ON THE EDGE:
WOMAN, NATURE, MOTHER AND FATHER
IN THE WORKS OF KONO TAEKO

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the works of the contemporary Japanese author, Kono Taeko. In particular, the themes of Nature, Mother and Father, and the manner in which the female protagonists of the works relate to each of these objects, is studied. Within these relationships, issues of fantasy, marginalization, and preoedipal and Oedipal development are also examined. The approach is psychoanalytical, using the relational model rather than classical analysis as the theoretical basis.

The first chapter deals with the manner in which the female protagonists relate to the "natural" environment. Some of the similarities and differences in the perception of nature in Japan and the West are pointed out, especially with respect to the way that nature is characterized as being female and maternal. The author is seen as moving from an essentially antagonistic position where nature is perceived as a denying mother-figure to one where nature is regarded as a means of personal liberation and rebirth.

Chapter Two focuses on the mother-child relationship and the ambivalent feelings toward mother and motherhood that many women experience. The characters vacillate between a desire to reexperience feelings of original unity with the mother, and a desire to cut themselves off from the mother and
establish themselves as separate beings. No final resolution in either direction is seen as being reached in these relationships.

In the final chapter, the father-daughter relationship is examined, especially with regard to the father's place in the masochistic fantasies of the characters in these works. Furthermore, the father is seen as an idealized figure who acts as a means of escape from the omnipotent mother, but who ironically leads the protagonist back to the mother.

The mother-figure, then, lies at the bottom of all of the other major themes in the works of Kono Taeko. These works display an interesting mix of Western and Japanese perceptions of the mother-figure, and the tensions implicit in ambivalent attitudes toward the mother are apparent and make for fruitful study.
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INTRODUCTION

The works of Kono Taeko, one of the preeminent writers of contemporary Japanese fiction, have the power to fascinate and horrify, attract and repel, soothe and shock. They have been described as "piercing...masterpieces," written with "the casual skill of an uncommon talent," and possessing a "lightness...and freshness." They have also been characterized as "anti-natural" and "interesting," but lacking coherency.¹ Certainly these works provoke strong reactions, and encourage readers to ponder the many conflicting images, symbols, and emotions that are evoked by them. Several themes are prominent in the works of Kono Taeko, but perhaps the two that stand out in readers' minds for their shocking "subversiveness" are the recurring descriptions of scenes of masochism and of the torture of children. In this thesis I plan to examine three broader topics that encompass these two more sensational themes, but produce a subtle yet stronger impact on Kono's work as a whole. The three

themes addressed in this thesis are Nature, Mother, and Father, and each is analyzed with respect to the manner in which the protagonist relates to it. Within these relationships, issues concerning alienation, marginalization and preoedipal and Oedipal development will also be examined.

At this point, some discussion of the author's own background may be beneficial. Kono was born in 1926 in Osaka and spent her early childhood in the lively environment of the downtown merchant quarters. Her health, however, was poor, and during her elementary school years she was forced on several occasions to withdraw from schools and relocate to more favourable climates. Eventually she entered secondary school, and it was here that she first encountered two Japanese authors who were to influence her development as a writer. The first of these was Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, an author known for his sensuous style and for the masochistic themes underlying much of his work. The second was Izumi Kyoka, whose interest in the influence of the spirits of the other world corresponded with Kono's own.

The start of the Pacific War in 1941 led to more disruptions in Kono's school-life. Students were required to drill, train and help out occasionally in the munitions factories. After she entered university in 1944 (in the Economics Department, as she was not successful in her attempt to enter the Japanese Department), Kono's attendance in class became even more irregular. Most of the students' time was
spent working in munitions factories, and very little of it studying. With the frequent bombing raids, Kono came to realize the precariousness of her life; she had no guarantee that she would wake up the following day. In March of 1945 the family home was destroyed in the Osaka air raid.

The war obviously had a great impact on Kono's life, and her thoughts concerning it are most fully expressed in a work entitled "Toi natsu" (1963; Faroff Summer). In this story, Kono uses the protagonist to describe the fear she felt, wondering if her life might end before she ever experienced the good things it had to offer. The end of the war brought a keen sense of liberation from the feelings of uncertainty, depression, impatience and physical exhaustion, as well as a newly-found, almost violent enthusiasm for life. The story's conclusion also hints at the inevitable disappointments and disillusionments the protagonist (and Kono herself) would experience as a result of this excess of optimism.

After the war, Kono looked for a way to express this new joie de vivre, and finally decided that writing was the answer. After that decision there followed a long period when she tried to establish herself as an author while working full time to support herself in the postwar period of economic hardship. She eventually exhausted herself and then contracted tuberculosis. After her recovery two years later, she published some work in minor literary magazines, but then entered into a prolonged slump when her preoccupation with the meaning of life and
fiction rendered her unable to write. Eventually, the frustration that had been building up in her over the years exploded in the form of a work entitled "Yoji gari" (1961; Infant Hunting). This was the first piece that achieved recognition for her in established literary circles, and was personally significant in that it forced her to see that she should write what she wanted and not what she believed others expected of her. In a later essay entitled "Watashi no shisei" (1968; My Attitude), Kono states that the experience taught her to write

(t)he things I most want to write, in the manner easiest for me to write; in other words, I write the things I most want to write in the most precise, powerful expression possible. (43)

From this point she left behind her writer's block, and with the help of her mentor, Niwa Fumio, began to write again in earnest. Two years later she won the Akutagawa Prize (most promising new author) for the story "Kani" (1963; tr. Crabs 1982). Since that time she has been awarded most of the major literary prizes in Japan, including the Tanizaki, Yomiuri, Noma, and Women's Literature Prizes.

In "Watashi no shisei," Kono states that the things she most wants to write all originate within her in a space that is neither spiritual nor physical.

In other words, it seems that the source of the things I want to write is not the mind or the body, but the part where the two meet which is neither. (I do not mean the mind in relation to the body. Perhaps it would be better to say sensation.) From that kind of part arises a misty, gloomy thing. (44)
This "in-between" space, which psychoanalysts would call the unconscious, is the source of much of the fascination of Kono's work, and contributes to the sense of unreality about it. The space between the material, the real, and the mind, the intangible, is unreal, fantastic, imaginary, and this is the sphere in which Kono excels.

Kono herself characterizes her work as "anti-natural" (hanshizen), pointing out that she rarely builds a plot or attempts to construct her work as movement along a line. She is more interested in stillness, in the points on a line, than the line itself. She contends, however, that pictures of stillness put together can have the effect of producing movement and life in an "anti-natural" way.

Kono retreats within herself, then, to find the inspiration for her works. What is inside, however, is affected by the world around her, a world in which she is a marginalized being. While her talent is generally acknowledged, as an author in a culture that has long regarded writers of fiction as peripheral persons, she lives outside the mainstream of conventional society. Furthermore, the fact that she is a childless woman in a society that still strictly adheres to the notion that a woman's most important role is that of mother makes her status suspect. She herself, then, is in an indeterminate space; she cannot be placed in a definite role within society. She may be respected and admired, but she cannot be accepted as a conventional member of society. Her position on the outside
allows her to probe more freely and deeply the indeterminate, unknown space of the mind, where reality and unreality meet, where disturbing fantasy, sensuous imagery, unconventional sexuality, fear and desire exist.

The method I intend to use to examine the works of Kono Taeko is psychoanalytical. In particular, I draw on the writings of the object relations school, especially the work of Nancy Chodorow. Object relations theory, or the relational model, differs from traditional Freudian thought in several ways, but the fundamental difference, put simply, is as follows. Although he later incorporated principles of object relations into his theory, Freud fundamentally believed that human beings are creatures of instincts and drives, living between the inherent demands of a sexual, aggressive nature and the reality of participation in a broader society. From infancy to adulthood, development occurs in inevitable and universal stages that are determined by instinct. Followers of object relations theory, on the other hand, recognize the fact of biological maturation, but argue that psychological growth takes place in relation to the caregiver. In other words,

(t)he mind employs what anatomy and physiology supply, but the meaning of those body parts and processes, the underlying structure of experience and its deeper meanings, derive from relational patterns -- their role in the struggle to establish and maintain connections with others. (Mitchell 4)

The discussion that follows is based on the works of Chodorow (The Reproduction of Mothering), Ashbach and Schermer (Object relations, the self, and the group), and Mitchell (Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis).
The interaction between infant and caregiver determines the process of development, as the following passage indicates.

Object relations theory asserts that mentation is established in interaction with significant others, so that to think and to experience is also to participate in a transactional situation.

(Ashbach and Schermer 3-4)

As the infant is not born with an adaptive ego, the primary caretaker (most often the biological mother) must act as the "external ego," anticipating the infant's needs and desires, until the child develops an integrated ego of its own through its interactive experiences. Development depends on the type and quality of care provided -- if there is a discrepancy between the child's needs and the response of the caretaker, the child develops a sense that something is lacking in itself.

Object relations theory, then, places a great deal of emphasis on the earliest months and years of a child's life, what is known in Freudian terms as the preoedipal period. Since the biological mother is in most cases the primary caregiver during this period, the mother-child relationship is considered the basis of the child's development. In traditional Freudian theory, on the other hand, the Oedipal complex brought on by the introduction of the father into the mother-child dyad is seen as the determining factor in psychological development. Because of its emphasis on the preoedipal period, object relations theory is seen by many feminists as a welcome challenge to the patriarchal basis of traditional Freudian theory, while still
using psychoanalytical principles to investigate the development of the mind.

Both traditional psychoanalytic theory and the relational model are based on research and cultural assumptions in the Western tradition. How, then, can it be used as the basis for a study of literature from a different cultural tradition, where attitudes toward child development and family dynamics may not correspond with our own? Obviously, there will be limitations that cannot be overcome, both from a theoretical point of view and from a personal point of view, where I as a cultural outsider attempt to make sense of a literature and a language that is foreign to me. But perhaps, using a theory developed in a specific culture context, I, as an outsider like Kono Taeko, can probe into issues, themes and situations unquestioned or taken for granted by the insider, and contribute a new and different interpretation of a rich literature that is open to a multitude of interpretations. The works of Kono Taeko are such that they invite any number of methods of analysis; I have chosen a psychoanalytic approach, despite its limitations, because I feel that her works, dealing as they do with the psyche, and the fears, fantasies and desires that dwell there, are receptive to this methodology.

The first chapter deals with the theme of Nature and the manner in which the female protagonists relate to their environment. This chapter points out some of the similarities and differences in the perception of nature in the East and in
the West, particularly with respect to the way that nature is characterized as being female. Here, psychoanalytic theory as developed in the West does not play as large a part in the analysis except where issues of preoedipal merging and separation are concerned. Chapter Two examines the relationship between the protagonists, their mothers and their (potential) children, and attempts to analyze the ambivalent feelings toward mother and motherhood that many women, especially marginalized ones, feel. The final chapter deals with the father-daughter relationship, the idealization of the male parent and the role of the father in masochism. In effect this moves from an examination of the broader environment to an analysis of the smaller family unit and how that unit impacts on individual relationships in society. It is hoped that this type of a thematic analysis of the literature of Kono Taeko may contribute to a greater overall appreciation and understanding of her work.
CHAPTER ONE

Woman and Nature

A discussion of the theme of nature in literature is likely to provoke contradictory opinions among scholars, particularly in our modern society, characterized as it is by urban living. While some critics defend nature as "one of the richest sources for the creative imagination...a bridge between the harsh world of urban reality and the surrealistic world of dreams and fantasies" (Goldsmith 10-11), others argue that nature is peripheral to the experience of the modern author and only serves to reflect "an ideology of dualism completely dead and antiquated" (Farrell, qtd. in Goldsmith 10). The issue of the dichotomy implicit in the term nature, paired as it usually is in the West with its supposed opposite, culture, is of particular importance for feminist theory, although there is no consensus on whether this dualism is a thing of the past or not. Ortner argues that across cultures and across history, woman has traditionally been associated with nature and sexual reproduction, and man with culture and the production of human consciousness, resulting in the belief that woman is "lower on the scale of transcendence than man" (76), and therefore must be controlled and dominated. On the other hand, MacCormack points
out that the "myth" of nature and culture, as well as that of man and woman, must be seen as an ideological construction, a "system of arbitrary signs which relies on a social consensus for meaning" (6), and cannot be considered as a universal category without regard for the traditions of the culture in which it is constructed. Rich celebrates the association of woman and nature, accepting the implicit dichotomy but arguing for a revaluation of the traditionally negative term (110 ff). Klein, however, argues that the alignment of the terms "mother/woman" with "nature" works as "an ideological and symbolic construction of an effaced and castrated resource reflecting masculine subjectivity" (274) and any association of woman and nature is detrimental to feminist goals.

In the West, then, attitudes toward the seemingly "natural" category of nature are varied. This may in part be due to the fact that "nature" can mean so many different things, some of them contradictory, as MacCormack implies. In ancient and early modern times, nature was defined as "the state of mankind prior to social organization and prior to the state of grace" (Merchant xix), as well as the properties inherent in an individual and the dynamic principle that created phenomena and caused change. Nature was considered a living organism, with all of its parts, including humans, contributing to its well-being (Merchant 1). During the Enlightenment, nature again carried varied meanings, but generally could be defined in four ways: the pre-social state, the internal processes of the human
body, the harmonious co-existence of humans, plants and animals, and the way of life of "primitive" peoples (Bloch and Bloch 27-28). Currently, Webster's Encylopedic Unabridged Dictionary lists eighteen entries under the term "nature." Obviously, then, the meaning of nature has changed according to the time and place it is used. As Bloch and Bloch argue, it has always been defined in opposition to something else, but that something else changes depending on the circumstances, so that nature is "at bottom a category of challenge rather than an element in a stable binary contrast" (31).

This, then, is the problematic of the perception of nature in the West. But how is nature viewed in Japan? Has there been a stable conception of the category "nature" over history? Traditionally, nature has been a theme indispensable to the literature of Japan. The earliest anthologies of poetry are constructed around images of nature and the way humans fit in to the "natural" world. Humans and nature are seen to part of an organic whole, with humans existing as a part of nature, not in opposition to it. In this respect, the traditional Japanese world view is relatively nondualistic (Tsuruta 5). Miner attributes this view of the world and nature in particular to the influence of Shinto beliefs, in which all the world is filled with an animalistic vitality and purity, and spirits live alongside humans (146). This view is supported by Kitagawa, who states that the early Japanese religious universe is characterized by "its unitary meaning-structure, a structure
which affirmed the belief that the natural world is the original world, and which revolved around the notion that the total cosmos is permeated by sacred, or kami, nature" (70).

Defilements exist, especially those associated with death and menstruation, but humans best deal with these defilements by staying within nature and using its purifying forces -- water, wind and the sasaki tree -- to cleanse themselves (Miner 147). Nevertheless, nature is generally construed in female terms and associated with the comfort and protection of the womb and the mother as nurturer and provider of amae, or indulgence. "Full of nurturing milk, (nature) indulges, energizes, and restores...Far from threatening man, she is posed as alluring enough to facilitate his 'regression,' thereby allowing him to 'merge' with her, at least temporarily" (Tsuruta 6). (Where woman as daughter fits in to this seemingly sexual relationship between man and the alluring mother/nature is another problem again.)

In the preface to the Kokinshu, the tenth century imperial anthology of poetry, Ki no Tsurayuki expresses the ideal of this bond between humans and nature in the following manner:

The seeds of Japanese poetry lie in the human heart and grow into leaves of ten thousand words. Many things happen to the people of this world, and all that they think and feel is given expression in description of things they see or hear. When we hear the warbling of the mountain thrush in the blossoms or the voice of the frog in the water, we know every living being has its song. (Rodd 35)

Language and nature are seen to be indivisible; words are leaves that germinate in the heart. Even the poems dealing with love
usually make reference to some aspect of nature, be it the season, the weather, celestial bodies, plants or animals. The cycles of nature were seen as being inseparable from the life and death of humans. (This organic world view is not, of course, unique to Japanese culture.) It should be noted, however, that although poetry was conceived as being a sort of Wordsworthian overflow of feeling originating from the heart, the process of representing that feeling was highly intellectualized and stylized. Spontaneous expression was not valued as much as the careful and witty representation of feeling in a prescribed form (Konishi, qtd. in Rodd 7). Here, then, we can see that the notion that the Japanese, because of the preoccupation with nature in their poetry, are somehow closer to nature is, in fact, a cultural construction, despite the belief to the contrary. Nevertheless, the belief that nature and humans are part of an organic whole certainly prevails in traditional thought.

With the late-nineteenth century introduction into Japan of literature from the West came new ideas concerning the meaning of the self and nature. The notions of dichotomy and antagonism between humans and nature began to be entertained by Japanese authors, and this trend perhaps reached its extreme in the work of Akutagawa Ryunosuke. Here, nature is seen as a

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1In this discussion I am indebted to Professor Kinya Tsuruta's introduction to Nature and Identity in Canadian and Japanese Literature and to discussions held during his seminar on Modern Japanese Literature.
malevolent, anthropomorphic force that pursues and eventually destroys human beings. Still, traditional aesthetics continued to exist in modern Japanese literature, the best example of which is probably Shiga Naoya, who was known as the "God of the Novel." The essence of what was believed to be "purely" Japanese was felt by the critics and the reading public to be most effectively captured by Shiga, whose work expresses what can be seen as the ideal of traditional Japanese thought -- the gradual dissolving of the individual ego and its merger with the greater forces of nature. The individual, then, regresses to an infant-like state and experiences again the sense of oneness with the Mother.

Adrienne Rich, in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, has characterized prepatriarchal "primitive" cultures as mother-centred and based on an organic relationship between humans and the Mother Goddess. In these societies, natural phenomena were gynomorphized; the earth was seen as the womb from which life appeared, as a child appeared out of the womb of a woman. The earth was also the place to which vegetation, animals and humans returned after death to await rebirth. Humans were bound as children to the Great Mother whose cycles included both life and death in an endless process. The Mother Goddess was also seen to exist in the ocean, "whose tides respond, like woman's menses, to the pull of the moon, the ocean which corresponds to the amniotic fluid in which human life begins" (108), the ocean which gives but also
takes life.

There are some obvious parallels between this view of nature (admittedly idealized on the part of Rich to further her argument) and the traditional Japanese view. Both view nature/mother as the central figure in the cycle of life, the force that incorporates both life and death, light and darkness. The splitting of nature/mother into two elements, good and evil, has not yet been pushed to the extreme evident in other patriarchal societies. Death may be considered to be unclean, as in the Shinto tradition, but it is also seen in both world views as a step in the process of rebirth. The splitting of nature/mother into positive and negative forces occurs most emphatically in the West with the Enlightenment, when technological advances spurred the need to see the earth as a resource to be controlled rather than a living (maternal) organism. In many respects, this way of thinking was taken over during the Japanese drive to modernize in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, resulting in a more dualistic world view.

