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# Fashioning a Political Identity: French Women and the White Neoclassical Dress

Michele Dobbins

Louis XIV once observed that fashion is “the mirror of history”.<sup>1</sup> He could not have known that many years later, his great-grandson’s grandson would lose his head and the great wheels of the revolution would set in motion changes that reached into every corner of society, including clothing, which came to be a cornerstone of political representation. Even the seemingly innocent trends of fashion carry historical significance. In a society where women’s fashion was said to change every fifteen days, the craze for the neoclassical white dress stands out as a startling example of uniformity. The trend began in the 1780s but gained its true momentum during the Terror, Directorial, and Consular periods all the way up to Napoleon’s rule before falling out of favor for its link to English trade. Its repeated presence in fashion magazines, at recorded events, and in portraits attests to a greater meaning than mere aesthetics. Rather, it invoked political ideas for women in a society that continually sought to keep them out of the public sphere. Although revolutionary France and the decade that followed it are understood to be extremely misogynistic – which they were in many cases – perhaps French women were not content to leave it that way. This essay seeks to probe the question of women’s neoclassical dress – how was it represented in art, why did it maintain longevity, and what did it mean for

<sup>1</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress: Fashion in England and France 1750 to 1820* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), 3.

the hundreds of women who decided to wear the ideals of Greek and Rome upon their very bodies?

To begin with, a working definition of the neoclassical must be established. As Robert Rosenblum points out, “Neoclassicism” is a broad category under which many interpretations and ideological motives fall. The term casts a wide net, but at its core lies the idea of reinterpreting Greek and Roman antiquity. Initially, France preferred an idealized Rome, but as the upheaval settled following the overthrow of the monarchy, contemporaries frequently associated Rome with a decadent culture, so dressing *à la grecque* became a safer and more popular style under the Directory. Although at different times during its political upheavals France preferred one behemoth of ancient society to another, both Greece and Rome inspired ideas of heroic republican virtue, simplicity, and knowledge, while rejecting lavish, aristocratic monarchy. The neoclassic dress assembled itself most often in some interpretation of the simple, linear-oriented folds of drapery. Most importantly, this drapery was white to emulate ancient statues and to connote purity. Women wore their belts up high, closer to their breasts. At times, a shawl was added to this costume to emphasize the effect of drapery; these shawls provided the opportunity to advertise symbols of the ancient world. Women often paired the outfit with a natural style of hair, sometimes even described as messy, in direct contrast with the elaborate, carefully arranged wigs of aristocratic women before them. Rounding out the style, women wore *cothurnes*, flat sandals that were similar to the footwear Greek actors wore in theatre performances. For portraits, women often posed bare-footed.<sup>2</sup>

The values of neoclassical fashion stem from its roots in sculpture. E. Claire Cage writes that by linking themselves to statues, women gave fashion an air of timelessness and importance. Connecting to antiquity was more than imitation – it was a lineage. The interest in antique sculptures began before the French Revolution, when archaeological discoveries of Pompeii and Herculaneum reminded the European world of the civilizations from whence they came. The artifacts from these sites represented an idyllic democracy and the cornucopia of wisdom and philosophy in the ancient theologians. Women thus became living stat-

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3–4; E. Claire Cage, “The Sartorial Self: Neoclassical Fashion and Gender Identity in France, 1797–1804,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 193, 196–197, 207; Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 92, 114–115.

ues by adopting the style of the ancients. John Carr's comment about Juliette Recamier, both fan and subject of David's work, is particularly revealing; he observed that she had decorated her bedroom in Grecian style, with Herculaneum vases on either side of the bed, "upon which this charming statue reposes".<sup>3</sup> His metaphor illustrates the argument that women's fashion tied itself to the ideals of classic art, and therefore the choice of dress was more than comfort, attractiveness, or whimsy – it was a political statement invoking the memory of ancient republican virtue.<sup>4</sup>

These political statements drew from a reservoir of symbols – purity, simplicity, nature, and republican values. The understated white dress positioned itself as the stark opposite of the lavish, complicated attire of the aristocracy, with their foot-high powdered wigs, heels, and tight corsets. The loose folds of the new dresses directly contrasted with the stiffness of the corset, which came to encapsulate the deceptive nature of the whole aristocratic ilk – disguising the natural figure of a woman by stuffing it into a predetermined shape, the corset was unnatural and false, as well as unhealthy for women in the long run. A return to nature, in line with Rousseauan fashion, reinforced the idea of rejecting material extravagance and was symbolized by the simplicity of the dress. The whiteness of the dresses also represented purity and immortality by its similarity to the whiteness of Greek and Roman statues. Ironically, Aileen Ribeiro argues that over time, the semi-transparency of the whiteness conjoined with the clinging nature of the muslin or gauze of the dresses, came to represent not only elimination of artifice, but women's sexual freedom. Few of the dresses covered the neck or arms, even in France's less than balmy weather. This freedom to show off her body with bare skin and the illustrative shape of what lay underneath the material allowed the modern French woman to be a sexual being. This sexuality, though frightening to some, did not necessarily equate itself with promiscuity, however. As *Journal des dames et des modes* succinctly put it: "Truth is nude".<sup>5</sup> In this way, French women

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>4</sup> Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 207–208; Judith Chazin-Bennahum, "A Longing for Perfection: Neoclassic Fashion and Ballet," *Fashion Theory* 6, no. 4 (2002): 373; Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 113.

<sup>5</sup> Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 200.

created a new persona for themselves; a freer body to match the free people.<sup>6</sup>

Aileen Ribeiro perfectly sums up why the French idealized antiquity to such a high degree in her chapter “The Stuff of Heroes.” She writes that to the French, the characters of ancient Greece and Rome, such as Plutarch and Homer, symbolized republican virtues that enabled a perfect civilization and government to thrive. The Roman heroes placed honor above everything else, either achieving noble victory or dying for their cause. The excess of the aristocracy came to represent a materialistic world view that the French began to despise, turning instead to the didactic morality of Neoclassic art. Rousseau shared that he was strongly influenced by Plutarch, which shows in his treatise on education, *Emile*, whose protagonist forgoes contemporary literature in favor of antique writers. Rousseau’s writings glorified a simple lifestyle. These ideals of virtue, self-sacrifice, and a new world made possible by republican values also became represented in women’s dress. I argue that this invests the feminine with a political power that perhaps the French did not intend to give them, but that can be seen in the women’s fashion choices nonetheless. Women associated themselves with the ancient world in a bid to embody not just societal values but the root of what the Revolution was hoping to accomplish governmentally as well.<sup>7</sup>

This trend is further illustrated by the way in which women began to take on the personalities of heroic ancient women such as Aspasia and Portia. This indicates that women were not just copying a dress style because they thought it was attractive, but because they valued the ideas it stood for and were attempting to bring themselves into the public view as active participants. A contemporary woman, Fusil, said that “we transformed ourselves into Athenians”.<sup>8</sup> Cage points to the active voice that Fusil uses as an indicator of women’s agency in this societal transformation. Fusil includes the name of Aspasia in her litany of elements of Greek revival, and men and women alike compared contemporary women to a modern Aspasia in their writings. This invocation of Aspasia is significant, according to Cage, for this an-

<sup>6</sup> Cage, “The Sartorial Self,” 207; Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 19, 92–94; Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, 59–61.

<sup>7</sup> Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 135; Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Cage, “The Sartorial Self,” 2003.

cient woman's role in Greek life. Aspasia was more than the lover of the prominent philosopher Pericles; she taught rhetoric – to Socrates, no less – and gained a place as an intellectual and orator. Many of the men with whom she was contemporaneous are cited as being influenced by her, politically as well as philosophically. French women considered such a publicly active woman, who also displayed her powers of beauty and sexual attractiveness, as the perfect role model. Their choice to emulate a real historical figure, rather than some abstract goddess, shows their interest in forging a place beside the men of their times as Aspasia had done.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Rosenblum identifies Portia, wife of Brutus, as another key figure who exhibited the value of heroic sacrifice that embodied the Roman Republic as well as the new France. Nicolas-Bernard Lépicié painted *Courage of Portia*, to display at the 1777 Salon, in which Portia slits her own thigh to prove to Brutus that she will take her life if he does not succeed in assassinating Caesar.<sup>10</sup> This action transcends suicide to become an act of martyrdom. Lépicié portrays Portia as a political actor, motivated by the ideals of the perfect state and tying her own life to something larger than herself – the hope of a world free of the tyranny of Caesar. Though this painting predates the Revolution, it reveals an undercurrent of sentiment that felt the Bourbon dynasty was no longer acceptable. The women who began to model themselves after Portia, in dress and actions, no doubt remembered this iconic painting as symbolic of the effect that women could have on the world around them.<sup>11</sup>

The line between the symbolic and the real blurred as art became women's fashion, and fashion became art. This paper has already shown how women were inspired by the sculptures and ideals of Greece and Rome, but their trends also inspired a slew of paintings in which artists focused on themes of women's civic merit or captured their female sitters almost exclusively dressed in the white neoclassical dress. Both Lynn Hunt and Aileen Ribeiro comment on the significance of the moment in September 1789 when French women, all

<sup>9</sup> Henry G. Adams, *A Cyclopaedia of Female Biography* (London: Groombridge & Sons, 1857), 75, <https://archive.org/details/acyclopaediafem01adamgoog>; Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 200, 202.

<sup>10</sup> Art Resource at artres.com is another site available for reference in this case; readers can view there the portrait of Henriette Delacroix and *The Courage of Portia*.

<sup>11</sup> Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, 62.

wearing the white muslin gown, gave up their jewelry to the National Assembly as a donation to the country. An artist memorialized the 1789 event in a painting, titled *The Patriotic Gift of Illustrious French Women*. Significantly, the women were inspired by Plutarch's story of the Roman women who did the same thing in a sacrifice to Apollo. Madame Roland, a French woman at the time of the donations, said of Plutarch: "he inspired me with a real enthusiasm for public virtues and liberty".<sup>12</sup> Her diction here indicates a desire to participate in the open – she deliberately chooses the term public to describe her virtues, showing her push against the confines of the "private." Indeed, one could also assume her bid for liberty could stand for more than just the liberation from the monarchy, but for the liberty to engage in politics as well. The donation is doubly interesting in that it takes a stereotypical female possession – jewelry – and uses it in a traditionally male space – the National Assembly. This juxtaposition of feminine and masculine makes a powerful statement for how French women could push on the bubble of their sphere to participate as citizens in a *fraternité* oriented society. Women, adopting the stereotypical male virtues of patriotism and self-sacrifice, represented themselves in the garb of republican antiquity as a reminder that they deserved the opportunity to help shape their country in the same way that they felt the Roman Republic had allowed women to do.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most iconic French painters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Jacques-Louis David, took on the role of both painter and propaganda expert. In his elaborate fêtes, he celebrated the values of Revolutionary France and its success in emulating the values of the ancient world. For example, in the Festival of the Supreme Being, he arranged for the parade to end at a "mountain" where all participants dedicated themselves to the Supreme Being. The men of the Convention wore red and blue costumes that David had designed; women wore white dresses similar to the style worn in *The Patriotic Gift of Illustrious French Women*. Ribeiro suggests that these white dresses were a type of uniform, at least for patriotic ceremonies such as the dedication of jewelry and during David's fêtes. This suggestion is particularly appealing when considering that men all had to

<sup>12</sup> Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 146.

<sup>13</sup> Lynn Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," in *From the Royal to the Republican Body*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Kathryn Norberg (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 244–246; Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 146.

wear the same outfit, and their uniformity united them under Robespierre. Should women have no political role at all, their outfits might have shown variation, but their own uniformity accords them a certain degree of civic importance in the politically-charged fêtes.<sup>14</sup>

David also stationed women dressed in the neoclassic dress at the new Temples of Reason to represent priestesses or Goddesses of Reason. To the ensemble was added a tricolor sash that took the place of the usual shawl, as well as a *bonnet rouge*, the headwear associated with liberty because it was this same style of hat that Romans presented to newly freed slaves. This choice of headwear alone seems full of politically loaded potential in that freedom could mean many things to women who found themselves consistently controlled by both government and men. I am not arguing that David coordinated these costumes in support of women's agency but would like to suggest that women's adoption of the outfit both inside and outside of the symbolic ceremonies indicates that they recognized the potential for empowerment and hoped to bring it into everyday life.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to propaganda, David created numerous portraits of women who chose to portray themselves in the neoclassic dress. Lynn Hunt identifies his 1800 painting of Madame Récamier as the most iconic of his women's neoclassical portraits (although Ribeiro shares that the Madame did not really care for the portrayal and preferred a more seductive version later done by Gérard). Another of his works, *A Young Woman in White*, captures the simplicity of the ancient look, complete with the draped effect of the dress and shawl, exposed arms, and more natural hairstyle (see Figure 1 on the following page).

These typical components all constitute the style that many women, including Thérèse Tallien and Henriette Delacroix, chose for their portraits. Ribeiro points out that David's 1799 painting of Delacroix mimicked an engraving of a Roman matron from André Lens's 1776 *Costume des peuples de l'antique*, emphasizing the direct link that French artists saw between their present and the Roman past.<sup>16</sup> David's work shows a similar trend, in that his 1775/1780 black chalk drawing seems more like a classical statue frozen on a pedestal than it does a specific person (see

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-146; Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 245.

<sup>15</sup> Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 144-1146; Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 245.

<sup>16</sup> Visit Bridgeman Images at [bridgemanimages.com](http://bridgemanimages.com) to see Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's *Madame Vigée-Lebrun and her Daughter, Jeanne-Lucie-Louise*.



Figure 1: Jacques-Louis David (1798). *Portrait of a Young Woman in White*. Oil on canvas, 125.5cm x 95cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (Chester Dale Collection)

Fig. 2 on the next page). The relaxed posture and hand position seem to be a mirror-image of his 1798 portrait, showing David's conception of the link between antique statue imagery and the specific style he

chose for his portraits. The positioning of one's body runs parallel to the positioning of one's self within a framework of republican values.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 2: Jacques-Louis David (1775/80). *Seated Woman and Man Sprawling on the Ground*. Black chalk on laid paper, 13.5cm x 16.2 cm. Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington, Patrons' Permanent Fund

Therefore, although a distinction must be made between women's symbolic representation in festivals and portraits and the clothes they wore on a daily basis, the neoclassical dress deserves study because in both categories – the symbolic and the real – the costume was the same. Women have been representing nations for decades without there being any implicit claim to political activism, yet to my knowledge, never before did the contemporary women dress themselves according to their allegorical symbols. The collapsing of the space between representation and reality speaks volumes about the significance women

<sup>17</sup> Hunt, "Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France," 245; Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 112–116.

placed on the neoclassic dress as a way to participate in post-Bourbon society. Indeed, if the divine right of king over country had been shaken, so too could the natural domination of man over woman. It would be selling French women short to think that they could not draw these conclusions themselves, and if not advocating for political positions of power, they at least might have been making the case that they deserved more recognition for how they had helped the nation in more ways than just producing future citizens.

