
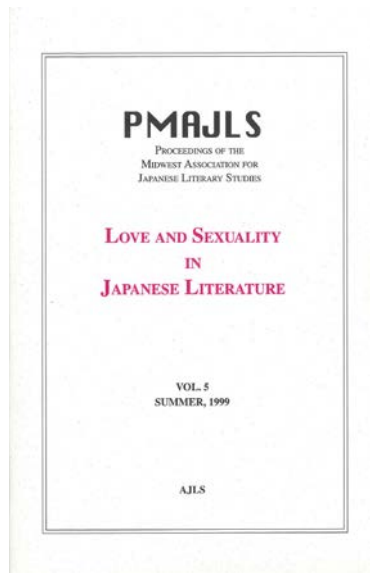


“What’s Happening to Sexuality?: Corporeal Sensations in Matsuura Rieko’s *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai*”

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**WHAT'S HAPPENING TO SEXUALITY?:
CORPOREAL SENSATIONS IN MATSUURARIEKO'S
OYAYUBI P NO SHUGYŌJIDAI**

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SEXUALITY AND THE MALE-FEMALE BINARY OPPOSITION

Matsuura Rieko's *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* (Big toe P's apprenticeship)¹ is the first concept novel in modern Japanese literary history to question the fundamentally male-female binary opposition that often dominates prevailing views on sexuality. Referring to the totality of a person's sexual orientation or preference, sexuality is still, at the end of the 1990s, understood largely in terms of the heterosexual relationship. This fixation with the heterosexual relationship has allowed the gender role divisions, which mark society to be essentialized simply by pointing to the biological differences between men and women. While feminist critics such as Adrienne Rich are working to illuminate the social and cultural contexts within which sexuality and gender are constructed, society's general fixation with the heterosexual norm is making it difficult to present sexuality as a mere social construct.

A lack of alternative models of sexuality has meant that, to date, related discussions remain limited to behavioral aspects such as sexual intercourse and procreation, without actually being able to address questions of the heterosexual norm itself. The extent to which heterosexuality remains unchallenged as the social norm can be gauged, for instance, from the curiosity homosexuality is currently generating within sexuality-related research. In today's society, "sexuality" often refers simply to "sex," and as a whole the sexual orientation of society is viewed as being overwhelmingly heterosexual. While there may indeed be a growing awareness of gender as a mere social construct based on the forced binary separation of social roles; the same cannot be said of sexuality. At present, the main flow of information throughout society still largely presents an image of heterosexuality, thus effectively stifling any chance of alternative perspectives.

Even if one is willing to acknowledge the growing awareness of gender as a social construct, the fact is that our conditioned response is to prioritize the heterosexual relationship above all others and to accept the

¹ Quotations of *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* are taken from the Kawade bunko edition, 1995.

inevitability of the binary division of gender. Thus sexuality is equated with sex. Also, the oft-theorized relationship of mutual dependency between gender and sexuality is ultimately grounded in corporeal sensations, the essential residue of which is supposedly retrieved by isolating the respective politics and strategies of both sexuality and gender. Corporeal pleasures gained from one's partner are accounted for by referring to the functioning of the "specific differences" built into the male and female sexual organs, with desire for the opposite sex consequently deemed to come "naturally" to those programmed to act on "instinct." This view of sexuality is all the more convincing because of its origins in the subjectivity of the individual, in comparison to gender which, being relegated to the public spheres, is open to criticism. This then is perhaps why one tends to feel, more or less, the legitimacy of the sexual norm whenever reference is made to the "intimate" corporeal sensations of the individual. This "privatization" of what was fundamentally "public" has been an integral part of modernity. The fact that corporeal sensations are generally viewed as being private in nature adds much weight to constructs otherwise considered to be strictly public, a prime example of the effectiveness this system being the construct of gender.

Once having acknowledged the male-female binary opposition as a construct of the "system," one might assume its abandonment a simple step. This is not so, however, since the reality is that sex, sexuality, and gender remain fused together at the level of corporeal sensations in such a way as to mutually support each other's conscious construction. Of course, to reveal such collaboration would be an effective admission of their suspect foundations. It would also expose the actuality behind the supposedly "personal" nature of corporeal sensations. As the individual's own personal "truth," these corporeal sensations become inseparably linked to the essence of human existence. Literature is one field in which these corporeal sensations have been treated as a given. Revered within literature as the most noble and readily comprehensible of the corporeal sensations, sexual intercourse (as a basic ingredient of existence) has come to represent the pinnacle of these sensations. Literature has, in fact, played a major role in the longevity of this particular fiction, in which sexuality is portrayed as being personal and inseparable from the male-female binary opposition. The depiction of this most "intimate" moment is in fact considered in some circles to be the cornerstone of literature.

Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai presents a focused problematization of prevailing views on sexuality. By questioning the "natural" or "personal" nature of sexuality and the equation of sexuality with sex, the text emphasizes the fact that gender, as a binary structure, is altogether unten-

able, thus casting doubts on the very basis for the gender-related research. The oppression directed towards the otherwise “public” category of gender (in its political, social, and cultural sense) is grounded in the politics of the male-female binary opposition, which traps sexuality in the private sphere.

A number of fundamental questions need to be asked when problematizing sexuality. For instance, why is it that any consideration of sex always ends up reinforcing the phallogocentric foundation of the male-female binary opposition? Why should sexuality prioritize sex and why are corporeal sensations simply treated as something personal in nature? And why is gender so easily associated with the politics of sexuality? *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* tackles these issues like a role playing game. To get to the next chapter (= stage) one must first clear the previous one. It does not, of course, necessarily mean that one is always progressing. Rather, in the same manner as a video game, which gives the player the feeling of climbing or moving forward while actually remaining fixed on the same flat screen, *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* shows the reader varied “scenes” of a society constructed around binary sexuality. The reader’s task is then to conscientiously read the hierarchy of sexuality that rules this virtual landscape.

By exposing the reader to a parade of the so-called “natural” and “instinctive” sexual scenes, this novel points out that men’s and women’s bodies are being seduced by an extremely cunning hierarchical system. It portrays one’s desires and feelings of pleasure as something unjustly artificial, something that is no more than a product of the system and the predetermined nature of supposedly “private” sensations. This is not to deny the potential for desires and feelings of pleasure inherent in corporeal sensations (nor to conclude that these too might be fabricated sensations), but simply to criticize their deceptive expansion into, and encasement within, the public sphere, and to return them to the private sphere of the pure body. As such, *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* touches on a number of key issues related to gender studies.

HOMOSOCIAL AND HOMOPHOBIC

The first “voice” appearing in the text is that of Noma Kazumi, who confesses to a writer known only as “M” the troublesome fact that a big toe on her right foot has mutated into what now closely resembles a penis. This is the big toe P, from which the novel derives its title. While Kazumi’s big toe P neither ejaculates, nor is useful for procreative purposes, it is nevertheless capable of having an erection, and of making Kazumi feel good, making the “organ purely for pleasure” (vol.1, p.33).

Despite being identical to a penis in appearance, Kazumi's big toe P is, however, in the final analysis, not a sexual organ. Kazumi has not become a man, nor does she appear to have an identity crisis as a woman. The story principally revolves around events and relationships following the transformation of Kazumi's big toe.

Kazumi jointly runs, with her close friend Ayasawa Yōko, an entertainment business called *Lovership*, which sells "love" to customers and, as such, serves as an example of consumer society in the adult industry. *Lovership* is known for selling love, separately from selling body: a customer has to choose a girl for sex or love. Ultimately, however, sexual intercourse remains as the most pure form of love. In this respect nothing is fundamentally challenged to the binary foundation of sexuality. The women are not only required to satisfy the sexual fantasies of men, but are also under their complete control (i.e. the full service required for "love"). Yōko, whose desire goes beyond such limited sexuality, later commits suicide without revealing her desire for Kazumi.

Kazumi's boyfriend, Komiya Masao, and his friend Iwatani Seisuku, are extremely homosocial/homophobic male chauvinist types. After Yōko's suicide, Kazumi continues the monogamous relationship with her high school classmate, still believing that love is equated with sex and they will marry in the near future. Masao, however, shares the values stressed by his best friend, Iwatani, who views women as mere sex-toys, displaying strong male chauvinist or even misogynistic tendencies: a tendency complemented by his high valuation of the homosocial relationship with Masao based on their mutual trust. Upon finding out about Kazumi's transformed big toe, Masao tries to ignore the fact. During sexual intercourse with Kazumi, Masao avoids all contact with the big toe P, yet insists on having oral sex with Kazumi. For him the penis is dirty, so a woman sucking his penis is a sign of true devotion, or what he considers "love." When Kazumi finally realizes the way in which Masao views their relationship, she quickly loses interest in him.

