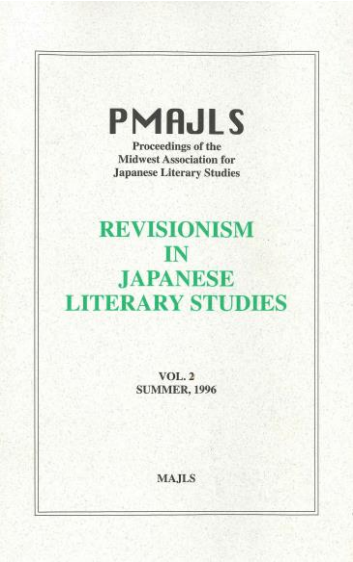
“Gender Differences in a Genealogy of Modern Love Stories”

Eiji Sekine

Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies 2 (1996): 313–334.



PMAJLS 2:
Revisionism in Japanese Literary Studies.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN A GENEALOGY OF MODERN LOVE STORIES

EIJI SEKINE
Purdue University

In Edo love stories, a couple in a relationship seems to constitute a predestined pairness, an axiomatically established inseparable bond from the beginning. The drama develops in such a way as to reconfirm the strength of their tie.[1]

The premodern notion of love and sexuality, based on ying-yang harmony was fundamentally challenged and confused in modern relationships when Western-inspired values of individuality and interiority of selfhood were imported and pursued. A relationship then necessarily implied a meeting between strangers within the binary confrontation between subject and object. In short, there was a sharp break or opening during the transition from Edo to Meiji, where a man and a woman became inevitably aware of the "distance" between them.

A gendered differentiation, however, continues from the past, exaggerating its binary distinction and hierarchical fixation. In the pursuit of modern selfhood and a modern world view, men and women have developed different perspectives in dealing with the gendered premise. Men have tried to explore a new modern self-image by conserving and utilizing the gendered binarism, while women have discovered a taste of freedom by trying to digress from the gendered system.[2]

I would like to discuss the three stages of development in modern expressions on sexuality by comparatively pairing

---

1 See E. Sekine, "Love and Sexuality in Tamenaga Shunsui," *Imaging/Reading Eros*, Sumie Jones ed., Indiana University, 1996.

2 See Mizuta Noriko, *Monogatari to han-monogatari no fūkei*, Tabata Shoten, 1993.

male and female writings at each stage. The three stages are here utilized as a working hypothesis in order to articulate historical changes in relationship with our thematic concerns. Quantitatively, the first stage, the Stage of Anxiety, may be characterized most typically by a number of works during the years 1900s and 1910s; the second stage, the Stage of Reconciliation and of Return to Traditionalism, peaked with works mainly written in the mid-1930s and early 40s; the third stage, the Stage of Uncertainty, developed from the 1960s and continuous to the present. The criteria for pairing male and female writings is that two texts should be written around the same time and share important characteristics thematically. Then, their subtle differences can be highlighted. This way of reading can shed light on the dynamics which frames modern writings on sexuality in conjunction with gender differences.

At the first stage, bitterness and insecurity in modern relationships are keenly expressed. Ishikawa Takuboku's *Rōmaji nikki* (石川啄木『ローマ字日記』Rōmaji diary, 1919) and Tamura Toshiko's "Ikichi"(田村俊子「生血」Live blood, 1911) are good examples to compare.[3] Both narrators express anger and anxiety, inspired by physical interactions with someone of the opposite sex. Yet, their anxiety reveals different directedness and visions

[3] The originals refer to Ishikawa Takuboku, *Rōmaji nikki*, Iwanami, 1992 and *Romaji Diary and Sad Toys*, S. Goldsten and S. Shinoda trans. Charles Tuttle, 1985, and Tamura Toshiko, "Ikichi," *Tamura Toshiko Sakuhin shū*, vol. 1, Orijin Shuppan, 1988. Quotations and page numbers are from the English translation for Takuboku and from the Japanese original for Tamura, E. Sekine trans. Important critical references can be found in Charles Inouye, "In the Scopic Regime of Discovery: Ishikawa Takuboku's *Diary in Roman Script* and the Gendered Premise of Self Identity," *Positions*, 2:3 (1994), and Kurosawa Ariko, "Kindai Nihon bungaku ni okeru 'ryōsei no sōkoku' mondai," *Jendā no nihonshi*, vol. 2, Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1995.

regarding their understanding of relationships. The narrator in Takuboku's *Nikki* displays a deeply split self-image. He is a loner who tries to enjoy the temporary freedom of living alone in a big modern city. On the other hand, he feels more at home in the role as a head of a traditional, rural family from Iwate.

