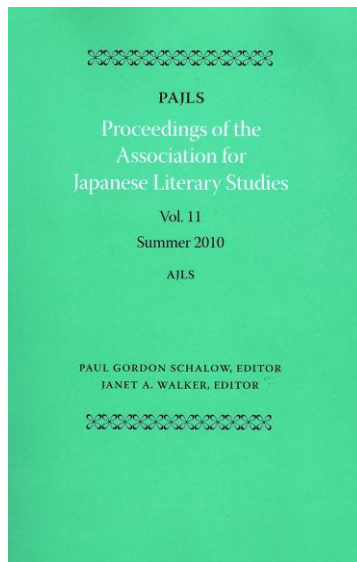


“Male Mother and Female Father, or Both in One:
Problematizing Gendered Parenthood in *Ariake no
wakare*”

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Male Mother and Female Father, or Both in One

Problematizing Gendered Parenthood in *Ariake no wakare*

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The representation of parenting in late-Heian and early-Kamakura court fiction is of great interest for a variety of reasons. In the first instance this is because the range of relationships represented is remarkably broad, reflecting and refracting a notable variety found in the historical record. A further reason for the interest of this topic is that there are a striking number of complexly gendered parenting relationships, particularly when it comes to step-parent/stepchild relationships. Given that *mamako ijime* (継子いじめ, the “tormented stepchild” motif), is such an ubiquitous trope in so much fiction, not just in the Heian era¹ nor just in Japan, but across many periods and cultures,² this topic should have a broad comparative interest. I also find that the anonymous late-twelfth-century court tale *Ariake no wakare* 有明けの別れ (*Parting at Dawn*),³ serves admirably to critique a whole range of other gender expectations, not just relating to step-parenthood, and as such integrates well with the focus of this conference.

This paper especially casts light on a ‘matched pair’ of unusual step-parenthoods, both of which relate to a pre-existing narrative (and plausibly real-life) social archetype, but imaginatively and provocatively subvert it by gender transposition. I hope to show that this is much more interesting than simply being yet another instance of the predilection *giko monogatari* 擬古物語 (‘classical tales imitative of *The Tale of Genji*’) have for playing with symmetries and inversions,

¹As examined in Ury 1981. She notes that matrilocality in Heian marriage should have lessened the incidence of stepchild abuse, as, in the event of the death of a child’s mother, her parents would continue to house and care for it. However, a child might be vulnerable to stepfamily machinations even when not in their direct care.

²For an interesting cross-cultural survey see Dundes 1988.

³Ôtsuki 1979.

a predilection rather summarily dismissed by literary historians such as Katô Shûichi⁴ and Konishi Jin'ichi.⁵ Even Donald Keene, though regretting the neglect these works have suffered (despite their evident popularity within a century or more of their appearance), largely echoes these judgments.⁶

On the contrary, one can make a case that *Ariake no wakare* raises serious concerns and a pointed critique, not only of strictly gendered and highly canonized fictional tropes of gendered parenthood, but also, quite plausibly, of actual social phenomena in the aristocratic family structure of the Heian and early Kamakura periods. In so doing, texts like *Ariake no wakare* may have had more influence than previously thought, not just on fictional narrative, but also on later memoiristic narrative, such as the early-thirteenth-century *Towazugatari* とはずがたり (*An Unrequested Tale*)⁷ by Nakanoin Masatada no Musume 中院雅忠娘⁷ (1258–early 13th c.).⁸

Parents, Step-Parents, Mentoring, and Inheritance

For a variety of reasons, including the vicissitudes of the literary canon, the disparity in number of manuscripts, and the availability of translations, *Ariake no wakare* is much less well known than the earlier, similarly crossgendering-themed tale *Torikaebaya* とりかへばや (*The Changelings*).⁹ Accordingly, it is hard to avoid presenting rather more plot-summary here than one would ideally like. Nevertheless, the tale is without a doubt so engaging and unusual that such detail is, in and of itself, of considerable interest. This is apparent even by comparison with *Torikaebaya*, and in ways which lead us directly into the topic of this paper. In *Torikaebaya*, the cross-dressing of the child protagonists is motivated by a clear case of symmetrical gender dysphoria shared by the half-siblings in question. The boy is feminine and wishes he were a girl; the girl is masculine and wishes she were a boy. The parental role is limited to acquiescence to their wishes. Although the gender-dysphoric element is relatively novel in the known history of classical Japanese tale literature, it had perhaps been partly prefigured by the non-gender-conformity of the lady in the short tale *Mushi mezuru himegimi* 虫めづる姫ぎみ (*The Lady Who Loved Insects*),¹⁰ if that tale indeed pre-dates *Torikaebaya*—both texts existed by the thirteenth century, certainly before 1200 in the case of *Torikaebaya*.

