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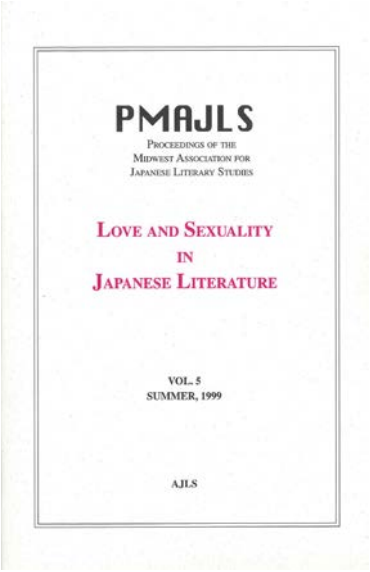

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TRACING THE BODY OF THE QUESTION MARK: KANAI MIEKO'S *AI ARU KAGIRI*

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The ego, as Freud has written and feminist philosopher and critic Judith Butler has stressed, is first and foremost "a bodily ego."[1] If the body, then, is of a piece with its construction as and through language, how it gets configured, or rather, what form it assumes, should suggest the psychic operations of the subjectivity bound within its form. But what would it mean if that body, figured as it is in Lacanian discourse as necessarily in the domain of the Other, took on, not the form of a body fragmented or whole, and not even of the Symbolic letter, but instead of punctuation, of a question mark? In Kanai Mieko's story "Ai Aru Kagiri" (1971, "As Long as There is Love"),[2] the literal center of the text is taken up with the embedded story of the narrative's "lover" as one embodying plenitude in the form of the question mark, one whose absence becomes marked by a mutilation evoking both castration and irrecuperable plenitude.

In this essay, I trace the body of the question mark in "Ai Aru Kagiri" in order to locate its shifting relationship to the protagonists of the story; or, rather, the question mark itself points us to the traces of a body whose dismembered corpus leads us not to death so much as to the obsessive life motored in its eroticized name. Moreover, in the course of

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[1]Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Work of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. London: Hogarth, 1953–74. Vol. 19: 26. My critique of the structures of presumptive heterosexuality is greatly indebted to the work of Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

[2]Kanai, Mieko. "Ai Aru Kagiri." *Kanai Mieko Zentanpenshū* Vol. I. Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992. 455–472. Originally published in *Shinchō*, May 1971. All translations of the text in this essay are mine. Kanai's stories are collected in Kanai Mieko *Zentanpenshū* Vols. I–III. Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992. Volume III of this collection contains a very good chronology (*nenpu*). A useful introductory bibliographic essay on Kanai can be found in Mulhern, Chieko, ed. *Japanese Women Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994. For the most recent update of this information, see my bibliographic essay and chronology in *Josei Sakka Series*, Vol. 19. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1998.

this tracing I argue that as a parody of the romantic script of heterosexual union, "Ai Aru Kagiri" exposes the pathology of that coded "love" precisely in its failure to satisfy a romanticized but thoroughly ideological notion of undifferentiated union—what Luce Irigaray has called "that old dream of symmetry"[3]—and yet, it is resounding in the successful self-mutilation required to keep that "love" alive.

SADOMASOCHISM AND MUTILATION: THE TRAJECTORY OF THE "LOVER"

"Ai Aru Kagiri" has an embedded narrative structure of several stories contained within a frame narrative. The two main characters, a female nurse denoted as the letter "A" and an invalid man who is called simply "the man," live alone together in a house near the sea. The very timelessness of the story and the nonspecificity of the place, coupled with the protagonists' anonymity and their simple, mutually dependent everyday lives, all suggest a fairytale in the making. At first, that is. Until we discover that when A and the man sit down together to talk about their past lives and loves, the story that they each tell is of sadomasochistic violence and abjection, of cruelty and intense desire; until we discover that they have told each other these stories so many times that each knows the other's story by heart and can supplement it when anything is left out or forgotten; until we discover that A and the man live only for a lover that is lost to them and in the past, a lover that they can only reconstitute through the narration of their stories:

> Then, gradually, they both became aware of a deviant passion that lay between them, having in heightened sensitivity smelled out the strange animal odor brought about by this kind of passion.
>
> The two of them drew together among the memories of the love that each had lost, creating a strange and intimate bond out of the mutual memories of each other's love. They waited, each believing that "the lover" would come home, and in each con-

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[3]See Irigary, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. Also, *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985. The debate about heterosexual love and Aristophanes' vision of the originary unity of the sexes in Plato's *Symposium* is humorously reworked in a deliberate manner in Kanai's short story "Ryōseiguyūsha(tachi)" (In *Kanai Mieko Zentanpenshū* Vol. II. Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992), showing her intellectual engagement with such origin myths of the Self and its desires.