Becoming aware of what constitutes "normal" sexual relations—the steadfast loyalty to male chauvinist, homosocial, communal bonds (e.g. Masao's relationship with Iwatani), the homophobic attitudes (e.g. the blatant prejudice directed towards the big toe P), and the male desire to control women, with force if necessary (e.g. the forced oral sex)—Kazumi now questions the validity of the prevailing views on sexuality. Of course, this awakening is not Kazumi's own doing, but due solely to an external influence—the transformation of her big toe.

While the existence of the big toe P does not change Masao's "normal" views on sexuality, he secretly feels threatened by that toe's pleas-

ure-only function. After all, not only does the big toe P give Kazumi a taste of sexual desires supposedly reserved for men, but its lack of a procreative function also tends to devalue the very essence of male existence. This could, of course, be seen in a positive light as having relieved sex of the burden of procreation, although Masao is incapable of holding such a view. Faced with a nullified logic of sexual love (normally glossed-over using words such as "affection" "trust" "happiness"), and burdened, moreover, with the need to consider women's desires and feelings of pleasure (normally not bothered with), the very basis of Masao's once secure value system is thrown into doubt. What makes Masao shudder the most is the thought of having sexual relations with the big toe P. In short, Masao is incapable of thinking about sex, sexuality, and gender in terms other than of the male versus female framework. Since he is able to relate to women only in terms of sex, he is forced to look to his friend, Iwatani, for psychological fulfillment. For both Masao and Iwatani, women represent the ultimate Other, incapable of comprehending male needs. Unable to accept Kazumi's rejection of him, Masao isolates the big toe P as the cause of her change and tries to cut it off.

In contrast, characters belonging to the "music industry" do not privilege sex, viewing it as just one aspect of sexuality. In the end, however, this de-glorification of sexual intercourse leads them to sexual anarchy. The possibility of criticizing the male-female binary opposition is thus lost, "music industry" becoming the "heretic" at once using and being used by this binary opposition. Finding a friend in the blind composer, Kendō Shunji, after fleeing from Masao's attempted "castration," Kazumi is pleasantly surprised to discover Shunji as someone completely uncontaminated by any illusions of male dominance. Warmed by her experience of sex as an extension of cuddling, free from the associated "norms," Kazumi falls for Shunji. Used as a sex-toy by both men and women due to his free nature, Shunji feels no repulsion towards the big toe P, involving it enthusiastically in his sexual contact with Kazumi.

Shunji is under the control of his cousin, Eguchi Chisato. The stereotypical Epicurean, Chisato, far from seeing women as oppressed, seeks to give herself over to the "norms" of the society. While her attempts reach comical proportions at times, Chisato's value system is incapable of seeing things any other way. Holding a grudge against Kazumi for taking Shunji in away from her, Chisato breaks into Kazumi's room in the middle of the night and has "sex" with the big toe P, while Kazumi is asleep. Angry at having been used, Kazumi goes to see the novelist M, who then correctly tells her that she was "raped." Kazumi initially interprets the unpleasantness she has felt after the incident as a

mere physical uneasiness coming from her contact with another person's female sexual organ, and thereby as a sign of her lack of lesbian inclination. However, she comes to realize that the unpleasantness most likely arose from isolated feelings of repulsion for Chisato's act.

Once involved with and now seeking to control Shunji, the musician Oinuma Tamayuki's attitude represents little more than a transfer of male chauvinist ideals from the male-female relationship to the male-male relationship. Oinuma takes Shunji from Kazumi and prevents her from seeing him. While this is a homosexual relationship, it is one in which gender lines are clearly drawn, Shunji having been forced into a submissive position. There is, in this regard, no distinction between this relationship and Shunji's relationship with Chisato. The mere fact of its being homosexual does not, of course, nullify the possibility of the relationship being one of control and submission based on the social "norms" of sexuality and gender. Oinuma's attitude, then, exemplifies the way in which a homosexual relationship becomes phallogocentric.

