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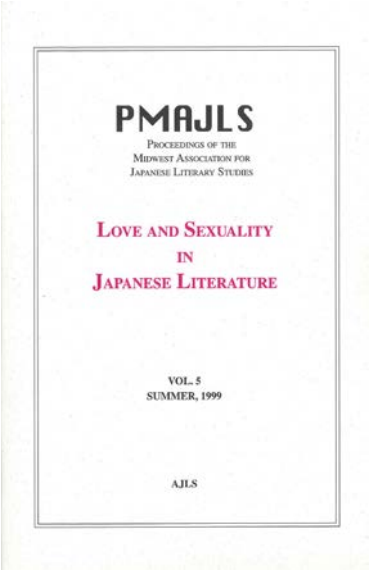

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BROKEN PASTS, UNCOMFORTABLE PRESENTS: TALES OF YŪ MIRI AND "COMFORT WOMEN"

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In 1990s Japan, concern with individual and historical trauma has risen precipitously. Literary works such as the cartoonist Uchida Shungicu's autobiographical *Fazaa fakaa* [Father Fucker] (see Murakami, this volume), have become bestsellers, bringing individual experiences of sexual abuse and its traumatic effects on individuals into the public eye. At the same time, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the "coming out" and filing of lawsuits by former comfort women has instigated a reexamination of atrocities inflicted both by and upon Japanese, bringing the matter of what I call "historical" trauma into view.

I have been intrigued with the question of how the discourse surrounding these two different sorts of trauma are linked and how the understandings of them inform discourses of sexuality and ethnicity in contemporary Japan. I do not mean so much the way these are associated within the psychiatric discourse of trauma but rather the significance of their linkage within a sociocultural framework in Japan at this particular historical juncture.

In this essay, I read a story of Yū Miri, one of the most prominent contemporary authors considering sexual trauma. Yū is of Korean descent, and the literature of Koreans in Japan often considers domestic abuse and rape. In some works, the violence serves as a metaphor for that of Japanese colonialism in Korea while in others it acts a more direct reminder of the subjugation of women within Korean culture.

I believe, however, that the depiction of sexual violence has a rather different significance in her work. I think it speaks not to Korean, but to *Japanese* ethnicity, family, and sexuality in the 1990s. Yū Miri's work, unlike that of many of the so-called Resident Korean writers to precede her, does not deal directly with the plight of Koreans in Japan or other such legacies of Japan's wartime colonization of Korea.[1] Only one of her

[1]Throughout this essay, I will use the term "Resident Korean" to refer *to Zainichi Kankoku Chōsenjin*, following Norma Field, "Beyond Envy, Boredom, and Suffering: Toward an Emancipatory Politics for Resident Koreans and Other Japanese," *Positions: East Asia Culture Critique* 1(3), Winter 1993, pp. 640–70.

works deals explicitly with a Resident Korean family; most of her characters do not even have Korean names.

On the surface, her works deal not with sexual violence but with the theme of the dysfunctional family. Specifically, she suggests that "performing" the roles of family is pointless. Woven with this primary theme, however, are rape, loveless sexual relationships with older men, and erotic attraction to little girls. She writes openly in her autobiography, *Mizube no Yurikago* [Cradle by the Sea] of coming from a troubled, violent family and of having been sexually abused as a child. She speaks in interviews of being unable to love and of having erotic attractions to young girls. Her fiction, then, is clearly autobiographical, and it is she as much as her work that is a media phenomenon. She is strikingly attractive, and articles about her in women's magazines—where she often appears—are usually accompanied by full body photos.

The Resident Korean literary figures Ri Kaisei and Takeda Seiji insist that the family she depicts simply *must* be Korean, I would contend otherwise. She has written a series of vignettes about other people's families (as well as her own) which appeared first in the popular journal *Shūkan Asahi*, and later as a collection (bearing the English title *Family Disunity*). Many of these families are broken in similar ways to Yū's own, and this suggests that she wishes to indicate that it is not the Resident Korean family per se, but the Japanese family, or perhaps even the family universally, that is in crisis.

