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The Exclusion of the Bakla in Philippine Contemporary Cinema

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Abstract

This paper explores representations of the *bakla* (a Filipino gender category that conflates sexual orientation and gender identity through the performance of the four components of effeminacy, cross-dressing, same-sex sexuality, and lower class status) and gay globality (which emphasizes hypermasculinity, desiring sameness, and upper class status) in contemporary Philippine cinema. An analysis of three films makes apparent the subtle exclusion of the more traditional *bakla* performed by both members of elitist gay cultures (upper class, urban gay men) and heteronormative people. This exclusion can be linked to aspects of social class, normative conceptions of masculinity, and the exercise of male (homo)sexuality. The *bakla* is often portrayed as a low-income beautician whose economic status denies him entry into urban gay landscapes. Ironically, what little income he has is often shown being spent on sexual dalliances with purportedly straight men. The *bakla* is also portrayed in manners that resemble western conceptions of transgenderism; cross-dressing and hyperfemininity are part of his standard repertoire – two things which further alienate him from the community at large, which treats his gender-bending as comic relief. This association with feminine aspects codes him as backward and passé, while the hypermasculine gay is considered modern. The root of his social exclusion is perhaps his sexuality, which when directed toward the otherness of the *lalake* (straight, masculine man) must be policed and controlled through any means necessary, and unequivocally denied when directed toward other gay men.

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Introduction

In the Philippines, categories of gender and sexuality operate on a sort of typology (Garcia, 2010), reflected in the non-sense childhood rhyme “Girl, Boy, *Bakla*, Tomboy”, which functions as a local version of sorts to the English play-rhyme, “eeny, meeny, miny, mo”. The Tagalog word for this gender matrix is *kasarian*, which literally means ‘type’ (Garcia, 2000). In this matrix, the girl (*babae*) and the boy (*lalake*) are considered the normative genders, but their sexualities are not restricted to heterosexual sexual acts. Traditionally, they are allowed to transgress heteronormative lines without carrying the burden of being labelled homosexual if they engage in same-sex sexual activities with purported tomboys or *baklas*, respectively (Garcia, 2010).

Bakla is a Tagalog term that conflates the ideas of homosexuality, transgenderism, transvestism, and effeminacy (Manalansan, 2003). “*Bakla* as a term is specifically denotative of the identity of the effeminate and/or cross-dressing male...” (Garcia, 2009, p. xxi). *Bakla* itself is a clipped word that combines the Tagalog words for women (*babae*) and men (*lalake*). The Filipino concept of the self is rooted in the interior (*kalooban*) and *kabaklaan* (being *bakla*) is seen as a form of psychosexual inversion – where the self is anchored on a heterosexually defined interior based on the binary of male and female, regardless of a person’s exterior or body (Garcia, 2009). In other words, it is the *bakla*’s feminine ‘spirit’ that anchors and legitimizes her desire to be directed toward the *lalake*. A common way of looking at the *bakla* is through the metaphor of a woman trapped inside a man’s body (Garcia, 2010).

While the *bakla* remains bodily male, she is internally female – this internal femaleness is reflected externally in the *bakla*’s cross-dressing, effeminacy, and sexual desire directed at the masculinity and maleness of the *lalake*. Unlike the gay man, whose sexual desire is directed mostly at other gay men who reciprocate this desire, the *bakla*’s desire must be directed toward the *lalake*; it is often considered incestuous when one *bakla* has sexual relations with another *bakla*, since all *baklas* are supposed to be ‘sisters’. “*Bakla* connotes a certain comportment in the same-sexual act which differentiates [her] from [her] masculine partner who is not considered *bakla* precisely, while homosexual connotes a certain form of orientation, preference, or desire which both parties in the same-sexual experience engender and share” (Garcia, 2009, p. xxi-xxii). Thus, the sexual object of the *bakla* is the *lalake*, but the *lalake* who engages in same-sexual activities with the *bakla* are not themselves labelled *bakla*. Often, this relationship is not only sexual in nature, but also economic – it is common for *bakla* to provide for their masculine partners financially.

The *bakla* has roots in the gender-crossing *babaylan* of pre-colonial Philippines, who acted as spiritual and social leaders in ancient times and embodied both male and female spirits (Garcia, 2009). Before Spanish occupation, local cultures in the Philippines practiced a form of religious animism headed mostly by women – thus, women occupied a social rank in pre-colonial Philippines that paralleled that of men (Garcia, 2009). Women were considered more spiritually linked to the animist gods. *Babaylanism* was an occupation dominated by women (Garcia, 2009) however it was not exclusive to genital females. Males would be allowed to perform the *babaylan* function provided they took on the garb and mannerisms of women (Garcia, 2009).

The *babaylan*, however, did not merely cross-dress but took on the “social and symbolic role of the other, complementary... sex” (Garcia, 2009, p. 165). This means that they shared all the rights, roles, and responsibilities of genital women.

While the contemporary *bakla* has retained traditional vestiges of *babaylanism* (cross-dressing, effeminacy, and sexual desire directed at the masculine *lalake*), it lost its position of privilege in society through centuries of Spanish Catholic rule, which coded the practice of *babaylan* shamanism as demonic and immoral, and the incursion of American psychiatric discourse, which emphasized the pathology of both homosexuality and transgenderism (Garcia, 2009; Tan, 1994). The incursion of other labels like MSM (men who have sex with men), from HIV/AIDS discourses, and the Eurocentric political “gay” label have posed problems for the *bakla*. From being ancient religious leaders in the form of the *babaylan*, the *bakla* came to be identified with the occupations of fashion design and hairstyling (Garcia, 2009). The most pervasive stereotype of the *bakla*, since the ‘70s is that of the *parloristas*: a low-income beauty salon worker (Benedicto, 2008).

To distance themselves from the *bakla* and its connotations of lower class status, urban homosexuals have begun to identify as gay rather than *bakla* (Benedicto, 2008). The urban Manila “gay” scene always seeks to project an image that is compatible with Western, and therefore modern, images of male homosexuality (Benedicto, 2008). This is reflected in the proliferation of various bars, clubs, gyms, and saunas patterned after imaginations of American gay lifestyles (Benedicto, 2008). The *bakla* is seen as an outdated identity that needs to be rooted out but is nevertheless pervasive in ‘modern’ urban gay culture (Benedicto, 2008). “The struggle of gay men in Manila has been cast in terms of finding ways to perform homosexuality without being coded as *bakla*” (Benedicto, 2008, p. 323).

The effacement of the *bakla* is not only rooted in their association with the lower classes but also in their purported effeminacy and cross-dressing, which make them undesirable sexual partners (Benedicto, 2008). The recent popularity of discourses on transgenderism/transsexualism also poses a challenge for the *bakla* identity. In 2008, the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines coined the term “transpinay” to refer to transgender women of Filipino descent (Sassot, 2011). Unlike the terms gay or *bakla*, transpinay does not connote sexual orientation but gender identity; not does it connote surgical status (Sassot, 2011).

Bakla is also often used as a pejorative, so the distancing of the transgender identity from the word *bakla* is quite understandable, but nevertheless privileges western conceptions of gender over endemic ones. Transgenderism, it seems, is a new kind of modernity being imposed on the *bakla* that further stigmatizes the identity as being out of sync with the times. The *bakla*, however, co-exists contemporarily with practices of transgenderism and gay male homosexuality in both rural and urban cultures in the Philippines. Martin Manalansan (2003) argues that in diasporic contexts, Filipinos use the *bakla* label to “negotiate the violences that accompany their dislocation” (in Benedicto, 2008, p. 318). In this paper, I argue that contemporary Philippine cinema presents an economically elevated image of the *bakla*, whose effeminacy is accepted as part of the *bakla* identity, but also tries to police its practice of sexuality, especially when directed toward the *lalake*.

This paper looks at three recent films: Olivia Lamasan's *In My Life* (2009), Chris Martinez' *Here Comes the Bride* (2010), and Wenn Deramas' *Petrang Kabayo* (Peter the Horse) (2010). *In My Life* is a drama set in New York City about a Filipino gay couple that features a cross-dressing *bakla*, Hillary, who serves as the movie's comic relief character as well as an important catalyst for the movie's primary character, Shirley, to come to terms with her gay son's relationship with his lover. *Here Comes the Bride* is a comedy about the soul-switching that happens among five primary characters and features the *bakla parlorista*, Toffee, who achieves the ultimate goal of becoming a woman by entering bride-to-be Stephanie's body. *Petrang Kabayo* is a remake of an '80s comedy about a wealthy but mean-spirited *bakla*, Peter, who is cursed to turn into a horse until he learns to control his temper.

Class Status

In contemporary mainstream cinema, the *bakla* is still associated with their traditional professions in the beauty industry. Unlike the common lower-class stereotype, however, the *bakla* in most mainstream films is economically elevated. They may still be hair-dressers, but they are coded as entrepreneurs rather than low-income earners. This economic elevation is reflected in their style of dress, their possessions, and the worlds in which they move.

