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Great Mirror of Motherly Love: Maternal Fantasy, Mystic Mothers, and Reflected Selves in  
Modern and Contemporary Japanese Fiction  
by  
Jessica LeGare

A thesis presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences  
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of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Great Mirror of Motherly Love: Maternal Fantasy, Mystic Mothers, and Reflected Selves in  
Modern and Contemporary Japanese Fiction

by

Jessica LeGare

Master of Arts in East Asian Languages and Cultures

Washington University in St. Louis, 2016

Professor Rebecca L. Copeland, Chair

Fantasy and mysticism often serve as key elements in escapist literature—constructing stories that move protagonists beyond the furthest reaches of the real, the familiar and the human. Yet, the otherworldly can also bring the protagonist within reach of the familiar if we consider the representations of mothering in the following Japanese narratives: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's "Longing for Mother" (1919), Izumi Kyōka's "The Holy Man of Mount Kōya" (1900), Takahashi Takako's "Doll Love" (1976), and Ono Masatsugu's "Prayers from Nine Years Ago" (2014). Through their depictions based on supernatural and spiritual tropes, mystical-mother figures become metaphorical mirrors meant to reflect the protagonists' ambivalent desires to escape and also to rejoin the social order. To illustrate this dynamic, this study highlights the non-rational motifs and themes that cast the maternal figures as both ideal and deviant in the above-mentioned narratives. This study also considers these stories in relation to the Meiji-era discourse on the *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife, wise mother"), pointing out the past and ongoing role that ideal motherhood has been assigned in forging the connections between individuals and society. These works demonstrate

consistency across modern and contemporary representations of ideal motherhood, but they also expand the range of depictions, such that the category of “wise mother” becomes a less restrictive one.

# 1. Introduction

...is there anything rational that contains the truth? More likely the truth is tucked safely somewhere in the ambiguous folds of irrationality.

- Takahashi Takako, “Doll Love”

With merely a name, one television drama<sup>1</sup> collapses the almighty and supernal upon the humble and human as it relates the stories of five Japanese mothers: “*Namae o nakushita megami*” (lit. “goddesses who lost their names”). The screenplay grounds its storytelling in realism, and no one in the story explicitly refers to the mothers as *megami* (“goddess”). Yet the title brings to bear a well-established history of heady narratives in which mothers and divine beings are coded as one and the same. Dating back to—and certainly preceding—civilization’s earliest texts, representations of mothering have been used to show the darkest<sup>2</sup> and most sanguine possibilities for the interpersonal bonds that govern society. In the array of fiction originating from the imaginations of modern Japanese writers, we find representations of the mother as varied in their styles as they are in their affirmations or denials of the prevailing views on maternity. Some authors depict the mother as nurturing through atypical explorations of her or her children’s romantic pursuits—one example would be the quest for a mother that leads to a wife in Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s (1886-1965) “Arrowroot” (*Yoshino kuzu*, 1931; tr. 1982). Other writers expose the rarely considered facets of maternity as a means to substantiate well-worn beliefs about women and parenthood. Tsushima Yūko’s (1947-2016) “Clearing the Thickets” (*Kusamura*, 1976; tr. 1988) uses a dream sequence to effect such an exploration, showing the

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<sup>1</sup> *Namae o nakushita megami*, produced by Asano Kiyomi, aired April 24, 2011, on Fuji Television.

<sup>2</sup> Consider the goddess Izanami in the eighth-century *Kojiki* (*An Account of Ancient Matters*): she produces much of the world with her lover, the god Izanagi, but after she dies in childbirth, Izanagi imprisons her in the underworld, which provokes her to vow death against one thousand mortals every day.

unintentionally abortive results of a young, pregnant woman’s eagerness to behold her child—the woman has her mother cut the fetus from the womb only to discover that it was not yet the proper time. Despite the diversity in the range of depictions, there are frequent allusions to one particular model of exemplary womanhood: the *ryōsai kenbo* (良妻賢母; “good wife, wise mother”). In this thesis, I take special interest in how select narratives attend to the dualism that has long been accorded motherhood through story elements that dichotomize the maternal vis-à-vis several tensions—that between the mundane and the otherworldly (i.e.: rational vs. irrational),<sup>3</sup> and that between defying and upholding ideal motherhood. Within Tanizaki’s “Longing for Mother” (*Haha o kouru ki*, 1919; tr. 1980), Izumi Kyōka’s “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya” (*Kōya hijiri*, 1900; tr. 1996), Takahashi Takako’s (1932-2013) “Doll Love” (*Ningyō ai*, 1976; tr. 1982), and Ono Masatsugu’s (b. 1970) “Prayers from Nine Years Ago” (*Kyūnen mae no inori*, 2014), we find mothers and mothering women who both effect and populate spaces for mysticism, fantasy, and spiritual expression. In other words, the maternal figures in the forthcoming narratives demonstrate robust associations with the extramundane. At the same time, through their adherence to and deviation from model motherhood, these women speak to the continually shifting terrain of gender roles and familial relationships in modern society. Ultimately, I argue that these works obliquely discuss the vacillating connections between individuals and society within constructions of motherhood that capture the complexity of the protagonists’ inner and outer worlds.

The primary sources considered in this investigation rely upon an understanding of how the ideals tied to motherhood have continued to inform even contemporary fiction, and thus, I prefer

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<sup>3</sup> To avoid redundancy with words such as “mundane” or “supernatural”, I will employ “irrational” and “rational” in this thesis.



to expound on the social contexts that gave rise to and lend ongoing relevance to the concept of the “good wife, wise mother.” Popularized in part by Nakamura Masanao (1832-91),<sup>4</sup> a statesman during the Meiji-era (1868-1912), the *ryōsai kenbo* model for womanhood has its origins in the “affectionate wife, wise mother” ideal that was already enjoying a strong foothold in nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>5</sup> This ideal for womanhood also perpetuated the principles espoused by the *Onna daigaku* (“The Great Learning for Women”)<sup>6</sup>—a neo-Confucian educational text from the Edo period—resulting in a complex model by which women’s roles were expanded, but still restricted, at the onset of Japan’s modernization. In terms of embracing western thought, one might argue that the move to define “good” women through public discourse and documents like the Meiji Civil Code of 1898 was only important insofar as clearly delineating a future paradigm for Japanese society. Yet some scholars<sup>7</sup> have investigated how the vestiges of this ideal materialize in the sphere of fictional literature, a domain perhaps less concerned with *changing* social realities than with describing and making sense of them.

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<sup>4</sup> Indra Levy identifies Nakamura’s argument that “[to improve] the character and customs of the people... it is necessary to attain good mothers” as part of an “important addition to the discourse of correspondence between the status of women and their nations” (Levy, *Sirens of the Western Shore: The Westernesque Femme Fatale, Translation, and Vernacular Style in Modern Japanese Literature*, [New York: Columbia University Press, 2010], 53).

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Lock, “Restoring Order to the House of Japan,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1990): 43.

<sup>6</sup> Sohn Jaehee, “Dazai Osamu inyō ron—Kazuko to hebi o megutte” [Kazuko and snakes in Dazai Osamu’s *The Setting Sun*], *Nihon kenkyū* no. 19 (1999): 98.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Ragsdale frequently refers to the “good wife, wise mother” ideal in her examination of how the “domestic novel” genre (*katei shōsetsu*) emerged at a time “when the Meiji government was keenly interested in defining the family and women’s role within it” (Ragsdale, “Marriage, the Newspaper Business, and the Nation-State: Ideology in the Late Meiji Serialized *Katei Shōsetsu*,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24, no. 2 [1998]: 229). Separate critiques of Tamura Toshiko’s (1884-1945) “Slave” (*Dorei*, 1914) by scholars Anne Sokolsky and Tim Yamamura (2010) and Nagai Ai’s (b. 1951) “The Three Hagi Sisters” (*Hagi-ke no san shimai*, 2000) by scholar Loren Edelson (2004) describe at least one of the protagonists in each play as either the embodiment or antithesis of the *ryōsai kenbo* model. Michael Brownstein discusses the history of *Jogaku Zasshi* (“The Woman’s Magazine”)—a widely-published periodical of important literary influence during Meiji-era Japan—in the context of the principles for women held by the journal’s founder and editor Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1863-1942) (Brownstein, “*Jogaku Zasshi* and the Founding of *Bungakukai*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 3 [1980]:321).

Before the Meiji Civil Code, there were in fact efforts to ensure the advancement of women's social identities. At first, *ryōsai kenbo*'s inception in Japan brought about greater promotion for women's education with the understanding that an educated woman would be "better able to nurture and educate [her] children at home."<sup>8</sup> Although such a stance does little to free women from the expectation to become parents, scholar Margaret Lock assures us that this imported philosophy "represented a vast improvement" for women,<sup>9</sup> as they progressed beyond their pre-Meiji status as "borrowed womb[s]"<sup>10</sup> and took to campaigning for further recognition of their rights.<sup>11</sup> So, too, does scholar Sharon Sievers note the revolutionary calls for the improved status of women after the Tokugawa era which "assumed male superiority":<sup>12</sup> contrary to a past in which they were simply expected to produce heirs and coexist with their husbands' concubines, the modern woman of Japan—according to Nakamura and other Meiji Six<sup>13</sup> cohorts—"should play a major role in the home, should be educated and (within limits) demonstrate her intelligence and competence."<sup>14</sup> However, Lock also explains that with the establishment of the Meiji Civil Code, women were "effectively denied...any legal standing"

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that Lock primarily reserves these assertions for the women of "pre-Meiji samurai and merchant households" (ibid., 43-44). For more consideration of the intersection between socioeconomic class and social codes for women in the late Meiji period, please also consult Sharon Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings's chapter "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910" in Gail Lee Bernstein's edited volume *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). In the last half of their chapter, Nolte and Hastings introduce several stories from early-twentieth-century issues of the periodical *Shimin* ("The Subject"), highlighting the literature's use in standardizing specific virtues (i.e.: modesty, frugality) across all classes of women.

<sup>10</sup> The actual Japanese adage, *hara wa karimono* ("the womb is a borrowed thing"), is cited by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901)—one of the Meiji "enlightenment" thinkers—as one of the problematic beliefs that Japan should do away with if the nation ever hoped to be seen as civilized by western countries (Carmen Blacker, "Fukuzawa Yukichi on Family Relationships," *Monumenta Nipponica* 14, no. 1/2 [1958]: 54).

<sup>11</sup> Lock, "Restoring Order to the House of Japan," 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> Sharon L. Sievers, "Feminist Criticism in Japanese Politics in the 1880s: The Experience of Kishida Toshiko," *Signs* 6, no. 4 (1981): 604.

<sup>13</sup> A group named for the sixth year of the Meiji period, during which they began their activities, the Meiji Six included intellectuals that contributed greatly to the discourse on how to modernize Japan by reconfiguring the rights and social expectations pertaining to women (ibid., 603).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 604.

despite the code's progressive language and "certain concessions to the ryosai kenbo [sic] ideal."<sup>15</sup> Hence, in some respects, the notion of the ideal woman, as cemented by society's most powerful representatives, diverged little from pre-Meiji expectations for gender performance. These expectations were associated with the *ie* (household) system that warrior class families typically observed, but the Civil Code's enactment marked a shift to apply such standards in a more generalized fashion.<sup>16</sup> Even without poring over the vast discourse that has arisen around gender roles, the *ie*, and a modernizing society,<sup>17</sup> one can discern the transition from tacitly acknowledged social codes to a clearly delimited system. This transition, while only one stage in a long process of reifying women's roles, helped crystallize the nurturing, productive, and family-bound wife and mother as the model that would be most integral to Japan's future.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>16</sup> Scholar Jean-Michel Butel recognizes the "wide variety of family types [that] existed before the Meiji period" while also noting that it is "the warrior family—the *ie*—which would serve as an idealized reference for advocates of the new Civil Code" (Butel, "Loving Couples for a Modern Nation: A New Family Model in Late Nineteenth Century Japan," *Japan Review* [2012]: 80). We should also heed Sievers's research which explains that even though "samurai women often bore the brunt of the Neo-Confucian model of womanhood prevailing in the Tokugawa, all women suffered from an attitude characterized [during the Meiji era] as *danson jōhi* ('respect the male, despise the female')" (Sievers, 604).

<sup>17</sup> Among the variety of studies that explore this intersection between these concepts, Koyama Shizuko's *Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan* (*The Ideology of the Good Wife, Wise Mother*, 1991), Part Two of Bernstein's *Recreating Japanese Women* (see note 3), and Muta Kazue's *Senryaku to shite no kazoku: Kindai nihon no kokumin kokka keisei to josei* (*Family as a Strategy: Women and the Formation of nation-state in Japan*, 1996) have been frequently cited as useful sources.

<sup>18</sup> Nolte and Hastings highlight the Meiji state's commitment to codifying acceptable conduct for *all* women, not just mothers. Of particular interest is the scholars' indication that "[in] 1910, the Japanese government still valued a woman's productive power more than her ability as a mother"; "productive" in this context connotes economic productivity (Nolte & Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890-1910" in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], 173). However, the scholars also recognize that the activities for which women were most lauded (e.g., working in hospitals, raising funds or donating their own savings and possessions, etc.) "reinforced the image of women, not as weak and fragile beings in need of protection, but as national assets with particular nurturing skills" (159). Nolte and Hastings go on to cite the example set by the empress who displayed a "particularly poignant symbol of her motherly concern" in the prosthetics she provisioned for wounded servicemen (160). Hence, it is helpful to note, as Nolte and Hastings have done in their study, that the roles sanctioned for women did not necessarily confine them to the domestic space or to a life of child-bearing. However, it is also useful to realize that state policies were equally capable of encouraging women to serve the nation in ways that still drew upon essentialist readings of the connections between female physiology, reproduction, and the aspects of gender performance tied up in mothering. The ways in which such connections are used can change depending upon societal contexts (e.g., war, economic growth/recovery, etc.), as will be covered later in this introduction. Therefore, even if these connections are not used to keep women

In no way did the Meiji state have the final word on the paragons for Japanese women, as ever-changing national objectives saw fit to recycle feminine ideals for new sociohistorical contexts: supporting imperial expansion and warfare, sustaining economic growth, and staving off population decline. As noted earlier, Meiji policies focused on women's potential to contribute to the state through a capacity for nurturing that was seen as innate to their gender and not necessarily as the exclusive province of actual mothers. However, a change to foregrounding actual mothers began in the 1920s, thirties, and forties through the advocacy of feminists—for example, Ichikawa Fusae (1893-1981)<sup>19</sup>—who argued for greater political involvement for women as a boon to the state's war efforts. Naturally, this period saw numerous ideologies and motivations behind the movements to protect mothers, but despite their differing reasons for advocacy, many supporters were quite unified in focusing on childbearing and childrearing as vital ways for women to strengthen the state.<sup>20</sup> During the postwar economic boom from the late

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confined to the home at one point in time, there is no guarantee that national goals will not change the agenda for women in the future.

<sup>19</sup> Tomie Naoko's "The Political Process of Establishing the Mother-Child Protection Law in Prewar Japan" (2005) and Miyake Yoshiko's chapter ("Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women's Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s") in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945* both attend to the importance of Ichikawa's role in linking motherhood to state policy as a means to further women's rights.