The narrator's ambitious search for success in the career of a new modern writer is fruitless and he constantly expresses anger and hostility against anyone and anything around him. In one of the most famous episodes, he violates a sleeping prostitute by putting his entire hand in his partner's vagina and desperately mutters to himself, "Men have the right to murder women by the cruelest methods. What a terrible, disgusting thought that is!" (Takuboku, 74) A total lack of connection with this particular prostitute accelerates his frustration. Although the prostitute is a complete stranger, Takuboku cannot help wanting some communication with her. At one level, his explosive reaction expresses the frustration of a modern individualized self, consciously aware of the distance from others.

We need to note, however, this aggressively outgoing, or possessive, mode of anxiety he displays is ultimately a part of his desire to feel connected with any and all women. This expression of power hunger, as well as that of a generalized assumption regarding male superiority over female inferiority in the gendered power game, seem to come from Takuboku's identification with a traditional male head of the household. Note in this regard the way he expresses his love for his wife: He claims that he has not always been faithful to her, but he knows that she has been good and honest to him. He feels sorry for her sacrifice and perseverance; he is sure that he loves her deeply. His love expresses a superior male's sympathy towards an inferior member's vulnerability, as well as his feeling of guilt coming

from his lack of economical and social power. Indeed, behind Takuboku's forceful approach to the prostitute is also hidden a crisis of his traditional self, which assumes an inseparable unity with a submissive female. Facing the modern urban reality which does not provide him with such unity, he then insists on his gendered identity by claiming that men are destined to overpower women. A modern binary and confrontational worldview thus reinforces Takuboku's gendered system of self-identification, which needs women as an integral part of its function. That is why Takuboku extensively and obsessively records his contacts with women--from his wife through nameless prostitutes via ex-girlfriends--in order to repeatedly discover and reconfirm his gendered identity, which transcends the conflict in him between modernity and tradition.

In Tamura's short story, the female protagonist, Yūko, expresses an unspecifiable anger after she has slept for the first time with a man. Unlike Takuboku's narrator, Yūko's partner is not a stranger, rather he is someone close to her. Yet, she feels like she wants to escape. The physical interaction makes her keenly aware of the power struggle in a modern relationship, in which her gendered self-image inevitably finds itself as a helpless abject. Her anger against the gender system can only be expressed in a scene where, through petty violence, she pokes a goldfish's eye, and then kills it.

Yūko's disgusted feeling regarding her loss of virginity does not go away. Instead, it grows to be a sort of ontological threat against her consciousness. Thus, she mutters to herself: "Even if I poke needles in each and every pore of my skin and scrape small pieces off my flesh one by one, my body, once dirtied, can never be really cleaned up." (Tamura, 11) Sexuality

devastates the protagonist and makes her realize the losss of her old identity: she now becomes something unpleasantly obscure.

Inspite of her desire to escape, Yūko, however, follows the man all the next day in a sort of numb and helpless manner. The man enters a vaudevillian theater and Yūko follows. She is impressed by a girl performer on stage, who, wearing a *furisode* top with a male *hakama* bottom, spins an umbrella with her feet. Yūko, who sits alone and away from her boyfriend in an area close to the back wall, realizes that a bat's wing comes out of one of the back wall panels and beats its wings.

Yūko and her partner come out of the theater in the late afternoon. They have nothing particular to do and stand by the Sumida River after slowly wandering along. When, extremely tired, Yūko feels ready to do whatever her boyfriend wants her to do, she is hit by this image: "A bat is sucking live blood of the girl who wears a yellow, satin weave, male *hakama;* it's sucking her blood..." (Tamura, 20)

Here, the bat may be a metaphor of the male, as well as the gender system itself, both of which survive by sucking and devitalizing the female desire for equality. And Yūko is identified with this half-crossdressed female vaudevillian. Note that Yūko is attracted to the hybrid picture of the performer: Their male-like conscious selves, equipped with socially competitive skills, coexist with their female powerlessness; they are ready to be identified as the object of a male gaze.

By depicting not only Yūko's sharp and introverted anger, but also her indecisive and passive behavior which follows, Tamura portrays the modern female ambivalence towards gender differentiation. She is aware that men and women are equally eager to be "modern" persons; yet, a modern female needs to go through a tough battle to overcome the gendered convention,

which not only governs males and male-centered society, but also governs females themselves from within. "Ikichi" is a powerful text, not so much because it claims the importance of female independence, but because it realistically visualizes the complex nature intrinsic to a modern female search for freedom from her already gendered conditions.