During the 1780s and 1790s, women crafted a unique position for themselves in French society through fashion and the arts. Artist Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun was one of the first to promote Grecian dress, propelled by the reading of *Voyage du jeune Anarcharsis en Grèce* to host a dinner in which her female guests were draped like Athenians, served Grecian food, and plunged into a decor of ancient Greece. An excellent example of her work can be seen in her self-portrait with her daughter, in which she wears a neoclassic-style dress.<sup>18</sup> The salons represent another example of feminine power at this time. E. Claire Cage writes that the reinvigoration of fashion corresponded with the reopening of the salons, which had been closed during the Terror. As Rousseau had once feared, the salons became a place of powerful social influence, where politics and art were key talking points. According to Madame de Cazenove d'Arlens, the salon that “ran all of Paris” belonged to Juliette Récamier, the same woman who has already been referred to in this essay several times for her role in advancing the style of women’s fashion *à la grecque*.<sup>19</sup> Other titans of fashion, such as Thérèse Cabarus Tallien and Joséphine Bonaparte, promoted neoclassical attire and hosted important salons as well.<sup>20</sup>

Some of these salons were so politically significant that when Napoleon came to power, his suspicion of their clout prompted him to exile Récamier and her contemporary, De Stäel. This conjunction of powerful women and neoclassic dress suggests an important correlation between feminine political sway and the empowering fashion that was worn at these assemblies. In addition, this time period saw an increase in the prominence of female artists and patrons. While only three women exhibited at the 1789 Salon, the number had multiplied

<sup>18</sup> Art Resource at artres.com is another site available for reference in this case; readers can view the portrait of Henriette Delacroix and *The Courage of Portia*.

<sup>19</sup> Cage, “The Sartorial Self,” 204.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 202–209.

exponentially to a total of forty-nine in 1802. One such female artist, Marie-Denise Villers exhibited at the Salon of 1801 (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Marie-Denise Villers (1801). *Young Woman Drawing*. Oil on Canvas, 161.3 x 128.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY

This painting is thought to be a self-portrait, and the costume Villers portrays is a long-sleeved, white dress with flowing drapery and

a highly placed belt. Women like LeBrun and Villers already empowered themselves by becoming both the artist and subject; choosing the neoclassic dress as their mode of representation also indicates a conscious self-fashioning as entities ready for political action. As women began to be associated more often with fashion, they used this feminization to create for themselves a type of authority and specialization. In a sense, women became experts in a field which has been repeatedly shown to carry political sentiments.<sup>21</sup>

Key female figures during the Revolution did not always escape unscathed. Lynn Hunt mentions that two women, Lucille Desmoulins and Manon Roland, wore white dresses to the guillotine during this time period. In these cases, the choice of death costume is one's final statement to the world, and an in-depth look at the volatile figure of Madame Roland further supports the idea that powerful women who engaged in the political arena often chose to represent themselves in this garb. Madame Roland's connection to her husband and the Girondins cost her her life in 1793 when the Jacobins began to dominate the Revolution. Her *Mémoires*, written during her time in prison, were shaped by the theme of heroic death. As Roland awaited her trip to the guillotine, she framed her narrative for future readers, hoping they would understand and regard her plight with sympathy. Her attempt to defend her actions to the future against the injustice of the Jacobins was enough to indicate that she saw herself as a figure to be remembered alongside the prominent players of the Revolution. She even compared her feelings about the split in the revolutionary movement to ancient Rome by praising Brutus, who likewise attempted to free a state from tyranny only to see it replaced by an equally problematic regime. Scholars such as Carl Becker believe that Roland probably portrayed herself in *Mémoires* as more political than she really was as a youth, but for this study, Roland's slight bias highlights her self-fashioning of a political identity. The fact that Roland attempted to go back through her life and synthesize events that led to her martyrdom at the hands of the Jacobins showed a determination to create a narrative of political awareness. What matters most was that at the end of her life, she desired to portray herself as a descendent of Greek and Roman values. Roland repeatedly turned

<sup>21</sup> Cage, "The Sartorial Self," 202–209; Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, *Marie-Denise Villers. Young Woman Drawing* (New York, NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), accessed December 6, 2015, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/17.120.204>.

an eye to the classics as the foundation of her political experience: “It was from this time [the reading of Plutarch at the age of nine] that I received those impressions and ideas which were to make me a republican without my dreaming of becoming one”.<sup>22</sup> When recounting her impressions of Louis’ court prior to the revolution, she said in her *Mémoires* that she had “...sighed to think of Athens, where I could have equally enjoyed the fine arts without being wounded with the spectacle of despotism; in imagination I walked in Greece, I assisted at the Olympic games, and I grieved to find myself a Frenchwoman”.<sup>23</sup> In all these statements, Roland drew strength from antiquity to give meaning to the events that led to her imprisonment.<sup>24</sup>

Following the attack on the Bastille in 1789, Madame Roland emerged as a Girondin and clearly thought of herself as a political agent. In one letter, she made this explicit when considering her message might be intercepted by enemies: “If this letter does not reach you, let the poltroons who read it blush to recall that it was written by a woman, and tremble to think that she can make a hundred enthusiasts, who in turn will make millions more”.<sup>25</sup> In some ways, this might be seen as playing on stereotypes of men being put to shame because a lowly woman bested them. Yet, it can also be interpreted as a powerful threat, one which announced clearly that though some might look down on her sex, her abilities as a writer would simultaneously inspire fear in her enemies and hope in her potential allies. Roland thus fought linguistically to raise an army – a powerful act indeed. During her husband’s time as Interior Minister, Madame Roland helped shape the political scene further. Much like Aspasia, she acted as a prominent advisor to the Girondin party, helped her husband pick cabinet members, added both passion and reason to her husband’s writing, and contributed to the success of *La Sentinelle*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Carl Becker, “The Memoirs and the Letters of Madame Roland,” *The American Historical Review* 33, no. 4 (1928): 793, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1838371>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 795.

<sup>24</sup> Hunt, “Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France,” 245; Becker, “The Memoirs and the Letters of Madame Roland,” 785, 788–799.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 799.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*; Lesley H. Walker, “Sweet and Consoling Virtue: The Memoirs of Madame Roland,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001): 404, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053986>; Anon, “Biographical Sketch of Madame

Una Pope-Hennessy writes her 1917 biography of Madame Roland in a narrative style, providing a valuable connection between Roland's political activism and her death. Hennessy described Roland's wardrobe choice as painstakingly intentional, having kept the white muslin dress with its black belt aside for the occasion of her trial, which she expected to precede her death; in reality, there was some time between the two, but she still considered the white muslin dress as her *toilette de mort*.<sup>27</sup> Hennessy narrates that "She was determined to make the offering of her life in a dignified and seemly manner; for in Rome were not the sacrificial victims always garlanded and crowned?"<sup>28</sup> Thus, the case study of Madame Roland links the key themes of this study: classical values, female political activism, and the white muslin dress. Madame Roland becomes a physical example of the power of the neoclassic style of dress as a political statement, especially in its use to symbolize the unconquerable nature of sincere republican values – proudly displayed on the body of a woman who saw her death as a statement as well as a sacrifice.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the many ways in which neoclassical dresses empowered French women, E. Claire Cage reminds readers of the ways that this very same outfit sought to keep women in their place. Neoclassical dress drew support for its Rousseauan virtues of nature and motherhood. The dress made breastfeeding easier and more accessible, while the belt, positioned beneath the breasts, provided support. The breasts are a cornerstone of maternity and the essential nature of women; by valuing this feature above all others, proponents of neoclassical dress perpetuated the strict role of women as mothers. I would also argue that with the belt no longer cinched across the waist, women's stomachs were free to grow in pregnancy. The aristocratic dress was viewed as having been too tight for proper growth for women and children, but the looseness of the neoclassical style allowed women and children to be healthy French citizens. The fashion magazine *L'Arlequin* proclaimed "the breast, free of any obstacle, free from defects, attains the degree of growth and perfection necessary for the use to which nature

Roland (Continued)," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 4, no. 21 (1810): 276, accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30073702>.

<sup>27</sup> Una Pope-Hennessy, *Madame Roland: A Study in Revolution* (London: Nisbet & Co. Limited, 1917), 525, <https://archive.org/details/madamrolandstudy00pope>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

destined”.<sup>30</sup> Though one could argue that the uniformity of the style indicated a type of uniform not unlike the *sans-culottes*, this style separated women from men along gender lines as well. Compared to the modern, coarse fabric of the men, women’s fabric was light, feminine, and revealing. However, I agree with Cage’s central thesis in “The Sartorial Self”, which argues that despite the set-backs of French society that sought to prevent women from gaining political power, these issues highlight the many ways in which women did succeed in fighting for political input by taking over a style that sought to repress them and using it to represent republican sentiments.<sup>31</sup>

The term “feminism” was not coined until the late nineteenth century, so to argue that French women identified as feminists in search of total equality with men would be pasting my own world view onto the past. Rather, I simply want to point to the many ways in which women did affect post-Bourbon France and how this can illustrate a move towards political agency for women at this time. Following what J. C. Flügel calls “The Great Masculine Renunciation”, fashion was placed firmly in the province of women as fashion began to indicate more about gender boundaries than it did those of class. Prior to the Revolution, Frenchmen’s dress had been more extravagant than women’s, but the new regime promoted a uniformity in men’s clothing to create distance between themselves and the inequality of the old aristocracy. The adoption of pants previously worn by the lower classes – over the aristocratic breeches – became symbolic of one’s dedication to the Revolution and the renunciation of firm class lines. However, without being allowed suffrage or political office, women were less associated with government, so they could vary their clothing without the political ramifications that men experienced. Consequently, fashion became a safe place for women to negotiate their identities as revolutionaries in their own right. As Cage’s article showed, French women were able to manipulate the negative roles that men sought to put them in and to redefine their own power through fashion, the arts, and political activism. I would argue that the prevalence of female political activism in the misogynistic time of Revolutionary France and the decade following it testifies to the endurance of the female spirit that continues to the present day. In addition, recognizing the ways in which women have crafted empowering personas out of attempted repression may

<sup>30</sup> Cage, “The Sartorial Self,” 197.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 193–202.

improve feminist scholarship. Historians sometimes cast women in the object view by repeatedly studying them as artifacts of oppression rather than agents of empowerment. While it is important to study the ways in which conservative views have oppressed minorities, historians should also focus on how these minorities can transcend the category of “victim” to fight that oppression.<sup>32</sup> Rather than being reduced to the sweeping observation that they were passive recipients of inequality, women who lived during misogynistic times deserve attention for the many ways that they crafted political personas with the opportunities they could find.

<sup>32</sup> Erik N. Jenson makes a similar point about focusing on the active role of victims in his study of the pink triangle and homosexual persecution under the Nazis. See Erik N. Jenson, “The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2005), 319–349.

# Divinity and Royalty in the Writings of Motoori Norinaga

Chad Totty

The Edo Period 江戸時代 (1600–1868) of Japanese history is probably best known for the so called Pax-Tokugawa, the period of peace and tranquility that lasted nearly 270 years. Thanks to this time of peace the Tokugawa Period witnessed a revitalization of Japanese common culture. Indeed, much of the culture that we today associate with Japan finds its roots in the culture of the Tokugawa Period. However, while cultural artifacts such as *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and kabuki theatre have received significant attention, the revolution of ideology, ideas, and intellectualism is less known among those that have not spent significant time studying this period.

When one studies the history of this period it becomes evident that the Tokugawa Period was the battle ground for a host of competing ideas and ideologies that shaped the very fabric of the Japanese psyche and defined what it means to be Japanese. The Confucian orthodoxy established by the Tokugawa government was challenged by scholars devoted to ancient learning such as Itô Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 (1627–1705) and Ogyû Sorai 荻生徂徠 (1666–1728). Buddhist priests and scholars, likewise, asserted their own ideologies and doctrines with doctrines such as the Pure Lands Sect of Buddhism gaining widespread popularity during the Tokugawa Period.

However, it was in the realm of Shinto thought that changes in ideology would occur that would have long-lasting effects on Japanese society. *Kokugaku* 国学, or national learning, emerged in the Tokugawa Period to become an important force in Japanese thought that would

have significant effects on the course of Japanese history. Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) is considered by most scholars to be the most eminent of the *kokugaku* scholars and is credited with formulating the ideology into a comprehensive whole.

This paper concerns the *kokugaku* movement as seen through the philosophy of Motoori Norinaga. Specifically it looks at Norinaga's view of the divine and its connection to his philosophy regarding Japanese royalty, the emperor, and the imperial line. It will examine the qualities of Norinaga's thought that linked his philosophy of the divine with his views of the emperor, served to formulate his world view, and his idea of Japan's place in the world.

These topics will be covered in several distinct sections. The first will be a biographical overview of Norinaga, covering his early life and influences. Norinaga's influence from the Confucian scholar Ogyū Sorai and the Shinto nativist Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769) will be given special emphasis. Second, there will be an examination of Norinaga's views of the divine and the supernatural world. Norinaga's views of the Japanese *kami* 神 (gods) and the Japanese foundation myths led him to belief that the *kami* were involved in all aspects of daily life. Third, we will turn to the imperial line and draw the connection between the emperor and Norinaga's view of the *kami*. What will be seen is that Norinaga saw the emperor as a *kami* living on earth and the descendant of the most revered of the *kami*, the sun goddess Amaterasu. Finally, there will be a discussion of the ramification of Norinaga's view of the supernatural and how it influenced his ideas of Japanese identity, Japan's place in the world, and its relationship to other countries, especially China.

What will be argued is that Norinaga's view of the supernatural is the lynch pin of his philosophy. Everything depends upon how he views the divine and the role that it played in Japanese royal lineage as well as every day life. Motoori Norinaga was a man that believed that the Japanese gods were an active force in the world and had heavy influence on people's lives. He also believed that the Japanese emperor was the living embodiment of a god, descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu. With these two basic ideas he crafted a nativist ideology that viewed Japan as the chosen land of the gods and the Japanese people as a special people, endowed with the true, pure heart of the gods. It is a philosophy that is highly spiritual and religious and would have a profound effect on Japanese culture and history.

Motoori Norinaga was born in Ise Province in what is today Mie Prefecture. His family had a long, proud history with samurai roots. However, the family patriarch had been killed in the civil war that defined the Japanese Warring States Period *Sengoku Jidai* 戦国時代 (1467–1603). Upon the patriarch's death, the family renounced its claim as a samurai family and took up the life of wealthy farmers. Despite its rich history, by the time Norinaga was born his family had changed from a samurai family into a family of cotton farmers.

The religious background of Norinaga's life is not what one would expect from one who would go on to become one of Japan's most celebrated Shinto nativists. Norinaga was brought up as a Buddhist. Specifically, he was brought up in the Pure Land Sect of Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> This particular sect of Buddhism was unique in its doctrine of personal salvation through faith in its deity, the Amida Buddha. According to the Buddhist monk Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), a person need only to call on the name of the Amida a single time in order to attain salvation. The convert would then be assured to be reborn in Amida's western paradise.<sup>2</sup> This is in stark contrast to Norinaga's later teachings which included the Shinto doctrine that there was no salvation and that all men, women, and children were destined to spend eternity in Yomi 黄泉, the polluted underworld. However, despite his upbringing in the Pure Land Sect there is evidence that Norinaga took an interest in Shintoism from a young age.<sup>3</sup>

Despite his upbringing on a cotton farm, Norinaga's education was excellent, and he was educated in many aspects of Japanese high culture including tea ceremony, *noh* theatre and *waka* poetry. By 1752 he had decided on a career in medicine and left for Kyoto to begin his new career. There he came under the tutelage of the Neo-Confucianist Hori Keizan 堀景山 (1689–1757).<sup>4</sup> In Kyoto Norinaga came in contact with many of the ideas that would influence his philosophy. In a stroke of serendipity, Keizan was in contact with Ogyū Sorai and Norinaga poured over his writings.

<sup>1</sup> Peter E. Nosco, "Remembering Paradise: Nostalgic Themes in Japanese Nativism, 1690–1823" (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1978), 232–238.

<sup>2</sup> Mikiso Hane and Louis G. Perez, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 9–10.

