

## Visions of Excess and Excesses of Vision — Women and Transgression in Japanese Myth —

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Thus, at the root of sexuality, of the movement that nothing can ever limit (because it is, from its birth and in its totality, constantly involved with the limit), and at the root of this discourse on God which Western culture has maintained for so long . . . a singular experience is shaped: that of transgression.

(Michel FOUCAULT 1977, p. 33)

A persistent problem for historians of Japanese religions has been the proper identification and definition of the Other World, a realm beyond ordinary experience that is also thought to be the abode of the kami and, occasionally, of the dead as well. Despite the fact that the Japanese tradition uses several names to refer to that experiential zone, most scholars conceive of it as a single entity and thus contribute to a confusion that has continued unabated to this day. It does not take wild flights of the imagination to suspect that Japanese scholars themselves might be under Western academic and/or religious influences when they use the term *takai* 他界 (other world) to refer globally to the three supernatural realms (namely, *Yomi no kuni*, “the land of darkness,” *Takamagahara* “the high heavenly plain,” and *Tokoyo*, “the permanent realm”) that are mentioned in the myths. Although vague or simplistic distinctions are made at times, the designations are almost always conflated in a single category. In all cases, however, scholars fail to provide sophisticated interpretations of the terms. Even Carmen BLACKER conceives of the other world as a single realm; while recognizing the topic’s importance, since she devotes a chapter to it in her book on Japanese shamanism, she offers little solace:

We must ask therefore, what is the shape of the universe which accommodates both our own world and the worlds of the *kami* and the dead. No sooner do we pose these questions than we find ourselves, like the people on Bunyan's enchanted ground, beset by confusions and ambiguous shapes. . . . In Japan the vision of the other world is riddled with ambivalence, like a piece of shot silk (1986, p. 69).

Because Blacker's chief concern is the identification of a "realm beyond" with whose denizens contemporary Japanese shamans communicate, and because she is an anthropologist committed to a definition of the Japanese little tradition as something that is radically opposed to the religious and political institutions derived from the *Kojiki* (the earliest compilation of Japanese myths), Blacker carefully, but, I think, wrongly, separates folk religion from the elite tradition found in those myths. She rejects that tradition in peremptory manner:

We may begin by dismissing a cosmology which will in future concern us scarcely at all. This is the vertical, three-layered universe of the *Kojiki* myths. . . . It is tolerably clear, certainly, that the people who transmitted the *Kojiki* myths and those who built the great tombs were one and the same. . . . But they did not comprise the whole of the Japanese people, nor were their myths necessarily accepted by people dwelling in other parts of the islands. Neither the vertical cosmology of these myths, nor their segregated and polluted dead, can be in any way related to the shamanic beliefs we are considering (pp. 70, 72).

In a rather blunt manner Blacker goes on to conclude that the other world of Japanese shamans is the realm of mountains.

But is it really so? Should we accept without further ado the notion that the cosmology offered in the *Kojiki* is vertical, three-layered, and unrelated to shamanism? Furthermore, should we agree with the proposition that the vision of the other world is riddled with ambivalence? And last but not least, what do women have to do with all this?

In the following discussion I will attempt to suggest that different readings, structuralist and post-structuralist in character, of the myths discarded by Blacker seem to indicate that there was not one, but several, highly distinguished other worlds, and that this fact behoves us to reconsider shamanism, the "beyond," and women.

#### *Unraveling the Travels Beyond*

I will begin on a theoretical level, by positing that the "realm beyond" of classical Japanese mythology *and* of present-day shamanism is constituted, first and foremost, by the postulation of an impossibility that is

immediately denied, and second, that it is expressed in the literature by means of spatial metaphors. Indeed, though the realm beyond be described as inaccessible because death or a natural boundary (such as that between water and air) marks its beginnings and limits, that realm is not totally impervious to communication: shamans visit it and return unscathed, or they throw some kind of linguistic bridge over the yawning chasm of absence that separates the living from its shores. On a preliminary level of investigation, then, the power of a shaman is the power to negate spatial impossibilities; just as there are amphibious animals, so a shaman can live in both this and the other worlds.

Examples of cataleptic persons who return to a conscious state and describe their journeys to hell abound in literature; some are blind seers, some communicate with the dead, and some are said to breathe under water, while others soar to the heavens. These shamans, if we decide to call them that, are people for whom there is apparently no such thing as a physical, spatial boundary, and who can leave their bodies and engage freely in mystical travels to hyperreality. If we decide to state that a shaman is someone who crosses what is universally regarded as a boundary, it is important to note that this statement needs to be reversed as well: at the very moment she or he crosses over, the shaman thereby *re-enforces* the space of common experience on this side of the threshold to the headlong precipice. A shaman, however, does much, much more than that, and of interest to the historian of religions is the question of finding how that boundary was established and what its source entailed. And a question the social and intellectual historian must address is why in Japan most, though not all, shamans are women.