Thus at the beginning stage of modern writings on sexuality, the search for a modern relationship, and love, has started to be played out between men and women, who are aware, with varying degrees, that the hierachized gender differences are a given condition of their games.

At the next stage, certain efforts to reconcile with the modern conditions of relationship produce a number of stories which dramatize protagonists' truist correspondence with life itself. Let me compare Kawabata Yasunari's *Yukiguni* (『雪国』 Snow country, 1937 and 1948) and Okamoto Kanoko's *Kingyo ryōran* (『金魚撩乱』 Goldfish in profusion, 1937) as symbolic examples of this stage.[4] In Kawabata's story, the hero has relinquished the

[4] The originals refer to Kawabata Yasunari, *Yukiguni, Kawabata Yasunari shū*, Gendai no Bungaku, vol. 8 (Kawade Shobō shinsha, 1963) and *Snow Country*, E. Seidensticker trans. (Charles Tuttle, 1979), and Okamoto Kanoko, *Kingyo ryōran, Chikuma Nihon Bungaku Zenshū Okamoto Kanoko* (Chikuma Shobō, 1992). Quotations and page numbers are from the English translation for Kawabata and from the Japanese original for Okamoto, E. Sekine trans. Important critical references can be found in *Bungei Tokuhon Kawabata Yasunari*, Kawade Shobō shinsha (1977), Nakamura Mitsuo, *Ronkō Kawabata Yasunari*, Chikuma Shobō, 1978, Okude Ken, *Kawabata Yasunari Yukiguni o yomu*, Miyai Shoten, 1989, Tajima Yōko, "Komako no shiten kara yomu *Yukiguni*," *Onnna ga yomu Nihon kindai bungaku*, Egusa Mitsuko and Urushida Kazuyo eds., Shin'yōsha, 1992. Setouchi Harumi, *Kanoko ryōran*, Kōdansha Bunko, 1971, Urushida Kazuyo, "*Konton mibun* o yomu," *Onna ga yomu nihon kindai bungaku*, and Maryellen Mori, "The Splendor of Self-Exaltation: The Life and Fiction of Okamoto Kanoko," *Monumenta*

idea of a union with a real woman. Instead, he seeks unity with the feminine essence of a woman in a fantastic framework of interactions. The hero, Shimamura, who is a modern urban intellectual, goes to an otherworldly snow country, where he meets a charming geisha, Komako. As a customer, Shimamura totally controls his relationship by randomly visiting his favorite geisha with no commitment to any serious involvement with her. Komako is viewed and appreciated in her "beautifully wasted" mode of existence, which is unpractically pure and charming; her charm is one of selfless sacrifice, which simply and fully expresses the force of life within. She is sensuous and passionate, yet at the same time, cleanly virginal in the sense that she is a mere agent of vitality uncontaminated by human calculation. Komako's cleanliness is stressed further by introducing Yōko as Komako's de-sexualized double.

In the conclusion of the story's drama, Komako is amalgamated with Yōko. Yōko falls from a burning movie theater and Komako comes into the scene to rescue Yōko. With Yōko on her hands, madly crying, Komako goes back toward Shimamura. Meanwhile, the spirit of the universe, embodied in the Milky Way, is dramatically eroticized: "The Milky Way came down just over there, to wrap the night earth in its naked embrace. There was a terrible voluptuousness about it." (Kawabata, 165) Komako, in madness mixed with the erotic Milky Way, forms a transcendental and sensuous vision of femininity, and seduces Shimamura. Thus, at the very end, while watching a crying Komako approach him, Shimamura is spiritually identified with her. Note that the matter is expressed by way of his identification with the Milky Way in order to stress a sacred qualification

attached to the author's understanding of femininity: "...the Milky Way flowed down inside him with a roar" (Kawabata, 175). Thus, the text suggests that Shimamura is united with the feminine essence in the Komako/Yōko fusion and that the drama is located in a metaphysical elsewhere transcending this reality.

A typical male version of reconciliation is seen here, in which a male master is imaginarily united with a female sacrifice. This unity is based on the protagonist's establishment of a modern individualistic self and his binary worldview, which posits his idealized fantasy as an autonomous counterpart of reality. The snow country is a metaphor of his fantasy land, autonomous from the modern city in which his daily self belongs. By the same token, he articulates and appreciates the fantastic phase in Komako as something autonomously separate from Komako, who lives her real daily life: Komako's "beautifully wasted" life is then celebrated since it ironically challenges the values and standards of modern life, consisting of such notions as meaningful goals, consistent development and progress, positive contributions to society, and the like. This fantasy world is further mystified through metaphysical symbolism. Komako's charm symbolizes that of the feminine essence, which inseparably fuses, at the end of the story, with the universe's vitality itself (represented by the erotic Milky Way). And the male protagonist, identified with the very life of the universe, allows himself to transcend reality's meaningless dailiness. In other words, Kawabata's fixedly binary worldview leads him to view real relationships as impossible unconnected interactions between strangers, and encourages him to confine himself in his dream world so as to portray his vision of unity with women, as well as with his life.