We can see, then, that nature, as a construct of a particular society, has traditionally played a vital role in Japanese literature, but to what extent has nature been present in postwar literature? Specifically, where do the works of Kono Taeko, herself a child of the city, fit in to the scheme of Japanese literature with regard to nature? Does she follow the patriarchal Western model adopted by the likes of Akutagawa that traditionally pits Man against Nature? Or is she of the lineage
of Shiga, attempting to become one with nature like the proverbial raindrop that merges with the sea? I believe that over the course of her career, Kono has adopted both of these positions to a certain extent. Throughout her work she has reinforced the traditional identification of nature and mother, and her early work shows a definite ambivalence toward nature/mother characteristic of dualistic thought. In fact, the perception of nature as female is used to denigrate female sexuality and reproductive capacity. Nature may seem to be nurturing, but is in fact an oppressive force that denies freedom and the fulfillment of desire. Later works, however, show a move away from this positive/negative dichotomy as the lines between imprisonment and freedom become blurred and a more benign and accepting view of the world is reached.

One of Kono’s earliest successes is the work "Kani" (1963; tr. Crabs 1982), which won Kono the Akutagawa Prize in 1963. The story revolves around the protagonist, Yuko, a mid-thirties childless woman much like the protagonists of many of Kono’s other works. Yuko, determined to go to the seashore in order to finally overcome the lasting effects of tuberculosis, pleads with her husband, Kajii, who is not inclined to allow her to go away. Her persistence eventually pays off and she travels to the Boshu Peninsula for a month to convalesce. Here she initially experiences a resurgence of health and a feeling of freedom as if she were being energized by the power of nature and the sea. Her idyllic world, however, is eventually intruded
upon by Kajii’s brother and sister-in-law and their young son, Takeshi. Yuko welcomes this intrusion and invites Takeshi to stay with her for the few days until Kajii comes to visit. His parents at first decline the invitation, but after much cajoling on Yuko’s part and some hesitation on Takeshi’s, it is decided that he will stay. The card that Yuko plays in order to convince him to stay is the promise that they will go crab-catching. Her motive in wanting him to stay with her is not entirely selfless; she hopes that he will act as a buffer in the rapidly deteriorating relationship between herself and Kajii. Their crab-hunting expedition is not successful, however. They search the beach and every other place they imagine crabs to be, but to Takeshi’s great disappointment, they are not able to find any of the bright red-pincered animals. Finally Takeshi gives up the hunt and announces that he will wait for Kajii’s arrival to continue looking for crabs with him. Yuko reacts violently to this pronouncement and forces Takeshi to promise that he will not reveal to Kajii the fact that they were unable to find any crabs. The story ends with the two of them awaiting Kajii’s arrival the following day.

In this story, as in many of Kono’s works, nature is ostensibly envisioned as an escape from the confinement of the city. In "Kani," the city is for Yuko clearly associated with an indescribable and unbearable sense of oppression, gloom, confinement and sickness. The emotions evoked by the city also reflect the extent of her estrangement from Kajii, and her
escape to nature therefore represents flight from him as well. Yuko equates nature with peace, freedom, health, and rebirth, and in this respect her state of mind corresponds with the season, as she goes to the sea during spring in order to revive herself. Soon after she arrives in Boshu,

(t)he feelings of sluggishness and helplessness that she had experienced up to now were already gone. With each passing day, she could definitely feel the strength welling up within her. With spring, she felt that she was beginning to truly live.² (330)

Nature is seen as the life-force that comforts and protects her and facilitates a metaphorical rebirth much as a traditional, idealized mother-figure would. At the same time, however, the positive qualities that Yuko associates with nature are subverted by natural imagery that has negative implications. For example, the tubercular scars that remain on Yuko's lungs are first compared to the branches of trees, and then to the needles of a young pine.

Nature, then, is initially presented on the surface in a romantic form. Yuko believes that her own life and nature are linked in a continuum where one both reflects and is reflected by the other, in the same way that theorists since Freud have argued a pre-linguistic infant perceives its relation to its primary caregiver, usually the mother. However, while the infant depends entirely upon its mother to satisfy needs, the reverse is not true, as the mother has interests and

²Translations mine unless otherwise indicated. Further quotations will be followed by page number.
responsibilities outside of the relationship that will lead her necessarily to deny the child things that it wants. As Rich points out, in most cultures "it is from women that both women and men have learned about... the comfort of a need satisfied -- and also about the anxiety and wretchedness of a need deferred" (126). It is the realization of this asymmetry that forces the infant to emerge from a state of naive egoism (Chodorow 87). In "Kani," when nature ceases to deliver what the protagonist sees as its promise, the asymmetry of the relationship in which Yuko identifies with nature becomes obvious. When Yuko, like the infant, comes to realize that nature/mother does not exist solely to fulfill her needs, and in fact denies her the satisfaction she seeks, she emerges from her state of identification with it. Nature becomes an object for her, as Klein argues the mother becomes for the Oedipal child (264). In that sense it is artificial, something created by her against which she can define her desire. Eventually, however, it becomes apparent that nature, embodying the denying aspects of the maternal figure, can ironically act as an obstacle to the realization of those desires, and in fact can reinforce in her a sense of powerlessness and futility.

Yuko's search starts simply enough with Takeshi's desire to catch a little crab with bright red pincers. His wish is understandable, as children at the beach are often fascinated by collecting the small creatures that inhabit the sand. To Yuko, the request seems easy enough to grant -- there are always
plenty of crabs to be found at the beach. But as it becomes apparent that catching a crab is easier said than done, Yuko is caught up in Takeshi’s desire as well as her own. Takeshi continues to insist on looking for a crab, but eventually the crab becomes an obsession for her as well, a means of showing her control, a way to demonstrate her ability to grant the wishes of others. In several other instances in the work, Yuko displays her obstinacy, her need to control and have her own way, and her attachment to the idea of catching a crab is another example of this. The final scene of the work also underlines the issue of control, as Yuko forbids Takeshi to tell Kajii about their failure. The struggle for dominance in her relationship with Kajii prevents her from admitting any weakness, and even the thought of revealing her failure causes shame to rise within her. This experience recalls the shame she feels in her failure to physically endure the level of pain required to stimulate the two in their masochistic sexual relationship.

Yuko could not become sexually aroused by conventional means, and after she became sick, she demanded even more intense stimulus, instead of listening to Kajii when he said, "You’ll only get worse again, you know."

Even while protesting, however, he was already applying stronger force. (333)

Yuko can see, however, that Kajii is becoming less able to tolerate the ups and downs that characterize tuberculosis, especially the occasions when she refuses his sexual advances.

At times when her body was truly affected, Yuko’s slovenliness and whining seemed to renew his disgust,
and it appeared that he did not want even to look at her face. (333)

She cannot bear the thought that Kajii is disgusted by her weakness, and Yuko is desperate to prevent the humiliation that even the simple failure to find a crab will cause. Yuko may also see in Takeshi a miniature of Kajii, and this may help to explain the intensity of her reaction at the end of the story. In forcing Takeshi not to relate his unfulfilled desire to Kajii, she may be hoping on another level to prevent Kajii himself from speaking of his own dissatisfaction. Yuko can yield pleasure to neither Takeshi nor Kajii, and her inability to control or satisfy their desires increases her own frustration and sense of impotence.

The author's use of a crab as the focus of obsession and control is an interesting point. From a structural point of view, the crab is an obvious choice as an object of desire for a young boy who has come to the seaside. But why is it so fitting as an object of Yuko's desire? The scarlet pincers, or "scissors" as they are known in Japanese, could be seen as the means for her to cut her relationship with Kajii. But the bright red of the imagined crab may also represent for her the health and vitality, the blood of the life-force, that she is searching for. In addition, we know from later works that Kono associates sexual fulfillment with the meat of shellfish, as the following passage from "Hone no niku" (1969; tr. Bone Meat,
Likewise the sight of the scarlet-wrapped slender morsel of flesh bursting from the single lobster claw granted her made her want to sigh. All those varied bone and shell dishes began to give her the feeling that a sense of taste had been awakened throughout her body; that all her senses had become so concentrated in her sense of taste that it was difficult for her even to move. And when she awoke the next morning, she felt her body brimming with a new vitality. (50)

The crab that Yuko looks for in "Kani" can be connected with the desire for a revitalized sexuality, for a rebirth of the sexual life she knew before her illness.

This vitality, however, like the crab Yuko desires, is elusive and, in the end, seemingly unattainable. In fact it may never have existed at all, like the crabs everyone seems vaguely to remember seeing. Her landlady, the local fisherpeople, some junior high school students all believe the crabs exists somewhere, but no one is able to give a definite answer as to where that might be. The only person who does seem to know where to find the bright red crabs is a young girl, and the answer she gives is unexpected. One must go to the freshwater springs in the mountains in order to find the kind of crabs Takeshi and Yuko want. They have been looking in the wrong place altogether; the idea that they had taken for granted turns out to be false. What Yuko had seen as the promise of nature in fact has the effect of mocking her.

Once Yuko realizes that she will not find what she is looking for, she begins to lower her standards, both for Takeshi's sake and for her own. She wants to satisfy the boy's wish, so she decides that if they cannot find a bright red crab, perhaps they can at least catch an ordinary one. For both of them, the fact that they cannot find a crab makes it all the more desirable.

She couldn't wait to experience the moment when she could grab the crab, scuttling off sideways with its pincer ready, and drop it into the transparent plastic bag, saying, "I'll do it because we wouldn't want it to pinch you." (349)

The fact that she no longer has her sights set on a scarlet crab, however, shows that the vitality she thought she had found at the sea is itself an elusive desire. But as long as Takeshi insists on looking for crabs she cannot give up the search. Interestingly enough, she temporarily abandons nature when she sees that it may not cooperate with her desire and turns instead to the man-made fish pond where she asks to be given a baby sea turtle that she hopes will appease Takeshi. Here the artificiality of her concept of nature again comes into focus; if nature is not the tool that will fulfill her desire and allow her to exhibit control, she can easily turn to other sources for satisfaction. This episode also reinforces the identification between Takeshi and Kajii, as the attempt to offer a turtle, traditionally considered an aphrodisiac, once again indicates Yuko's wish to satisfy her husband's desire.

As it becomes more and more obvious that the search is
futile, Yuko's waning enthusiasm becomes evident even to Takeshi, who suggests that they give up for the day and wait for Kajii to catch one for them the following day. Here Yuko again comes to life, adamantly refusing to allow Kajii the satisfaction of taking possession of the symbol of her vitality. The failure of her attempt to satisfy a little boy's simple wish for a crab, however, underlines her ultimate failure to gain control of her life and her relationship with Kajii. She must depend on Takeshi not to betray her or reveal her weakness to her husband. Her initial progress in the direction of peace, freedom and health is seemingly aided by a sympathetic natural world, but in the end it is the same natural world that causes her to realize her powerlessness and denies her the vitality she seeks.

In the work "Kincho" (1963; Birds) written the same year, Kono uses another animal to express these feelings of powerlessness, sexual frustration and lack of freedom. In this story, we are introduced to a variety of birds and the experiences and feelings that the protagonist relates with them. In the West, birds have long been symbols of resurrection and rebirth (Eliade, qtd. in Goldsmith 69). In Japan as well, images of birds are often central to traditional literature. Mention of mountain thrushes, nightingales or wild geese evokes images appropriate to the season and sentiment. Particularly in the West, however, birds that are caged or in any other manner controlled or restricted, suggest imprisonment and oppression.
These are the birds that appear in Kono Taeko's works.

In "Kincho" the main character, Kimiko, is once again a woman who has married relatively late and has no children. The story is set at a time when Kimiko and her husband, Miyaji, have been married for less than a year, but are already experiencing difficulties and are no longer sleeping together. Kimiko takes the blame for the situation, as she, on some insignificant pretext, provoked the argument that caused the split. The shame she feels about the situation is revealed one day when Miyaji's younger brother, Atsushi, comes to visit early in the morning and inadvertently discovers the secret. While neither Atsushi nor Miyaji pay much attention, Kimiko is flustered and embarrassed and does her best to cover up, as though the situation reveals a weakness or undesirability about her.

Kimiko's discomfort is further exacerbated when Atsushi asks her and Miyaji to buy a pheasant carcass that he has seen in the poultry shop near their home. The drama club at his university is staging a play and the bird is needed as a prop. Despite the fact that Kimiko has an intense dislike of birds, she takes on the request in an attempt to make amends to Miyaji. After a few days hesitation, she buys the carcass and brings it home, but the mere thought of the bird oppresses her, and forces her to recall experiences from her youth that she would rather forget.

Kimiko first remembers the cage of parakeets that her childhood family doctor kept in the yard outside of his
...For Kimiko, whose eyes were already dimmed with fever, the dizzying movements of the flock of parakeets were unbearably annoying. In addition, the colouring of the feathers that seemed to be dyed was an overpowering stimulus. The yellow, green and indigo colour combination appeared strangely malignant, and to Kimiko it seemed that it gave off a somehow unpleasant odour. (19)

The impatient pecking motion of the birds' beaks and the manner in which they open and close their eyes are the characteristics that Kimiko dislikes the most. Although at the time she observes the canaries she may not understand why they disturb her so much, she is later able to comprehend logically what she only knew intuitively as a child. The birds are trapped in a cage from which they cannot escape, but the physical cage is not the only thing that imprisons them. The birds may be able to mimic human speech, but because they have no language of their own, they are unable to express their desires in a way that others can understand; they are frustrated by the inability to let anyone know what they need. Kimiko feels much the same way in her relationship with Miyaji. She can see that her presence oppresses him, that his characteristic carefree manner has disappeared and that he probably regrets their marriage. At the same time, she feels a dependence on him, a hope that he can save her from the despair she feels in her life, but she does not know how to express this desire. Sex
does not seem to be the answer, for even after they resume their sexual relationship, she remains unsatisfied. In fact, her sexuality is the cause of her anguish, the cage that traps her, and she relates this frustration in herself to the birds she feels she is beginning to resemble.

...Lately, Kimiko couldn't help thinking that the characteristic appearance and movement of birds exposed the fact that they had no way of dealing with the anguish of their flesh. At the same time, she felt that she herself was gradually becoming more birdlike: her entire body covered with obscene feathers, subjected to a burning suffering, resisting futilely. -- Flying off in all directions in irritation, face feverish, blinking tiny eyes that show pent-up resentment, suddenly biting the wire of the cage, scratching the ground with the claws of scaly legs. -- The sharp, hard beak unable to voice complaints, able only to mutter and grieve incomprehensively or call out in a shrill voice. Yearning for understanding but knowing that to be impossible, the bird, with no other form of expression, instead of showing gratitude, frustratedly, angrily pecks out at people with that beak. (28-29)

Later, when Kimiko hears that the parakeets were incinerated in the fire bombing raids on Tokyo, she relates to the pain they experienced, trapped in their cage, abandoned by the person they depended upon and with no way to save themselves. She can identify with their longing to be delivered from their pain, because it parallels her desire to be rescued from her own sexual frustration and feelings of imprisonment. She knows that her attempts to communicate this desire are incomprehensible, but she hopes that somehow the gap between herself and Miyaji can be transcended. When Miyaji inevitably fails to understand and to rescue her, she uses the pretext of any trivial matter to
peck out and provoke him, just as a caged bird would.

Kimiko also recalls a second experience with birds that occurred later in her childhood. After their wartime evacuation to the suburbs of Tokyo, her parents decide to raise chickens for food. On the day that the chicks are first brought home, she and her brothers let them loose to play in the garden, but when one jumps up on her lap, she reacts violently. To her, the chicks are pecking, hyperactive, dirty creatures, and she cannot stand to touch them. At the same time, she is strongly affected when one of the chicks is hauled off by a rat into a drainage pipe and eaten. Her father is unable to save the chick, and the sounds of its pitiful cheeping make a lasting impression on her. Here again, she intuitively rejects the restlessness and dirtiness of the bird, qualities that she later finds disgusting in herself, but at the same time Kimiko empathizes with the bird’s inability to escape and with its attempts to communicate its despair in a voice no one can understand. As Kimiko watches the remaining chicks change from balls of fluff that cannot sit still for a minute to more sedate chickens that seem to calculate their every move, she thinks about the chick that should have grown up as the others did. That chick was unable to transcend the situation that imprisoned it and could only wait in vain for someone to rescue it, much as Kimiko herself is unable to transcend the trap of her own helplessness and alienation.

Kimiko is forced to confront her dislike of birds when
Atsushi makes his unusual request. After buying the pheasant, she puts the carcass on a high shelf in the kitchen where she will not have to look at it. Its presence, however, oppresses her, and she imagines that it is beginning to putrefy and smell. When she hears that Atsushi will not be returning to pick up the pheasant for several months, she starts feeling desperate. She worries that her phobia of birds and her gradual acquisition of birdlike qualities will become apparent to Miyaji, and she feels shame at the thought of him discovering this weakness. It occurs to her that somehow she must get rid of the carcass, and in the final scene of the work, while frying rarely-enjoyed prawns for dinner, she fantasizes about incinerating the carcass in the hot oil before her.

All of a sudden the oil would bubble up as if it would overflow, and from that moment, the feathers shrivelling in the heat would peek out, and the tail feathers sticking out would shake violently. The bird would writhe as though it were actually alive and in pain. Scratching the bottom of the hot frying pan slick with oil, the legs becoming inflamed, trying to flutter wings that were saturated in the hot, heavy oil, all it could do was suffer. (29)

The irony of the situation is that while she is dreaming of this revenge on the bird that seems to curse her, she is burning the delicacy that she is preparing for dinner. While it seems that she is taking some control of her fear and helplessness, in fact the bird, and her phobia, mock her and in effect punish her for her attempt to free herself. The reader is left with the impression that Kimiko will never be able to escape the prison of her unhappiness; she will never have a voice that will allow
her to express her desire.

