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CHIASMATIC NARRATIVE AND TWISTED SUBJECTIVITY IN KANAI MIEKO'S *BOSHIZÔ*¹

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The article provides a reading, from a psychoanalytic point of view, of Japanese writer Kanai Mieko's short tale *Boshizô* (*Portrait of Mother and Child*), published in 1992, as a "twisted" or "contorted" parable of the construction of female subjectivity. Establishing connections between the form and the content of the novel, the essay analyzes how Kanai's use of the rhetorical figure of the chiasmus structures the internal narrative of the novel at the same time that it reflects the process of formation of female subjectivity and desire. The novel becomes, thus, a staging of the female Oedipus complex which plays out its twists.

KEY WORDS: Japanese literature, psychoanalysis, Kanai Mieko, *Boshizô*, female subjectivity, Oedipus complex, female desire, incest.

From the first lines of *Boshizô* (*Portrait of Mother and Child*, 1992), we know we are in Kanai's fictional world². Lying in bed, an unnamed female

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² Kanai Mieko (b. 1947) is a contemporary woman writer who debuted in Japan at only nineteen with her poetry and the story, "Love Life" (*Ai no seikatsu*, 1967). Since then, a three-volume collection of her short stories has come out, two volumes of poetry, collections of her essays, children's stories, and several novels. She is a prolific film and cultural critic as well, and so besides her serialized fiction, her essays appear in newspapers and journals on a regular basis. Her essays are intellectually playful and somewhat acerbic in their wit, while her fiction tends to be stylistically experimental with long, lyrical sentences that in their sensuous attention to color, motion, time, and space evoke cinematic qualities. Works translated into English include her stories "Platonic Love", (trans. Amy Vladeck Heinrich), "Rabbits" (trans. Phyllis Birnbaum), "Rotting Meat" (trans. Mary Knighton), excerpts from her long work *Treading on Soft Earth*,

protagonist is awakened by a smell in her room, a stench really, as of an animal-like presence. This smell transmutes itself subsequently into a disembodied voice. *In medias res*, this voice begins a story that will become the internal narrative to the female listener's frame story in Kanai Mieko's short tale *Boshizō*. Uncannily intimate to its listener, the voice is yet outside and foreign. In this way, Kanai's story presents a scene of fantasy enclosed and framed by a voice that resembles less a narrator *per se* than an inscrutable message from the big Other of Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse. For us as readers, the demanding task of endlessly making sense of this "message" overtakes the goal of finally "getting it"; that is, *Boshizō* as symbolic parable demonstrates how Lacanian psychoanalysis is fundamentally concerned with the necessary incommensurabilities and slippages involved in "translation": translation between individual subjectivities, between cultures, and between the self divided from itself. In my reading here, Kanai's story stages at several levels a "crossing over" of languages, disciplines, cultures, and psychic registers, and its primary means of doing so is effected by the rhetorical figure of the chiasmus. The stakes of this crossing are, I believe, grounded in rituals of contestation and transgression—what "translation" in its myriad significations is all about—rather than coherence, fidelity, and harmony, translation's ostensible goal³.

The story opens with the voice from the internal narrative claiming "I couldn't help but love him because, of course, there was nothing else for me to do" (551). We quickly find out that the speaker is a young beautiful girl

which appeared in *TriQuarterly* (trans. Sarah Teasley), and most recently, a representative collection of stories, *The Word Book* (trans. Paul McCarthy).

³ In valorizing the footnote-encumbered monster of literal translation over the so-called popular and harmonious one, Vladimir Nabokov puts his case somewhat differently than I mean to do here but he expresses his caustic disdain at the standards of "readability" in a memorable way: "I constantly find in reviews of verse translations the following kind of thing that sends me into spasms of helpless fury: «Mr. (or Miss) So-and-so's translation reads smoothly». In other words, the reviewer of the «translation» who neither has, nor would be able to have, without special study, any knowledge whatsoever of the original, praises as «readable» an imitation only because the drudge or the rhymster has substituted easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text. «Readable», indeed! A schoolboy's boner is less of a mockery in regard to the ancient masterpiece than its commercial interpretation or poetization. «Rhyme» rhymes with «crime», when Homer or *Hamlet* are rhymed. The term «free translation» smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the «spirit»—not the textual sense—that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase" (Nabokov, 1992: 127). Among required readings on translation theory one usually finds Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (1968). In this essay, Benjamin argues that the translation is a different work from the original and has a life of its own. The translation should not *reflect* but rather *illuminate* the original, while also pushing the limits of one's own language to perceive a foreign language as yet kin. For Benjamin, the ideal translation is one that unifies the seemingly opposing and irreconcilable translation goals of literalness and freedom. One "vocal image" used by Benjamin that I find to resonate provocatively with my allusions to the Lacanian big Other with its echo of "Che vuoi?" could well serve as the epigraph to my essay here: "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one" (Benjamin, 1968: 76).