<sup>20</sup> A mention inline would prove too digressive for this introduction, but it is pertinent to further explicate the activism, legislation, and state policies that increased attention for mothers in prewar and wartime Japan. Hiratsuka Raichō (née Hiratsuka Haru, 1886-1971)—already known for her earlier work with founding, financially backing, and editing the feminist journal *Seito*—was a particularly ardent supporter of the Mother-Child Protection Law (*Boshi hogo hō*) that was eventually enacted in 1937 after almost two decades of consideration by policymakers. In her study of this law's establishment, Tomie refers to Raichō as part of a group of women's suffragists that "underlined women's roles as mothers and called for maternity protection by the state" (Tomie, 241). This type of advocacy seemed to directly contrast with the sort that framed women's rights in terms of gender equality rather than differentiation (i.e.: the difference between believing that rights are deserved because all citizens are equal, not because the genders have equally special differences that make each of them essential to the state). Yet, Tomie argues that the progress of Japan's war efforts actually brought these contrasting approaches into complementarity (ibid.). With Japan adopting a more aggressive international posture (244) and looking to social welfare as a means to ensure a viable crop of human resources for its military (242), suffragists invoked "the rights and duties of those who give birth to and raise the future leaders of the nation" so as to highlight women's political *and* domestic indispensability to the state (243). Thus, the advancement of women's civil rights was certainly put forth as a means to afford all citizens—regardless of gender expectations—a hand in political activities. However, the most gains were made by women taking up the cause of mothers and expressly delimiting the necessity of this particular gender role for the nation. Raichō stated much earlier in her *Yo no fujintachi ni* ("To the Women of the World", 1913) that "We can believe no longer that women should sacrifice themselves...on account of the need to preserve the species,

1950s until the eighties, women's roles in the family continued to be a key aspect of encouraging and stabilizing national gains, this time in terms of state prosperity. Although women had more opportunities than before to contribute directly to the economy via their own labor, their value still depended heavily on parenting and overseeing the domestic environment. The earlier war machine was exchanged for a growing economic engine, and as before, women's most recognized contributions were in their personal investments to the human resources for this engine: husbands and children (i.e.: current and future labor).<sup>21</sup> Even more recently, in response to Japan's population decline (*shōshika*) and post-boom economic concerns, the pressure for women to become mothers has increased.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps owing to this newly fervent discussion of motherhood in service to the country—made more acrimonious by one politician's reference to women as “birth machines” (*umu kikai*)<sup>23</sup>—it is not far-fetched to imagine the latest conversation as yet another in an ongoing dialogue between women and society about gendered social codes. That ideal modes of motherhood remain relatively consistent while servicing the transient needs

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or that reproducing offspring is woman's only work...”—a sentiment that shows a hope for something beyond the ideals of the *ryōsai kenbo* imperative (Reich & Fukuda 1976, 288). Nonetheless, building upon the expectations already cemented for women was perhaps the most practical initiative in 1930s Japan.

<sup>21</sup> Women's personal investment in the human capital behind Japan's economy is considered closely in Mary Brinton's *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). There is also Marie Thorsten's article “A Few Bad Women: Manufacturing Education Mamas in Postwar Japan” (1996) which specifically aims to treat the stigma related to mothers and an overzealous approach to their children's schooling in the same era of booming prosperity.

<sup>22</sup> In her legal research, Rachel Brehm King has specifically cited the government's concern over the effect of low birth rates on economic growth and higher costs for social welfare programs (presumably due to an aging society with fewer young caretakers) (King, “Redefining Motherhood: Discrimination in Legal Parenthood in Japan,” *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 18, no. 1 [2009]: 199).

<sup>23</sup> In January 2007, Yanagisawa Hakuo—Japan's then-Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare—was sharply criticized for referring to women in this way during his address to the National Diet on the subject of counteracting population decline (Yōko Haruka, “Yanagisawa daijin no shitsugen, watashi no mikata” [“My Take on Minister Yanagisawa's Gaffe”], *Nikkei Business Online*, February 9, 2007, accessed April 14, 2016, <http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/person/20070208/118652/>; “Henshū techō: kakuryō no mondai hatsugen” [“Summary: The Cabinet's Problematic Remarks”], *Yomiuri Shinbun*, January 30, 2007, Tokyo Morning edition, accessed April 14, 2016, Yomidias Rekishikan). More recently, an LDP member shouted at a female politician for being unmarried and childless as she was advocating on the floor of the Diet for improved day care benefits to aid working mothers (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, June 24, 2014, Osaka Morning edition, accessed July 13, 2016, Yomidias Rekishikan).

of the state brings to mind the idealized mother's wide-ranging utility in the construction of intricate, fictional narratives.

In light of the mother's social importance, the stories of those who comply and deviate from maternal expectations artfully touch on the social impacts of shifting gender roles in the modern age. In "The Collapse of 'Japanese Mothers,'" Ueno Chizuko adopts Etō Jun's use of the terms "acceptive" and "rejective" to describe mothers who either: (a) unconditionally accept their children and spouse's shortcomings, and always strive to ensure that they are satisfactory mothers; or (b) search for some semblance of satisfaction away from their frustrating family situations.<sup>24</sup> These categories assist Ueno in an examination of "mothers" that incorporates anthropological and literary insights that point to a manufactured cultural product "that can be discontinued at any time."<sup>25</sup> Within *Hahaoya gensō* ("The Illusion of the Mother," 1993) by scholar Kishida Shū, we see a similar discourse emerge from one of the first declarations in his study: "humans are animals with broken instincts."<sup>26</sup> Although using Ueno's terms—"acceptive" and "rejective"—establishes consistency across my analyses of mystic mothers in fiction, this thesis can also benefit from Kishida's more general critique of prevailing maternal myths and the beliefs related to an essential mother-child conflict. Going forward, I will build a discussion of motherhood that makes sense of the frequent inclusion of "acceptive" and "rejective" mothering in the maternal figures that populate fiction.

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<sup>24</sup> Ueno Chizuko, "Collapse of 'Japanese Mothers,'" *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement* no. 10 (1996): 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Kishida Shū, *Hahaoya gensō* ["The Illusion of the Mother"], (Tōkyō: Shinshokan, 1995), 7.

*Condensing Extremes and Expanding Narrative Power*

As will be seen in the stories handled in this thesis, mothers tend to exist outside the margins of civilization. In Tanizaki's "Longing," she occupies the dream. In Kyōka's narrative, the maternal figure has purview over the mountains and forests. Ono and Takahashi closely link the mother to fantasies of her own making and deviant personal lives by which they, too, share in a pattern of construction that moves the mother closer to a "rejective" position. Existing in such a way, the mother is potentially free to flout social convention and to fulfill her own wishes. However, the selected writers also show these women adhering to an "acceptive" type of motherhood wherein they play attentive nurturers who can assist the protagonist or other characters in entering or returning to society. Such a construction strongly evokes the expectations tied to the "wise mother" of the modern era, a woman who can lay the path toward public, societal engagement even as she remains on the fringes of social spaces. Marshalling a domain that is separate from modern society while being charged with its creation, enrichment, and continuation, how can the *kenbo* be anything other than a mythical or spiritual figure (i.e.: one of the many goddesses who played similar roles opposite a primordial world or universe)? Susan Napier takes a similar stance in *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature* (1996) as she considers one literary work by Ōba Minako (1930-2007): "Oba's ironic point [in "Smile of a Mountain Witch" (1982)] is that every woman must become a mountain witch in order to fulfill her role as wife and mother properly."<sup>27</sup> For this reason, I will place emphasis upon the role of irrational storytelling elements (motifs, themes, setting, etc.) in the selected narratives, demonstrating how richly writers can construct the complicated relationships between

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 83-84.

individuals and society through multi-layered portrayals of motherhood. Essentially, the maternal can be used to signify simultaneously the conflicts within and external to the protagonist, which contributes to the density of meaning within the narratives examined below.

Before moving on the heart of the thesis, I should clarify how I intend to glean evidence of irrational story elements from the primary sources. The terms “supernatural” (超自然的; *chōshizenteki*) and “spiritual” (精神的/靈的; *seishinteki/reiteki*) may not explicitly appear in all of the chosen works but such labels are appropriate and general enough to describe a variety of events, actions and behaviors that defy the explanations offered by rational discourse. Following this method of classification, this thesis will analyze the appearance of spirits, specters, rituals, talismans, and other components that indicate a sense of mysticism within a story. Still, the above classification must be further refined to also account for the influence of perspective in the (mis)attribution of supernaturalism—after all, a character’s mental state can also account for the numinous qualities linked to a particular element. Thus, a supernatural or spiritual element will be identified as an event, object, or entity that possesses a connection to the incorporeal/immaterial. Moreover, these elements qualify as supernatural or spiritual if they are unexplainable by rational discourse as understood by either a character in the narrative or the actual readers. This classification heeds the power of perspective—the protagonist’s, the narrator’s, or the protagonist’s viewpoint packaged within the narrator’s—to further complicate interpretations of what the irrational signifies.

### *Section Overview*

In Section Two, I analyze Tanizaki’s “Longing for Mother” and Kyōka’s “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya,” considering how the maternal figure conveys submerged aspects of the protagonists’ subjectivity. I also touch upon the suggestion of a multi-layered symbol of



motherhood that emerges from the contradictory facets of these stories heroines. In light of additional themes and motifs that manifest the supernatural and spiritual in these stories, I posit that the mother of fantasy and the fantastic, spiritual mother figure in Tanizaki and Kyōka's narratives illustrate the fragile and uncertain process of defining or redefining one's identity in light of conflicting urges to integrate with and remain separate from society at large. In Section Three, I offer analyses of Takahashi's "Doll Love" and Ono's "Prayers from Nine Years Ago" to continue the process of highlighting the protagonists' complexities as they manifest through the fantasies and spiritualism tied to motherhood. While my discussion of Ono's work will resemble my treatments in Section Two—focusing upon motifs and themes relate the spiritualism of the mother figures—my exploration of Takahashi's narrative will place heavy focus on the structure of the narrative which adds unexpected dimensions to the fantasy shown in the story. As in Section Two, the primary sources considered in Section Three work to problematize how the protagonists' relate to society while resolving their own inner conflicts. However, in Takahashi's narrative, we see an exceptionally dark connection between the individual and society, and in Ono's work, we see a particularly optimistic suggestion of how the protagonist can forge connections from a marginalized social position. In Section Four, the conclusion to this thesis, I will further discuss the similarities and distinctions between the analyzed stories, arguing for the rich modes of storytelling that manifest from the intersection of the tropes and themes tied to the non-rational and the family in modern fiction. I also suggest other narratives that may prove useful for testing the insights from this thesis along with avenues for the future research.

## 2. Fairest of Them All

The maternal in the chosen stories by Kyōka and Tanizaki presents as an “other,” complementing and challenging the more centrally-placed protagonist. Her exoticism services the dream and the living hell crafted by these authors to regale readers with the unexpected consequences of depending upon motherly comfort, guidance, and love during our most vulnerable moments. The stories show the mother as a saint, a demon, a sanctuary, a dungeon, and yet, her contradictory depictions—rather than elucidating her own nature—capture the interiority of the filial hero and how he relates to society. Essentially, the mystic mothers mirror the protagonist, and as is typical for mirrors in fantasy, they are meant to reflect more than what can be seen with the naked eye. Her use in this way confirms what scholar Rosemary Jackson once identified as the ability for fantasy to “[trace] the unsaid and the unseen...that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent.’”<sup>28</sup> And in this regard, we can certainly detect the utility of the mother and fantasy in modern literature, with its many narratives that often display a preoccupation with somehow recapturing or uncovering, at least, a lost or submerged self. I would also argue that the maternal—as the site of numerous contradictions and an engagement with the discourse on ideal womanhood—not only works to portray a submerged layer of the protagonist, but also to expose all the layers that the mother possesses unto herself which adds to the depth of the narrative. As a result of this depth, Tanizaki and Kyōka convey the possibilities for the maternal space to either shelter the heroes or usher the filial characters back into the realm of reality and civilization, thus pointing to several different conflicts within and external to their protagonists (e.g., fear vs. courage, passion vs. self-restraint, obscurity vs. fame, etc.).

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<sup>28</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy, the Literature of Subversion*, (London: Methuen, 1981), 2.

*Expressing the Inner Child in “Longing for Mother”*

In “Longing for Mother,” we follow the protagonist and narrator, Jun’ichi, through a dream sequence in which the rural setting blends the mystique and intrigue of an unworldly atmosphere with mundane elements. Before showing how such a fantasy world serves as a reconstruction and a projection of the self, I will attend to the images of light in the opening passages (e.g., moonlight, street lamps, etc.) which create striking interplays between the peculiar and the quotidian. As Jun’ichi observes the atmosphere he notes that “the moon is engulfed in clouds; but light streaks down from nowhere, giving everything a pale, whitish glow.”<sup>29</sup> The narrator describes this light as “eerie” and “phantasmal,”<sup>30</sup> words clearly meant to communicate the sense of separation from reality that is natural for the dream state (ibid.). However, Jun’ichi also happens upon street lamps that offer some familiarity in what he calls an “alien” land, displaced by a great distance from “the land of the living” (ibid.). Moreover, he finds other recognizable elements that restore the scene’s earthly quality, including “[r]ows of pine trees” and a “damp...salty” wind that indicates a nearby sea (ibid.). Still, only shortly after it imparts a sense of mundanity, the street lamp captures the environment’s more unusual dynamics. Jun’ichi approaches the circle of light beneath the street lamp—an “area as bright as day” (469)—imagining his own dissolved corporeality<sup>31</sup> becoming tangible as both he and his surroundings are better revealed in the lamplight. The lamp also faintly casts its light over the

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<sup>29</sup> Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, “Longing for Mother. Haha o Kouru Ki,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 4 (1980): 467.

<sup>30</sup> In the original text, these words (“eerie” and “phantasmal”) respectively appear as “*fushigi*” (“strange”; “mysterious”) and “*maboroshi no yō*” (Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshū*, [Tokyo: Chūō Koronsha, 1981], 6:193). This particular appearance of “*maboroshi*” (“phantom”; “apparition”) is the first in a chain of references designed to convey a sense of disembodiment, reaffirming the gap between body and spirit which in turn illustrates the separation between fantasy and reality. Tanizaki subsequently builds this chain through the narrator’s remarks on his own spirit-like existence and the ghostly descriptions of withered lotuses, to be examined momentarily.

<sup>31</sup> “Perhaps in the darkness my body was transformed entirely into spirit, and now that I have at last reached light, the flesh has returned.” Tanizaki, “Longing for Mother,” 469.

dried, rustling lotus leaves that have overtaken an old pond beside the road, but in the moments before he can fully recognize what the shifting objects are, Jun'ichi perceives a more spectral veneer in the pale, withered leaves.<sup>32</sup> In the darkness, with only the white undersides of their leaves catching the light as they blow in the wind, the lotuses take on the ghostly, discarnate existence that Jun'ichi felt only shortly before. Based on the protagonist's initial description, one easily imagines fluttering spirits instead what he eventually recognizes as lotuses. In their shared transformation from intangible to tangible, both Jun'ichi and the environs display their own inherent union through a merger of the peculiar and the unexceptional. Consequently, the narrative sets the stage for other textual elements that unite the plausible and the unimaginable, producing a journey that unveils much of the protagonist's interiority even as it frames the action as external to Jun'ichi. At the culmination of the narrator's quest is the otherworldly mother—a reification of the dead mother in the waking world—who serves as the bewitching other and the “mirror” in which Jun'ichi finds the reflection of his own emotional discord.

Just as the setting attends to a fusion of contrasts, so does the narrative style bespeak the interwoven extremes that shape the son in this story. In particular, we see that Jun'ichi bears a hybrid identity as a real-world adult merged with the child of the dream world. His description of himself fosters a sense of the unreal since he recalls his own age and personality as though he is reliving a memory within a hypnotic trance.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the narrator's refined language also strengthens the perception of an adult viscerally recounting an experience from which he is now

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<sup>32</sup> Jun'ichi describes the lotuses as follows: “white objects rustling in the dark area to my right attract my attention once again. The arc lamp's light on them makes their fluttering appear more pronounced. They look even eerier, now that they are dimly visible. I face the darkness and gaze resolutely at them through the pines. For one whole minute, then another, I stare, but I still cannot decide what they are. They extend from practically below my feet far into the black distance, and flicker like a sea of iridescent phosphor. The scene startles me, bewilders me.... (ibid., 469).

<sup>33</sup> Jun'ichi describes himself as “still only six or seven years old” and as “[having] been a coward for as long as I can remember” (ibid., 467).

removed by his age and his dreaming state-of-mind.<sup>34</sup> Ken Ito's analysis of Tanizaki's work in *Visions of Desire* (1991)<sup>35</sup> is especially germane to this construction of the narrative hero. To explicate how the artful reflections of an adult mind can invest the youthful experience with narrative power, Ito cites Tanizaki's own reflections on writing *Childhood Years* (*Yōshō jidai*, 1955-56; tr. 1988):

...my accomplishments as a novelist owe far more to my childhood surroundings than I had previously imagined. [...] I believed that I had become who I am through influences encountered after my adolescence...[but] I find, as I look back, that an unexpectedly large part of what I now possess had already sprouted during my childhood....<sup>36</sup>

Ito surmises that “[w]hatever *Yōshō jidai* may reveal about Tanizaki's childhood, it does say something about how he defined himself as a man and a writer.”<sup>37</sup> If we go further with this claim, we recognize that Tanizaki's literature frames some elements of the childhood experience (e.g., parent-child bonds) as essential to one's most meaningful engagements with society. This framing is apparent in the duality of Jun'ichi's voice—a voice that exhibits the hero's present-

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<sup>34</sup> As he finds his bearings in the dream, one particular reflection on his family's economic hardship illustrates the mature mind at work, even if the narrator's physicality is child-like: “The sudden decline in my parents' fortunes has filled me with unspeakable sorrow” (Tanizaki, 467). The original Japanese text more plainly illustrates the adult-child hybrid with its inclusion of the word “*kodomogokoro*” (“childish”)—which sounds strangely self-conscious from a child—alongside the poetic “*watashi no mune ni iiyou no nai kanashimi*.” The latter phrase is poetic for the same reasons that English speakers find words like “within my breast” (“*watashi no mune ni*”) to be particularly affective—and thus, *effective* or useful—when illustrating one's own emotional state. For reference, what follows is the untranslated text of the passage already mentioned above: “...*kinō ni kaeru kyūgeki na wagaya no hiun—sore ga kodomogokoro ni mo watashi no mune ni iiyou no nai kanashimi o motarashite ita no de atta*” (Tanizaki, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, 6:194).