In Okamoto's *Kingyo ryō ran*, the hero, Fukuichi, remains

in a daily working reality. He idealizes his childhood sweetheart and wealthy neighbor, Masako. She is married to another man, and has a child. She is unattainable, but still a next door neighbor--Masako on top of the hill and Fukuichi at the bottom of the hill. Fukuichi's desire for Masako is translated into his desire to create a goldfish which embodies the mystery of Masako. He works obsessively for years without success. Discouraged by this fruitless effort, he is ready to give up his pursuit near the end of the story. And it is by accident that he discovers a perfect goldfish in one of his old ponds, where he has dumped the fish that did not pass his aesthetic standard. After years of mixture between them, these abandoned fish have created a miraculous masterpiece without and beyond Fukuichi's knowledge and imagination. At the conscious level, Okamoto seems to send a Buddhist-driven aphorism that says "身を捨ててこそ浮かぶ瀬もあれ (when you stop clinging to your own ego, you may find a break from the deadlock)." Just like in *Yukiguni*, whose protagonist is exposed to life's truth embodied by the Milky Way, Fukuichi witnesses here a revelation of truth and beauty. However, there is a definite difference between the two male characters. Shimamura literally internalizes the Milky Way, while Fukuichi does not appropriate the wonder of his ultimate goldfish: Rather, his self is shattered and overwhelmed by the presence of the enigmatic "other" in front of him:

This conclusion's implications, related to the issue of gender, are fairly ironical. Fukuichi cannot be united with the real Masako, and he cannot be identified with the mystery of Masako, either. He can only kneel down and worship the mystery that is beyond his comprehension. Furthermore, in order to meet with such mystery, Fukuichi should not look around in an otherworldly elsewhere; instead, he should remain in a daily,

domestic, working space.

Note that the goldfish is described as a "fuzzy, elusive, and unreal creature, which is, however, life itself" (Okamoto, 88): The truth questioned here is not located at the level of metaphysical sublation of a binary opposition between reality and fantasy. It is discovered at the borderline, which confuses the binary system itself. This mystery refers, not to the feminine essence, but to the, say, female otherness in Masako. Note in this regard that the narrator stresses that the masterpiece fish does not resemble Masako. This mysterious otherness does not resemble anything: it does not represent a feminine essence within the system of gendered interpretative code. Instead, it presents itself as a scandalous vision, that is, a bare and mere image, which swims around and away from any explication.[5]

Note also in this regard, an episode through which Fukuichi has started to be deeply obsessed with Masako. When they were children, Fukuichi used to boss Masako around. When they become adolescent, Masako counterattacks. One day, Fukuichi teases her as usual by shouting at her, "Hey, you should behave like a lady." She then turns to him and suddenly throws on him a

[5] Let me add some words on the notion of female otherness, which is an excess of gendered semanticism. In general, otherness is something left out of the binary semantic system consisting of the opposition between sense and non-sense, or meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Otherness is not meaninglessness, or a negatively integrated counterpart of the meaningful. Otherness is part of each self, but it is not the so-called "personality." Personality is some singularity which the self can consciously specify, own, and control in the form of uniquely patternized styles and the like. Personality is a notion associated with an interpretative function of communication. Rather, otherness in a person is associated with the expressive phase of communicative activities, in which the self presents him/herself as unpredictable, accidental wonders of expressiveness.

handful of cherry flowers while saying, "Is this how you want me to behave like a lady?" (68) And she quickly runs away. One of the petals sticks in the deep back of his mouth and he suffers all night. After this incident, Fukuichi starts to idealize her without being able to confess his emotion to her. It is this unpredictability and accidentality in Masako that seems to be incarnated in the ideal goldfish. If the goldfish/Masako represents a feminine truth, it is certainly an elusive quality. That is to say that the type of truth Okamoto advocates deconstructs a Kawabata type of truth, which directs itself in such a way that the male protagonist internalizes and appropriates it.