Hillary in *In My Life* owns her own New York City flower shop, and then employs Shirley part-time. She is fond of wearing colourful dresses often with floral patterns. Her fondness for high-end fashion is also reflected in her preference for colour-blocking and accessorizing with gold. Hillary first appears on-screen wearing an orange floor-length gown with a black fur-trimmed bolero. When she is first introduced to Shirley, Hillary wears a bright pink jacket cinched over the waist with a thin, blue belt over a yellow floral-print mini dress. Her colourful wardrobe seems to reflect the humour in her personality, and only during the funeral scene do we see her in an all-black outfit, and even then, she accents her look with gold hoop earrings and a brass-studded belt. It's important to note that Hillary's costumes are not coded as drag since there really is no aspect of spectacle or parody to Hillary's dress. Despite a certain semblance of camp aesthetics in her wardrobe, the function of her costume seems to be to code her character more as trendy and economically stable rather than to parody heteronormative norms of dress.

The lovers, Mark and Noel, are also contrasted in terms of class. Shirley's son, Mark presumably holds US citizenship as does his mother, works as an advertising executive while Noel is an illegal immigrant who is content at working odd jobs to earn a living. They live together partly because Noel is not able to afford his own rent. The apartment they live in is stylishly furnished, with matching furniture, its walls decorated with interesting pieces of art. Mark is perennially shown wearing tailored suits and dress shirts, while Noel wears ratty old t-shirts, street wear, or his chauffer's uniform.

The film also uses language to code the economic backgrounds of their characters: Noel speaks English fluently but with a thick Filipino accent, and often codeswitches when he is talking with the other Tagalog-speaking characters in the film. Mark, however, speaks with an affected Brooklyn accent and often uses English instead of

Tagalog in conversing with the other characters. This is a reflection of the commonly held belief in the Philippines that English is the language of the upper classes.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee first appears wearing a black, wide-brimmed hat, knee-high boots, and red couture clothes accessorized with half-a-dozen rings and necklaces. When he enters into Stephanie's body, his first move is to make Stephanie's look more high-end, which he does by camping her up with thick make-up and big hair. Later, he revamps Stephanie's bridal gown by using the décor in her room, turning the plain dress into haute couture. Toffee's gay friends, Alfie and JR, wear designer men's wear and drive luxury four-wheel drives. The salon they own also caters to upper-class clients. Collectively, all three queers refer to themselves as 'image stylists' to distance themselves from the more common title of beautician.

In *Petrang Kabayo*, Pedro grows up in the slums raised by a physically abusive father. He runs away and is adopted by a rich old maid, who then names him heir to her estate. Pedro changes his name to Peter to class-up his persona. Growing up as heir, he has developed a mean-streak and has become verbally and physically abusive to the household staff and farmhands. When the old lady dies, Peter inherits her fortune and is tasked to run an airline company as well as a farm that breeds pedigree racehorses. Peter, who is perennially dressed in couture and surrounded by bodyguards, travels from his country estate to the office driven in a luxury van by a personal chauffeur. Peter likes to boast of his new-found wealth by calling his staff *hampas lupa* (dirt poor) and *patay gutom* (poor people who are starving to death). When his meanness leads to the death of a prized racehorse, the Goddess of Horses, another *bakla* character, appears to him and curses him to turn into a horse every time he loses his temper. Unlike either Hillary or Toffee, Peter is coded as a corporate professional; he is shown strutting into the office while employees scurry to get out of his way, hiring new employees for the airline, and berating his staff during a board meeting.

Effeminacy and Cross-dressing

Contemporary mainstream films also reflect 'modern' practices of queerness in Philippine society. The *bakla* has bifurcated into two rather distinct identities that have been subsumed under the English label of 'gay': the cross-dressing *bakla* (that seems to operate on a similar level to that of the transgender) and the non-cross-dressing *bakla*. What is interesting in these films is that, unlike what Benedicto (2008) has argued, the effeminacy of these characters is not challenged – it is seen as a simple, logical marker for their queerness.

In *In My Life*, Hillary's performance of femininity is unremarkable – she sashays down the streets of New York, dances playfully provocatively in one of the gay bars, and acts as Shirley's self-improvement coach. She takes Shirley to a salon to get her hair done and then coaches her on what she has to do during interviews to get a proper job.

Neither Noel nor Mark is as effeminate as the more stereotypical depictions of the *bakla* or the gay man in contemporary cinema. Compared to each other, however, it is easy to see that one of them is more feminized than the other but on different levels. Mark's performance of *kabaklaan* is much closer to that of the global gay image than

Noel's. Mark is independent and keeps himself busy with work, but we also see that Mark often works out – he is shown jogging in one scene and then later abandoning Shirley to Noel saying, “I need to run to the gym.” Even his outfits reflect this kind of lifestyle; he prefers to wear tight muscle shirts at home, while Noel wears loose t-shirts. This reflection of the global gay image in Mark is further reinforced in a scene where he takes Shirley and Noel to a client's party and the client happens to be a gay bar. Shirley watches with a visibly uncomfortable Noel as Mark dances on the dance floor with several shirtless men: a beer in one hand, the other raised in the air, pumping to techno music. Mark is also coded as the primary provider in their family, as he is the only one with a professional job. Mark, however, is much more feminized than Noel when it comes to his movements and gestures. In one scene, we see him giggling at photos of his nephews. In another, he sits with Shirley near a fountain in Central Park with his knees locked closely together and his arms hugging his torso.

Nothing in Noel's actions code him as gay, save for one display of overcompensating hypermasculine behavior when he visits with his homophobic relatives. What feminizes Noel is his feelings and his attitudes and his inability to challenge either Mark or Shirley's displays of power, and also his working class status. The film implies that most of Noel's financial needs are taken care of by Mark, putting Noel firmly into the position of house-husband. In the film, Noel constantly sought to impress and please Shirley and so he is more reflective of the stereotypical daughter-in-law (Hillary says as much in one scene), than he is of either *kabaklaan* or gay globality.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee wears some sort of drag and then proceeds to drag up Stephanie's female body. Alfie and JR, however, do not cross-dress but, being image stylists, they do wear some make-up and carry big feminine handbags. All three are also incredibly effeminate, a fact that is emphasized when another character, Bien (the groom's grandfather), enters into Toffee's body and uses it to rediscover his lost youth and seduce a bridesmaid. When Bien first wakes up in Toffee's body, he admonishes Alfie and Toffee for acting so effeminately. Unaware of the body-switch, Alfie and JR bully him into doing his job as a make-up artist. When he is unable to this properly, Alfie and JR exaggeratedly scream at him and throw him out of the room.

When Toffee enters Stephanie's body, she begins to act in an exaggeratedly feminine and campy manner, also using *swardspeak* – gay lingo that makes use of elements of English, Tagalog, Japanese, and Spanish along with certain celebrities' names spoken in a hyperfeminized fashion (Benedicto, 2008). Stephanie starts calling her mother ‘Mamu’ instead of Mom and uses terms such as *spluk* (speak) and witticisms like ‘*ang haba ng hair ko*’ (‘my hair is so long’, implying physical beauty or attractiveness). At the movie's climax, when all five characters attempt to re-create the accident in an effort to switch back to their proper bodies, *swardspeak* is yet again used to code the *bakla* identity.

As a kid, Peter is very feminine and dresses in tight t-shirts and hot pants. When his father sees him wearing a dress and plucking hairs from his armpits, Peter gets beat up and dunked into a tankful of water – an allusion to the many abusive practices that *bakla* kids supposedly go through when their fathers want them to stop being *bakla*. When Peter opts to play with other *bakla* kids instead of taking care of his father's

horse, which then runs away, his father severely beats him up, straps him to his *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriage), and makes Peter pull on the carriage as a replacement for the horse.

When Peter is adopted by the rich old maid, *Manang Biday*, he starts dressing in more feminine clothes and dances for his adoptive mother, who then comments, “You are like a real woman!” Peter also starts to adopt a fondness for equestrienne clothing, often roaming around the *hacienda* in riding boots and carrying a riding crop, which he also uses to intimidate both the horses on the farm and the human staff. His corporate attire consists of high-fashion pieces, often with exaggeratedly big shoulder pads reminiscent of ‘80s-era fashion. Peter also often wears stiletto heels when going to the office or even when simply lounging around at home.

Sexuality

All three films code the *bakla* as a primarily sexual identity, while attempting to control this sexuality with violence or social exclusion, or by purging the *bakla* from any form of sexuality altogether.

The lovers in *In My Life* share several romantic moments, but it is not until ninety minutes into the film that we get to see an actual kiss. One scene poignantly points out this policing of affection. Early in the film Mark enters their apartment and discovers that Noel has decorated the living room with displays of romantic quotes to celebrate their anniversary. Noel begins to read out one of the quotes, and then begins to touch Mark’s cheek. Just as the audience sees Noel looming in on Mark for a kiss, he starts tickling him instead, reverting to juvenile displays of affection.