<sup>35</sup> The first chapter in Ito's monograph, “The Childhood World,” includes the scholar's own consideration of “Longing for Mother” in which the scholar studies the connections between Tanizaki's literature and life alongside the themes of a “lost feminine presence” or a “child's yearning for happiness lost” (Ken K. Ito, *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds*, [Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991], 24, 26).

<sup>36</sup> This material from Tanizaki's collected volume of literature (*Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū*, Vol. 22 [pp. 401-2]) has already been translated by Ito (*ibid.*, 8).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

day maturity alongside his remembered inexperience; a voice that makes obvious the problem of how to extricate the adult who has retreated into a child's existence. There is an accord between the dualism to be found in both the setting and the hero, and Tanizaki goes on to map the extremes of both upon the magical mother who is at first alluring, yet distant and suspicious, before she finally becomes familiar and comforting. She is the solution to drawing the child out of the dream and back into the real world: her mysterious and potentially unhuman form validates the son's apprehension, but her loveliness acts to inspire the curiosity and bravery that bring Jun'ichi to the close of the dream.

That Jun'ichi's courage to express his emotions should materialize upon recognizing the mother's face<sup>38</sup> bears a similarity to his earlier encounters with the lamplight and the lotuses. When the narrator ventures down the road to reach the lamp post, he conveys the sense of walking for an extremely long time, which is a phenomenon he also experiences when following the mother: "For all I know, I may have already walked for two or three or even ten years down this road [...and] as I walk down this road I feel that I am no longer a living person..." (Tanizaki, 474). At the end of this quoted passage, we see a suggestion of existing as something other than flesh and bone—i.e., as part of an intangible dream world—a sentiment he conveyed as he entered the circle of light from the street lamp. In addition, Jun'ichi's slow recognition of his mother resembles his delayed recognition of the lotuses beside the road. These similarities therefore call to mind Jun'ichi's earlier description of his own transformation from immaterial to material. Might not the same transformation be taking place again, this time under the influence of the mother?

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<sup>38</sup> There are parallels between this woman—with her impossibly white skin—and the moon, which reinforces the imagery related to light that appears throughout the story.

Turning again to Kishida's *Hahaoya gensou* offers some insights which illuminate the dynamic that unfolds between Jun'ichi and the fantastic mother who lures him closer to his reconstitution in the domain of reality. Kishida writes: "During the time when the child lacks a sense of self, [the mother's] blind devotion poses no ill effects. [...] We live in a narcissistic world with no knowledge of the differences between self and other, real and imaginary. [...] Thus, while the child lacks the sense of self, it does not matter if we take the dark cloud of blind devotion for motherly love...."<sup>39</sup> In the context of Jun'ichi's regressed state, these claims by Kishida give import to his vague suppositions concerning his journey and his surroundings. As stated earlier in this study, Jun'ichi is not quite a child, but like a child, he struggles to fully comprehend the connections between himself and the world he traverses. At one point, Jun'ichi wonders, "Having witnessed such a moon, who would not associate it with eternity? The word itself has no meaning to me, child that I still am; yet an emotion born of an instinctive recognition of that eternity wells up in me" (Tanizaki, 473). For this reason, Jun'ichi's final encounter can be read as a challenge in which he must replace a vague awareness of his inner conflict (represented by the hidden face of the mother) with an actual awareness. The challenge is especially suited to the world of fantasy because reality leaves no possibility for encountering a fox-human, or demon, or even our own emotions refigured as a separate individual who beckons us nearer.

As Jun'ichi approaches the end of his journey,<sup>40</sup> he is drawn to the "plaintive" sound of a *samisen* which summons fond memories of a nursemaid and the time they spent listening to the

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<sup>39</sup> Kishida, *Hahaoya gensō*, 36-37.

<sup>40</sup> Before encountering his mother at the end of the story, Jun'ichi stumbles upon the house of a different woman who is cooking dinner and waiting for the arrival of her son. This particular woman—who is much surlier than the mother at the end of the narrative—is not described through supernatural tropes, making it difficult to include her in this treatment of non-rational motifs in fiction. Consequently, I do not analyze this character except to note that her presence emphasizes the ethereal beauty of the mother that Jun'ichi discovers at the end of his dream. However, I do

stringed instrument being played in a street near his old home in Nihonbashi (Tanizaki, 474). He recalls his nursemaid mimicking the notes of the song and adding the words “*Tempura kuitai, tempura kuitai*” (“I want to eat tempura”) (ibid.). While he would marvel at the music’s resemblance to “someone crying out for a bite to eat,” the young Jun’ichi would also “grope for [the nurse’s] breast,” in search of his own nourishment (ibid.). Hence, to once again hear the sounds of the *samisen* suggests that the comforts of home are accessible from the dream world if only he can find the mysterious woman walking along the moonlit shore, playing the same song. Jun’ichi does not initially recognize the Shinnai balladeer in the dream as his mother, and the story’s translator Edward Fowler touches on this detail in his own analysis. Fowler notes that the musician is “distant and wraithlike” and “[it] is difficult to imagine how she might have passed an ordinary day at home,” giving rise to the question “just how ideal is the narrator’s idealized mother?”<sup>41</sup> The answer to Fowler’s question— “definitively ideal”—is suggested by the protagonist’s assumption of the woman’s mystical identity: “Why she’s not human at all, but a fox that’s turned itself into a woman!” (Tanizaki, 475). Anthony Chambers has discussed the fox motif as a means for Tanizaki to incorporate his broader theme of “eternal women” who gain their mystique due to their detachment from the everyday world.<sup>42</sup> Jun’ichi’s curiosity testifies to the mother’s possession of the same sort of mystique. Fowler argues similarly, stating that

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provide an analysis of the woman’s house later in this section, particularly its ability to draw out Jun’ichi’s innermost desires in the same way as the beautiful mother he eventually discovers.

<sup>41</sup> Fowler, “Tanizaki’s Sentimental Education,” 480.

<sup>42</sup> The fox motif plays a significant role in Tanizaki’s “Arrowroot,” and scholar Anthony Chambers details the author’s use of the motif as an innovation on a popular theme from Japanese folklore: the “wife from a different realm” (*takai no tsuma*) (Anthony H. Chambers, “A Study of Tanizaki’s Yoshino Kuzu,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41, no. 2 [1981]: 502). Chambers summarizes the theme, put forth by the literary scholar Origuchi Shinobu, as an outgrowth of an ancient custom of children living with the father, and thus, seeing the mother (who customarily lived in a separate village) as “a being of another world who would come occasionally to visit but would always go away again” (ibid.). Chambers also enumerates the many other Tanizaki heroines who “occupy a ‘different realm,’” thus showing the author’s appreciation for how usefully this theme can exoticize what would otherwise be a mundane figure (ibid., 503).



“Tanizaki’s eternal woman does not hail from everyday life; in her incarnation as an itinerant Shinnai musician, she materializes on the moonlit road like a figure in a tableau vivant: flat, veiled, static, aloof...[she] is no ordinary mortal, like the aging woman [Jun’ichi] encounters [earlier] at the farmhouse, but enchanting and ageless, transcending time and space.”<sup>43</sup> Fowler adds that even though a “sentimental yearning for the maternal informs ‘Longing for Mother’ ...[but] the musician strolling down the moonlit road is hardly the matronly figure one might expect...[and indeed], she has few motherly traits.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, we also see the musician gradually adopt a more maternal air and the distance between mother and son becomes negligible. During Jun’ichi’s hesitant approach toward the mother, certain uncanny details—like her “extraordinarily white skin” or the sand that “leaves no mark on her feet or kimono” (Tanizaki, 474)—leave him unsure as to whether she is a fox, a “wild-eyed demon” (475), or a mere woman.<sup>45</sup> However, the eventual confirmation of her humanity and the revelation of her identity is coterminous with the pair’s physical embrace.<sup>46</sup> More notably, Jun’ichi affirms that he “know[s] just how she feels” once she is close enough to press her cheek to his and she “gives herself over to her tears” (477). The mother urges the protagonist to release his own feelings, and he spends the last moments of the dream weeping in her arms.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Fowler, “Tanizaki’s Sentimental Education,” 480.

<sup>44</sup> Fowler follows this pronouncement with his comments on the comparative warmth of the nursemaid (see the first quote from Fowler in note 28 of this thesis), bolstering his view of the cold aestheticism and unreachable past signified by the ideal mother (ibid., 480). In my own analysis, I approach the representation of the ideal mother with an eye toward her capability to embody and to externalize the extremes already felt within the protagonist, which renders her as a figure that is both distant (i.e.: separate from the son) and familiar (undifferentiated from the son).

<sup>45</sup> I would also argue that this suggestion of a frightening creature is meant to capture the perturbation that accompanies thoughts of the mother overlaid with the figure of an enticing woman. Thus, Jun’ichi’s suppositions about a monstrous or unhuman face produces a fear that might stifle (or at least counterbalance) the sense of attraction.

<sup>46</sup> Even after seeing the woman’s crying face, he does not place her as his mother, but rather he imagines that she could stand in as the “beautiful [older] sister [he has] longed for” (Tanizaki, 476).

<sup>47</sup> In the original text, the power of this moment to overwhelm the senses is less ambiguous. In the translation, our narrator states: “I hug her with all my might, and smell her warm, sweet breasts through the folds of her kimono. The moonlight and pounding breakers still numb my senses. I hear the samisen even now. Tears stream unceasingly down our cheeks.” (ibid., 478). Rather than numbing his senses, the moonlight (“*tsuki no hikari*”) and the sound of

In this moment, the “eternal woman” does not necessarily fall away, but she is no longer the depthless, “two-dimensional” painting that Jun’ichi first beheld with suspicion. Instead, the mother maintains the status highlighted by Fowler (“enchanted and ageless,” “transcending time and space”),<sup>48</sup> and she effuses the emotion that her lost, helpless, powerless son feels too inarticulate to express. “Painting” or “tableau vivant” she may be, “vivant” (“living”) is the operative word for explicating the mother’s purpose in the dream, as we discover that the woman is already deceased in the waking world.<sup>49</sup> Of course, as Fowler argues, she acts to revive Jun’ichi’s memories of the irrecoverable past, but in this thesis, we should also emphasize her elicitation of the son’s deep-seated anguish through a movingly aestheticized, palpable, and vibrant embodiment of his grief. Although she is unreal, the mother who is distanced through fantasy and idealization is still somehow accessible and capable of exemplifying the child’s angst in a way not possible for the more realistic mother who is already distanced by death.

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the waves (“pounding breakers”; “*nami no oto*”) can be taken as “permeating” or “filling” the narrator’s senses (“*mi ni shimiwataru*”). In some respects, the word “numb” can denote a meaning similar to the two words just listed, but it more readily suggests deadened feelings or a loss of one’s perceptions, which arguably differs from the connotation in the original text. I argue that the mother’s embrace causes Jun’ichi to come alive to a connection between the world around and within himself. The original Japanese for this specific sentence in the passage is as follows: “*Ga, izen to shite tsuki no hikari to nami no oto to ga mi ni shimiwataru*” (Tanizaki, *Tanizaki Jun’ichirō zenshū*, 6:219).

<sup>48</sup> Fowler, “Tanizaki’s Sentimental Education,” 480.

<sup>49</sup> “Longing” ends just after the narrator wakes up from the dream and explains that his “mother is no longer alive; she died two summers ago” (Tanizaki, 478).

In light of the assertion that the mother is “flat” and “static,” I think more recognition must be given to the depth<sup>50</sup> that actually accompanies her depiction in “Longing.”<sup>51</sup> Tanizaki prominently suggests her depth—or at least the existence of something below the surface—when the narrator ponders what may lie beyond the visible features of the figure he is pursuing.<sup>52</sup> Jun’ichi’s nescience—in other words, his ignorance of the woman’s true appearance—leads him to fill in details that better reflect his own psychology instead of what actually exists. Before reaching the shore, Jun’ichi discovers a farmhouse in which he imagines a comforting scene of family life, but the fantasy immediately dissolves when he peers inside and speaks with the hostile woman who lives there.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, story elements such as the farmhouse (before he peers inside) and the mother (before he draws nearer) can be described as “flat,” but the phrase “blank canvas” lends greater narrative momentum to metaphors such as the house and the mother’s unseen face. The mother and the house are useful as blank slates unto which Jun’ichi can paint representations of his own mentality. At the farmhouse, the representation is a positive and

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<sup>50</sup> Taking the lead from scholar Nina Cornyetz’s *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words* (1999), I revisit the idea of depth assigned to a maternal figure when I analyze Kyōka’s “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya.” As she extends Karatani Kojin’s remarks on depth in premodern and modern literature, Cornyetz offers an insight that is relevant to my arguments here about the mother’s depth in “Longing”: “The very process of seeking a hidden premodern within the modern [as is done by Kyōka in “Mount Kōya”] establishes depth, since it entails looking for something beneath or beyond the surface” (Nina Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words: Phallic Fantasy and Modernity in Three Japanese Writers*, [Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999], 52). In Tanizaki’s work, Jun’ichi’s repeated conjectures about the true form of the woman presents a similar process of “seeking [the] hidden” which generates a maternal figure with depth.

<sup>51</sup> This portion of my analysis may seem needlessly contrarian, but the discussion of depth is actually useful for proving how the fantastic mother represents the hidden aspects of the protagonist *and* possesses a hidden quality that inspires the audience to engage in the same seeking being performed by the narrator—ultimately, she demonstrates the depth of the narrative and the main character.

<sup>52</sup> Despite the heavy emphasis placed upon the parts of her body that are easily seen—cf. “In Praise of Shadows” (“*In’ei raisan*,” 1933; tr. 1977), for similar treatments of the wraithlike female body—I have also pointed out the moments that show Jun’ichi’s suspicion of *something* being hidden from view.

<sup>53</sup> “I walk another five or six hundred yards and gradually approach the light. It comes from the window of a thatched farmhouse. Someone is living there for sure—perhaps my own mother and father! [...] If I were to slide open the paper-covered window from which the light is shining, wouldn’t I find my parents getting well on in years now, sitting around the hearth and tending the fire? Wouldn’t they welcome me and bid me sit with them, pleased that I had arrived home safely after dark? [...] What is going on inside? Is someone preparing dinner at this late hour? The familiar aroma of soybean soup wafts toward me, followed by that of fish sizzling on the grill. ‘Mother’s cooking mackerel, her favorite,’ I tell myself excitedly. ‘Yes, that’s what she’s doing!’” (Tanizaki, 470).

reaffirming scene of familial belonging. However, the sudden dissolution of that representation<sup>54</sup> forces Jun'ichi to continue his travels. As for the mother on the shore, the narrator creates a representation of himself through the alternating images of a woman and a monster which exhibit the anxiety and anticipation that stem from his earlier experiences with hope and disappointment. Through the shared emotional release that he experiences with the mother, Jun'ichi finds the belonging that was denied earlier and he wakes up, safely returning to the civilized world.