> firming the degree of the other's conviction of this, they recognized their mutual existence. What they feared most and yet also desired most was oblivion, and perhaps the perfect oblivion was really death itself. Having before them their mutual existence, together they ate away at the days of each other's past and between them confirmed them. But it was not the past, it was the present. What had begun as sympathy and consolation in response to the similar shape of their fates had become, perhaps, a kind of love. They were bound to each other by the fact that each lived out the same fate while carrying out their shared day-to-day life—by this one thing only were they bound to each other—and they lived in their past memories, striving to keep them from fading; or rather, by their empty striving, trying to retell their memories in denser, more precise words, they were bound each to the other in a kind of obscene intimacy, and believed that "the lover" would come back to them again. (456)

The woman A and the man have created their own world together, one whose deviancy from norms and isolation from the outside world is underscored by their claustrophic room suspended as if in a vacuum amidst the raging storm outside. Their mutual storytelling of the "lover" is said to "bind" them together, the language of masochism evoking their inevitable passivity in the face of this loss. Yet they must work hard to keep the story of desire intense and plausible to one another, as it is only through their subjection to their own fictions that they are able to feel themselves alive: their very sense of existence is bound up with the erotic deferral of pleasure in any closure to their stories, closure being the "oblivion" of death.[4] In "their empty striving," then, to tell and retell their stories, the two stave off the death and nothingness that form the necessary underbelly to their passions' excess.

While the narrative is told in third-person omniscient to frame the first-person stories narrated by A and the man, the text clearly privileges the woman over the man by letting the reader in on her thoughts and describing her sensations; moreover, most of the narrative is made up of her stories. The woman A tells her stories first. She begins "for the thou-

[4]Here, of course, I refer to the *jouissance* of the text as its *petit mort*, an overreaching for pleasure that is orgasmic and "obliterating" just as the French word *jouissance* literally means. Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot, to name only two critics, make much of the link between the end of a novel (its closure) and death, as does a critic as different from them as Frank Kermode in his *The Sense of an Ending*.

sandth time, the millionth time" "the story about 'Him' [*kare*]" (457), telling the man how afraid she is of her memory fading. She narrates that the two of them as young lovers were in the habit of walking to the sea twice a day, and that he gradually moved from childish cruelty towards her to more violent treatment, such as making her undress on the rocky cliffs and sing songs despite the fact that she could not sing well. At times he would angrily punish her for her bad singing, wrapping her hair around his hand and pushing her face into the water until her throat burned with the pain of being unable to breathe. One day he smashes her face into the rock, causing her to be covered in blood before looking up to see him as a vision of a "burning star" (459) in the Milky Way galaxy. This leaves a red scar on her white forehead in the shape of a star, a "decoration" that she proudly and laughingly shows her listener, the man in the wheelchair, in order to have him confirm both its painful beauty and the verity of her story. Another time, when the "lover" rapes her in the sand with her hands crossed behind her, the sand cuts into her hand making it bleed, finally engraving a constellation of black blemishes in the back of her hand where the sand has eaten into her flesh. These bodily marks now act as a reminder of her "lover," for the marks on her body of "star" and "constellation" evoke his importance for her as, quite literally, the whole universe (461). The worshipful attitude of the woman A for the lover's supremacy over her defines the masochistic pleasure she feels in the repetitive verification of her abjection in the order of things, and in the naturalized hierarchy of their relationship.