The film’s script offers a look into how the characters perceive the nature of *kabaklaan* as an identity that is based mostly on sexual practice. In one scene, Mark takes Shirley on a picnic and they start talking about how she first found out about Mark’s sexuality. Mark says, “*Naaalala mo nung second year ako, nung nalaman mong bakla ako dahil nahuli mo kami ni Tommy?*” (Do you remember when I was in second year, when you found out I was gay because you caught me with Tommy?). Mark opens up about how Shirley has been distant after this, “In fact, since then you just shut me out. *Pagkatapos noon, kahit anong gawin ko, parang hindi na kita mapasaya.*” (After that, I felt like what ever I do, I could never make you happy.) Mark goes on to list how Shirley had always put him down despite his achievements and concludes, “You will never be proud of me because I failed you as a son.”

This dialogue reflects Westernized discourses on the nature of the *bakla* by equating *kabaklaan* purely with sexual practice (rather than being woman-hearted, effeminacy, or cross-dressing). Shirley’s attitude toward Mark’s sexuality has also led Mark to imbibe within him the attitude of *kabaklaan* as some form of failed masculinity. This perceived failure to perform masculinity as an idealized image of the son is constantly reinforced by Shirley’s passive-aggressive behavior. Shirley and Mark’s relationship and dialogues also reinforce rather dated Freudian discourses about the male homosexual as the product of an over-bearing mother and an absentee father.

Hillary is also an interesting counterpoint to the lovers in the film. She is the sole character in the film that does not talk about love or gets paired up with someone. She

remains celibate throughout the whole film, a fact that becomes even more obvious because she is surrounded by romantic couples: Mark and Noel, their friends Vince and Mia, and even Shirley, who starts dating an American man toward the end of the film.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee's primary goal while in Stephanie's body is to experience sex with a man. Toffee heads off to the beach in Stephanie's newly made over body and begins to seduce random men. He runs into Harold, Stephanie's fiancé, and begins to seduce him, pulling him into a room and desperately attempting to pull off his shorts while he reminds Stephanie of their vow to wait until they're married before consummating their love.

The film also uses the word *bakla* liberally, both as a marker for the *bakla* identity and as a pejorative. The three image stylists freely refer to each other as 'sis' or sisters, and in one scene JR calls Alfie and Toffee's attention by yelling, '*Hoy, mga bakla ng taon!*' ('Hey, fags of the year!') But the presence of homophobic language is also quite obvious. When she first discovers the soul-switching, Stephanie seeks out the other parties. She first finds Bien in Toffee's body, and later her aunt, Precy, in the body of the nanny. When Stephanie realizes who is in her body, she becomes flustered and panicked and says, '*Ninang! There's a gay man inside my body!*' to which Precy simply says, 'My God!' When they confront Toffee, just as he is seducing Harold with a pole dance, Precy also comments, '*Malaswa!*' ('How indecent!') When Harold realizes that the person he married was not Stephanie but Toffee, Bien comments, '*Si hijo, na-tanso ka,*' a term that means one has been hoodwinked into thinking that something fake is actually the real thing. This calls to light discourses regarding *kabaklaan* (being *bakla*) and mimicry—the *bakla* is an identity that is an in-between: neither truly male/masculine nor truly female/feminine, but one that exists somewhere in between those two poles (Manalansan, 2003). Finally, when Toffee gives chase in an effort to experience sex using Stephanie's body, the others call after him with words like '*Pigilan ang baklang yan!*' ('Stop that faggot!'), and even in Spanish, '*Vuelve maricon!*' ('Stop you faggot!') When they catch him, Toffee ends up bound and gagged. He stays this way for the rest of the film. In order to switch back into their original bodies, they must wait two years and then try to re-create the accident that lead to the soul switching. For two years, they all live in one house taking care of each other and trying to adopt to their new bodies. Throughout this period, we see glimpses of Toffee, still in Stephanie's body, bound by the wrists, chained to a bedpost, or isolated and alone during birthdays and Christmas.

JR and Alfie, also attempt to police Toffee's sexuality, deriding him for insisting on having a *lalake* as his partner. They suggest that he tries 'boys who like boys', to which Toffee replies with an indignant retort commenting on how the other two are just as reprehensible by their preference for equally effeminate partners. The traditional *bakla*'s protest against this model for same-sex relationships is quickly shut down when Toffee's friends comment on how old-fashioned and stereotypical he is.

JR and Alfie also police the lines between gender hierarchies. When they see Bien using Toffee's body to seduce one of the bridesmaids, Alfie vomits and JR has an emotional breakdown. Later, they call him disgusting and liken him to a tomboy: a

bakla who chooses a *babae* as a sexual partner cannot be a heterosexual *lalake* (or even a bisexual), but is relegated to the lower level of the tomboy, reinforcing the hierarchic rhyme of ‘girl, boy, *bakla*, tomboy’. JR and Alfie are also notably absent during the last few moments of the film, while everyone waits for the chance to switch back into their bodies. It seems they have abandoned their friend, whom they now view as a tomboy. The film ends happily for Toffee though, who ends up in the hospital, back in his original body, being tended to by three good-looking nurses, who seem eager to receive his flirtations.

In *Petrang Kabayo*, any form of Peter’s sexuality is met with violent retribution. In one scene, he secretly watches three farmhands bathing in the open. Peter hides behind one of the horses, who then starts urinating on him. Peter begins to beat up the horse, which attempts to run away from him but instead drags him around all over the farm as his boot had been caught up in the horse’s reins. Peter orders that the horse be butchered and made into *tapa* (cured meat), but the farmhands refuse. Peter fires all of them. Later, Peter is transformed into a female horse (hence the name Petra), and by working hard and doing good deeds, earns the affection of Erickson – one of the farmhands whom Peter had fired. Only if a man kisses him while in horse form can the spell be broken. At the end of the film, Erickson kisses the horse and it transforms back into Peter. Peter giggles naughtily, while Erickson is repulsed by what he had just done.

Conclusion

Contemporary mainstream films that feature *bakla* characters often code these identities as economically elevated, divorcing them from stereotypical portrayals of the *bakla* as existing in states of relative wealth amidst abject poverty, as is a common image seen in films from the past decades. Unlike most contemporary independent cinema in the Philippines, which have a proclivity for settings its stories in urban poor or rural contexts, mainstream cinema offers audiences images of ludicrous wealth and imaginings of globalization and economic success. This perhaps accounts for the distancing of the *bakla* from poverty.

The *bakla* in contemporary mainstream films come in two major varieties: the cross-dressing and the non-cross-dressing types. Effeminacy is not seen as problematic in these films, but merely as a marker for the *bakla* identity – both the cross-dressing and non-cross-dressing type of *bakla* are coded as highly effeminate. The non-cross-dressing type of *bakla* is coded as modern and closely linked to global imagining of the gay identity. Interestingly, the cross-dressing *bakla* is coded not as transgender or transsexual. Discourses of transgenderism do not exist in contemporary mainstream cinema, even though there are references in some films to *bakla* characters who have undergone sexual reassignment surgery.

The primary marker for the *bakla* identity remains sexuality directed toward the otherness of the *lalake*. There are instances of reciprocated same-sex desire, but the dominant model for *bakla* sexuality in contemporary mainstream films is that of the *bakla* and her *lalake* partner. The *lalake*, though, remains heterosexual, but to safeguard this heterosexuality, the *bakla* ends up being violently bound and gagged to control any exercise of sexuality. The best model for the *bakla* is apparently still one that is divorced from sexuality and serves no other primary purpose but comic relief.

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***Common Songs: A Study of the Saibara Collection and Inquiry into “Fuzoku” Arts
in the Heian Court***

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Abstract

Even a cursory glance at the obscure *saibara* song collection reveals a deep and prevalent intertextual relationship with the canonical Nara period poetic anthologies, the *Man'yōshū* (万葉集) and *Nihon shoki kayō* (日本書紀歌謠). This intertextuality is, in some cases, near identical duplicates of poems. They offer an intriguing perspective into the semiotic construction of the songs, as well as offer insight into what aesthetic elements separate *saibara* from the collections that help construct its subtext.

Saibara is usually treated as a Heian period text (Konishi 1957, Usuda 2000, Kimura 2006, Ikeda 2006) with archaic but untenable roots in traditional oral songs of commoners and regional ballads from outside the capitol (Fujiwara 2011, 43 - 50; Usuda 2000, 116 - 17). This widely held assertion about *saibara*'s provenance is the most persistent element in studies and commentaries on the songs. This paper will look at *saibara* in the historical records, as well as at its intertexts, in order to illuminate elements of its historical construction as a *fuzoku* (風俗) “folk” text.