⁴Katô Shûichi 1979; see especially "Heian Fiction after the Genji Monogatari," pp. 188–97.

⁵"The twelfth-century taste for fantasy is usually dismissed as yet another manifestation of an aristocratic society in decline. *The Changelings* (*Torikaebaya* とりかへばや) has consequently been characterized as a work of fin-de-siècle decadence and described as "sordid," "bizarre," "lewd," "perverted," "sensual," and "shocking." Konishi 1988, pp. 96–98.

⁶"One senses everywhere in this work a corruption of the spirit that makes these aristocrats seem both familiar and contemptible." Keene 1989, p. 3.

⁷Also known as Go-Fukakusa-in Nijô 後深草院二条 (Lady Nijô).

⁸SNKT 50. Brazell 1973 translates an earlier edition.

⁹SNKT 26. A translation from an earlier edition exists: Willig 1983. An especially interesting study of *Torikaebaya* with regard to the focus of this paper is to be found in Pflugfelder 1992.

¹⁰One of the tales in the *Tsutsumi chûnagon monogatari* 堤中納言物語 (*The Riverside Counselor's Tales*), in SNKT 26. Translated in Backus 1985.

Ariake no Wakare immediately catches our attention by comparison, because the cross-dressing is motivated by the parents' socio-economic ambitions, and reinforced by divine guidance, not by the child's expressed gender-identity preference. Some way into the tale, after we have been told of the distinguished protagonist of this tale, who is one of the most accomplished young courtiers,¹¹ the narration explains in a key passage:

Well into adulthood, the Minister of the Left (*sadaijin* 左大臣) still had no male offspring, so he had no heir from his marriage, and the yin-yang diviners were consulted. He was very grieved and all kinds of prayers were offered, and then his wife became pregnant with this child, and apparently a divine revelation was made (*kami no shirube shimeshi-tsuge-tamau yau arikereba* 神の御しるべしめしつげたまふやうありければ). This must have been why the child was brought up to look rather differently from what one would expect. And with such a brilliant talent for the koto and flute, surely keeping the child indoors would have been a terrible waste.¹²

The opening of the passage just quoted explicitly focuses on the problem as a matter of gendered inheritance: 'otodo no, otonabi-tamau made, otokogimi mumare-tamawade, tsugi-owashimasu-majiki yo wo 大臣の、おとなびたまふまで、男君むまれたまはで、つぎおはしますまじき世を,' then, much more obliquely, the narrator clarifies that the child must have been a female but was evidently raised as a boy: 'kaku omoi no hoka naru on-sama ni mi-nashi-kikoe-tamaite shi narubeshi かく思ひのほかなる御さまにみなしきこえたまひてしなるべし.' The reference to the flute, the male courtier's instrument par excellence, is key to understanding this, as is the reference to the reluctance to keep the child in seclusion, as would be appropriate for an aristocratic girl-child beyond a certain age.

Readers primarily familiar with the *tsukuri-monogatari*¹³ tradition might be a little surprised at the parental mindset here, so focused is that tradition on the potential for making politically advantageous connections by having a daughter to marry into the imperial family, especially if such a dynastic marriage resulted in the opportunity to raise a future emperor in the family home as a result of uxorilocality. However, now that *kanbun* studies have a rather higher profile than heretofore, we are much more sensitized to the father-to-son transmission of the minutiae of court protocol, hierarchical precedence, and precedents for privileges, as preserved in *kanbun* diaries.¹⁴

¹¹ A *gon-chūnagon* 権中納言 (Acting Middle Counselor), and thus implicitly male. Ôtsuki 1979, p. 38.

¹² *Ariake no wakare*, Book I.ii.6, Ôtsuki 1979, p. 44. All translations from *Ariake no wakare* are my own, based on Khan 1998. Text references include the segmentations used in Ôtsuki 1969, 1970, and 1979: the book number is followed by the chapter number (Ôtsuki 1969 and 1970), then the section number (Ôtsuki 1979).

¹³ 作物語 "long court fiction".

¹⁴ In this regard, note especially the recent partial translation of the *Teishinkôki* 貞信公記 by Fujiwara no Tadahira 藤原忠平 (880–949), now accessible in an annotated excerpt with translation by Piggott and Yoshida 2008. Readers of French will find much that is à propos to the late-Heian period in Francine Hérail's translation of the *Shunki* 春記 by Fujiwara no Sukefusa 藤原透房 (1007–1057), excerpted in *Notes de l'hiver* 1039, Hérail 1994. The complete translation is found in Hérail 2001, 2004.