<sup>3</sup> Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 232–238.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 239–240.

In Sorai's work *Norinaga* discovered the ideas of *kogaku* 古学, the ancient learning school. Sorai was a Neo-Confucianist and as such was concerned with finding the "Way", meaning he was searching for the single underlying meaning and mechanism of the universe. Sorai had come to the conclusion that while other Neo-Confucianists were looking for the Way by observing nature they were engaging in a fruitless effort. He believed that the Way could no longer be found in the current time. To Sorai the Way was an ancient thing that had been created by the sage kings of China at the dawn of civilization. However, it had been corrupted over the generations by the Chinese dynasties who had not lived in accordance with the Way. Thus, for Sorai, the only way to rediscover the lost Way was to go back and read ancient texts from the time when the Way was still active in the world.<sup>5</sup> Sorai urged his students to study only original manuscripts when investigating the Way. He cautioned them not to rely upon translations or commentaries since the meaning and content had been altered by gradual changes until it was now unrecognizable as the true Way. He wrote:

Space is like time; time is like space. Thus, if we see the old words in terms of today's words, or today's words in terms of the ancient words, then in both cases they will be gibberish. There is no difference on this point between the ancient Chinese language and the Indian. The times change, bearing the words along; the words change, bearing the Way along. That "the Way is not clear" is due chiefly to this fact. To descend a hundred generations and then to transmit the Way of a hundred generations earlier – isn't this like piling up nine layers of translation between the land of Yueh-ch'ang and the Middle Kingdom? How great the difference was between the original and the ninth translation we have no way of knowing.<sup>6</sup>

Norinaga seized upon this teaching of Sorai. He too would come to believe that the only means by which to rediscover the Way were

<sup>5</sup> Samuel H. Yamashita, "Nature and Artifice in the Writings of Ogyū Sorai (1666–1728)," in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, ed. Peter Nosco (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 140.

<sup>6</sup> Ogyū Sorai, "Ogyū Sorai's Instructions for Students: A Translation and Commentary," trans. and comm. Richard H. Minear, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 36 (1976): 5–81, 16.

through an investigation of ancient texts. Although later in life he would passionately attack Neo-Confucianism and attempt to distance himself from writers like Sorai, the similarities between Sorai's regard for the sages and the Norinaga's opinion of the myths in the *Kojiki*, which will be discussed later, are too close in likeness to be easily dismissed.

Norinaga's biggest influence came from the Shinto nativist Kamo no Mabuchi. Like Sorai, Mabuchi also believed that there was a "Way" that needed to be discovered. However, unlike Sorai he did not believe that this Way was to be found in the Confucian classics or the works of the Confucian sages. It was not a man made way like the Confucian concept of the Way but was a way that was completely natural. He referred to it as the Way of Heaven and Earth. He believed that this true Way could only be discovered by analyzing native Japanese sources, in particular sources of Japanese poetry.

Mabuchi espoused that in the past the Japanese people had held the Way naturally within their hearts. They did not need formal education or instruction in the Way, but it was a natural and latent part of their very existence. He taught that the Japanese only lost this natural "true heart" when foreign influence came into the country. He was particularly concerned about Chinese influence, Confucianism, and Buddhism. For Mabuchi, this invasion of foreign influence and the perversion of the Japanese heart to foreign things constituted what he called "The Fall", that moment when the Japanese turned away from the Way that they held naturally and turned toward foreign things.<sup>7</sup>

However, Mabuchi believed that the true heart could be recovered. Like Sorai he thought that to recover the true Way one had to engage in an intense investigation into ancient sources. In this case, Mabuchi focused upon native Japanese sources. He was particularly focused upon the eighth century Japanese anthology of poems the *Man'yôshû* 万葉集, which is literally translated as the "Collection Ten Thousand Tea Leaves".<sup>8</sup> Mabuchi reasoned that if the true Way was contained within the hearts of the ancient Japanese then the only way to rediscover it was to look for manuscripts that contained the contents of the heart. He pointed to poetry as the perfect type of document. Mabuchi argued that when the heart began to overflow with emotion that its contents

<sup>7</sup> Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 186–192.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–152.

would spill out onto paper in the form of poetry. “Poetry,” he wrote, “is something that expresses the human heart.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, he believed that if one read the poetry of the ancient Japanese, one could interpret the contents of their heart and rediscover the Way.

Norinaga quickly became a student of Mabuchi’s works and took to heart his idea that there was something inherently special about the Japanese heart. In 1757 he returned to his home town to begin a career as a physician but found that his true interests remained with the investigation of native Japanese texts and the secrets that they could hold regarding the nature of the ancient Japanese heart. He turned his attention to great texts of renown throughout Japanese history. He began to study and give lectures on great Japanese literary classics such as the *Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*. Taking after Mabuchi he also studied the poetry of the *Man’yōshū*. However, Norinaga’s interests quickly shifted. He departed from Mabuchi’s idea that the true heart only be found in the annals of the *Man’yōshū*. Rather, he came to the conclusion that in order to learn the Way one must go back even further to study the very foundation of Japanese history, the foundation myths contained within the Shinto text, the *Kojiki*. Norinaga believed that the myths of the gods and goddess discussed within the *Kojiki* were not myths at all but were historically factual accounts of the distant past of the ancient Japanese. He believed that if one were to study these accounts then it would be possible to find the true Way which would wash away foreign influence and bring the Japanese people into a connection with the gods. He referred to this way as the Way of the Gods.

Norinaga came to the conclusion that what was needed was a full textual analysis of the contents of the *Kojiki* in order to rediscover the Way. However, before undertaking a project of such size he hoped to seek out Kamo no Mabuchi in order to get the Shinto sage’s advice and secure his blessing. Thus in May of 1763 in the town of Matsuzaka Norinaga met Mabuchi in a meeting known as “The Evening in Matsuzaka.” However, to Norinaga’s dismay, Mabuchi did not give his blessing to Norinaga’s project. He believed that Norinaga was too young and inexperienced to undertake a full analysis of the *Kojiki*. Mabuchi urged him to go and study the *Man’yōshū*, the manuscript that Mabuchi preferred, before undertaking a project as large as an analysis of the *Kojiki*. Nori-

<sup>9</sup> Peter Fluekiger, “Reflections on the Meaning of our Country: Kamo no Mabuchi’s *Kokuikō*,” trans. Peter Fluekiger, *Monumenta Nipponica* 63, no. 2 (2008): 211–263, 244.

naga was undeterred and against the advice of Mabuchi he embarked on an analysis of the *Kojiki* in 1763. While the two men remained in contact through letters and correspondences over the years, the relationship was strained with Mabuchi continuing to insist that Norinaga focus on the *Man'yōshū* instead of the *Kojiki*.<sup>10</sup>

While these early influences would have a profound effect on Motoori Norinaga's thought and philosophy, his findings in the *Kojiki* itself would serve to have an even greater influence upon his ideas of the gods and the role that they played in Japan's place in the world. He would come to the conclusion that the Japanese gods were an active force in the world and that the emperor was the physical embodiment of a god, directly descended from the sun goddess, Japan's most highly regarded deity. He would use these ideas to create a nativist mythology wherein he placed Japan above all other nations and considered Japanese culture to be the best and most pure culture on earth.

Norinaga's philosophy stems from his investigation into the *Kojiki*. While Norinaga's ideas include many elements, what we are interested in primarily is how he viewed the divine and the role that it played in the world and Japanese identity. While Kamo no Mabuchi's philosophy was spiritualistic Norinaga took his philosophy to new, religious heights. He viewed the Shinto gods not as a distant, impersonal force but as active members of the world and human society. Likewise, he viewed the imperial line as a divine lineage. These things served to create a nativist ideology that would have a profound impact on Japan.

The nature of the gods in Norinaga's work is fascinating. Shinto has never been a religion that emphasizes personal interactions with the *kami*, but Norinaga's philosophy believed that they were an active force in the world. For Norinaga, the events of the world and the will of the gods were the same in nearly all cases. He argued that the gods controlled daily events and all human actions. He wrote that "everything that exists in the world, great and small, everything in nature between Heaven and Earth, the condition of men and their deeds – all are derived from the spirits of the gods and are the result of their plans."<sup>11</sup> He did not limit the influence of the gods to merely virtuous actions. Rather, he attributed all actions, both good and evil, to the influence of the gods upon the human mind and the human heart. For Norinaga,

<sup>10</sup> Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 249–263.

<sup>11</sup> Norinaga Motoori, "Tamakushige," *Monumenta Nipponica* 43, no. 1 (1988): 45–61, 51.

there were both good and evil gods. The evil gods attempted to control people's actions to do evil. The good gods, likewise, attempted to control people's actions to do good. There were very few instances wherein an action could occur that did not have some divine influence behind it. For Norinaga, the events of the entire world were merely the result of an invisible struggle going on between good and evil gods as they tried to get people to do their will.<sup>12</sup> He cautioned people that they should always revere the gods, no matter what their inclinations because a human is incapable of resisting the will of the gods:

The gods differ in essence from the Buddha and others. There are not only good gods, but evil gods as well, and their hearts and deeds are correspondingly good and evil. This is why it is common in the world that people who do evil deeds prosper, and people who do good deeds suffer. The gods are not to be measured according to whether or not they are in accordance with principles. One must simply stand in awe of their wrath, and accord them the utmost respect.<sup>13</sup>

In order to demonstrate his world view, Norinaga used a clever metaphor to describe the ways in which the gods interact with the world. He likened the relationship between people and the gods to the relationship between a bunraku puppet and the puppeteer. Bunraku is a form of Japanese theatre in which the characters are portrayed by large puppets that are able to mimic the movements and expressions of a human being. These puppets are typically controlled by multiple puppeteers, dressed in black clothing so that they blend in with the background and a master puppeteer who is the only puppeteer allowed to be visible. Unlike marionette puppets where the puppeteer controls the puppet using strings, bunraku puppeteers directly control the movements of their puppet with their hands and fluid movements. For Norinaga, this was the way that the world worked. The world was a stage upon which the will of the gods could be played out. Humans

<sup>12</sup> Norinaga Motoori, "Tamakushige," 51–52, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Motoori Norinaga. *Naobi no Mitama* from Norinaga Motoori, *Kojiki-den*, trans. Ann Wehmeyer, vol. 1 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1997), 213–247, 235.

were merely puppets. In most cases they did not choose good or evil on their own but were subject to the will of the puppeteers – the gods.<sup>14</sup>

Norinaga did caution, however, that this did not mean that people were free from responsibility for their actions. The gods, he noted, may control the human realm in the same way that a bunraku puppeteer controls a puppet but on occasion the gods do cede control of human actions to humans themselves. Thus, since there is no way to know whether a person's actions were self-induced or were the result of divine intervention, a person must still be held accountable for the things that they do.<sup>15</sup>

This is an important element in Norinaga's philosophy because it forms a link between the secular actions undertaken by the state and the religious realm of the gods. Norinaga reasoned that since the gods controlled all human actions, including the official, secular acts of the Tokugawa government, the religious and secular realms were unified. Norinaga wrote:

Since the affairs of the world are all in accordance with the plans of the gods, secular matters are ultimately not separate from sacred matters. But still, there is a distinction. Let us say that the deities are like men and the sacred matters are like the acts of men. When it comes to secular matters, let us say that humans are like puppets, and the secular matters are like the movements of puppets. These puppets have heads, arms, and legs, and their various movements occur because in actuality men manipulate them. But the movements of the puppets are distinct from the humans who manipulate them. They have heads, arms, and legs, and only if they perform their functions well, we know them to be satisfactory puppets. If they lose these things and could not function, then what would define them as puppets? If we understand this distinction, we realize the necessity of using our best endeavors in the realm of secular matters.<sup>16</sup>

Norinaga's commentary here is important. He recognizes that the gods and humans are not one entity but that humans are influenced by

<sup>14</sup> *Idem*, "Tamakushige," 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

the gods the same way a puppet is. However, he argued that the humans must mimic the will of the gods even in secular matters or they will not make good puppets. For Norinaga, then, acting according to the will of the gods in secular matters constitutes a matter of religious service since the two worlds are not separate from one another.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Norinaga believed that all gods were the same. There was certainly a hierarchy of gods. At the top of this hierarchy was the sun goddess, Amaterasu. Amaterasu is a very special deity in the Shinto faith for a number of reasons. The first is that she is the deity most closely associated with the imperial family. However, another important reason is that Amaterasu is said to be the direct offspring of Izanagi, the god responsible for the creation of Japan. The *Kojiki* tells the tale of how Izanagi and his wife, Izanami, created the islands of Japan by dipping their spears into the waters of the ocean. Afterward they gave birth to a number of gods and goddesses. However, Izanami died in childbirth while delivering the fire god and was forced to go to live in the land of *Yomi*. Izanagi attempted to rescue his wife by entering the polluted depths of the underworld. However, when he saw her in her rotten and putrid state she was ashamed and forced him to leave and never return. Izanagi then went to a stream to cleanse himself of the pollution that he encountered. When he washed himself in the water, Amaterasu was born from his right eye. While Izanagi would also go on to directly give birth to two other major gods (Tsukuyomi, the moon god, from his right eye, and Susanoo, the storm god, from his nostrils), Amaterasu is the most highly regarded of the three.<sup>17</sup>

Norinaga did not only see Amaterasu as a goddess that had a superior lineage but he viewed her as the most supreme of deities because of the important place she held in the cosmos. Norinaga took Amaterasu's designation as the sun goddess literally. He saw Amaterasu as being the literal embodiment of the sun as it moved across the sky. Thus, by Norinaga's estimation Amaterasu was the most supreme goddess, because she was the most important. It was only by her divine providence that she provided in the form of light and warmth that the world could continue to survive. Every nation on earth, thus owed Amaterasu a debt of gratitude because they could not exist without her.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ô no Yasumaro, *The Kojiki*, trans. Gustav Heldt (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 8–18.

<sup>18</sup> Norinaga Motoori, "Tamakushige," 47.

Norinaga took his high regard for Amaterasu and connected it to Japan by once again turning to the *Kojiki* for textual support. He identified a passage wherein Amaterasu makes a decree in which she declares that Japan is to be ruled by her heir. Amaterasu states, “The realm of plentiful reed plains, of a thousand five hundred long autumns of fresh rice ears, will be a realm ruled by our heir...”<sup>19</sup> In this instance the term “plentiful reed plains” refers to the Yamato Plain, the area that is now Japan. The initial heir of the Yamato plain is Amaterasu’s son. However, her grandson, Ninigi eventually takes over the realm and then after some time his son, Jinmu takes over for him.<sup>20</sup> This is important because Jinmu is a name that is historically associated with the first emperor of Japan. While it is unknown whether Jinmu is a historical figure who was given divine lineage or whether he is pure myth, Norinaga seized upon the opportunity to link the imperial line to Amaterasu. By tradition, the Japanese imperial line is considered to be made up of an unbroken lineage going back into the distant past. Today, most historians doubt this, but Norinaga took it as truth. He pointed to the textual evidence in the *Kojiki* and the unbroken imperial line to make the declaration that the emperor was the direct descendant of Amaterasu who herself was the descendant of the god of creation. In Norinaga’s philosophy the emperors were divine, and by being the descendants of Amaterasu the imperial throne was vested with the full power and authority of the sun goddess.<sup>21</sup>

It was from his ideas about the divine and the imperial lineage that Norinaga found the evidence necessary for his nativist ideology. Norinaga believed that Japan was superior to every country on earth and his reasoning for such thinking was very simple and linear. If every country on earth owed its existence to Amaterasu and the sun goddess had chosen Japan as her chosen nation, as the very seat of her divine lineage, then Norinaga found it reasonable to assume that Japan had found favor with whom he considered to be the supreme deity in the world. Thus, no other country could hope to match Japan in prestige. In the opening lines of *Naobi no Mitama* 直毘靈 (1790) (The Rectifying Spirit) Norinaga states this belief very clearly. “The Imperial Country (Japan) is the land of the awesome goddess, Ama-terasu-o-mi-kami, ancestor of the gods,” he states. “Of the reasons why Japan is superior

<sup>19</sup> Ō no Yasumaro, *The Kojiki*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–61.