In current Japanese popular psychology, the family is in fact linked with the matter of sexuality through the discourse of the "adult child," or, in common parlance, the "AC." This term, which comes from the United States, initially was used by mental health providers to refer to adult children of alcoholics, who exhibited a range of behaviors linked to having grown up in a family in which their needs as children were not met. It now has come to be used also for the grown children of "dysfunctional families" more broadly defined—characteristics such as such a strong sense of one's "difference" from others that one has difficulty in developing intimate relationships, of loving. The term has also come to refer to survivors of more serious trauma, those who in the United States would probably be diagnosed with the psychiatric condition, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in part because of the concerted efforts of the main psychiatrist to introduce these concepts to Japan to link them. At any rate, pertinent for my purposes today, Yū Miri—among other public figures, including Hashimoto Ryūtaro and the Murakami Haruki—has been identified as an "AC." In Yū's case, the identification as an AC is

not based so much on the grounds that she writes about dysfunctional families but on the fact she writes about trauma.

All this having been said, it may still seem strange that I want to argue that her work is tied to the matter of the recent considerations of the historical trauma of Japan's imperialist war. Yet I will argue that it is apt to examine Yū Miri's stories against the backdrop of this issue, particularly as it is manifested in the extensive public debate over the inclusion or exclusion of the history of "comfort women" in middle school textbooks. There are two central issues here: 1) what it is appropriate to teach children about their country's past?, and 2) what sorts of sources should be included in formulating the historical narrative found in textbooks used to teach those children?

As for the former question, those who have proposed eradicating the issue of comfort women from the textbooks (by this I mean those associated with the so-called liberal historiography, or *jiyū shugi shikan*, camp led by Fujioka Nobukatsu) argue that teaching too much about issues such as comfort women will make children feel insecure about their Japaneseness; as for they latter, they contend that the sexual slavery system cannot be proved by official written documents to have been instituted by the military and that it was simply an extension of the public prostitution system existing in Japan (and, I would add, Korea) at the time.[2] Implicitly, therefore, they deny the significance of teaching about the public prostitution system itself. Most pertinent for us here, they all but ignore the testimony of former comfort women—whose memories are seen as unreliable. The argument for exclusion of comfort women from textbooks, therefore, emerges both from a conception that Japaneseness should be a source of pride and from a worldview that sees violent sexuality as an inappropriate subject to be discussing with middle school students.

Yū's 1995 story *Furu hausu* [Full House], her most chilling depiction of child sexual abuse and its effect on adult relationships, contributes significantly to this very debate over the reliability of memory, and over whose accounts should be heeded.[3] The story, told in the first person, opens with the narrator, Sumi, and her younger sister, Yōko, entering the new and extravagant house their father, who works in a *pachinko* parlor, has built with a massive loan (roughly half a million dollars at the exchange rate in 1995). He hopes that the luxury of the house will enable

[2]For further information, please see the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 30(2), 1998, which contains several articles on these textbook debates.

[3]Yū Miri, *Furu hausu* [Full House] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1996). Page references will appear in parentheses within the text. All translations are my own.

him to persuade his family—the two girls and their mother, who left 16 years ago—to live together again. The house, which sits on land on the periphery of Yokohama that he bought 20 years before, is in a development planned before the burst of the economic bubble, and Sumi suspects that it will become a ghost town (16). Despite the fact that there is no promise that anyone will live there, the house is not only immense but is filled with all the trappings of middle-class life: futons, furniture, rice cookers, baths with timers, multiple brands of shower gel.

During this first visit, Yōko makes it clear that she has no intention of living there, but Sumi hedges, saying she'll stay "some of the time" (13). Yōko leaves the following morning, but Sumi hangs on. The next evening, when they are eating together, her father says abruptly,

> "I suppose you think it's my fault that that woman, your mother, left. But at the very least I never was violent."
>
> . . .
>
> "I never abused you. The only time I ever got violent was with that woman, your mother, and then only twice, . . ." (32–3)

This boldfaced assertion of innocence, which one would not expect of an actually blameless person, makes readers suspicious of the father's truthfulness. These doubts are further encouraged by the intervening narration, which tracks him chucking his *kin'en paipu* (plastic cigarette used to aid in quitting smoking) out in favor of the real thing. The narrator's thoughts have much the same effect: "As I brought each bite of fried rice to my mouth, I went back over my memories, and counted the number of times my mother had been hit. One time for each spoonful" (33). Then, after the father says, "I also never sexually abused you. Do you have any memories of my doing that?" we find another narrative comment: "Putting my spoon down after three bites, I quietly put the lid on my memories, and shook my head. 'No, I don't have any memories of that either'" (33). The voices may be at odds, but it is clear that it is the voice of the apparent victim that we are to trust.