*Suppressing the Inner Beasts in Kyōka's "The Holy Man of Mount Kōya"*

Kyōka's is the earlier of the two narratives treated in this section, and more than Tanizaki's, it presents a maternal figure who is wholly autonomous from the male protagonist, a travelling monk. This autonomy may be, in fact, what lends a persistent sense of danger to the mountain woman that the protagonist encounters in "The Holy Man of Mount Kōya." The shifts in narrative setting, the inexplicability of the woman's powers, and the transgressive and corrupting nature of her power also contribute to the foreboding atmosphere that suffuses "Mount Kōya" and exoticizes this particular female "other." While this treatment will show that Kyōka's central female character can ensure the protagonist's well-being, it also stands to reason that she is a threat to life as he knows it. In at least one of his treatments of "Mount Kōya," Charles Shiro Inouye speaks to this dualist representation, specifically describing Kyōka's "archetypal woman" as "a complex of maternal and sexual desire" to whom the author accords the "taboos of death and incest [that] deny the male protagonist's full engagement with [the] idealized woman."<sup>55</sup> That particular treatment by Inouye greatly connects his preceding claim to

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<sup>54</sup> Not only does the woman living in the farmhouse tell Jun'ichi that she is not his mother, she says that he likely has no mother (Tanizaki, "Longing for Mother," 471). Without a doubt, her statement salts the earth and presents the ultimate affront against the seed of hope he had already planted within that domestic space.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Shiro Inouye, "Water Imagery in the Work of Izumi Kyōka," *Monumenta Nipponica* 46, no. 1 (1991): 65.

Kyōka's use of water imagery,<sup>56</sup> but in this thesis, I build much of the justification for the heroine's duality upon the spiritual power and the phenomenal events that present either danger or safety in the spaces linked to the woman. As seen in Tanizaki's work, the maternal force at the center of the journey beyond civilization attends to the complex relationship between emotions—in this case, fear, passion, bewilderment, etc.—and a rational understanding of the self, which can either assure or jeopardize one's association with society.

“Mount Kōya” centers on the embedded story being recounted by Monk Shūchō—already a celebrated monk<sup>57</sup> at the time of the framing narrative—as he lodges with a new acquaintance during a journey home. In the framing narrative, the monk spends his evening at an inn, telling his fellow lodger about a woman that he encountered during a pilgrimage through the mountains many years earlier. This narrative setup compels the audience to consider, by story's end, the magnanimity of his encounter with the mysterious woman of the mountains: any threat

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<sup>56</sup> Inouye has also written a critical biography of Kyōka, *The Similitude of Blossoms* (1998), in which he considers “Mount Kōya” and the contained imagery that is unrelated to water—for example, flower blossoms as suggested by the monograph's title. In fact, when summarizing the character of the mountain woman in “Mount Kōya,” Inouye notes that she is “a composite of the spirited Edokko, the alluring geisha, the nurturing Maya/mother, the cannibalistic Kishibo, and the benevolent Kannon” which points to the fusion of the irrational and the mundane that establishes the woman as a tremendous maternal force in the text (Charles Shiro Inouye, *The Similitude of Blossoms: A Critical Biography of Izumi Kyōka (1873-1939), Japanese Novelist and Playwright*, [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998], 147).

<sup>57</sup> Shūchō is written as having an association with Mount Kōya, a mountainous district centered around the town of Kōya in Japan's Wakayama prefecture (*JapanKnowledge Lib*, s.v. “高野山,” accessed May 19, 2016, <http://japanknowledge.com/lib/dis-play/?lid=1001000090233>). Home to more than one hundred temples, the area has been long regarded as sacred, and Kūkai (known after his death as Kōbō Daishi, founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism) selected Mount Kōya in 816 CE as a place to start his ascetic community (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, s.v. “Kōya, Mount,” accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001/acref-9780192800947-e-4088>). Although this locale does not make an appearance in Kyōka's story, the association between Shūchō (after his ordeal) and these sacred mountains likely heightens the sense of moral triumph in the protagonist's survival. Mark Cody Poulton touches on this triumph in his own critique of “Mount Kōya” when he asks, “...had the priest succumbed to his sensual urges, would he not have ended up like the woman's other suitors, turned into a beast? Or is it precisely because of his contact with the woman—it is not that he resists her; rather, he is profoundly moved by her—that the priest has become ‘holy’?” (Poulton, “Metamorphosis: Fantasy and Animism in Izumi Kyōka.” *Japan Review* no. 6 [1995]: 82). Poulton frames his questions as though they suggest mutually exclusive possibilities, but I would posit that Shūchō is greatly moved by the woman's power yet he is also capable enough to avoid the disastrous outcome, which can make his story all the more impressive.

that the woman poses against the monk is a threat to the very story being shared. Thus, despite her relative confinement to a personal anecdote—especially one as far removed by time and space as Shūchō’s—Kyōka’s narrative construction figures the woman’s power, and thus maternal power, as influential beyond the divisions<sup>58</sup> that typically ensure safety. We can clarify the import of this narrative construction with scholar Nina Cornyetz’s examination of the depth—that of the woman and the overall story—in “Mount Kōya.”<sup>59</sup>

In Cornyetz’s critique, the “textual duplicity” and Kyōka’s construction of “femaleness” and “maternal dimension” enable readerly “seeking” in “Mount Kōya.”<sup>60</sup> The duplicity stems from the delivery of the monk’s story—or what Cornyetz calls the “confession” (i.e., *zange*)—through a separate narrator,<sup>61</sup> thus “[deferring] and [putting] into question...the confession.”<sup>62</sup> Additionally, “the contradictory, alternating descriptions of the woman’s maternal gentleness, wondrous sexiness, and terrifying power to encompass, pluralize, and transform” shapes a layered figure who is capable of stoking the audience’s fixation even long after she has been left behind in the mountains.<sup>63</sup> Hence, the depth inspires deeper contemplation of both the woman and Shūchō’s story/confession, in much the same way as Jun’ichi’s interest was drawn toward the balladeer in “Longing.” However, Cornyetz suggests that the monk’s confession “ultimately [confesses] ‘nothing’” (ibid.), and it is this notion of an empty confession that illustrates the

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<sup>58</sup> One might count the separations between civilization and the natural world, masculine and feminine, structure and chaos, etc. as any one of the many “divisions” that might be threatened by an extremely powerful mother figure, at least in this literary context.

<sup>59</sup> Please refer back to note 50 where I also cited Cornyetz’s *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words* to argue that Jun’ichi’s process of “seeking the hidden” lends a sense of depth to the mother—and as I will show momentarily—the text.

<sup>60</sup> Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*, 53.

<sup>61</sup> The separate narrator—the person who finally relays Shūchō’s story to the audience—is the young man who meets Shūchō in the framing narrative.

<sup>62</sup> Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*, 53.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

mountain woman's ability to jeopardize—even from within several layers of narrative—the safety one might expect to feel upon returning to society.

As a means of reframing and constraining the woman's powerful allure, the empty confession acts to signify and endorse the Buddhist principles to which Shūchō eventually returns. After all, we see moments of shame and self-consciousness as the monk recounts his experiences in the mountain woman's company, including one such moment after Shūchō remembers his naked body being dried off by the woman—“The monk laughed, seeming a bit embarrassed. ‘I'm afraid this is quite a story I'm telling you.’”<sup>64</sup> This shame qualifies the feelings that the woman stirs up, working to thwart the transmission of her magnetism beyond the confines of her isolated domain. Essentially, the shame intervenes in the dynamic that emerges between the woman and the monk, or even between the woman and Kyōka's readers. The shame is meant to circumscribe her magnetism in service to the larger narrative which contrasts masculine and feminine forces. In fact, the narrative includes a number of “interventions” that foreground the interplay between concepts coded as masculine—structure, order, restraint—and feminine—primitivism, unruliness, passion.

The warning from the mountain woman's male servant to Shūchō counts as one of these interventions, as Shūchō only summons the wherewithal to finally leave the forest after the revelation that the woman can transform men into animals. We see another intervention in the form of Shūchō's repeated references to the life of asceticism that awaited him after his pilgrimage. The monk provides a clear image of his expected austerity when he remembers contemplating suicide as he stood before two majestic waterfalls—the “Husband and Wife

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<sup>64</sup> Izumi Kyōka, “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya” in *Japanese Gothic Tales*, trans. Charles Shiro Inouye (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 49.

Falls”—during his mountain pilgrimage: “My dreams of someday donning a purple surplice and living in a fine monastery meant nothing to me. And to be called a living Buddha by others and to be thronged with crowds of worshippers could only turn my stomach with the stench of humanity.”<sup>65</sup> The masculine-feminine interplay that the story communicates through different vignettes of spiritualism is not groundbreaking. Kishida briefly discusses paternalism and maternalism in Japan through the lens of concepts—such as *giri* (“obligation”)—that carry strong links to Confucianism and paternalist influences from China.<sup>66</sup> Kishida notes the orientation of *giri* around social rank and public interaction as compared with *ninjō* (“human feeling”) which relates to the private sphere and the modes of interaction grounded in maternalism. Thus, Kyōka’s narrative arguably taps into the age-old masculine-feminine conflict through the lens of spiritualism: the magic of the woman is less visible than the association that the monk, by definition, has with Buddhism. We only learn of the woman’s immense power second-hand, and her display of magic is literally a silent act. However, we discover the monk’s renown early in the story, and the narrative itself—a confession—counts as an additional articulation of faith.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the confession contributes the dynamics between masculine and feminine, clearly meaning to contextualize and rein in the woman’s mystical allure.

However, the empty confession undermines its own purposes by inviting readers to peer deeper into the feminine power that it superficially means to contain and neutralize. Therefore, Kyōka suggests that the idealization and demonization of the woman—examples of which are provided later—are meaningless against such an obviously powerful maternal force. For this

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<sup>65</sup> Kyōka, “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya,” 63.

<sup>66</sup> Kishida, *Hahaoya gensō*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Scholars have noted *zange* as a concept with “a long history within Buddhism and can be traced to the practice of confession as taught, according to early tradition, by the Buddha himself. When monks violated one of the precepts, they were obligated to confess their sin before the sangha or to an immediate superior” (James L. Ford, *Jōkei and Buddhist Devotion in Early Medieval Japan*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 126).



reason, the mountain witch can be said to have influence even beyond the text, mostly because the nested stories carry her far beyond the forest and allow her to pull in others just as she did with Shūchō. This indicates that one is never truly beyond the guidance or control of the maternal.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, if the mother is a dangerous one, might she spell the collapse of civilization? I keep the implications of such a question in mind as I move on to considering how the mountain woman's mystical surroundings and capabilities reveal her mystifying version of nurturing.

In the embedded narrative, the monk is travelling through a region called Hida<sup>69</sup> where he strays from a putatively safer path in order to warn and redirect an itinerant merchant who ventures in a more dangerous direction. Shortly after his detour, Shūchō wanders into a leech-infested forest that nearly kills him. Covered in leeches and struggling to escape the forest, the monk stresses the intimate link between the creatures and the world's eventual demise, suggesting that they will one day “disgorge” the “untold quantities of human blood” that they have consumed since “the age of the gods” before they eventually bring about the “destruction of mankind” and a “new generation of life” (Kyōka, 36-37). Scholars such as Inouye have cited the leeches (*yamabiru*) as another example of the story's abundant water imagery,<sup>70</sup> and by incorporating the symbolic meanings associated with water, other scholars like Poulton and Takahashi Yasuo<sup>71</sup> have reflected on the ideas of transformation and metamorphosis in their own

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<sup>68</sup> I point the reader back to Tanizaki's comments on *Yōshō jidai* which communicate a similar sentiment.

<sup>69</sup> The Hida mountain range, also known as the Northern Alps in Japan, traverses present-day Toyama, Nagano, and Gifu prefectures (*JapanKnowledge Lib*, s.v. “飛騨山脈,” accessed July 13, 2016, <http://japanknowledge.com/lib/display/?lid=1001000193024>).

<sup>70</sup> Inouye, “Water Imagery in the Work of Izumi Kyōka,” 56.

<sup>71</sup> Takahashi Yasuo, “*Kitan kikei: izumi kyōka 'kōya hijiri' ni miru genkei*” [“Fantasy and mental landscape in Kyōka Izumi's fiction”], *Sapporo daigaku sōgō ronsō* 6 (1998): 71-155.

critiques of the leeches.<sup>72</sup> In light of this investigation's focus, I prefer to seize upon the reference to "the age of the gods,"<sup>73</sup> which reveals how densely this literature has constructed the extramundane images of maternal influence.

Early in the *Kojiki* (*An Account of Ancient Matters*), we find an account of the malformed Leech-child (*Hiruko*; 水蛭児)<sup>74</sup> that resulted from the union between the goddess Izanami and the god Izanagi. Izanami's consultation with higher deities reveals that the child is the result of her transgression before she consummated the union with Izanagi.<sup>75</sup> For this reason, the gods sent the child out to sea in a reed boat and never count it amongst their official children.<sup>76</sup> Hiruko's appearance in the *Kojiki* symbolizes the consequences of a mother who errs. This parallels the leeches of "Mount Kōya" which signify the monk's official entry into the mountain woman's territory and once again the corruption that flows from a woman to her "offspring" should she operate outside of social guidelines. Also notable is the inclusion of the ideograph for "water" in

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<sup>72</sup> Poulton extends his analysis of the leeches to include other slithering specimens from "Mount Kōya"—i.e.: the snakes Shūchō sees before he finds the forest—noting that these animals are "both primitive and protean, which is to say that they are the furthest removed from the human and at the same time demonstrate a potential to metamorphose. Both the snakes and the leeches have a flowing, oozing movement which recalls Kyōka's major image of metamorphosis: water" (Poulton, "Metamorphosis," 84). Takahashi connects the leeches to transformation in a more oblique manner: he cites several possibilities for the origin of the word "*hiru/hihiru*"—perhaps taken from "*hirahira*," which often connotes the undulating, swaying, or writhing movements of different plants and bugs—and then he suggests Kyōka's use of the leeches to illustrate a sort of transformed worldview in which the universe is suddenly overrun by that fluid movement. Takahashi surmises that the scene in the leech forest is therefore "a moment of illusion made real. Or one could also say, it demonstrates the principle of catastrophe inciting catharsis" (Takahashi, "*Kitan kikei*," 98-99). Hence, Takahashi considers the ability for the leech scene to portray emotional transformation through Shūchō.

<sup>73</sup> Although one could also translate the story's original text (*kamiyo no inishie kara*) as "since time immemorial," the actual language makes the same reference to "gods" as occurs in Inouye's translation.

<sup>74</sup> Hieda no Are and Ō no Yasumaro, "*Shimajima no seisei*" ["Formation of the Islands"] in "*Kojiki*," accessed April 22, 2016, [http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/001518/files/51731\\_50813.html](http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/001518/files/51731_50813.html).

<sup>75</sup> Rather than allowing the god to proposition her first, Izanami took the lead in expressing her desire for Izanagi (Ō no Yasumaro and Gustav Heldt, *Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters*, [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2014], 10).

<sup>76</sup> At least one other child, known as Froth Island (*Awashima*), was also considered a failure and not counted as part of Izanami and Izanagi's group of children (ibid.).

the Leech-child's name, which shows the import that a *Kojiki*-reference might have for both an investigation of water imagery and an appraisal of numinous themes and metaphors.

Unpacking the associations between Hiruko, water, and mystical power is made easier by certain treatises on the folklore that possibly inform the legend of Izanami's first child. In "A Folkloric Study of the Mythological Abortion 'Ebisu'" (1997),<sup>77</sup> Liu Fude focuses on Izanami's discarded child and considers the diverse depictions of deformity in ancient sources that may have informed the Leech-child's appearance in the *Kojiki*. Liu posits that Hiruko's<sup>78</sup> deformity and its disposal via the reed boat may have a basis in the moon-based spiritual beliefs that were likely transmitted to Japan from the continent during the Jōmon period (ca. 14,000-300BC).<sup>79</sup> Citing folklore scholar Matsumoto Nobuhiro,<sup>80</sup> Liu considers interpreting the Leech-child's reed boat as a symbol of new life or spiritual rebirth which, as Liu first suggested in his introduction, might plausibly reflect the beliefs of a people that arrived in Japan by crossing the sea.<sup>81</sup> Such an interpretation lends further credence to the leech's ability to signify transformation, not just through a physical likeness to water, but also through the notion of spiritual renewal intimated by key events in the mythology related to Hiruko. Liu's appraisal also connects leeches to the moon

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<sup>77</sup> Liu Fude, "Ebisu kou" ["A Folkloric Study of the Mythological Abortion 'Ebisu'"], *Hikaku minzoku kenkyū* 15 (1997): 85-107.

<sup>78</sup> Liu refers to Hiruko and Ebisu (蛭子) somewhat interchangeably, owing to how the tale of one has been adapted as the foundation of the other. Jane Marie Law attends to this connection, explaining that "[while] nothing comes of the legless child again in the main narrative of the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, this deity is brought back into the mainstream of Japanese religious practice by means of another myth and ritual tradition: Hiruko grows up (or in some cases, merely comes ashore) and becomes Ebisu" (Jane Marie Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyō Tradition*, [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997], 123). Law also notes that in light of this "connection between the account of Hiruko floating on the waves and the motif of the floating deity...the Leech Child is the floating deity par excellence" (ibid.).