Shunji's blindness means that he has to rely on his sense of touch in all relationships, including sexual ones. Warmed by her sexual experience based on cuddling, Kazumi feels comfortable with Shunji. However, the abuse that Shunji has suffered at the hands of bisexual and homosexual men as a result of his uninhibited nature only leaves him with feelings of dissatisfaction. Kazumi values her relationship with Shunji for the "chastity" of their affection for each other, in which sexual intercourse meets "pure love." Subsequently, there is a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding the actual role of the big toe P in their sexual relationship. Sometimes the big toe P seems to be involved as a third person, whereas at other times Kazumi feels repulsion, as her pure desire becomes entangled with homosexual elements. Chisato's "rape" of Kazumi's big toe P is initially fueled by her feelings of jealousy towards Kazumi, who has taken Shunji away from her. However, there is also an element of malice in Chisato, who attempts to suppress Kazumi's possibilities for personal growth by treating her big toe P as a mere sexual tool. While she avoids the disgrace of being called a lesbian by having "sex" only with the big toe P, Chisato nevertheless has the option of labeling Kazumi as a lesbian and effectively alienating her from the "normal" society.

Homosocial and homophobic attitudes are clearly here a means of self-preservation among controllers of the "norms," allowing them to continue building their relationships on the basis of the control and submission framework. Feeling of togetherness, which characterizes male homosocial communities, allows prevailing sexual norms to be passed off as fair and balanced. While homosociality functions as a means for

men to view women as Other, homophobic attitudes, on the other hand, continue to produce the feeling of repulsion towards homosexual sex, thus directing them to exclusively engage in heterosexual relations. There exists a misconception that such homophobic sentiment is shared by both men and women, since the forfeiting of one's identity as either male or female would signal an immediate loss of sexual identification, which is the basic element facilitating one's social adjustment. Clearly, homophobia represents the value imposed upon sexuality by the "norms" of the male-dominated society. The meaning of sexuality is thus hierarchized, placing men and women in the fixedly gendered roles of the controller and controlled. As long as we continue to locate the ultimate meaning of sexuality in heterosexual sex, that is, sexual intercourse depending solely on the biological difference between male and female sexual organs, an end to this hierarchical system and the introduction of new perspectives for sexuality will not be possible.

THE SEXUAL HIERARCHY

Bumping into Iwatani (now involved with Chisato) one day, Kazumi finds out about a stage production called *Flower Show*, the members of which have "sexual organs very different from the average" (vol.1, p.226). *Flower Show* involves the performance of sexual acts before a select audience, although individually the seven members of the group hate having sex. Of all the different groupings featured in *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai*, *Flower Show* shows the most potential to redefine prevailing sexual boundaries. All the members of *Flower Show* have what the mainstream society would define as "deformed" sexual organs, or "abnormal" sexual orientations. For instance, the director of *Flower Show*, Suwa Shigeki, believed for a long time that his defective penis rendered him incapable of having sex, while Suwa's partner in the show, Sakurai Aiko, cannot have sex without feeling pain due to an allergic reaction to semen. The phallocentrist, Kodama Tamotsu, idealizes sexual intercourse as the culmination of love, yet he is only able to have sex vicariously through the penis of his Siamese twin brother, Shin, which protrudes out from Tamotsu's abdomen. Tamotsu's own penis is rendered useless because it is hidden beneath his brother's, a fact that causes him much anguish. As atonement for discovering his secret after once stripping him naked when he was a baby, Tamotsu's partner, Mizuo Eiko, swore to take care of him and she actually does look after him, until his violent temper drives her away. Kinoda Yukie, another performer, has teeth in her vagina and cannot have sex without injuring her partner (this depiction of Yukie is at once a representation of misogynist male tendencies found in

much pornography, and also the personification of the vagina as a Medusa plotting its revenge on men). Motivated to change sex out of revulsion for the male sex organ rather than from any desire to be female, the transsexual, Ayase Masami, opted for no clitoris so as to minimize sexual pleasure. Finally, Masami's partner, Tanabe Yōhei dislikes anything related to sex so intensely that his eyes to pop out of their sockets every time he has orgasm.