"Bone Meat" is another story that ends with the protagonist figuratively setting fire to the objects that oppress her. Here again animals, in the form of birds and shellfish, play a major role. As mentioned above, the woman of the story loved nothing more than dishes that involved bones and shells, although she ate only the tiniest portions of the tastiest parts left behind by her lover. She is especially partial to the small bit of muscle where the oyster is attached to the shell, and is able to reach a state of ecstasy by savouring its taste, smell and texture. The pattern involved in the eating of these dishes is strictly laid out -- the woman begs for a whole oyster and the man refuses to give her any. She then eats the scraps he leaves behind, but the scenario is in fact always controlled by her in that it is only the small piece of meat that can satisfy her desire, therefore she always gets what she wants. The scene is essentially foreplay, as the ritual is always the precursor to sex, but the first time that the man deviates from the set pattern in both the eating of the oysters and the expected outcome, he robs the woman of her control of the situation. The woman later looks back on this incident as the beginning of the end of their relationship, a fact that had been foreshadowed earlier that same day when the man suggests they not buy the roasted chickens that they had up to that point eaten so eagerly.

"Would you mind not buying any? Lately they're fattening chickens with female hormones. It seems a
man shouldn't eat too much of it." (45)
The woman doubts the truth of what he is saying and recognizes
the implicit misogyny. This is her first indication that the
man is beginning to withdraw from her.

It is interesting that in this scene birds are once again
connected with feelings of shame. The woman, mesmerized by the
glass case where the chickens are turning on the rotisserie,
makes the following observation.

Inside the glass case each row of four chickens,
richly glazed, rose, turned, and sank back down. As
they rose again, with hardly a trace of the severed
necks, they seemed to be lifting their wings high.
The row of plump breasts rose, then began dropping out
of sight, and the bones that peeped out from the fat
legs as they rose made the chickens appear to be
falling prostrate, palms up, withdrawing in shame.

Even though they are dead, these birds, like those of the
earlier story, are in the women's eyes trapped, confined and
ashamed of the spectacle they present. Perhaps the way the
birds are exposed suggests to the woman her own vulnerability,
especially in light of the comment made by the man. She may
feel that her own unconventional sexual preferences are being
ridiculed as the man rejects the object that had been so closely
connected with her sexual desire. This rejection makes her
realize that her control over the situation is slipping away;
she no longer has control over her sexual expression and she
feels ashamed of this exposure.

In the end, however, the woman manages to regain the sense,
at least, of some degree of control over her life. Caught
between the world of illusion and the world of reality, the woman believes that after burning the belongings left behind by the man, all she has left from the relationship is a mountain of shells and bones. These she cannot burn, and they remain as a reminder of the failure of the relationship. Even so, the woman does not find them oppressive, nor do the carcasses mock her as they would Kimiko. Here, the woman completes the process only begun by Kimiko, and the fire seems to have had a spiritually cleansing effect on her. She has reached a level of detachment -- what had imprisoned her before no longer has a hold over her.

The siren of a fire engine wailed somewhere continuously. But what caused her dream to recede was less the siren than the words she had just heard in her dream. From the ashes of the man's belongings, that there should be so many bones and shells! "Is that so? Is that so?" she said nodding, and the siren, to which was added a furiously ringing bell, filled her ears. Was what she had been told in the dream perhaps prophetic? The bell stopped, and just then the siren arrived blaring under her window. But the woman, her eyes closed, nodding "Is that so? Is that so?" simply snuggled deeper into the quilt as it seemed to begin to smoulder. (52)

While some readers may argue that this final scene indicates the woman's ultimate submission and despair, I believe it is clear that the figurative burning is a release from the sense of confinement and oppression that the man's belongings had caused the woman to experience after the end of the relationship. Her own thoughts illustrate this in the following passage which precedes the passage quoted above:

Tomorrow when she awoke, she would no longer be troubled by anxiety...It was months since the woman had felt calm, and so exhilarated; the thought put her completely at ease. (52)
The theme of self-liberation coincides with natural imagery in another work from Kono's later period. In "Tetsu no uo," (1976; tr. Iron Fish, 1985) both real and man-made varieties of fish are used to develop the theme of awakening freedom. In the story, a woman visits the complex where her first husband, a sailor who lost his life in the war, is enshrined. She has waited nearly twenty-five years to visit the shrine, partially out of deference to her second husband, but mainly because she wanted to wait for a time when she was ready to personally experience the death of her first husband and when she would be able to freely explore the shrine and possess it as her own. The shrine itself has taken on a meaning larger than just that of the death of her husband. For her, it is "something she could possess all to herself, doing whatever she wanted there" (368). The way she hopes to gain this freedom is by trying to relive the last moments of her husband as he embarked on his suicide mission, loaded into a hollow torpedo, known as an Iron Fish, and aimed at an enemy ship. By experiencing his confinement, she believes that she can come to a new understanding of their relationship and resolve the feelings that remain from it. In order to do this, she hides away in the museum in the shrine complex, and spends the night thinking of her first husband and how he has affected her second marriage.

The image of fish, then, plays a major role in this work. At first the woman thinks of "fish," in that they contributed to her husband's death, in a negative, yet somehow detached manner. In the following passage his final moments are recalled.

Sometime, somewhere, her first husband had bade a last farewell to several of his close friends and had entered the belly of an iron fish before putting to sea. His wife knew nothing about this. The iron fish had destroyed itself against another great fish -- or was it a small iron island, whose upper half lay flat on some distant ocean? Her husband died, destroyed with the iron fish. His flesh was torn into many pieces that drifted down to the bottom of the sea, where they must have attracted the real fish feeding there. (367)

The simple, direct and emotionless delivery of the passage serves to underline the barbarity of the situation and of war in general. The woman, however, seems to lay no blame, and the reader is left only with the benign image of small pieces of whiteness drifting quietly down to the bottom of the ocean. Later she decides that his flesh would probably not have been eaten by fish but would have instead turned into small white stones like the ones under the iron fish displayed at the shrine complex. Here his body becomes a permanent, unfeeling and therefore invulnerable object, like the rocks, wood and metal that make up the shrine itself. He becomes, in effect, a permanent part of the environment, reminiscent of the kami that are believed, in traditional thought, to permeate the cosmos. 5

5"Everybody and everything in the early Japanese monistic religious universe, including physical elements such as fire, water, wood, and stone, as well as animals and celestial bodies, were believed to be endowed with kami nature." (Kitagawa 70)
The woman enters the iron fish and realizes how claustrophobic her husband must have felt inside. This action is in many ways analogous to a return to the womb, to the mother -- reunion is desired as a step in the healing process, yet feared as an annihilating experience. In a sense, her experience of the feeling of being trapped inside the womb-like fish gives her a greater understanding of and appreciation for the concept of freedom. The fish is associated with the potential for acquiring her own freedom, even while it was the instrument of her husband's death. His death is a source of regret for her but she also realizes that it has played a large role in the way her two marriages have affected her own sense of identity. In the final scene, she is sitting with her back against the iron fish and experiencing a variety of emotions concerning herself and her marriages.

She tried to discover what sort of disillusionment or what sense of attachment her first husband might have felt toward her when he shut himself up inside the iron fish. Had they been a specific kind of emotion? Perhaps. She couldn't help regretting that more time from her life had not been spared for him.

As she thought about these things...she realized that the emotions she was now experiencing for her first husband had been fostered by her life with her second, and that her first marriage had made her react with keen appreciation to the comment that her current companion had made soon after their remarriage [concerning the fact that she should not feel uneasy about remarrying]. (374)

This experience of imprisonment has been for her, then, a liberatory one. In this sense, the lines separating the notions of freedom and imprisonment have been blurred and the dichotomy
broken down.

In many of her works, Kono draws on the powerful natural imagery of the sea, and "Tetsu no uo" is perhaps the culmination of her development of the sea from false hope to liberating prison. The sea is, without a doubt, one of the most widely used natural images in world literature, but this may be particularly true of Japanese literature, since Japan, as an island nation, has traditionally been both dependent on and isolated by the water surrounding it.

As mentioned above, "Kani" is one of Kono's early works that deals extensively with the theme of the sea. Yuko, whose name ironically evokes images of calm vastness, is implicitly related to the Pacific Ocean she so desperately wants to visit. She is convinced that if she is allowed to travel to the seaside her health will improve, and the first lines of the work illustrate that she believes her insistence has paid off.

Yuko had pressed adamantly for the change of climate, and its remarkable effects were visible, even though it was only ten days since she had come to Soto-Boshu from Tokyo. (330)

She has visited the area before with her husband, and pleasant memories from her first trip help her to convince herself that the Boshu seashore is the spot where she will become healthy again. The sea, then, is for Yuko a symbol of hope, of healing, and of freedom.

Yuko thought that if she could live by this beautiful, peaceful seaside, in the state of tranquility, health and freedom that she desired, she could go on without ever needing anyone else. (336-37)
In light of the romantic memories she holds, her choice of Boshu might indicate her desire to mend the rift between herself and Kajii. However, it would seem that what she really wants is to be alone in the protective womb of the sea, and she depends on its healing powers for physical and spiritual rebirth. In effect, Yuko is attempting to recapture the illusion of infancy referred to by Winnicott as "subjective omnipotence," when the child feels that it is the world, that its desires magically create and control the world, and that no one exists outside of it (in Mitchell 32). The illusion is, of course, supported by the caregiver who satisfies the child’s needs and desires, yet from the child’s point of view remains undifferentiated. In this case, Yuko believes that the sea will fulfill her needs just as her mother once did, and she will need nothing and no one else.

The first indication that the sea may not in reality correspond with her expectations of it come when she catches a glimpse of it from the train on her arrival. The sea appears bright and warm in the spring sunshine, but in fact it is rough and the pounding surf produces a fierce noise. Yuko’s illusion differs greatly from the reality of the sea before her. This scene is analogous of the actual asymmetry existing in the mother-child relationship. While the child depends completely on the mother, the reverse is not true, despite the child’s belief that the mother exists for it. The mother has desires, aggressive feelings and needs of her own that do not correspond
to the child's, just as the reality of the sea does not correspond with Yuko's illusion of it. Initially, Yuko does not pay any attention to this discrepancy, but conversely acquires an energy off the turbulent water. Her first ten days are spent for the most part outside, and although she religiously observes the ritual of her afternoon nap, she spends much of her days walking, exploring the beach and watching the water. She sometimes thinks of her troubles with Kajii, but those thoughts soon fade from her mind; even her sexual experiences seem like something from another life. She feels that she has been reborn into a new life at the sea.

The fantasy she has built up around her life at the sea begins to crumble with the arrival of Takeshi. He demands something that the sea cannot provide for her. The crab she is certain she can find at the edge of the sea is not there -- when they dig holes in the sand, all they find is seawater. The sea gradually becomes a symbol of false hope, and in fact, what they are sure they can find there may actually exist in the mountains, a completely opposite direction. The sea becomes a symbol of what she cannot have, the peace, health and freedom she so desperately desires. Like a child who feels its self-centred needs are denied by its mother, Yuko is denied the vitality she seeks, and in the end is left to face her powerlessness.

The story "Michishio" (1964; High Tide) also reinforces this notion of false promise, although in a less overtly
pessimistic manner. This work tells the story of a young girl whose family moves out of the city to the suburbs near the sea. The father continues to commute to the family shop in the city, but the children are now able to enjoy life in a more rural setting. The family moves during the summer vacation, and the girl and her younger sister and brother spend the holiday outside at the beach. The setting is idyllic, and the sea is initially seen as an escape from the city. However, several incidents over the course of the story reveal the negative side of the sea under its surface positive image.

The first indication of the sea’s false promise occurs when the family goes to the beach one afternoon before the outbreak of the war with China to observe a naval parade. The children and their mother get there early and then wait for more than an hour after the scheduled parade time, but the anticipated display does not materialize. The younger sister becomes disillusioned and suggests they all go home, but at about that time someone shouts that the ships have become visible on the horizon.

Suddenly, towards the head of the procession, the vague black outline of a warship floated into view far offshore. On the beach, the onlookers cried out excitedly. But it was more like an illusion, and in a moment it disappeared. (179)

The sea fails to deliver what was expected of it, and the sense of disappointment is strong in the young girl.

Later in the story, it is revealed that the daughter of the widow who lived next door to the family in the city had years
earlier committed suicide by throwing herself in the ocean upon learning that the girl's father was engaged to be married. Here the sea is not the giver of life, the nourisher and protector, but the instrument of death. It may be argued that the sea here is again an escape, but it can only be seen as a negative one. Although the girl does not become aware of the facts surrounding the neighbour's death until she is an adult, the way that it is revealed in the story reinforces the negative power of the sea and in retrospect casts a shadow over what she believed was an idyllic youth.

In the final scene of the work, the girl and her father are walking along the darkened streets of the business and entertainment district strangely quiet due to the war. The young girl thinks of the way the war has changed her life, and has in effect taken the innocence of childhood from her and introduced her to the adult world of reality. She thinks of the loneliness of the familiar places lit in happier times with neon, and compares the local river that formerly reflected bright light with the dark reality now before her. This river is affected by the tides, and as she crosses it with her father, she can hear the lapping noise of the water as the tide rises up the banks. Here I think we can see a definite identification of the protagonist with nature, although the character herself may not make the connection consciously. There has long been a saying in Japan that humans are born on the rising tide and die on the ebb tide ("michishio ni umarete, hikishio ni shinu"), but
I think Kono extends this connection of the tides with the cycles of life to include the onset and cessation of menses. As quoted from Rich above, the tides, controlled by the moon, have also been traditionally connected with the menstrual cycle. The young girl in "Michishio" has just entered junior high school and therefore is at the age when menstruation will begin. Her crossing over the bridge to adulthood is occasioned not only by the loss of innocence connected to the war, but also by the start of her period. Here, then, the sea is again connected to woman, but the idea of becoming a woman is not one that is welcomed by the young girl.

Images of the sea are of course also prominent in "Tetsu no uo," but in this story the sea that is connected with the denying mother or negative female imagery is no longer evident. The sea here is viewed in a more holistic fashion similar to that of Rich's Mother Goddess; the sea is the taker of life, but it is also the means of rebirth into a new life. The protagonist enters a sea-like atmosphere in order to answer questions that relate to her understanding of herself and her identity.

It seemed as if the iron fish were now deep in water. She noticed a very dim light rising from the bottom of the ocean.

Part of the cylinder rested on some tiny white pebbles spread in a rectangular wooden frame. The light at the bottom of the sea was the reflection of those white pebbles faintly gleaming in the darkness. It was not yet completely dark -- there was enough light to tell where the pebbles lay.

At the bottom of the deep sea she touched the white pebbles; she held them in her palm, then scooped them up in both hands. (372)
Here the darkness of the ocean is penetrated by a dim light that reflects off the stones that as we have seen have become the flesh of her first husband. The darkness at the bottom of the sea is not perceived by the woman as threatening, but rather as an appropriate environment in which to contemplate her being. The white flesh of her husband, reflecting light from above, helps her to come to terms with her feelings for him. The sea gives her the opportunity to call up feelings from the bottom of her subconscious, which can then, in order to be understood and resolved, be looked at in the light of her own reality, unaided by the reflected light that comes from another being. The closing line of the work illustrates the woman's realization that her self-imposed confinement has given her the key to her own freedom. When she wonders about the way her two marriages have affected each other and herself, she thinks that the answers she seeks may be revealed "if she could see the brightness of the sun again" (374). The woman may still have a period of darkness ahead of her, but she has come to the realization that darkness and confinement is part of the process of understanding her own subjectivity. In this respect, then, imprisonment becomes a liberatory experience, and metaphorically, the sea is the womb-like environment in which freedom is achieved.

Despite this seeming change in the development of Kono’s attitude toward the sea and the connection she makes between it and woman, one of her latest works once again reveals the
ambivalence of the relationship between life, death and the sea. In "Sono zengo," (1989; Around Then) the sea is connected with death, but the association is ambiguous. In this work, nature imagery is used infrequently, but the final lines connect the death of an unnamed person with the movements of the tide. The woman is informed of the time of death, and when she checks her calendar, she realizes that the death occurred at the precise moment when the tide began to ebb, corresponding (perhaps too neatly) with the traditional belief about birth, death and the tides noted above. This connection of the cycles of life and death with the natural environment, in addition to the fact that the dead person is not identified, mitigates the fear and finality of death to a certain extent. The woman can take comfort in the fact that the ebb tide never marks the end; the tide will rise again and life will go on. However, we could also speculate that in this case the tide is not so much associated with death as with the cessation of menses, once again making the connection between the lunar calendar and cycle that controls both tidal movements and menstruation. The woman is at the stage when she will be experiencing menopause "around then;" she may see that event as a kind of "death" of a part of her. This connection between menses and the sea possesses potentially negative connotations, as it did with the young girl in "Michishio." At the same time, the woman seems to accept the death of the person in a detached manner, perhaps in the same way she has come to accept the change in herself. (It should be
noted that the woman has never, whether by choice or by circumstance, had children herself, so menopause may or may not be a significant event for her in terms of her reproductive ability. It may indicate just another stage in the cycle of life.) The association of menopause with a natural force like the movements of the tide renders it less fearful and more part of a cosmic chain of events.

The essential ambivalence of Kono's feelings regarding nature, then, can be seen throughout the course of her writing career. Initially, natural imagery is used ostensibly as a symbol of escape from the confines of the real world. The subtext, however, subverts this romantic imagery and instead paints nature as a prison and an obstacle to the achievement of one's desire or even the expression of that desire. Nature is, in effect, a kind of mother figure that both promises nurturance yet withholds amae. Like the traditional Western patriarchal perception of the mother, nature in Kono's early works is seen as having the power both to promise and to deny life, and this power enables it to trap those who depend upon it. In addition, the sexuality of the female protagonists itself is seen as a trap, and this is conveyed using natural imagery, reinforcing the woman/nature/sex association. Yet, as the woman in "Tetsu no uo" comes to understand, nature, especially the sea, can be seen in a more holistic and less threatening manner. Its power is not something that must be escaped, but something that transforms those who willingly enter it and accept it, not as an
oppressive force, but as a step toward their own freedom and rebirth. Through this experience, what was formerly perceived as dark, mysterious and threatening becomes accepted as part of a process of liberation. Death, then, also comes to be seen as an essential part of the cycle of life, and at least to a certain degree, the fear of it is diminished.

While Kono Taeko continues to accept the traditional view of nature as a female and maternal entity, then, she has moved away from a position that resembles the dualistic view of nature as a force that cannot be depended on and that must be subjected to domination by culture, to one that tentatively resembles the traditional Japanese viewpoint. This traditional construction of nature results in a single, holistic universe where nature and humans, life and death, darkness and light all are seen to exist in a timeless cycle.
CHAPTER TWO

Woman, Mother and Child

In the previous chapter, I examined the concept of nature and the relationship between it and the female protagonists of Kono's works. Throughout the course of the analysis, it became obvious that Kono reinforces the traditional association between nature and mother. Nature, like mother, is both the giver and taker of life, the object of ambivalent feelings and desires, and finally the means to a deeper self-knowledge and sense of freedom. In this chapter I intend to look in more detail at the mother-child relationship and how it affects the protagonist, both as daughter and as potential parent, particularly in a society in which women are defined by their ability to mother.