who, while surrounded by admiring young men, has eyes only for “him”. The term *ano hito* is used here to refer to this “him” and, in context, it takes on the sense of *kare* as used colloquially in Japanese to designate one’s lover or boyfriend; moreover, from the beginning, both *kanji* characters for “love” appear, as seen in the verb *aisuru* (552) and the form *watashi no koi* (552), leaving little doubt of the sexualized nature of the relationship. Despite this apparent intimacy, however, we discover the relationship is also curiously distant, marked by a “gaze” (*mitsumeru, chuushippanashi*) that simultaneously separates and connects them. With no mention of *ano hito* returning her passionate gaze, she instead insists upon the intensity of her own: “In order to learn everything about him, to know his deepest secrets, I would stare at him ceaselessly –I could think of nothing but sacrificing myself for him” (553). The very repetition of lines such as this reinforces the power of the gaze, structuring the violence and restraint of a narratorial desire that can be fulfilled only in looking⁴.

We do not yet get an inkling of who this “he” is for some pages into the story; what we do find out, however, are how the desirous advances of other young men are encouraged only to be refused; how these young men tell her that her attraction to *kare* is “abnormal” (*ijou*, 553); and how her own objective is to become nothing less than the perfect object of male desire. She strives to become an eternal virgin (*eien no shojo*, 554) emanating the lustful heat of a prostitute.

As if mad with desire, like a prostitute hunting for customers –even going so far as to give coy, provocative looks– I worked hard to get men completely obsessed with me. As a virgin I would reign among these men and, for his sake, thereby make my body into an eternal sacrifice. Or perhaps, in the sacred rites of a festival orchestrated by him I would be the virgin shamaness, the *miko*. (554)

She strives to maintain a suffering position, “sacrificing” her body’s own strong desires in response to others’ “for his sake” (since they will not or cannot get together, she will, it appears, have no one); simultaneously though, she claims the elevated, victorious stance of the desired object who rejects the attentions of young men who only want her for her body. The language at this point in the story has become notably lofty in tone, as she refers to herself as a *miko*, or virgin shamaness, using her body as medium for containing the desires of others without itself being contaminated by them. She connects *kare* to her quasi-religious yet sexualized function as an “eternal virgin”: “He was always inside of me, so that though I might go deep into the darkness inside, wavering and uncertain, beyond and ahead I would

⁴ For more detailed Lacanian explorations of the link between voice and gaze, see Saleci and Žižek (1996).

see the lightsource of a brilliant, shining bliss; so even though I might go deep into the darkness inside, because I knew he was there beyond, I could, freely, taste the happiness of being a woman" (553-554).

Here we get the image of an individual taking "uncertain", somehow risky, steps in the world yet being protected by a curiously deified male figure who is simultaneously internal ("always inside of me") and external ("there beyond"). Even at its most self-righteous, however, the narrator uses language that is startlingly sexual in its imagery: "he was always deep inside of me" leading up to "the lightsource of a brilliant, shining bliss", that culminates in "the happiness of being a woman". It is not until half-way through the story that we explicitly find out who the object of her tortured, distant, and circumlocutious desire is.

If you wonder why I had to go through all of this, it was because he was my father. I never even once wished he hadn't been. On the contrary, if my father had not been tied to me by blood (how strange to so much as imagine!) I probably would never have loved him. That we had the same blood flowing in our veins, that we really did look a lot alike –these things were important. That he was my father, that I was his daughter: there was nothing more important than this. (554)

Our understanding now of this love as the incestuous feelings of a daughter for her father, along with the sexualized descriptions of a desire ceaselessly fueled by its deferral and displacement, retroactively alters the earlier language of distant, idolatrous love. She makes clear that it is precisely her father's being prohibited and his kinship, not to mention the narcissism embedded in her claim that they "really did look a lot alike", that underpin her desires. Still, we are not sure to what extent her incestuous feelings are reciprocated because the daughter is so quick to describe for us how her father's failure to acknowledge her desire mirrors her own eroticized suffering and self-denial.