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Background

Saibara (催馬楽) “horse urging music” refers to a genre of accompanied vocal court songs from the Heian period. It consists of 61 songs that were ultimately preserved in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. These songs were likely part of a much larger repertoire that was performed in accompaniment with music and dance in the Heian court (Konishi 1957, 267). *Saibara* was formalized as a genre of *gagaku* (雅楽) “elegant music” during the *Engi* period (901 – 923), but there are several early attestations, beginning with the *Sandai Jitsuroku* (三代実録) “True History of Three Reigns of Japan” (901 CE), *Wamyō ruijushō* (倭名類聚抄) “Annotated Classification of Japanese Taxonomies” (ca. 935), *Makura no sōshi* (枕草子) “Pillow Book” (1002), *Genji monogatari* (源氏物語) “Tale of Genji” (1021), and *Taiheiki* (太平記) “Record of Tranquility” (ca. 1368).

Almost nothing is known of the provenance of the songs, however they are frequently attributed to traditional regional songs of the peasantry that were brought to the court through tribute and traveling performers (Fujiwara 2011; Konishi 1957; Usuda 2000).

The history of the songs is illustrated first by Go-Shirakawa in *Ryōjin hishō* (梁塵秘抄) “Secret Collection of Rafter Dust” (ca. 1180) and later by Ichijō Kanera in *Rōjin guanshō* (梁塵愚案抄) “Secret Collection of Rafter Dust Folly” (ca. 15 c.). In *Ryōjin hishō: Kudenshū* (梁塵秘抄口伝集) “Secret Selections of Rafter Dust: Collection of Oral Transmissions,” Go-Shirakawa writes,

From ancient times to the present, these songs have been learned and passed down. These [songs] are known as *kagura*, *saibara*, and *fuzoku*... *Saibara* was born from the oral traditions of commoners from various provinces who came offering tribute in the Ministry of Finance

古より今にいたるまで、習ひ伝へたるうたあり。これを神楽催馬楽風俗といふ。かぐらは天照おほん神の、天の岩戸をおし開かせたまひける代に始まり、催馬楽は、大蔵の省の国々の貢物おさめける民の口遊におこれり。(Ryōjin hishō: Kudenshū 1)

Among the theories of *saibara*’s origins, this early description by retired emperor Go-Shirakawa has held the attention of most modern scholars on the subject. In a recent study, Fujiwara notes the difficulty in substantiating this version of *saibara*’s history, but yields to the possibility of a refining process that may have taken place after the early adoption of the songs in the court (Fujiwara 2001, 47, 45).

Saibara was ultimately preserved in two family manuscripts, *Tenji-bon* (天治本) (1125) of the Fujiwara (藤原) family (referred to in the literature as the *Tōke* 藤家 manuscript) and *Nabeshimake-bon* (鍋島家本) (ca. late 12 c.) of the Minamoto family (referred to in the literature as *Genke* 源家). Despite the late dates of these manuscripts, both are written in *man’yōgana*, which would have almost certainly been an obsolete script by the eleventh or even mid-late tenth century. This, in corroboration with other evidence suggests that the collection itself may be much

older than their extant copies reveal.¹ The first appearance of “*saibara*” in text is the *Sandai Jitsuroku* (三代実録) “True History of Three Reigns of Japan,” part of the *Rikkokushi* (六国史) Six National Histories. It is recorded that a lady-in-waiting who had risen to the rank of *Naishi no kami* (尚侍) or Fourth Rank court official, *Hiroi no joō* (広井女王), was proficient at and instructed in *saibara* song and dance:

Fourth Rank court official Third Subordinate Lady Hiroi passed. At the time of her death she had surpassed eighty years. Hiroi cultivated a virtuous character. She had etiquette. She thusly was known to be a talented singer. She was especially perfected in *saibara* song. (Tenth month, twenty-third day of *Jōgan* 1 [859 CE])

尚侍従三位広井女王薨。薨時年八十有余。広井少修徳操。挙動有礼。以能歌見称。特善催馬楽歌。

Thus, it is clear that as part of a performance tradition, *saibara* songs were already being enjoyed by the court aristocracy since at least the ninth century. This allows for some firm grounding when considering the historical context of *saibara* being preserved some time in the Nara period. However, tenuous speculation turns to serious consideration in light of other textual and historical connections, beginning with Hiroi no joō and the *Nihon shoki*.

While very little is known about Hiroi no Joō, it is likely that she came from a family with a tradition of some performative and / or poetic achievement in the Nara period. In the *Sandai jitsuroku* it states that Hiroi is the descendant of Nihin no nagashinnō (二品長親皇) “Prince Nagashin of the Second Princely rank.” This is likely Naga no miko (長皇子) “Prince Naga” (ca. 715) who was the fourth son of Emperor Tenmu (天武天皇) (631-686). Poems authored by Naga no Miko can be found in *Man'yōshū* volume I and III (*Ise to Tsukushi no tabi*) (MYS 1.60, 1.65, 1.73, 2.130). Additionally, Nagata no Miko’s² father, Kurusu Ō (来栖王) “Lord Kurusu”³ (681-758) was charged with the duty of heading the bureau of court *gagaku* in 733. Concurrently he organized an *utagaki* at the *Suzakumon* 朱雀門 “Vermillion Bird Gate” at the capitol *Heijō kyō* (平城京) (Nara). In the *Shoku nihongi* (続日本紀), in the second month, first day of the thirtieth year of the sexagenary cycle, *Tenpyō* (天平) six (734), it is written:

At the *Suzakumon* gate, before the imperial palace of the emperor, an *utagaki* with more than 200 men and women in attendance was viewed.

¹ Comparative evidence of these manuscripts with early Chinese music transcriptions suggest a “received precedent” (Markham 1983, 17). The statistical preservation of *kō-otsu* distinctions in the *man'yōgana* graphs used also point to scribal conservatism in the orthography, strongly suggesting that the manuscripts are copies or edits of earlier ones (For details, please refer to Scanlon-Canegata, unpublished MA thesis, 2014).

² Nagata no Miko is Prince Naga’s grandson

³ For details on the controversial dates and records regarding Prince Naga and the imperial line, see <http://www7a.biglobe.ne.jp/~kamiya1/mypage441.htm>

Among them were talented individuals of special distinction. Lord Nagata of the Lower Fourth rank,⁴ Lord Kurusu⁵ of the Fourth Rank, Prince Kadobe,⁶ Lord Nonaka of the Fifth Rank⁷ and others were the event leaders. Everyone sang verses in chorus. And in this way, they performed in the scales (*ne* 音) of the song Naniwa (難波), the song Yamatobe (倭部), the song Asaji no hara (浅茅原), the song Hirose (広瀬), and the song *Ya mo sashi* (八裳刺)². As decreed, men and women in the capitol were seen indulging there. They enjoyed thoroughly until they became fatigued. The men and women who (honorably) [performed] *utagaki* received a small reward (for their performances).

二月癸巳朔。天皇御朱雀門、覽歌垣。男女二百余人。五品已上有風流者、皆交雜其中。正四位下長田王。從四位下栗栖王。門部王。從五位下野中王等為頭。以本末唱和。為難波曲。倭部曲。浅茅原曲。広瀬曲。八裳刺曲之音。令都中士女縱觀。極歛而罷。賜奉歌垣男女等祿有差。

Kurusu's son, Ōhara Ō (大原王) (ca. 742), who is also found in the *Man'yōsū* (17.3952), would have been Hiroi's paternal uncle and elder. Furthermore, the similarities between the songs performed at the above mentioned *utagaki* and the *saibara* songs *Asamuzu* 浅水 "shallow water," *Asamidori* 浅緑 "shallow (pale) green," and *Namuba no umi* 難波海 "sea of Nanba" cannot be ignored. What is clear is that Hiroi and her family had deep ties with practitioners and offices dealing with Nara period *gagaku*, and *saibara* in particular. Fujiwara suggests that Hiroi was the first to learn and pass on the *Genke saibara* tradition from Emperor Saga (嵯峨天皇) (r. 809-823) (Fujiwara 2011, 131). If this is accurate, it puts into question the assertion that allusions to poems in the *Man'yōshū* and other Nara period texts are in fact 'allusions.' These instances would have almost certainly been viewed as borrowed elements by later literati, but in reality it may be something much more indirect and unintentional. Haruo Shirane reminds us that intertextuality is a "collective unconscious" that "dispenses with the classical criteria of authorial consciousness or contact" (Shirane 1990, 76). In line with this definition, *saibara* is a prime candidate for this kind of unconscious and authorless ubiquity. What's more, the composite of textual elements present in these *songs* speaks to a possible parallelism between folk traditions and early court poetry.

On the character and venues where the *saibara* songs enjoyed their greatest popularity in the court, the *Gyōyūshō* (御遊抄) (1485) documents it in excerpts dated from 906 to 1200 CE. The context of the songs is further documented in the *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (1021) and *Saibara ryakufu* (催馬楽略譜) (1738). These entries describe songs from the *saibara* repertoire as sung typically with musical accompaniment at various events through all four seasons. They were especially prevalent at *kōen* (公宴) "court banquets." The lyrics were not fixed and are described as being flexible, with

⁴ Nagata Ō Seishi (正四位下長田王) (*Nagata-no-Miko* 長田皇)

⁵ Kurusu Ō Jushi (来栖王從四)

⁶ Kadobe-no-Ōkami (門部王)

⁷ Nonaka Ō jūgo (從五位下野中王)

ample room for spontaneous alterations, without strict rules or guidelines for performance (Fujiwara 2011, 20 - 21). Lyrics and phrases would often be altered spontaneously and many times deliberately in order to adjust the content to a particular event taking place, i.e. adjusting to appropriate seasonal metaphors or physical locales, etc. (Harich-Schneider 1952, 403; Fujiwara 2011, 43). An excerpt from the *Gyōyūshō* confirms the casual singing of *saibara* songs at a banquet:

On the occasion of the imperial visitation to *Tōhokuin*. Record of Minister Sukefusa. At the residence of the Imperial Consort.