Although the structure of Japanese society is undergoing profound changes in our time, it is safe to say that since the beginning of this century, the worth of a Japanese woman is measured to a large degree by her ability to bear and raise healthy, productive children within the bounds of a sanctioned marriage.¹ In her study of Japanese women, Lebra states that

¹In the introduction to Recreating Japanese Women: 1600 - 1945, Bernstein argues that until the twentieth century, womanhood was not primarily equated with motherhood, and
"the essential worth of the bride lies in her fertility" (159), while Uno argues that "(i)n present-day Japan two domestic activities, motherhood and household management, define the core of women's familial and social obligations" (17). White reports that 76% of the informants in her sample stated that their ikigai, or reason for living, is their children (155). Furthermore, Lebra states that full adulthood is not thought to be achieved until a woman bears a child and thereby becomes able to experience the meaning of love, suffering and empathy in addition to power, strength and bravery (164-5). Childless women are thought to be cold and unable to love completely.

Whether consciously acknowledged or not, the pressure on a Japanese woman to bear children is heavy. However, as White argues, this pressure is countered by feelings of pride and self-worth that arise as a result of doing a job considered both difficult and important in a society that values children as its greatest asset. In addition to providing the focal point for these feelings of self-worth, children also supply the means of a woman's participation in society, as it is normally through her children that a woman will interact with neighbours, teachers and other mothers. Childless women often find themselves isolated from the rest of the community (Lebra 209).

motherhood was not necessarily defined biologically. During the Tokugawa period (1600 - 1868), women were expected to marry, but childbearing was not a primary obligation as heirs could be adopted. It was not until the Meiji era (1868 - 1912) that the state took an active role in promoting the notion of women as "Good Wives, Wise Mothers."
In Western society as well, women traditionally have been defined by their ability to bear children, and have achieved a sense of identity through their children. As a result, the child comes to play a very important role in a woman's psychological make-up. As Chodorow argues,

\[(i)f \text{ having a child makes a mother all-powerful or totally powerless, if women's maternal potential requires the desexing of women or enables fully embodied power, then the child who invokes this arrangement must also be all-powerful. The child's existence or potential existence dominates the mother's. (1989: 85)}\]

The significance to a woman of the existence of a child, then, is great; as a result of societal pressure, the existence or lack of existence of a child dominates the woman's sense of identity. However, that domination can have the effect of producing emotional reactions against the child as well. Chodorow goes on to state that many women, as they become mothers or imagine becoming mothers... fear the experience as all consuming and come unconsciously and consciously to resent, fear and feel devour by their children. The outcome is powerful aggressive feelings and ... preoccupation with death. (1989: 92)

Although Chodorow is basing her conclusions on studies of North American women, the works of Kono Taeko can in many respects be used to illustrate her arguments. Kono deals with these issues of self-identity, aggression both inwardly and outwardly directed, and the mother-child relationship. Herself a childless and therefore marginalized woman, Kono explores the conditions of childlessness, sexuality and marginality in many of her works. Her protagonists, always female, are usually
involved in masochistic sexual relationships, a fact that further adds to their marginality. In addition, many of these protagonists indulge in fantasies involving the torture of children. In this chapter, I will examine the prevalence of these themes and what they mean to Kono’s work.

Kanda Yumiko is a Japanese scholar who has concluded that these themes indicate that Kono’s characters, and Kono herself, suffer from a twisted maternal instinct. Her essay entitled "Kono Taeko: Bosei dokei no qyakusetsu" (The Paradox of Maternal Longing) illustrates the general prejudice against childless women that exists in Japan. In this work, Kanda characterizes Kono’s “barren” protagonists and by extension all childless women as experiencing a "natural" desire for motherhood that, because unfulfilled, becomes warped and transformed into a death wish (47). Women who cannot realize a "normal" sexual relationship with men (one that leads to the creation of a new life) turn instead to man’s miniature, young boys, to achieve their goal of destruction. This, according to Kanda, explains the sadistic fantasies involving children that many of Kono’s protagonists experience (47). Furthermore, the men involved in relationships with these women are seen by Kanda as castrated victims who inevitably lead irregular and lazy lives, playing the part of the idiot child to the women’s indulgent mother (51). Kanda works on the assumption that there is in fact a natural maternal instinct and that any woman who does not or cannot take action on that instinct is somehow incomplete or
abnormal. She does not consider the possibility that this "instinct" may be socially constructed and reinforced by implicit and explicit pressure on the part of individuals like herself who marginalize anyone not conforming to the "normal" standards.

Chodorow, whose interests lie in the reproduction of the social organization of gender, presents a case for social construction of the maternal instinct. In The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender, she argues that, as long as women continue to act as the primary caregiver, female children will be unconsciously conditioned to grow up to take over that role in adulthood. She states that because the mother reacts to a male child as a sexual other, she pushes him into the oedipal stage at an earlier age than the daughter (106-08). Because the daughter's preoedipal attachment to the mother is longer and the resolution to the complex itself not as complete as the boy's is thought to be, her sense of separateness is not as strong.²

As long as women mother, we can expect that a girl's preoedipal period will be longer than that of a boy and that women, more than men, will be more open to and preoccupied with those very relational issues that go into mothering -- feelings of primary identification, lack of separateness or differentiation, ego and body-ego boundary issues and primary love not under the sway of the reality principle. (110)

²This is not to say that firm ego boundaries are necessarily to be valued more highly, although in our society they tend to be.
In addition, the daughter does not turn absolutely from the mother to the father during the Oedipal period, but adds him to form an emotional triangle, in effect retaining both parents as love objects. While girls may eventually make a commitment to men sexually, emotionally the commitment to heterosexual love may not be as strong. Instead, love for the mother remains primary, while heterosexual relationships are added to the triangle as non-exclusive and secondary ones (198). The girl may feel the need to recreate this emotional triangle in adulthood by having a child of her own. Men, then, can return to the mother through sexual union, while women can only recreate this primary identification of mother and child by bearing a child. This is the social construction of the "maternal instinct."

But where do Kono's characters, many of whom are fascinated by children but do not consciously desire them, and cannot physically bear them, fit in? Certainly they live in a society where motherhood is considered to be the natural course of events. How do they react towards this being, this child, whose existence, or lack of existence, dominates the way they are conditioned to feel about themselves? "Yoji gari," (1961; Infant Hunting) one of Kono's earliest works and the first for which she received literary recognition, explores the issue of childlessness and what it means to its protagonist. Kono

3Chodorow relies on the work of Helene Deutsch as the basis for her conclusions here.
describes "Yoji gari" as the first work in which she allowed herself to write what she truly wanted and needed to express, without paying attention to plot or style ("Watashi no shisei;" My Attitude, 45-6). The title itself gives some indication of the subversive nature of the work in which the everyday and fantasy worlds of the protagonist, Hayashi Akiko, are combined to produce a shockingly violent, yet richly descriptive, picture of a woman on the margins. Akiko is an unmarried and childless woman in her early thirties who is involved in a masochistic relationship with a younger man. She is also a talented former operatic singer who makes her own living translating scores and other materials from Italian to Japanese. Akiko characterizes herself as lacking in maternal feelings, and she detests more than anything young girls between the ages of three and ten. However, she is enamoured of boys the same age, and one of her greatest pleasures is buying little boys' clothing to present to the sons of her acquaintances. Over the course of the story, however, it becomes clear that this seemingly altruistic action

"Kono herself is very much enamoured of young boys. In a recent interview in Bungakkai (45.2, 1991), she explains why. "For me, I have the feeling that small boys, among male and female, young and old, have the best elements of human beings. When they're happy, they are truly, thoroughly happy. When they are angry, they are terribly angry, and when they cry, their crying is as though the universe has become completely dark, isn't it. These, perhaps because of the fact that I like little boys, give me the feeling that they seem to possess the best elements of human being."

Kono seems to accept these qualities as being part of boys' innate make-up. She does not question the role society may play in encouraging little boys to express themselves while discouraging girls from doing so.
is in fact the means for her to bring to life her fantasies. Her obsession with small boys is further underlined by the description of her interaction with a boy at the public bath, and finally in the last scene which ends with the bewildered Akiko holding a piece of dirty, sweat-and-saliva soaked watermelon she has shared with a young neighbourhood boy. Akiko recognizes that she is a woman who does not fit in with the rest of society. Older, unmarried and frustrated in her original aspiration to become a famous singer, she feels that life has played some kind of cruel joke on her. At the same time, she is able to laugh at her situation, and is quite comfortable with the knowledge that she will probably stay single and will definitely remain childless due to the fact that her body, weakened from tuberculosis, is unable to handle a pregnancy. Still, she often wonders at the fact that this same body continues to undergo the menstrual cycle even though a child will never be produced from it.

A long time ago, Akiko thought about the strangeness of the function that month after month, for the sake of the child there was no possibility of bearing, laid and destroyed a bedding in that same flesh that did not understand the impossibility. At the same time, there was a period when she thought it terribly important that there was not yet one single being on the face of the earth that had received her own blood.

At times when she does think about the fact that no being had experienced that part of her, she wonders if there was not a way to bear a child and leave its upbringing to someone else. She envies men who can father a child and know that they have
left that legacy without having to take on any of the responsibilities of raising the child. The ambiguity of her feelings, at least at one point in her life, is clear. She desires to leave something of herself behind, to experience a connectedness with another being, but at the same time, she feels threatened by that connectedness and wishes to retain her separateness. Eventually, however, she comes to believe that she is lacking in maternal feelings, and to accept the fact that in reality she does not desire to have children. She prefers to accept the role of social misfit.

Then, Akiko became accustomed to the fact that her own body should not bear a child. When she thought of that, she even began to experience a kind of joyful feeling. (330)

Akiko's joy may relate to the fact that since she is unencumbered by the reality or possibility of childbearing, she is free to indulge herself in fantasies that give her a great deal of sexual satisfaction.

Akiko, then, becomes comfortable with her marginality and in fact uses it in a subversive manner to bring her vivid fantasies to life. Knowing that people will rationalize her behaviour, she takes the liberty of buying gifts for the young sons of acquaintances.

The people who received the gifts were amazed at the appropriateness of the choice of a woman who had never once had a child. Among them as well were perhaps people who thought that she probably was carried away with maternal feelings, people who thought they had discovered the reason for the unexpected gift. (323)
The irony of the situation is that Akiko does subvert this perception of her maternal feelings when it becomes clear that her actions are a way of achieving sexual satisfaction in the playing out her fantasies that involve the torture of young boys. The gift that Akiko chooses in "Yoji gari" is a short-sleeved red-and-navy striped wool shirt, and as she holds it in her hands, stroking it, she envisions the following scene.

The four-or-so-year old boy wearing the light shirt would determinedly, boyishly stretch the nape of his neck burned black during the summer. When he takes it off, the child definitely insists on doing it himself. Trying his hardest, he crosses his short, round arms in front of his body and finally grabs the hem of the shirt. But pulling it up is difficult. He closes his eyes, wiggles his bum, and struggles with all his might, but only his belly, looking as though it is ready to burst from all the food he eats, appears, and no matter how long he tries, the shirt is not removed. (323)

Akiko attempts to stage this scene when she gives the shirt to the four-year-old son of an acquaintance from her singing days. She insists that he take the shirt off as soon as he has tried it on, despite the fact that both the child and his mother want to leave it on. It is only later, as we see Akiko apparently self-stimulated and entering the ecstasy of her fantasy world, that the significance of this scene becomes obvious. Her fantasy always involves a father growing more and more violent as he chastises his son for some wrongdoing. A woman also becomes involved with the beating, urging on the father as he progresses from beating the child with a belt to hitting him with a cane. It is not clear who the woman is; she could be the child's mother or Akiko herself. In either case,
although she is not the direct agent of the child's torture, she contributes to the course of it. In the final phase of the torture, the father presses the boy against a red-hot zinc shed, producing a sizzling noise as the boy's flesh burns.

The father pulled the boy near to him. The boy staggered. The father supported him with his own body. Then, he turned the child's blistered back on which the red-hot corrugated aluminum had left copper-coloured stripes, towards the woman.

But still it was not over. The father chastised the boy for leaning against him. He tied the hands of the boy who could just no longer stand above his head and hung him from the branch of a tree.

"I wonder if there isn't anywhere we could strike him?"

Because the father said this, the woman said enticingly, "His stomach is still left." So they decided that the child would be attacked there.

All of a sudden, the child's stomach split. Stringy intestines flowed out in a gush. They were a beautiful purple colour. (332)

The red stripes, the hands over the head, the writhing and staggering, and the bursting stomach all recall the earlier scene imagined by Akiko as she caressed the shirt. She has used an unsuspecting young boy to play out her fantasy, and in a completely subversive way has had, in effect, the last laugh on the "normal" people by whose standards she is judged "abnormal."

On the other hand, in the opinion of most people these fantasies would be considered sick and antisocial, but perhaps they should be seen as a weapon wielded by a marginalized woman as a protest against the society that does not see her as a whole person.

While fantasies may be a marginalized person's form of protest, these fantasies in particular are extreme in their cruelty. Why does Akiko take her protest to such lengths,
especially at the seeming expense of children and not the adults who marginalize her? It seems clear that these fantasies are not only a subversive form of protest, but also a means for Akiko to achieve sexual satisfaction. In imagining the scene, she must be able to experience the boy's pain at the same time as she or her surrogate in the fantasy directs the torture. She is in the ideal masochistic position -- she controls the pain at the same time that she experiences it, and therefore she is able to reach a climax that explodes in a beautiful purple gush. But why is a little boy, and not a girl or a woman, the object of her identification? This may be related to the fact that Kono herself, as stated above, sees little boys as the epitome of vitality, energy and honesty. Her characters may be trying to identify or associate themselves with these qualities, and therefore justify their own desires through them.

Akiko, then, like many of Kono's other characters, likes young boys, yet she cannot stand girls of the same age. Akiko likens her abhorrence of girls to someone who hates snakes or frogs, yet she remembers that time of her own life as probably the happiest period she had known. Beneath the happiness, however, she detects that there existed a strange, gloomy feeling,

like having to walk endlessly down a long, low tunnel, like an invisible slime oozing from her entire body, like being cursed by something; an abhorrent, repugnant feeling that attacks the senses. (321)

The references to Freudian theory and the conventional association of femaleness and bodily discharge are obvious.
These qualities are apprehended in a child of an age corresponding to the oedipal period, when "there is no longer any doubt about the sexual life in the child" (Freud, *General Introduction* 286), and the latency period, when sexual development may cease but sexual activity and interest continues. Akiko, whose own reproductive potential is latent, may see girls of this age as a miniature of herself, a woman with the physiological equipment but not the ability to reproduce. The difference is that the girl has the latent potential to reproduce and therefore become an accepted member of society, while Akiko does not have the option of realizing that potential, and therefore must always remain on the outside. The miniature woman is therefore hated both as a reminder of her condition and as a mockery of it. Despite personally accepting the fact that she cannot bear children, and even using that condition to help her achieve sexual satisfaction, Akiko still must deal with the fact that her condition excludes her from an approved and valued position in society. The gap between the individual's sense of self-worth and society's judgement of that individual is evident here, and in that gap ambivalent feelings and self-doubt arise. It is interesting, however, that Akiko converts these feelings into a hatred of young girls rather than women who can bear children. This may indicate more of a fear of the potential, what she could have been, than of the real, what she isn't. She may also be directing her anger at a weaker, defenceless target whom she can more easily control.
Feminist theorists, psychoanalytic and otherwise, have tried to explain why some women (specifically women that are mothers), consciously or not, dislike young girls. Both Flax and Rich argue that because a mother understands that in our society men are valued more highly than women, mothers are more apt to favour sons. Giving birth to sons has been the way to consolidate the woman's power, "one means through which a woman could leave 'her' mark on the world" (Rich 193), while the birth of a daughter means one more disappointment. Klein argues that women may prefer sons "out of an intuitive feeling that the old resentments and fears they felt about their mothers would be reactivated if they, in effect, gave birth to themselves" (16). Friday points to the competition between a woman and her daughter for the father's love as the source of the conflict -- a situation that causes the woman to relive the oedipal struggle with her own mother (138). This may be the psychology at work in the minds of characters like Akiko; although they themselves do not have daughters, girls cause them to see themselves as daughters in relation to their own mothers. Women like Akiko may have internalized societal valuation of men, but their abhorrence of girls would seem to be a much deeper part of their psyche, and this may relate to unresolved conflicts in their relationships with their own mothers.

Chodorow, however, argues that primary identification and symbiosis tends to be stronger in mothers of daughters -- the son is related to as a sexual other, while the daughter is seen as a narcissistic extension of the mother. (1978: 109)
Interestingly, Akiko finds that, because she is unaccustomed to male/female similarities and differences in another race, foreign girls of the ages three to ten do not have the same effect on her. Therefore, she theorizes that if she had married a foreigner and born a mixed-blood daughter, her reaction to the girl may not be as negative. This may well be because she could see the child as being something not completely part of or resembling her (the term for "foreigner" in Japanese literally means "outside person"); something not a miniature of her and therefore not a threat to her own sense of self. She finds it more difficult with foreigners to differentiate between the sexes, so she does not see foreign girls as sexual beings with latent reproductive capacities similar to her own. On the other hand, she may be more able to identify and empathize with this female who is, like her, on the outside.

Akiko calculates that, if she had married and born children as most women do, she would then probably have a child somewhere between the ages of three and ten, and she wonders what kind of parent she would be if the child was a girl. This question can perhaps best be answered by examining another of Kono's early works, entitled "Ari takaru" (1964; tr. Ants Swarm, 1982). This work deals with another unconventional couple involved in a masochistic sexual relationship. Both partners are working, the husband as a reporter and the wife as an employee of a foreign law firm, and together they have decided that they will remain
childless. They are planning to leave Japan for a year to study in America, but, because of a late period, the wife, Fumiko, becomes convinced that she is pregnant. To her surprise, her husband Matsuda seems quite pleased, and Fumiko at first finds it hard to deal with his reaction.