In terms of the gendered binarism, we should also note Fukuichi's ambiguity. Symbolically, he confines himself within an imaginary matriarchy, in which he plays the role of son/worshipper of Masako, who is viewed as his mother/queen. At the very end of the story, disgusted by the fruitlessness of his symbolic project, he gives up on his plan and consequently becomes free from the binary system he has bound himself to. And his new position, exterior to the slave-queen symbolism, allows him to encounter the masterpiece goldfish. Note also that the submissive and inferior role Fukuichi has played can be easily translated as the position of a conventional housewife or daughter within a patriarchal system. In this sense, Fukuichi is a disguised female. And the message in this context is that the type of female vitality, focused on by this story, comes from outside the patriarchal or matriarchal definition of femininity.

Finally, we should note the different visions of life-force pictured in *Yukiguni* and *Kingyo*: namely, the Milky Way and the mysterious goldfish. Unlike Kawabata's transcendental characterization of life, Okamoto describes life's mystery as something that resides adjacent to our daily reality in the form of

something elusive, yet (re)productive and real. This difference seems to come from the two authors' different approaches to the gendered premise: Kawabata tries to dialectically transcend gendered binarism so as to attain a higher meaning of the system as a whole, while Okamoto tries to decenter the gendered system so as to shed light on a reality outside, and free from, the gendered semantics. In short, at this stage, which encourages the truism-based search for life and sexuality, male and female writings differ from each other in the very understanding of the notion of life's truth(s).

Then, what is going on at the present stage of writings on sexuality? With the recognition of an explosive number of female writers after WWII, literature is currently developing diversity, which augments uncertainty, yet at the same time, nurtures a hope for new mode of communication between men and women. Overall, the gap between male texts and female texts, however, remains large. Female authors have become more aware of the type of reality we call "female otherness," and have created texts that question the issue of gender, while male authors are fairly ambiguous, if not confused, in terms of this issue. Males know they cannot see male/female relationships under the metaphor of master-playboy vs. geisha-sacrifice. They can no longer write metaphysical fantasy in a naively narcissistic fashion, yet they resist viewing women as incommensurably heterogeneous others. In order to shed more light on today's situation on the topic of sexuality, a comparison of two stories, Tomioka Taeko's "Sūku" (「芻狗」 A straw dog, 1980) and Murakami Haruki's *Noruwei no mori* (『ノルウエイの森』 Norwegean wood, 1987), will be examined.[6]

---

[6] The originals refer to Tomioka Taeko, "Sūku," *Nami utsu*

Tomioka unfolds a story of a middle age woman's pursuit of young men for one night stands, in which the issue of female otherness is focused on in a subversive way. The protagonist desires to "just have sex" with a young men. Obviously, she challenges the image of a woman as an object of male desire. But her man-hunt is not a female reversal of a Don Juan pursuit. It is assumed that a modern male pursues the ultimate woman in order for him to attain the conclusive meaning of sexuality and life. The pursuit of Tomioka's protagonist shows no interest in that direction. Instead, she tries to be free from the very notion of the meaningfulness of life. Therefore, strategically, sexuality is reduced to each performance's meaning-free, accidental particularity. The protagonist is moved when her body can quietly communicate with her interactant, thanks to his body's "inborn expressiveness" (Tomioka, 261). Appreciation of this kind of nameless realness, intrinsic to the logic of an (inter-)action, encourages her to expose herself randomly to strangers as a "mad woman," according to the word by a young male parent, whom the protagonist seduces in a children's playground of a small park.

The protagonist talks about her "wish to live as an animal" (Tomioka, 272) and quickly adds that "it is not to seek ecstasy, it

---

tochi/Sūku, Kōdansha Bungei Bunko, Kōdansha, 1993, Murakami Haruki, *Noruwei no mori*, 2 vols., Kōdansha Bunko, 1994, and *Norwegian Wood*, 2 vols., A. Birnbaum trans., Kodansha English Library, 1995. Quotations and page numbers are from the Japanese original for Tomioka, E. Sekine trans., and from the English translation for Murakami. Important critical references can be found in Ueno Chizuko, *Onna toiu kairaku*, Keisō Shobō, 1986, Mizuta Noriko, *Feminizumu no kanata*, Kōdansha, 1991, Murakami Keiji, *Noruwei no mori o tōrinukete*, JICC Shuppankyoku, 1991, *Kokubungaku* 40:4 (March, 1995), and *Murakami Haruki no sekai*, *Yuriika* 21:8 (June, 1994).