The same evening, Sumi's father goes back to his apartment and she is left alone in the house. Just as she drifts asleep, a memory, she says, "floats to the surface." At age 6 or 7 she is alone at home. She is dozing, but wakes to a sound. She hides. Just as she thinks she was just imagining things, her mouth is covered, and she is held down. Here I quote:

> I could hear the man's rough breaths and my heartbeat. The man put his hands in my underpants, and roughly pushed a finger like the tip of a log inside me. The pain spread through my legs but my throat only gave off a sound like a balloon with a hole in it. Just then the man shivered. He clung to me like a drowning person to a piece of driftwood.
>
> At that moment there was the sound of a key turning in the door. My mother and sister came home. The man hurriedly separated his body from mine, raised his zipper, and ran off. I heard the man escaping from the kitchen window and running down the street, and then all of this was put to an end with my mother's voice saying "We're home." I hurriedly put on my underpants, which were around my ankles, went into the bathroom, and locked the door. I gently stroked my sore hollow (*kubomi*) with my fingers (40–41).

At this crucial juncture there is a break in the text. Then comes the line "Yume datta no ka mo shirenai" (Perhaps it was a dream). Whether this refers to what comes before or what comes after—a dreamlike sequence mostly in present tense in which a girl sets a field on fire and fire trucks are confusingly "already gone"—is not clear (42–3).

If in the conversation between Sumi and her father, his actions and her thoughts, supplied by the narration, intimated that a different "truth" lay behind his words. In this case, a host of memories unstable even in Sumi's mind appears. Yet here too emotions manifest themselves in bodily form: Sumi wakes (though from which dream it's not clear), and is overcome by a feeling that she needs to leave the house.

There are only a few brief passages between Sumi's leaving the house and her return, though we are told that a whole month passes. In this interlude, Sumi goes to see a pornographic film in which her sister appears.[4] What is presented here is not at all erotic in the narrator's eyes. The dominant emotion is not so much disgust but of a sort of resentment; why, she wonders, had her sister convinced her to come to watch her be tortured on screen. She senses that she has "come to confirm [her] sister's unhappiness," and that her sister, who felt she had been neglected

[4]Originally, I had not included a consideration of this scene in my analysis, but Professor Inaga's presentation helped me to see how important the matter of the "adult video" industry is for considering the discourse of trauma in contemporary Japan. I do not have space here to go into this matter in detail, though I do hope to do so on a future occasion.

by their parents in contrast to Sumi, probably had encouraged her to see this as a sort of revenge.

As I mentioned, not much of the story takes place outside the vicinity of the new house. When she comes at her father's urgent request, she finds, to her surprise, a man and a woman and their two children. She assumes they must be distant relatives whom she does not remember. They have made themselves at home; more precisely, they seem to have taken over.

One by one, she meets the members of this strange family, whom she calls *otoko, onna, shōnen, shōjo* (man, woman, boy, girl) even after she learns their names. If the depiction of the man, woman, and boy is flat, that of the girl is laced with eroticism. She notices her "lips red like sucking candy" (53). Not long after, Sumi goes into her room, which the girl is occupying. She sits at the desk, and then, she says:

> . . . nimble small hands covered both my eyes. They felt cold. When I twisted my body and grabbed those bony thin hands and pulled them toward me, the girl suddenly went limp and fell face up. I smiled faintly and knelt to pull up her sagging socks. On her inner thighs, showing from beneath her upturned skirt, were bruises like ink spots. I touched them gently with my fingertips.
>
> "Does it hurt? Did you fall?"
>
> No matter what I ask, she doesn't answer. Maybe she doesn't want to answer questions or maybe she can't hear. So that she doesn't notice that my breaths have grown uneven, I whisper in her ear, "Your name is Kaoru, right? How do you write that?" (37)

Sumi then speaks to the mother and discovers, to her surprise, that the four visitors are not relatives, but rather a family made homeless when the father lost his job. Her father, the woman recounts, took pity on them and offered to let them stay there. Whatever his original intent, the woman makes it clear that they intend to live there permanently.

In the same conversation, she learns that the girl's silence was not unusual: in fact, she never speaks. The woman reports that she has taken her to every imaginable source in an attempt to find out the cause. The mother pretends not to know, but betrays that she may: she tells Sumi that her daughter has clearly been bullied, and that once she even came home missing her underwear (58).