There was no musical performance, however the adjutant minister who was in attendance at the banquet initiated the singing of miscellaneous songs. A certain Saibara [song], a certain miscellaneous song, and, again, a certain Kusha⁸ hymn, which were said to be quite unorthodox.

幸東北院資房記。女院御在所。無奏音楽。但於饗座丞相及戸部発雜芸事。或催馬楽。或雑哥。或又俱舎頌。奇怪云々。
(*Gyōyūshō*, *Chōkin gyōkō*, *Eisho* 6) (cited in Fujiwara 2011, 44)

This excerpt dated 1086 and describes the unfixed nature of the songs. Konishi draws a parallel between *saibara* and *min'yō* (民謡) via its relationship to *gagaku* (Konishi 1957, 167). The term *minyō* is a calque derived from German *volkslied* “folk song.” This is an interesting parallel considering the character of the songs as described in the literature. The definition of folk music is an elusive one. Ronald Cohen defines folk music as a musical tradition with unknown origins (Cohen 2006). Another definition given by the International Folk Music Council is based on an evolutionary process of oral transmission (Latham 2002). Other definitions have folk music as constituting any musical tradition associated with the underclass, or that is culturally and linguistically regional in nature (as opposed to central or standard speech), and being passed through oral tradition. Within the study of folklore, the folk process is the operation by which songs are adapted, re-interpreted, and altered over time in order to better suit changing environments (ibid). In consideration of this process, *saibara* can be viewed in this way. While it is likely the original melodies were lost early into its induction into the *gagaku* repertoire, the songs likely had considerable dialectal and melodic variation (Tachibana 1967; Fujiwara 2011). Each song chosen was inevitably representative of whatever region they hailed from. As is the case in the folk process, lyrics were altered and adapted to fit the court environment and the events where they were sung. Moribe asserts that the songs were not altered from their original state as regional folk ballads (Tachibana 1967, 102). This disputable assertion notwithstanding, *saibara* offers ample connection with late Nara period courtiers, as seen above, as well as an intriguing correlation with excerpts from the *Nihon shoki*.

⁸ Kusha (俱舎) (Sanskrit *Kośa*) is probably referring to *Kushashū* (俱舎宗), a sect of Hinayana Buddhism brought to Japan some time in the Nara period from India via a continental intermediary. The sign 頌 *jō* can refer to a gatha or hymn (also those found in the *shijing* (Jp. *shikyō* 詩經 “Classic of Poetry”))

Geography of the songs and *Nihon shoki* records

Thirty-five of the *saibara* songs contain references to specific geographic locations in Japan. The majority of songs indicate provinces in or around the capital *Heijōkyō* (平城京) modern Kyoto, most in the areas along the *Tōkaidō* (東海道) “Eastern Sea Road.” *Tōkaidō* encompasses the *Goki shichidō* (五畿七道) “Five Capital Provinces and Seven Districts (lit: roads).” *Tōsandō* (東山道) “Eastern Mountain Road” stretches through the center of *Honshū* from as far west as modern day *Shiga* prefecture and northeast to modern *Ibaraki* prefecture. However, *saibara* does not indicate anything farther than modern day *Aichi*. *Saibara*’s geographical distribution can only be put into perspective when compared with textual evidence from the *Nihon shoki*.

“With no limitation as to the distance or proximity of their provinces, [they] invited able singers.”⁹

The above excerpt is from the *Ryō no shūge* (令集解), a ninth century commentary on the *yōrō* code (養老律令) originally written in 718 CE. The full excerpt describes the *utamai no tsukasa* (樂官) the governmental management system of song and dance under the *ritsu ryō* (律令) system. This early description of the office’s origins corroborate those of court *saibara*’s genesis as *fuzoku uta* (風俗歌) “folk / commoner song” in *Ryōjin hishō* and *Ryōjin guanshō*. In an entry dated 675, an excerpt from *Nihon shoki* lists the provinces where song, dance, and other talent were collected under the auspices of the imperial academy of music, to perform and instruct within the confines of the court.

Table 1: Location correspondences between *Saibara* and *Tenmuki*

Corresponding locations		
<i>Nihon shoki</i> (<i>Tenmuki</i>)	<i>Saibara</i>	Song
Yamato no kuni (大倭国)	Katsuragi (葛城) ¹⁰	2.20
	Asukawi (飛鳥井) ¹¹	1.8
Kawachi no kuni (河内国)	Ishikawa (石川)	2.19
Settsu no kuni (攝津国)	Naniwa no umi (難波海)	2.36
Yamashiro no kuni (山背国)	Sawadagawa (沢田河)	1.2
	Fujūno (藤生野)	2.11

⁹Original excerpt: 不限国遠近取能歌人耳。

¹⁰ There is also a placename, *Katsuragi*, in *Kawachi* province, which it is possible this poem is referring to as well. However, as the birthplace of the *Soga* clan (蘇我氏), it seems more likely this location is speaking of *Yamato* province.

¹¹ Poem 1.8 only has a passive and ambiguous reference, 安須加井爾 *asukawi-ni* “at the well at Asuka / at Asukawi.” This can be referring to *Asuka* 飛鳥 in *Yamato*, *Yamashiro*, or *Kii* provinces where *Asuka* is a known placename (Usuda 2000: 129)

	Yamashiro(山城)	1.7
Tazima no kuni (但馬国)	Irusa no yama (伊留左の山)	2.12
Ōmi no kuni (近江国)	Mi Kurusu, Mikurusu no hara (御来栖, 栗津の原)	1.23
	Hashiriwi	1.7
	Ōmi (近江)路	1.19
	Shinohara (篠原)	1.20
Ise no kuni (伊勢国)	Ise no umi (伊勢)	1.10
	Takekawa (竹河)	2.8
	Kawaguchi (河口)	2.9
	Suzukagawa (鈴之川)	2.27
Mino no kuni (美濃国)	Itsunuki kawa (伊豆貫河), Mushiroda (蓆田)	2.26
	Minoyama (美濃山)	2.30
Owari no kuni (尾張国)	Simatuda (島つ田)	2.4

There are a total of 9 corresponding locations out of a total 12 cited in *Tenmuki* and 16 in *saibara*. Furthermore, all 13 locations are referenced in the *Engishiki* (延喜式) (927) with the exception of *Awaji*. This evidence is cause for speculation and is considered by Konishi (1957) and Fujiwara (2011) in their assessment of *saibara* as having genuine *fuzoku* origins. With other sources agreeing with this analysis, it is likely that, at the very least, these were the areas where many of the *saibara* songs originated, some time in the Nara period. Fujiwara views these statistics as supporting the idea that the songs collected as *saibara* were not limited to outlying provincial areas but also represent *fuzoku uta* from the capitol (Fujiwara 2011, 53 - 55). Furthermore, he cites the intertextuality and phrasing that is reflected in poems from the *Man'yōshū* and the *Nihon shoki kayō* (日本書紀歌謠) “Archaic songs of the *Nihon shoki*.”

Despite this correlation, there is only one identifiable textual allusion to the *Nihon shoki kayō* in *saibara*. It is dated *Tenchi* 9 (ca. 635) and occurs in a song that contains comparable elements from other intertexts as well:

Saibara: Takekawa (竹河)

太介加波乃 波之乃川女名留也 波之乃川女名留也 波名曾乃尔 波礼 波名曾乃尔 和礼乎波波名天也 和礼乎波波奈天也 女左之太久戸天

take kafa no / fasi no tume naru ya / fasi no tume naru ya / fanazono ni fare / fanazono ni / ware woba fanate ya ware woba fanate ya / mezasi tagufete

By the bridge of Takekawa, [it is] by the bridge of Takekawa

At that flower garden *fare*!

Let [me] go at the flower garden, put me with those girls and let me go!