Yet, he continued to pretend not to notice. But wasn't it a truly impossible thing for him, while receiving the exclusive attention of one woman, to have to continue to pretend not to notice? Not to mention that since it was only the two of us, my father and myself, occasionally just by everyday conversation or some small casual act, we would be like the skin of a balloon stretched tight, filled to bursting with our dangerous, sweet suffering. (554-555)

We get explicit reference here to the absence of the mother, there being only the two of them, and a description of their everyday interaction as

heightened yet restrained passion, even if only on her side; we get nothing from the perspective of the father to confirm or refute her. The emphasis in this passage on “pretending” by the father is, moreover, suspect, implying that the daughter has no reason to believe her desire is reciprocated but instead justifies her own desire in the imagined return of it in his unselfish and stoic denial of his real feelings for her.

The language of desire, like a “balloon stretched tight”, tells us that there has to be a breaking point to this tension, and it comes in the form of an automobile accident that leaves the daughter’s face disfigured and her leg amputated; the father is unscarred but loses his memory and ability to speak. After the accident, they move away from their old friends to a place isolated and remote where no one knew them and where they live together in seclusion. “We’d moved to a place where no one knew us as father and child” (555). It is only then –when neither the daughter nor the father is an object of others’ desire; when there is no one to gaze upon and witness their transgression; when the father has no memory of his relationship as father to his daughter– that the incest can take place. “[W]hen night came, we slept like lovers in the same bed. With a strange happiness and uneasiness, together. For my father’s sake I had already found it unnecessary to lock myself up in the chastity of an eternal virgin” (556).

This relationship goes on for about a year until, one night, in mid-embrace, suddenly he cries out to her in his first word since the accident and the only word we get from him anywhere in the story: “Facing me and as if calling for me –“Mother”– he said. Hearing that, I resolved to take on this new existence he had given name to. So, while I did not doubt that I myself was his mother, at the same time, the son before me was my father” (556).

With this, the story switches back to the frame narrative for an abrupt conclusion, the voice and smell fading away as the woman lies in her bed alone in the dark.

We as readers, too, are left in the dark; that is, is the man her father or her son? Who is that other female character lying in bed and why is *she* made privy to this story? How do we make sense of this bizarre, incestuous tale? After some time pondering the evidence, one might decide that the male character is indeed her father, thereby affirming the truth and stability of the first part of the internal narrative before the accident and according her lines at the story’s end a degree of validity; in other words, she really is his daughter but, fine, if he wants her to be his mother from now on, she will gladly play that role to make him happy. One could argue that the greater part of the story is taken up by the description of her as daughter to the father, and that her unreliable and contradictory narration is actually the language of an incest victim who loves her father yet has to “pretend” and delude herself to rationalize the unspeakable taboo in which she is immersed; to this one might add that incest between father and daughter is more likely and plausible in general than that between mother and son. On the other hand, however, we find this interpretation easily countered by evidence for mother-son incest not only in the title itself, *Portrait of Mother*

and *Child* (not “Portrait of Father and Child”) but also in the widespread belief in Japan that incest between mother and son is more common than that between father and daughter. The phenomenon of “maza con”, or mother complexes, and anecdotes of mothers sexually easing their sons’ tensions during the stressful periods of “exam hell” are familiar social and cultural discussions in Japan⁵. In the end, how do we make sense of these seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of *Boshizō*? How can we “translate” across the linguistic and socio-cultural gaps we see widening here? My method from here on will be less to resolve or reconcile these differences and more to complicate and intensify them by closely reading psychoanalytic fictions against Kanai’s tale and the interpretations it raises. My methodological aim is to find my way to content via form, and work back through content again, so that by the end form and content in this story have cracked each other open, revealing a literally and deliberately “twisted” parable of subjectivity.

It is at this point that we must proceed by way of detour to the meanings of the chiasmus: a chiasmus is a rhetorical figure that literally derives from the Greek for the letter x, and means “to cross”, twist, or invert. Generally in poetry or prose form, the chiasmus appears according to the scheme *abba*, and it is sometimes a palindrome. As M.H. Abrams tells us in his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, the chiasmus is “a sequence of two phrases or clauses which are parallel in syntax, but reverse the order of the corresponding words”⁶. He gives an example in prose from Shelley’s *Defense of Poetry* (1821): “Poetry is the record of the *best and happiest* moments of the *happiest and best* minds” (emphasis added). This inversion in syntax need not be entire or even exact, however, since inversion may be suggested in alliteration (an f-sound + p-sound, p-sound + f-sound) or effected by the forms of speech themselves (verb + adverbial clause, adverbial clause + verb); consider, for example, “*He went to the theater, but home went she*”⁷. My contention is that the chiasmus quite literally structures the form of the internal narrative in *Boshizō*, with the daughter and father reversing in the center of the story to become mother and son; that is, the chiasmus form is that *child* and *parent* reverse to become *parent* and *child*. We may add gender and modify this to construct a double cross: the *female* child and *male* parent become the *male* child and *female* parent. The chiasmus structures not only the overall interior narrative in this way, but also key sentences in *Boshizō*.