Accordingly, the scenario described here, although fanciful in terms of its resolution, seems well grounded in the socio-political realities of the Heian and Kamakura court regarding parental motivation.¹⁵

At this point, a short digression on gendered property inheritance should be countenanced. For a number of years I had wondered if the preoccupation with gendered inheritance in this tale was perhaps a symptom of court anxiety at the possible encroachment of samurai law inheritance practices, which were much more male primogeniture-oriented than courtier law. Given the dating of *Ariake no wakare* to the very end of the twelfth century (ca. 1196–1201, in fact), this had seemed plausible to me. I was also encouraged in this line of thought by a very unexpected parallel from Old French literature. I have explored elsewhere the remarkable similarities in theme, character, and narrative structure between this tale and the thirteenth-century Arthurian romance, the *Roman de Silence*.¹⁶ Both tales seem to be fantasy resolutions of aristocratic anxieties associated with gendered inheritance: what could you do if you only had a daughter but you needed a son?—You could raise her as a boy. And such is the broadly accepted explanation among scholars of Old French for the emergence of this theme in the *Roman de Silence*.¹⁷

However, after discussing this issue with historians of the Kamakura era,¹⁸ I am now aware that it was really later in the Kamakura era when samurai-law property-inheritance practices began to impact courtier law. So either *Ariake no wakare* was presciently addressing a future rather than a present issue, or the focus of concern is, in fact, rather different.¹⁹ By a very unexpected turn of events, indeed, the issue of parentally-gendered mentoring and court protocol transmission within families returns much later in the tale, and I think it is this restatement of the theme that offers a more nuanced and historically grounded explanation for this aspect of the tale.

A deeply moving subplot of the first book of *Ariake no wakare* involves the cross-gendered protagonist's deep sympathy for a young aristocratic woman who is being sexually harassed in her new home at her step-family's. I will examine in

¹⁵Each aristocratic lineage (*ie*) had journals that were particularly valued as sources of information. These became one pillar of a lineage's sense of self and status. While there was a natural desire to obtain and read journals from other lineages, it was quite difficult to do so. In many cases only the heir (*chakushi*) could view his sire's journal. High-ranking courtiers also used various means, including cliental relationships, factional bonds, and marital ties to get hold of the most important journals.' Yoshida Sanae, "Aristocratic Journals," in Piggott and Yoshida 2008, p. 17.

¹⁶Khan 2002. A complete translation of *Le Roman de Silence*, together with the Old French text, can be found in Psaki 1991.

¹⁷Cf. for example Kinoshita 1998.

¹⁸I am particularly indebted to conversations over many years with Ethan Segal, specialist in medieval Japan and pre-modern East Asia, at the Department of History at Michigan State University.

¹⁹"By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as the houses of the aristocracy segmented, journals came to be regarded as treasures passed down from earlier ages and as sources of both continuity and legitimacy. Houses with such journals came to be called 'houses with journals,' *nikki no ie*." Yoshida Sanae, "Aristocratic Journals," in Piggott and Yoshida 2008, p. 17.

more detail later how this abuse is framed and the very original way in which the theme is handled. At this point I want to examine its long-term consequences as they relate to the theme of gendered parenting.²⁰ The cross-dressed protagonist Ariake manages to rescue the abused girl, Tai-no-Ue 対の上, by virtue of his own assumed male gender and court rank.²¹ The girl is being pursued by her stepfather, the Major Captain of the Left (*sadaishô* 左大将), but the protagonist, hailed as the brilliant young son of the Minister of the Left, and having already attained the rank of Major Captain of the Right (*udaishô* 右大将), is able to abduct the girl with impunity and install her in the relative safety of his own parents' residence, as a consort. Not only does this offer greater protection to the vulnerable young Tai-no-Ue, but it also bolsters the protagonist Udaishô Ariake's male identity at court.

Shockingly however, it turns out that the young girl is already pregnant by her abusive stepfather. Outrageous as this is, nevertheless, because Tai-no-Ue now bears a male child acknowledged by the protagonist Ariake, this initiates changes in the inheritance dynamics that motivated Ariake's father, the Sadaijin, to raise his daughter as a son in the first place. Again, this is quite explicitly stated in the tale:

Morning and night Ariake's parents had grieved over their lack of a successor, and now [a child had turned up] that they could have as a successor, giving them some peace of mind (*ake-kure oboshi-nagekishi kata wa, isasaka kokoro-yasuku yuzuri-oki-tamaeru ni* あげくれおぼしなげきしかたは、いささか心やすくゆづりおきたまへるに). Nevertheless, it was now many years since they had first lavished their loving care on Ariake, and they were quite accustomed to his very prominent social position—not that his marriage was anything like the kind of marriage that was mandated by a bond from a former life (*sasuga ni ooku no toshi, nare-tamahinuru on-motenashi no uchi-hajime, amari kezayaka ni narabite wa, saki no yo no on-mi koso chigiri kotonare* さすがにおほくの年、なれたまひぬる御もてなしをうちはじめ、あまりけざやかにならびては、さきの世の御身こそちぎりことなれ).²²