> Why am I a whore? I asked him. He laughed loudly in a crazed voice, pushed up my skirt, and with one hand twisted my body over to make my buttocks face him, beating and pinching them. Then he ordered me to kneel right where I was, calling me really horrible names, and I finally began to cry. I had committed an unforgivable error, he said. Did I also intend to bear up under my humiliating disgrace like a martyr? And love, that idea called *love*, had I really believed that that was what had been shoved upside in me, in *there*? And then he said even more horrible things, completely taking me under his control. I couldn't say a word to him in response, and just the hatred and loathing with which he stared at me was enough to make me feel satisfied. That is all. In my profound satisfaction and misery, I cried to think that all I could do was crouch at his feet, worthless. (459–60)

The bedrock of "darkness" and meaninglessness that is the Void that the "lover" represents is the very grounds upon which A erects her pleasure and existence. His infinite quality as the galaxy in which the finite world of her own body exists so insignificantly in comparision is here rewritten in terms of a male-female relationship of domination and subordination, a heterosexual coupling rationalized as "complementary." The myth of a gentle merging into a cosmic Oneness that the heterosexual romantic script of "love" calls for is here mocked when the lover asks her about her choice of terms to describe their relations; that is, he ridicules her self-deceptive use of "love" to stand in for his "rape" of her body. The complementarity of roles in the discourse of sadomasochism is striking in the woman's stories, and it is linked, I would argue, to the discourse of heterosexuality. The tendency to see sadism as "masculine" and masochism as "feminine"—a critical habit which more consistently "feminizes" men who are masochistic than it truly "masculinizes" or "empowers" the female sadist—is persistently underwritten by the presumption of heterosexual dyads, of masculine supremacy, and of sexist codes in psychoanalysis. Indeed, it has become so "natural" to see women as masochistic and men sadistic that critics like Gilles Deleuze or Kaja Silverman seem only to have something new to say about masochism when it is *male* masochism, not female.[5]

In order to pursue the tension between masochism and sadism as gendered acts let us consider the woman A's moment of sadistic joy, taught her by her mentor in pleasure, the "lover." This is another episode in the stories that A tells the invalid man.

> He wrung the necks of my cat's kittens, and ordered me to kill the kittens too, in the same way. He set one of them onto my lap, a living creature just born with a trembly, wriggly little body, and through the thin material of my skirt I could feel the

[5] Let me make clear that while I find these critics' work intellectually rigorous and insightful my main point here is that the focus on the male subject as the test case for masochism does not subvert the naturalization of that category in relation to women but more thoroughly establishes it in perpetuating the universalization of the male subject; the dangers of this are clearly in the psychoanalytic tendency to make the male subject the standard against which the female subject can only be derivative and relative. One should not overlook that "perversions," despite their supposed marginalized status, also erect standards and methods of categorization that are gendered. See Gilles Deleuze. *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty and Venus in Furs by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch*. New York: Urzone, 1989. Kaja Silverman. *Male Trouble*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

> kitten's softness and warmth and even its soft squirming. I told him that there was no way I could do such a thing, I begged him, but he just gave his terrible smile and flashed eyes burning with tyrannical power. I circled the kitten's neck within my thumb and forefinger where the skin is thin and sensitive, and when I exerted pressure, between my fingers I felt its convulsions run up through my whole body as a faint, bad smell of blood came from the hot stuff overflowing from its mouth and nose cavities; then, not uttering a sound, in a look of blank amazement, the kitten died. After this, he seemed content to watch in silence as I, with a beautiful face like an angel, strangled the kittens. (460)

The sadistic pleasure that A gets from killing the kittens is reminiscent of the little girl in Kanai's story, "Rabbits" (1972) who at first kills rabbits with her father for food, and finally alone, for pleasure.[6] In both cases, however, the sadism is not so cleanly cut from the masochism, since the female protagonists identify with the objects they kill. In the case of "Rabbits" the protagonist starts to wear a rabbit suit made from the rabbits she has killed, thinks she is a rabbit, and ultimately kills herself in the manner in which she tortured and killed the rabbits. In "Ai Aru Kagiri," besides the fact that the woman owns a female cat, cats are, not unexpectedly, associated with female anatomy and sexuality. For example, the place by the sea where the "lover" used to beat A is described as a smooth rock where "in a narrow crack in the rock the seawater struck, making a sound like a big feline animal lapping up water with its tongue" (458). The description links cats, vaginal imagery, and the water to produce a figure of female anatomy and sexual arousal, precisely the meaning that that place holds for A during and after her torture by her "lover" there. (Later, the man's female "lover" will be described as catlike in her lithe movements during sex.) In that A kills an animal she associates with herself, her erotic investment remains strongly masochistic, and not simply sadistic; indeed, when she describes herself as killing the kittens "with the beautiful face of an angel," it is clear that the self-righteous image of the martyr and victim mark the final words of the scene. The difficulty critics like Deleuze have in disentangling masochism from sadism may have to do with the presumption of a dynamic of