<sup>21</sup> Norinaga Motoori, “Naobi no Mitama,” 226–227.

to all countries, this is the most salient. There is no country that does not receive the sacred blessings of this august deity.”<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, in the same treatise he goes on to remark how other kings cannot stand equal to the Japanese emperor. He calls upon the Confucian virtue that one should remain loyal to one’s ruler to make his point. Norinaga argued that there was no nation on earth who had better exemplified that idea than Japan who had an unbreakable imperial line back into the distant past. He mocks the idea that the Chinese are the standard bearers of proper civilization when they have had many dynasties to Japan’s one. He wrote:

In foreign countries there is no predetermined ruler, so ordinary people suddenly become kings, and kings suddenly become ordinary people, or fall to ruin in death; such has been the custom since antiquity. Those who scheme to seize the country but are unable to do so are called rebels, and are disdained and despised, while those succeed are called sages and are revered and venerated. The so-called sages are thus merely those who have succeeded in a rebellious act. Our sacred emperors do not stand in equal rank with the kings of such lowly countries. They are part of the imperial lineage granted to them by the ancestral deities who gave birth to this august country. From the beginning of heaven and earth, the realm under heaven was preordained as their realm to rule. As there is no decree on the part of the august deities that one must not submit to the emperor if he is evil, one cannot stand aside and judge whether the emperor is good or bad. As long as heaven and earth exists, and as long as the sun and moon shed their light, no matter how many generations pass, our lord will remain steadfast.<sup>23</sup>

Norinaga was steadfast in his belief that Japan was superior to all nations and that it was the divine nature of the imperial line that made it so.

Norinaga’s philosophy on Japan’s superiority informed all other areas of his philosophy. From top to bottom his philosophy is highly na-

<sup>22</sup> Norinaga Motoori, “Naobi no Mitama,” 213.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

tivistic. Looking to the idea that Japan was superior, Norinaga extended that to the idea that Japanese culture was also superior. He argued, very similarly to Kamo no Mabuchi, that in the distant past the Japanese people had been perfect in heart, straightforward, and simple. They lived in perfect concordance with what he called the Way of the Gods. They acted in a straightforward manner, they did not attempt to conceal anything within their hearts, and they revered the emperor with all their hearts. Norinaga, like Mabuchi, argued that it was only after the influence of foreign culture washed away the inward perfection of the Japanese people that the Way of the Gods was lost.<sup>24</sup>

He was particularly concerned with the influence of Chinese culture. He was so upset about the influence of Chinese culture on the Japanese people that he likened it to a stain and a dark mark upon the Japanese heart.<sup>25</sup> It was a condition that he took to calling the Chinese Heart which was in contrast to Mabuchi's True Heart and the Way of the Gods. Norinaga believed that this Chinese Heart needed to be washed away and in calling for such he used the Japanese word *harai* 祓 which means cleansing or exorcism. Norinaga saw the influence of foreign cultures on Japan as nothing less than an evil force that needed to be exorcised from the heart so that the people could follow the Way of the Gods again.<sup>26</sup>

Herein we find a common theme within Norinaga's works. His primary concern is to find a way to wash away the foreign cultural influence and bring it back in line with the type of world that he believed existed in the past. However, this desire stemmed from his reading into ancient texts, particularly the *Kojiki*, wherein he discovered what he believed to be a theological truth: that Japan was superior to every other country on earth.

In conclusion, when we look at the works of Motoori Norinaga we see that he was a man that was very concerned with the spiritual. His early influences from Ogyû Sorai and Kamo no Mabuchi inspired him to look to the past, to ancient texts. The text he chose was the ancient Japanese collection of myths, the *Kojiki*. Furthermore Norinaga took the information contained within the *Kojiki* literally. He came to believe that the gods were active in the world and controlled all human actions. Like puppeteers controlling a puppet, the gods were responsible for all

<sup>24</sup> Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 266–272.

<sup>25</sup> Norinaga Motoori, *Kojiki-den*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Nosco, "Remembering Paradise," 288–289.

the world events, both good and evil. Likewise, since there was no gap between religion and secular life this meant that secular service was just as important as religious activities.

He expanded on the idea of the divine when he looked at the role of the emperor. Based upon his findings in the *Kojiki*, Norinaga argued that the emperor was a divine figure, descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu. Norinaga created a myth of national superiority by pointing out that Amaterasu was the physical sun in the sky that gave all the nations warmth making her necessary for the survival of all nations. He continued by noting the Japanese emperor was her chosen heir, and that Japan was the chosen seat for her divine lineage. Using these ideas Norinaga created a myth of superiority by which he argued that Japan was superior to all nations on earth.

This myth of superiority informed the rest of his ideology. He called for a return to traditional Japanese culture, for people to live according to the Way of the Gods, and to revere the emperor. To do this he called for the Chinese influence on Japan to be wiped away. For Norinaga it was a stain and a corruption that needed to be exorcised.

Thus, when we look at the philosophy of Norinaga we see one that is highly nativistic. There can be no question that this nativism stemmed from a deep sense of ethnocentrism and a sense of Japanese superiority. This ethnocentrism was informed by Norinaga's spiritual convictions: that the sun goddess was the supreme deity on earth, that the emperor was her chosen heir, and Japan was her chosen nation.

# Reflections on the Veil: Tracing Blurred Boundaries of Politics and Desire in Vienna's Saturn-Films

Beth Withey

*And the crowded, half-darkened auditorium with the flickering images seems to me, I cannot express it otherwise, almost venerable, a place of refuge where souls flock together in their somber fight for identity: from a digit to a vision.<sup>1</sup>*

The Screen flickers.

Out of darkness, a title appears between two eight-pointed stars. *Sklavenmarkt*.

It is a breezy summer day. A turbaned Turkish Pasha sits in a wooded field before his tent slowly stroking his beard. Twice the Pasha claps and from the tent a robed servant appears. Kneeling, he adjusts the his master's hookah. From a nearby field strides an armed slave trader: in his wake four women and two guards. One by one the women are

<sup>1</sup> From Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Der Ersatz für die Träume* (The Substitute for Dreams), 1921, quoted in Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 101–102.

stripped, their naked bodies displayed for the Pasha's approval; one by one they are thrust into the tent as the servant, watching, guards its entrance. The Pasha chooses three slaves; one woman he waves away (apparently because of her small breasts) to an unknown fate. While the servant watches, slave trader and Pasha haggle over a price. As the deal is struck, the camera swings left to reveal – unbeknownst to the participants in the drama to the fore – someone peeking around the back of the tent and (incongruously) a black and white border collie enjoying the scene. The slave trader, happy with his deal salaams his way out of the frame. Assisting his master to rise, the servant escorts the Pasha into the tent where together they will inspect their latest acquisitions; the border collie, with nothing more of interest, puts his head down in the grass. The scene is overseen by the omnipresent eight-pointed star of Saturn Films.<sup>2</sup>

The film *Sklavenmarkt* (Slave Market), was a product of Vienna's Saturn-Film Company founded by Johann Schwarzer in 1906. Saturn, the first cinematic company in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to produce continuous narrative film, created exclusively *Filme Pikante* (spicy films) in which clothed men engaged with fully naked women in a variety of ways, including touching but no "explicitly" sexual acts.<sup>3</sup> Saturn's often comic plot devices afforded new voyeuristic opportunities for men both onscreen and in the audience. Naked women were accessible for viewing in stasis and in motion, in parlors and in nature. Their flickering images ran through forests and streams, struck wrestling stances, and posed as neoclassical statues which might, at any moment, come to life. Saturn's women were naked hypnotists, alluring or angry bourgeois matrons, or – as in the compilation of "*Orientalisierende Fantasien*" (Oriental Fantasies) illustrated by *Sklavenmarkt* above – slaves

<sup>2</sup> Anton Thaller et al., *Saturn-Films: Der erotische Anfang der österreichischen Kinetographie*, (DVD) (Wien: Hoanzl, 2010). This description combines my viewing notes with elements from the Saturn Catalog's description of the film.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Ballhausen and Günter Krenn, "Die Mehrheit der Blicke. Eine Vorbe-merkung," in *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik, 1906–1910*, ed. Michael Achenbach, Thomas Ballhausen, and Nikolaus Wostry (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2009), 7–8. In the Saturn Catalog Schwarzer noted, "Our films are of a purely artistic tendency, and we avoid tasteless subjects in favor of beauty."

of the harem: commodified heroines of melodrama threatened with abduction, beatings, and in need of rescue.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1906 and 1911, with Schwarzer as sole marketer, producer, and director, Saturn-Film Company had a remarkable run: creating fifty-four short films marketed in an elaborate print catalog of detailed plot descriptions and nude photographic stills; on its cover a naked woman lifts Saturn-Film's trademark eight-pointed star above her head.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1: Saturn-Films Catalog

Though aware of a growing threat of censorship, Schwarzer made little secret of Saturn's activities. The Saturn-Films catalog circulated throughout Europe, to America, and according to newspaper accounts, as far as Japan. So great was Saturn's popularity that "Viennese Film" became, along with "French Film" and *Film Pikante*, synonymous with European erotica. Schwarzer advertised Saturn screenings and rental opportunities internationally in trade papers and the first European journal for all things film, *Der Kinematograph* (Cinematography). Though most often shown at *Herrenabende*, (gentlemen's evenings) some advertisements were di-

<sup>4</sup> Bert Rebhandl, "Hochpikante Herrenfilms," (DVD Liner Notes), in *Saturn-Films: Der erotische Anfang der österreichischen Kinematographie*, ed. Anton Thaller et al. (Wien: Hoanzl, 2010). *Sklavenmarkt* was one of four Saturn films which could be rented individually or in the compilation, *Die Sklaverei im Orient* (Slavery in the Orient). The compilation's other films, *Im Harem* (Harem), *Sklavenraub* (Slave Theft), and *Sklavenschicksal* (Slaves Fate) also depict women of the Harem at the mercy of the, often sexually frustrated, Turkish Pasha. Of the original four films, two survive. Those lost, *Im Harem* and *Sklavenschicksal* are described in Saturn's Catalog with more violent plots involving simulated beating. See Michael Achenbach, Paolo Caneppele, and Ernst Kieninger, *Projektionen der Sehnsucht: Saturn, die erotischen Anfänge der österreichischen Kinematografie* (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2000), 145 and forward for a complete reproduction of the Saturn Catalog with film descriptions and photographic stills. See also Michael Achenbach, Thomas Ballhausen, and Nikolaus Wostry, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910: Saturn: Viennese Film Eroticism 1906–1910* (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2009), 138, 134, 132, 116–117 for abstracts of the film plots in English.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

rected to both men and women, and there is evidence that at least one of the films, *Der Angler* (The fisherman) received a fairground showing.

Despite (or because of) this success, in 1911 Austria's Departments of Justice and Interior authorized censorship of Saturn-Film Company; its offices were raided by police, the films confiscated, and orders issued for their destruction. By 1914, Johann Schwarzer, age thirty-four was dead: a second lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian forces killed in Poland at the battle of Wirballen within three months of his arrival at the front.<sup>6</sup>

With this history it is worth asking why Saturn-Film Company – founded in Vienna at a time of political upheaval and approaching war, known internationally as the major exporter of Austrian erotic film, and terminated by express order of Austro-Hungarian authorities – has yet to be approached by scholars in terms of gender, politics, and relation to the state. In part, this neglect can be attributed to the films' recent recovery and restoration. Though ordered destroyed in 1911, thirty-one of Saturn's original fifty-four films survived in complete or fragmentary form to be restored, in the late 1990s, by Filmarchiv Austria – also the chief source of research and publication on the films.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Austrian film production developed later than elsewhere in Europe, so while France's Pathe and Germany's Wilhelmine cinema have been the subjects of numerous books and monographs, Austro-Hungarian cinema has attracted far less notice.<sup>8</sup> Those works which have addressed the topic, such as Robert Von Dassanowsky *Austrian Cinema: a History* (2005) – notable as the first extensive volume on the history of Austrian Cinema in English – largely gloss Saturn's significance. In his two-hundred-eighty-five page book, Dassanowsky devotes two sentences to Saturn Films. It would seem that in his “attempt to place Austrian cinema back into the Anglo-American understanding of an international film canon,” Dassanowsky finds little place for the

<sup>6</sup> Achenbach, Ballhausen, and Wostry, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910*, 7–31.

<sup>7</sup> The majority of restored Saturn films were found in the private collection of Albert Fidelius; see Nikolaus Wostry, “Anmerkungen zur Überlieferungssituation der Saturn-Filme,” in *idem*, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910*, 45.

<sup>8</sup> Willy Reimer, “Literature and Austrian Cinema Culture at the Turn of the Centuries,” in *Literature In Vienna at the Turn of the Centuries: Continuities and Discontinuities around 1900 and 2000*, ed. Ernst Grabovszki and James N. Hardin (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 186.

*pikante* films of Saturn.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Saturn's scholarly neglect may be due, as Nikolaus Wostry has contended, to the perception by film historians of Saturn's erotica as "seemingly shameful relics," the public showing of which, through the 1960s, could have had legal ramifications.<sup>10</sup>

One senses however, the possibility of another factor at play. A thread runs through much of the writing about Saturn – a kind of defensive diminution: as if Saturn's often comic erotica should not be taken *too seriously*. The danger for scholars in such reductionism is that relegating Saturn films to "*harmlos-charmante Nuditäten*" (harmless charming nudités) implicitly negates the rich field of historical meaning available from these newfound, multivalent historical artifacts.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to reread and contextualize the films: to decipher and interpret their images with an eye to what they may reveal about gender, politics, and the interplay of state(s) in *fin de siècle* Austro-Hungary.<sup>12</sup>

*Sklavenmarkt* described above, representative of the Orientalist films which comprise almost ten percent of the Schwarzer's total Saturn output, provides a rich entry point for such analysis. Superimposing highly sexualized melodramatic and Orientalist fantasies of power onto the bodies of Viennese men and women and a recognizable Viennese landscape, the film documents blurred boundaries between the

<sup>9</sup> Robert Dassinowsky, *Austrian Cinema: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 10, 2. Examples of works on German cinema include: Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, eds., *Kino der Kaiserzeit: zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2002), Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002), Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907–1933* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson, *A New History of German Cinema* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), to name only a few.