means that I detach myself from physical 'relationships' and language itself" (Tomioka, 272). A love relationship is usually filled with detailed explanations of each other's feelings and the like in order to make sure that the couple are doing something meaningful. They rely on the validity of the, say, monogatari's causally consistent explication of life, as well as on the language's semantic authority. Tomioka's protagonist is precisely annoyed by such an image associated with "relationship" and "language," and proposes the image of "animal" as a picture of freedom from human obsession with "meaning."[7]

There is in her an indescribable, mal-humored, monster, who wants to aggressively shake up society's gendered conventions. This lonely battle has no end and is exercised deconstructively. She is disillusioned with men and bored with life. Yet, we should note that through her man-hunt, she is literally open to men, sending a challenging message. She is calling for a new form of communication on the basis of the appreciation of the wonders intrinsic to the human ontological foundation, programmed as a performative being--probably more than as a semantic being. If our primary urge for communication comes from our desire and ability to present our expressive selves in different interactive contexts, we need to learn, in the first place, how to appreciate and respond to our partner's intimate, yet limitlessly mysterious expressiveness, rather than to interpret and appropriate our partner as finished, or finishable, knowledge. In this sense, Tomioka's story contains a challenging and positive

---

7 This is one of the characteristics of contemporary stories, shared also by some male writers such as, most typically, Tanaka Komimasa in "Poroporo" (*Poroporo*, Chūkō Bunko, 1982) An early critical work on this issue is found in Karatani Kōjin's *Imi to iu yamai* (Kawade Shobō shinsha, 1979).

message in order to seek a breakthrough from the deadlock of gendered semantics.

From the standpoint of gender, Murakami Haruki's *Noruwei no mori* contrasts with Tomioka's aggressive approach. The heroine, Naoko, troubled by the gender system, escapes into madness and death. The hero, Watanabe, is sympathetic to his mentally unstable girlfriend, yet he cannot provide her with any meaningful help and helplessly loses her. If the story claims that this circulation of helplessness between two honest persons produces a tragic love story, it is so in the sense that this is a variation of the classical male beautification of female suffering.

Naoko is described as a girl who cannot accept the gendered image of a sexualized woman. First, she has a boyfriend from childhood, named Kizuki. They are inseparable alter egos, with perfect emotional unity. Trouble begins when they grow older and Kizuki starts wanting to make love to her. She thinks she also wants to do so, but realizes that her body keeps refusing him sexually. Kizuki suddenly kills himself. A couple of years later, Naoko happens to see Watanabe, Kizuki's best friend at high school, and starts a brief relationship. They once have sex and Naoko experiences ecstasy although she does not feel like she is in love with Watanabe. Soon after this experience, she becomes restless and escapes to a center for mentally troubled patients. Watanabe keeps contacting her through occasional visits and fairly frequent correspondence. She grows her love for Watanabe and feels numb sexually. He later asks Naoko to come out of the center and to live with him. This proposal seems to make Naoko ill again. Soon she kills herself, saying ,"I just don't want anyone inside me again, ever. I don't want anyone to have his way with me" (Murakami, vol. 2, 240).

From the standpoint of a gender issue. Naoko's sexual

problem with her first boyfriend suggests her fear that, with sexuality, she may destroy the happy self she has enjoyed as an innocent girl. While hesitating, she is carried away into a transitional stage, in which her old self is already puzzlingly missing and replaced by a sexually matured self. During the first sexual encounter with Watanabe, Naoko is excited, not because she wants him, but because of the feeling of a nostalgic distance he inspires in her. Unity with this acquaintance/stranger allows her, in her twisted subconscious, to simulate a re-unification with her now distant old self. She immediately realizes, however, that she is united with a male stranger and actualizes her full integration within the sexualized system of adulthood. She then becomes physically numb to Watanabe and hopelessly accelerates a thirst for her missing girlhood. This theme of lost girlhood, associated with a strong desire to get out of the gender system, can be linked with the issue of female otherness.[8] Girlhood is then an asexual exterior, digressive of the gendered self-identity. Rather, Murakami chooses to integrate the topic of girlhood within the gendered system as a category of the 'desexualized,' binarily opposed to the 'sexualized' adulthood. Because girlhood is defined as a pure negativity within gendered semantics, Naoko's life becomes helplessly stagnated. She is obsessed with a mission impossible to actualize in her real life, a mission which orders her not to age but to go back to a "girl of thirteen or fourteen." She then forces herself into a fantasy world, binarily alienated from reality. She has nothing to do in real life except for completely wasting her life by committing suicide. Kawabata's Komako/Yōko

[8] In terms of the relationship between the notion of "girlhood" and that of "female otherness," see Mizuta Noriko, ""Shōjo to iu bunshin," *Uta no hibiki, monogatari no yokubō: Amerika kara yomu Nihon bungaku*, E. Sekine ed., Shinwasha, 1996.

fusion, according to the narrator, wastes life "beautifully"; Naoko's life, on the other hand, is but a paler and unenergetic variation of Kawabata heroines.