For example, we first find the chiasmus in the opening of the story while still in the exterior narrative. The exterior narrator comments on the voice and smell that has awakened her in this way: “It was then that I noticed how

⁵ For more on mother-son incest and “maza con”, see Anne Allison’s (2000), especially “Transgressions of the Everyday: Stories of Mother-Son Incest in Japanese Popular Culture” (123-146).

⁶ The examples here are borrowed from Abrams (1985: 160-163).

⁷ See the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* entry for “chiasmus” (1976: 232). An additional example from Abrams that may be useful to show the variations of the chiasmus is taken from W. B. Yeats’s “An Irish Airman Foresees his Death”: “The years to come seemed *waste of breath, / A waste of breath* the years behind” (1985: 162).

difficult it was to separate the voice from the smell –had the voice become the smell? The smell the voice?– so that, in the end, they were one and the same thing” (552, *koe ga nioi ni natta no ka, nioi ga koe ni natta no ka*). The chiasmus of voice/smell/voice serves to underscore the literal questioning, then erasing of, distinctions between the two terms voice and smell until “they”, multiple terms, become “one”. The Möbius-strip quality of the chiasmus is most clear in such sentences as this; that is, much as a two-sided strip of paper becomes one-sided in a topological trick so do the two terms reverse in such a way as to suggest that they are all on the same “side”, all of “one” piece. Significantly, the presence of the chiasmus in the exterior narrative suggests something about the relationship between the exterior and interior narratives as well; just as the smell-voice has penetrated her room and her consciousness, her conscious and unconscious mind may be of a piece with the interior narrative and, indeed, shaping it. The chiasmus poses topological questions about just what is inside and what is outside: Is the voice/smell her consciousness or her unconscious? Is the voice from inside or outside? Is her unconscious ventriloquizing as rebus the interior narrative for the exterior narrator?⁸ The chiasmus sets up the “magic” of such reversals and the apparently “supernatural” quality of the opening scene⁹. Another chiasmus follows upon this first one in the opening exterior narrative when the voice says, “[M]y life was, simply put, my passion for him; this passion was my life” (552). Her very being is structured by her desires for him, and “they” are inextricably “one”.

The most significant sentence of the narrative tellingly adopts the chiasmus form. It is one calculated to shock and surprise the reader at the revelation that it is the father who is the object of the narrator’s desires: “I loved him because he was my father and because he was my father for being forbidden” (555). As the culminating sentence to the delayed revelation of just who her love object is, this sentence in form and content emphasizes the mutually constitutive conditions of the child’s relationship to the father. Incest and prohibition, of course, are the keys to and from the Oedipal kingdom: the child individuates and receives his gender identity by graduating from the family romance in which he had desired his mother and attempted rivalry with the father. The Oedipus complex is basically the story of

⁸ In his later writings of the 1970s, Lacan turned to topological figures such as the Möbius-strip in order to better express a non-Euclidean order of space and different mode of temporality (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre XXVI. Le topologie et le temps, 1978-79*, unpublished, cited in Evans [1996: 207-208; 234]).

⁹ Žižek discusses the paradoxical reversals that psychically enable and perpetuate racism and anti-Semitism, as well as the ghostly, supernatural quality of the “phantasmatic specter” whose support is the *petit objet a* (the voice or gaze, for example) in his “«I Hear You with My Eyes»; or, the Invisible Master” (Saleci and Žižek, 1996: 90-126). One might also turn to Emily Apter (1992) to see not only how the concept of the fetish is derived from associations with talismans and “magic” but also how the fetish (derived from the mother in psychoanalysis) enacts reversals reminiscent of the chiasmus. Like Apter, Moustafa Safouan’s interpretation of Lacan on femininity in “Feminine Sexuality in Psychoanalytic Discourse” makes reference to Karl Marx’s language of commodity fetishism to explain how objects, and women as sex objects, appear to speak (Safouan, 1982).

a patriarchal social contract: the male individual in society must accept the prohibition of incest with the mother and identify with the Law-giving Symbolic father, receiving in exchange the phallus to mask his castration and substitutes for the mother in other heterosexual women exchanged between men¹⁰. Clearly, this is the boy's, not the girl's, development narrative. Incest and prohibition structure her story differently, and indeed, the tortured turns of the female Oedipus story make the girl child into an exception to the rule of the male's. It may be its very convolutions and implausible turns, however, that most usefully parallel the strange twists in subjectivity we get in *Boshizô*.