<sup>10</sup> Wostry, "Anmerkungen zur Überlieferungssituation der Saturn-Filme," 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> The use of *fin de siècle* in this essay reflects that of Carl E. Schorske's in Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1979). In his essays on Klimt, Schoenberg, and Kokoschka, Schorske extends the period past the century's turn, examining Klimt to 1908, Schoenberg through the composition of *Die glückliche Hand* (completed 1913), and Kokoschka through his 1914 painting, *The Tempest*. In his analysis of Saturn, Nikolaus Wostry of Filmarchiv Austria also places the films within the *fin de siècle*. However, since it may be argued that Schwarzer's prescient, enthusiastic embrace of the new technologies of film and projection, as well as the ebullient tone of the films themselves equally place them within the forward leaning frame of the *Belle Époque*, both terms are used at various points throughout this essay.

interior fantasy world of cinema and the external, political and cultural realities of day-to-day life in *fin de siècle* Vienna.<sup>13</sup> This blurring points both to Carl E. Schorske's thesis of artistic, aesthetic life as refuge from the political volatility of *fin de siècle* Vienna, and to Scott Spector's counter-argument that Central European art and politics of the period were inextricably fused and entangled.<sup>14</sup> Saturn's films are themselves artifacts of these blurred realities of art and politics: fantasy and "reality." The cinema – new popular artform for the "masses" – created a womb-like escape from the immediacy of the outer world; one might argue that the exclusivity and nude visions of *Herrenabende* were especially conducive to such escape. Yet in a cinematic viewing of *Sklavenmarkt*, local reality merged with the exotic as images of day-to-day existence of localized people and place were experienced in simultaneity with Orientalist fantasies of power. It is quite possible that the images of bodies on view to *Herren* in *Sklavenmarkt*'s interior cinematic space were known as physical bodies in the world outside the cinema.

Likewise, the sinister Turkish Pasha – embodiment of exotic Oriental "otherness" and melodramatic villainy in three films of Saturn's four-film compilation, *Die Sklaverei im Orient* (Slavery in the Orient) had long symbolized Austria-Hungary's conflicted and multivalent relationship to the Ottoman Empire as evinced in politics, art, and Viennese culture. Johann Heiss and Johannes Feichtinger describe two contrasting visions of the Orient present in Habsburg political discourse of the *fin de siècle*. The first imagined a "distant" Orient of "bad Turks" defeated at the gates of Vienna in 1683; the second, an Orient "close to home" inhabited by "good Slavs" in provinces of the Ottoman Empire annexed by Austria-Hungary in 1883 where colonial exploitation and a "civilizing mission" might be forwarded.<sup>15</sup> This paradoxical mix of

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Ballhausen and Günter Krenn, "Die Mehrheit der Blicke. Eine Vorbemerkung," in *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik, 1906–1910*, ed. Michael Achenbach, Thomas Ballhausen, and Nikolaus Wostry (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2009), 19–21. Per Nikolaus Wostry, Saturn's outdoor scenes were filmed near the Danube, see the 2015 EFA Film Festival Catalog, *L'Europe autour de l'Europe* 56. Accessed November 29, 2015. <http://evropafilmakt.com/2015/wp-content/uploads/efa-2015-catalogue-en.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Schorske, *Fin-De-siècle Vienna*, xxvii; Scott Spector, "Beyond The Aesthetic Garden: Politics and Culture on the Margins of 'Fin-De- Siècle Vienna,'" *Journal Of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 4 (1998): 692.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Feichtinger and Johann Heiss, "Distant Neighbors: Uses of Orientalism in the Late Nineteenth-Century Austro-Hungarian Empire," in *Deploying Oriental-*

distrust and paternalism was propounded by the virulent antisemitic priest, Dr. Joseph Deckert. Conflating the past “Turkish Menace” with fantasies of a current “Jewish Threat,” Deckert superimposed phantasms of a hypersexualized, feared Orient onto antisemitic hatreds of the day.<sup>16</sup> Though repudiated by the Austrian *Reichsrat*, Deckert’s image was rehabilitated under Vienna’s antisemitic mayor, Karl Lueger. A public square named for Deckert in 1901 remained so for over eighty years, until his name was deleted from the traffic directory by the Vienna Municipal Council Committee on Culture in 1990.<sup>17</sup>

If the Orient was a site of suspicion, it was also the site of sexual fantasy and longing depicted in Viennese art and architecture.<sup>18</sup> Though the Egyptian Halls of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (completed 1891) with Egyptian-themed spandrel paintings by Gustav Klimt are perhaps the best-known example of Orientalist art and architecture in Vienna, Oriental influences permeated the city: from the “Turkish Room” installed in Hofburg Palace by Crown Prince Rudolph to the interiors of Viennese coffee bars – and the Turkish coffee itself.<sup>19</sup> Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, Austrian painters traveled to the Orient returning with props – vessels, rugs, photographs, and mental images – which they translated into painted landscapes and eroticized images of women and the harem. Those who had not themselves traveled, nevertheless painted Oriental themes. Working from local artists’ models, they too painted fantasies of naked slave girls, slave markets, and erotic harem *Szenen*.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most pronounced example of this Orientalist layering of meaning is the larger-than-life figure of being an armed Turk serving coffee which overlooks a major intersection in Vienna. The monument, erected in 1885 by the Coffee Makers Guild of Vienna, in fact, honors Georg Franz Kolschitzky, the “Patron Saint of Coffee,” who legend has

*ism in Culture and History: From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. James R. Hodkinson and John Walker (Rochester, NY: Camden, 2013), 149-151.

<sup>16</sup> Deckert quoted in *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*; [www.Wien.gv.at](http://www.Wien.gv.at), accessed November 22, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Elfriede Haslauer, “Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Vienna: A Phantasm?,” trans. John Winbigler, *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation (Special Issue on Visual Documentation in Freud’s Vienna)* 23, nos. 1–2 (2007): 85.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 87–97; Tag Gronberg, “Coffeehouse Orientalism,” in *The Viennese Cafe and Fin-De-Siècle Culture*, ed. Charlotte Ashby, Tag Gronberg, and Simon Shaw-Miller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 59–77.

<sup>20</sup> Haslauer, “Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Vienna,” 100–101.

it, donned Turkish uniform, broke through enemy lines, and helped save the city in the battle of Vienna (1683).<sup>21</sup> For his valor, Kolschitzky was awarded several bags of beans thought to be camel food but later discovered to be the source of the Turkish drink, coffee. As legendary founder of the first coffeehouse in Vienna, Kolschitzky is arguably responsible, in part, for its intellectual and cultural climate. Tag Gronberg argues that the Orientalized interiors of Viennese coffeehouses provided an environment in which the “feared other” could be contained and domesticated in a situational discourse of leisure, safety, and comfort.<sup>22</sup> Following this argument, Saturn Film Company’s sinister Turkish Pashas are thus doubly contained: imprisoned in flickering, insubstantial images of light; viewed within the the comfort of bourgeois gentlemen’s movie nights.

Imprisoned fossil-like within Saturn’s films are other concerns once vital to men and women of the *fin de siècle* and *Belle Époque*. In her discussion of Bertha Pappenheim’s 1903 expeditions to brothels in Salonika, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Alexandria to rescue Jewish girls sold to harems in the white slave trade, Mary Bergstein, writing about Freudian imaging in the films, points to interlocking tropes of Orientalism, white slavery, Jewishness, and psychoanalysis present in *Sklavenmarkt*. The adult reformer and founder of *Jüdischer Frauenbund* (League of Jewish Women), Bertha Pappenheim, had been the adolescent “Anna O” of Josef Breuer’s and Sigmund Freud’s highly publicised 1895 work. Though Bergstein posits no direct causality between Freud and Saturn, Freud’s work permeated Viennese culture, and it is apparent from Schwarzer’s gendered and comic scopophilic depictions of dreams, hypnosis, and medicalization of the period, that he deemed both doctors and patients in need of satirical treatment. Since, as Bergstein contends, Saturn’s viewer-voyeurs saw themselves as protagonists in the films, they received Saturn’s “treatment” as well.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> William H. Ukers, *All About Coffee* (New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Co., 1922), 49, accessed November 23, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/allaboutcoffee00ukeruoft#page/48/mode/2up>.

<sup>22</sup> Gronberg, “Coffeehouse Orientalism,” 66.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Bergstein, “Freud, Saturn, and the Power of Hypnosis,” in *Photography and the Optical Unconscious*, ed. Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 18, 9.

What kind of “treatment,” then, did these congregations of predominantly male, bourgeois protagonist/viewers of Saturn’s films receive; why were they in need of treatment? In Freudian parlance, the visual pleasure obtained at *Herrenabende* was a manifestation of scopophilia – the erotic pleasure of looking, of “taking people as objects”.<sup>24</sup> In Saturn’s films, the scopophilic gaze is magnified by the narcissistic act of viewing oneself looking – since in all Schwarzer’s films, a clothed male actor as the voyeur of female nudity, positions both audience and actor as powerful, “unseen seer”.<sup>25</sup> Pleasure is also derived from the passivity of viewing (as in a cinema audience) and reflexively, from viewing oneself in the act of being passively viewed. Finally, visual pleasure is expanded by desire itself – from the inability to possess the object of desire. Desire, according to Jacques Lacan whose psychoanalytic theories have come to dominate film theory, is “only ever represented as a reflection on a veil.” Saturn’s objects of desire, flickering women made of light and shadow, by their very lack of substance, perpetuated and increased the visual pleasure of desire.<sup>26</sup>

Schwarzer’s films, *Der Traum des Bildhauers* (The Sculptor’s Dream) and *Die Macht der Hypnose* (The Power of Hypnosis) illustrate these interlocking forms of visual pleasure. In *Der Traum des Bildhauers*, a male sculptor in his studio is seen chiseling his creation, “The Three Graces” (portrayed by three nude women posed on a raised platform).<sup>27</sup> Pleased with his work the sculptor drinks champagne, smokes a cigar and promptly falls asleep on his couch. In his dream state the women dismount their platform, creeping toward him with seeming curiosity. One of the women, (identified in the Saturn Catalog as Venus) leans forward and kisses him.<sup>28</sup> The sculptor wakes from his troubled dream to find the three women – his sculpture – once more inanimate on the platform. After some apparent mental agony, he toasts it once more, returns to his chiseling, and the film fades out.

<sup>24</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual And Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 90–104.

<sup>25</sup> The theory of the “unseen seer” is taken from Jacques Lacan’s “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” reproduced in “French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis,” *Yale French Studies* 0, issue 48 (1972): 39–72.

<sup>26</sup> Lacanonline.com, ed., “What Does Lacan Say About ... Desire?,” 2010, accessed November 22, 2015, <http://www.lacanonline.com/index/2010/05/what-does-lacan-say-about-desire/>.

<sup>27</sup> Thaller et al., *Saturn-Films*.

<sup>28</sup> Achenbach, Ballhausen, and Wostry, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910*, 138.

Numerous points arise viewing *Der Traum*. First, as the title suggests, the film evinces the prevalence in Viennese culture of Freudian dream analysis.<sup>29</sup> Second, it enacts the *fin de siècle* gender norms of masculine authority, creativity, and possession of women. The trope of women as statues – most often of white marble – which come alive is a common plot device in Saturn’s films and illustrates not only an objectification of women, but the gendered view of women as unpredictable and untruthful; despite the “truth” of their nakedness, women are different than they appear.<sup>30</sup> Third, *Der Traum* exemplifies the catenation of visual pleasures discussed above: the scopophilic gaze of the “unseen seer;” the obverse passive pleasure of being observed; the pleasure of desire itself. Finally, *Der Traum* ends with the resumption of normative gender roles and masculine re-empowerment as the sculptor returns to his work, chiseling beautiful, but non-living women.

*Die Macht der Hypnose* (The Power of Hypnosis) illustrates these same theories of visual pleasure, focusing even greater attention on the role of a passive clothed man observed – and in this case controlled – by a naked woman. In addition, the film provides a visual example of censorship by Austro-Hungarian authorities which eventually led to Saturn’s downfall. An intriguing satire of hypnosis prevalent in treatment of women’s hysteria, *Die Macht* illustrates Mary Bergstein’s contention that, “hypnosis was always a sex and gender-laden practice,” controversial among medical practitioners in Vienna and Paris for its potential sexual and criminal abuses.<sup>31</sup> Though eschewing the use of hypnosis in favor of his own “talk therapy,” Freud, who had, in the 1880s, studied with Jean-Martin Charcot – the great advocate of hypnosis in diagnosis and treatment of hysteria – would not have been alone in an intimate acquaintance with Charcot’s methods. Photographs of women taken in hysteric states induced by hypnosis in Charcot’s sessions at Paris’ Hospital Salpetriere were published in book form in 1878 and in bi-monthly

<sup>29</sup> Freud’s *Die Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams) was published in 1899.

<sup>30</sup> Four Saturn films portray men interacting with women as female statuary. *Das eitle Stubenmädchen* (The Vain Maid) extant; *Die lebenden Marmorbilder* (The Living Statues) lost; *Lebender Marmor* (Living Statue) extant; and *Der Traum das Bildhauers* described above. For a discussion of Saturn Films and tableaux vivants see Vito Adriaensens and Steven Jacobs, “The Sculptor’s Dream: Tableaux Vivants and Living Statues in the Films of Méliès and Saturn,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 13, no. 1 (2014): 41–65.

<sup>31</sup> Bergstein, “Freud, Saturn, and the Power of Hypnosis,” 4.

journals between 1888 and 1918; these often highly eroticized photographs would not have been unknown to bourgeois men of Vienna.<sup>32</sup>

In satirizing hypnosis, Schwarzer reverses normative gendered power relationships by assigning the role of hypnotist to a woman but maintains female stereotypes by the hypnotist's actions of deception and manipulation.<sup>33</sup> The film, set in a plush apartment dominated by an oval mirror, opens as a middle-aged man and younger woman dressed in evening attire enter and are served drinks by a young male servant.<sup>34</sup>

As they chat and kiss, a dare is made and the man, amused, rises and sits in a chair the woman indicates. Still fully clothed, she stands and makes mysterious gestures, presumably hypnotic, toward him until he is entranced. She tests his hypnotic state by baring her stockinged leg and placing her foot on his knee, then, assisted by the young servant, she undresses. Naked, except for a transparent chemise, shoes, and stockings,

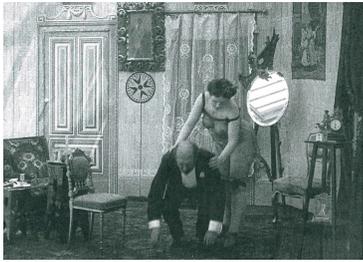


Figure 2: Censored frame from  
*Die Macht der Hypnose*

the hypnotist leans close to her guest, observing him from many angles. With a gesture, she causes him to stand and perform tricks like a dog – jumping over a stick, hopping on one foot, and kneeling on all fours – at this point, one sees the work of the censors. In the original Saturn-film Catalog description, the woman mounts the man and rides on his back like a pony; by order of the censors, this action was cut from the film.<sup>35</sup> Following the cut, the man, still hypnotized, reappears, lying on the floor. The woman takes his wallet and leaves the room while the servant, also versed in hypnotic techniques reenters and by mysterious gestures revives the older man. When, wearing a negligee and seemingly solicitous of his health, the woman reenters

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<sup>32</sup> Photos from Charcot's *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* may be viewed at: <http://cushing.med.yale.edu/gsd/collect/salpetre/#sthash.tQhwaffG.dpuf>.

<sup>33</sup> Thaller et al., *Saturn-Films*. The film is also available for viewing at, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of9huT8mTV8>.

<sup>34</sup> Prominent in the Victorian period, oval mirrors were commonly called “psyches.” An oval mirror featured prominently in the case study of Anna O. published by Freud in 1895. See Bergstein, “Freud, Saturn, and the Power of Hypnosis,” 16.

<sup>35</sup> Achenbach, Ballhausen, and Wostry, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910*, 174.

the room, the confused older man kisses her hand and is escorted out by the young servant. As the film closes, the young servant and the woman, laughing, congratulate each other on their successful venture and together, exit.