Should one scan the earliest extant texts while bearing in mind root metaphors related to space, it soon becomes evident that the fundamental metaphor around which those myths that speak of the “realms beyond” were formulated is the metaphor of travel. At first sight, the narratives found in those texts seem naive in their recapitulation of the movements that took place between various realms of existence, and of the tragedies that resulted in the closure of space and the dichotomy between this and the other worlds. Tragedies they were, because those realms that became “other” were not, originally, delimited or marked in any way: there was free intercourse over a vast plane of existence, between men and women, before the specific transgressions that caused that plane to be partitioned occurred.

Upon closer examination, however, it is clear that these travel narratives always describe journeys on the part of men to the abode of women, and that, when looked at from such a perspective, the myths turn out to be powerful tales that exhibit human sexuality in its raw movement toward the limits, and use it to delimit the space and time of existence, to construct rules, circumscribe corners, trace boundaries, and erect the

poles that mark them, and, finally, to inscribe values and so trace the contours of the sacred and the ritual conditions of its approach. These myths provide mental maps of the sacred, by which I mean a blueprint for the spatial manifestations of social power and its codification that is inscribed on bodies at the time of ritual.

Those transgressions were coeval with a partitioning of the plane of existence into zones that became the focus of codes and prohibitions because they were seen as the locus of a specific, dangerous power (itself relegated to the deeper recesses of forbidden chambers such as wombs, parturition huts, and tombs), *and* as the ultimate justification of male domination. But more about that later. For the present, let us examine these “other worlds” as they are described in Japanese mythology.

### *Three Types of Other Worlds*

The *Kojiki* posits the existence of three other worlds that differ in structure and function. Their structural differences are related to the type of fundamental human experiences in which they are embedded, while their functional differences are of two types and frame other human experiences in a rigorous, twofold epistemological specificity: first, they function to posit a taxonomy of gender and to delineate types of ritual activity; and, second, they function together, not only to posit the existence of realms that will be termed “supernatural” because they are beyond immediate sensory perception, but also to carve out Japan as a separate social, experiential, and “geographical” entity. It is fitting, therefore, that the literary constitution of the three other, “hyperreal,” worlds of female residence, and of Japan as a fourth, “real,” world governed by males, is mediated by the fundamental metaphor of travel and sightseeing, what will be defined later in this discussion as “voyeuristic voyage” or “depth-peregrination.” It is necessary, furthermore, that we become conscious of the fact that these four worlds are literary constructions. Indeed, we should not underestimate the role played by spatial metaphors, which treat space as a formal plane onto which the objects that will be seen (“visibilities”) and talked about (“legibilities”) are posited. These visibilities and legibilities sustain those metaphors and dominate the field of representations; for the penetrating insights that will be discussed below are connected to the experience of the body, which MERLEAU-PONTY has shown to be, first and foremost, the perception of spatial extension (1945, pp. 235–344).<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, since a central issue in the field of Religious Studies is to examine the relationship between myth and ritual, it is necessary—

<sup>1</sup> See also MERLEAU-PONTY 1968, in which he discusses those issues in a strikingly rich and clear manner.

for reasons that will soon become obvious – to underline the fact that, in Japan, boundaries between villages or counties are the object of peregrination and of “marking” by means of sexual symbols. There is no question in my mind that rituals served to solidify social practices of power, and that the myths do not function as interpretations of the rituals, but as a veil to disguise power and as a means to institutionalize it.

In the following discussion, these “hyper-realms” will be analyzed in terms of the human experiences they focus on, in terms of the ritual functions they serve to delineate, and in psychological and epistemological terms. The nature of language imposes a separate treatment of these issues, but it should be clear that none of those are separate in the phenomenon of “space” that is constructed by those myths. It is precisely when one restitutes the interconnectedness of those issues that it becomes clear that “space” was constituted in order to trace a social hierarchy, to define practices of power, and to promulgate concomitant modalities of knowledge, all of which resulted in debasing women.

Yomi no kuni  
*The Bio-degraded Female Condition*

Before I treat *Yomi no kuni*, it is necessary to read a few lines of Japanese mythology that set the tone for all the myths we will consider. Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female), a primordial couple of kami, churned the ocean and thus created an island to which they descended in order to consolidate the drifting world. There,

They erected a heavenly pillar and a spacious palace. At this time [Izanagi-no-mikoto] asked his spouse, Izanami-no-mikoto, saying: “How is your body formed?” She replied, saying, “My body, formed though it be formed, has one place which is formed insufficiently.” Then Izanagi-no-mikoto said: “My body, formed though it be formed, has one place which is formed to excess. Therefore I would like to take that place in my body which is formed to excess and insert it into that place in your body which is formed insufficiently, and give birth to the land. How would this be?” Izanami replied, saying: “That will be good.” Then Izanagi-no-mikoto said: “Then let us, you and me, walk in a circle around this heavenly pillar and meet and have conjugal intercourse.” After thus agreeing, Izanagi-no-mikoto then said: “You walk around from the right, and I will walk around from the left and meet you.” After having agreed to this, they circled around; then Izanami-no-mikoto said first: “Ana-ni-yashi, how good a lad!” Afterwards, Izanagi-no-mikoto said: “Ana-ni-yashi, how good a maiden!” After each had finished speaking, [Izanagi-no-mikoto] said to his spouse: “It is not proper that the woman speak first.”