Let us look at the sentence again: "I loved him because he was my father and because he was my father for being forbidden". Her love is forbidden love –terms one and four in the chiasmus, the "outside" terms– and the reason "because he was my father" –terms two and three, or "inside" terms– herein create a reversal of cause and effect, where effect actually precedes the cause in order to itself subsume the place of cause; rephrasing this more clearly, she loves him not merely because he is her father but because loving him is forbidden he *is* her father. The interior terms to the chiasmus reverse to become exterior terms in the second part of the sentence, so the interior cause "because he was my father" precedes the exterior terms "forbidden love"; as a reader, we follow the necessarily forward movement of the sentence's narration, but the clause "because he was my father" both bridges and reverses its own intent, connecting "I loved him" with "for being forbidden" at the juncture of the cause-become-effect "because he was my father". That he is forbidden is stressed over his being her father, but more importantly, the chiasmus form also suggests that in some sense he is her father precisely because he is forbidden.

In Japanese, the form of the chiasmus is less regular than in the English translation but its meaning similarly twists: *watashi ga ano hito wo aishita no wa chichioya datta kara, soshite sore wo kinshisuru nomo, ano hito ga chichioya datta kara deshita*. Here there appear to be three rather than two or four even balancing "parts" to the chiasmus due to the two commas, but in fact, the second "part" actually makes up the first part of the second independent clause (beginning with *soshite* and ending in *kara deshita*). The middle section of the sentence nevertheless separates two independent clauses that repeat similar elements while it also modifies and actually inverts the first clause's meaning in the second clause. Looking closely, we see that *sore* refers to the preceding clause *watashi ga ano hito wo aishita no wa chichioya datta kara*, and that it is the "that" which is forbidden (*sore wo kinshisuru nomo*). Literally translating then: "I loved him because he was

¹⁰ For various takes and retakes on the female Oedipus complex, see: Freud (1953-74), especially "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex", *Standard Edition* XIX (1924); "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes", *SE* XIX (1925); "Female Sexuality", *SE* XXI (1931); and "Femininity", *SE* XXII (1933); Jacques Lacan's *Encore* lectures, Chapters 6 and 7 from Seminar XX (Lacan, 1982). For more on the Oedipus Complex, see Lacan (1993). For feminist readings, see Mitchell and Rose (1982); Gallop (1982 and 1985); Rubin (1975); Irigaray (1993, 1985a and 1985b); De Lauretis (1994).

my father/ and despite that being forbidden/ it was because he was my father". The first "because" refers back in Japanese to the first independent clause to give us *cause* (because he was my father) and *effect* (I loved him); but the second "because", while referring back directionally the same as the first clause and seemingly a mere and exact repetition of it, actually alters the first in meaning so that the second independent clause asserts *effect* (*despite and because* of my love's being forbidden) and *cause* (he was my father). The second "because" can be said to extend to the *entire* independent clause and not just to the "part" of it set off by a comma. The chiasmus form acts in the sentence to twist the final terms so that they *do not only* mean "loving him was forbidden because he was my father" *but also* "he was my father because he was forbidden". Such an understanding of the doubled meaning of the sentence in both the English translation and the Japanese original, as well as of the cross-over rhetorical effects of the chiasmus, leads us in both form and content now to the forbidden and masked desire of the girl as it develops in the female Oedipus complex.

The fact of being the father ("because he was my father") does not justify or serve as reason for the incest and its prohibition between father and daughter; rather, it is the love forbidden to female subjects in the Oedipus complex, one for which the father is only a mask, that we must consider. This forbidden love is that for the mother, every child's first love object. In order for the female subject's love object to be properly heterosexual, however, she must transfer her love away from her mother and to her father in an "acceptable" and believable incestuous love that is never fully refuted or prohibited just as the turning away from the mother cannot be fully prohibited since the girl must desire the father and identify with the mother. Consequently, Freud's oft-reviled and truly convoluted theory of the girl's "penis envy" emerges to roughly parallel the boy's castration complex, or his desire to be the phallus/father for the mother. Unlike the boy, the girl undergoes a "double wave of repression", since she must not only shift her love object from mother to father but also her erogenous zone from her inferior "little penis" to the vagina. To effect these shifts, the prohibition of the girl's incest with the father is not so much prohibition as encouragement, even "seduction", as feminist critics Jane Gallop and Luce Irigaray have pointed out: in the Freudian paradigm she is promised the "penis" in the form of a "child" only if she replaces the mother in the triangle with the father, while in Lacan's development and revision of Freud, the girl sees that the Phallic mother doesn't "have" one after all, turns to the father for it but he will not give her one so she learns to accept her castration to get what she wants, a man like her father who will enable her to "be" the phallus for the man (Gallop, 1982; Irigaray, 1993). "Being" the phallus is a state she achieves most fully by having a child to serve as a copula, or supplement, that masks her Lack; later, this Phallic mother will represent for the boy child the mother's insatiable desire for something that he cannot be or fulfill, inaugurating the castration complex. For Lacan, the pre-Oedipal dyad of mother-child does not exist; the phallus is always present, structuring the relationship into mother-phallus-child. In the Oedipus complex, too, there is