Why, faced with such opulent nudity, did censors cut only frames of the female hypnotist riding her male guest? Mary Bergstein posits the subverted gender roles depicted in these images as reason for the cut, and further contends that an educated Viennese public would have known a sixteenth century woodcut by Albrecht Dürer's student Hans Baldung Grien, *Phyllis and Aristotle* (showing Phyllis as dominatrix of the enamored philosopher).<sup>36</sup>

Nikolaus Wostry opines: "The sexual liberty of Schwarzer's images perfectly conformed to the traditions of the Viennese *fin de siècle*." but further argues that Schwarzer's criticism of such "sacred institutions ... as marriage and the military" led to Saturn's demise.<sup>37</sup> Censorship in the far-flung polyglot Austro-Hungarian Empire was seldom clear cut. As Lothar Höbelt shows, censorship in the Empire cut a long zigzagging trail through the nineteenth century, veering between iron-fisted control and liberal lassitude. Primarily a regional affair, censorship standards varied from city to city, and, with the rise of mass politics, deployed both control and compromise. By the latter half of the century, the principal job of theatrical censors was to keep the



Figure 3: Hans Baldung Grien, 1513, *Aristotle and Phyllis* (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg)

<sup>36</sup> Bergstein, "Freud, Saturn, and the Power of Hypnosis," 14; Filmarchiv Austria would seem to agree with Bergstein on this point since the Baldung Grien print is included Achenbach, Ballhausen, and Wostry, *Saturn: Wiener Filmerotik 1906–1910*, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Wostry, 2015 EFA Film Festival Catalog, *L'Europe autour de l'Europe*, 56. Accessed November 22, 2015.

peace; plays were previewed and censored before they reached the stage to diminish the chance for public outcry at the performance itself; mediocre work might be preferred by censors because it had less potential to stir the masses. Though, as Höbelt writes, Viennese censors were, after Karl Lueger's election as Mayor, more sensitive to the objections of Catholics, overall views on censorship at the century's turn remained liberal, as confirmed by Prime Minister Koerber's statement in 1903, "The stage should not on principle be closed to the discussion of any conflict."<sup>38</sup>

Why, in this liberal climate, was Saturn censored? Perhaps the better question is not, why was Saturn censored, but why, after allowing Schwarzer four years to operate a successful international business venture, did censors act when they did? A number of intersecting factors influenced the timing of censorship which led to Saturn's demise. First, cinematic technology was new; censors had no precedent or existing standards by which to judge it. Second, cinema reform movements which proliferated in Germany (led by both Protestant and Catholic women's groups) had far less impetus in Austria-Hungary.<sup>39</sup> Austro-Hungarian reform campaigns were located outside of the capital (primarily in Moravia and Bohemia) led by Catholic women's organizations, and had varying goals. Some opposed all cinema, others only "untruthful" fictional cinema; however, all reformers emphasized the negative effects of violent and dramatic cinema on youth. So while *Herrenabende* and "Parisian evenings" for gentlemen and adults were opposed, they were not the campaign's primary targets.<sup>40</sup> Höbelt gestures to other possible factors in the crackdown on Saturn, noting that after 1908, Archduke Ferdinand's conservative views on cultural matters tended to coincide with those of Catholics. More likely still may have been the influence of predominantly conservative views of the mass parties. None of these factors, however, fully accounts for Saturn's downfall. The destruction of Saturn came after complaints from

<sup>38</sup> Lothar Höbelt, "The Austrian Empire," in *The War for the Public Mind: Political Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Robert J. Goldstein (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 211–230.

<sup>39</sup> Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine*, 27–42.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Achenbach, "Die Geschichte der Firma Saturn und ihre Auswirkungen auf die österreichische Filmzensur," in Michael Achenbach, Paolo Caneppele, and Ernst Kieninger, *Projektionen der Sehnsucht: Saturn, die erotischen Anfänge der österreichischen Kinematografie* (Wien: Filmarchiv Austria, 2000), 75–102.

government offices of principalities outside the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

First came a lengthy complaint from the Austro-Hungarian consul in Tbilisi to Foreign Minister Aehrenthal (the foreign ministry had been placed in charge of censorship issues) complaining of Saturn-Film's obscenities. The letter confirms the films in question as Saturn's by the presence of a logo, described as a Maltese Cross. Saturn-Films' distinctive logo, so ubiquitous in the films as to become a kind of visual joke, was created by Schwarzer to brand his product. Though always figured as an eight-pointed star, the logo had three incarnations over the course of Saturn's existence; in the final version a cross, incorporated into the points of the star, is more visible than the star itself.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Michael Achenbach of Filmarchiv Austria disputes the Tbilisian complaint, arguing that because of Saturn's popularity, the logo may have been pirated onto other more pornographic film stock, a common practice of the early cinematic period<sup>42</sup> According to newspaper accounts following the police raid on Saturn, letters of complaint were received from embassies in Berlin, Rome, Paris, London, and Tokyo. Though such letters, if received, no longer exist, there is extant a letter which may well have sealed Saturn's fate. In August of 1910, a letter of complaint was received from the United States Ambassador, along with images of naked women (presumably from the films or catalog) in "bedenklichen Situationen" (precarious situations). Saturn films were banned and ordered destroyed by the Imperial and District courts of Vienna in February of 1911. *Herrenabende*, which had been prohibited since 1910, gradually faded from Vienna's cultural scene.<sup>43</sup>

Even as Saturn-Film Company flickered out of existence in 1911 and Schwarzer soon thereafter, the films were being hoarded by collectors;

<sup>41</sup> Though I found no research specifically discussing Schwarzer's choice of an eight-pointed star as Saturn's logo, eight-pointed stars were ubiquitous in Austro-Hungarian heraldry of the period. Eight-pointed stars have also been associated with various deities, (such as Ishtar) Islamic architecture and design, and there is some association with Masonic symbols. More likely however, the ubiquity of eight-pointed stars in heraldry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and elsewhere influenced Schwarzer's logo design. Included in the appendix are portraits featuring examples of numerous breast badges shaped as eight-point stars worn by, among others, Archduke Ferdinand, Minister Aehrenthal, and the Turkish prelate Mehmed V.

<sup>42</sup> Achenbach, *Projektionen der Sehnsucht*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

a law suit which dragged on through 1915 allowed the films continued showing in some areas, and ironically, but not surprisingly, many were resuscitated and shown to the Austro-Hungarian troops during World War I to boost morale.<sup>44</sup> One film in particular seems eerily to prefigure coming events. *Weibliche Assentierung* (Female Conscripts), depicts seven women receiving medical examinations for service in the army. Blustering men in uniform measure them in their bloomers; their breasts, their height; all are carefully recorded. In true Saturn style, the women are cheerful and the props fall down. There is no sense of foreboding among the actors, nevertheless the images recall to the viewer the war which soon came and in which Schwarzer died.<sup>45</sup>

Another of Saturn's late films, and its final example of Orientalism, *Die Zaubereien des Mandarins* (The Mandarin's Sorcery) portrays neither Turks nor women of the harem. In this brief film, a man in Chinese costume – wearing a pointed hat, sandals, and carrying an enormous parasol – stands alone in an upholstered room undecorated save for three Asian paintings and the eight-pointed star of Saturn. From behind his parasol, women – bare-breasted wearing ornamental corset belts, dark stockings and shoes – by the magic of Chinese sorcery and Schwarzer's early experiments with trick photography, appear. One by one they pop out from behind his twirling parasol; they stand against the upholstered wall; they move forward into full view; one of them trips slightly, then with a gesture from their creator, all vanish.<sup>46</sup>

What can Saturn's films, these brief intimate confidences, tell us about Vienna of the early twentieth-century? What is to be learned from Schwarzer's gaze through the new technology of the moving picture camera? Zooming in to view the women of Saturn-Films, we see that Schwarzer's gaze does not discriminate; variety is interesting, more so when in motion. Women's naked bodies of various shapes and sizes all generate visual pleasure and seem themselves to take pleasure from being naked. These women, known now only through Schwarzer's gaze, are the shadowy dreams of bourgeois fantasy. Through Schwarzer's lens they seem to embody the visual

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Jeanpaul Goergen, "Der pikante Film," in *Kino der Kaiserzeit: zwischen Tradition und Moderne*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 2002), 58.

<sup>46</sup> Thaller et al., *Saturn-Films; Die Zaubereien des Mandarins* may also be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q69Q4w5ToTQ>.

pleasure they created in others. Turning to the male actors, a close-up of Schwarzer's men reveals gendered stereotypes of bourgeois mid-life masculinity – with a twist. Whether villainous or dreaming, hypnotised or “othered.” Schwarzer's middle-aged bourgeois men maintain their authority at the price of their dignity. In the world of Saturn, if naked women are the essence of pleasure, clothed men are authority to be lampooned; men are the punchlines of Saturn's visual jokes.

Saturn's parodies of bourgeois masculinity may point to the history of comic theater in Vienna, but more pertinent would seem to be Schwarzer himself.<sup>47</sup> Twenty-seven in 1907, and hailing from Javornik in Moravia – the same area as Freud, and the site of the reform movements which contributed to Saturn's downfall – Schwarzer, a provincial outsider, depicted the capital city in all its contradictions of past and present values: bourgeois and bohemian mores.<sup>48</sup> Born in 1880, Schwarzer was a young man of the *fin de siècle* – that group Carl E. Schorske and others posit as in revolt against the paternalistic authority of the prevailing culture.<sup>49</sup> From this vantage point, Saturn's comic fantasies of sex, politics, and power reveal youthful rebellion. If so, why were they so appealing to an audience made up of those being lampooned? Though nudity was, no doubt, a major attraction, much more “hard core” filmic pornography was available for viewing in Viennese brothels.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps *Herrenabende* served bourgeois men as talk therapy did Viennese matrons – providing a site of psychological safety in which to confront fears and anxieties about volatile changes in mores, politics, and power boiling Vienna's crucible at the turn of the century – what Hugo Hofmannsthal described as *das Gleitende*, a “slipping away of the old world.”<sup>51</sup> From seats in the trancelike environs of the Saturn's cinema, gentlemen in evening attire watched past fears, present confusions, and uncertain futures flicker by amid enticing visions of accessible, insubstantial, unobtainable women and onscreen versions of themselves: recipients of pleasure and providers of comic relief. It is

<sup>47</sup> For more on comic theater in Vienna see Ian F. Rose, “The Comedy Of Schnitzler's ‘Reigen’,” *The Modern Language Review*, 1994, 674–688.

<sup>48</sup> Bergstein, “Freud, Saturn, and the Power of Hypnosis,” 10; Karin Moser trans. Nick Somers, “Combatting Dirt and Trash,” in *The World of the Habsburgs*. Accessed November 22, 2015. <http://ww1.habsburger.net/en/chapters/combatting-dirt-and-trash>.

<sup>49</sup> Schorske, *Fin-De-siècle Vienna*, xxvi.

<sup>50</sup> Ballhausen and Krenn, “Die Mehrheit der Blicke. Eine Vorbemerkung,” 13.

<sup>51</sup> Hofmannsthal quoted in Schorske, *Fin-De-siècle Vienna*, 9.

this moment of masculine anxiety and escape that Saturn preserves as in amber, to be viewed now through its tinged and viscous lens.

Schwarzer's cinematic gaze captures a singular view of a Vienna on the cusp of a new century. Somewhat blurred, a bit askew, it frames a liminality. A city both old and new, liberal and reactionary: a crucible of high art and mass politics where new technologies of cinema and familiar havens of coffee houses simultaneously concealed and unmasked personal anxieties. The buoyant films of Saturn with their conflicting messages, dark and bright, pinpoint a Viennese historical moment of pre-war anxiety and possibility – before the events of the twentieth-century took hold.



# Encountering the Sublime: Early Hermit Lifeways, Visual-Spatial Worlds, and the Global Recluse

James Brown

The pages that follow will assess the degree to which reclusion in the early period can be labeled a global phenomenon. They will examine three key areas, which I will call, in turn, the institutional ambits of reclusion, the visual-spatial world of the hermit, and the enduring cultural canon associated with eremitisms across both geographical and temporal distances. This is my first major task. The second is a more ambitious epistemological and phenomenological exercise in deriving humanistic insight from the experiences of recluses, as gleaned through deep consideration of their environments and cultural products.

Though my approach relies largely on a comparative case study between two regions – eastern Eurasia and western Europe – it engages with issues relevant across the global and temporal reach of hermitage, from South Asia to the Balkans and the Middle East and from ancient to modern contexts. My hope is to demonstrate that reclusion, like other phenomena, represents the staggering multiplicity of human experiences across time and space – and thus a challenge for scholars attempting to make sense of its vast expanse. But in such diversity also lies an opportunity for historians, artists, and humans-at-large to confront the equally overwhelming reality of similarities in demeanor, art, and, for many, pursuit of the otherworldly.

## The Institutional Ambits of Reclusion

Hermits by definition seek distance from the strictures of society and the demands imposed upon human freedom by the animal desires of the flesh; and thus any comparative consideration of recluses must take into account the various institutional forces through which hermits took up their recluse lifeways and against which they often struggled. As always, there are no clear distinctions between one institution and another, no point at which the historian can neatly consider the influence of religion to have ended and that of society to have begun. Especially in the case of the recluse, institutional influences reinforced one another and joined with personal circumstances, constituting complex matrices of motivations and decisive events for recluses' choice to leave the official world. But institutions nonetheless offer a useful analytical point of departure in considering the universal aspects of the recluse experience – one driven by external as much as internal forces.

Nowhere was this clearer than in the courtly societies of early eastern Eurasia, where rapidly shifting power dynamics over the course of several centuries engendered tumultuous and frequent political tremors. Under the governments of Chinese dynasties during the Warring States period, and later during the politically tumultuous eras of pre-Heian and Heian Japan, these palace intrigues and their consequences constituted the single greatest institutional influence upon the philosophy and practice of reclusion. They often inspired the choice for reclusion itself, with scholars, court officials, and would-be bureaucrats driven to the wilderness by discontent or danger emanating from the capital. Political tensions dictated the physical distance recluses were required to go before distance from the governmental center proved feasible – or safe. And goings-on in the capital, giving rise to conflict both within society and among religious sects, certainly impacted the way recluses lived and documented their lives.<sup>1</sup>

This centrality of government as the central institutional influence on early Asian recluses underpins a vast body of recluse sources, much of which employ the palace as a key foil and external nexus of critique. In the Chinese and Japanese canons, bureaucracy and politics represent the ink that, however skillfully calligraphed, meticulously styled and carefully placed, still stains the pure canvas upon which true human

<sup>1</sup> William R. LaFleur, *Awesome Nightfall: The Life, Times, and Poetry of Saigyō* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003).

fulfillment resides. To the recluse, statesmen, merchants, and commoners alike take part in constant cycles of desire, temporary fulfillment, and resurgent discontent whose roots lay in inevitably insatiable human desires. The philosophical conduits for such sentiments varied throughout centuries of the Asian recluse tradition, variously including Daoism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Throughout, however, the key theme is the recluse's desire to abandon the pattern of suffering and achieve enlightenment through protracted self-reflection, with the ultimate goal of freedom from cyclic torment. The mood is never pedagogical or didactic, rarely framed in overtly philosophical or religious terms, and always reflective – revealing the recluse's deep introspection and desire to see contradictions reconciled and humanity's true nature enjoyed.<sup>2</sup>

In the West, however – to speak in broad strokes of those areas under the cultural influence first of classical Greece, and later of Rome and its Christian successors – the institutional ambits of the recluse exhibited considerable differences from their eastern Eurasian counterparts. Though certain Western recluses certainly embraced more secular agendas of social critique and citation of hypocrisy, the Western eremitic tradition quickly evinced a strong association with religious life, and in particular cenobitism. It therefore exhibited a *de facto* and quite intentional tie with one of the key institutions in Western society, the Church and its various monastic branches. The ramifications of such close ecclesiastical connections ranged widely but proved immense – from the focus of recluse artwork to the creation of a body of monastic works and even the outright politicization of monastic life.