Nevertheless, they commenced procreation and gave birth to a leech-child. They placed this child into a boat made of reeds and floated it away. . . . Then they ascended together and sought the will of the heavenly deities. The heavenly deities thereupon performed a grand divination and said: "Because the woman spoke first, [the child] was not good. Descend once more and say it again" (PHILIPPI 1969, pp. 50–52).

This page offers a micro-formulation (or, if you prefer, a stylization or miniaturization) of the issues that will be discussed presently, because it shows that sexuality was problematized in a specific manner. One might well ask: why did Izanami and Izanagi not remain at the blissful stage of just "seeing" their obvious physical difference? They might have enjoyed that difference forever in bliss. The answer is: sexuality is constituted as a domain of social practice; at the moment a social code ("the woman should not speak first and invite to copulate") was established, formal differences became functional differences to which unequal value was attached, and this, in virtue of the principle of isomorphism between sexual relation and social rapport that was discussed by FOUCAULT in his *L'Usage des Plaisirs* (1984). Some dreamers today might imagine sexual interaction as a matter of mutual consent and contentment. However, in myth, as in life or in sub-molecular physics, things are never what they appear to be, for as soon as they come under scrutiny they behave differently than theory would have it. The glaring excessive form in Izanagi's body and the perceived insufficiency in Izanami's body were socially constructed qualifications that correspond to a code according to which a woman should not invite a male to copulate, because a man is supposed to be active and penetrating. The right to speech is a male prerogative and duty; to break this ritual rule will only cause social incoherence – the production of disformed progeny.

We might also underline the fact that the first time a woman appears in the myths, she is treated solely as a sexual partner and a biological entity. Michelle Zimbalist ROSALDO noted that "biology becomes significant only as it is interpreted by human actors and associated with characteristic modes of action" (1974, p. 23). Foreseeing the conclusions of this presentation, we have to go one step further and propose that the denial of specific speech-situations to women may have been responsible for other types of speech on their part, particularly for the "speech in tongues" that will characterize their activity as shamanesses. Let us now turn our attention to *Yomi no kuni*.

The *Kojiki* states:

Thus, at last, Izanami-no-kami, because she had borne the fire-deity, divinely passed away. . . . At this time, [Izanagi-no-mikoto], wishing to meet again his spouse Izanami-no-mikoto, went after

her to the land of Yomi. When she came forth out of the door of the hall to greet him, Izanagi-no-mikoto said: "O, my beloved spouse, the lands which you and I were making have not yet been completed; you must come back!" Then Izanami-no-mikoto replied, saying: "How I regret that you did not come sooner. I have eaten at the hearth of Yomi. But, O my beloved husband, how awesome it is that you have entered here! Therefore I will go and discuss for a while with the gods of Yomi my desire to return. Pray do not look upon me! Thus saying, she went back into the hall, but her absence was so long that he could no longer wait. Thereupon he broke off one of the large end-teeth of the comb he was wearing in his left hair-bunch, lit [it as] one fire, and entered in to see. At this time, maggots were squirming and roaring [in the corpse of Izanami-no-mikoto]. . . .

Hereupon, Izanagi-no-mikoto, seeing this, was afraid, and he turned and fled. At this time his spouse Izanami-no-mikoto said: "He has shamed me!" Thereupon she dispatched the hags of Yomi to pursue him. . . . Finally, his spouse Izanami-no-mikoto herself came in pursuit of him. Then he pulled a tremendous boulder and closed [the pass] Yomo-tsu-hira-saka with it. They stood facing each other, one on each side of the boulder, and broke their troth. At this time Izanami-no-mikoto said: "O my beloved husband, if you do thus, I will each day strangle to death one thousand of the populace of your country." To this Izanagi-no-mikoto said: "O my beloved spouse, if you do thus, I will each day build one thousand five hundred parturition huts." This is the reason why one thousand people inevitably die and one thousand five hundred people are inevitably born every day (PHILIPPI 1969, pp. 57, 61–62, 64–66).