So now the Sadaijin has a grandson, despite the anomalous circumstances of their child's marriage—actually a marriage between two women. The major plot-line of the narrative moves to the passionate relationship which is developing between the cross-dressed protagonist and no less a personage than the young Emperor, who is moving towards establishing what he evidently conceptualizes as a same-sex relationship with the attractive young Major Captain of the Right, Ariake. The Emperor's impulsiveness in consummating this relationship²³ eventually precipitates the major upheaval of Book I: consummation naturally means that the cross-dressing

²⁰Here I will note that because the cross-dressed protagonist moves through a dizzying range of court ranks both male and female, I have used the name "Ariake" for the protagonist in my translation to try to reduce the danger of confusion for the modern reader or listener.

²¹Book I.vi.23–24, Ôtsuki 1979, pp. 84–88.

²²Book I.ix.38, *ibid.* p. 120.

²³Book I.xi.46, *ibid.* pp. 138–44.

ruse is revealed to the Emperor, but since he persists in his ardour and young Ariake becomes pregnant, the days that the cross-dressing ruse can persist are numbered.

One extra-textual reason for this is a question of literary decorum. Remember that *Ko Torikaebaya* 古とりかへばや, the earlier version of *Torikaebaya* no longer extant, is roundly criticized in the *Mumyōzōshi* 無名草子 (*An Unnamed Book*)²⁴ of ca. 1202, for including a scene where the cross-dressed female protagonist gives birth while in male identity and court robes, and his masculine coiffure comes undone in the throes of labour—most unseemly!²⁵ But another, text-internal, reason is that the Sadaijin's family can now have it all: they have a male grandson, thanks to Tai-no-Ue's suffering at the hands of her stepfather, and now their daughter can become an imperial consort via another ruse. They have always maintained that they actually have *two* children, a boy and a girl, but the girl is being raised in seclusion at a rural villa. Now they announce that their son the Udaishō Ariake has suddenly died, and what is, in fact, their only child can now give up cross-dressing, and after enough time to grow her hair, return to court as her own sister to become favourite Junior Imperial Consort (*nyōgo* 女御) of the Emperor.²⁶ Bearing the Crown Prince then ensures her elevation to Empress (*chūgū* 中宮).²⁷

This first book is the part of *Ariake no Wakare* that has most in common with the extant *Torikaebaya*, though, as we have seen, the differences, especially the differing focalisation, are especially important. It is in the second and third books where *Ariake no Wakare* departs much more from *Torikaebaya*, establishing *Ariake* as a much more nuanced tale, especially when one considers that the relative degree of closure at the end of the first book might have seemed sufficient for the original author to have laid down the brush definitively at that point, after an apparent “euphoric return to the norm.”²⁸ For the major crisis of gender and inheritance is resolved, in the sense of the transmission down the male line of the family's accrued body of knowledge on court protocol and politics. The protagonist's father is now able to pass on his body of knowledge accrued over a lifetime at court, to his acknowledged grandson.

Stepchild Abuse and Rewriting Gender and Narrative Stereotypes

Looking more closely at the way the stepchild abuse is framed in a gendered perspective, we see that the import of this element goes far beyond the mere invocation of the stepchild abuse trope and then adding gendered inversion. Far from being obliquely alluded to, in the manner of some other “sensitively intimate” elements of the tale, the sheer nastiness of the stepfather's urging his stepdaughter

²⁴ Attributed to Fujiwara no Shunzei no musume 藤原俊成; Hiroshi 1976 and Marra 1984.

²⁵ Cf. the translation of this episode in Marra 1984, p. 409.

²⁶ *Ariake no wakare*, Book I.xiv.60–68, Ōtsuki 1979, pp. 174–93.

²⁷ Book I.xv.69–72, *ibid.* pp. 194–202.

²⁸ The phrase is from Gilbert 1980/81, and is very apropos here, as is her entire article with regard to *Ariake no wakare*, book 1, but, interestingly, not books 2 and 3.

to comply with his sexual desires through cajoling and outright threats is unsparingly depicted, and heightened by simultaneous commentary from the protagonist Ariake, who is spying on what transpires. This constitutes a clever inversion of the *kaimami* 垣間見 ‘peeping’ topos, where spying, far from providing an incitement to consummate the viewer’s desire with the female object of his gaze, the usual outcome, in this case actually incites the viewer to try to intervene and spare the girl the threatened sexual onslaught.