Unlike Kawabata's Shimamura, Murakami's hero, Watanabe, does not aggressively control his relationships. Yet, he keeps his distance from Naoko in a consistent and fairly passive-aggressive fashion. Moreover, his interest in Naoko develops an ambivalent split; he becomes actively involved with a more lively and practical girl, Midori, who wants to develop an intimate relationship with him. He then decides that he is in love with her, also. Towards the end of the story, the narrator provides a reconciliatory answer to Watanabe's split situation through the words of a mother-like figure, Reiko: "I think if you harbor some pain over Naoko's death, you should hold onto that pain and feel it for the rest of your life...But completely separate from that, I think you should be happy with Midori" (Murakami, vol. 2, 246). Thus, Watanabe is encouraged to live by internalizing Naoko's death as an integral part of his survival. Watanabe's mystification of Naoko evidently follows the pattern of male beautification of a female sacrifice.

Note also that in this story, all characters stick to the modern idea that everybody is an independent and lonely individual. At the same time, however, they are à priori connected to each other, thanks mainly to the characterization of the women, who are all fundamentally forgiving. The type of emotionalism which dominates this text reminds one of Shunsui's *ninjōbon* , *Shunshoku umuegoyomi* (『春色梅児誉美』 Spring-colored plum calendar), in which emotions circulate endlessly in order to support and assert the type of authority constituted around a helplessly

passive male center.[9] In terms of the description of female characters, *Noruwei* adds nothing menacingly new to the existing gendered convention.[10]

Murakami's story is, however, definitely different from Kawabata's story. Kawabata's story consists of a clear-cut binary worldview, which excludes reality from fantasy. And the celebration of the fantasy world allows the hero to transcend reality's dailiness. In contrast, Murakami's binary world consists of the logic of ambivalence, which lets reality and life coexist with fantasy and death in a non-exclusive fashion. This ambivalent world view constitutes Watanabe's borderline self. After a psychological ordeal caused by Naoko's death, he tries to return to the world of Midori. At the very end of the story, he calls Midori on the phone and confesses that "there is nothing else I want in this world but you." (Murakami, vol. 2, 255). Midori makes him, however, realize that he does not know where he is: "I held onto the line to Midori from there in the middle of nowhere" (Murakami, vol. 2, 256). He is here reduced to living through a mere phone call, a call for life intuitively urged from within himself.

This ending description circularly reminds us of a primary scene which Watanabe associates with the memory of Naoko. In the beginning of this long story, he is thirty-eight and in an

---

[9] On *Umegoyomi*'s ideological structure, see E. Sekine, "Yonosuke to Tanjirō," *Edo Bungaku*, vol. 10 (April, 1993.

[10] Saegusa Kazuko is puzzled by the "unexcited" quality of love relationships developed in *Noruwei* and concludes that *Noruwei* is not a love story in the modernist sense of romantic love. (See *Ren'ai shōsetsu no kansei*, Seidosha, 1991). It should be noted that basically *Noruwei* follows, just like *Yukiguni*, the modern gendered premise, which allows the male hero to beautify his female sacrifice. In this sense, the story apparently belongs to the genealogy of modern male love stories.

airplane, which is landing at Hamburg Airport. Suddenly he is swallowed by a violently confusing and nostalgic emotion and reminds of a meadow, which he viewed with Naoko eighteen years before, and recurrently remembered.

> Several days of drizzle had washed away the last speck of that summer's dust bringing out a deep, vivid green in the hills. Tall stalks of pampas grass were swaying in the October breeze, thin trailing clouds frozen precisely in place against the blue overhead. The sky reached such heights it hurt your eyes just to look at it. Her hair stirred slightly with each puff of wind that swept across the meadow and passed on to the woods.... (Murakami, vol. 1, 8-9)

Watanabe stresses that in this picture of recollection, no human is included--no Naoko and not even himself. This picture is keenly melancholic since it is a picture of the past, irrecoverably lost. The present distance from this picture creates in the hero a sad and confusing inertness. This picture of nothingness is not, however, strongly tainted by a nihilistic drive towards self-destruction; instead, the stress on freshness and softness in the scene seem to subtly celebrate the protagonist's life drive.[11] Here again, Watanabe is reduced to a mere call for life, associated with his desire to be in a selfless state of mind.