In this case, Izanami lost her life as a direct cause of giving birth to fire. It must be noted that all the kami born of sexual union between Izanami and Izanagi are natural elements, that is, the islands of Japan, various aspects of nature, and fundamental constitutive elements of the natural world. It is because Izanagi was deprived of further sexual enjoyment that he killed his son and then undertook his journey to *Yomi no kuni*; that is the first, but not the last, time in the myths that a male becomes violent because he cannot gain sexual satisfaction. Although we do not know how he managed to meet with his spouse—she herself is quite amazed by that feat—they agree to continue their creative efforts. However, for the first time also, a woman is so knowledgeable, or so brave, as to put a condition to resuming sexual relations: namely, that the male not look at her. And the male transgresses, only to be bedazzled, if not horrified, by the spectacle of the natural process of decay and putrefaction, which will henceforth irrevocably be associated in the Japanese psyche with womanhood. I call this the "bio-degraded" feminine condition. Izanami thereafter completely disappears from the myths,

and Izanagi, finally able to escape from the underworld, swears that, as a male, he will produce more children than his former spouse will kill.

What is the ritual dimension of this myth? In order to answer that question, we must read on:

Hereupon, Izanagi-no-[mikoto] said: "I have been to a most unpleasant land, a horrible, unclean land. Therefore I shall purify myself." [Izanagi discards his clothes, enters a river, and purifies his body.] Next, when he bathed at the bottom of the water, there came into existence the deity named Soko-tsu-wata-tsu-mi-no-kami; next Soko-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto. When he bathed in the middle [of the water], there came into existence the deity named Naka-tsu-wata-tsu-mi-no-kami; next, Naka-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto. When he bathed on the surface of the water, there came into existence the deity named Uwa-tsu-wata-tsu-mi-no-mikoto; next, Uwa-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto. These three wata-tsu-mi deities are the deities worshipped by the *muraji* of the Azumi as their ancestral deities. . . . The three deities Soko-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto, Naka-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto, and Uwa-zutsu-no-o-no-mikoto are the three great deities of Suminoe. Then when he washed his left eye, there came into existence a deity named Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami. Next, when he washed his right eye, there came into existence a deity named Tsuku-yomi-no-mikoto. Next, when he washed his nose, there came into existence a deity named . . . Susano-o-no-mikoto (pp. 68–70).

This passage is of great importance. First, it is clear that purification rituals encompass the body, but that that body is male. In other words, whereas putrefaction is associated with the female body, purity is associated with the male body. But purification is not only a matter of physical cleanliness; it is fundamentally opposed to nature—even though in Japan it will always take place in a natural environment and will always be mediated by natural elements such as fire, water, and salt. It is on the basis of that opposition between nature and culture, symbolized by the oppositions between pollution and purity, and between woman and man, that purification will become the root metaphor for culture. We know this much for the simple reason that all the kami that are born from the purification of that male body are those that became central to the state cult of classical Japan: each of those is a cultural symbol. The six kami born from the body of Izanagi are not only ancestral, they are the symbols of the naval force of Japan, and are still worshipped in some of the major Shinto shrines. The kami that were born from the purification of Izanagi's face are even more important: Amaterasu is the ancestral kami of the imperial lineage and the symbol of the mystical aspects of imperial rule; she is enshrined at Ise. Tsukuyomi is related to agriculture; and Susano-o, whom we will consider next, is representative of



land possession wars. In other words, these kami that are born from a male body undergoing purification rituals symbolize the tri-partite functions and aspects of classical Japanese society: politico-religious, agricultural, and military. Culture, i.e., social partition, organization, and management, is a male prerogative that required the death of a woman (that is, the refraining from sexual activity), as well as a distancing from nature through the performance of a symbolic act of violation and its corollary, purification.

To sum up: *Yomi no kuni* is posited as other world only after a male has transgressed by failing to observe an ocular taboo. By the same token, women are relegated to being defined as essentially natural and biodegradable, and henceforth will be posited as symbols for decay, death, and periods of reclusion and invisibility. The sole mode of production they will be granted is biological and in the confines of marriage. At the opposite end of the purity-pollution spectrum, the single male's purified body dominates the mode of production of cultural emblems. And so it is not without reason that Sherry ORTNER stated in her article "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" that

One realm of cultural thought in which [nature and culture oppositions] are often articulated is that of concepts of purity and pollution. . . . Purification is effected in a ritual context; purification ritual, as a purposive activity that pits self-conscious (symbolic) action against natural energies, is more powerful than those energies (1974, p. 72).

### Takamagahara

#### *Erotic Disclosure to Retrieve the Light of an Occulted Sun*

The *Kojiki* states:

At this time, Haya-susa-no-o-no-mikoto said: "In that case, before I go I will take my leave of Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami." When he ascended to the heavens, the mountains and rivers all roared, and the lands all shook. Then Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami heard this and was startled. . . . She asked him: "Why have you come?" Then Haya-susa-no-o-no-mikoto replied: "I have no evil intentions. It is merely that the Great Deity divinely inquired about my weeping and howling. I said that I was weeping because I wished to go to the land of my mother. . . ." Then Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami said: "If that is so, how am I to know that your intentions are pure and bright?" Then Haya-susa-no-o-no-mikoto replied: "Let us swear oaths and bear children."