The framing of this scene guides the reader or listener inexorably to that interpretation. The scene is first prefigured by a gossiping group of female attendants who remark how odd it is that the Sadaishō, soon to be revealed as the abusive step-father, shows less interest than might be expected in his attractive youthful-looking new bride.

Although she looks just over twenty I gather that she must already be well into her thirties, so how remarkably young she is for her age! Hardly what one would call an unfortunate marriage for him. So [her husband’s straying] is really all the more unexpected. There is nothing so unreliable as a man (*kai-naki yo ni mo arazu. Nao omoi-yorumajiki midare yo. otoko bakari uki-mono nakarikeri* かひなき世にもあらず。なほ思ひよるまじきみだれよ。男ばかりうきものなかりけり).²⁹

Then the mother mentions how oddly her daughter is acting, neglecting her koto, and generally behaving in a withdrawn fashion. To which the girl replies:

‘I’ve been feeling so terribly unwell, and I really won’t know how to play it at all now.’ And diverting the mother’s attention with these words, finally the girl leaned back and stretched out to sleep.³⁰

Next, the girl’s faithful attendant Jijū 侍従 laments the girl’s vulnerable innocence, alluding to the shocking fact of the pregnancy:

The one person who truly looked out for her was her attendant Jijū, who could see that something looked amiss, and it turned out to be something rather noticeable (*jijū ga me ni, ayashi to me-todomuru koto mo idekinikeru* 侍従が目に、あやしと目とどむることもいでにける).

Worried that her young Ladyship had no idea about her situation, Jijū found a suitable opportunity and explained it all to her. I really wonder how the poor girl must have felt after that. Wondering, ‘How can I even live out the rest of the day!’ she just lay there overwhelmed by the sheer awfulness of her state.³¹

As the narrator skillfully builds up the scene from the vantage points and remarks of a variety of characters, the next on the scene is the Sadaishō himself.

²⁹ Book I.vi.19, *ibid.* p. 74.

³⁰ Book I.vi.20, *ibid.* p. 76.

³¹ Book I.vi.21, *ibid.* p. 76.

The Sadaishô came into the room and stretched out by the girl with a knowing leer. 'Don't worry about her Ladyship, she's busy overseeing the staff and won't come here.' Then he carried on meanly carping at the girl in his usual quite offhand way (*otodo wa, ito nare-gao ni iri-fushite, 'sashite mi-sashitamaheru koto areba, yo ni owaseji' rei no uchi-tayumi, imijiki urami-goto wo notamai-tsuzukuru ni* 大臣は、いとなれ顔こいりふして、「さしてみさしたまへることあれば、よにおはせじ」と、れいのうちたゆみ、いみじきうらみ言をのたまひつづくるに)³²

All this is being secretly observed by Ariake with horror, as a result of which, with many remarks on the wickedness of men, he eventually abducts the girl and incorporates her into his family, as described previously.

The choric framing of this episode is remarkable for its resonance with two other earlier court tales, effectively reorienting the reader's response to both of them. First of all is the parallel with *Ochikubo Monogatari* 落窪物語 (*The Tale of the Lady Ochikubo*).³³ That may seem strange to some readers. Surely one might object that although this is clearly a case of stepchild cruelty with the gender of the step-parent transposed, in the case of *Ochikubo Monogatari* the mother is not a sexual abuser. Not in person, to be sure. But does she not use her elderly uncle who lives in the same house, the Tenyaku no Suke 天薬の助,³⁴ as a surrogate phallus, quite explicitly instructing him to go downstairs to molest the hapless Lady Ochikubo?

When no one was near, the Kita no Kata summoned the Tenyaku and told him everything that had happened and of how the Lady had been shut up in the store-room. 'I want you to understand the situation (*saru kokoro omohi-tamahe* さる心思ひたまへ),' she concluded.

The Tenyaku no Suke was highly delighted; he smiled until his mouth reached round to his ears.

'Tonight you may go to her room,' she said (*yo-sari kano itaru heya e owase* 夜さりかのういたる部屋へおはせ).³⁵

In fact, the Kita no Kata, the Lady Ochikubo's wicked stepmother, is quite enraged to find that owing to the Tenyaku no Suke suffering a well-timed (for the Lady Ochikubo) attack of loose bowels, he has failed to "do his duty," being unable to muster the necessary strength to force open the barricaded door.

The Kita no Kata read the letters left behind by Akogi and was further angered to find that what she had planned to happen between the Lady and Tenyaku had not come to pass. She called him in to her and explained how the Lady had disappeared. 'Putting her in your charge was useless. She has run away like this. Didn't you become intimate with her?' (*chika-jikashiku*

³²Ibid. p. 78.