The prevalence of the binary norm within the *Flower Show* itself serves to amplify the existential anguish of its members. Under the group's influence, Kazumi begins to ponder the possibility of sexual communication, sexual union, and sexual feelings, without the inevitability of sexual intercourse. Her mind opens to the possibility of previously unexplored formulations of sexual desire and pleasure, otherwise hidden behind an infatuation with the sexual organ as the only means of satisfying sexual desire. Here, it would be easy enough to conclude that our present infatuation with sexual intercourse has developed as a result of our sexual desire being ruled by the sexual fantasies of the male mind. By blindly following this channel, one can only entrench the sexual hierarchy according to which the ultimate goal of love is nothing but ranking the gendered identities of the partners. Having occupied a major portion of many people's lives, we now discover that sexual desire is little more than a construct of the prevailing sexual hierarchy. Cemented through the repeated production and reproduction of the male-female binary opposition, the hierarchy itself paradoxically helps us to see the history behind the reproduction of the human sexual desire.

All the members of the *Flower Show* are sexual outsiders, unable to survive in the phallogocentric mainstream of society. It is not for their own pleasure that they perform, but to produce pleasure for others, as Kazumi comes to realize from working with them. Continuing her lessons in love and sex, Kazumi becomes discouraged when her love, Shunji, is taken away by Oinuma. However, she receives moral support from Eiko and Tamotsu. A sexual relationship develops between Kazumi and Eiko through the medium of the big toe P, forcing Kazumi at last to face her homophobia. Unable to put up with his violent temper, Eiko leaves Tamotsu and together with Kazumi, returns to Tokyo to start a new life. Tamotsu and Shunji (having fled from Oinuma) turn up at Eiko and Kazumi's place in Tokyo, and all four begin a strange life together. Running out of steam around this time, the *Flower Show's* finale is scheduled to be performed in Kobe. The final show is to be presented in cooperation with another theatrical group lead by Udagawa Kin'ya, who was the mind behind the anti-authoritarian theater of the 1970s.

For the Kobe show, Kazumi chooses Eiko to be her partner, their first and last performance together on stage. Tamotsu, meanwhile, decides to use the occasion to rid himself of the embarrassment of Shin's penis once and for all. However, during Tamotsu's performance, Kazumi intervenes, preventing Tamotsu's planned castration by thrusting her own big toe P into the teeth of Yukie's vagina. Having looked forward to seeing Tamotsu's castration performance, Udagawa goes mad when Kazumi gets in the way. Depicted as an uncritical believer of the sexual "norms," Udagawa verbally abuses Kazumi: "I will hit women as well, if necessary. A woman like you needs to learn not to wrongly assume that a decent man should never beat a woman" (vol.2, p.309). while shouting these words at her, he hits her hard with his fists. A relic from the 1970 s, Udagawa's attitude shows the extent to which the free-sex movement of that period solidified the sexual hierarchy, alienating women, and forcing homosexual sex into the ghettos. Udagawa's physical attack on Kazumi in the final scenes of the novel is dually motivated; first, it is an act of punishment directed towards all women who would dare challenge the authority of the prevailing sexual hierarchy, and second, it is a protective measure preventing the erosion of his privileges as a monopolistic distributor of sexual desires.

After the Kobe performance, the *Flower Show* breaks up with members returning to their own lives. Having searched for "perfect sex," Kazumi now wonders whether it really exists. Either way she has determined to "no longer crave after the perfect sex" (vol.2, p.319). On this note the novel comes to a close.

Having suffered at the hands of the prevailing sexual hierarchy, the members of the *Flower Show* actively seek alternatives to the "norms" of sexuality, while Kazumi, having faced her sexual anguish, enters into a new life with Eiko. Still, she feels that something is out of place with her sex with Eiko, and even with the sex she has with Shunji. The reason is that Kazumi does not fit into a particular "mold." For the first time, Kazumi has taken the initiative in developing a relationship with Eiko. Here "mold" refers to the "nature of one's desire," which by incorporating both body and mind, gives "meaning" to sexual intercourse. Kazumi uses the term "mold" to refer to the fundamentally difficult question of one's sexual desire. Ultimately, her decision serves to cloud the hierarchical distinction between controller and controlled, the distinction ultimately becoming one of stance. Neither ambiguous nor preferential, a mold helps to shape structures. It shapes the structures itself, not allowing them to become grounded at the individual level. Once we approach the

issue in this way the possibilities for alternative formulations of sexuality open up.