Whereupon they each stood on opposite sides of [the river] Ame-no-Yasu-no-kawa and swore their oaths. . . .

Then Haya-susa-no-o-no-mikoto said to Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami:

“It was because my intentions were pure and bright that in the children I begot I obtained graceful maidens. By this it is obvious that I have won.” Thus saying, he raged with victory, breaking down the ridges between the rice paddies of Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami and covering up the ditches. Also he defecated and strewed the faeces about in the hall where the first fruits were tasted . . . [H]is misdeeds did not cease, but became even more flagrant. When Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami was inside the sacred weaving hall seeing to the weaving of the divine garments, he opened a hole in the roof of the sacred weaving hall and dropped down into it the heavenly dappled pony which he had skinned with a backward skinning. The heavenly maiden, seeing this, was alarmed and struck her genitals against the shuttle and died.

At this time, Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami, seeing this, was afraid, and opening the heavenly rock-cave, went in and shut herself inside. Then Takama-no-hara was completely dark, and the Central Land of the Reed Plains was entirely dark. Because of this, constant darkness reigned, and the cries of the myriad deities were everywhere abundant, like summer flies; and all manner of calamities arose. . . . Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto bound up her sleeves with a cord of heavenly *hi-kage* vine, tied around her head a head-band of the heavenly *ma-saki* vine, bound together bundles of *sasa* leaves to hold in her hands, and overturning a bucket before the heavenly rock-cave door, stamped resoundingly upon it. Then she became divinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals.

Then Takama-no-hara shook as eight-hundred myriad deities laughed at once. Then Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami, thinking this strange, opened a crack in the heavenly rock-cave door, and said from within: “Because I have shut myself in, I thought that Takama-no-hara would be dark, and that the Central Land of the Reed Plains would be completely dark. But why is it that Ame-no-uzume sings and dances, and all the eight-hundred myriad deities laugh?” Then Ame-no-uzume said: “We rejoice and dance because there is here a deity superior to you.” While she was saying this, Ame-no-ko-yane-no-mikoto and Futo-dama-no-mikoto brought out the mirror and showed it to Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami. Then Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami, thinking this more and more strange, gradually came out of the door and approached the mirror. Then the hidden Ame-no-Ta-jikara-o-no-mi-kami took her hand and pulled her out. Immediately Futo-dama-no-mikoto extended a *shiri-kume* rope behind her, and said: “You may go back no further than this!” When Ama-terasu-ō-mi-kami came forth, Takama-no-hara and the Central Land of the Reed Plains of themselves became light. At this time the eight-hundred myriad deities deliberated together, imposed upon Haya-susa-no-o-no-mikoto a fine of a thousand tables of restitutive gifts, and also, cutting off his beard and the nails of

his hands and feet, had him exorcised and expelled him with a divine expulsion (pp. 74–76, 79–81, 84–86).

Here we encounter motifs that are already familiar to us, albeit with structurally significant variations: a journey to the residence of a woman, a traumatic encounter, the retreat of the female to a forbidden chamber, the disclosure of a female body, and the expulsion of a male henceforth deprived of intimate interaction. These motifs are coloured by sexuality: a quasi-incestual production of children, a male violence that causes a maiden to hurt her genitals, and an erotic dance followed by speculation and the sudden bursting forth of light; and this sexuality is related to vision: the occultation of the sun, the discovery of a female body, the use of a mirror, and the return of light. We might point out that the undressing of a woman during the dance caused laughter and sexual arousal (it even caused a woman, Amaterasu, to peek), whereas in the myth examined earlier, Izanagi's piece-by-piece undressing did not cause any laughter or sexual arousal, because it served as a preliminary to cultural production. A woman strips to tease and arouse the gods, but a man discloses his body as a cultural act.

The motif of transgression is played here over and over again, on all modes: not only does Amaterasu protect the limits of the territory that will be invaded, but the language in which the invasion is expressed is spatially explicit, such as the breaking down of ridges, the covering up of ditches, the defecation into the palace, the loss of personal space, the ensuing retreat to the cave, and the stepping out of Amaterasu followed by the passing of a rope that will prevent her from further retreats. In ritual terms, Susano-o's redress is called, in Japanese, purification; however, it is structurally different from Izanagi's purification analyzed above: in the present case it is an atonement that takes the form of economic restitution and is accompanied by physical cleanliness, as is evidenced by the cutting of beard and nails. Whereas Izanagi had visited the realm of natural putrefaction, Susano-o polluted an entire realm with his excrements and thereby made it uninhabitable for himself.