Murakami's "meadow" resembles more Okamoto's ultimate "goldfish" rather than Kawabata's "Milky Way" in terms of the protagonist's relationship with his ultimate object. While

---

[11] It may be interesting to compare this scene with that of the empty temple garden, depicted at the very end of the *Sea of Fertility* by Mishima in order to examine the different approaches to nihilism by the two authors.

Kawabata allows his hero to be identified with the Milky Way so as to complete and close his symbolism of life and the feminine, Okamoto and Murakami stress the heroes' exposure to the inspirational elusiveness of the world and portray life as an indeterminate mystery.

Throughout his early works through *Noruwei*, Murakami has been concerned about the theme of the loss of boyhood. He has tried to connect the search for this theme with his intuitive approval of survival. In this story, the author develops a connection through the creation of Watanabe as a borderline character, trying to accept both the loss of his old self and his desire for life. In this sense, the story demonstrates a break from the confinement in the binarily fixed world of fantasy, by exposing the hero to an ambivalent phase of reality, which the hero recurrently points to as saying, "Death exists not as the opposite of life but as a part of it."

In conclusion, *Noruwei* is a product of contradiction in terms of the issue of self-identification. The very notion of identifiable self is questioned by the characterization of Watanabe, while Naoko's failed effort for self-identification is explained within the binarism of gendered feminine identity. This contradiction suggests a current theme in male writings on sexuality.[12] Men have started to pursue a new self-image, free

---

[12] See, for instance, Yoshiyuki Junnosuke's *Genshoku no machi*. The author/narrator is here identified with a female prostitute protagonist and expresses his existential uncertainty through the protagonist's psychological difficulty for survival. The narrator's identification with the female prostitute allows Yoshiyuki to question the pre-WWII *karyū shōsetsu* format, according to which a narrator, identified with a male customer, beautifies his relationship with a prostitute. Yoshiyuki's story necessarily expresses a disbelief in the symbolism represented by stories like *Yukiguni*. However, Yoshiyuki's self-image as a marginalized self

from the modern belief in the interiority of a self, yet they cannot be free from their almost blind clinging to gendered power, asymmetrically assigned to them so as to allow themselves to domesticate the mystery in women.

It is a somewhat odd picture to see Tomioka's mad woman juxtaposed by Murakami's gentle-but-helpless young people together. The juxtaposition displays how diverse current writings on sexuality can be. Despite the strong contrast between the two texts, however, we should note that one important background is shared. Unlike the stories by Kawabata and Okamoto, men and women in these contemporary stories are available to each other and interact on a real and/or physical basis. Contemporary writers have shown a more conscious attention to the issue of sexual body as something digressive of the conventional body/mind binarism.

As a book project, I have been experimenting with this kind of pair reading of male /female writings in order to examine the issue of modern subjectivity in conjunction with the issues of gender and sexuality.[13] I am not saying that all male writings are within this category, consisting of the essentialist dramatization of femininity, or that all female writings form subversive texts

---

allows him to be too hastily identified with a marginalized female. By so doing, he ignores the asymmetric and hierarchized structure of the gender difference, and thereby is unable to focus attention on the semantic excess, associated with a marginality of the female.

[13] In the book project, besides the three pairs discussed here, I plan to include such pairs as Higuchi Ichiyō's "Nigorie" and Mori Ōgai's "Maihime"; Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* and Enchi Fumiko's *Onnnazaka*; Arishima Takeo's *Aru onna* and Uno Chiyo's *Irozange*; Kojima Nobuo's *Hōyō kazoku* and Tomioka Taeko's *Namiutsu tochi*; Tsushima Yūko's *Chōji* and Shimao Toshio's *Shi no toge*; Ōe Kenzaburō's *Ame no ki o kiku onnatachi* and Tawada Yōko's *Inu muko iri*; Matsuura Rieko's *Nachuraru Ūman* and Aono Sō's *Onnna kara no koe*, among others.

challenging male discourse. What I am saying is that things are complex and transgendered. However, in the area of love fantasy, in particular, male texts often revel in the metaphysical representation of a relationship, while female texts often question the validity of male representation. The main point of this project is to broaden our foundation for reading modern Japanese texts on sexuality in such a way as to develop a dialogue between male critics and female critics. The term of dialogue should not be taken here as a simple exchange of already shared values and meaning. Rather, it should be understood as a venture of language, which would encourage us to appreciate the rich diversity and complexity developed by the texts on gender and sexuality.