So in the end, what does this big toe P represent? Firstly, it is depicted throughout the novel as something “dispensable.” As there has been no change to Kazumi’s female sexual organ, perhaps the only noticeable difference is that a sock on her right foot has been a little difficult to be pulled up. She has assumed that because the big toe P has no procreative function and exists solely to satisfy “pure desire” of hers, she would hardly notice if it simply disappears. This assumption, however, proves to be wrong. Without the transformation of her big toe, Kazumi would not have considered the meaning of her pure desire, or that of the desire in her, which exists only to satisfy desires of others. Having narrowly escaped Masao’s attempt to “castrate” her big toe P, Kazumi becomes shockingly aware of the reality of sex-related violence. Men are often only concerned with their own sexual desire, not with that of women. This fact reveals itself in the violent attitudes of men who try to make women the object of their desire. As such, Kazumi strongly values her big toe P, which makes her realize how much loathing and fear she senses regarding her own relationship with Masao because she has been used as just “one of those tools to fondle his penis” (vol.1, p.89). This awareness now makes her determined to break free from her own desire and pleasure, programmed by the prevailing sexual hierarchy.

The big toe P thus serves to highlight the sexual “norms” of the society, bringing to the foreground examples of sexual traumas and misconceptions of those who contact with the sexually traumatized partners. Not merely functioning as a means of confronting the simplistic structures of male-dominated society, the big toe P’s very presence brings insights to the nature of the relationship between controller and controlled. In this respect, Kazumi’s relationship with the sexually uninhibited Shunji, as well as with the members of *Flower Show*—all of them being digressive of mainstream sexual norms—, reveals to Kazumi the forced nature of the prevailing sexual hierarchy, and encourages her to search for new formulations of sexuality. Not that she necessarily uncovers any such new formulations, for this is not, after all, the novel’s main focus. More importantly, Kazumi changes from being subjected to the sexual “norms” at the beginning of the novel, to someone able to see sexual intercourse, and consequently gender, as realities distinct from sexuality—a change conclusively stressed by her “voice” stating that she “no longer craves after the perfect sex” (vol.2, p.319). Also, we find out that corporeal sensations of the personal kind do in fact exist. Any focus on a sexuality centered on phallogentric male-female binary oppositions is thus reconfigured

to be merely one of the many possible formulations. This does not deny the heterosexual relationship, nor does it present the homosexual relationship as an ideal. Any "noise" from the reader suggesting otherwise would be a complete misreading. The text is in fact seeking to free gender from their essentialized definition, which is ultimately concluded as the sexual union between male and female sexual organs. In short, the text seeks to free gender from a view of sex/sexuality grounded in the static image of male/female identities. Whether such search for freedom can, in fact, be successful would, of course, depend on whether we manage to reconfigure our thinking as it relates to gender. Only then will there be any chance of exploding the myths of the prevailing sexual hierarchy.

THE WRITER/NARRATOR/READER AS LISTENER

The final section of this paper looks at issues relating to the novel's narratorial structure. One of the "rules of fiction writing," according to which the writer, while directly involved in producing the text, remains at the same time external to the text, is indeed applicable to *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai*. However, this novel does not support the linear development of a story, according to which "meaning" is being revealed as the reader works her way through the text. The fact that the plot or story of *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* merely recounts, in a conventionally chronological order, events which happened to Kazumi in the course of a year would seem to point to the lack of interest, on the part of the writer/narrator, in investing the text with "meaning".

This novel covers the one year period, starting from the time when the protagonist, Mano Kazumi, initially goes to see a novelist known only as "M" (prologue), through the time of her second visit to M (epilogue) a year later. The prologue and epilogue are both narrated by M, while the sixteen chapters in between are narrated by Kazumi. Nevertheless, we are informed in the epilogue that, having listened to the whole of Kazumi's story, M has, on Kazumi's urgings, "written this novel" (vol.2, p. 324). Thus at the commencement of the story, the novel, *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai*, has yet to be written, while the story itself (the sixteen chapters narrated by Kazumi) ends up being claimed as M's recounting of what she has heard from Kazumi.