The occultation of a female and her return, out of curiosity for a laughter generated by an erotic dance, were followed by the expulsion of a male: Susano-o was then relegated to the shadow of Amaterasu's radiance, whose return created specific horizons that will be discussed in a few moments. The myth goes on to state that Susano-o then descended to Japan, which he never left again. Thus, at the very time Japan is constituted as a space that differs from *Takamagahara*, *Takamagahara* is constituted as a space to which access is henceforth denied except under specific conditions, such as trance, possession, and mystical travel. In the chthonogonic myth on which the *Kojiki* opens, Izanami and Izanagi had

free access to *Takamahara*: there was no barrier of the kind that now stands.

### Tokoyo

#### *See-through Cormorant Feathers on a Parturition Hut*

The *Kojiki* states:

[W]hen the younger brother [Ho-ori] was weeping and lamenting by the seashore, Shio-tsuchi-no-kami came and asked: "Sora-tsu-hiko, why are you weeping and lamenting?" He replied: "My elder brother and I exchanged fishhooks, and I lost his hook. Since he asked for his hook, I have repaid him with many hooks, but he will not receive them, saying that he must still have the original hook. That is why I am crying and lamenting." Then Shio-tsuchi-no-kami said: "I will give you good counsel." [Thus saying, he] made a small boat of closely woven bamboo stalks, and put him in this boat, instructing him: "When I push this boat free, continue to sail for a little while. Then there will be a very good tideway. If you continue going along this way, [you will come to] a palace made as if with the scales of fish. This is the palace of Wata-tsu-mi-no-kami. When you reach the gate of this deity, there will be a luxuriant *katsura* tree next to the well at the side. If you climb to the top of this tree, the daughter of the sea-deity will see you and will counsel [with you]." He went a little way as he was instructed, and everything was exactly as he had been told. He climbed up the *katsura* tree and waited. Then the serving maiden of Toyo-tama-hime, the daughter of the sea-deity, brought out jeweled vessels to draw water; then she noticed a brightness in the well and, looking up, saw a lovely young man. She thought this exceedingly strange. . . .

Then Toyotama-hime, [her sister], thinking this very strange, went out to see [for herself]. They looked [at each other] lovingly and became man and wife. . . . He lived for three years in this land.

At this time Ho-ori-no-mikoto remembered the things of before, and gave a long sigh. . . . [He leaves the ocean and returns to earth.]

At this time, the daughter of the sea-deity, Toyo-tama-hime-no-mikoto, came forth and said: "I have been with child for some time, and now the time of my delivery is near. I thought that it would not be fitting for the child of the heavenly deities to be born in the ocean. Therefore I have come forth." Then, by the edge of the beach, a parturition hut was built, thatched with cormorant feathers. But before the parturition hut had been completely thatched, the urgency of her womb became unendurable, and she entered into the parturition hut. As she was about to be delivered of her child, she said to her husband: "All persons of other lands, when

they bear young, revert to the form of their original land and give birth. Therefore, I too am going to revert to my original form and give birth. Pray do not look upon me!" Then, thinking her words strange, he watched in secret as she was about to give birth; she turned into a giant crocodile and went crawling and slithering around. Seeing this, he was astonished and ran away. Then Toyotama-hime-no-mikoto, learning that he had been watching, felt extremely shamed and, leaving behind the child she had borne, said: "I had always intended to go back and forth across the pathways of the sea; however, now that my form has been seen, I am exceedingly shamed." Then, closing the sea-border, she went back into [the sea]. . . . Nevertheless, later, although she was bitter at him for having looked at her, she was still unable to subdue her yearning, and sent her young sister Tama-yori-hime to nurse the child, entrusting her also with a song, which said:

Beautiful are red jewels;  
 Even their cord seems to sparkle.  
 But I prefer pearls  
 For the awesome beauty  
 Of your pearl-like form.

Then her husband replied with the song:

As long as I have life,  
 I shall never forget  
 My beloved, with whom I slept  
 On an island where wild ducks,  
 Birds of the offspring, came to land (pp. 150–52, 153, 156–58).

[The child born in the parturition hut married his aunt, Tamayori-hime, who gave birth to four children, the second of which, Inai, "entered the ocean, the land of his mother"; the third, Mikenu, "treading the crest of the waves, crossed over to the land of Tokoyo"; and the fourth, Iware, became Japan's first emperor (pp. 159–64).]

The separation of the realm of Tokoyo, rich in maritime imagery, from Japan's shores, is thus pictured as resulting from the breaking of an ocular taboo on the part of a male. When the woman is about to give birth, she is represented as reverting to a natural, wild, form; that natural event is regarded as dangerous and polluting—socially, it is subjected to shame.

The ritual dimensions of this particular myth cannot be discussed here because they are structurally dependent on other myths which space prevents me from presenting. I will simply suggest that, apart from the fact that, once more, a male subjects a female to his objectifying gaze and thereby loses her, it might be interesting to look for the reasons

why, in the myths examined to this point, males always have to leave by dissociating themselves, ritually or otherwise, from what was “home.” It is as though to be a man implies a radical break. But this is not the place to discuss this kind of male problems.