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[6] Kanai, Mieko. "Usagi." 1972. In *Kanai Mieko Zentanpenshū* Vol. I. Tokyo: Nihon Bungeisha, 1992. (Trans. Phyllis Birnbaum. "Rabbits." In *Rabbits, Crabs, Etc.—Stories by Japanese Women*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982.)

complementary heterosexuality, a dynamic in which a seeming symmetry masks asymmetrical gender relations. A feminine sadist, then, is not a mere inversion or on a par with a masculine sadist, and consequently may not be out of sync with the power relations of complementary heterosexuality so much as revelatory of its insidious, calibrated imbalance.

A pressure point for future feminist interrogation in the discourse of sadomasochism has to be the convergences as well as the divergences between the paired, gendered terms of masochism and sadism, and not merely the distinct and separate ontological "dispositions" of each term; indeed, each term is so overdetermined and saturated with the presence of its binary that not to explore them as a structure with a built-in gender dynamic inseparable from the presumptive heterosexual script of symmetry and complementarity—one perhaps originating in the sexological invention of "heterosexuality" and in psychoanalytic presumptions of primary bisexuality—is, perhaps, to overlook sadomasochism's symptomatic force.[7] This interrogation is particularly urgent, it seems to me, in the case of contemporary and postwar Japanese women's fiction, including Kanai's, in which sadomasochism has been so marked a characteristic.

Turning now to the man's story that immediately follows the woman's, we can see the narration effectively embed his story within the woman's, and further consolidate the link between complementary heterosexuality and sadomasochism. He starts off his story by telling how he came home one day to find a young girl wearing a white dress and sitting down with her arms about her knees, asleep in his doorway. He notes that she seemed familiar to him, that maybe he had seen her in a dream, he was not sure—and at that moment, the woman A cuts in and takes over his story, narrating in second and third person.

> ". . . so then, you each came to know each other, and of her own will she came before you, threw off what she was wearing and lay down on the floor. On the floor she opened her arms wide, and slightly twisted her neck to face you standing there, saying in a serious and commanding tone, 'Hey there, come close to me!' In the dim gloom of the room with its blinds shut, her naked white body was like a pitiful, broken doll, like a soft

[7] See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, for her critique of an originary bisexuality that is constructed according to heterosexual aims. For an accessible tracing of the discourse of heterosexuality and its relation to the early sexologists, see Jonathan Ned Katz. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. New York: Plume Books, 1995.

> white question mark, rife with mystery like the madness of night suddenly descended upon broad daylight. And then she, the soft white question mark that was lying on the floor, opened wide her eyes, sealed shut her lips, twisted her neck to face you as you stood there and directing her gaze at you she waited, her body faintly shuddering. You got down on your knees and lightly touched the question mark before you as she gazed at you with wide-open eyes. You spoke. 'Who? Who in the world are you?' You lay down beside her with your upper body raised on your left elbow, and as you peered into her face your right hand slid slowly over her body. But she did not answer at all." (462–3)

The man and the question mark that is his "lover" have a relationship that at first appears completely opposite from the woman A's with her "lover": they are solicitous and tender with one another, and their love-making is said to be "an act dominated by gentleness and sensuality as long as it imitated death, that ritual..." (463). The question mark, in fact, seems in complete, passive acquiescence to their relations. That she *is* a "question mark," however, makes one wonder what or who she is, and of course we too, along with the man, have to ask. Does she signify desire, or the infamous question of what women want, à la Freud? Is she the dreamwork as rebus to be deciphered? Or perhaps she represents that transhistorical, mythic mystery of "woman" for man? Yet again, perhaps she is meant to evoke the Pygmalion figure, the "doll" and "sculpture" given life and meaning as the ideal woman by her male creator? And then again, perhaps she is all of these: she certainly does not contradict any idealized romantic idea of Oneness achieved through heterosexual union that all of the above well-known images work to reinforce. The sensual language of the text itself sculpts the girl as the object of desire that cements the two of them, the man and the girl, together as One. In the final passage from the man's story of the "lover," we see that the two have become inextricably linked in their gaze when not literally in their bodies. It is as if a "membrane" surrounds the two of them in an image of Oneness, of mutual and romantic dissolution:

> "In the dim light, each of you always in the other's gaze, it was your own bodies that you discovered once again. In the dim light, her naked body lying as if thrown out upon the floor, breathing, like grass, like frail, green grass, her breast gently heaving, sweat making her breasts and belly slippery, she

> smelled like wet grass. The gaze that dominated the space between you was like a smooth, wet and shimmering cool thin membrane that overlapped with her body and wrapped up your body, and before your gaze she was laid all bare, and yet, what was she?—still, you didn't know."
>
> "I didn't know who she was. She was a question mark that suddenly entered my life and directed the question Who are you? at me. Just as abruptly as she appeared, she disappeared. It must have been then that she took my legs with her."
>
> "Whatever for?"
>
> "Because I never said who she was, what her true form was.... As punishment for that. But now I can say it. She is my eternal lover." (464)

As we can see, the truly lyrical description and romantic notion of heterosexual complementarity is immediately and rather comically undercut by the man's loss of his legs. At this point, we learn what has made the man an invalid: in short, his failure to perform as a complement. That is, the logic of complementarity suggests that if the girl as question mark represents a question, the man is put in the role of one with an answer. Ironically, however, the only answer he knows to the question comes upon his symbolic castration with the loss of his legs. Although the question he asked her at the time was "Who are you?" he revises it in light of what he knows now, making it "Who am I?" This question, it appears, is both rhetorical (it is its own answer) and self-referential, functioning to turn back on its self, on its questioner, in a gesture not unlike the sadistic superego turning back upon the masochistic ego.[8] In other words, we have a self divided against itself in gendered sadomasochistic terms and not a self in attempted dialogue with another. Faced with the loss of the plenitude that the question mark seemingly had provided him, the man is disabled, but his body bears the mark of his psychic loss in terms very like self-mutilation rather than a wound inflicted by another. After all, he *accepts* his punishment rather than resents the girl, and even in calling it "punishment" he implies that *he* has transgressed in an unacceptable way and cannot resent what he deserves. Let us note that lovemaking between the man and the question mark imitated death, suggesting that their pleasure had exceeded safe boundaries and gone "beyond the

[8] See Silverman (1993) and Deleuze (1989). Also, see the "Introduction" to Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997. 1–30.

pleasure principle," as Freud would have it; that is, their pleasure had transgressed into the realm of *jouissance*, and as such, become a dangerous movement towards death.[9] Consequently, perhaps we can better understand the man's gratitude rather than resentment towards the question mark, for she prevents their love resulting in death and termination of desire, and instead, as a question mark, she defers the necessary and pleasurable end to their *jouissance* by propelling it back into the Symbolic. As a *point de capiton*, or "quilting point," she forces the man's (and our) recursive movement back into the Symbolic so as to render their love coherent, but only retroactively.[10] In the place of his lost plenitude, then, the man's castration establishes access to a mechanism of desire through which the "eternal lover" can, and must be, constituted and reconstituted in the realm of the Symbolic, in storytelling itself.

HALLUCINATION: COMIC DESPAIR AT THE ORIGINALLY WHOLE, BUT NOW SPLIT PAIR

In the last part of "Ai Aru Kagiri," we see that the two protagonists live in willing isolation from the rest of society: "they met no one, violated each other's memories and thereby lived amidst their waiting, having forgotten about all life outside of their memories" (464). Their intimacy and seclusion have taken on the character of pathology, now that the reader understands that the successful maintenance of their world of past memories requires the rejection of the rest of society and all other people. In their home they have even erected a kind of pathetic shrine to the "lover," a cabinet containing bits of faded ribbon, ticket stubs to mu-

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[9]See Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. and Ed. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961. For more on *jouissance* see Chapter six comprising the "Encore" lectures by Lacan in Jacques Lacan. *Feminine Sexuality*. 1975. Eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, Trans. J. Rose. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1985.