no triangle but instead the Lacanian “quaternary” of mother-phallus-child-father. The phallus inflects relationships so that the girl child desires the mother but learns to hate her for her inferiority and castration within heterosexual familial arrangements, which is why the girl begins to want what she does not have, playing with dolls that lead her to understand how to make the equivalency later of child = penis/phallus. This promise is fulfilled in her assumption of heterosexual relationships and motherhood that allows her to usurp the place of her mother by becoming the Phallic mother herself. The girl conveniently “forgets”, it seems, her memory of her mother as one without “it” in her eagerness to replace the mother by having a child, thereby securing the father and the power and legitimacy of her role in the family triangle where the structuring role of the phallus remains invisible (much as all ideology masks itself to become invisible to what is deemed “normal”)¹¹.

Boshizô, I want to suggest, is a parodic parable of the contortions psychoanalysis puts itself through to explain the “exception” of female subjectivity and desire. According to psychoanalytic discourse, we can read the daughter in Kanai’s story as the daughter all mothers are before they become mothers; consequently, the father is the father the daughter is encouraged to seduce in order to become the mother, one whose child will compensate and substitute for the missing phallus. At the end of the story, however, we see that this portrait of mother and child via the father’s seduction is not the maternal, sanctified, and self-sacrificing image we expected, but instead a portrait of mother-son incest as the logical playing out of the female Oedipus complex. The quest for and sublimation of desire and power in social and kinship relations that the Oedipus complex describes is early hinted at in the story when the daughter tells us that “he was always inside of me”, a deifying and gendering simultaneously of the phallus and its site in her womb as source of the power and “happiness of being a woman”. The image literalizes the Phallic Mother, and in doing so parodies the quasi-religious status of both the mother and the phallus in psychoanalytic discourse. Itself only six pages in length and allegorically presenting its characters in ahistorical time, *Boshizô* acts as a performative parable whose lesson comes to us as a question, and these qualities resonate with those of psychoanalysis’s own fictions. J. Hillis Miller’s work with the performative dimension of tropes and parables may be apt here:

[F]igures of speech turn aside the telling of a story or a presentation of a lyrical theme. This was what initially fascinated me about literature, the way it does not straightforwardly say what it means, but always says it in terms of some other thing, often by way of what seem wildly ungrounded analogies.

¹¹ As Althusser says, “Ideology is a «representation» of the Imaginary relationship of individuals to their Real conditions of existence” (1971: 161-162).

The exploration of this turning gradually leads to the recognition that all works of literature are parabolic, “thrown beside” their real meaning. They tell one story but call forth something else [...] [T]he topological dimension of literature is not local and intermittent, but pervasive. Each work is one long trope: an ironic catachresis invoking by indirection “something” that can be named in no literal way. “Parable” is one name for this large-scale indirection characteristic of literary language, indeed of language generally [...]

Parables do not merely name the “something” they point to by indirection or merely give the reader knowledge of it. They use words to try to make something happen in relation to the “other” that resonates in the work. They want to get the reader from here to there. They want to make the reader cross over into the “something” and dwell there. But the site to which parable would take the reader is something always other than itself, hence that experience of perpetual dissatisfaction. As Kafka put this, “There is a goal but no way. What we call the way is only wandering”. Nevertheless, this topological, parabolic, performative dimension enables writing and reading to enter history and be effective there, for better or for worse. (Hillis Miller, 1991: ix)

Complementary to Miller’s hypothesis that tropes performatively enable history and culture to interact with literary texts, Malcolm Bowie argues that indeed the rhetorical figure may best facilitate “translation” across cultures and disciplines. Rhetorical figures operate in shared fields of language and subjectivity, effecting a “cross-over” while preserving differences¹². In placing such emphasis on the chiasmus as figure of speech and on the parable form of *Boshizô*, I am striving to find the “something” that is Other, that opens up to history, and that performs “beside itself” as the inside and outside of Kanai’s story.

Another way to get at this, I think, is by considering more closely how the larger narrative, not just individual sentences, is a chiasmus, with its narrative twist taking place at the center of the story, after the accident that causes the daughter and father to move away to be alone together. Certain conditions have to be met to allow the reversal of cause and effect we have discussed, a reversal from the first half of the story where she loved him because he was her father but without incest, to the latter half of the story where she loved him incestuously because he was forbidden.