*Psychology and Epistemology*

Allow me, instead, to rearrange the material by pointing out two similarities. A first common feature is that of the journey on the part of a man to the abode of a woman, and a violent invasion of her body-space; a second common feature is that of the ensuing reclusion of a woman: Izanami went to the darkness of an underworld, Amaterasu hid in a cave behind a rock, and Toyotama gave birth in a hut. These reclusions can be interpreted from several vantage points; as scholars have readily professed in the past, one may speak of burial in the case of Izanami, of solar eclipse in the case of Amaterasu, and of parturition huts in the cases of Konohana and Toyotama. However, as you no doubt understand by now, it is more illuminating to consider the phenomenon of reclusion as an effort on the part of males to deny a space that would be exclusively female, or as a reaction of jealousy toward female cultural prerogatives. All narratives point out that the male behavior was experienced by females as an act of aggression, but even that is interpreted in the myths from a male vantage point: Izanami was mightily upset and shamed; Amaterasu was infuriated by her brother’s hubris; and Toyotama was ashamed; in every case, the accent is put on the female “emotional” character and her assumed powerlessness.

It is also possible to consider the phenomenon of reclusion from the point of view of what caused it. I will submit that that cause was a quest for vision, but not of the kind we, in Religious Studies, like to discuss. The vision in question was only the result of a specific desire to see, and it is that desire that deserves thorough analysis. Psychology, epistemology, space, and vision, need to be thoroughly related in the analysis of shamanism and cosmography. Psychology and shamanism go together, not only because the shamans’ experiences are a proper object for psychological investigation, not only because we are here particularly interested in the psychology of female shamans, but also because of what Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS wrote. Namely:

It is not improbable that the study of shamanism may one day serve to elucidate obscure points of Freudian theory. . . . We saw that the only difference between the two methods that would outlive the discovery of a physiological substratum of neurosis concerns the origin of the myth, which in one case is recovered as an individual possession and in the other case is received from collective

tradition. The last difference between the theory of shamanism and psychoanalytic theory would, then, vanish (1973, p. 202).

One way of connecting psychology, anthropology, and epistemology is to focus on the desire to see, the relationship between ocularcentrism and transgression. Transgression might be viewed, as is often enough the case, from a negative standpoint because of its contemporary moral connotations. However, the establishment of boundaries and the ensuing crossing thereof have several interrelated purposes: not only was the act of transgression necessary for the creation of a limit, and therefore of rules of a social and ritual character that correspond to the male morphology of excess, but it was necessary for the creation of a space that would, essentially, be the purview of female shamans engaging in extradomestic mediation with hyperreal worlds, a supernatural space that corresponds to female anatomy and that is inscribed within the epistemological category of the oppositions between nature and culture.

The term "epistemological" is here used to qualify the oppositions between purity and pollution because the separation of nature and culture, and of male and female, is a question of the relationships between knowledge and power. Roman Jakobson pointed out that, of the two terms of a linguistic opposition, one is usually "marked," and the other "unmarked," which refers to the fundamental fact of asymmetry in the body and, therefore, in language. We should not be fooled, however, and conceive of the opposition of nature and culture as a linguistically unescapable phenomenon; it is a social and cultural phenomenon from the very moment women are associated with nature, and men with culture. When "woman" is identified with nature, it is to keep her below and thereby attach less value to her person, her mind, and her productions. However, this social "event," if we can call it that, is also a matter of knowledge because, even though the reclusion of women is presented in the myths as a "natural" reaction, what ensues is the creation of separate fields of knowledge and activity, be they described in "natural" terms (such as death, birth, and so on), or in "cultural" terms (such as rituals of purification and atonement). Second, ritual power is divided between the sexes: purification is essentially a male prerogative and, as we have seen, is directly related to the creation of cultural emblems and, therefore, of domains of knowledge. The only field of speech-knowledge that is left to women is that of communication with the introverted negativities of the worlds beyond.

What is more, the fields of knowledge alluded to are dominated by their production through the primacy of sight: males separated themselves from females, in those myths, whenever they treated them, not as human beings, but as objects of curiosity. At issue here is the fundamental problem of the relationship between what is seen and what is heard, or

between things and words. In the case of the myths with which we are concerned, there is an opposition between what was seen and the linguistic utterances, despite the fact that what was said claimed to be for all to “see,” that there was a basic conformity or correspondence between a visibility and a legibility. However, there can be conformity only between forms that are seen, and co-response only between things that are said. If there were no opposition between those two fundamental modes of information, then feminine inferiority ought to be visible to the naked eye; but that inferiority is not something that comes with the form of the feminine body; it is something that is “inscribed” on the body and becomes legible, not only to outsiders, but to women as well: their social conditioning seems to regulate the way in which they experience their body and imprints on the body a “visibility,” which they think is that of their own shameful forms even though that shame is constructed. They as subjects are conditioned by such “visibilities,” which are, in fact, treated as legibilities.