³³Fujii and Inaga 1989; translation (of an earlier edition) in Whitehouse and Yanagisawa 1965.

³⁴The Assistant Director of the Bureau of Medicine of the Imperial Household Department.

³⁵Fujii and Inaga 1989, p. 95. Whitehouse and Yanagisawa 1965, p. 78.

wa mono shi-tamawazarikeru ka 近々しくはものし給はざりけるか) According to these letters which were left behind, you did not.³⁶

It seems no stretch of the imagination for that episode to be invoked here. In so doing it makes the point that stepchild abuse is practiced by *both* genders, and in the manner in which it sends one back to the scene in *Ochikubo*, it also stresses that even sexual abuse can be effectively practiced by both genders.

A marked difference, however, occurs in the narrative framing of these scenes. In *Ochikubo*, not only does the Lady escape molestation, but the Tenyaku's pathetically embarrassing excuse is also clearly intended to evoke derisive laughter:

The next night I decided to make her give way to me, but when I was there I found the door fastened against me from the inside. I could not open it and stood outside on the boards until midnight and caught a cold. My abdomen began to roll 'koho, koho.' I took no notice of it for the first few times but when I made a last effort to open the door, a filthy thing happened. I was able to think of nothing else but what had happened and went back to my room, and by the time I had cleaned myself it was already dawn.³⁷

The upshot is very far from the 'parting at dawn' he and Lady Ochikubo's step-mother would have had in mind . . . By contrast, the narrative framing in *Ariake no wakare* focuses on the single-mindedness of the perpetrator and the dismay of the victim, and the molestation has indeed succeeded—repeatedly.

Ariake even goes further in terms of allusion, in that the association of step-parent abuse with abduction inevitably invokes the sequence in the *Tale of Genji* where Genji takes Murasaki into his household as an apparent step-daughter, rescuing her from an unhappy situation, but he unexpectedly (to her) transitions the relationship from step-fatherhood to husband, much to Murasaki's evident chagrin, at least at first.³⁸ *Ariake no Wakare* reminds the reader just how traumatic such a change in relationship must have been for Murasaki, and makes it harder to return to that episode with much sympathy for Genji. It may even be the case that this recontextualising of the parental-to-marital transition, or at least quasi-parental to sexual, is behind the similarly fraught change of relationship experienced by Lady Nijō in *An Unrequested Tale*.³⁹

³⁶Fujii and Inaga 1989, p. 119; Whitehouse and Yanagisawa 1965, p. 99.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸In *The Tale of Genji*, Murasaki is abducted in Chapter V, 'Wakamurasaki'; the consummation takes place in Chapter IX, 'Aoi' immediately following the death of Genji's principal wife, Aoi.

³⁹Lady Nijō writes in her diary that her fourteen-year-old self was astonished and confused upon the consummation of their relationship by Emperor Go-Fukakusa 後深草 (r. 1246–1259). The primary resonance is clearly with this episode from the *Genji*, but it is quite plausible that Lady Nijō knew *Ariake no wakare*, given her dates and milieu and her experience with Go-Fukakusa may echo Ariake's with the Emperor in Book I.xi.46. *Ariake* was still sufficiently widely read in Lady Nijō's time for its poems to be extensively excerpted in the *Fūyōwakashū* 風葉和歌集 of 1271. The twenty *Ariake no wakare* poems included rank it eighth out of the 198 *FYS* source tales. Lady Nijō may even have been involved in the compilation.

Step-Parenthood Recuperated

After such a distressing presentation of step-parenthood, it comes as some surprise then, that *Ariake no wakare* unexpectedly manages to recuperate a positive representation of step-parent/stepchild relations, in a manner as heartwarming as it is unforeseen. The boy child born from the sexual abuse suffered by Tai-no-Ue rises to the rank of Sadaijin despite his lack of parental backing. His biological father, the Sadaishô, is unaware of his existence, and his mother, Tai-no-Ue, takes orders and retreats from court life. He thus becomes totally dependent on the backing of his grandfather, the former Sadaijin, now Great Minister (*dajôdaijin* 太政大臣). [I will refer to this child as 'the young Sadaijin' to minimize confusion]. Unfortunately, the remaining conventional source of political mentoring is now a tetchy old man:

The lecturings and scoldings (*oshie-sainami-tamahu koto* おしへさいなみたまふこと) the young Sadaijin got caught up in from his grandfather, which I suppose were partly due to his being elderly, were quite unlike his grandfather's relations with the late Udaishô, and the young Sadaijin's grandfather would angrily reprimand him. Since his grandfather did not have many years left to live, the young Sadaijin stayed close at hand and served him.⁴⁰