[10]Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989. Here, Zizek on the *point de capiton* as I use the concept here, and *as I* expand upon its relationship to hallucination in the next section of the paper: "When Lacan introduced the notion of foreclosure in the fifties, it designated a specific phenomenon of the exclusion of a certain key signifier (*point de capiton*, Name-of-the-Father) from the symbolic order, triggering the psychotic process; here, the foreclosure is not proper to language as such but a distinctive feature of the psychotic phenomena. And, as Lacan reformulated Freud, what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real—in the form of hallucinatory phenomena, for example" (72). Throughout his text, Zizek elaborates on the workings of ideology in relation to the *point de capiton* of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

sic concerts, single cuff links, dried roses, some photographs and other "bits of junk" (464) that hold meaning only for them. That the omniscient narrator calls these objects "junk" reveals an ironic gap between the narratorial consciousness and that of the protagonists, making room for parodic effects. At the same time, however, the omniscient consciousness is sympathetic to the plight of the characters who, as storytellers, are trying to make sense of their lives somewhere between reality and fiction:

> They tried to exhaust what they had to say about their love. They tried to tell about their truth, approaching truth and getting thrust away from truth, and discovered from inside their mutual lies the truth of telling. Love: it is in the telling; it is in the back of telling where so much of the black, infinitely dark silence packed into the body is concealed; it is in the chance to run into truth through the lies of telling. It is not a mystery to solve—it is impossible to exhaust the telling—since by the telling truth gets further away, showing all signs of getting sucked into the fiction. Gazing at the rampant memories repeated again and again within themselves was enough, each tied and bound their self, and the "beloved" [*anata*] that they should have known well became the puzzle that they tried over and over again to solve—adrift in a sea without shores, the two lived together, perfectly matched (465).

The omniscient narrator here explicitly links the concept of "love" to storytelling, and the "lover" to a puzzle they both should know so well it needs no solving. One cannot help but recall the mechanism of "ideology" here, one which operates on a tautological basis, always self-evident and thoroughly naturalized. Just as with that judge who once infamously proclaimed about pornography that "I know it when I see it," we recognize in our two protagonists' relation to the lover an ideological mechanism of knowing what one will find before it is found. Such an ideology of heterosexual love remains potent only in its seeming stability as universal truth, yet it is one necessarily underwritten by discursive adaptability and mobility. Whereas "love" suggests a state or feeling, or better still, a merging of signifier and signified in an impossible union outside of the Symbolic, "desire" is more like libido, the mechanism that drives a narrative forward in endless signification and inexhaustible telling precisely because the signifier is unable to reach its signified object and must instead substitute another signifier for it, infinitely. The object of the protagonists' narration and desire, *anata*, remains beyond their grasp,

constituted precisely as that recognizable object of desire which "hails" them (in the Althusserian sense)[11] but nonetheless eludes them in the infinite sea of signification, "a sea without shores" in which they willingly lose themselves.

Let us turn now to the last pages of the story. The text gives itself over to the woman A once again, this time as she lies in her bedroom listening to the rain outside and feels her body become suffused with water and desire. Her unbearable desire is one the narrator describes as a creaking wheel pursuing her, a desire aimed at nothing (468). The narrative breaks at this point, suddenly opening with a new section that heralds the final scenes of "Ai Aru Kagiri": "One night, when A opened the door of her room there was a woman she didn't know standing in the hallway" (468). The woman is a shocking sight, a combination of prostitute, clown and doll-like automaton. She is the very personification of the "abnormal," the "artificial" and the "comical" (468) synthesized in her appearance: her thick make-up has given her skin the smooth and artificial texture of paper-mâché; her hair is a mass of frizzy golden curls that hang over archly drawn, garish eyebrows; and her lips are "drawn as beautiful heart-shaped flower petals in burning red, but their size, just as with her eyes, were so large as to be clearly disproportionate to the rest of her face" (468). The woman A is astonished and finally asks her who she is, at which the strange woman cackles with laughter and says, "Someone you know very well" (469). The voice is clearly that of a man. The woman A responds with "I know only one person," all the while staring intently, trying to decipher the identity of the figure before her. The woman A then recognizes in the woman before her the "lover," *anata.* This figure soon vanishes, but before it does it tells A that, just as she has already suspected, it is and always has been nothing more than an illusion: "I am an existence that can't be seen and that is without even a name, one that your dreams and ideas spun into being" (470).

When the apparition disappears, A goes to the other room where the man, already understanding what has transpired, awaits her in his wheelchair. With some malice, he tells her her "lover" has gone away and will not come back. Her response to him ends the story:

> . . . She stood before him and spoke as if in pronouncement.

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[11] Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Toward an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127–188.