<sup>79</sup> Liu also acknowledges the theory that Ebisu or Hiruko is most often linked to solar symbolism, but he uses the study to provide counterexamples to such a theory (ibid., 88).

<sup>80</sup> 「蛭子が葦船または天磐樟船に乗せられて流されたことに対して異なった見方もある。松本信広はこれを祭式と結び付けて解釈し、魂の新生を表す通過儀礼の思想の現われとした。」 ["There are also differing views concerning Ebisu's being sent off in the papyrus or celestial boat. Matsumoto Nobuhiro connects this to spiritual rites, taking it as evidence of belief in a rite of passage that conveys spiritual rebirth."] (ibid., 87).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 85.

by virtue of their connection to Izanami who holds many of the same traits as moon deities.<sup>82</sup> As another prominent image in Kyōka's narrative, moonlight serves to portray the woman's ethereality which lends credibility to her reputed metaphysical powers. Moreover, the moon in Kyōka's story—like the prominently placed moon in Tanizaki's "Longing"—carries forward a long-used metaphor that depicts a looming motherly presence and a supremacy over all other figures in the story. For this reason, incorporating consideration for mythological and otherworldly metaphors, like the leeches or the moon, afford opportunities to read more multi-layered connections between key symbols in "Mount Kōya," such that the interpretations put forth by previous scholars are bolstered and expanded to include other appraisals of the dangerous but comforting mountain woman.

With their possibly mythic associations in mind, Kyōka's wriggling creatures occasion an even deeper reading into the destruction associated with theirs and the woman's presence. By referring to the "age of the gods" and the end of the world during Shūchō's ordeal, the author positions the leeches at the beginning and end of days, perhaps swallowing up the geological timeline as they do the blood on which they survive. Thinking of the forest and its primordial inhabitants as symbolizing both physical and temporal enclosures calls to mind the uterine images that appear elsewhere in the text: an enveloping white peach blossom to which Shūchō compares his host as they bathe together;<sup>83</sup> the small cove of the river in which the two bathe (ibid., 45); the sense of enclosure imparted by the mountains that rise up around the monk and the woman (ibid.). Aided by the dissimilarity between blood and water, the undulation of the

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<sup>82</sup> 「蛭子の母の伊邪那美は多くの月神の性質を持っていた。」[“Ebisu's mother Izanami possesses the qualities beholden to many moon deities {across cultures}.”] In support of this connection, Liu references Izanami and other moon deities' stationing in the underworld, but he directs his readers to Matsumae Takeshi's *Nihon shīnwa no shinkenkyū* [“New Research in Japanese Myth”] (1960) for more information (ibid., 88).

<sup>83</sup> Kyōka, “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya,” 48.

hungry leeches in the forest forms a repellent contrast to the pleasantly undulant waters of the river that later soothes the monk's wounds. To gather more insight into the spiritual transformations in this story, one might look even further into the depictions of blood and water that thoroughly permeate the forest and river scenes, respectively.

As already noted in an earlier citation from Takahashi, Shūchō's escape from the forest leads to a wild moment of catharsis:

When I saw the blue sky above me, I threw myself down on the road and began smashing the creatures to pieces. I wanted nothing more than to reduce them to the dust of the earth. I rolled on the ground, not caring if it were covered with gravel or needles; and after scraping off more than ten, I tumbled ahead another thirty feet before I stood up with a shudder. [...] Here and there in the surrounding mountains, the evening cicadas were chirping against the backdrop of this forest that was so intent on turning itself into a great swamp of blood and muck. (Kyōka, 38)

Amidst this blood and muck, Shūchō mostly recounts the raw, unbridled behavior and emotion that accompanied him through this particular trial, likening himself to a “madman dancing through the forest” “with arms flailing and legs marching” as he was “reduced to pain-racked skin and bones” (ibid., 37). As noted in Susan Napier's “Woman Found,”<sup>84</sup> Kyōka has steeped the passages concerning the forest in numerous mentions of blood, and if one reads the forest as yet another instance of the womb imagery seen throughout the story, then Shūchō's traumatic experience largely speaks of rebirth or recollecting the birth that began one's life. Still, it is not a

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<sup>84</sup> Napier reflects on the leeches as phallic symbols in her investigation of “Mount Kōya,” and she explains that their presence in the “womblike bloody swamp [suggests] sexuality and rebirth on a personal and suprapersonal level” (Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, 30).

rebirth by means of water's more gentle and cleansing essence which appears later. Rather, this reemergence from the forest back into the world evokes the episode of intense pain and primal emotion that links mother and child and marks the barrier between nothingness and actuality for all people. Poulton examines "Chimera" (*Kechō*, 1897)—another story by Kyōka—in the same article that contains his treatment of "Mount Kōya," and he highlights the protagonist Ren's sudden manifestation of wings at the point when he has experienced a virtual regression back to the point of birth.<sup>85</sup> Poulton identifies this regression as an understandable consequence of the "quest for one's origins, essentially a quest for the self, which naturally leads the Kyōka hero toward his mother, [and can also be called] something of a death-wish."<sup>86</sup> This similar dynamic in "Mount Kōya" figures this leech-filled frontier—so clearly the signpost for the inviting woman who waits ahead—as the maternal void that might just as soon gobble up life even after the labor of pushing it forth into the world. However, as seen in "Longing for Mother", even this intense focus on the maternal eems designed to decode the mystery of the male protagonist rather than bring about a fuller understanding of the conspicuous mother figure. This much is evident in the water and animal imagery that strongly contrasts with the blood-filled forest.

Shortly after ridding himself of the leeches, the monk stumbles upon the residence of a woman and two other men—one man is a servant who eventually details the woman's mystical power; the other is inarticulate and Shūchō silently refers to him as "the idiot" but also recognizes him as the woman's "husband." Shūchō never learns the woman's name, but nonetheless, accepts her invitations to bathe together, have dinner, and stay overnight in her home. The river in which they bathe makes for an enchanting atmosphere as the monk notices

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<sup>85</sup> Poulton, "Metamorphosis," 79.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

his pain “ebb[ing] away” in the moonlit water (Kyōka, 47). The river cures his ailments while also appearing to render the woman’s skin translucent and shimmering in the light (49). Shūchō does not attempt to venture a rational explanation for the sensation of being immediately healed or for the changing appearance of the woman as she bathes; after all, his perceptions may be due to the ethereal quality of the setting rather than the genuinely extraordinary properties of the river or the woman. Yet this ethereality arguably sets the stage for her unexplainable encounters with wildlife which the servant eventually confirms to the monk is evidence of her supernal capabilities.

While the woman is subduing an unruly horse near the cottage by way of an unusual ritual, the monk ponders the immensity of her power and whether “she were a god, or maybe a demon” (Kyōka, 54). The woman opens her kimono, approaches the horse and stares head-on at the animal, at which point the mountains seemingly become “darker . . . more lonely and intense” (ibid.). Such scenes with the horse, the other animals around the cottage, and the “idiot husband”<sup>87</sup> initially serve as evidence of her desirable, hospitable, and conciliatory nature. The monk’s evening in the woman’s company (although not in her bed, notably) washes away his traumas, much like water washing away blood after an injury. However, once the woman finishes with the horse, Shūchō recognizes that to exist in her world means enjoying her “friendly disposition” and a degree of safety, but only if he can avoid “getting in her way if she were angry” (50). Even before the servant’s private revelation to the monk—that the animals are men who were turned into beasts (Kyōka, 65); that the horse was indeed the lost peddler whom

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<sup>87</sup> Although her other episodes with animals were not covered in detail in this study, they are still worth a brief mention: while bathing in the river, the woman scolds the birds and bats that dart over their heads, the frog that visits them riverside and the monkey that jumps on her back. She often exclaims, “Can’t you see I have a guest?” and the monk says he is reminded of a mother reprimanding her children (Kyōka, “The Holy Man of Mount Kōya,” 49-50). The monk observes a similar pattern of interaction between the woman and the husband whose childish behavior leads her to scorn him as well.

Shūchō was pursuing (66)—the protagonist suspects that “if [he] were unfortunate to get on her wrong side, [he] would be as helpless as a monkey fallen from its tree” (50). With the servant’s final disclosure, Shūchō learns that the woman had benefited others with her healing touch since she was a child, but her greatest powers developed after she left her village and ventured further into the Hida mountains. Thus, her propensity for magic allows the woman to reduce men to their baser instincts, a consequence that manifests both emotionally—through their arousal or comfort—and physically—through their transfigurations into actual animals.

Shūchō’s eventual resistance to the woman’s power therefore signifies the spiritual triumph that likely positioned him to obtain his reputation as a renowned ascetic. Poulton observes that Kyōka’s women are “always more than human” and they serve as the “focal points for his protagonists’ encounters with nature.”<sup>88</sup> Although they are meant to represent an “impersonal, natural force,” they display nature as “personified and eroticised.”<sup>89</sup> In “Mount Kōya,” the woman is the force that incentivizes and problematizes the monk’s contact with the uncivilized world which he must overcome if he hopes to achieve personal transformation. For these reasons, Kyōka can also be said to engage in the dualistic presentation of a woman’s mothering nature in service to furthering the protagonist’s journey toward an arbitrary spiritual goal. As the “acceptive” mother figure, magically tending to the wounds and comfort of Shūchō and past villagers, the mountain woman is the “other” that is a beguiling but dangerous obstacle to Shūchō’s monastic aspirations.<sup>90</sup> Just before learning of her past, Shūchō had contemplated halting his journey and setting up permanent residence with the woman since he recognized that “upon returning to the civilized world...the best he could expect was some old crone with bad

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<sup>88</sup> Poulton, “Metamorphosis,” 89.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Mishima Yukio’s “The Shiga Priest and His Love” (*Shigadera shōnin no koi*, 1953; tr. 1966) for another example of the mesmeric relationship that unfolds between a beautiful woman and a holy man.



breath offering [him] a cup of tea” (Kyōka, 64). As the “rejective” mother who might destroy the beings that draw her ire, she is the “other” that initially weakens the monk through leeches and snakes, but without which the story might lose its purpose as a cautionary tale and as a retelling of this famous monk’s origins. Like the water so closely identified with this mountain woman, her maternal influence is portrayed as either a productive and destructive force for the surrounding men who often find her waiting at the end of their quests for self. The maternal body, specifically the womb, connotes the promise of shelter and safety, but also the threat of restriction and isolation. The mothering woman facilitates the protagonist’s retreat into the self and she presents the seductive suggestion that freedom can be found away from social expectations. However, there is the risk of permanent seclusion from society within the realm of the maternal. Thus, the otherworldly maternal figure demonstrates the precarious nature of existing within and apart from the social order.

### *Our Mothers, Ourselves*

Despite the key differences between Tanizaki and Kyōka’s stories (e.g., narrative perspective, the actual imagery used, etc.) both have contributed comparable depictions of women who can simultaneously embody the most comforting and terrifying extremes associated with maternal instinct. The narrative mother is everything and nothing (i.e.: “acceptive” and “rejective”) as appropriate to the needs of the child-like protagonist who will always be locked in a cycle of retreating from and engaging with civilized society. The bewitching mother of Tanizaki’s “Longing,” is conceivably poised on the brink of becoming and being perceived as a “rejective” mother, but the ways in which Jun’ichi realizes his desire through this woman—for comfort, safety, and a return to what is known—is what firmly establishes her as the “acceptive” mother. Kyōka shows greater willingness to investigate the depths of her danger through the

threat of devolution, but her threat provides the context, whether real or imagined, for the spiritual attainment accorded Shūchō's reputation in society.<sup>91</sup> Essentially, her representation depends upon the incorporation of both extremes—adherence to and deviation from expected roles—in order to creatively explore the conflicts that arise between one's hidden and public personas. The multifaceted manifestations of supernaturalism and fantasy facilitates the illustration of these extremes by establishing the intricacy of the maternal in addition to establishing the intricacy of the maternal-filial relationship. Thus, Tanizaki and Kyōka tease out a host of readings concerning the link between individual and society. The spaces coded as belonging within reality or civilization certainly communicate more safety than might be found in peripheral locations (i.e.: the dark mountains or strange dream worlds). Still, seclusion from society also presents an alluring space that puts one in better touch with the feelings and desires that must be submerged for the benefit of communities based upon a well-defined social order. As this thesis moves on to more contemporary stories in the next section, we will see further evidence of the narrative density offered by maternal figures who are explicated through irrational themes, motifs, and modes of storytelling.

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<sup>91</sup> Japanese literature contains a number of stories—i.e., *setsuwa* (tales)—in which women offer opportunities for spiritual learning and growth just as easily as they are shown to offer the opportunity of romance (women can also stand as impediments to spiritual learning). See “How a Monk through Bishamonten's Aid Begot Gold and Obtained a Means of Support” in *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2007), pp. 117-120. There is also the story titled “Three Monks: Part One” in Margaret H. Childs's *Rethinking Sorrow: Revelatory Tales of Late Medieval Japan* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1991), pp. 73-82. The former narrative depicts a deity that manifests as a woman, only to disappear and leave behind a large chunk of gold for the priest who sheltered the woman and eventually conceived a child with her. The latter narrative shows how a murdered woman unites two priests in their shared recollections of how she led them—either as a lost lover or as a victim—to even deeper levels of spiritual commitment. In *The Karma of Words* (1983), William LaFleur offers a more thorough consideration of the literature and themes related to this construction of women, including an examination of the nō drama *Eguchi* in which the titular “courtesan bodhisattva does not demonstrate her comprehension of religious truth by refusing monks at her door; rather, she teaches men the meaning of mujō [or impermanence] while entertaining them in her bedroom... [turning] her pillow into a pulpit of sorts” (William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], 72).

### 3. Reflecting Back on Simpler Days

In this section, we consider literary selections by Takahashi and Ono—“Doll Love” and “Prayers from Nine Years Ago”—and like the primary sources considered in the last section, the mother’s portrayal depends heavily upon themes of physical and social isolation. Also, these works offer insights that are similar to those gained previously—that both the “acceptive” and “rejective” aspects of nurturing can intermingle within a single portrayal of motherhood, an effect emerging from the inclusion of fantasy and spiritualism. However, these works mark a departure from Tanizaki and Kyōka’s narratives by centering the stories on women’s perspectives. Furthermore, they avoid demonizing the maternal, which enables presentations of the women’s “rejective” traits that are more realist. Nevertheless, the protagonists still attend to the narrative complexity that emerges from crossing maternity and the irrational. Takahashi details the contortion of what seemed to be reality, which works to dissect the heroine and place her in literal and figurative opposition to herself. Though not as surreal, Ono’s narrative resembles Takahashi’s in its references to the otherworldly as a means to place the protagonist at odds with herself which draws greater introspection into the practice of mothering amidst an atmosphere of persistent isolation. Whether presenting complex narratives or complex narrative voices, Takahashi and Ono use the tensions within the self and the tensions with society to treat conflicting desires related to fulfilling gendered social roles and connecting meaningfully with relatives and larger communities.

#### *Through the Looking Glass in Takahashi’s “Doll Love”*

Resistance against the common roles for women is an overwhelmingly frequent theme in Takahashi Takako’s literary works. Amanda Seaman, Maryellen Toman Mori, and Julia Bullock,

among other scholars, have analyzed works like Takahashi's "Holy Terror" (1971) and "The Boundless Void" (1970) with an eye toward mythology and fantasy's ability to explicate the struggle between women and expectations. "Doll Love" also attends to these themes, mostly through the incorporation of a fantastic narrative structure—the "end" of the protagonist's first-person account actually leads the reader back to an earlier point in the narrative. In "Doll Love," the protagonist (*Watashi*; "I/me") takes a trip—with no particular destination in mind—and ends up at "T hotel" where she has dreams about bringing to life a doll version of a young man (Tamao) who is also staying in the hotel. At the end of the story, the woman visits a garden near the hotel and is followed by the young man, to whom she begins to refer as her son. Upon calling him her son, she hears a woman's voice nearby and looks around to see a ghostly version of herself asking if there is a hotel in the area—a question she had asked earlier to a then-unknown mother standing with her son in a garden. As in "Longing" and "Mount Kōya," the supernatural shapes the maternal figure as a multi-layered other, betraying the heroine's complicated relationship with society. The narrative also presents a protagonist who only superficially displays the control and wherewithal to concoct her own reality as an escape from social anxieties. Thus, through the dissociative effects of a surreal and otherworldly toward a maternal figure, Takahashi portrays ambivalence and disaffection toward the mothering roles often expected of women.