Indeed, the history of European recluses could convincingly be argued to have hinged upon the determining factor of religious influence. The student of medieval history will be familiar with the proliferation of religiously inspired monastic orders whose *raison d'être* was seclusion and meditation upon the mysteries of Christ's works – the Carmelite, Camaldolese, and Carthusian orders alike adopted lifelong vows centered around solitude and service. That such groups produced

<sup>2</sup> There are a great many sources in philosophy, religious studies, and history that deliver penetrating insights on the philosophical milieu of the early east Asian recluse. Among the most helpful are Alan Sponberg and Daniel Stevenson, *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1987) and Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

enduring works of literature, art, and religious scholarship speaks to their close association, educationally and intellectually as well as physically, with the papacy.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in both the Asian and European cases the institutional dimensions of reclusion should not be overstated. Though institutions played key roles in shaping the events and nature of recluse lives, their relative influence, as well as the constellation of other factors in which they coalesced, differed widely. Monastic hermits, as we have seen, lived in constant adoration of Christ and emulation of the fraternal Christian tradition – but they also operated within complex realms of power relationships between the Church and emergent states whose temporal and religious boundaries often caused dispute, rebellion, or at worst open warfare with the papacy. In these protracted struggles between worldly and spiritual authority, even those who sought distance from earthly distractions often found themselves violently confronted with the full reality of worldly affairs. Responses could be decisive – and radically at odds with religious devotion. Few episodes mirror the barbarity of persecution campaigns leveled against monks of the Cathar, Cistercian, and Franciscan monastic orders, across several centuries throughout the Middle Ages and early modern era.<sup>4</sup> Therefore although the Church provided much more of an institutional support for the practice of reclusion in early Europe, it would be simplistic to speak of the region's recluses as enjoying a wholly symbiotic relationship with the pontificate.

In east Asia, too, the vicissitudes of dynastic and governmental transitions led to ruptures in the relationship between recluse and institution. Here, even the hermit's best efforts at detachment often ran afoul of warlords' violence or war's omnipresence. As he sought oblivion from wants the recluse existed among the hecatombs of battle, constantly confronted with the finality of mortal existence. Thus could Saigyô, one of Japan's most famous early medieval recluses, write in moving prosody of merciless warfare and endemic turmoil:

Swords on which my eyes  
once fasted with delight are

<sup>3</sup> On this political and religious milieu see especially Richard W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the best single-volume history of the Christian monastic tradition is David Knowles, *Christian Monasticism* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1969).

here branches of trees  
 ascended by bodies being flogged  
 by barb-studded whips.<sup>5</sup>

There's no gap or break  
 in the ranks of those marching  
 under the hill:  
 an endless line of dying men,  
 coming on and on and on...<sup>6</sup>

Society and its temptations may have been the ultimate foil and object of reform for the medieval Asian recluse. But even the most concerted of attempts to break from its powerful hold over human passions could meet with ruin in the face of raw diplomacy's power to destabilize the earthly world.

The institutional ambits of reclusion should, in short, be acknowledged both for the intensity of their impact upon recluse lifeways and for their conspicuously unstable relationship with the lives of recluses themselves. Though the Church in Western Europe and the palace in eastern Eurasia largely shaped the passage of hermits' lives, the relationship between eremites and the official world could hope for little constancy or stability. In this, recluses thousands of miles apart nonetheless shared the fundamental trait of a tumultuous existence vis-à-vis the key human institutions built around them.

## The Lifeways of Hermitage: Recluses' Visual-Spatial Worlds

Parallel to similarities in institutional relationships lay key convergences in the visual and spatial worlds of recluses in both Asia and Europe. It is all too easy to focus overmuch on the external dimensions of the eremitic life – political struggles, warfare, and the intrigues that drove individuals to reclusion in the first place – without properly acknowledging the overwhelming importance of recluses' inner journeys toward spiritual enlightenment. But while hermits sought physical and philosophical separation from society at large, they too lived lives in

<sup>5</sup> LaFleur, *Awesome Nightfall*, 46.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

human bodies and relied upon the same bodily faculties to perceive and contemplate their experiences. And though the details of their surroundings could differ markedly, reclusive environments played a key role in shaping the nature of those experiences.

For hermits in early Asia, the formative spatial material was the natural world. Nearly every major figure in the Asian recluse canon evokes strong connection with the solitude and inherent spirituality of nature, from groves and forests to still rivers and secluded caverns, and in many works nature itself seems to represent a key protagonist in the recluse's journey. For Bai Juyi, wind whispering through mist-shrouded rows of plants constitutes a sweet musical breeze, a mellifluous collection of sounds that "floats and falls with the breezes, sometimes absorbing, other times fading away." Saigyô goes further, finding in his natural surroundings a personified, ethereal power:

Cloudfree mountains  
encircle the sea, which holds  
the reflected moon:  
this transforms islands into  
emptiness holes in a sea of ice.<sup>7</sup>

To modern, urban humans, the life of a recluse spending decades in nature seems at least foreign and fanciful, if not entirely unimaginable. But for the hermits who adopted such lifestyles, intimate contact with natural majesty dissolved boundaries between humanity and the sublime. Direct corollaries emerged between the cycles of seasons and the pulse of existence; just as the heat of the sun rose and fell each day, so too did the passions of humans surge and ebb in a ceaseless order. And for recluses living in the philosophical milieu of early east Asia, nature – to quote a much later, American eremite – represented the ideal cathedral for channeling the Way.<sup>8</sup> In hikes through forests, climbs on snowy mountaintops or solitary walks through babbling streams, Chinese and Japanese recluses pondered vast philosophical expanses mirrored in the surrounding natural landscapes.

Cenobitic monks in medieval Europe, though embracing many of the ethical and spiritual stances on detachment shared by their Asian

<sup>7</sup> Bai Juyi, "Around My Pond,"; LaFleur, *Awesome Nightfall*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> I of course speak here of John Muir, the great American naturalist and conservationist who frequently referred to his connection with nature in spiritual, quasi-religious terms.

counterparts, generally adopted quite different living arrangements. Whereas earlier Western hermits had lived in “monasteries” composed of rudimentary structures – often only a makeshift hut, cave, or other natural feature – cenobites resided in communities housed in a complex of multiple buildings, each subdivided into individual cells inhabited by a single or, at most, two to three monks. The setting was at once communal and private, inspiring personal reflection within a larger fraternity of devotion and, often, behind the walls of elaborate structures wholly at odds with the organic surroundings of Asian recluses.

The implications of such organizational shifts for cenobitic lifestyles were immense. In shelters furnished by concerted human artistic and architectural effort, day-to-day existence unfolded in highly regimented environments in which structural features governed residents’ movement through space and time. Consider the floorplan of the Abbey of St. Gall, a library-hermitage erected by Saint Othmar in the eighth century (see Fig. 1 on the next page).

A cursory glance will reveal living quarters, dining areas, congregational facilities, and storerooms; more careful study uncovers intricate passageways, library nooks, and even individual closets. Yet the deepest significance of the abbey lay in the way its architecture dictated the ebb and flow of monastic life. To one of the monastery’s residents, there would be no reason to experience the outside world. Sustenance, shelter, and periods of solitude each were furnished under the abbey’s roof – one could, in fact, live the entirety of one’s life behind its walls. Here, smooth walls of stone, robed monks ambling along open passageways, and quiet personal liturgies constituted the chief aesthetic domains of reclusion. For cenobites, encounters with the divine may not have been a matter of internalizing the soundscapes of wind through a mountain forest, nor of meditating upon the natural rhythms of cascading stream-water. But the power of communal devotion to evoke moving spiritual experiences was no less potent.

The spatial dimensions of early recluses were thus as diverse as the cultural circumstances which gave rise to various forms of hermitage. In a seeming paradox the barrenness of a mountaintop and the sophistication of medieval architecture each acted as the seat of enlightenment; yet the power of both European and Asian hermits’ environments to shape their spiritual experiences underlines the common theme of situational influence on the practice of eremitism.

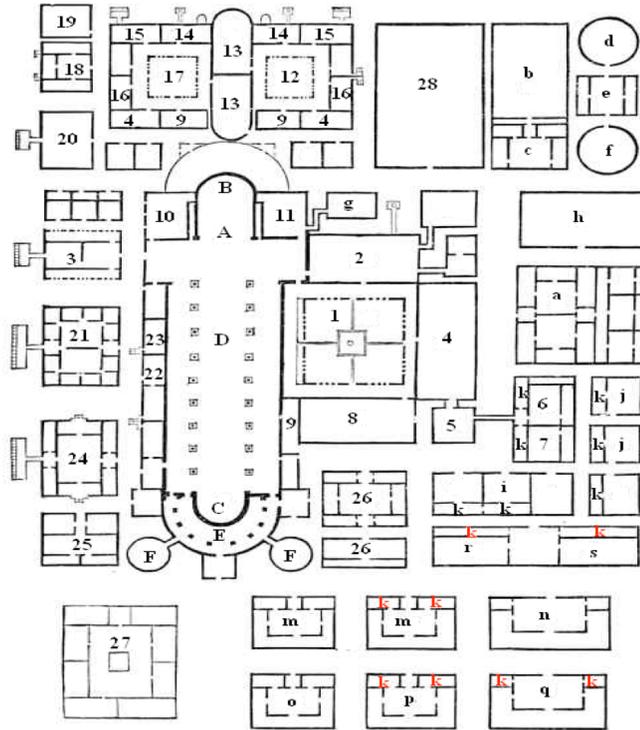


Figure 1: Floorplan of the Abbey of St. Gall

## The Recluse Legacy: Art and the Evocation of Hermitage

Recluses sought and achieved a measure of immortality through artistic output, ranging from the visual arts to music to both prosaic and prosodic meditations. And the effects of recluse art writ large proved instrumental in cementing the place of the hermit in a broader social consciousness, with both Asian and European monastic recluses well documented, acknowledged, and revered in subsequent centuries. The artistic legacies of recluses thus represent a bifocal lens of transmission and reception – capturing the philosophies and intentions of recluse-artists and providing clues into the experiences of those who, centuries on, consumed these representations. They also underscore striking

similarities in recluses' meticulous communication of their encounters with the sublime.

Nature, as we have seen, provided the ideal backdrop for the praxis of Asian reclusion, and the natural world constitutes the primary device in the region's recluse art tradition. The overriding theme of this canon is solitary experience of a wider, mysterious, but ultimately tranquil whole, often representative of otherworldly enigmas but generally rendered, in metaphorical form, as nature.

Consider a classic painting created at the end of the Ming Dynasty – itself a testament to the enduring cultural significance of the recluse in Chinese philosophy, religion, and society (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Xiang Shengmo (1597–1658). *Summoning the Recluse* (detail), 1625–1626. Ink on paper, handscroll.<sup>9</sup>

A few aspects of the painting are worthy of particular note. The entire scene is dominated by a complementary mixture of whitespace conservation and perspectival contrast, giving the impression of a solitary figure willingly – but only after considerable contemplation, captured in his static stance – venturing into a grove of much taller trees with a terminus beyond the boundaries of the canvas. The forest into

<sup>9</sup> Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Fund, 60.29.2.

which he stares is deep, dark, and its expansiveness undefined; we experience almost enough tension to engender dread – but not quite. And deeper analysis of the painting’s compositional dimensions reveals careful attention to the ways each of its elements is visually constructed and represented. Meticulously plotted density differentials suggest the richness of natural features compared to the monochromatic, unmysterious, but artificially constructed bridge in the image’s center. Meanwhile, the protagonist’s relative absence of color focuses attention on his size, purity, and simplicity relative to the environment – and patches of dense color place him in immediate visual opposition to the densely and richly colored forest, the embodiment of enlightenment, toward which he journeys. We feel, perhaps without even realizing it, an expectation that the protagonist will cross the bridge in front of him and that balance will thus be restored. And that, of course, is precisely the point.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 3: Left: Manuscript Leaf with the Martyrdom of Saint Peter Martyr in an Initial P  
 Right: Cod. Bodmer 127 (Weissenauer Passional), fol. 244r,  
 Detail: Initial R, with selfportrait of Fr. Rufillus

The artistic outputs of European recluse-monks likewise reveal close attention to composition and visual representation. Monastic art

<sup>10</sup> I am here in debt to a number of excellent works in art history and information design. Among the best are Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) and John W. Tukey, *Exploratory Data Analysis* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1977).

had as its chief goal the glorification of Christ and his works through creative endeavor – an enterprise that dovetailed well with monastic commitments to both work and prayer. In visual art, monks could find spiritual fulfillment in the meditative actions associated with hand-printing and careful translation of musical forms from deeply sensual liturgy to two-dimensional space.

Both the musical notation and the compositional art above make use of small multiples – similar points and figures arranged closely together, but with distinct areas of space between them, to bring attention to change between each element. And the dominant theme in both pieces of art is indeed change – between one tone and the next, between a pitch in one register and another a half-step above, between a complex thought and a subordinate point articulately encompassed in a particular logical order and arranged on paper-space in such a way as to retain this relationship.<sup>11</sup> For viewers of such art, the effect is likewise one of continuous state transition. Difficult or even insurmountable religious concepts seem to flow here as multiple portions of a single, cohesive truth, with each point an offshoot of the next, as if there were no other way it could be. Major and minor thirds appear clustered together, reinforcing both the distinct character of each chord, and its difference from preceding and subsequent notation, but also the union of distinct elements necessary to produce a uniform sound. And could such a gaze have reinforced viewers' own religious perspectives – the duality of existence, artistic reminders of the tension, travail, and transience of humans' passage to a more permanent afterlife? We soon encounter the perpetual enemy of the cultural historian – the liminal state between evidentiary conclusions and intangible, subjective experiences, especially of subjects long gone. Yet it seems clear that the outputs of European hermits shared important characteristics with their Asian counterparts in attention to artistic elements meant to convey deep cultural and spiritual significance.

<sup>11</sup> I have been greatly inspired on these points by a number of works treating the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of early European monastic music, including Sherri Johnson, *Monastic Women and Religious Orders in Late Medieval Bologna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Forms-of-Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), and Lynda L. Coon, *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

The great diversity of Asian and western European recluse art thus reflected the divergence of institutional influences on the recluses themselves. But this should not be taken to mean that art across recluse traditions shared no common themes. In each, viewers and readers encountered a rich combination of visual material and information arrangement that conveyed profound cultural significance through the static design and representation of three-dimensional experience. The forms and inspiration of recluse art may have been diverse indeed, but they stemmed from a common desire to document the sublime realm of spiritual experience.<sup>12</sup>

## Conclusion

It would be impossible to concisely and adequately convey the profound cultural differences that informed, inspired, and dictated the lifeways of recluses in the ancient and early medieval periods. Though it is possible to speak of common institutional factors – governments, religious traditions, and social arrangements – that affected eremitic lifestyles, beyond generalities the situational specificities of varying contexts render the pursuit of a global definitions for the recluse, beyond the simple “one who lives a solitary life,” fruitless.