As remarked earlier, a key element in gendered inheritance is the transmission of court protocol and experience, via kanbun diaries and mentoring by the older males in a young courtier's family. The young Sadaijin lacks the all-important nurturing mentorship that a father would have provided.⁴¹ Surprisingly, however, it turns out that he receives such mentoring from his aunt, the Retired Empress (*nyôin* 女院). Unbeknown to him, she is none other than the loving father (actually step-father!), the Udaishô Ariake, who apparently died when he was an infant. To complicate matters still further, the young Sadaijin has grown up to be a real *irogonomi* (色好み "libertine") in the manner of his real father, the Sadaishô, and is, in fact, nursing a highly secret sexual passion for his aunt, in ways that transgress so many relationships that we are beginning to lose track of them!

Thus, early in Book II the scene is set for this mentoring relationship:

Without missing a single day he would meet with Her Eminence the Retired Empress, and she herself had none of the customary reluctance arising from the distinction between men and women; she was even disposed to go so far as to instruct him absolutely truthfully in all the ways of court politics and protocol in part of their conversations (*makoto-makotoshiki michi-michi no koto made, kata e wa notamawase-oshiuru on-gokoro* まことまことしき道々の

⁴⁰ Book II.1.2, Ôtsuki 1979, p. 230.

⁴¹ Is there perhaps even an implication that the grandfather's lack of patience may also be attributed to his knowledge that the young Sadaijin is not his biological descendant? That would add another wrinkle to the depiction of step-parenthood.

ことまで、かたへはのたなはせおしふる御心), and it was quite unnerving and awe-inspiring for his lovelorn heart to feel so close to her. He felt quite self-conscious, and disturbed by his heightening passion for her, but it was a passion that must never be revealed.⁴²

Scenes of this nature are played out repeatedly, and become an essential part in the young Sadaijin's political education, as well as his *éducation sentimentale*. In framing the relationship like this, the narrative, having spared us nothing in the representation of how bad step-parent/stepchild relationships can be, now turns unexpectedly to show that they can be of great value, especially if the elements typically gendered male and female are complementarily combined within one and the same personage.⁴³ This seems remarkably imaginative, not just in terms of literary tropes of the 'wicked stepmother,' but in broader terms of gendered human relations, with implications that go beyond the boundaries of a purely fictional tale.

Conclusion

Thus, although *Ariake no wakare* might have come to a conclusion at the end of Book I, that would have constituted a more merely superficial presentation of the gendering of parenting and inheritance in the world of court tales and, by implication, of the world of polygynous aristocratic society of which it is a refraction. True, it would have offered a more explicitly trenchant criticism of society than most preceding works; but it would have been more a snapshot than an x-ray, more description than analysis. Instead, *Ariake no wakare* invokes the two-generation *Genji*-type structure over its full three books. In so doing, it not only offers a more nuanced and elaborate picture of the gendered causes and effects of human behaviour, but it also transits from a simple denunciation of aggressive and selfish male behaviour facilitated by the social constraints placed upon women, to what seems to me a startlingly modern explanation of how such behaviour replicates itself down the generations. In this explanation there is implicitly a degree of sympathy for all of the characters presented, both male and female.

I hope it is not too much modern psychoanalytical hindsight to suggest this, but rather a natural consequence of the way that the tale is presented—with a narrative sophistication that might well have led contemporary readers to conclusions similar to those of modern readers. This seems to be the basis for the relatively positive contemporary evaluation of *Ariake no wakare* offered in the *Mumyôzôshi*, where the style and tone are praised, implying that these situations

⁴²Book I.ii.2, *ibid.* p. 232.

⁴³Intriguingly, this is precisely the conclusion that Jane Tolmie comes to, regarding the *Roman de Silence*, in Tolmie 2009, developing the idea from Bloch 1986: "Following on from Howard Bloch's investigation of a 'refusal of univocal meaning' in the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence*, this article examines the poem as inviting critics to investigate the collapse of binary systems such as male/female, [etc]." Tolmie 2009, p. 14.

struck an empathetic chord, even though the supernatural elements are thought to be rather too disquieting.⁴⁴ By understanding the early-childhood case history of the young Sadaijin, we are naturally led to speculate that his *irogonomi* behaviour may resemble that of his true father, the Sadaishô, precisely because the Sadaishô could himself plausibly have experienced the kinds of loss and dislocation of human relationships visited on the young Sadaijin in the first book of the tale. Most importantly, these losses and dislocations are not dependent on the very fanciful element of cross-gendering. Surely any contemporary reader would have seen that these losses and dislocations were very much part and parcel of the aristocratic family life of the times.