The strongest—and most thought-provoking—indication of the numinous in "Doll Love" is encapsulated in *Watashi*'s meeting with a mother before she arrives in T City. The protagonist has been walking around for an hour after alighting a train, and she stops at a house where she sees a woman gardening, hoping to receive directions to a hotel in the area. At the end of "Doll Love," this event occurs for a second time, revealing that *Watashi* is either the mother with

whom she spoke, or else one woman among many who form an unceasing procession through time. Both interpretations are plausible, and they allow us to draw intriguing insights from each possibility. In the way that Kyōka's mountain woman and Tanizaki's eternal woman reflect a heretofore repressed or unacknowledged interiority within the protagonist, so, too, does *Watashi*—if she is the same mother from earlier in the story—stand to present to her former self the maternal inclinations that have yet to materialize. On the other hand, as merely one woman among infinitely many, *Watashi*—who directs the successor that will one day replace her—demonstrates the power of the mother to influence even beyond her domestic confines. If we merge both of the above interpretations, we see that the protagonist of “Doll Love” resembles Kyōka's heroine, with both women trivializing the practicalities of time and space in the narrative. Whether the story tells of a woman following her future alter-ego or a woman following the directions of a stranger, the basic premise is that of a non-mother being drawn toward her future reality by a premonitory mother figure. I will further consider the narrative power offered by this “looping” story structure after treating *Watashi*'s depiction as a mother and non-mother on either side of this mystifying encounter.

As a nurturer in T City, *Watashi* displays a conviction in her creative power that we do not see at the start of her journey. This contrast is mainly explicated through the protagonist's dreams which inexplicably manifest through Tamao, a young man whom she will come to regard as her son. Upon arriving at “T Hotel,” and staying there for an evening, *Watashi* meets a young man in an elevator, thinking on his similarity to the wax doll of which she dreamed the night before.<sup>92</sup> In the dream, which repeats a number of times throughout the story, she caresses the

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<sup>92</sup> In fact, *Watashi* admits that even though the man is not identical to her wax doll (*yume no rōningyo to sikkuri onaji to made wa ikanaku to mo*), he resembles the figure quite closely (*sukunaku to mo hijyō ni yoku nite ita*) (Takahashi Takako, “Ningyōdai” [“Doll Love”] in *Heitaiyado. Parutai. Ningyōdai* [“Soldier's Lodging, Partei, and Doll Love”] [Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1998], 352).

face, ears, and chest of a life-size male doll.<sup>93</sup> She senses a heartbeat, but she is uncertain as to whether it belongs to her or the doll (ibid.). She also senses the body parts “awaken” to her touch in a gradual process that highlights her growing ability to create (ibid.). Her descriptions underscore his unhuman nature, but rather than being unnerved by his otherness, Takahashi’s protagonist relishes the opportunity to play Geppetto to his Pinocchio. She names the doll “Tamao,” and in the elevator, she calls the young man by this name before he can introduce himself. Following this encounter, *Watashi* silently muses:

And so from our first encounter I have insisted on calling him Tamao. He may have felt he had no choice except to go along with my forcefulness. [...]

A single human being in itself is no one; but once named, a distinctive identity arises that can be nothing other than the name itself. A name creates content. Naming, then, it seems to me, is a kind of magic. By my naming Tamao, that young man became decisively influenced by the wax doll of the same name in my dream. Without knowing it at all, he had become a person nourished day by day, through me, by the dream I had at night. (Takahashi, “Doll Love,” 206)

Hence, *Watashi* declares her ability to reshape a world that she had once envisioned as a potential wasteland before her arrival in T City. As can be seen with many depictions of the maternal, including those treated above,<sup>94</sup> the protagonist of “Doll Love” symbolizes the power

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<sup>93</sup> Takahashi Takako, “Doll Love” in *This Kind of Woman: Ten Stories by Japanese Women Writers, 1960-1976* ed. Yukiko Tanaka and Elizabeth Hanson, [Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1982], 206.

<sup>94</sup> In “Mount Kōya” we see an emphasis on the physical which touches upon the woman’s ability to draw out Shūchō’s passion (evocation), and birth is symbolized in the passage through the leech forest (procreation). As for “Longing,” there is great emphasis on the cerebral which foregrounds how the mother can draw out Jun’ichi’s mental anguish (evocation) which, as mentioned many times before, occasions his passage from the dream back into reality (procreation).

of evocation and procreation—I consider the latter topic just below—with her ability to both draw forth the life already present within the wax doll of the dream and then push that life into a fully-materialized form outside of her body.

The strength of our narrator’s affirmed beliefs in the passage cited just above calls to mind Seaman’s assessment of how Takahashi’s protagonists changed as the author herself aged: “the mothers and housewives of [Takahashi’s] early days have given way to mature women, able to channel their passions and explore their own formidable intellectual and sexual powers.”<sup>95</sup> Although Seaman refrains from tying this thematic change to a precise point in Takahashi’s career, the difference between the heroine in “Doll Love” and that of another work, like “Holy Terror,” is indicative of this scholar’s assessment.<sup>96</sup> The end of the first part—where *Watashi* explains to Tamao the sexual meaning contained in a painting of a flower<sup>97</sup>—and the beginning of the second—*Watashi* again insists upon the power of her dreams (ibid.)—juxtapose the “sexual” and the “powerful,” thus, illustrating a procreative power over which the protagonist now presides in T City. Moreover, her mastery of such power appears quite spontaneously and insinuates the common belief in women’s work being innately tied to bearing and rearing (i.e.: educating) children. Again, we can draw from Kishida’s discussion of a culturally-constructed maternity, as the scholar observes a widespread fondness for the belief in a maternal affection that simply springs up from within.<sup>98</sup> So readily embodying the sanctioned traits of motherhood, *Watashi* easily takes up the mantle of the idealized mother which casts her as a parallel to the balladeer in “Longing” and the mystical healer in “Mount Kōya.” She is the fantastic mirror that

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<sup>95</sup> Seaman, “A Womb of One’s Own,” 485.

<sup>96</sup> In “Holy Terror,” a pregnant mother is quite helpless to her anxious fantasies in which she pictures her young daughter and unborn child as unhuman entities.

<sup>97</sup> Takahashi, “Doll Love,” 211.

<sup>98</sup> Kishida, *Hahaoya gensō*, 27.

stands opposite the non-mother and shows the kingdom of maternal care over which the woman will eventually reign. Yet, with the suggestion that the protagonist's procreative ability merely materializes as a matter of course, one finds cause to question how much control *Watashi* actually wields in T City. When considered in relation to her actuality before her life in T Hotel, one sees that the control and power she asserts does not guarantee a satisfactory existence, for her transition to motherhood is revealed to be an inevitable and inescapable journey beyond her command.

In contrast to the enchanting and empowering quality of her dreams in T City, the beginning of "Doll Love" surrounds the protagonist with a negativity and powerlessness that pits the desolation of past romances against the maternal love of the future. In these earlier portions of the story that take place during train rides, the otherworldly is primarily contained in *Watashi's* memories of the spiritual guidance espoused by her fortune-teller. The remembered advice leads her to reflect on her dead husband, and her dead lover—both of the men committed suicide—who, according to the fortune-teller, "[entered] the circle of death" as a result of her love.<sup>99</sup> In the words of this spiritual consultant, she is "too lucky," which poses a danger to the men.<sup>100</sup> These assertions have occasioned the protagonist's thoughts on a world "filled with skeletons and corpses that [fall] from the sky day and night," a world in which she "should act as if [she herself] were dead and hide" (ibid., 202). A sense of purposelessness forms at the intersection of these dark thoughts and her directionless, ineffectual train rides: our heroine is

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<sup>99</sup> Takahashi, "Doll Love," 201.

<sup>100</sup> The fortune-teller attempts to clarify himself by likening her relationships to arm wrestling: the strength of her own lucky fate works against the fates of her lovers, and throughout the duration of either romance, as her and her lover's "individual fates were groaning and straining... in their struggle against each other... a circle of death was forming around [her] lover's feet" (ibid.).



shuttled between the various stations, thinking less of the train's final destination<sup>101</sup> than that of her departed lovers'. It is only when she passes by the station at N City, which transfers its passengers to the line bound for T City, that she feels "guided by a peculiar sensation"<sup>102</sup> that is ill-defined and evocative of the "indefinite realm" into which she enjoys blindly wandering.<sup>103</sup> At the end of the story, we can reflect on the sensation as a clear reference to the act of mothering that she will take upon herself in T City, but as part of the first sentence in the narrative, the reference merely obscures the dubious construction of maternal instinct within the unassuming dynamics of predetermination.

As a traveler and as a site for layered contradictions, Takahashi's protagonist again boasts a construction resembling those presented by Tanizaki and Kyōka. The esotericism (i.e.: the "circles" of death) informs *Watashi's* existence as "lucky" and unlucky. The same esoteric discourse frames this woman as a harbinger of death, while her later experiences in T City connect her to life. Even the nature of these different modes of framing—the symbolism and intangibility required to explicate death vs. the palpable presentations of life<sup>104</sup>—contribute to her conflicted presentation. Furthermore, she models an anxiety related to an absent "other" (i.e.: the deceased and unattainable lover) that calls to mind the unease demonstrated by Jun'ichi. Similarly, the fascination with the "other" to be found on the other side of the parent-child divide informs the changed emotional state of both Jun'ichi and *Watashi*. These are among other

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<sup>101</sup> *Watashi* explains, "I had a habit of getting on trains without having a particular purpose. When you have a destination everything is defined accordingly, but when you have none the land itself takes on an air of ambiguity. I enjoy the feeling of wandering unaware into that indefinite realm" (ibid., 199).

<sup>102</sup> This "sensation" appears as an incredibly white light that she sees as the train passes the station at N City (ibid., 200). This white light reappears again when she actually meets herself as mother, but rather than sparking immediate recognition, it brings about a sense of an "absolute order [descending] from somewhere" which compels to go to T City (ibid., 203). The white imagery appears again when she sees the "pure white" wax doll in her dreams (ibid., 206).

<sup>103</sup> See previous note.

<sup>104</sup> Even in *Watashi's* dream world, much of her experience is related through her physical contact with the wax doll (a contrast unto itself when viewed as a union of physical acts and sensations with ideas).

conflicting patterns and concepts that redefine and deepen Takahashi's story and heroine from even the earliest stages of the narrative. I return now to the question of how the irrationality inherent to the "cyclical" story structure thrusts these contrasts into stark relation with each other, thus creating an atmosphere of futility and ambivalence regarding *Watashi's* path toward the maternal. What follows will serve my final argument concerning the mother figure's utility as a "mirror" in this story: despite *Watashi's* parallels to both the protagonists and the nurturers in Tanizaki and Kyōka's stories, her construction in "Doll Love" figures the maternal as a dissolution, rather than a reconstitution, of self.

Near the story's end, *Watashi* appears as the mother who directs a "ghostly woman"—her past self—to T Hotel, collapsing two points along her journey into a single moment that signifies progression, termination, and preordination. This is a moment that challenges her earlier musings regarding the power and agency granted by the dreams experienced at T Hotel. Moreover, it is a moment that suggests an unwitting entry into a fundamentally sequestered space or timeline wherein fate, not choice, will ultimately limit her contact to the male victims foreseen by the fortune-teller. One particular worry that plagues the protagonist during her travels is especially useful to note at this point in the analysis:

I could clearly see the signs that [my husband and lover's] lives really had been sucked into a circle of death. Like losing yourself, spinning round and round in a whirlpool that swirls unnoticed in the middle of a dark night ocean:  
irresistible, all too easy, yet final. (Takahashi, "Doll Love," 202)

Likely stemming from her desire to avoid harming others—an obsession that she says had overtaken her life—*she* may now be the one who has wandered into a "whirlpool" that trivializes her influence upon the world, effectively rendering her as nonexistent as her former partners.

Certainly from her enjoyment of the mysteriously manifesting dreams we can tell that this whirlpool is just as irresistible as she first imagined, but the narrative's conclusion confirms the whirlpool's finality. There may be no other reality for *Watashi* beyond her existence as the woman who either follows or beckons her reflection toward T Hotel. Might not this peculiar sense of predetermination undermine the displays of powerful will that characterized her life in T City? More importantly, does this will even count for anything in light of what happens—or rather, does not happen—after meeting her alter ego?

As the recipient of directions, she witnesses herself “disappear” after walking off toward the voice that calls her “Mother” (205). As the giver, she calls Tamao her “son” just before the woman's arrival, and once she instructs the “ghost” toward T City, the story ends. Twice readers have seen the protagonist pointed toward motherhood, twice the author has placed a seeming oblivion at the end of that journey,<sup>105</sup> and there is a foreboding sense that “twice” comprises but a fraction of an infinite succession. In her commentary on the diabolical women (*mashō no onna*) she includes in many of her works, Takahashi discusses the implications of following or diverging from maternity: “The maternal is on the side of social order, and the demonic, disorder. The maternal sides with morals, and the demonic with the amoral. Something maternal puts the breaks on women, redirects women's energy toward children, and dreams up women

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<sup>105</sup> One possible argument against this interpretation may arise from a close analysis of the passage that comes just before the protagonist's request for directions. After arriving in T City and walking around for an hour, she comes to the garden where she sees her “middle-aged” alter ego (Takahashi, “Doll Love,” 204). As the woman's back is turned, the protagonist seems to enter a trance in which she has access to the memories and sensations of the other woman. She senses the weight of the copper watering can the woman is holding, she says the can has been passed down through her family for generations, and she says she has been growing roses for over eight years (*ibid.*). This calls into question whether the protagonist at this point is indeed witnessing a future version of herself, as the end of the narrative betrays few indications of how much time has passed since she arrived in T City. However, the story's final passages do offer a cursory mention of *Watashi* having to water the roses every day after she finds the garden (222). It is possible that a period of eight years does in fact pass like this, with the protagonist tending to the plants daily. Still, there is the matter of the supposedly inherited watering can to which I hope other scholars will eventually apply their wits.

who turn to family tranquility and childbearing.”<sup>106</sup> In this statement, we also see the vague reference to “something maternal” (*boseiteki na nanika*) that can steer unwitting women toward motherhood. The mysterious power of this “something” has been highlighted by the story’s translators who note that Takahashi routinely explores realms where “the formless and the relative in everyday life are transformed somehow into the definite” (198). The same can be said of this story, as the unavoidable repetition concretizes the view of motherhood as seen in Takahashi’s other works: as a loss of identity. Although *Watashi* establishes a new reality for herself in T City—by way of mothering Tamao—she has surrendered her former reality and become unrecognizable to her past self. Moreover, in her maternal role, *Watashi* describes the past self as a ghostly figure, confirming the dissolution of her previous existence and trading the hope to be a good wife for the possibility of being a wise mother.

If such an interpretation overstates the troubles of entering into motherhood, then at the very least, we can shift our consideration to the isolation that suffuses “Doll Love” and pits *Watashi* against the foreign terrain of parenthood. As already seen with the fortune-teller’s predictions, the story foregrounds discussions of spiritual esotericism and the nonsensical in order to compromise what little familiarity the protagonist possesses vis-à-vis her environment, relatives, and acquaintances. Essentially, these conversations often indicate a disconnect between *Watashi* and everyone besides the son Tamao. Her conversations with the soothsayer leave her feeling socially displaced with the weighty realization that love might be forever unavailable to her. As an example of the nonsensical, a conversation that *Watashi* has with a western couple staying at the hotel is useful: the protagonist struggles to follow what the couple says to her, and

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<sup>106</sup> Takahashi Takako, “Sei: onna ni okeru mashō to bosei” [Gender: The Diabolic and the Maternal in Women] (1976), quoted in Yoshikawa Toyoko, “Takahashi Takako no ‘mashō no onna’” [Takahashi Takako’s Diabolical Women], *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kanshō* 45, no. 4 (1980): 68.

the connections between the couple's own shared remarks seem tenuous.<sup>107</sup> Among all the characters she meets near the end of the story, *Watashi* only has in-depth, relatively coherent,<sup>108</sup> and effectual conversations with Tamao, discussing obscure artwork and music, his progress in his studies, and her interest in roses. With every other character, including her own alter ego, a verbal exchange that involves more than two utterances is rare. From this we see that the protagonist is mostly detached from everyone, and even herself. The dissociation from self is also constructed very tellingly through the mental "fog" that overtakes her when she speaks up to ask her future self about T City (Takahashi, "Doll Love," 204). She describes the feeling as the way one feels "just at the moment of waking up" (ibid.). While this is described as a psychological phenomenon at this point in the story, the effect becomes visually perceptible when she is described as ghostly in the conclusion. Ruminating further on her fogginess, *Watashi* reasons:

On the brink of waking, when you still want to sleep, it seems as though if you actually voice that desire, with that wish you will tumble into a paralyzing sort of dead sleep and, once there, infinity will open up and everything will appear distinctly familiar and well loved. (ibid., 204-205)

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<sup>107</sup> One might argue that as foreigners, the difficulty with following their conversation may lie in a lack of linguistic competence. However, upon inspecting the original Japanese text, there is nothing particularly marked about the couple's Japanese. They are neither excessively familiar nor polite, and they display comfort and capability with the language's grammar structures. No hesitations, uneasy facial expressions, or surprising uses of dialect are attributed to the pair. Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that it is the content, not the language, that plays a role in the incoherence of *Watashi*'s dialogue with the couple. The exchange is a lengthy one, but it begins with the wife asking *Watashi*, "You, too, came to see it?" without indicating what inspired her question. The husband soon remarks, "Earlier, I didn't agree; it was my wife who felt so enthusiastic. But then...I don't know how to say it, but when I got to be this age I thought what a splendid thing it was, and I came to appreciate it." *Heitaiyado. Parutai. Ningyōai* [Soldier's Lodging, Partei, and Doll Love] (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1998), 368-69.