¹² See Bowie (1993), especially “Comparison Between the Arts: A Psychoanalytic View” (87-116), where at one point he uses the figure of the chiasmus to bridge the disciplines of literature and paintings.

We'd moved to a place where no one knew us as father and child. And from that point on we had no names. Like Alice lost in the forest of the nameless, we completely forgot we were father and child. Like Alice and the fawn that ordinarily would never have come so close to one another, we were always together. For the sake of everything, it was best not to remember. Without saying a word and always sitting in that chair, he was as adorable as the doll of a young boy, and ceaselessly, I gazed at him. He didn't grow old. Then, when night came, we slept like lovers in the same bed. Together, with a strange happiness and uneasiness. (555)

It is no accident that Kanai draws upon Lewis Carroll in a story with incest at its core, Carroll's close relationships with and photographs of little girls debated by scholars and biographers not only today but in the Alice "boom" of the 1970s in Japan when *Boshizô* was written. Indeed, Kanai's use of Carroll in her works extends beyond incest, his eroticism also very much a part of his charged word play, his striking imagination of a girl's fantasy life, and his unusual scenes of "reversal" and paradox¹³. One such scene of "reversal" is alluded to in the passage above, from *Through the Looking Glass*, when Alice walks into the forest of no names and forgets her own name. She encounters a fawn and they walk together, Alice's arm about its neck, as friends instead of natural enemies. At the edge of the forest, however, the fawn gladly remembers itself as a fawn and flees Alice in fear and recognition of her as "a human child" (Carroll, 1992: 227). Similarly, in *Boshizô*, father and daughter live in a secluded place, in a kind of state of nature lost to society much as cultural anthropologist Levi-Strauss describes the Real, the realm outside of and prior to the Symbolic, a realm before sense. While it is the father who is supposedly amnesic, they both "forget" societal rules; the daughter's words "For the sake of everything, it was best not to remember" suggest less her loss of memory than her troubled, willed attempts to forget. We see her describe the father as a boy before the father's memory returns to alter her role to that of mother and his to son, suggesting that the role reversal had come about already, not with his words at the end of the story but in the space of incestuous desire, the Real. But just as the fawn's memory returns and it recalls its place and relations in the Symbolic, so too does the "father" have his memory and language return to him; his cry "Mother" punctuates their relationship immediately and for the future while it also rearranges the order of all other events in the text, reversing their relationship in retrospective revelation for the reader¹⁴. It is as if she has not been the daughter but the mother all along, one whose father is also her son; that is, as allegorical daughter never refuting her incestuous desire for the father she goes on to consummate it once outside of the

¹³ See Rackin (1991: 153, note 1). For a biography of Lewis Carroll that examines his relationship to the prototype of his Alice books, Alice Liddell, see Cohen (1995).

¹⁴ See my discussion of Lacan's *point de capiton* via Žižek in Mary A. Knighton (1991).

prohibitions of society. It is because of the prohibitions of society that she loves someone prohibited only in society, not in nature, someone nominally “father” but equally prohibited: the son. At the end of the story we get the capsule version of the female Oedipus complex with its twists and contortions played out: it is the son with whom she will resume her role as “mother” virginal and desirable, yet he, as the son, who always will be “the father” for the girl become desiring subject¹⁵. In *Boshizô*, the boy’s coming back to language and into the Symbolic to name her “Mother” reminds our willfully forgetful mother of her “natural condition” of castration, the frustration and privation of desires for power and the father that are only apparently assuaged by becoming the Phallic Mother. She is compelled to give over the rules of the naming game as a masculine prerogative to a mere boy; even a boy has more power to control what and how she is named and must “be” in the Symbolic than she herself. What the daughter forgot in the forest of no names, it seems, was not her father but her mother, whose “having” the phallus does not prevent her erasure from the Symbolic into the blank nonsensical Real “being” of it¹⁶.