If at this point, we have an abuser (Sumi's father), a victim (the girl), and a formerly abused victim (Sumi), the scene that follows complicates this already complex scheme. Sumi's father comes back, ostensibly to speak to her about the family's presence, but says nothing directly about it. Instead, putting laundry in the machine, he says simply, "You have to get out the stains the same day that they appear" and "There is no stain in this world that won't come out" (63). He engages in conversation over dinner (the family has decided to build a pond in the garden, and he is powerless to object although he clearly does not want one). While this exchange does not necessarily imply that he is a victim as well as a perpetrator of abuse, it does seem to suggest that Yū wishes to focus on abusiveness as a psychological dynamic, rather than on abusers as criminals or those abused as victims.

This notion is reinforced when Sumi takes a bath with the girl in a sequence of a dreamlike abuse not unlike the earlier scene of Sumi's own victimization. I quote:

> Finding pale purple bruises on her sides and hips, like a person who speaks and laughs in her sleep, I say foolishly "You bumped into something, didn't you, Kaoru? You're a tomboy, aren't you!," and try pressing on the bruises with my fingertips (67).

The girl does not resist when Sumi washes her nipples, her belly button, and even when her hand moves downward. "She just left her body to me like a plant" (67–8). She smells the girl, who does not even resist when she washes "the most recessed place in the girl's body with her finger" (68). The scene ends with the line "when her body was hidden by her towel, at last the oxygen returned to my brain" (68).

Confronted with a scene like this one, I wonder how is it that Yū Miri is a best-selling author among young women. Even if the family in some abstract sense is the more obvious theme of her work, the psychological dynamic of abuse occupies enough space in the text that it could not go unnoticed. When I first read her work, my impulse was to interpret it as providing a tale of speaking out against victimization with which readers who had similar experiences could identify. Yet reading a scene like this, I began to wonder why her readers (mostly young women, I believe), want to read not only about being abused but about abusing. The controversial argument that survivors of abuse exhibit a tendency to perpetrate similar acts themselves is well known. Is this is what is happening here, and is that what readers want to witness? Do they identify

with these actions? Overlook them? Or might a sort of voyeurism be at work here? Does the fact that Yū points to the compliance of victims in their own abuse, that she emphasizes a system or psychology of abuse, rob her of the opportunity to blame specific real abusers?

Before I go any further with this line of thought, I want to propose a different reading of the story, which at any rate, does not end with Sumi's act of violence. This reading depends on and understanding of the girl, consistently referred to as "shōjo" in the narration despite the fact that we know her name, as an alter ego of Sumi's. At multiple points in the text, these characters are superimposed on one another. Not only is the girl living in her room, but their characters are similar: even Sumi's sister comments on how like Sumi the girl is, and, as Sumi tells us, she, like the girl, is unable to rebuff unwanted advances (73 and elsewhere).

In addition, the vocabulary used in the depictions of their abuse is strikingly similar. Furthermore, though the man who raped Sumi was referred to only as "otoko" (the man), the scene in which her father says "you don't have any memory of my sexually abusing you, do you," implies that either she both was raped by a stranger and her father or that the "otoko" was indeed her father.

The girl, too, we soon learn, has been raped not only by Sumi but by an "otoko." One day Sumi follows the girl on bicycle. After, quite out of the blue, taking Sumi's wrist and biting it, the girl finally speaks, albeit in quixotic syllables, "chichi, kite, kite, teki, chichi, chichi, kite, iku, ku, ku, ku, ku." This line at first seems mere word play, but is actually laden with meaning: "father," she begins, then *kite*, or "come!", and in a reversal of syllables, *teki*, or enemy, followed again by *kite*, followed by reversed in meaning to *iku*, literally "I go," but in Japanese the equivalent of saying "I'm coming" (ejaculating), and then the last syllable of "I go" or "ku," meaning pain, resounding four times (80). The implication is, I believe, clear. Given that the father is called "otoko" throughout the text, the layering here is blatant.

We are thus encouraged to read the bath scene as Sumi's re-enactment (in fantasy, this interpretation would go) of her own abuse from the perspective of the abuser. Of course this does not change the fact that on one level the story is patently about the psychology of abuse, or, more specifically, about both the passivity of the abused in the face of their abusers *and* the compelling desire of those abused to abuse others. It does not change the fact that the web of abuse is so often woven between family members.