...Fumiko had never wanted to have a child. Just to think of bearing the child and having to raise it disgusted her. This time too, when her menstruation was late, she was fearful, held a grudge against Matsuda, and was concerned only with finding a solution; she never had any real hope. Therefore she found Matsuda’s words extremely shocking. She felt betrayed and jealous when she thought that Matsuda, while she remained oblivious, had come to think of a child and experience a parental emotion which she would never have, despite the fact that they had promised each other so emphatically.⁶

Although Fumiko does not want a child, and the thought of conceiving one makes her feel helpless, she lets Matsuda fantasize about the child and even becomes caught up in his excitement, because she enjoys seeing him play at being a father. When her period does finally start, she experiences a sense of relief mixed with disappointment. The relief she understands readily enough, but the disappointment is somewhat incomprehensible and disturbing. As she returns from the washroom late at night after discovering that her period had started, unexpected thoughts occur to her.

Fumiko reflected deeply on the past several days. At night Matsuda’s footsteps had sounded different. While she was preparing evening snacks for him, he had

been eager to talk about the child. Since Matsuda usually had fallen asleep again when she was ready to leave the house for the office, she was accustomed to saying good-bye to him casually, but it had been different these days. Whenever I opened and closed this door -- thinking of it she looked back at the bathroom door. She realized that she could not dismiss this incident as a foolish experience. She realized that the familiar curtain, corridor, wooden door, wall and pillar had all been imbued with a certain richness during these days, but that the richness was now diminishing rapidly. (112)

The plan of the house that the two occupy corresponds to the organization of the female reproductive organs, and it seems that the richness that Fumiko perceives in the house applies also to her new, perhaps still subconscious feeling towards her own reproductive capacity. Fumiko, unlike Akiko, has the ability to bear children, although she chooses not to, and this is one of the differences between the two characters. Akiko is forced into her marginality by a society that isolates childless women, while Fumiko chooses her marginality. However, even Fumiko is affected by the mistaken belief that she is pregnant, indicating the ambiguous feelings surrounding motherhood that many woman experience.

The richness Fumiko feels, however, is not in the body, but in the mind, as she is not actually pregnant. This would imply that the condition of fertility or infertility is a psychological, not a physical, phenomenon; one does not consider oneself "fertile" or "barren" physically until one is made to
consciously consider the issue in a social context. Fumiko even feels "barren" when she discovers that she is not pregnant and has to inform Matsuda.

"I should have kept silent from the start. I talked too early," Fumiko said on the pillow which Matsuda let her share and cried again. She felt that she was like a barren woman who had been longing for a child and who had to face the bitter fact once again. Yet the tears flowed spontaneously. (113)

Fumiko realizes that the incident has affected the way she feels about her body and its potential to give life, but at the same time she feels a sense of release from the anxiety of the previous days.

Because she no longer has to worry about the actual child, she allows her imagination to take over while she and Matsuda fantasize about their non-existent child. Here we see parallels with Akiko's way of thinking. Fumiko states that if the child is a boy she will not be extreme, but if it is a girl, she will be so strict that outsiders will think she is the girl's stepmother. She will not allow the girl to have much education, or teach her to think for herself.

"I hate a girl who thinks of all sorts of things. Let's raise her to be a girl who never talks back. It won't do if she just restrains herself from talking back. She ought to be a child who is incapable of criticism, a child who has no opinion of her own. A child who can automatically do what she it told -- an idiot-like child -- even her face must look like an idiot's."

"You mean a child like a doll."

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7Sandelowski states that it is the cultural labels of "mother" and "infertile woman" that "prescribe certain patriarchal standards" (34). These labels in turn cause women to think about themselves in those terms.
"Yes, like a Chinese girl in olden times; we'll let her learn only domestic matters from an early age, and soon after she graduates from junior high school, I'll marry her off." (114)

While the fantasy is obviously exaggerated, it seems that Fumiko only desires a daughter who is her absolute opposite, a daughter who can be controlled. The daughter will be, in effect, everything that Fumiko, a well-educated working woman, is not; Fumiko will not have to deal with seeing her own self in miniature form. Furthermore, the girl may represent the lifestyle that Fumiko has rejected; through her Fumiko may be taking a shot at the "ideal" Japanese woman whose identity is defined in the domestic sphere and who is encouraged to keep her thoughts and opinions to herself. She may be attempting to assert her perceived superiority and control over this type of woman, particularly if in reality she is fighting the judgement of society and therefore does not feel this superiority and control in relation to the people around her. If she feels pressured or insecure in her decision not to have children, she may need this type of fantasy to support her self-esteem.

The issue of control may also relate to unresolved conflicts that Fumiko has experienced during her own childhood. Chodorow argues adults consciously try to recreate aspects of their early relationships, especially if those relationships were unresolved or repressed (1987: 51). Furthermore, in order to parent effectively, the primary caregiver, most often a woman, must be able to regress to her own childhood in order to understand the needs of her child. This regression also
activates early defenses and conflicts that then affect the mother-child relationship. In imagining this type of control over her "daughter," Fumiko may be reenacting the struggles she experienced with her own mother, and trying to claim for herself the control that her mother had over her.

Fumiko goes on to fantasize a torture scene involving the imaginary daughter, and although it is not as graphic as Akiko's, it is still shocking in its description of her cruelty. She uses the daughter's failure to buy groceries as the excuse she needs to punish her.

"You forgot to buy butter."
"Yes." As soon as she answered she crouched beside the gas range as if hiding and lowered her face. There were several red scars on her back. They looked like scars left by cigarette burns.
"Go and buy butter," Fumiko said. Butter in a yellow paper box slid down from the ceiling and onto her palm, feeling cold and heavy. Fumiko... scooping some out with a spoon, brought it to the gas flame. If it melts completely it will be very hot. Looking down at the back of the daughter who was squatting at her feet, Fumiko gazed at the butter in the spoon. A yellow lump melting smoothly from its edges-- (116)

While the degree of cruelty here may not be as great as that of Akiko's fantasy, it is interesting that the protagonist sees herself directly involved in the torture, not as an observer as Akiko is. Perhaps this is because Fumiko has been made to realize that she can in fact bear a child and, feeling both threatened and fascinated by this idea, recognizes her principle role in the whole scheme. This understanding leads her to place herself directly into the fantasy, taking the initiative in destroying the child that threatens her and her
way of thinking and of life. Akiko, however, knows she cannot have children and therefore does not need to take a direct role in the torture of the child, although she may be thought of as the unseen woman who encourages the man in the scene. She is an observer in the game of motherhood, not a potential player.

Fumiko, who now sees herself as a potential mother, experiences all of the ambiguous feelings that entails and feels compelled to take direct action on them.

Another work that examines the ambiguity of feelings surrounding motherhood real or imagined is *Fui no koe* (1968: An Unexpected Voice). In this work, the protagonist, Ukiko, is a childless woman who attempts to resolve the conflicts she experiences in various relationships, including her relationship with children. Ukiko learns from a friend that her former lover has a young son attending the playschool where the friend works. One day, Ukiko goes to the school in order to observe the boy. She is captivated, much like Akiko, by his boyish, puppy-like qualities, by the softness, warmth and dampness that she feels in him, and by his happy face. When she sees him, she feels that for the first time she has come to the realization that there are beings in the world other than adult men and women, and that she and her estranged husband, Kiichi, were once children themselves. At the same time, she begins to see the boy as the child she could have had if she and his father had stayed together. At the time of her relationship with this former lover, who is referred to as "the opposite sex," her body
was capable of bearing children. For some reason (possibly due to tuberculosis), by the time she met her husband, she had become unable to have a child. She wonders if having a child might have saved their relationship. Her thoughts, however, are not so much indicative of her desire to have children as her desire to prove to Kiichi that she was not always "barren." As she watches the young boy playing games, she imagines herself crying to her husband,

"This is the child that for the first time reminded me of the face of the child I could have had. Of all the children in the world, this is the adorable child who is most closely connected to me. But, I will make him go -- I will make him go at any cost. I am dying to make him go. I will make this child who is so closely connected to me, who is so adorable, go.

(303-304)

Here we see the opposing pulls of the notion of motherhood -- Ukiko longs to feel a connection with another being who is separate but part of her, yet she must destroy this part outside of her that threatens her own separate being.

Ukiko, who has already lost touch with reality by this point, uses the word "go" in the passage above as a euphemism for dying, but the term also implies orgasm, so again we see the association of young boys and sexuality. In this case the relationship is almost incestuous as Ukiko has come to see the boy as her child that could have been. Again we are reminded of Chodorow's conclusion to the effect that a mother often confuses her relationship to her son with a sexual relationship to him as a male and therefore usually pushes him into the sexualized
Chodorow also argues that this sexual stage again causes the mother to relive her own oedipal situation, resulting in incestuous libidinal fantasies that originate with the mother. This possibility will be explored in more depth in the following section; here suffice it to say that Ukiko’s fantasies may not be "abnormal," just incompletely repressed.

In the passage above, the aggressive, violent fantasies of the potential mother are taken to the extreme. In this fantasy we see a mother who feels her individual identity threatened by a child who is but is not part of her, and who therefore kills the child in her imagination. At the same time, we see a child who is both the destroyer of the mother and the object of destruction (Chodorow, 1989: 87). Ukiko for the first time feels a connection to a child, but the urge to destroy the child that both threatens her separateness, reminds her of the potential she has lost and causes the reactivation of her own oedipal situation, is overpowering. The ambiguous love/hate relationship with a being that is perceived as a miniature of a sexual other as well as a part of her is dealt with through violent fantasy. (Although written as though taking place in

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Chodorow cites the work of Bibring and Slater who found that an explicitly sexual relationship may exist between mother and son. They also concluded that the mother may achieve sexual gratification from nursing and caring for infants of either sex. Stephens, however, noted that in the societies studied by him, "erotic manifestations" and "libidinal pleasure" during nursing were definitely far more noticeable with mothers of boys than with mothers of girls. (In Klein, 21)
reality, we later learn that the entire scene is a long description of Ukiko's fantasy.)

The other principle in the protagonist's fantasy, the child who is both destroyer and object of destruction, provides the point of view from which the protagonist sees her own mother. As stated earlier, a woman who undertakes or imagines raising a child must regress to the psychological state of infancy in order to understand the needs of the child. In doing so, the adult relives the conflicts that it experienced in childhood. These childhood conflicts, or the mother-child relationship from the point of view of the child, is another theme that Kono explores in her work. The point of view in this case is almost always that of a female child. An example of this type of work is "Michishio," discussed in the previous chapter. In this story, the girl's mother is portrayed as a kind, loving woman who devotes herself to her family in the conventional manner. Her traditional role is established in the first paragraph where she binds herself with her obi, or sash, as she prepares to leave the city with the children. The girl later implicitly contrasts her quiet, traditional mother with some of the stylishly dressed, outgoing mothers at her new school.

One of the girl's fondest memories is that of hot summer nights spent in the garden setting off fireworks given to the children by their mother. As the first fireworks were set off, (all of a sudden the darkness was brightened, and the young girl was already in a different world. The fireworks lived momentarily, intensely, hastily, in a
world of brightness and beautiful colours, while burning and shrivelling with a hissing sound. (107)

The opportunity to enter this world is provided by the mother, and the girl, keenly aware of the mother’s presence in the darkness, notices the expression of fascination on the mother’s face as it is lit by the exploding fireworks. The girl can feel the connection between her mother and herself as both are transported into a fantasy world.

However, it is this same mother who later, during the war, denies the girl the opportunity of entering this world when she takes the fireworks away from the children in response to a stranger criticizing the children for wasting gunpowder. While the father dismisses the stranger as just a stick-in-the-mud, the mother capitulates to the pressure and takes the fireworks away. As she gives up the fireworks to her mother,

the girl’s heart was heavy. It wasn’t because she regretted the fireworks. It was because no matter if she was allowed or urged, she felt that she would never be able to experience the happiness of fireworks again. (111)

The girl has lost her innocence as the adult world of war has been brought home to her in a tangible manner that she can understand. She can never again enter that world of fantasy, and although it was the stranger that censured her, it is with her mother that she associates the criticism. Her mother is unable to protect her from the reality of the world outside, and in the end takes the source of her fantasy away. The mother, then, is associated with the child’s passage from innocence to adulthood. In a later scene, it is the mother who specifically
warns the girl about what she faces in the future, and prepares her for the disappointments she will encounter in life.

"You know, I sometimes think about your lives. I don’t know what kind of person’s place you will go to as a bride or what kind of life you will lead, but just don’t think that the life we are leading now is an ordinary one. It’s not normal; it’s too happy."

Further signs of the disappointments and unfulfilled desires to come are also associated with the girl’s mother. A naval parade that she takes her children to see never materializes. The school uniform the daughter covets is denied her due to wartime shortages, but had her mother given birth to her one month earlier, she would have been part of the last class that has the privilege of wearing it. These incidents are not violent or traumatic, but all of them reinforce in her the impression that her mother is not the omnipotent being she had experienced as an infant. Obviously all children must come to this realization if they are to achieve maturity themselves, and in fact, development is defined in terms of growing away from the mother. Eventually, the mother comes to represent dependence, regression, passivity and lack of adaptation to reality (Chodorow 1978: 82), even while she is teaching her children what that reality is. However, the sense of loss and perhaps betrayal remains with the child in the form of a nameless, shapeless desire to recreate that primary relationship and resolve the conflicts that arise out of it.

In Fui no koe, Ukiko, in addition to resolving her ambiguous feelings about her own potential child, looks at her
relationship with her mother. Ukiko recalls that when she was young, although it was her mother that scolded her, she was far more terrified of her father. Because she spent more time with her mother and was used to her mother’s kindness, Ukiko’s fear of her was not so intense; in fact the two were quite close. By the time she reached fifteen or sixteen, the fear that she did have for her mother diminished greatly and was replaced by feelings of almost painful tenderness. The feelings of wretchedness, fear and worry she had previously experienced when being chastised by her mother turned to feelings of regret and apologetic sorrow, and while she did not go out of her way to make her mother happy, she also regretted doing anything that would make her mother sad.

During the war, when Ukiko was sent to work in a munitions factory and had to face the threat of death, she came to realize that the parents she had depended on all her life, and under whose protection she had lived, could not in fact save her should anything happen. With the realization of this fact, the remaining fear of her mother disappeared almost completely, and the painful tenderness she felt towards her mother also subsided. Ukiko starts to think that the tenderness she did feel was in fact a transformation of fear, a concealer of fear, and that that fear disappeared when she realized that her mother was in fact just human like herself. This discovery causes her to feel a calm tenderness for her mother, and their relationship changes to resemble that of siblings. The pity and compassion
she feels for her parents who have been exposed as the mere human beings they are is manifested in an outward show of gratitude. At the same time, she becomes much more stubborn in her own demands, and does not fear her parents’ anger or threats when they oppose her plans. After she moves away from home, she reaches the stage where, although she does nothing to make her parents happy or express her feelings to them, she begins to pray fervently that they live long, healthy lives. However, it is after she marries that Ukiko realizes that, while she has absolutely no fear of her father, fear of her mother’s disapproval still remains.

For the daughter, it seems that that last touch of fear of the mother is not lost even when the mother is old and the daughter is in the prime of womanhood. It is probably the same even for daughters who grow up to be socially successful. It is not even enough just to get married. It seems that it is only when, after bearing children, understanding the feelings of a mother, being acknowledged as a woman who understands the feelings of a mother by one’s mother, and when each truly understands the other, through that world one can come to no longer experience fear of the mother. However, in her case, because of physical reasons, barring a miracle there was no way she could become a mother. This being the case, her slight fear of her mother would probably continue until her mother died. (236-37)

This early passage reveals the ambiguity of the daughter’s feelings towards her mother: consciously she hopes that her mother will live a long and healthy life, but at the same time there is the knowledge that she will not be free of her mother’s influence until the older woman’s death is accomplished.

Her wish that both her parents live long into old age, however, is not granted as her father dies prematurely of heart
disease. Once, shortly before his death, and again several times after, the face of her father appears to her and the two of them have short conversations. The father can usually be counted on to show up in Ukiko's time of need, as he does when she is ejected from her home by her husband. Ukiko interprets the gist of their conversation at this time to mean that he encourages her to free herself from the relationships that oppress her, and as she resolves to do so, she feels a new strength welling up within her, as if she has finally found the way out of her problems. It becomes apparent that her devils are mother, child and man, and she decides that the first one with whom she must deal is her mother. She travels back to her home with the intention of "making her mother go." She arrives home, and is greeted by her mother whom she describes as resembling a ghost. Ukiko looks for a way to accomplish her goal during a lengthy conversation in which her mother implicitly criticizes Ukiko's neglect of her, and in which Ukiko, perhaps for reasons of pride, defends her abusive husband. (Interestingly, it does not seem that Ukiko and Kiichi's relationship is one in which masochism is used as a sexual game. Rather, it appears that Kiichi's physical and mental abuse of her springs from hate and disgust.) As Ukiko observes her mother, she notes that while the mother was quite muscular in her youth, she is now very frail.

Inside her slender attire, it seems that there are gaps here and there, especially around the collar. Her slim neck and her hidden breast look helpless,
shrivelling into the farthest recesses of the kimono. (282)

Her mother's frailty leads Ukiko to imagine the following scene.

Going around to her back with "Shall I massage your shoulders?" she would make her mother feel relaxed. At the moment she says "Oh, that really feels good," Ukiko would from behind wrap one arm around her throat, cover her nose and mouth with her other palm, and letting her strength do the rest, draw her mother in to her chest. She would probably struggle violently, but she would be no match for Ukiko's physical strength, nor for the violence Ukiko was used to in her fights with Kiichi. (282)

Ukiko relates the violent feelings she experiences to her relationship with Kiichi. We have also seen how Ukiko later connects her killing of the young boy to her relationship with her husband. All of the humiliation and abuse that she suffers at the hands of Kiichi are taken out on the two beings that represent the roots of her frustration and her fear, the child that she can now never have, and the mother that she can never replace. As she cannot become a mother, she must free herself of her own mother in order to rid herself of the fear that she feels, to empower her to deal with her other devils. Furthermore, she may blame her mother for her own failures in her relationship with Kiichi, despite the fact that the relationship is of her own making. Placing blame in this way may be irrational, but as Chodorow states, not uncommon, particularly as mothers are the first beings upon whom the child must depend. Striking out at the mother in rage is a consequence of this tendency to blame.
Rage is an inevitable outcome of this extremism [of blaming the mother]. We magnify the impact of one individual, the mother, and when the child in us suffers the inevitable frustrations of living, we blame our mothers... We are all prone to mother-hating, for we live in a society that says that mothers can and should do all for their children. (1989: 91-92)

Ukiko may also blame or resent her mother for her own marginality. Because she cannot become an accepted member of society through motherhood, she may feel that she has to kill her mother in order to rid herself of everything her mother represents. Killing her mother can be seen as an act of rejection of the society that values a role she can never play. As Gardiner argues, in many twentieth century novels,

the heroines' mothers represent the traditional social roles of wifehood and motherhood together with the psychological traits that conventionally accompany them. The dying mothers thus embody both the stultifying roles and the negative personal traits that the daughters want to bury. (148)

Adrienne Rich also comments on the daughter's need to free herself of her mother in Of Woman Born. Here she states that Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondages, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (236)

Ukiko, then, is performing radical surgery in order to validate the self that does not seem to be valued by society or, on the personal level, by her husband.