(*Saibara: Takekawa*)

Nihon shoki 124

于知波志能 都梅能阿素弭爾 伊提摩栖古

utipasi no₂ / tume₂ no₂ / aso₁bi₁ ni / ide-mase ko₂

Come out girls, to the amusement by the bridge (NSK 124)

There are no precisely corresponding full lines, just the phrases *fasi* ~ *pasi* “bridge,” and *tume* “edge; vicinity” However, the description and context is similar, both are anticipating the company of young girls at the foot of a bridge. In part following Moribe, Usuda suggests that the *saibara* song is a fragment of an old tale involving sexual temptation of the imperial princess serving at *Ise Shrine* (*Saigū* 齋宮), for which the punishment was death (Usuda 2000, 147). Tsuchihashi views the *Nihon shoki* poem as a description of *utagaki*, which commonly took place at the foot of a bridge (Tsuchihashi 1957, 206). This *saibara* song is also compared with the following *Man'yōshū* poem:

墨江之 小集樂尔出而 寤尔毛 己妻尚乎 鏡登見津藻

*SUMI₁NO₂YE NO₂ / WODUME₂ ni IDETE / UTUTU ni mo / ONO₂-DUMA
SURA wo / KAGAMI₁ to₂ MI₁tu mo*

Going out to the small gathering at Sumiyoshi

It is not a dream

That my spouse appears as a transient beauty, as if [looking] in a mirror (MYS 16.3808)

This *Man'yōshū* poem has a commentary following:

[Regarding this poem], it is said there was a man from outside the capitol. His name is not known. On an occasion, the townspeople gathered in great numbers and for field amusement (*utagaki*). Among the people who attended there was a couple of provincial peasant stock. The woman's countenance was handsome and supreme to everyone who gathered there. And that provincial peasant felt increasingly endeared towards his wife. This was when he made the song and praised her with it.

右傳云 昔者鄙人 姓名未詳也 于時鄉里男女衆集野遊 是會集之中有鄙人夫婦 其婦容姿端正秀於衆諸 乃彼鄙人之意弥增愛妻之情 而作斯歌贊嘆美兒也

The commentary identifies this poem as composed by a man of regional peasantry stock (*tohitō* 鄙人) during an *utagaki*. The above *Nihon shoki* poem also has a clear reference to *utagaki*. These intertexts necessitate a revaluation of Usuda's interpretation of the *saibara* song and immediately tie the song into a subtextual theme of *utagaki*, romantic encounters and feminine beauty. They are further tied together by their *fuzoku* provenance (explicitly in MYS 16.3808) and topic. It is difficult to say whether these songs were included consciously or as an unconscious bricolage of poetic elements accessible to anyone within the sphere of oral ballads in this period. Suffice it to say that the intertextuality between *saibara* and *Man'yōshū* is considerable, and begs many more questions about the literary or pre-literary relationship they reveal.

Saibara and Man'yōshū

Man'yōshū is the major (known) intertext of *saibara*. There are 26 references to the *Man'yōshū* occurring across eight books. This is probably one of the most intriguing and evocative aspects of the *saibara* songs, an aspect that has them stand out considerably from the other Heian period *fuzoku* song collections. Interestingly, with the exception of one poem *Manyōshū* 11.2362, and *saibara*: *Yama shiro* (山城), all the songs with *Man'yōshū-saibara* parallels are from unknown authors (Fujiwara 2011, 41). While these parallels are not numerous, it is important to keep in mind the size of the *saibara* corpus. Furthermore, the putative origins, venue, content, and composition of the majority of songs in the *Saibara* collection are, for the most part, vastly divergent from those selected for inclusion in the *Man'yōshū*. This makes for a perplexing qualitative contradiction in the inclusion of *Man'yōshū* poems in the collection. In order to better understand what these resemblances reveal, it is necessary to briefly outline the *Man'yōshū* books wherein they appear.

It is clear that of all 26 instances, there is particular density in Book VII, XII, and XIV. The concentration of intertextual references to poems in Book XIV is interesting, considering the association of *Azuma uta* with *fuzoku* artistry in general. The relatively high number of occurrences in Book VII and XI is also interesting for different reasons, which I will elucidate below. However, a compositional breakdown of the books that have the highest number of poems with intertextual references in *saibara* is necessary to understand what, if any, connections they may have to better understand its historical context.

Man'yōshū Book VII contains the highest number of intertextual references in *saibara*, occurring in six songs (five poems from Book VII). Book VII's compiler is not known. It contains 350 poems in the *zōka* (雑歌), *hiyuka* (比喩歌), and *banka* (挽歌) genres. Though the majority of poems are not dated, they are likely from the late seventh or early eighth century. Along with the *zōka* and *hiyuka* genres are a series of themed poems such as *mondō* (問答) “question and answer” poems involving a hypothetical addressee (i.e. MYS 7.1251), and *yamatokoto* (大和琴) “songs on the Japanese zither,” which include songs applied to the *kagura* and other *gagaku* repertoires.

The majority of poems have anonymous authors. However, among those attributed to an individual, Book VII contains a small pool of various authors. The vast majority of poems, however, are attributed to *Kakinomoto no Hitomaro*, 56 in total. These poems are from the collection *Kakinomoto no ason Hitomaro kashū* (柿本朝臣人麻呂歌集) “*Kakinomoto no ason Hitomaro* Poetry Collection” (abbr. *Hitomaro Collection*). This is one of several collections included throughout the *Man'yōshū* as *kokashū* 古歌集 “old song collection” (Commons 2003: 34).

Man'yōshū Book XI contains four poems referenced in four *saibara* songs. Of these, MYS 11:2362 is identified as a *Hitomaro Collection* poem. This book in its entirety is identified as having a distinctly folk flavor (Takagi 1972: 9-11). It is also dominated by logographic writing, especially in the case of the *Hitomaro Collection* poems.

These *Man'yōshū* books share a few commonalities: (1) the spelling system; all the books apply semantographic spelling with very few exceptions. (2) The general composition of the poems: Books XI and XII have distinctly folk-style poems reminiscent of some *gagaku* and *kagura* song varieties. (3) Anonymous authorship; the majority of poems in Book VII, XI, and XII have anonymous authors. (4) Kakinomoto no Hitomaro; *Kakinomoto no Ason Hitomaro Kashū* (柿本朝人麻呂歌集) poems appear frequently in Book VII, XI, and XII. These three books specifically contain poems from the *Hitomaro Collection*. The largest cluster of references in *Man'yōshū* Books VII, XI, and XII statistically reflect the distribution of poems from the *Hitomaro Collection* in *Man'yōshū*. The highest density of *Hitomaro Collection* poems is found in Book XI with 161 poems. The full distribution is as follows:¹²

Table 2: Distribution of Hitomaro Collection poems in the *Man'yōshū*

MYS Book	XI	X	VII	IX	XII	XIII	II	III
Number of <i>Kashū</i> poems	161	68	56	49	27	3	1	1

Compare this with the distribution of *Man'yōshū* songs in *saibara* summarized below.

Table 3: Summary of distribution of textual references to the *Man'yōshū*

MYS Book	II	III	V	VII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XVI
Totals	1	1	1	6	1	1	3	3	2	4	2
Grand total	26										

With the exception of one reference appearing in Book XIV, the *saibara-Man'yōshū* intertextual references correlate exclusively with poems from *Hitomaro Collection*. It is clear from the conspicuous appearance of these poems that they were held in high esteem by the compilers of *Man'yōshū*. Commons notes that this is especially true in Book VII, where the poems are indeed heading most of the *zōka* 雑歌 sections, thus reflecting veneration paid to Hitomaro as one of the great and respected poets of the age (Commons 2009, 34). There are 84 poems attributed directly to Hitomaro himself, but these are distinct from those quoted from the *Hitomaro Collection*. It is not known whether these songs were actually composed by him or not. There is a theory that Hitomaro did, in fact, not author the bulk of these poems, but that he collected them in his travels. The recitation of Hitomaro's songs before travel poems in some *Man'yōshū* books further suggests that Hitomaro's name was at least superstitiously associated with safety in travel (Commons 2009, 1). While this does point to some connection between Hitomaro and the *saibara*, or perhaps more aptly, early oral songs and poetic traditions of travelling entertainers and regional commoners, more investigation is necessary to substantiate this.

These lines of inquiry may bring about more questions than answers. The connections between *saibara* and Nara period poetic collections and its historical provenance, may turn out to be a phantasm--a construction, of a vision of *saibara* as nostalgic ballads, imbuing them with a certain curiosity and raw flavor that would have appealed to the

¹² chart adapted from Commons (2003: 34)

bored and isolated court aristocracy. Or there may be a genuine underlying history threading them together. However, the implications for both of these scenarios is significant for our understanding of the development of oracular traditions and literacy in Japan, as well as the way in which song and poetry and native traditions of the populace was conceptualized in the minds of early Japanese courtiers.



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**The Lonely Island of Queerness: Manifestations of Early Shōwa Homosexuality
Discourse in Edogawa Ranpo's *Kotō no Oni***

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In my paper I write about Edogawa's Ranpo novel *Kotō no Oni*, The Demon of the Lonely Isle, and the way the issue of homosexuality is treated there.

Edogawa Ranpo was born in 1894 as Hirai Tarō in Nabari (Mie prefecture). When he was 18, he left for Tokyo and received an economic degree from Waseda University. Later he held various jobs, from chief accountant through bookshop clerk to a street vendor selling soba noodles. In 1923 Ranpo debuted as a writer with a detective story *Nisen dōka* (The Two-Sen Copper Coin). This story was written already under the alias Edogawa Ranpo, wordplay with the name of Edgar Allan Poe. Ranpo was greatly inspired by Poe, the father of detective story, as well as with the works of A. C. Doyle.

