama are outside the scope of this talk. An important work in this area is: Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess: with a new preface* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1995). Applying to Japan his argument that melodrama deals with questions of ethics in the context of modern loss of the sacred would require some consideration of different religious cultures. Yoshiya's characteristic use of Christian imagery would also be worth taking into account.

¹³ Yoshiya, *Yaneura*, p. 195. The final ellipsis is doubled in length (twelve instead of Yoshiya's usual six dots).

¹⁴ My use of "excess" is informed by Linda Williams's use of the term to apply to both melodrama and pornography, especially, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4, Summer 1991, p. 9.

stands as some presence for Yoshiya, who often attended it, Mary Ann Doane argues that the space caused by the blank moments between single frames is bridged often by stories of heterosexual romance, and she provides examples where kisses, expected and unexpected, form that bridge.¹⁵ In Yoshiya's novel, rather than feeling like something has gone missing in the ellipsis space, the reader is invited to fill in an ending and bridge it. But here it is the ending asked for by a sort of "subculture" of girls rather than the one expected by dominant culture.¹⁶

Of course, most of Yoshiya's readers, including those who might have wanted to, did not have access to this alternative relationship as permanent lifestyle beyond girlhood, even if Miss Akitsu and Akiko do in the novel or Yoshiya did in real life, in large part thanks to her own financial success as a popular fiction writer. Most would not likely be able to complete such gaps in real life in this way.

Interestingly the author also provides for alternative completion of this story that recognizes the real circumstances of many of her readers. There is a sort of double ending to *Yaneura no nishojo* that explores two pathways for women like Akitsu. The first is the option Mrs. Ban, who has been married off by her father, takes in spite of her love for Miss Akitsu: suicide. Her choice is captured in a letter, which shows her melodramatic missed opportunities; she discovers how strong her strength of will to not marry is too late to survive it, and she is even too late to convince Miss Akitsu to die with her since she has fallen in love with Akiko. Akiko's jealousy towards Mrs. Ban is suddenly transformed to shock at the apparently inexorable nature of Mrs. Ban's story and her own fear of it being "too late" for Miss Akitsu and herself. Words fail repeatedly in this scene, with multiple dialogue paragraphs represented simply as "....." In fact, the final romantic ending between Akiko and Miss Akitsu is precipitated by their shock over the tragedy of Mrs. Ban. Mrs. Ban's life story is suddenly captured in the letter that tells her whole story, a story that could have been Akiko or Miss Akitsu's, or a reader's. The shock of that narrative leads to the emotional drama of the final chapter of the book where the two women create a second story.¹⁷ They reject a fixed story arc in favor of an open-ended path in the final passages of the book where they both kiss the wall of the attic and begin their life outside.

Still the darkness of the Mrs. Ban and the aposiopesis that it creates in the dialogue of the two women hangs over the end of the book. There remains both some hope on, an individual level, that a life like Akiko and Miss Akitsu's, which might be inassimilable to the dominant culture, might work and, at the same time, that sympathy for other completions of the story that

¹⁵ Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, pp. 204-5.

¹⁶ This is interesting to think about this in terms of the typography of censorship as well: the gaps in the self-censored texts as discussed in Jonathan Abel's paper. Similarly censorship is an intentional, if governmentally required, silence that often calls on the reader familiar with genres and the look of modern fiction to fill in the blanks. Such gaps emphasize perhaps a sense of community, and that community depends in some way on the text in question. Some communities might include: educated Japanese; radicals; the dirty-minded. And of course, depending on the flexibility and style of the given sentence each group might have more or less leeway in how they filled in the gaps.

¹⁷ This letter that arrives after her death creates the sense of "posthumous shock" described by Benjamin in the context of photography; there is in fact the appearance of a photo of Mrs. Ban and Miss Akitsu in their heyday. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 175.

most women readers of her community might practice is needed. But the artful use of typographical markings allows, even to those who do not have access to that life in reality, a sensorily rich experience in the world of fiction.