However, Ukiko doubts that she will be able to carry out
this operation as she fears that should her strength fail her and the hand covering her mother's mouth slip, her mother would say something that would render her unable to complete the act. She does not want to share the sensations her mother experiences in knowing that death at the hands of her daughter is upon her. Ukiko tries to come up with a method that will not cause her mother any pain and will not allow her mother the time to leave behind the words of condemnation of which Ukiko is so afraid. Instead, Ukiko wants to hear her mother say something beautiful, something offhand, before she realizes that her daughter is "making her go." In addition, Ukiko does not want her mother to see any blood, and she wants to leave the older woman with the impression that she is a loving, filial daughter. She finally decides to ask her mother to lie down with her ostensibly so that they can cuddle and nap. She prepares the stockings, plastic bag and towel she will need for her undertaking and then asks her mother to join her in bed.

"It's alright. You just did your hair, but lie down for a little."

"Okay. This is a funny development!" Mother laughed, opened the sliding paper door further and came in. With an accustomed hand she untied just her obi, and, going around the side next to the sliding doors, she pushed her knees into the bed. Ukiko immediately moved her body, blocking that side, and said, "Why don't you come over here?" as she turned over the pillow and placed it on the empty opposite side.

"Well then, we'll need something for a pillow for you." Mother said as she circled to the other side.

"No, that's fine. Well now Mother, you get in too," said Ukiko, in high spirits as she peeled back the quilt at an angle and her mother lied down in the place Ukiko suggested. Ukiko gently covered her with the quilt. (287)
Ukiko appears to be taking on the role of the parent as she has her mother get into bed. The scene, however, starts to take on sexual overtones as the two women lie together. This is again intensified by Ukiko’s use of the expression "making her mother go," with its sexual implications.

"Your legs are cold, aren’t they. Are they like this even in this warm weather?" said Ukiko as she began to envision a method. At the same time, she was trying to share the mother-daughter atmosphere she imagined was the case with her younger sister.

"It didn’t feel that way to me, but your legs are so warm. Maybe mine are cold after all.

"They are. Isn’t that warm?" said Ukiko as she squeezed her mother’s legs between hers sideways.

Ukiko pulls her mother close to her and embraces her at length, then puts her face so close that the cheeks of the two women are touching. Ukiko tells her mother how she has been hoping that the older woman will lead a long life, and laments that she herself has no offspring to wish that for her. Ukiko remarks that her mother is lucky to have a daughter so filial, and when the older woman replies, however weakly, that she is a filial daughter, Ukiko decides to make those words her last. She stuffs the end of the towel she has hidden under the bed into her mother’s mouth and, in order that she not have to see her mother’s startled gaze, covers her face with the rest of it. She straddles her mother’s writhing body and binds her hands with a pair of stockings, then covers her head with a plastic bag. Still, the mother is able to scratch Ukiko’s inner thigh, sending her into spasm of excruciating pain and causing her to quicken her movements.
As the clawed part of her thigh felt like it was coming off, Ukiko, holding the lumped-up part of the plastic bag tightly, quickly stretched her body over her mother. Then, sandwiching her mother's bound hands between their bodies, she leaned slightly to the side and with one leg lifted the quilt, then grabbing it with her hand, covered the two of them... Ukiko squeezed her mother's two legs together tightly. The mother tried to pull her leg out. Ukiko squeezed even more deeply. Because she was sandwiching them, what she was touching directly was not her mother's skin, but her kimono which covered her thigh.

"Mother. I really wanted to make you go while I wrapped my legs around yours."... Covering her face in the V of her mother's breast as if to press down there, as if to give herself up for keeping there, Ukiko said this in her heart. (292)

In Japan, sharing a bed and cuddling intimately with one's mother may not be considered unusual, but I believe this scene also implies a sexual relationship bordering on incestuous rape. The suggestion of mother/daughter incest, or even rape, may be, on the surface, very disturbing, but according to feminist theory, not unexplainable. Signe Hammer states that although mother/son seductiveness has been studied, seductiveness in the mother/daughter relationship has not, because women's sexuality has always been invisible except in relation to men. However, she argues that this mother/daughter seductiveness may in fact explain in part the intensity of mother/daughter relationships (60). Chodorow points out that while mother/daughter incest is entirely possible, it is not even considered in a male-dominated society because it is altogether too threatening to that society (132). However, as Flax points out, an erotic relationship between mother and daughter is understandable, given that the child's first love object is usually its mother.
All of us carry the memory of the experience of our mother's body -- her softness, smell, comfort. These experiences have an erotic aspect. Girls must repress their desires for the mother as they transfer sexual allegiance to the father in the individuation process in our society... The power of women's erotic memories and wishes for the mother may not be expressed in directly sexual form. They may not even be available to the consciousness. But their power is strong enough to frighten any woman in whom they are even semiconsciously aroused. (183)

This may be part of the fear that Ukiko feels, the fear that cannot be erased except with the death of her mother. In a patriarchal society such as Japan, these kind of thoughts are dangerous and anti-social, and if the daughter recognizes them, she may feel compelled to act on them and at the same time rid herself of their object. Here, the attraction to the mother, the desire to return to the state where the child's primary love object is the mother, meets the desire to cut the cord, free oneself from the mother and become an autonomous individual. Ukiko may be experiencing an overpowering desire to re-merge with her first sexual object at the same time that she acts on the desire to free herself from the power of that object.

Ukiko, and other characters like her, experience extreme fantasies that many readers would condemn as being sadistic, immoral, pathological and anti-social. However, this kind of reaction may very well indicate that these fantasies exist in all of us at some deeper level -- we recognize them, they strike a chord in us, and we must violently deny or reject their existence. This is not to say that unconsciously we all want to kill our mothers or our children, but that hostility against
those individuals who threaten our separateness or who dominate or control our existence certainly lies deep within us. Especially in Japan, where the mother-child bond is considered perhaps even more central to a woman's identity than in North America, this hostility may only be expressible by a woman on the outside, a woman marginalized by her inability and lack of desire to fill the role prescribed for her. Only a marginalized woman may be fit and free to question the "sacred" mother-child relationship, to explore its darker side, to express the ambiguous feelings women may feel with regard to it, and to accept the ostracism that follows. This punishment dealt by society is conventionally associated with the Father, the figure to whom we now turn.
In the previous chapter it was pointed out that Japanese mothers are traditionally responsible for the upbringing of children and the smooth running of domestic affairs. In this chapter I will look at the role of the Japanese father, whose responsibilities lie in the public sphere and the financial support of his family. These responsibilities lead him to spend a great deal of time away from the home, given the long working hours for which the Japanese are famous,¹ and the extended commute the average suburban dweller must face. As a result of the time the father spends away from home, the typical Japanese child often sees very little of his or her male parent. In fact, in a recent Japanese government survey of one thousand children aged ten to fifteen, twenty-eight percent replied that their fathers never take them for walks or play games with them. (In comparison, a similar survey in the United States indicated

¹Figures from the 1989 Annual Report on the Labour Force Survey, published by the Statistics Bureau of the Japanese Government, indicate that the average work week for all men both self-employed and employed by others is 51.0 hours. Self-employed men in wholesale, retail and restaurant businesses average 60.1 hours per week.
that only three percent of American children said their fathers did not take part in these activities.) Furthermore, the survey found that the average father can find only thirty-six minutes per day for his children (Hartcher: 59). Another study found that sixty percent of fathers do not take part in the family breakfast, and thirty percent are absent during dinner time (Kurimoto: 33).² It seems clear then, that the average Japanese child does not have a great deal of opportunity to get to know his or her father well. What are some of the consequences of this distance between male parent and child, and how does this distance affect the father-child relationships that appear in the works of Kono Taeko?

Chodorow argues, based mainly on research in the Western tradition, that the distance between father and child, which reflects the fact that the father is often absent, leads the child to idealize the male parent because he is not really known (1989: 71-72). This is especially true for the female child who looks to her father for a confirmation of her own identity separate from her mother. This confirmation is desired first during the Oedipal stage, and again as the child enters puberty, two developmental stages when separation issues are of central importance to the child. The father is seen as an

²It should be noted that as these statistics are very recent, they may not apply directly to the context Kono Taeko was writing in thirty years ago. In general, however, the rapid postwar trends toward industrialization and urbanization have resulted in long workdays for the family breadwinner.
escape from maternal omnipotence, an opposite against whom she can confirm her own uniqueness.

The experience of self in the original mother-relation remains both seductive and frightening: unity was bliss, yet means the loss of self and absolute dependence. The father, by contrast, has always been differentiated and known as a separate person with separate interests. He has not posed the original narcissistic threat (the threat to the basic ego integrity and boundaries) nor provided the original narcissistic unity (the original experience of oneness) to the girl. Oedipal love for the mother, then, contains a threat to selfhood which love for the father never does. Love for the father, in fact, is not simply the natural emergence of heterosexuality. Rather, it is an attempt on the girl's part to break her primary unity and dependence. (1989: 71)

Although the son is also concerned with establishing an identity separate from the mother, he has his own uniqueness confirmed every day in opposition to the female primary caregiver in a relationship based on reality. The girl's relationship with her father, who is largely unavailable, does not have this same grounding in reality and tends therefore to exist on a level of fantasy and idealization (1989: 71-72).

Benjamin also comments on the idealization of the male parent. She argues that the female primary caregiver can never be regarded by the child as a sexual subject, for from the child's point of view, the mother exists to satisfy the child's needs and desires (113-114). The mother is not seen as having desires or a sense of agency of her own; she is the object of desire. The father, the symbol of authority and power, however, is regarded as a sexual subject, the representation of potency, agency and desire. As a result, "(u)nable to create a
representation of desire based on maternal identification, a sense of agency that is active and feminine, the girl turns to an idealizing love for a male figure who represents desire" (115). Again, this idealization is associated with the attempt to separate from the primary caregiver and establish the self (135).

The story "Michishio," discussed in the previous chapter, illustrates some of these aspects of the father-daughter relationship. The young girl is ten years old when the story begins and reaches puberty at its conclusion. This is the period Helene Deutsch calls "prepuberty," when separation issues and the establishment of self again become important.

"The young girl of eleven lives in a world situated between the past and the future, between childhood and adulthood... The renunciation of infantile fantasy life is of the greatest importance for the growing girl. This is principally accomplished through the search for new object relationships, that is, new objects to love, to hate, and with which to be identified. The need to be recognized as an adult is great at this time and the battle for such recognition is all the more acute and painful because the young person in her insecurity and need for protection has an unconscious desire to remain a child. (vol. 1: 6)

As in the Oedipal period, the person to whom the young girl often turns as a model of independence and agency is the father. The father is still the idealized figure associated with desire. Once again, the fact that he is often unavailable and therefore not really known aids in the idealization. This is certainly the case in "Michishio," where the father commutes to his business in the city and rarely seems to participate in the children's upbringing or education. Nevertheless, it is he who
is seen as having power and agency, able to act on his desires in the public sphere. This is illustrated in the episode concerning the school uniform, referred to in the previous chapter. The girl wants more than anything to wear the navy blue wool sailor uniform that the older girls wear, instead of the poor-quality brown uniform she is forced to wear due to wartime shortages. Finally, it is her father who is able to take advantage of his connections in the business world to enable her to have the desired uniform. Her wish remains unfulfilled until her father, who possesses the power and agency to act on his desire, pulls the necessary strings. The mother, because the issue is outside of the domestic sphere she controls, is unable to satisfy this need; only the father, now even more of an ideal figure, can fulfill the desire of the young girl.

The girl's admiration and love for her father further increases when, after fitting her new uniform at the tailor in the city, he takes her out for dinner with Mrs. Horita, their former neighbour. They dine on fine food at a good restaurant, a luxury enjoyed rarely during those wartime years, and the girl is treated by her father as an adult, a guest. Here, with her father in the public world, she is recognized as an adult, an acknowledgement deemed by Deutsch to be crucial to a young girl's development and sense of self. In addition, the girl is admitted by her father into the adult world of secrets, as he requests that she not tell her mother about their dinner with
Horita san. The girl does not understand the reason for secrecy, but she vows to her father to keep it from her mother. As Deutsch points out, girls of the age of about twelve (the girl here has just turned thirteen) tend to surround themselves in secrecy, and particularly feel compelled to keep secrets from the mother (11-12). In "Michishio," the girl forms an alliance with her father against her mother, further indicating her wish to free herself from dependence on the mother and to enter the world of adulthood. The idealized father proves to be the easiest method to achieve this goal.

The final scene of the work indicates the girl's physical passage into adulthood. Later the same evening, she walks over a bridge with her father and hears the tide flowing below her. The significance of the title, "Michishio," or "Full Tide," becomes clearer, especially when the association of the tides with the female menstrual cycle is recalled. Furthermore, the term for a girl's first menstruation in Japanese is the "first tide" (shocho). Here then, the tide indicates the impending onset of the girl's first menstruation as she crosses from childhood into adulthood. It is interesting that her passage to sexual maturity is associated with her father, with whom she has just vowed to keep a secret from her mother. She does not feel an identification with her mother, a woman who has experienced what she will undergo. Instead, the (hetero)sexual nature of her entry into puberty is underlined by its association with her father, her sexual opposite. Freud took the heterosexual nature
of this passage into sexual maturity for granted with his statement, "(w)hen the girl turns away from her mother, she also makes over to her father her introduction into sexual life" (SE 21:238). Her mother is once again her sexual rival, as she was during the Oedipal stage. The ambivalent nature of the physical changes at puberty is underlined by writers like Friday who argue that the beginning of menstruation reawakens both the sense of humiliation that accompanies lack of bodily control and the conflicts that one experienced with one's mother during toilet training (118). Furthermore, the start of menstruation reminds the girl that she is like her mother, and that if the girl is a sexual being, then so is her mother. This disturbing and threatening realization can lead to a sense of competition in the girl for that which is also the object of the mother's desire. However, the sexual rivalry that is centered on the father is in fact more indicative of the girl's struggle for recognition in the world (138).

The story "Ari takaru," also discussed in the previous chapter, is another, more explicit example of this rivalry between mother and daughter for the love of the father. In this work, however, the rivalry is experienced in the fantasy of Fumiko, despite the fact that her daughter also exists only in her imagination. As she and her husband Matsuda fantasize about

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3Quotations taken from The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud will be identified with the accepted abbreviation "SE" followed by volume and page number.
their potential child after they know Fumiko is not pregnant, the following exchange takes place. Fumiko says,

"After she graduates from junior high school I will make her stay at home and use her as a maid. Yes, by this time of day she’d be forced to get up to prepare breakfast. I’ll be here with you like this."

"That will be good."

"Do you like it? Then I’ll make her do it when she enters elementary school... and soon after she graduates from junior high school, I’ll marry her off."

"I’ll visit her often to see how she is. I’ll bring her some of the sugar we receive without your knowing."

"No!"

"But you never cook with sugar. There’s lots of unused sugar."

"Is that so? Okay then, you can bring it."

"I’ll go to her every Sunday."

"You’ll be disliked by your son-in-law."

"No matter. He’ll be a nice husband. I’ll find her a nice, gentle one."

"It won’t work that way. I’ll urge him to be a bad husband, to be dissipated. You too must encourage him to be dissipated. Even if you find beautiful women, I know you will give them up. Bring them to your daughter’s husband, as many as possible, like you bring sugar."

Fumiko continued, "I will not listen even if she comes to me to complain. I’ll show her my body and tell her that her father is such a cruel man, but that her mother endures it. I’ll tell her that she must bear it too." (114)

Here Fumiko encourages her version of the ideal father to be both indulgent and cruel toward his daughter. Part of this can be attributed to the ambivalent, rivalrous emotions a mother may unconsciously feel towards her daughter with respect to the husband/father. The mother uses the father to inflict pain and punishment on the daughter in order to secure the mother’s own claim to him. At the same time, there is a superficial identification between mother and daughter because both suffer
the cruelty of the father; in effect, however, the sympathy the mother shows is ironic and mocking as the pain she experiences is sexually gratifying and desired on her part.

Fumiko may also be reliving in fantasy her own conflicting youthful emotions toward her father. Here the father is idealized, indulgent, providing the sweetness that the mother at this time cannot or will not. This imagined sweetness may also include sexual gratification, as the reference to sugar, the gift from the father, may indicate. Although her first reaction to Matsuda’s suggestion that he take sugar to his daughter (a suggestion that indicates his own desire) is a resounding "No!" Fumiko soon capitulates and agrees to the action. She may in fact be fantasizing about her desire to receive that sweet gift, which Freud would argue is first a penis and then a baby, from her own father. Here again, both her own ambivalent feelings regarding motherhood and her desire for the father are being expressed. Furthermore, the connection between sugar and the Japanese word amae, or sweet indulgence, cannot be overlooked. Amae would be associated with the kind of self-sacrificial, indulgent and giving nature that an ideal mother would possess. Fumiko cannot feel this kind of sweetness toward a child (although to a certain extent she displays these qualities with her husband). That role is left to her husband, who will supply the daughter with amae and at the same time act as the instrument of the mother’s punishment for the daughter’s
desires. The father, then, is both idealized as an object of desire and feared as the representative of the mother’s wrath.

The sexual nature of the parent-child relationship has been noted by scholars and writers for centuries, at least as far back as the original myth of Oedipus. Freud used this myth to illustrate what he saw as the most important developmental phase in the life of a human being. He theorized that by the time the child reached the age of three it had become sexually aware and curious, and from about that time enters into the Oedipal complex (1920: 278-286). For the boy, sexual desire is directed at the mother, and he wishes to take his father’s place and possess the mother completely (although the act of intercourse is not itself understood). However, the threat of castration which is usually verbalized by the mother to be carried out by the father, is made more believable after the child has in some circumstance had the opportunity to observe the "castrated" female genitals. The loss of his own penis then becomes imaginable, and the child must choose between possessing the mother at the price of his penis, for his father would castrate his as punishment, or giving up his mother as an object of sexual desire. Freud concludes that in the normal case, the boy would place his narcissistic interest in his penis over his

Once again, Freud is basing his theory on an exclusively Western model.