But Ranpo wasn't content with classical detective stories and soon turned to *ero guro nansensu* sensibilities then in vogue in Japan. That is why many of his stories contain references of perversions and other unusual things. For example, in his *D-zaka no satujin jiken* a woman loses her life during a sadomasochistic play, and the hero of his perhaps most famous short story *Ningen isu* spends a month hidden inside of an armchair because he is aroused by the contact with the sitting people.

Kotō no Oni is a mystery novel written between 1929-1930 very much influenced by these *ero guro nansensu* sensibilities, with a somewhat overwrought plot. I'll try to summarize this plot to the extent necessary for my analysis. The main character, a young man named Minoura, is working at a business company, where he meets an 18-year-old woman clerk named Hatsuyo. The two young people fall in love and start going out together. Hatsuyo tells Minoura her life story – when she was just three years old, she was found abandoned in a harbor by a couple who adopted her. From her earliest life, she remembers being near the sea and watching a coastline in the shape of a reclining cow. She also remembers playing with a beautiful baby, probably her brother or sister.

Minoura is happy with Hatsuyo, but one day she is killed in her home by an unknown murderer. Minoura suspects his friend Moroto of the crime. The doctor Moroto is the official homosexual of the story and in many ways its key character. He met Minoura in the boarding house where they both lived and fell in love with him. Minoura didn't discourage him at first and tolerated some of Moroto's advances such as hand holding. He even let Moroto wash him in the bath. One night they both get drunk and Moroto tries to seduce Minoura. Whether he succeeds in this attempt is not very clear. I'll quote the seduction passage later.

After this seduction happened or almost happened, Moroto apologized to Minoura, claiming he wasn't "like that". They stayed friends from then on, but Moroto kept sending Minoura love letters. However, that abruptly stopped when Minoura became involved with Hatsuyo. To Minoura's unpleasant surprise, Moroto started courting Hatsuyo. Minoura understood it could be no genuine interest on Moroto's part, because he had confessed to Minoura that women didn't hold any attraction to him. That's why he suspects Moroto of jealousy and trying to destroy his and Hatsuyo's happiness, first by courting her, and when that failed, by murdering her.

However, he soon understands that Moroto is innocent of her murder, and they try to solve this crime together. During their investigation, they find a strange document. It

is a diary of young girl, who refers to herself as Hide-chan. Upon reading this diary, it becomes clear that Hide-chan is one of conjoined twins. The other conjoined twin is a boy, which is of course biologically impossible. For their whole lives, the twins have been held captive. From their prison, there is view of a coastline in the shape of a reclining cow. Moroto admits that he knows this place – it is a small island in Wakayama Prefecture where he was raised by disfigured parents and servants. However, he doesn't remember the twins.

Meanwhile, there have been more murders, and various clues point at Moroto's father Jōgorō, a cruel man suffering from kyphosis – the medical term for hunchback. Moroto and Minoura travel to the island to prove that the father's behind the murders and free the twins.

They find the twins as expected and Minoura falls in love at the first sight with Hide-chan. After freeing the twins and other disfigured captives, Minoura and Moroto go searching for a lost treasure in the island's labyrinth of underground caves. Because of Jōgorō's intervention, the two young men get lost in the labyrinth.

The second important interaction between Minoura and Moroto takes place in this labyrinth. After almost losing their lives when the underground caves are flooded by the tide, the two men find themselves utterly lost in the labyrinth. They spend some time aimlessly wandering about, and eventually come to the bleak conclusion that they would never see the light of day again. At this point, Moroto claims that the normal rules of society no longer apply to their situation: "*Just as there is no light, there are no laws, morals, customs, nothing.*"¹ and later says that they have now a whole new world just for the two of them². With these claims, Moroto tries to seduce Minoura in a violent manner, but Minoura is disgusted and fights back. This seduction/fight is put to an end when a fisherman appears. From the fisherman, they learn that Moroto isn't Jōgorō's biological son and that Hide-chan is Hatsuyo's sister, who was born healthy, but Jōgorō kidnapped her and surgically joined her with a country baby boy. This was done as a part of Jōgorō's monstrous project of creating a "cripple empire", which also included trapping infants in boxes in order to create artificial dwarfs.

Sometime later, Moroto and Minoura find the lost treasure and escape from the labyrinth. There is the predictable happy end – Jōgorō and his sidekicks are arrested, Hide-chan turns out to be the rightful heir to the treasure and the island estate. Moroto surgically separates her from the country boy, Minoura marries her and they use a part of the treasure to build a special facility for healing disfigured people. Minoura intends to ask Moroto to become the chief physician of this hospital. However, all does not end well – Moroto dies while visiting his real family. His last words –which are also the last words of the story – are those of devotion to Minoura.

At first glance, it may seem that the book is not very positive in its treatment of homosexuality, describing it in terms like strange and queer and having the hero renounce his friend's homosexual advances in fear and disgust. But it is important to realize some things about the author: Edogawa Ranpo was actually very interested in

¹ Edogawa 1987: 262

² Ibid. 269

homosexuality. He competed with his friend Iwata Jun'ichi (who is rumored to inspire both the idea of *Kotō no Oni* and its main character Minoura) as to who would collect more works dealing with male homosexuality, in Japanese past as well as in Western writings. Edogawa also wrote an article on Victorian intellectual John Addington Symonds who had been known for his defense of "sexual inversion" called "J.A. Symond's Secret Passion" for the journal *Seishin Bunseki* (Psychoanalysis)³.

This interest in homosexuality may have very well been personal: despite being married, he was rumored to be a frequent customer at a gay bar in Shinjuku and to have various affairs with men.⁴ Edogawa also touched upon the issue of homosexuality in his fictional works. In a short autobiographical story *Ranpo's Confession* (1926), the author describes his first love as a platonic relationship with a male classmate. He seems somehow ashamed of the fact, but at the same time he proclaims that the sex of one beloved might not really matter:

*"I experienced my first love when I was fifteen years old. I'm not boasting with my success, because my partner was not a woman. But, well, isn't it the same thing?"*⁵

Another example is *Mokuzu duka* (1936), which is not really a story but more like the traditional Japanese *zuihitsu* genre, an essay-like musing on a certain topic. Here he describes how he stumbled upon a story of two young samurai (ironically through English writer Carpenter), a tale of passionate love with a tragic ending. He proceeds to give its summary and reflects upon their fate on the titular Mokuzu mound, melancholic over the fact that it is now mostly forgotten in Japan. Nowhere in this work we find any judgment against homosexuality.

When we take into account all these Ranpo's writings and opinions, it does not seem likely that he would take a wholly negative stance on homosexuality in *Kotō no Oni*. Of course, the way he (or in fact any writer) wrote was influenced not just by his personal views and tastes, but by other factors as well. One was the rising of the Japanese Empire that brought along the strengthening of the censorship apparatus, with the number of banned books peaking between 1927 and 1936.⁶ It is not my point here to go to depths about transwar Japanese censorship, so it suffices to say that there were bans on works considered obscene (*fūzoku kairan*), together with those viewed as disrupting public order (*annei chitsujo bōgai*). The ban against supposed obscenity affected some books dealing with homosexuality, for example: Nakano Masato's (writing as Hanabusa Shirō) – *Nanshoku kō – A Study in Nanshoku* (1928) or the same author's translation of sexologist Albert Moll's study in female-female sexuality, *Dōseiai no shujusō – The Many Faces of Same-Sex Love* (1929)⁷. Apart from graphic descriptions of homosexual acts, censorship also tried to eradicate any expressions of sympathy for homosexuality.

³ Pflugfelder 2007: 314

⁴ This is claimed by Jeffrey Angles in his *Writing the Love of Boys*: "Even now, one hears the rumors in the Japanese literary world about affairs Ranpo allegedly had with men." (Angles 2011: 28)

⁵ Edogawa 1991: 341

⁶ Of course many books were also banned during the war years, but that was also caused by shortage of paper or by the impact the war had on writers.

⁷ Pflugfelder 293

Terminology

On the surface, *Kotō no Oni* appears quite unsympathetic towards homosexuality. It is in accordance with the medical discourse of its day when it refers to Moroto as *henshitusha* (pervert) and *seiteki tōsakusha* (sexual invert). The most often used adjective for speaking about homosexuality is *iyō* – strange, queer, and bizarre. The chapter where we meet Moroto and learn of his affection for Minoura is called *iyō naru koi* – queer love. Later we learn that Moroto possesses *queer* good looks⁸ and feels a *queer* attachment toward Minoura⁹, which he expresses in *somewhat queer* love letters¹⁰. He engages in a *queer* research¹¹, behaves in a *queer* manner¹² and experiences a *queer* lust¹³; ironically, when he in spite of his sexual orientation starts to court a woman, Minoura describes it as *iyō kyūkon undō* – queer courtship¹⁴.