> "Yes, that's right. Now that he has left, you will live with me for the rest of your life. What has been left me is only what I continue to narrate from now on just like before, so you must be with me for the rest of your life. This is the only truth. Sooner or later, you too will come to know this. That your eternal lover never existed from the start. And that your legs will be like this all your life. We will live together until we die. You are necessary to me, and I am necessary to you. We were the same person, and from now on, like before, we will be too. There are only the two of us to narrate that."
>
> Her face shone like a dark flame, looking at nothing. Besides this weird reality, there was—. (471–2)

And the story ends like this, in an abrupt dash. Clearly, there is some ambiguity by this point as to whether or not the man even exists, although the omniscient narrator's referring to "they" at various moments in the story suggests that he does but even then, as the ending above makes explicit, perhaps as nothing more than the woman's prisoner or her imagined companion in storytelling.

What does all this mean for the dream of heterosexual Oneness suggested by the fantasies of the "lover," of sadomasochism, and of the question mark? It entails an understanding of the woman A's self-righteous and transcendent aspirations by means of masochistic suffering as the certification of her Lack in her punishment by the "lover," a certification needed in order to mold the Self and its body to a missing complement, the perfect and perfecting Other. When the "lover" leaves, the Lack represented by the missing Other is perceived by the woman A as her own, and both literally and figuratively as her own body's mutilation. This structure is similar for the man and, in fact, his bodily mutilation as symbolic castration even more explicitly represents Lack and the desire for self-completion via an Other. Although it appears that the woman A is mutilated by the beatings and abuse of the "lover" and the man mutilated by the girl who was the question mark, reading their wounds through the lens of the seductive pathos and imperative fictions of heterosexual unity reveals that their bodies' markings are actually the results of *self-mutilation*: they can only sustain their belief in the completion of the Self by an Other by ensuring a mutilation which must be made up for from without the Self to make the Self complete. The evidence of the Other that is the sand buried beneath the skin of A's hand and the rosy star that scars her forehead, and of course the man's amputated legs, constitutes the traces on the protagonists' bodies of a desire for an imagined

plenitude that is, paradoxically, realizable only as self-diminishment: the literal incorporation of the Other from outside the Self—in Kanai's story, as scars, sand, or as "missing body parts"—perversely delineates the imaginary Self as one that is *whole* despite the *holes* in it and, indeed, *because* of them. The heterosexual partner that completes one's Self, then, is the very concept of prosthesis, a supplementing of the Self and compensating for its Lack or mutilation. As a nurse, the woman A is the ideal prosthetic partner for the handicapped man, and one could say that this relationship acts as an allegory for the ideal heterosexual union which organizes this story. Each completes his or her Self with the imagined prosthetic "lover," while also supplementing and verifying the fictional wholeness of the other's Self as drawn in his or her stories.

When the woman A says to the man at the end of the story that they are the same person, she is asserting their complementarity and necessary Oneness. Yet that this is romantic delusion the figure of the hallucination itself proposes: for rather than the perfection of a transcendent self-completion, the hallucination is a recombination of the fragments of bodies strewn about the text from the two characters' storytelling; indeed, the hallucination is nothing if not the discordant rather than harmonious assembly of the two "lovers'" body parts. This literally *re-membered* vision, paralleled in the ostensible goal of the *remembering* of the "lovers" in storytelling, creates a parodic and comical mirror in which the woman A and the man can see themselves and their objects of desire fused: the resulting nightmare of body parts disproportionate and out of place that the hallucination represents is the parodic literalizing of the desire for that "old dream of symmetry" that motivates and propels the narrative of "Ai Aru Kagiri" forward. The question mark leads us to the dis-membering dreams and remembering stories within this text, as it is itself an orthographic supplement to the written word that bears the trace of the separation between *langue* and *parole*, written and spoken language. Bearing the trace of the spoken words' faded intention and inflection, the question mark stands in for the necessary mutilation in the Real carried out in the name of Symbolic coherence. That the story ends with dashes in lieu of a final word to conclude the story's tale is the narrative's own self-conscious and self-mocking move to complete itself in mutilating itself, laughingly suggesting that "as long as there is love"—and we might amend this to as long as there is *heterosexual love masked as complementarity*—such narratives will continue to roll forward like A's creaking wheel of desire, on toward what appears to be "nothing."