Other writers, including Deutsch and Chodorow, point out that the girl generally enters the Oedipal stage later than the boy. In later works, Freud acknowledged the importance of the preoedipal stage for the girl.
desire for his mother, introject the father's authority into the
goal, resulting in the formation of the super-ego, identify
himself with his father, and finally resolve his Oedipus complex
(SE 19: 175-176).

In his early work, however, Freud is not as confident in
his analysis of the Oedipus complex in young girls, admitting
that his insight into this stage of their development is
"unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague" (SE 19: 179). He
theorizes that the little girl in this stage feels inferior
because she assumes that she once possessed an organ like that
of her male playfellows, but then lost it by castration, for
which she blames her mother. Since she accepts castration as an
accomplished fact, she does not fear it as a punishment,
therefore the motive for the formation of a strong super-ego is
not as powerful for her as for the boy. In Freud's early
estimation, the girl's complex is "much simpler" than the boy's,
and

seldom goes beyond the taking of her mother's place
and the adopting of a feminine attitude towards her
father. Renunciation of the penis is not tolerated by
the girl without some attempt at compensation. She
slips -- along the line of a symbolic equation, one
might say -- from the penis to a baby. Her Oedipus
complex culminates in a desire, which is long
retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift
-- to bear him a child. (SE 19: 178-179)

Freud concludes that the complex is eventually given up because
the wish is never fulfilled."

"In his 1931 essay entitled "Female Sexuality," Freud
revised his theory, acknowledging that sexual development and
the resolution of the complex is much more difficult for girls
Freud characterizes the "feminine attitude" as passive, narcissistic and masochistic, and implies that feminine masochism is not problematical (SE 19: 161). He makes this conclusions based on his belief that the female situation, ie. being "castrated," being copulated with and giving birth, all involve pain. Even males with masochistic preferences are placing themselves in "a characteristically female situation" (SE 19: 162). In some cases this inherently feminine masochism is expressed more overtly in fantasies and in actual recreations of those fantasies. These Freud discusses in one of his earlier works on masochism, entitled "A Child is being Beaten," concerning the beating fantasies that many of his patients being treated for hysteria or obsessional neurosis experienced. From his observations, Freud developed the following theory about these fantasies. Although both men and women reported experiencing them, Freud envisioned differing schemata for the sexes. Here the discussion will be limited to his conclusions about his female patients. Freud breaks these fantasies down into three stages, the first being summed up by the statement, "My father is beating the child whom I hate" (SE 17: 185). The child being beaten is usually a sibling, and can be of either sex. This stage enables the girl to deal with feelings of than boys.

These claims are the basis of feminist opposition to Freud's ideas. Later writers have pointed out that Freud confused fantasies of pain with the reality of it, and also disregarded the submission to pain for the sake of a higher purpose, ie childbirth (Benjamin: 116).
jealousy that the arrival of a new sibling may occasion, and to
convince herself that the father loves only her (and loves her
in the genital sense). In the first stage, then, the girl is
expressing an incestuous desire for the love of her father.
However, repression of this desire occurs either as the result
of the child's disillusionment in the father or of the fact that
the wish remains unfulfilled for too long. In any case,
repression leads to a sense of guilt about the incestuous
wishes. As a punishment for this guilt, the girl unconsciously
brings about a role change in her fantasy and enters the second
stage: now it is she herself who is being beaten by her father.
According to Freud,

"My father loves me" was meant in a genital sense;
owing to the regression it is turned into "My father
is beating me (I am being beaten by my father)". This
being beaten is now a convergence of the sense of
guilt and sexual love. It is not only the punishment
for the forbidden genital relation, but also the
regressive substitute for that relation, and from this
latter source it derives the libidinal excitation
which is from this time forward attached to it, and
which finds its outlet in masturbatory acts. Here for
the first time we have the essence of masochism.
(SE 17: 189)

In the third and final stage, the fantasy again changes,
and the content can be summed up in the statement "A person in
authority is beating a boy or a group of boys." Freud sees this
as a substitution for the second stage: the person in authority
is in fact the father, while the boys being beaten are
substitutes for the girl herself, who has abandoned her feminine
role and now only wants to be a boy. Thus, while the third
stage may appear on the surface to be sadistic, it is in fact a masochistic fantasy.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, beating fantasies play a not insignificant part in the literature of Kono Taeko. Can Freud’s theories be applied to her work? A story such as "Yoji gari," may indicate that the theory holds. The woman’s fantasy, as previously described, involves a boy being beaten by his father. On the surface, the daydream may be sadistic, but if, as Freud suggests in the third stage, the boy is actually a substitute for the person fantasizing, it is very much a masochistic fantasy. We know that the protagonist, Akiko, is involved in a masochistic sexual relationship, and on at least one occasion has been whipped so enthusiastically that she began to lose consciousness. Perhaps her fantasy allows her to experience herself as a boy of the age of which she is most enamoured being beaten/loved by her father. Two aspects of the scene, however, do not correspond with Freud’s theory. One is that while Freud noted that among his patients none of the children in the fantasy was ever seriously hurt, the boy in Akiko’s fantasy has his stomach split open. The second aspect is the woman we do not see who directs the torture from offstage. She plays no part in Freud’s theory but obviously is significant in Akiko’s fantasy, for it is she who suggests the course of the torture. Is this woman Akiko herself, directing the torture/ecstasy her surrogate receives at the hand of his father? Or is this a maternal figure, a cold mother who
controls the life and death of the child? How does the mother fit into a theory of masochism?

While Freud argues that the torturer in the masochistic scene represents the father whom the fantasizer uses both to expiate guilt and to achieve sexual gratification, Gilles Deleuze counters with the theory that it is in fact the mother who lies behind the masochistic fantasy. His essay entitled "Masochism; an interpretation of coldness and cruelty" examines the works of Sacher-Masoch, the man from whose name the term masochism is derived. Deleuze argues that Freud's mistake was in seeing sadism and masochism as originating from the same source, with masochism arising as a reaction to the guilt associated with a primary sadism. \(^8\) (In other words, the child feels guilty about imagining its father beating a hated sibling, and so places itself in the beating fantasy.) Deleuze sees the father as the main figure only in sadism, which is "an active negation of the mother and an exaltation of the father who is beyond all laws" (60). He theorizes that masochism, on the other hand, is associated with the mother. He breaks down the mother figure into three fundamental images: the primitive, uterine mother, the Oedipal, beloved mother, and the oral mother who both nurtures and brings death, and concludes that "the specific element of masochism is the oral mother, the ideal of coldness, solicitude and death, between the uterine mother and

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\(^8\)In later works, including Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) and "The Economic Problem in Masochism" (1924), Freud conceded that a primary masochism existed.
the Oedipal mother" (55). All paternal functions are transferred to the mother, and as a result, she lacks nothing, including the phallus. (Deleuze points out that fetishism, which originates from the original disavowal of the mother's lack of a penis, is essential to masochism.) The father, however, is humiliated and abolished, and it is in fact the masochist's desire to atone for his resemblance to the father that leads him to seek punishment (60). 9

This theory may apply to "Yoji gari" and "Ari takaru," as Akiko and Fumiko both fantasize that a cold, cruel woman plays the controlling role in the torture and humiliation of the child. 10 In both fantasies the woman tells the father what

9Deleuze obviously works with the model of the male masochist, but makes the following claim in order to extend his theory to women as well: "In masochism the masculine impulse is embodied in the role of the son, while the feminine impulse is projected in the role of the mother, but in point of fact the two impulses constitute one single figure; femininity is posited as lacking in nothing and placed alongside a virility suspended in disavowal (just as the absence of a penis need not indicate lack of the phallus, its presence likewise need not indicate possession of the phallus). Hence in masochism a girl has no difficulty in assuming the role of son in relation to the beating mother who possesses the ideal phallus and on whom rebirth depends." (68)

10It may be argued that the protagonists' fantasies are extremely sadistic, and that they are revealing the flipside of the masochistic preferences the protagonists display in reality. However, as Deleuze notes, the torturer in the masochistic fantasy always belongs completely in the masochistic context and never in the realm of sadism. As he points out, "a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim," because the sadist needs to know that the torture is causing real pain. "The woman torturer of masochism cannot be sadistic precisely because she is in the masochistic situation, she is an integral part of it, a realization of the masochistic fantasy. She belongs in the masochistic world, not in the sense that she has the same tastes as her victim, but because her 'sadism' is of a kind never found in the sadist; it is as it were the double or the reflection of masochism...The
should and should not be done, and in the culmination of Fumiko's fantasy, described in the previous chapter, the torture is performed entirely by the mother. Here we can see Deleuze's cold, death-dealing mother who is all-powerful and lacks nothing. These fantasies, then, may reveal more about the characters' attitudes towards their mothers than they do about their feelings towards their fathers, as Freud's theory of masochism would have us believe. On the other hand, Deleuze's theory is contradicted in part by the fact that in many of Kono's stories, as already indicated, the father is idealized.

Another work that deals with this idealization of the father is Fui no koe. Here again both the father and the mother play vital roles in the protagonist's fantasies, but it is the father whose image Ukiko believes urges her to rid herself of the devils that haunt her. As stated earlier in this thesis, during her teenaged years, Ukiko had reached a point where she realized that her parents could not be depended on as infallible beings, that they could not protect her. Even before that, torturess escapes from her own masochism by assuming the active role in the masochistic situation." (40-42)

Interestingly, this scenario corresponds with the theory of sadism developed by Klossowsky, as cited in Deleuze, where the father destroys his own family by "inciting the daughter to torture and murder the mother... (who) becomes the victim par excellence, while the daughter is elevated to the position of incestuous accomplice" (59-60). This theory, however, cannot be applied directly to Fui no koe, however, as it is Ukiko who imagines that she sees her father; the father does not take any direct action on his own part. Furthermore, it would appear that Ukiko is striving more for control of herself and her own destiny, rather than those around her.
however, it cannot be said that Ukiko idealized her father in the conventional way; rather, she feared him and also found him gloomy and depressing. After she realized his limitations, however, she lost all fear of him and began instead to act the indulged child, knowing her father would not censure her, as the following passage indicates:

Already, it could be said that Father was completely unfrightening. For example, no matter how embarrassing an occasion, if her father suddenly appeared, she would first put airs and say, "My goodness, what a state you've caught me in..." and then suddenly in a familiar tone she would only have to say "Hey, it's okay isn't it? Just this little thing," and her father, smiling sardonically, would seem to nod kindly. (236)

After her father passes away, it appears that she does begin to idealize him, to seek his approval and ask his advice. She believes her father appears to her after his death, sometimes of his own accord, but always when she asks him, and the two have conversations. Ukiko asks him about the direction her life should take, and believes that he advises her. He always leaves behind a Cheshire Cat-like impression, with his glasses and smile remaining after the rest of him has gone. Over the course of time, the father seems to get younger, until his image corresponds to the way he looked during the period when Ukiko feared him most. Ukiko's idealization of her father affects her memory of him as she begins to feel that perhaps he always was kindly and that she was in fact never afraid of him.

In that case, if Father was that young, Ukiko would have to be as she was at about eleven or twelve. It was the period when her father caused her to feel the most fear. However, even lately when Father had
returned to the same youthfulness of that time, he always showed her a kind face. Aside from that, only two or three times he had briefly shown a dead face completely void of expression, but even that dead face also again quickly returned to a young, kind face for her. After becoming acquainted with this father, she began to feel as though as a young girl she was also used to that sort of gentle father. (265)

When Ukiko's father appears to her after she is forced out of her home by her husband, Kiichi, he tells her, "Give it a try. It's alright, up to three people" (270). At first Ukiko takes the comment to mean that her third relationship with a man (Kiichi is her husband, but he is her second lover) will be a success. Then, in a flash of understanding that gives her goosebumps, she realizes that she is hearing his "fui no koe" ("unexpected voice") and that he is encouraging her to do away with three people in order to cleanse and restore herself. Ukiko feels compelled to believe that right or wrong, she must do what her father suggests, and she is filled with a new-found sense of strength when she resolves to follow his advice.

"It's alright, do it." So saying, her dead father's face changed again to a smiling one. "Do you understand?"

Smiling herself also, Ukiko felt the goosebumps recede from her skin.

"Of course I'll do it," she said. Smiling kindly, her father nodded firmly as if to encourage her, and disappeared.

As if trying to possess the air around where her father had been up to a moment ago, Ukiko sat down on the veranda and quietly tried to immerse herself in the feeling. The morning rays of the spring day that had cleared up shone even more brightly, and it felt as though a sweet warmth had spread. Father had perhaps tumbled away in that beautiful sunshine. Then, in that new sunshine, Ukiko became aware that a strength that seemed to urge her on began to well up inside her body. (270-71)
Her own reserves bankrupt, she borrows her father's perceived strength, which she equates with the bright spring sun, and uses him as the excuse she needs to take action. She raises her dead father to the level of god-like spirit, idealizing him to the point where he can be used to fulfill her own fantasies.

The fantasy in which Ukiko's ideal father gradually grows younger is foretold earlier in the story when Ukiko returns to her parents' home to see her father before he dies. Here, the father has regressed to an infant-like state where his care is completely in the hands of his wife and daughter-in-law. Ukiko insists on caring for him as well, care that includes helping him urinate and changing his diaper.

Father was debilitated, unable to raise his hips to insert the tin bedpan, and it required at least two people in order to change his diaper. For that reason, a few days earlier they decided that they would keep a diaper on him all of the time, but Ukiko had not once seen it dirtied. (248)

In this scene then, the roles of parent and child are reversed, and Ukiko is able to see herself as her father's mother. In this role, Ukiko is not only able to relive the preoedipal mother-child experience that in itself is coloured by ambivalent emotions, but also to act as the primary caregiver to her father. She can in this respect fulfill Oedipal fantasies of desire for the father in that as Freud argues, "(b)y her [the mother's] care of the child's body she becomes its first seducer" (SE 23:188). Unintentional or not, the caregiver, the mother, is the person who first arouses a sexual response in the
child. Ukiko's father is not physically able to respond sexually, nor would he necessarily consciously respond if able, but he has become like her child, and the situation allows for the possibility, in Ukiko's mind, of his seduction.

The sexual nature of the situation is emphasized with the extended discussion of Ukiko's father's penis. Ukiko's maternal aunt warns her to observe her father's penis as she believes it will begin to shrink just before he finally passes away.

"Ukichan," Aunt motioned her into the darkness of the washroom and said in a quiet voice, "Is there no change in your father's thing?"

"Father's thing?" Ukiko did not understand the meaning of Aunt's questioning.

"It's hard to say this kind of thing to you, a young lady, but..." Aunt pointed to the bedpan Ukiko was holding upright. "I've seen my husband off, and before that I nursed my father-in-law and his younger brother, didn't I? And so I know. I've never looked after a young person, and I don't know how it is with a sudden death, but, as the end gets nearer, a man's thing will get smaller -- What about your father?"

"Well, I haven't really noticed, but..."

"No, if that's the case, it's fine. It will amaze you, it gets so small, so you'll know at a glance. If it gets that way, it's serious. One, two days. Doctors don't know about this kind of thing. That's because they don't take care of the changings and cleanings. But it's true. As a matter of fact, for awhile I've been worrying if I should mention it or not, but it would be too cruel to tell your mother, and telling your brother's wife would seem like forcing her to take care of him... Ukiko, please watch out for him." (246)

Here the special status of the daughter with respect to the father's penis is emphasized; she becomes in effect its guard and caretaker. By virtue of her knowledge and care of it, she finally in a sense has some claim to the penis which is, as Freud argues, so fervently desired. Many later theorists have
argued that the father's penis is desired not as a physical possession, but as the most visible symbol of the phallus, of power, authority and agency. These are the qualities that Ukiko needs to take some form of control over her life. All of the ambivalent feelings surrounding Oedipal desire, childhood fear, teenaged disillusionment and adult gratitude and idealization are centered on this phallic symbol, over which Ukiko is to keep watch.

The illusory possession of the phallus is short-lived, however, as Ukiko is soon obliged to watch it slip away. It is as her aunt warned.

...her aunt said it would get smaller, and she watched as it happened the way her aunt said. The way it got smaller was that at first, it seemed to change as though it was pulled up. Next, it changed as though it was a long paper lantern folding down from the top, and at the dawn it suddenly looked like it had become a pickled plum. (248)

The object of desire is made to seem everyday, almost ridiculous, perhaps mocking her desire for it, and for the idea that she could possess it. At the same time, Ukiko comes to view the penis in a philosophical manner. She sees the

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Interestingly, the penis shrinks to the point that it could even be said to resemble a nipple, recalling Freud's association of fellatio and the nipple in the famous case of Dora. "It then requires very little creative power to substitute the sexual object of the moment (the penis) for the original object (the nipple) or for the finger which does duty for it, and to place the current sexual object in the situation in which gratification was originally obtained" (Quoted in Sprengnether: 44). The image of the mother, then, could also be lurking behind Ukiko's fascination with the father's penis.
shrinking phallic symbol as the departure of her father's spirit.

When Ukiko observed that manner of getting smaller, she did not seem to have the feeling that she was looking at her father’s flesh. She thought that it was not that the declining strength of her father’s body was shown there, but rather that it got smaller in proportion to the part of his spirit that had already departed. The bedpan had to be handled with both hands, and as she gazed on a level at her father’s face on the pillow, staring at the ceiling and listening from inside that warm blanket to the sound that poured into the bedpan, she wondered what at last he was thinking, and gradually she received from him a warm, rich, broad, resolution. (248)

It is this same spirit, departing from the penis, that she later feels has a power over her. She may not consciously believe that her desire is centered on this shrinking phallus, but it is only through her father’s spirit, connected in this way to the phallus, that she allows herself to fantasize about taking some form of control in her life, achieving what she desires in her life. Her desire to free herself of the relationships and potential relationships holding her psychologically hostage can only be realized through what she believes to be the power of her father’s spirit, departing from and with the phallus. Ukiko desires to be free of all ties, and particularly those that relate to motherhood and the opposite sex. The phallus is the key to this freedom. As Benjamin states,

(s)tanding for difference and separation, the phallus becomes the desired object for children of both sexes, who wish to possess it in order to have that power. The meaning of the penis as a symbol of revolt and separation derives from the nature of the child’s
struggle to separate from the original maternal power.

Although this analysis is based on the Oedipal period, the penis as symbol of freedom and power remains throughout life.