Yet the cross-gendering has an important role to play in implicitly offering a vision of how family life could be repaired, not by fantastical ruses of cross-gendering, but by offering parents the kind of combined-gender experience that the protagonist Ariake has managed to come by through those fantastical means. In the second and third books, the young Sadaijin is presented as an increasingly sympathetic character, not just because we understand that his sexually driven behaviour is very likely a function of his childhood traumas. He also grows in personal stature because, under the tutelage of Ariake, now Retired Empress, he receives the kind of political mentoring that he has been denied by the early loss of his connection both to his biological father, the Sadaishô, and to his father figure, the "good stepfather" if you will, the cross-gendered Ariake.

Not only this, he also grows in personal stature because he repeatedly observes and admires the stable and loving relationship that the Retired Empress has managed to maintain with the Retired Emperor. On a number of occasions the explicitness with which these imperial retirees express their mutual affection is quite remarkably described:

Wondering whether Her Eminence might not be feeling rather better, His Eminence went over and lay down beside her, and stretched out very close to her—did he affectionately murmur something to her?—at which she put her head under her bed-ropes and from under the sleeve reached out and gave his hand a pinch, whereupon he burst out laughing (*nao kokoro-yoku mo obosarenu ni ya, yorifusase-tamaereba, ito chikau soi-owashite, nani-goto ni ka komayaka ni uchi-sasameki, kokoese-tamaeba, on-gao wo hiki-irete, on-sode no shita yori on-te wo tsumi-kikoese-tamau ni, uchi waraite* なほ心よくもおぼされぬにや、よりふさせたまへれば、いとちかうそひおはして、なにごとにかこまやかにうちささめき、きこえさせたまへば、御顔をひきいれて、御袖のしたより御手をつみきこえさせたまふに、うちわらひて).⁴⁵

Such intimacies fill the young Sadaijin with admiring envy. Furthermore, he must necessarily rein in his potentially damaging urges of sexual attraction for the

⁴⁴ Marra 1984, p. 418.

⁴⁵ Book II.iii.9, Ôtsuki 1979, p. 244.

Retired Empress, because she is so often in the company of the Retired Emperor, where their mutual love is manifested in their easygoing social relations, which often have more about them of affection between two male companions (such as sharing scornful remarks about the Chinese compositions of others)—for good reason, though not one known to the Sadaijin. Homosociality indeed.

In absolutely every respect, the young Sadaijin could not rank beside the Retired Emperor, and yet whenever he observed what an enviably close bond of affection the Retired Emperor enjoyed with the retired Empress (*nao kono on-chigiri no urayamasiki koto zo mi-kikoyuru ga tabi ni wa* なほこの御ちぎりのうらやましきことぞみきこゆるがたびには), he simply felt he himself could not go on living any more.⁴⁶

In addition, because of her earlier life as a man, in the same way that she knows about court politics and protocol, the Retired Empress knows how men are, all too often, with the opposite sex, and she can deftly pre-empt the Sadaijin's youthful ardour when they are alone together, which, exceptionally, is permitted because of their familial relationship. So the Retired Empress is not going to make the mistake that Fujitsubo does with Genji—another sexualized step-mother/step-son relationship that is being referenced here.⁴⁷

The result is that the young Sadaijin matures emotionally to the point where he formalizes his hitherto precarious relationships with the two other women he has been involved with. In the same way that the mentoring of the Retired Empress strengthens his political career at court, his romantic life is also solidified by her example. By the end of the tale we have every expectation that his by now firmly established and institutionalized family life will prove happy and resilient, much to the benefit of his growing number of children. A large part of this optimistic prospect for the future has been brought about by the curious double-gendered life experience of the Retired Empress. It seems impossible to deny that her combined male and female existences not only brought happiness and stability to her own romantic life—and the Retired Emperor often good-naturedly and even humorously comments on what a cracker of a handsome young fellow she once was⁴⁸—but it continues to bolster the happiness and prospects of her descendants.

Can we not, then, suggest that *Ariake no wakare*, for all that it is a late-twelfth-century work, constitutes, in fact, the very apotheosis of the concept of being “post-gendered”? Not in a sense that downplays gender—far from it. On the contrary, it offers an idealized vision where both male and female nature and experience are combined and in balance. It recognizes that this is only likely to be achieved in the most exceptional of circumstances, but it offers a very heartening vision of what human beings might work towards.

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 248.

⁴⁷*The Tale of Genji*, chapter 7 “Momiji no Ga” (紅葉の賀 “An Autumn Excursion”).

⁴⁸Book II.iii.8, Ôtsuki 1979, p. 244.

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