We can nonetheless consider certain dimensions of the recluse existence, in concept and in aim if not in form, to be substantively similar. European and Asian recluses each existed within complicated institutional arrangements that simultaneously inspired and complicated their attempts to seek spiritual fulfillment away from society. Though their physical environments and living arrangements ranged from hastily constructed hillside huts to towering abbeys built on centuries-old foundations, the nature of recluse environments – and, most importantly, the perceptual lenses through which recluses experienced them – shared a common thread of design and interpretation conducive to the spiritual life. In the brotherhood of solitude that evoked the discipleship of Christ’s life or in the natural soundscapes of river and mountain fog, recluses from all traditions existed in environ-

<sup>12</sup> And aside from representing a rich area of study for cultural, architectural, and gender historians, the relationships between recluse environments and their two-dimensional depictions presents promising opportunities for new methodological approaches altogether – good news indeed for the rapidly expanding field of digital humanities.

ments that provided physical manifestations of the spiritual callings to which they devoted their lives.

Furthermore, recluse art – the visual, auditory, and literary life-chronicles and meditations hermits left behind – reflects the very nature of those environments, the experiences they engendered, and the enduring messages recluses sought to record for posterity. The historical value of such artworks encompasses domains far outside the religious and transcendent, ranging from art criticism to anthropology and visual cultures. But recluse art is nothing if not deeply spiritual, meant to communicate and to instill in its observers a profound personal connection with the world beyond human affairs.

It appears that reclusion, then, was a global phenomenon if only by virtue of the cultural continuities between its geographical variants. But what of our second question? Could it speak to a deeper insight around a shared humanity that, beyond the artifices of society, the core elements of recluse lives – spiritual contemplation, personal contact with the otherworldly, and artistic representation of the sublime – echo the same themes? Perhaps the answers to such questions also lie beyond the ambit of historians. Yet in considering and appreciating the phenomenon of reclusion, especially when the pace and goals of modernity increasingly question its relevance or even render it impossible, it is essential to acknowledge the humanistic threads that tied together those separated by their social milieus, by centuries, and by the divergences inherent in the societies from which they sought escape.



# The *Onnagata*: A Note Regarding the Male Actor of Female Roles in Japanese Theatre

John M. Metcalf

The *onnagata*, a long standing tradition of Japanese theatre, specifically in *Kabuki*, is a male actor who specializes in female roles.<sup>1</sup> The tradition goes back to the early 1600s when the government of Japan banned first women and then young boys from portraying women's roles in *Kabuki* and other theatrical styles, attempting to stop fights that frequented the performances and trying to establish tight control over the theatre as a means to prevent prostitution.<sup>2</sup> However, the government was never completely successful in removing the ties of sex and *Kabuki*; "both homosexual and heterosexual liaisons between actors and their fans were common."<sup>3</sup>

While *Kabuki* began with great acclaim in 1603 on the dry bank of the Kamo River of Kyoto with itinerant Shinto shrine dancer, Okuni, and her troupe, the *onnagata* would only emerge in the aftermath of the 1629 ban of women and the 1652 ban of boys from playing female characters in theatre, restrictions that *Kabuki* theatre companies still continue today.<sup>4</sup> Moralistic attacks by the government against the the-

<sup>1</sup> Christine Guth, *Art of Edo Japan: The Artist and the City 1615–1868* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 32; Laurence Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public: Female Impersonation as Performance," *Theater* 20, no. 2 (1989): 6–11.

<sup>3</sup> Guth, *Art of Edo Japan*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public," 9–10.

atre to purge it of sex and prostitution joined by an urge to gain respectability during the last three hundred years, by implanting the idea of higher art above base desires, have together provided the reason for these continuing measures. Altercations that arose among the various customers of *Kabuki* vying for the attentions of the actors, both female and their boy colleagues, had led to their being banned from the theatre. In their place, out of sheer necessity, had arisen the *onnagata*, males over the age of fourteen that shaved their forelocks, eventually donning dark purple patches, and later on wigs, to cover the government's required baldness.<sup>5</sup> Via generalized female behavior the *onnagata* adopted a specific way of playing the parts they acted out on the stage.<sup>6</sup> They acquired a high-pitched falsetto which they became highly skilled at and could produce for many hours despite the immense strain placed on the actor's voice. An aspiring *onnagata* would study for years to become proficient in the art, starting usually in childhood. Studying strenuous dances demanding continuous practice and arts such as flower arranging and tea ceremony, as well as learning techniques of posture, behavior, and movement all belong to the training. An honored star and *onnagata*, Jakuemon IV (1920–2012), in an interview with Laurence Senelick held in his Tokyo dressing room, revealed that he had been told, "You won't become useful until you are sixty". Senelick goes on to state of the sixty-eight year old actor that "as each new layer of white or touch of rouge was applied to his face, he [Jakuemon] seemed to grow younger – and coyer," and that later in the show Jakuemon's "performance seemed effortless, highly energized."<sup>7</sup>

As female role specialists or female impersonators in *Kabuki* theatre, the *onnagata* portray roles of young women, girls, matrons, mothers, grandmothers, courtesans, female creatures or spirits, and many other female roles. Many *onnagata* lived as women both in the theatre and in their private lives,<sup>8</sup> to assimilate the feminine behavior patterns they portrayed on the stage, it was thought.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, during the Tokugawa era (1600-1868) *onnagata* were "expected to maintain their roles offstage..., to use women's movements, dress, language, and

<sup>5</sup> Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public," 10.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Episale, "Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation: Reading the *Onnagata* in English," *Asian Theatre Journal* 29, no. 1 (2012): 89–111.

<sup>7</sup> Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public," 7.

<sup>8</sup> Guth, *Art of Edo Japan*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Episale, "Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation," 96–97.

manners”.<sup>10</sup> Acting manuals from then often encourage this notion as a means of “maintenance of the illusion”.<sup>11</sup> Ayame Yoshizawa, who lived in the 17th-century, wrote: “An onnagata should act like an onnagata even in the dressing room. [...] An actor who fails to live even his daily life like a woman will probably never be judged a successful onnagata.”<sup>12</sup> One such *onnagata* who presented as a woman in private life was the renowned actor Iwai Hanshirô V (1776–1847).<sup>13</sup>



Figure 1: Utagawa Kuniyasu, c. 1823, *Iwai Hanshirô V in Onnagata Costume*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

In the terms of femininity, the *onnagata* is often looked upon as presenting an “ideal” or a “stylized view”. Living National Treasure Bandô Tamasaburô’s own formulation of his interpretation of the femininity of the *onnagata* has been invaluable recorded through an interview he gave with the *The Japan Times* in 2013:

“My main priority is to create a moment, a second on the stage, to share something with the audience [...] but if I

<sup>10</sup> Senelick, “Changing Sex in Public,” 10.

<sup>11</sup> Episale, “Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation,” 96.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Scott, “Transformer: Controversial Kabuki star Tamasaburo Bando, who magically becomes a woman for Japanese roles, ventures into international waters in Andrzej Wajda’s film ‘Nastasya’. But this time, the actor plays male and female,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1994, 1–4, accessed December 1, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-05-22/entertainment/ca-60742\\_1\\_andrzej-wajda](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-05-22/entertainment/ca-60742_1_andrzej-wajda).

<sup>13</sup> Guth, *Art of Edo Japan*, 32–33.

never get there, if the people who come to watch me fail to appreciate it, then I will not be able to protect this treasure," he says.

He once said he realized he could never see the world through the eyes of a woman, that his vision would always be that of a man. Tamasaburô tries to create this essence piece by piece; the gestures, the eyes, the use of his fan, blurring the boundary between his male life and his female stage persona.

"The frontier is not clear. I am a man, I have never been a woman. The same concept of *onnagata* is based on a man's imagining of a woman. It goes a lot further than a simple physical transformation," he said.

"The real Tamasaburô is in front of you. On stage I am a dream, maybe just a creation. It's on stage that I am happiest," he smiles.<sup>14</sup>

Frank Episale refines the concept as not a mimicry of real women but rather as the essence of, or an acquired, femininity used by the *onnagata*. He suggests that it is more an "artificial and stylized femininity" and that it "paradoxically, embodies an essential and authentic femininity", an art that is "a product of eighteenth-century Japan ... brought about by Tokugawa-era reforms that garner the adjective 'traditional'". He claims it as "the embodiment of kabuki's celebration of artificiality and theatricality". An *onnagata* in today's world of *Kabuki* theatre is enacting this traditional view, a man's view of the ideal feminine form or likeness created during the Tokugawa or Edo era of Japan.<sup>15</sup>

Jakuemon IV confided to Senelick in their interview that for "the special quality needed to be an *onnagata*: 'Your heart must be virtuous, your exterior sexually alluring.'" <sup>16</sup> Leaning on Katherine Mezur's work on female-likeness in *Kabuki*, Episale advances that this allure is based on an ideal beauty of both genders as it was determined upon the

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Lhuillery and Kyoko Hasegawa, "Living National Treasure Keeps Kabuki Alive," *The Japan Times*, February 22, 2013, accessed December 1, 2015, [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/22/national/living-national-treasure-keeps-kabuki-alive/%5C#.Vm9\\_uo-cHIW](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/22/national/living-national-treasure-keeps-kabuki-alive/%5C#.Vm9_uo-cHIW).

<sup>15</sup> Episale, "Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation," 93–95; 97–101.

<sup>16</sup> Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public," 7.

beauty of young, adolescent men.<sup>17</sup> The establishment of the *onnagata*'s likeness was one based on the androgyny of *wakashū* (young person) performers rather than on women. Rather than base the created look solely on women, the *onnagata* were able to create a view of femininity with the male form, while adding feminine clothing, and actions. This acquired, stylized femininity as well as androgyny work to the advantage of an *onnagata*,<sup>18</sup> creating a character that both men and women are intrigued by. Theatrical androgyny, achieved by use of make-up, costumes, and behavior stylized in an extravagant way, lends to the allure of the *onnagata*. It is, in itself, a blending and transcending of the limitations of masculine with feminine qualities that are prescribed by society.

The *onnagata*, due to popularity and acclaim, have influenced society. Women have adapted their behavior at times to mirror or to attempt the same behavior or manners of the *onnagata*, styles and fashions have changed due to *onnagata* trendsetters, and in more recent years *onnagata* have taken to television as a means of speaking on current issues and events.<sup>19</sup> Makoto Watanabe of Hokkaido University spoke in 2006 about modern television shows of *onnagata*, especially of those portraying matron figures, such as the show of Akihiro Miwa or Mikawa [Yoshikazu Manase]:

There seems to be a vogue for these sorts of programs at the moment, with these 'mother figures' teasing, scolding or offering advice to both famous people and just ordinary citizens. That might be because of the decline of the mother figure and authority in the Japanese home and the viewing public's desire for moral guidance or wisdom from a respected adult such as Mikawa [onnagata performer]. [...] It doesn't matter that these are biologically men who are only dressing as women; they are imparting traditional values. I think that their roles are probably a part of our unique culture and the relative acceptance of transgender

<sup>17</sup> Katherine Mezur, *Beautiful Boys/Outlaw Bodies: Devising Kabuki Female-Likeness* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Episale, "Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation," 101–103.

<sup>18</sup> Erica Stevens Abbitt, "Androgyny and Otherness," *Asian Theatre Journal*:249–256; Senelick, "Changing Sex in Public."

<sup>19</sup> Guth, *Art of Edo Japan*; Julian Ryall, "On Japanese TV, the Lady is a Man," *Hollywood Reporter International Edition* 395, no. 50 (September 6, 2006): 14.

roles in the performing world. These people are simply taking it from the stage to the television screen, where they have become educators.<sup>20</sup>

The *onnagata* is one of the last examples of all-male theatrical arts left in the world. While occasionally today one may find a troop of all male actors in Shakespeare or Peking Opera, and while the all-male tradition of elite classical Japanese *Noh* also numbers among continuous traditions of all-male troops going back in history, the *onnagata* in *Kabuki* theatre nevertheless occupies a special place. While in more recent years there have been a few women who have entered into the art of *Kabuki* and into the roles of the *onnagata*, this is not a prevalent sight;<sup>21</sup> the *onnagata* remains a male art form. In the west, theatre roles for men that portray women these days are generally reserved for the character of an older or middle aged lady or that of a comedic lady who is not generally seen as an attractive character; one could point to the play, *Charley's Aunt* in which a male portrays a friend's middle aged or elderly aunt with dismay to the character of having to wear petticoats and regularly smoking a cigar.<sup>22</sup> It is more common for women to portray a role of a woman in today's theatre, especially in the west, even though such characters as Ophelia, Gertrude, Juliet, and other Shakespearean ladies were originally portrayed by men.

In another interview Bandô Tamasaburô spoke of how the *Kabuki* theatre has changed over the years:

“The kabuki of 300 years ago was very different,” he says. “There was no electricity for lighting, no electronics – for example, the trapdoor in the floor had to be moved manually.”

“Kabuki evolves, but it has kept its spirit and will continue to do so in the future – just like the Greek tragedies, the opera or the ballet,” he said.<sup>23</sup>

And Jakuemon told Senelick in their interview that: “Kabuki is an unnatural and distorted art. The introduction of a natural element, such

<sup>20</sup> Ryall, “On Japanese TV, the Lady is a Man,” 14.

<sup>21</sup> Episale, “Gender, Tradition, and Culture in Translation,” 103–104.

<sup>22</sup> Senelick, “Changing Sex in Public,” 10–11.

<sup>23</sup> Lhuillery and Hasegawa, “Living National Treasure Keeps Kabuki Alive.”

as a woman playing a woman, would throw it out of kilter.”<sup>24</sup> *Kabuki* is eccentric and theatrical and therefore the *onnagata* which is a part of the theatricality is a major player in *Kabuki* theatre.

This short study has left me at any rate with the impression that there may be a far darker side behind the beautiful illusion of the *onnagata*. Training begins in childhood and some of the children are adopted by performers or trainers who had or have no children of their own; it is a sheltered and secretive life. The life seems to take a heavy toll on its performer participants. Bandô Tamasaburô in two separate interviews spoke on his own life as an *onnagata* and the tolls this life apparently brought him.

“‘I used to be bothered by the confusion. My life has been as an *onnagata*. But am I a woman? No. Am I a man? Not really,’ he says.”<sup>25</sup> He also described how he was adopted, was trained, and forced to perform solely in *Kabuki* by his mentor. It wasn’t until after his mentor died that he actually tried anything outside the realm of *Kabuki* theatre.

Elsewhere, as we have already read, he says: “‘The real Tamasaburô is in front of you. On stage I am a dream, maybe just a creation. It’s on stage that I am happiest,’ he smiles.”<sup>26</sup> Here it seemed that the life of the *onnagata* may well be one of confusion and sadness. This last of my quotes from Tamasaburô resonated with me. He is happiest on the stage, not as himself, but rather as a creation, an illusion, or a dream. In trying to create the art of the *onnagata*, it seemed that the individual actor was stripped in some ways of their humanity and suffered a difficult life of continuous training, performing, and possibly abuse. The confusion and sadness of these quotes reinforced what I understood from my scholarly readings.

In all, the *onnagata* is a connection to the Tokugawa era continuously performed to this day. The *onnagata* has inspired fashions and behavior since the dawn of its creation. Though *Kabuki* theatre has changed over the centuries since it began, with new technology being added in, its linked tradition of the *onnagata* has remained a pinnacle piece of Japanese theatre. The darker tones that I detected when read-

<sup>24</sup> Senelick, “Changing Sex in Public,” 8.

<sup>25</sup> Scott, “Transformer,” 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

ing the various writings on the *onnagata* notwithstanding, the art is a piece of cultural heritage that remains in the spotlight, with exponents like Bandô Tamasaburô and many others continuing to perform and showcase the *onnagata* as a treasure of Japan.

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