In short, this novel revolves around M's retelling, for the reader, of a story she heard from Kazumi. Thus Kazumi is not in fact the narrator at all. Rather her "voice" is "recorded" and "played back," or rather "written down" by M, in the form of a performative narration. Of course, this performative narration is not simply a regurgitation of what M has been told, but involves M's own interpretation, as well as her "transformation"

of the story during the time M writes it down on paper. So how does Matsuura Rieko involve herself in the “mechanisms” of this text making? The following are comments she has made concerning the relationship between the novel’s outer appearance and its narrative content:

The structure is really messed up, so there’s no way you’d call it a novel, though the basic form comes from what you’d call novelistic or traditional. It’s supposed to be a developmental novel, a Bildungsroman, in appearance, at least. Some readers have gotten me wrong on this point, but basically the idea of having the protagonist develop and discover some answers along the way so that the writer presents to the reader some new truth or new outlook (about the issue of sexuality), was not what I was after. (“What is this big toe penis?” commentary, *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai*, Kawade bunko edition, 1995)

Matsuura relies on the form of the Bildungsroman in order to structure the narrative based on pre-textual “voices.” This form fits well with the chronological flow of corporeal time from past to present, dictated by Kazumi’s telling of her experiences to the listener, M. Filling the greater part of the text, the narration of Kazumi’s “voice,” is supposed to represent the telling of an extraordinary experience to a listener. At the same time, M, the listener or recorder, has been given the task of retelling the story for the reader. Having already begun her construction of the story (in terms of the chronological ordering of events) we are reading, M is, correctly speaking, no longer a “pure listener.” However, Matsuura attempts to maintain the position of M as a “pure listener” within the story by stating clearly that she has no intention of presenting the reader with “some new truth or new outlook.”

Included in this novel are several “mechanisms” designed to clear the impasse that the contemporary novel finds itself in. Firstly, the normal passage of fiction from writer to narrator, and then from narrator to reader is nullified by the fact that in the epilogue the reader is told, *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* has yet to be written. In short, the novel will be written sometime after the reader has finished reading. In place of herself, Matsuura has assigned the task of penning Kazumi’s story to the novelist (and narrator), M. Thus M is not only the listener and narrator, but also the writer of the story. This “mechanism” does not seek to align M with Matsuura, but rather to erase completely the presence of Matsuura as the writer of the text. The idea is to substantiate the in-text “voice” by erasing the writer’s (i.e. Matsuura’s) “voice” from the surface of the text.

Matsuura also seeks to suppress the reader's "voice" from the text. By continually exchanging Kazumi's "voice" with other "voices" within the text, the narrative takes shape, illuminating the plot developed in each chapter. While clearly intending M to take over from her the role of controlling the text, Matsuura also seeks to maintain the crucial role as listener, played by M.

To summarize then, the text is an attempt by M to write from "memory" of Kazumi's experiences over the past year using only the narration of numerous "voices." On the other hand, the published book that we have before us is the product of notes taken by the true "pure listener" of all the details, that is, Matsuura herself. This text is "read" when the reader reduces Kazumi's telling of her own experiences and the retelling of those experiences by M to the "voices" in the text. The text does not require the "noise" of the reader's "voices," but only that the reader listens to the "voices" already inscribed within the text. By doing so, one's corporeal sensations stand a good chance of being reinvigorated. Securing the dominance of the "voices" was Matsuura's intention from the start. The standard means of re-memorization, characters (kanji, hiragana, kata kana) are also the tool by which the reader learns the "norms" of the mainstream society. *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* recasts the writer, narrator, and reader in the role of listener, thereby connecting directly with the reader's corporeal sensations and avoiding the mediation of characters.

These "voices" call for conscious recollection of corporeal sensations experienced at one's pre-consciousness/signification stage. For instance, in the text, these "voices" make it possible for Kazumi to carry on a relationship with the blind orphan, Kendō Shunji. Shunji tells Kazumi that "To hear a woman's voice is like having my ears tickled, and I love that sensation" (vol.1, pp.98-99). By having the "voices" reach out to them, Shunji and Kazumi are able to experience pleasures not related in any way to sexual pleasure. Through the "voices," Shunji is also able to discover a part of himself, of which he was not aware, but lying dormant within his corporeal sensations.

The characters in *Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai* perform so as to give voices to these "memories" of corporeal sensations unconsciously concealed within one's body. The in-text narrative avoids being recentered around a given "I" by having the reader re-perform these "voices." Listening to the "voices" and calling out, which is no doubt being attempted both within and outside of the text, is one of the fundamental channels to connect the part of sexuality. It is a button to start the search for new possibilities of sexuality. Once this button is pressed, there is no way of telling what changes are going to take place in relation to sex and gender.

Oyayubi P no shugyōjidai presses this button. Now all we wait for are bodies capable of responding to what the “voices” are saying.

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