And this is not an exhaustive enumeration. Queerness seems to be an inherent part of Moroto's identity, one that he cannot escape even when acting as a heterosexual. However, when we look at the text closely, we'll find out that the adjective *iyō* is not restricted to Moroto. Not only does the story itself describe a *queer* matter¹⁵, but the conjoined twin Hide-chan is also endowed with *queer* beauty¹⁶. Apart from *iyō*, we find that other adjectives with similar meaning are abundant in the text, especially *myō* and *hen*. Not just Moroto, but other characters and their behavior are repeatedly described with these adjectives. Finally, Minoura notes that love itself is a *strange thing*¹⁷.

What do we make of these adjectives? From one perspective, they express distancing the “normal self” from the perverted other (and by doing so, of course also defining the “normal self”, which needs the other to exist). But the use of these adjectives had other meaning – giving the readers what they wanted and expected which was the erotic and the grotesque, preferably combined. Japanese history scholar Gregory M. Pflugfelder notices that connotations of “abnormal” sexuality didn't have to be wholly negative, when the concept of *hentai* sexuality was transferred from medical discourse to the popular one – there it partially stopped being the object of condemnation and became the object of enthusiastic consumption and celebration.

Marginalization

According to Pflugfelder, three strategies of marginalization were used in dealing with the subject of homosexuality – one was to place it in the Japanese past, where *nanshoku* was celebrated. Another one was to restrict it to the period of adolescence, and deal with it as the natural phase of sexual experimentation among young people at single-sex educational institutions, especially boarding schools. The last strategy was

⁸ Edogawa 1987: 18

⁹ Ibid. 22

¹⁰ Ibid. 23

¹¹ Ibid. 60

¹² Ibid. 153

¹³ Ibid. 270

¹⁴ Ibid. 52

¹⁵ Ibid. 20

¹⁶ Ibid. 188

¹⁷ Ibid. 39

geographical. It restricted homosexuality mainly to a region that has a reputation of being the backwater of Japan – Kyushu.¹⁸

Out of these three strategies, only the last one seems to apply to *Kotō no Oni* as the Island in the title is located south – it is not quite Kyushu, but south enough from Tokyo that I think it counts. We can also generalize that this strategy marginalizes homosexuality as a habit of the periphery as opposed to the heteronormative center. Czech literary scholar Martin C. Putna, who also writes about different strategies used by writers dealing with the issue of homosexuality, joins the temporal and geographical distancing practice under a single heading of “stylization methods”: “The author talks openly about the issue, but transfers it from asymptomatic civilian present into distant, “romantic” eras and environments, where homosexuality may seem “more acceptable” to the reader.”¹⁹

Minoura is struggling to assert his hegemony over this periphery by normalizing the country dialect used by Hide-chan in her diary, and expressing joy over her learning Tokyo speech:

*I don't think I have to describe the happiness I felt at the moment Hide-chan's wound had healed and she appeared before me with properly braided hair, made-up and wearing a silk crepe kimono, and then she spoke to me in Tokyo dialect!*²⁰

For Minoura it is not enough that Hide-chan becomes healthy, clean and beautifully dressed – all traces of her otherness must be purged.

As the whole it is easy to see how the work couldn't show homosexuality in more positive light. In *Mokuzu duka*, exploration of an erotic bond between two samurai from Japanese past presented as a primarily scholarly interest tinted with nostalgia was safely marginalized in the past. In *Ranpo's Confession*, the author's recollection of his platonic relationship with a schoolmate was safely marginalized in adolescence. Both could therefore be openly sympathetic to homosexuality.

However, a contemporary non-platonic relationship between two adult men taking place mostly in Tokyo (even though the “pervert” himself had been raised in the periphery) definitely wasn't safe. That's why it could not be presented in an unambiguously positive fashion.

The Gap

Let us now have a closer look at the first of Moroto and Minoura's key interactions: “Let's go to your room, let's go to your room!” *With these words, Moroto dragged me in my room. My futon lay spread in there, because I didn't put it away during the day. I don't know if he pushed me or I tripped, but suddenly I fell on the spread futon. Moroto came to stand beside me and looked down on my face. Suddenly he said bluntly: “You're beautiful.”*

¹⁸ Pflugfelder 207

¹⁹ Putna 89

²⁰ Edogawa 1987: 288

What I'm going to say next may sound strange, but at that moment I was overcome by a strange thought, that I had changed into a woman, and the beautiful young man looming over me, whom my drunken state made even more attractive, is my husband. Moroto knelt down and took one of my carelessly outstretched hands into his. "Your hand is hot."

*I, too, at that moment felt the other man's burning palm.*²¹

Here we can see how Minoura tries to rationalize his behavior using heteronormative terms. For him, it is less stigmatizing to think that he had become a woman for a moment, than that he felt a homosexual desire. But even this illusion of becoming a woman is soon shattered, because the scene continues as follows:

*At the moment I have huddled myself up in the corner, pale as a sheet, I saw that Moroto's face assumed an expression of regret over something that couldn't be taken back. Then he said in a strangled voice: "What just happened was a joke, just a joke. I don't do such things!"*²²

However, I would like to draw attention to a seemingly inconspicuous typographic element, that I consider actually quite important. Between the seduction here, and the rebuttal there, there's a blank line.

The hero who cannot admit feeling other than heterosexual desires, to an extent of preferring to become a woman, also wouldn't be able to admit that he engaged in a homosexual act with another man. But the fact that the rebuttal follows not immediately after the touch of Moroto's "burning palm", but only after the blank line, is telling.

Someone might argue that the author used the blank line to increase the narrative tension. But it is peculiar that it's the only line of this kind in the entire book. Other blank lines are always used to divide chapters or main narrative from other texts inserted in it, such as notes and letters. We don't encounter any blank lines in objectively more dramatic parts of the story. This leads me to the conclusion that the function of this blank line is other than dramatic – it could well be an omission of the consummation of a sexual act.

Moroto's Character

Finally, I would like to say something about Moroto's character. Although Moroto's personality and behavior are often described as "queer" and Minoura is downright disgusted by his friend's actions in the cave, the overall impression we get of this character is positive. He's willing to sacrifice himself to save Minoura, urging Minoura to leave him behind on the island, in his father's clutches. He is brave in face of danger and death, showing courage when Minoura has given up, and therefore acting more manly:

²¹ Ibid. 20-21

²² Ibid. 21

“You mustn’t despair. Until the very last moment, you mustn’t despair!” Moroto cried in an unnecessarily loud voice.

“Can you swim?”

“Yes, I can, but there’s no hope for me left. I want to die with all my heart.”

“Why are you saying such weak-spirited things? It’s not that bad. Darkness changes people into cowards. Stay strong!”²³

Minoura seems to be appreciating these qualities very much, finding solace in Moroto’s support:

Moroto put his arms hands around my hips and gripped me in a strong embrace. In the dark, I couldn’t see his face even though it was just a few inches from mine, but I could hear his regular breathing and feel his warm breath on my cheek. Through our wet clothes, I could feel his warm firm muscles hugging me. Moroto’s body scent, which I found far from unpleasant, was floating in the air next to me. All of this gave me strength in the dark.²⁴

Furthermore, he had loved Minoura steadily for eight years, even though he knew his feelings would likely never be returned. In comparison to this, the main example of heterosexual love we see in the story seems fleeting. Minoura seems much in love with Hatsuyo and when she dies, he claims that she was irreplaceable for him. However, contrary to this statement he replaces her rather quickly with her sister. Moroto’s affecting is unwavering. After he died in his hometown, his father wrote to Minoura this:

“Before he (Moroto) drew his final breath, he didn’t call out the name of his father or mother, but, while embracing your letters, kept calling only your name.”²⁵

The novel ends with this very sentence. There are no more judgments or lack of understanding love for queer love afterwards. To end the story not with fulfillment of heterosexual love, but with the final proof of Moroto’s devotion for Minoura, seems to me no random decision on Ranpo’s part. Rather, I consider it a conscious act of subversion.

Conclusion

The time and environment in which Edogawa wrote his novel wouldn’t have permitted him to openly express any sympathy for homosexuality. He had to cater both to the censors, who would have banned such a novel outright, as well as to his readers, who expected the topic of homosexuality to be treated in a certain – mostly scandalizing – way. Edogawa meets these expectations by using the proper vocabulary (“perverted”, “queer”, “strange” and so on) and by having his main character Minoura denouncing his friend Moroto’s homosexuality. However, at the same time he artfully subverts this conforming attitude, both in his other writings and more interestingly in the novel itself. He achieves it, among other means, by extending the “queer” terminology to other, non-homosexual characters and

²³ Ibid. 255

²⁴ Ibid. 254-5

²⁵ Ibid. 290

phenomena (including love itself), by hinting that something more might have taken place between Minoura and Moroto and – maybe most strikingly – by the presentation of Moroto’s character as manly, brave and self-sacrificing, and his homosexual attachment to Minoura as far more lasting and convincing than any heterosexual relationships in the novel.



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