At the same time, however, the father's submission to Ukiko's care may represent for him a fulfillment of desire both for his daughter and for his own mother. Willbern, in a development of Freud's seduction theory (which Freud later abandoned in favour of his theory of the Oedipus complex) argues:

(a) child's wishes may be spontaneous and developmental, but they also correspond with and are urged on by the parents' unconscious desires and preferences (father for daughter, mother for son). The mutuality of childhood seduction is reenacted later, when the maturing daughter stimulates a resurgence of her father's Oedipal wishes. Father and daughter then reconstitute a cautious choreography of mutual eroticism and ambivalence. (87)

Although Willbern is referring here to the Oedipal and adolescent periods, it can be argued that this mutual desire continues throughout the course of the father/daughter relationship, and is probably intensified during important events such as marriage, birth, death and so on. Boose also develops the seduction theory/Oedipal complex as it applies to the father and his desire to reunite with his own mother through the daughter. As Ukiko's father regress to an infant-like state and falls under the care of his daughter, he reverses the parent-child relationship, and as Boose argues,

...where a daughter stands for the mother, there is no superior father to make the son give up his (surrogate) mother. For the father, the regressive
design is clearly a high-probability strategy that promises to undo the defeat that as an infant he suffered from his own father. (41)

Although this is never a conscious move on the part of the father, the result is that his own desires can be satisfied through Ukiko.

It is interesting, although certainly not unusual, that Ukiko chooses a husband who possesses qualities not unlike her father's. Although we do not receive a great deal of information about the early part of their relationship, by the time that Ukiko reaches the stage where reality and fantasy become indistinguishable, it is clear that her feelings towards her husband, Kiichi, greatly resemble those she experienced with her father at the point when she feared him most. Her relationship with Kiichi is based on submission, fear, and loss of sense of self. Benjamin points out that

(w)omen are often drawn into relationships of submission because they seek a second chance for ideal love, a chance to reconstitute father-daughter identification in which their own desire and subjectivity can finally be recognized. (129)

Ukiko may have tried, and failed, to recreate that father-daughter relationship, but as a result has ended up with a partner who abuses and humiliates her mentally and physically.

The following passages, the first from her childhood and the second from her married life, indicate the emotions she experiences when encountering the anger of the two men.

Father never went so far as wielding force, but often in her mother's case, and sometimes in her older brother's case, he stormed at them violently. Next to them, she felt as if her mouth was dry from fear. If
her mother or brother did such things as making excuses or talking back, at the same time her father’s angry voice would grow louder. This was the most frightening point. Whether it was her mother or her brother, she wondered how they could do such an impudent thing. As if to cut off her father’s angry voice, her mother or brother would again start to talk back. Then, wanting to appeal "Be quiet!" she would stare intently at her mother or brother. At those times, if unexpectedly told by her father something like "Go to the other room," she would sit up with a start, and would realize that up until then fear had made her body unable to move. (233)

The paralysing fear, the feeling of walking on eggshells, and the suppression of her own feelings are also evident in her relationship with Kiichi as the next passage, which is part of Ukiko’s extended fantasy, suggests. Ukiko has been kicked out of the house by Kiichi, but has returned after ridding herself of the first of her "three people," her mother. It is late at night and she has been sitting by the door waiting for his return.

Kiichi jangles the keys in his pocket. He strikes a match and inserts the door key. The lock is turned, and as the door opens, Kiichi enters. Carrying her luggage, Ukiko had arrived with difficulty, but she knew the fact that she was not able to move immediately was not only due to her having been sitting for a long time. She had the feeling somewhere inside of her that she should not suddenly jump out, she should not suddenly speak out. (292)

Again, this passage is reminiscent of the fear that froze her when she experienced her father’s anger.

Although Ukiko and Kiichi may have been happy at the beginning of their relationship, it is clear that over time she begins to associate with him all the tension and negative feelings she experienced with her father. At the same time, her
father is idealized to the point where he does not resemble the man Ukiko had originally perceived him to be. All of the negative qualities she associated with him are transferred to Kiichi, who becomes the focus of her fear, anger and frustration. She has recreated with Kiichi the relationship she had with her father when she was a young child, and at the same time raised her father to the status of ideal parent. For Ukiko, fantasy and reality become indistinguishable and confused, and the confusion centers on the two men who have been most important to her.

It was pointed out earlier that Ukiko is one of Kono's few protagonists who is not involved in an overtly masochistic sexual relationship. Ukiko clearly suffers mentally in the relationship from the humiliation she receives at the hands of her husband, but it does not appear that she enjoys her suffering. Rather, she withdraws into a fantasy world where she eliminates one by one the three figures that prevent her from achieving a sense of control in her life; her mother, the child she never had, and finally an unknown man. This unknown man, however, appears to contain elements of both her father and Kiichi, and, interestingly of Ukiko herself. The merging of the man and Kiichi begins in a passage where Ukiko is considering the amount of blood that flowed from the unknown man when she fantasizes about killing him in the bathroom.

Ukiko didn't know how much blood there was in the human body, because so much flowed out of it.

"Please, let me wash your back." Naked, Ukiko entered the bathroom, and upon asking him again, he
consented. After scooping up water with his hands and washing his face in the tub, the man got out into the washing area and sat down proudly on the stool she had set out on the floor for him, and entrusted his back to her.

"Do you wash your husband's back too?" the man said as the sudsy washcloth was applied to his back.

"Yes, I did before," Ukiko answered.

"But it's not like that now?" the man asked.

"No, it's not like that," Ukiko answered.

"Why don't you do it for him any more?" the man asked again.

"It's not that I don't do it for him any more," Ukiko answered. "He won't let me do it. He started to refuse. At the beginning he would decline like a child, saying 'I'll do it myself. I can do it, you know.' I didn't think he was seriously prohibiting me. I liked to be refused in that way. That kind of childish way --... But, after that happened on several occasions, my husband again said 'I'll do it myself,' and when I again said 'Let me wash you,' he suddenly roared. 'Don't make a fool of me,' he said, and he elbowed me as I had my hand on his back. I had an awful nosebleed, and the whole bathroom turned bright red." (312-313)

Shortly after this exchange, while the man is enjoying the sensation of being washed by her, Ukiko takes out a knife she has hidden, and stabs him in the chest. Here, there is a connection between the man and Ukiko, as his blood is shed in the bathroom as hers was. She may be symbolically taking revenge on Kiichi's surrogate for the injury her husband caused her, or she may be ridding herself of the victim within her by killing someone identified with her through blood. By victimizing someone else, particularly someone who represents the cause of her pain, the victim in herself is overshadowed.

Ukiko later dismembers the man and puts his parts in the refrigerator. In the last scene, her father visits again, and the two of them contemplate the head of the dead man.
"Well, what do you think? Do you feel better? Tonight, you can rest easily," Father said as he nodded kindly.

Ukiko opened the door of the refrigerator, and examined the profile of the man whose eyes were closed coldly in the pale blue light of the refrigerator lamp. "Such a gentle person; why did I have to make him go? A person with such a kind face..." she said as she felt compelled to hope for comfort urged on by regret and fondness. As she realized she had completely lost the vividness of the impressions of many nights and afternoons and mornings, Ukiko nodded firmly to her father. (320)

The kind, peaceful face of the unknown man is similar to that of Ukiko's father who in his ghostly form is always characterized as having a kind face, and who appears to her only as a bodiless head. The real father whom she feared and found gloomy is "made to go," while the father who remains is a spiritual idealization removed from reality. At the same time, Ukiko identifies the man with her husband whose back she used to scrub in the tub. Both of these men need to be symbolically eliminated before Ukiko can sleep easily, as she seems to need to cut all ties with reality. However, it seems that the guilt caused by the residue of her fear of and love for her both her father and Kiichi cannot be overcome directly and instead a surrogate must be used in whose form they, and by extension all men, are symbolically eliminated. The father in particular is seen by Ukiko as her ally in the act of eliminating the three figures that haunt her. He is for Ukiko the best choice of ally because, being physically no longer in existence, Ukiko can imagine him to be any way she wishes, including idealizing him to the point where he is given the power to authorize the deeds
that she cannot undertake unilaterally. Although her desire to purge herself of mother, child and man exists subconsciously, she needs the authorization of a third party to lessen the guilt and provide the sense of agency needed to undertake the longed-for course. Although the father in reality has lost his phallic power, as illustrated by the shrinking penis, Ukiko attributes the lost power to his spirit whose imagined guidance she follows.

The fantasy concerning the death of the unknown man who is identified with Kiichi may also be interpreted as Ukiko's method of sublimating the fact that in reality she has actually killed Kiichi. Two passages lead to this conclusion, one being a play on words that implies that Ukiko and Kiichi would not leave their house until they ran out of money or one of them turned into a ghost. The second passage is part of the exchange between the unknown man and Ukiko that takes place in the bathroom.

"What will you do if your husband comes home on us?" the man asked as, facing the other direction, his body was being buried up to his hairline in the suds of the soap...

"Hmm, well, it can't be left at this, can it... At the very least, someone will probably be killed by someone else. Will I be killed first of all by my husband, or will you be killed? Will I kill my husband or you? But you, you can kill too. We know he will come home drunk. It would be easy, I think." (313)

This man, then, may represent her withdrawal into fantasy as a method of dealing with the fact that she has killed Kiichi. That the fantasy takes place in the setting where Kiichi has
expressed his rejection of her may further indicate her revenge against him. She mitigates this reality by fantasizing about a nameless man who can represent all men, including Kiichi and her father.

In the end, then, Ukiko has rid herself of mother and child, and, beside the spirit of her dead father, stands staring at the lifeless head of a nameless man. She has cut all ties to the past, the future and reality, and has chosen to live in a space of unreality (or perhaps it would be better to say in her own perception of reality) with only her dead father to accompany her. Only when she has completely isolated herself can she find the peace of mind that has eluded her, and it is only her father, with whom she no longer has a worldly relationship, that she can imagine helping her achieve that peace. His spirit, which Ukiko associates with phallic power, is the means by which she frees herself. Ironically, instead of the phallus being the means of her introduction to the real world, as it generally is perceived in Freudian or Lacanian theory, it causes her to retreat, as it were, to a state where time and reality have no meaning for her, a state that is conventionally associated with the preoedipal mother. Both father and daughter have, through the other, returned to this unreal period associated with the Mother, the father in his
regression to an infant-like dependence leading to death, and the daughter in her retreat into fantasy.  

This conclusion begs the questions, why does the father play such an important role if the ultimate desire is to return to the mother, and why the need to rid oneself of the mother if she is the desired end? I would argue in the first case that because the father has died and therefore does not exist in the real world, he is much more accessible as an instrument of fantasy; his actual presence never interferes with the way Ukiko chooses to perceive or idealize him. In addition, he has, through his death, already entered the world of unreality; he then has the capability to lead Ukiko there. Furthermore, in Lacanian terms, it is he, as representative of the phallus, that introduces the idea of difference between mother and child. The perception of this difference is the first step in the acquisition of language, and it is only through the phallus and language that one can attempt to erase difference once it is apprehended (although the attempt, of course, is futile). In response to the second question, the ambivalence inherent in the mother-child relationship can again be cited for the desire to both cut oneself off from the mother and at the same time return to her. Given the mother’s traditional association with death, her symbolic elimination may be Ukiko’s way of avoiding the death of her own self. On the other hand, by killing her

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13 Many theorists, including Rank and Bachofen, have associated death with the ultimate return to the Mother. Freud also dealt with this theme in his essay "The Theme of the Three Caskets."
mother, Ukiko may be anticipating a reunion with her in the unreal world of death that Ukiko is creating for herself. In reality, by symbolically cutting these ties, Ukiko isolates herself in the world of unreality with her dead father as her only "tangible" comfort. However, this world allows her to experience a calmness that does not exist for her in reality, to free herself of all the real conflicts that cause her to experience a lack of peace. The ability to achieve peace may be associated with the father whom she has idealized as a man embodying both power and kindness, and this may also help to explain why he plays such a significant role in her fantasy. The world she believes he helps her reach is one of quiet, blue like the sea, free from conflict, womb-like, but cold and deathly. He has returned to this environment through death; Ukiko returns there through him in fantasy.

It seems that the father, then, does play an important role in the developmental process of the characters that appear in Kono Taeko's works. But is his presence as all-encompassing as traditional Freudian theory would have us believe? Certainly in works like "Michishio" and Fui no koe (works, incidentally, in which overt masochism is not prominent) the father's part is significant. But in "Michishio" in particular it is a turning away from the mother that leads to the attraction to the father, the recognition that the mother does not have the power to fulfill the desires of the daughter. In this case, this knowledge also corresponds with the onset of puberty, another
period of turning from the mother. In *Fui no koe*, the father’s power is again used, but used in a manner that allows for a return for both father and daughter to a world of deathly peace associated with the preoedipal Mother.

With regard to the Freud/Deleuze conflict surrounding the paternal origins of masochism, it seems difficult to apply exclusively either theory to these works, although pieces like "Yoji gari" and "Ari takaru" seem to support Deleuze’s view that a cold, cruel mother, and not an authoritarian father, lies at the root of the masochist’s fantasies. On the other hand, the ideal father is evident in the works that do not deal explicitly with masochistic sexual relations. Behind this father, however, the spectre of the mother is visible, the mother who represents both life and death, nurturance and dependence. It may be, then, that Kono’s works, blending as they do the unreal world of the preoedipal mother and the world of real power and agency, represented by the father, do not fit the mould of any one theory. The fantasies of her characters are so full of a multitude of associations, desires, and fears that they cannot be contained by a single explanation. These fantasies are powerful enough, however, to make us look more deeply at the images of father and mother within them, and at the environment in which they take place.
In these three chapters I have examined themes pertaining to the closed world of parent-child dynamics and the broader world of the outside environment, and the manner in which Kono’s characters react and develop within relationships involving these outside objects. The first chapter concerned the protagonists’ relationships with Nature and concluded that while characters that appear in Kono’s earlier works tend to view nature in the dualistic, antagonistic manner typical of Western culture, later works introduce characters that see nature in the less threatening, more holistic manner associated with traditional Japanese thought. In both Western and Japanese cultures, nature is traditionally perceived as being female and especially maternal, and, as a mother figure, it is the object of ambivalent feelings and desires. The need to separate from the mother mixes with the desire to merge with her, and while Western literature generally emphasizes issues of separation, and therefore antagonism, Japanese literature traditionally moves in the other direction toward unity with the maternal figure and acceptance of her power to both give and take life in
an endless cycle. Kono tentatively approaches this second position in her later works.

In Chapter Two I focused on the actual mother-child relationship. Here again issues of separation and merging come to the fore as the marginalized protagonists deal with their feelings toward their mothers and their own potential (or lack of it) to become mothers. In this case, the ambivalence is not as easily resolved; no eventual acceptance of the mother's power is reached, and the characters continue to vacillate between the desire to firmly establish themselves as separate and whole beings, and the desire to return to that state of union with the mother.

The father-daughter relationship is examined in the final chapter. Here the idealized father figure acts as form of escape from the all-powerful mother and as a model of agency and desire. At the same time, as the possessor of the phallus, he is the instrument that allows the daughter to regress to a state of fantasy, of "subjective omnipotence," where the imaginary rules, a state associated with the preoedipal mother. Furthermore, in Freudian theory, the role played by the father in masochistic fantasies of the kind that many of Kono's characters experience is paramount; other scholars have argued, however, that it is the mother-figure that lies at the bottom of the masochist's fantasy. The importance of the father in family dynamics, then, is undeniable, but underneath, as Freud himself eventually came to realize, lies the spectre of the mother.
Common to these chapters, flowing as an underlying current, is the theme of the Mother, powerful, life-giving, life-taking, personification of nature, force prior to that of the father. In Kono's works, there exists an interesting mix of Western and Japanese perceptions of the Mother figure, and the tensions implicit in ambivalent attitudes toward the mother are apparent. In many cases the protagonists do resolve their personal and psychic conflicts by regressing to the mother and reuniting with her both to escape from and deal with the world around them. In other cases, the mother and motherhood are feared, resented and rejected as the protagonists struggle to assert their separate identities.

These conflicts and tensions, both obvious and hidden, give the works of Kono Taeko a complexity and intensity that can be explored in depth. In addition, the extensive use of fantasy and the blurring of fantasy and reality allow for in-depth analysis. Kono's works also profit from her ability to describe visual, tactile and olfactory sensations in vivid and colourful, although seldom cheery, detail. She is able to create for the reader a world that is both horrifying yet strangely beautiful, repulsive yet attractive. Kono takes the reader inside the minds of characters who live on the edge, both of society and of reality, and shows us the complex and often disturbing workings of the psyche. She forces the reader to confront fears, desires and fantasies that may lie deep within us all. This is not to say that most men and women harbour explicit masochistic or
sadistic desires, or fantasize scenes of torture and humiliation of weaker beings. It is to assert, however, that the potential for the expression of these kinds of disturbing fantasies lives in all of us, whether we acknowledge its existence or not. Kono shows us protagonists who have been pushed to the edge, who live precariously on the margins, and who fall off the edge into fantasies that enable them to exert the kind of power and control over themselves and others that does not exist for them in reality. Kono shows what could happen to any of us when pushed too far, when forced to face our own weaknesses, fears, desires. She shows us aspects of human "nature" that we may wish to deny, even though the proof of their existence can be seen all around us in the world today. One only has to come across the scene of a traffic fatality to understand that these ambivalent feelings exist -- onlookers know they will be repulsed by what they see there, yet they are drawn to look. I believe Kono's stories work in the same way -- readers are horrified by the explicit fantasies that are described, yet these fantasies also have a strange, morbid ability to attract. The juxtaposition of macabre content and beautiful, vivid description creates an unreal space that fascinates and repels.

This darker side to human beings can be explained in many ways. Freudians say that it is a result of innate aggressive instincts, Marxists that class and economics predominate, while many feminists argue that it is a manifestation of oppressive patriarchal values, and beyond this several reasonable
explanations can be put forward. I have chosen to analyze Kono's works with the aid of object relations theory, despite the fact that the theory is based on the model of Western culture and family dynamics. The cultural specificity of the theory does in some ways limit its applicability in the Japanese context, but I feel that the possibilities it opens up as a method of analyzing human relationships and the workings of the mind outweigh its limitations. The relational model makes possible a deeper understanding of these complex works from an outside point of view, and allows for a greater appreciation of the literature of Kono Taeko.


Rev. of "Hone no niku." Mita bungaku 59.2 (1972): 56.


"Sono zengo." Bungakkai 43.3 (1989): 112-123.


"Watashi no shisei." Bungaku no kiseki, 43-48.

"Yoji gari." Setouchi Harumi, Kono Taeko shu, 321-337.