The ending of the story, however, lends further credence to my alternate interpretation of the abusive dynamic. The girl calls the fire depart-

ment; when they come, there is no fire. The father begins beating his son whom he assumes has made the prank call. As soon as the firemen leave, the girl sets the curtains ablaze, then the trash can, then the newspaper sitting atop the desk. Sumi's father chuckles, and says simply, "insurance" as he watches the man and woman frantically putting the fire out. They succeed, and the man yells at the girl and raises his hand to strike her. She covers her face to protect herself, and, in the first line we hear from her, screams "That's why this is all a lie!" (91). The narrator says her voice has a "familiar ring, one with fond memories." Here we need to recall that after Sumi remembers her rape as a child, she dreams of a girl setting a field afire and gazing at it after the fire engines have left.

The girl runs out and Sumi follows her on bicycle. In the culminating passage, the distinction between Sumi's voice and the girl's is blurred. What might be dialogue or might be monologue between two parts of the self comes in rapid succession, undivided by spacing or quotation marks:

> The girl's bicycle sped off in the darkness emitting light as if ablaze. I can't keep up with you, I can't pedal, forgive me, that I set the fire, that was a lie, I'll never be as strong as you, it was probably a lie, please, wait, no one's going to hit you, when you're an adult you won't be hit, you'll see. (92)

The story ends with Sumi collapsing "bicycle and all," seeing only "the night swirling like a fingerprint" when she summons the strength to open her eyes (93).

If I follow through with my analysis here of the girl representing a part of Sumi, or her alter ego, what we are witnessing here is one part of Sumi, ostensibly the adult, caught in the swirling, vicious cycle of the repetition of abuse as the child manages to ride off glowing into the distance of adulthood.

To take this one step further, this ending seems to argue that trauma can never simply be overturned, that contrary to what Sumi's father claims, there are indeed stains that will never come out in the wash. Even if memories of trauma present themselves in ways that seem unreliable, their traces, not merely bruises but psychological scars, manifest themselves nonetheless. Yū Miri has often spoken of her own writing as her own form of "healing." In this story, crucially it is the coming to voice, the confession of having been raped (which we see in the girl's odd syllables and her statement that it is "all a lie") that enables the survivor of abuse to grasp some modicum of freedom.

While I used the word "confession" just now to speak of this action, I think now that I want to replace it. Instead I want to emphasize the act of speaking as a sharing of experience that will bring not release from pain, from the past, as in confession, but rather the way in which the narrativization of the traumatic memory transforms it into an understandable entity and allows it to be integrated into self-understanding. I also want to emphasize the way in which this act of self-revelation allows others with similar experiences to achieve such understanding. My notions come out of contemporary psychotherapeutic theories of trauma and traumatic memory, which describe the narrativization of what have been frozen as inassimilable memories as a key step in the healing process.

What does all this say to the issues I raised at the outset? One could argue that since Yū has Sumi/the girl free a part of herself by voicing her memories, no matter how unreliable those memories may seem, she is clearly coming out in favor of valuing the voices of comfort women. Perhaps this is the case. Yet I think there is a more subtle point to be mined from this story, one that provides an even more important interjection into the debate over the treatment of comfort women in historical discourse. That point is one of class.

It is no coincidence, I believe, that the title of this story is "Full House," a term for a hand in poker. The suggestion is not only that Sumi's father is gambling on the fact that he will be able to gather all the necessary cards (i.e. members) to make this "home," but that money is part of what is at stake here. This is a post-bubble tale of the Japanese dream of "mai hōmu" ('my home,' i.e. home ownership) gone awry, showing that buying a house and filling it is not sufficient to bring happiness. The frustrated class aspirations of the men in the story, it is implied, contribute to their sense of powerlessness, and as a consequence, to their using violence against those over whom they do have power. Thus it is perhaps not all families, but impoverished families, that she portrays as riddled with such sexual abuse.

While class was obviously a major factor in determining who was victimized by the comfort women system, this term is all too often left out of the debate. Those fighting vociferously to have comfort women left in the textbooks, while they rightly stress the role of social conceptions and structures of sexuality (such as the tacit acceptance of rape and prostitution), as well as the ways that ethnic prejudice was influential in producing these women's oppression. Most often, however, they neglect to stress that poverty and female gender were necessary conditions for becoming a comfort woman, but ethnicity, that is to say non-Japaneseness, was not. Pairing Yū Miri with the comfort women debate

is ultimately fruitful because it exposes the dangerous but prevalent tendency to displace class from discussions of sexuality and ethnicity in both Japan's history and in its present.