<sup>108</sup> Some instances of the dialogue between *Watashi* and Tamao also suggest a degree of disjointedness, but *Watashi*'s inner dialogue is typically shown to fill in potential gaps in meaning. Moreover, when the potential for misunderstanding results from the protagonist's questions or statements, Tamao continues the conversation without signaling a lack of comprehension. The result is a sense of a telepathic connection between the two characters.

With this bit of theorizing, the protagonist displays her own oracular talents, but in this case, warnings from the past are outmatched by the veiled, yet compelling invitations from the future.

Maryellen Toman Mori has written on subversion and fantasy in Takahashi's fiction, stating that the author "[plumbs] a female protagonist's fantasy world to reveal her distrust of the discourses that create communal 'reality,' her desire to violate boundaries...[of] rational thinking or cultural norms, and her yearning for a utopian counter-reality produced by...[dissolving those] boundaries."<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the procreative imagination speaks of an imagination centered on visions of bringing life into the world in distinct ways: bringing the life contained within the mother into a world beyond herself; or bringing life into a closed off space and thus creating a world within herself. All three narratives examined thus far betray an immense depth in their ability to signify these different manifestations of procreative imagination. However, Takahashi's touches profoundly upon a loss of self that differs from the loss of self that Kyōka signifies with the threat of leeches and devolution in "Mount Kōya." Where the leeches incite a dread that compels Shūchō to flee, the mother in T City compels *Watashi* to cross beyond the event horizon. While devolution leaves intact some semblance of the human psyche—we see this, after all, in the merchant-turned-horse that still recognizes the monk—the protagonist in "Doll Love" is so far gone that she ultimately lacks the recognition of her former and future self, such that she might question and consider diverging from the path that she will take and has taken toward motherhood.

*Adjusting the Rear View Mirror in Ono's "Prayers from Nine Years Ago"*

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<sup>109</sup> Maryellen Toman Mori, "The Subversive Role of Fantasy in the Fiction of Takahashi Takako," *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 28, no. 1 (1994): 29.

At the time of this writing, the critical examinations of Ono’s “Prayers from Nine Years Ago” are still very scarce, both in Japan and abroad, but the narrative offers a sympathetic presentation of a woman searching to reconcile her existences as both an acceptive and rejective mother, making it a compelling addition to this particular investigation. The story follows Andō Sanae—a 35-year-old single mother living with her parents near the coast of Ōita prefecture—as she makes a trip with her mentally-disabled son Kebin to collect special seashells<sup>110</sup> for the gravely-ill adult son of Sanae’s friend, Watanabe Mitsu. During the present-day excursion, Sanae’s thoughts frequently return to a trip she made to Montreal nine years prior, giving readers an early indication of the story title’s significance. Mitchan, as Sanae affectionately refers to the middle-aged Watanabe Mitsu, was also present during the trip, as well as five other Japanese women and a Canadian acquaintance who had just ended his work for the JET Program. While interweaving Sanae’s present-day experiences with her memories of the Montreal trip, we see parallels between the two storylines that lead to rich explications of the past (before Sanae was a mother), thus informing the protagonist’s *satori*-like (“enlightenment”) experience at the end of the present-day narrative. A third-person omniscient narrator—rather than Sanae herself—relates the story, but Sanae’s feelings and memories are the most privileged in the text, and those of the surrounding characters are typically explored through the viewpoint of our heroine. Furthermore, the past memories are interwoven with Sanae’s current experiences in a manner that strongly suggests the woman’s subjectivity even if the narrative voice is not explicitly portrayed as hers. Examples of this affective recollection of the past will be provided below and they will highlight

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<sup>110</sup> The seashells, of pink, purple and coffee-colored varieties, are on an island, Ayashima (文島), near Ōita prefecture and the shells reputedly hold the power to ward off evil (Ono Masatsugu, “Prayers from Nine Years Ago” [*Kyūnen mae no inori*] in *Kyūnen mae no inori*, [Tokyo: Kodansha, 2014], 32). This story also mentions another island, Kuroshima (黒島), which is a real island off the coast of Ōita prefecture. The island of Ayashima, however, appears to only exist in the world of Ono’s narrative.

how “Prayers” captures the same qualities we have seen in the stories by Tanizaki, Kyōka, and Takahashi. I will show that while Ono’s “Prayers” does not situate the narrative voice within the subjectivity of the protagonist—unlike what we saw with the previous stories—it does include elements that draw upon maternalism, fantasy, and spiritualism as shown by the protagonist and Mitsu. In Sanae’s imaginative negotiations with her past—sometimes she fancies having heard a voice that she is also sure that could not have been there—Ono details the protagonist’s struggle to reconcile her ambivalent feelings about connecting with her child or other people, sometimes as a non-mother and at other times, a mother.

As a single parent to a young son with whom communication is almost nonexistent, the sense of Sanae’s isolation is substantial, which likens her to the first two heroines already considered in this thesis. Early in the story, after Sanae’s mother relates the news of Mitchan’s hospitalized son to the protagonist, we see two examples—both from Sanae’s mother—of the criticism with which Sanae must repeatedly contend as a single parent. After sharing the news, Sanae’s mother says, “It’s gotten hard to face Mitchan since you’ve come to such a state” (Ono, “Prayers from Nine Years Ago”, 11).<sup>111</sup> The state (*kogena koto*; lit. “this kind of thing”) to which Sanae’s mother refers is undoubtedly Sanae’s separation from Kebin’s father,<sup>112</sup> and her return to Ōita as a single mother (Ono, 11). Just after her mother’s remark, the narrative states that “even in the conservative backcountry [where Sanae lives with her parents] it would not be rare to find single-parent households.” However, when coupled with another reproachful comment from Sanae’s mother, this detail about the area’s changing demographics serves to highlight Sanae’s

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<sup>111</sup> “*Anta ga kogena koto ni natta mon jyakara, Mitchan-ne ni kao o awasenikuu natta*” (or in the standard Japanese dialect, “*Anata ga konna koto ni natta mono dakara, Mitchan-ne ni kao o awasenikuku natta*”).

<sup>112</sup> Kebin’s father, Frédéric, is Canadian whom Sanae met during her trip to Montreal, but his being mostly absent from the narrative works to emphasize the conflicted relationship between Sanae and her son: the pair are very disconnected as a result of his developmental disability, but naturally, he is wholly dependent upon Sanae.



nonconformity. When handing Sanae a postcard about Sanae’s upcoming high school reunion, her mother predicts that there will be other single mothers at the event. When Sanae admits that she feels disinclined to go, her mother replies, “Well, you are free after all” (ibid.).<sup>113</sup> These strained interactions between Sanae and her mother—which often consist of Sanae simply listening to her mother’s suggestions and criticisms without responding—underscore the gentler nature of the relationship between Sanae and Mitsu. Whereas the relationship with her own mother results in frequent criticism against the woman Sanae already is, the past relationship with Mitsu, becomes a guide as to the sort of woman Sanae can become: a woman who possesses the spiritual power to ignore superficial failings and defects and to establish deeper connections.

Ono crafts Mitsu as the mother who is being sought, which should be a familiar trope from the earlier narratives. However, rather than being sought by a distanced child, she is sought by Sanae, and in this way, Mitsu resembles the future version of Takahashi’s *Watashi* in “Doll Love.” Yet, we can still say that Mitsu is quite distinct from Takahashi’s depiction because Sanae does not find Mitsu at the end of the journey taken in the present-day storyline—instead, Sanae “discovers” Mitsu in recollections of Montreal. Thus, Sanae travels back in time, negotiating with old experiences and finding new use in the past, or what she believes is past experience. This last suggestion that Sanae may be negotiating with experiences that are not necessarily from her past is an important point, as I argue for the presence of an interiority—notably, a fantasy-driven interiority—in this text. While Ono’s story does not contain elements of fantasy that divorce our protagonist from reality, we can still see that Sanae possesses an imagination through which she manages to pull out deeper meanings from her interactions with

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<sup>113</sup> “*Dōse hima nan jyakara, to haha wa an ni hinan shita.*”

others. Very often, the instances of Sanae's imagination emerge during moments when Sanae, as a non-mother in the past, relates to other mothers in the story.

In one instance, Sanae recalls the plane ride to Canada as she sits on the ferry with her son during their trip to Ayashima:

In the heat and the swaying of the boat, her slumbering heart slowly melted and spread throughout her body.... Water leaks out through the cracks of a dark wall. Not water—rather, a crying voice. A baby was crying. Sanae's eyelids were heavy. She looked over to see Watanabe Mitsu. *Why is Mitchan beside me?* From Sanae's memories of the time, it should have been Jacques Caro sitting beside her. [...] *So, it couldn't have been Mitchan.* (Ono, 38-39)<sup>114</sup>

This moment of mistaken recollection suggests more dream than memory, as the narrative next provides a more objective presentation of the details surrounding Sanae's trip: her seven other traveling companions, their names, their positions throughout the flight cabin, etc. Later in the story, Sanae's present-day thoughts about visiting the hospital to see Mitsu occasion other memories about the plane ride to North America. Sanae believes she actually heard Mitsu expressing an opinion about the crying baby, but again, the protagonist believes this is a mistaken memory (*machigatta kioku*):

Within that plane crossing the Pacific Ocean, Sanae listened to the baby crying. Mitchan, as if soothing the irritation of the surrounding passengers—no, she was speaking out against them—strongly remarked, to no one in particular, that it is

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<sup>114</sup> “Sono atsu to fune no yure ni, nemuri no kaku ga yukkuri to tokedashi, karada zentai ni hirogatte itta.... Kurai hekimen ni hibigairi, soko kara mizu ga morete iru. Mizu de wa nakatta. Nakigoe datta. Akanbou ga naite ita. Mabuta ga kasanatta. Yoko o miru to Watanabe Mitsu ga ita. Dōshite Mitchan-ne ga yoko ni iru no darō ka. Sanae no kioku de wa, ano toki, Shikago made tobu hikōki no naka de yoko ni suwatte ita no wa, Jaku Karō datta hazu da. [...] Dakara yoko ni ita no ga Mitchan-ne no hazu ga nai.”

normal for children to cry. But Sanae knew that it was a mistaken memory. [...]

Still, there was a recollection of hearing Mitchan's voice. (Ono, 54-55)<sup>115</sup>

In yet another recollection, readers learn why the Sanae of present-day has come to denounce her memories of Mitsu: in speaking privately with Eiko—a different traveler in the group, and a long-time friend to Mitsu—Sanae learns of the unlikelihood for Mitsu to speak about how children normally behave, given that her own son was unable to cry, or emote in the ways expected of other children (Ono, 89-90).<sup>116</sup> Essentially, these remembrances of Mitsu and the journey to Canada foreground an ongoing process of negotiation that is taking place within Sanae.

Although Sanae consistently remembers the crying baby, she struggles to recall Mitsu's role in the memory, forming at least three distinct depictions of her friend. Either Mitsu was sitting beside Sanae quietly, or Mitsu actually made a pointed remark in order to dismiss the hostile passengers, or Mitsu was nowhere near Sanae. The possibility for Mitsu, as a mother herself, to embody different actualities within Sanae's mind is suggestive of the contradictory depictions seen in the earlier stories. It is tempting to select the representation of Mitsu that is most accurate to what actually took place during the journey, but in fact, the woman's key role in Sanae's psyche relates to our protagonist's feelings regarding parenthood. On the one hand, the protagonist understands that there is a standard of behavior for children, and even Eiko, upon observing a black woman and her crying child in Canada, remarks, "Whether black or white,

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<sup>115</sup> "Taiheiyō o koete iku hikōki no naka de akanbō ga hageshiku nakisakebu no o kikinagara, Mitchan-ne ga, dare ni mukatte na no ka, shūi no iradachi wo nadameru yō ni, iya sore ni hanpatsu suru yō ni, kodomo wa naku mono da to tsuyoku itta no wo oboete iru. Shikashi sore ga machigatta kioku da to wakatte mo iru. [...] Na no ni, Sanae ni wa Mitchan-ne no koe o kiita kioku ga aru no da."

<sup>116</sup> Eiko discloses this information because she is surprised by Sanae's reference to the comment supposedly made by Mitsu on the plane. Eiko mentions that when she and Mitsu began to notice that the son did not become upset over teasing and he did not respond at all to harsh words, the two women cried bitterly (Ono, "Prayers from Nine Years Ago," 89-90).

children everywhere are the same” (Ono, 87). However, this observation is immediately thrown into contrast with Mitsu’s life—and by extension Sanae’s life, since Kebin, too, is shown to be different from other children—when Sanae relates to Eiko the details of Mitsu’s comment on the plane. Thus, just as Kyōka portrays the mothering but dangerous woman and Tanizaki presents the unattainable but somehow relatable mother, Sanae has constructed a woman who is both aware and unaware of the realities and challenges of motherhood. The Mitsu of Sanae’s past presents an opportunity to acknowledge the difficulties of raising children (whether they are typical or atypical), but Mitsu’s remark on the plane, whether real or not, connotes a sense of resignation to one’s fate. In other words, even if children present an especially difficult burden, everyone would be better served by simply accepting the challenges without question or complaint. After all, as much as everyone might desire to flee the plane—or more aptly, the reality of being a mother—escape is quite impossible, or at the very least, not a simple feat.

Another manifestation of Sanae’s imagination is again connected to her past and to Mitsu. During their trip, the two women shared a room at the hotel, and one night, Sanae wakes up to see Mitsu staring out the window at the garbage collectors on the street. This brings about their conversation about Mitsu’s family—a husband and a son who are garbage collectors—and Mitsu’s concerns about how her son will continue to work once his father dies, or how the son will get on when Mitsu herself passes on. After their long conversation, Mitsu is standing with her back against the glass, and Sanae, presumably looking at the woman’s reflection, notices “sadness standing directly behind” Mitsu (Ono, 67).<sup>117</sup> This sadness is described as always being beside Mitsu but invisible during the day, and on this night, even though it rubs Mitsu’s shoulder in consolation, it really only grows the pain that exists in the heart of the two women—one of

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<sup>117</sup> “*Mitchan-ne no sugu ushiro ni kanashimi ga tatte ita.*”

them being stroked by it and one of them serving as witness to the “gesture” (*shigusa*).<sup>118</sup> This image of a visibly rendered embodiment of sadness is not the only one to appear in this narrative, as it also appears at the end of the story when Sanae saves Kebin from walking off a pier. A similar motif appears in Tanizaki’s “Longing,” when Jun’ichi looks down to see his shadow which proclaims, “I’m your companion, not your servant [...] and since you’re here all alone, I thought I’d keep you company.”<sup>119</sup> In both “Longing” and “Prayers,” these companions are immaterial and unshakeable, thus reminding the protagonists of inescapable loneliness. The possibility of outrunning one’s shadow is no greater or less than that of extinguishing one’s reflection. Furthermore, the shadow and reflection present figures that are both separate and inalienable, speaking to the ways in which emotions can possess a physicality all their own and yet still be so deeply felt. Despite the difficulty of recognizing Mitsu as a woman who is, forgive the cliché, beside herself with sadness, Sanae has glimpsed the woman she will become by the close of the narrative. After considering one other instance of the imagination by which Sanae negotiates with the meaning or comfort to be derived from the past, I will also present the spiritual motifs that testify to Sanae’s progress toward the accepting and enduring nature witnessed in Mitsu.