Parallel to the forest of no names, that domain of Carrollian play and nonsense and space of the inaccessible Maternal Real, we find the whole internal narrative of *Boshizô* since it acts as the space of inversion for the external speaker’s unconscious from the interior of her self to her consciousness. Moreover, we can understand the interior of the story as really part and parcel of the exterior one in the confusion of voice and smell from the story’s opening. As the female narrator’s unconscious –indeed, the external narrator has just been awakened and may be, just like Alice in the exterior narratives of Wonderland, more asleep than awake– the interior narrative inscribes the fantasy scene of the unnamed woman who is the daughter and mother in the interior narrative. As if from the big Other of Lacanian discourse, the site of the Symbolic and of the possibility of language itself, a voice comes to the narrator seemingly from outside of herself, strange to her, yet it speaks to her familiarly and intimately. For Lacan, the big Other for the child is originally the mother, the one whose ministrations to the child’s body and needs phallically organizes the child’s cries into a coherent “language” of sorts, which serves as a precursor to his or her entry into the Symbolic itself¹⁷. At this point we must question whether the “Portrait of Mother and Child” we have in *Boshizô* is not daughter-father or even mother-son after all, but daughter-mother. Perhaps the unconscious of the narrator effects a return of the mother not *repressed* internally in the narrator but

¹⁵ Both Freud and Lacan relate the doll in the girl’s childhood to her organizing desire for the penis/phallus. Freud’s essay on “Femininity” particularly notes that the husband is always a child in the eyes of the wife/mother, a point brought home in the cartoon from *Manga Goraku*, December 9, 1994 included in Anne Allison (2000: 128).

¹⁶ See the works of Judith Butler, and on the exception and awkward logic of the heterosexual female’s development in psychoanalysis (1990).

¹⁷ References that relate the big Other to the Mother can be found in Lacan 1977 and 1993. See also Dylan Evans (1996).

censored from the Symbolic of the narrative proper; hence, like foreclosure, censorship opens up the possibility of a return of the Real by hallucination to disrupt the Symbolic¹⁸. Censored from the interior narrative yet the means by which its symbolic logic itself is supported, the mother's banishment to the Real allows the phallus to travel from father to son; but, for one brief chiasmatic moment, the Real returns as the interior narrative, an aural hallucination, to the woman lying in her bed, disrupting the Symbolic order of things.

Psychoanalysis's chief goal is to translate the fundamental fantasy of the individual and facilitate one's assumption of his or her appropriate role in society; here, the role of analyst seems to fall to us as readers as we translate this story across multiple gaps. As I stress in my opening to this essay, the goal of making "sense" of this fundamental fantasy scene finally overcomes the task of "getting" it in *Boshizō*; that is to say, interpretation and translation across languages and cultures result in an indefinite and over-determined range of meanings that cannot be fixed, resulting in ever more translations and re-translations and interpretations. Kanai's turn to texts outside of the Japanese literary tradition and across languages and cultures—the significant allusion to Carroll's *Wonderland* books in *Boshizō*, her frequent revisioning of the fables and parables of Kafka and Borges in other of her earlier stories, and her knowledge of Western theory and psychoanalysis amply demonstrated in her critical essays—overwhelmingly multiplies the trajectories of her fiction's "message". Not simply a "Japanese" writer, Kanai Mieko troubles such easy categories and presumptions about disciplinary or generic or national boundaries. While some critics in Japan deplore the abstract, intellectual, and foreign quality of Kanai's fiction, prominent literary figures such as writer Shibusawa Tatsuhiko and critic Yoshikawa Yasuhisa have lauded it for the same reasons, early on noting approvingly the semiotic and psychoanalytical allusions wrought by the gendered "turn" of the screw in *Boshizō*, for example¹⁹.

For me, as a feminist literary critic and teacher, psychoanalysis is not *the* key to even such a short, seemingly simple, allegorical parable as *Boshizō*, but it is *one* key which opens up a Pandora's box of ever more wide-ranging significations, none of which is confined to psychoanalysis but also many, perhaps, not adequately explored without recourse to psychoanalysis's fictions of human subjectivity. That female subjectivity remains the twist in the normative theory of the human subject makes *Boshizō* a parody of narrative failure in the powerful fictions of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis; at the same moment, of course, my "translation" here implicitly reproduces the insidious ideological work of a daughter's seduction by its

¹⁸ See my essay on Kanai's *Ai Aru Kagiri* where I raise the question of punctuation as a figure of speech, and consider the relationship between foreclosure and the *point de capiton*.

¹⁹ Shibusawa Tatsuhiko's (1992 [1974]) review of Kanai's collection of short stories, *Usagi* (1973), focused on the psychoanalytic twists and Carrollian word play in his favorite story, "Boshizō", while Yoshikawa Yasuhisa (1992) examines at length the recurring use of metaphors of water/juice/peaches in Kanai's oeuvre, which connote female sexuality as a ripening linked to the generative semiotic qualities of her *écriture féminine*.

phallic promise. I close by paraphrasing J. Hillis Miller, holding out the space of the chiasmatic twist as the “other side” of not only *Boshizô* but also of the psychoanalytic parable, where another story exists “beside itself”, as Other, as particular, as historically variable to disrupt such tales’ more totalizing and ahistorical tendencies.

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