In “Prayers,” we see evidence that Sanae’s imagination can also act as a magnifying lens upon her insecurities, particularly when it comes to fitting within her mother’s vision of an ideal family. Naturally, these brief moments of fantasy often occur in her romantic relationships, as seen when Sanae recalls dating a boss twenty years her senior. On occasion, when she saw

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<sup>118</sup> “Sanae wa kizuuta. Shikashi sono sonzai ni kizuute mo odoroki wa shinakatta. Mado o se ni shita Mitchan-ne no sugu ushiro ni kanasimi ga tatte ita. Sore wa Mitchan-ne no soba ni zutto ita no da keredo, hi no hikari no shita de wa mienakatta no da. [...] Mitchan-ne no kata o yasashiku sasutte ita. Shikashi kanashimi ga okonau sonna nagusame no shigusa wa, sasurareru mono to sore ni kizuute shimatta mono no kokoro no itami o masu dake datta.”

<sup>119</sup> Tanizaki, “Longing for Mother,” 473.

glaring signs of the man’s age—such as his thinning hair—she would imagine hearing her mother’s scorn so clearly that she felt the need to glance around and verify that the woman was, in fact, not there. As the mother’s imaginary voice would level various criticisms (“Dating a man that much older!? A man the same age as your father!?”),<sup>120</sup> Sanae would think of the responses that might demonstrate the propriety of the relationship.<sup>121</sup> However, the voice would then retort, “Yeah, well he’s got kids, doesn’t he? Three of them! And they’re grown kids who look the same age as you!” (ibid.).<sup>122</sup> Sanae’s imagination attributes the negativity that stirs up her anxieties to an outside force. However, these thoughts occur when Sanae is already living away from her parents’ home, an indication of the degree to which she has internalized these criticisms as a voice that can act separately from her mother.

Of course, our heroine’s internal voice is in no way unusual, as many people perform self-criticism as a means to summon up motivation or to maintain a certain moral code. For Sanae, however, the constructed voice presents an opportunity to defend her desires and choices. To actually bring her fantasy to fruition—in which she is comfortable with expressing dissent—would incite more of the same contempt that already disadvantages her as a nonconforming woman, and by extension a “rejective” mother. However, the use of a private virtual space offers protection for her hopes to connect as she wishes with men and their children without stigma. This suggestion of stigma is evident when Sanae recalls dating another man, during one particular outing with the family, she imagines being able to easily reconstruct the face of the children’s dead mother from the faces of her companion’s children—all of whom sit directly

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<sup>120</sup> “*Soge na toshiue no otoko to! Otōsan to toshi no kawaran otoko to!*” (Ono, “Prayers from Nine Years Ago,” 43).

<sup>121</sup> “‘But it’s not an affair.’ In her heart, this is how Sanae would protest. ‘He doesn’t have a wife. She died a long time ago from illness.’” [*Demo furin de wa nai no da. Sou mune no uchi de hanron shita. Otoko ni tsuma wa inakatta. Zuibun mae ni tsuma o byōki de nakushite ita.*] (ibid.).

<sup>122</sup> “*Jya kedo, kodomo ga oru jya nee ka! Sannin mo! Sore mo omae to toshi no kawaran yō na kodomo ga!*”

opposite Sanae and their father, indicating the unspoken antipathy that will doom the relationship (Ono, 45).<sup>123</sup> However, the hope and worry, as it relates to strengthening her connection with others, is most evident when Sanae's interactions with Kebin are framed in terms of spiritual motifs.

When Sanae and Kebin alight from the ferry after arriving on Ayashima, many island tourists who see Kebin begin to fawn over the young boy, remarking, "How cute."<sup>124</sup> Sanae looks over at the unresponsive Kebin, his profile appearing so angelic that it might actually stir someone to reach out and pinch his soft cheeks in order to pull forth the light and joy that must be hiding within him (ibid.). However, Sanae is aware that the only thing to emerge would be the crying, thrashing child that she must then pry off. Nonetheless, Sanae is also susceptible—like many of the onlookers—to those moments in which her child appears impossibly perfect. When they visit a shrine on the island, she sees Kebin in a praying position and his beautiful features (his mouth, hair, etc.) are described as giving the impression that he was divinely favored, even if only in terms of his physical characteristics.<sup>125</sup> Onlookers are able to take joy in their momentary glimpses of Kebin's charming features, even occasionally remarking that he appears unrelated to Sanae. While such comments are made with good intentions, they are unhelpful for a mother who is demonstrably imperfect, according to social codes, and struggling to meaningfully connect with a son who also deviates from social norms. The trip is meant as one avenue for forging a better connection, but their bond is most strengthened by Sanae's sudden recollection of taking part in a silent prayer with Mitsu nine years earlier.

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<sup>123</sup> "Sukoshi sōzōryoku o hatarakasereba, sono kao kara naku natta hahaoya no kao ga kantan ni fukugen dekita darō. Sanae wa otoko to narande suwari, teeburu no hantaigawa ni sannin de narande suwatta kodomotachi to taimen suru katachi ni natta."

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>125</sup> "Katachi no totonotta hana to kuchibiru wo miru dake de, kami ni hiikisareta utsukushii ko (demo, hiikishite moraeta no wa sono ten dake datta) da to sugu ni wakaru" (ibid., 82)

Sanae's recollection of Mitsu in prayer appears at the beginning and the end of the story, and in each case, there is a strong connotation of "enlightenment," or else, a powerful feeling of relief and connectedness. When hearing about Mitsu's ill son at the start of the story, Sanae is described, rather dramatically, as recalling the woman's name as though being illuminated by a single ray of light suddenly breaking through the clouds.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, Sanae remembers the image of Mitsu praying, but her memory of the woman is cut short by her mother's continued talking. However, after a tense episode with Kebin, Sanae recalls the vision again before being taken over by a sense of clarity that manifests as a sudden outpouring of feeling. When the protagonist and her son return to the mainland and disembark from the ferry, they walk toward her waiting parents hand-in-hand. However, when Sanae lets go of Kebin's hand, he begins to walk diagonally toward the edge of the wharf. At this point, we again see Kebin described divinely, suggesting that if he were truly perfect, he would be completely safe even if he reached the edge before his mother could stop him. Nonetheless, readers are immediately disabused of this notion by a statement confirming Kebin's utterly human existence and more importantly, his connection to Sanae:

As an assured angel, it would be fine for Kebin simply to walk off across the water and take off into the sky, passing through the halo of light that radiated from the sun. But even in the moments when Kebin wasn't the worm<sup>127</sup> being

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<sup>126</sup> "...*kyū ni kumoma kara issetu no hikari ga sashi, 'Watanabe Mitsu' to iu na ga Sanae o terashita*" (ibid., 10).

<sup>127</sup> Due to his tantrums—during which he flails around wildly, and if Sanae is present, clings to her tightly—Kebin is frequently referred to as a "worm" (*mimizū*). Looking back to Takahashi's narrative, in which the child was figured as a doll, there is a tendency for these contemporary works to other children, setting them apart from the earlier narratives in which the mother was othered.



pushed off [by his mother], he was most certainly not an angel. He was Sanae and Frédéric's child.<sup>128</sup>

Sanae manages to save the child in time, but by suddenly grabbing him and pulling him from the ledge, she causes him to drop the bottle of seashells they had collected from Ayashima. With little regard for Kebin's dislike for human contact, and with even less regard for the lost keepsake, Sanae immediately takes her son in a tight embrace. Just after this dramatic scene, Sanae remembers the trip to Canada when two members of their small tourist group became lost. As the group leader searched for the missing women, the rest of the group decided to wait near a church. Mitsu, entered the church and after being joined by the rest of the group, they begin to pray silently.

Sanae never learned the exact details of the prayer made by Mitsu, but she witnessed a mixture of happiness and sadness in her friend's smiling gaze. When the narrative returns the reader to Sanae embracing her son on the wharf, her "sadness" is presented as a disembodied entity—just as she had seen with Mitsu. No longer within Sanae, it is portrayed as an invisible figure that is "moved" by the scene of the mother and child and stoops down to whisper something in Sanae's ear. Whatever was uttered by the imaginary entity, we never know, but our lack of knowledge does not preclude one's appreciation for the moving descriptions of what Sanae senses as she holds Kebin: his cold hands in hers, the smell of the salty sea in his hair, the warmth of his head. The hidden interaction between Sanae and her sadness, along with the unknown prayer by Mitsu, continue the trope seen in earlier literature, whereby the exact dynamics that take place within the mother figure are elided or are simply so complicated as to

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<sup>128</sup> "Tenshi sakkuri no Kebin wa, jyūryō nado mukankei ni sono mama suiijyō o aruki, taiyō ga nagekakeru hikari no wa wo kugurinagara tenkū ni matte mo yokatta. Shikashi Kebin wa hikichigirareta mimizu de nai toki de mo kesshite tenshi de wa nakatta. Sanae to Furederikku no ko datta." (Ono, "Prayers from Nine Years Ago," 110).

escape precise interpretation. Furthermore, the final moment of release occasioned Jun'ichi's return to reality in "Longing," but in "Prayers" we see that just as the seashells have fallen away, so has the veneer of the perfect child that plagued Sanae's attempt to connect with her child without the intrusion of familial ideals. In her recalling Mitsu's ability to express at least partial joy—even in light of the struggles she had made known to Sanae in the hotel—the protagonist finds a way to acknowledge the inescapable presence of sadness without letting it dominate her outlook. In this narrative we have a mother figure seeking out another mother figure, and though Sanae does not meet within Mitsu in the present-day storyline, it was actually the Mitsu of the past that Sanae unknowingly sought out. Thus, even in a moment of mothering that some would consider flawed,<sup>129</sup> the protagonist finds a way to connect with her imperfect child, finally accepting the humanity within both of them.

This work contains a number of other compelling themes and tropes besides those outlined above is undeniable, especially given the length of the narrative. Nevertheless, the pronounced use of fantasy and spirituality allows Sanae to contest the boundaries of social expectations, to negotiate the past so that it maintains its worth even after she has transitioned to a new stage of life (i.e.: motherhood), and to learn to accept herself as she is such that she might connect more profoundly with those closest to her. With the fresh outlooks granted by her creative mind, Sanae reevaluates herself and how she can continue to live, and even thrive, in society.

## **4. Conclusion**

Each of the writers considered in this thesis place non-mothers and mothers alike on long, meandering journeys, at the end of which one finds the maternal figure who is meant to break

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<sup>129</sup> After the incident on the wharf, Sanae's mother sharply reprimands her daughter for letting go of Kebin's hand.

through some sort of suppression within the protagonist. However, none of these journeys are remarkably long to begin with. In “Longing,” “Doll Love,” and “Prayers,” the journeys mostly dwell within the mind, and in “Mount Kōya,” the journey is only as far as the distance from the story-teller to his captivated audience. This is to say that the theme of travel is an especially useful one in these stories that also foreground the appearance of the uncanny and the unexplainable. In the unfamiliar domains to which travel leads the protagonists, the mysteries presented by the otherworldly do not seem entirely far-fetched. Even more telling is the plausibility of the most unfamiliar spaces residing within oneself.

For Jun’ichi, *Watashi*, and Sanae, the spaces clearly grow out of unsettled minds in which an eerie dreamscape, a trip through eternity, and the changeable memory speak more so to the contradictions within the protagonists that mask the familiar as unfamiliar. In “Mount Kōya,” the story of asceticism—representing the familiar Buddhist act of confession—constrains the unfamiliar woman who speaks to the instinctual passion that lies within the revered monk. Moreover, the metaphors of birth in “Mount Kōya”—of course tightly bound with the maternal—convey the idea of materialization, or in other words, bringing something into being. As these stories unveil the emotions and motivations that forge the protagonists’ identities, the heroes either bring themselves or others into being through their embodiment of or interaction with the maternal in the narratives.

The person who materializes—i.e., wakes up—at the end of “Longing” is not the fearful child who does not recognize his mother and cannot express himself, but rather the tearful man who easily recalls his mother and her passing two years earlier. No matter how the stories of his dangerous travels unfold, what materializes from Monk Shūchō’s tale is the man who goes on to earn the grand reputation mentioned by the narrator. In “Doll Love,” what materializes is a

maternal instinct that brings *Watashi* into accord with the social expectations that have long been heralded for women. However, the dark undertones of this “materialization”—that *Watashi* absents herself from society—capture Takahashi’s bent for illustrating the ambivalence attached to the act of mothering. Ono’s is thus, the more optimistic of the two stories handled in the last section, as Sanae’s continued engagement with her son frames her as an acceptive mother, even while the dissolution of her partnership leads to the critical gaze of outsiders and relatives alike. However, Sanae is not the perfect embodiment of acceptive and rejective, as her sadness remains a significant part of her reality. Hence, the story still speaks to the power of the irrational to capture the contradictions that exist within maternal figures. However, Ono’s depiction offers a more grounded example amongst the literature treated in this investigation. Nevertheless, this point concerning the acceptive and rejective mothers’ embodiment within one individual is another facet of all the treated literature, and therefore, worthy of reiteration in this conclusion.

As part of her introduction to the chapter “Where is the Otherworld?” (*Ikai wa doko ni aru*) in *Tēma de yomitoku Nihon no bungaku* (2004), the late author Tsushima Yūko wrote:

Provided we think of the “otherworld” as the reflection of “this world,” we can say that it is natural for there to be something especially human within the tales thereof. To peer into the “otherworld,” as related through various works of literature, can mean nothing other than peering into our own realm.<sup>130</sup>

Tsushima’s assertions are extensible to the realm of the ideal woman/motherhood: peering into the maternal figure—as is done by the protagonists in these narratives—reveals as much about the heroes as it does about the nurturing women found during their journeys. For the protagonists

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<sup>130</sup> Ōba, Minako, *Tēma de yomitoku Nihon no bungaku: gendai josei sakka no kokoromi* [Thematically Interpreting Japanese Literature: Essays by Modern Women Writers], (Tōkyō: Shōgakkān, 2004), 267.

in Tanizaki and Kyōka's stories, the nurturing woman can be both wonderful and vile, unveiling the discomfort and danger of figuring the mother figure as a romantically coveted woman. For the maternal protagonist written by Takahashi, there is a sadness, isolation and confusion that grows as *Watashi* looks further within to satisfy her maternal purpose. On the other hand, Ono's heroine experiences a sadness and isolation that remains poignant throughout the story—due to the constant focus on her shortcomings as a mother—but the threat of failing to measure up to standards is lessened when she looks inward for guidance from the friend who carried herself admirably as a mother with an atypical family. As Tsushima suggests, humanity is found in the mundane and the otherworldly. As a reflection of the protagonist's humanity, it is therefore understandable for the maternal figure to possess her own extremes, embodying both the acceptive and rejective. The mothering woman manifests the most heartening and frightening aspects of humanity, which makes her a relatable, but also repellant figure to the protagonist. Nonetheless, the extremes presented by the maternal figures put the protagonists in touch with previously unexplored aspects of their own interiority.

Going forward, it may be useful for newer research to investigate the manifestation of supernatural or spiritual motifs in literature that places its focus on various members of a family (father, grandparents, siblings, etc.). Kita Morio's *Ghosts* (*Yūrei*, 1960; tr. 1991) offers a very aesthetically captivating and ethereal presentation of a family that gradually dies around a young protagonist. His fascination with insects, sometimes scientific and sometimes spiritual, acts as partial mediation for the sudden disappearances of loved ones, which allows for a fusion of rational and non-rational interpretations in order to make sense of this narrative about loss. Works such as Kita's illuminate dissonance within the family by assigning fantasy to just the protagonist, or else to everyone in the family besides the protagonist. In light of the changing

household structures in modern Japan (e.g., after the Meiji Restoration, after World War II, etc.), the examination of non-rational tropes may provide insight into more than just changing gender roles, but also changing familial roles as populations became more centralized in urban areas. Ultimately, a great deal can be offered by the appearance of the supernatural or spiritual in modern literature, as writers unveil the invisible forces that urge people to abandon or cling to the familiar aspects of daily life in hopes of better understanding the world and one's place within it. Through the representations of women and mothers in literature, various authors have shown how personal quests toward the unhuman and unreal can lead the protagonist closer to civilization or reality. Moreover, modern writers have compellingly shown the degree to which the human constitutes the otherworldly.

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