Thus, the dis-discovery of physical difference, the perception of the corpse in a lightning flash, the sight of the barebreasted dancer, the looking of the sun onto a mirror, and the insertion of a curious gaze between cormorant feathers have left deep marks on Japanese religious culture. These also immediately send one to Sigmund Freud, Georges Bataille, and Michel Foucault.

Bataille's famous pornographic novel, *The Story of the Eye*, was treated by Michel FOUCAULT in his study on transgression as the ultimate victory over the ocularcentrism that had dominated Western thought for so long (1977, pp. 29–52). Martin JAY, who wrote a perceptive analysis of Foucault's lifelong battle against ocularcentrism as the ultimate basis for knowledge, scientific enquiry, and the systems of prisons and their associated technologies of control (1986), intimated that Foucault's stance was related to Nietzsche and, more precisely, to FREUD, who had pointed out, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “the fateful linkage of vision with man's vertical posture, the repression of his sexual and anal erotic urges and the rise of ‘civilization’ ” (1961, p. 46).

Indeed, it causes an uncanny feeling to realize that, in the myths we discuss, we are dealing with the connection between vision from a vertically standing (I do not dare say “erect”) man on the one hand, and on the other hand his forced loss (read: repression) of his sexual and anal urges — all these being narrated in the context of the formulation of sexual roles and the concept of culture.

The primacy of sight caused the birth of the dark side of the other worlds. In every case, these realms were coterminous with a temporary closure of sexual availability on the part of women, and with an ensuing violence that caused both the final closure of that availability and the closure of the pathways to the woman's residence. In every case, it was



a woman who willed the closure by issuing a direction that a line not be crossed; in every case it was a man who, unable or unwilling to toe the line, crossed over and transgressed, usually by submitting her to the empire of his objectifying gaze. In all cases, that man spied on a woman, and excretory and other natural functions called for parsimony, cleanliness, and a sense of order: please note how man jumped from the toilet seat to the shower, while women remained under the domination of the taxonomic gaze when they urinated, excreted, menstruated, gave birth, and died, locked up in the prison of their biological condition, while man was left alone to pursue a civilizing role. And in every case the beyond came to be considered as a supernatural realm henceforth accessed only by women, men, and children to whom Freud and a few others would ascribe a neurotic character. The sacred was born in violence, and the hyperreal worlds may well be no more than the scars of that trauma. Those worlds may indeed be “other-wordly,” but only so in an allogenic sense, and not in the allochthonic sense.

*The Experience of Limits: A Sublime Subliminality?*

The ability of women to communicate with the realms beyond appears to be related to pathological disorders that are related to modalities of knowledge and to strategies of power. Let me begin by the latter, because many scholars have discussed the relation of trance to social and economic factors. ROSALDO stated that “because cultures provide no fine social classification for kinds of women and their interests, women are seen and come to see themselves as idiosyncratic and irrational” (1974, p. 29) and that “they lead lives that appear to be irrelevant to the formal articulation of social order. Their status is derived from their stage in a life cycle, from their biological functions, and, in particular, from their sexual or biological ties to particular men” (p. 30). And,

because women are more involved than men in giving birth and mourning death, feeding, cooking, disposing of feces, and the like, . . . cultural notions of the female often gravitate around natural or biological characteristics: fertility, maternity, sex, and menstrual blood. And women, as wives, mothers, witches, midwives, nuns, or whores, are defined almost exclusively in terms of their sexual functions (p. 31).

She also remarked, in a way that definitely applies to Japan, that “women’s status will be lowest in societies where there is a firm differentiation between domestic and public spheres of activity” (p. 36). Finally, LEWIS has indicated that “anomalous or powerless women in many parts of the world may be particularly vulnerable to possession by spirits; on

the basis of such possession, women form cult groups that rival the religious organization of men" (1971, p. 38).

This is where we approach the intersecting point between social power and modalities of knowledge. As mentioned above, women were denied visual knowledge—but they retained fully the ability to communicate by speech. At the level of shamans, that ability took the form of a power to “communicate” with the beyond, a power that represents an attempt, on the part of women, to delineate an area of expertise through which they might exercise some kind of control. Indeed, this can be demonstrated by an analysis of oracular religion, which forms the bulk, really, of both the classical religions and the so-called New Religions of Japan. It is a powerful system of control that has had political consequences through the centuries.

Therefore, the role of shamans and sacral women should not be downgraded to a mere ability to divest oneself of one’s body and merely “see” what is said to be beyond. It is time to upgrade our understanding of oracular religion by considering it in terms of its constitution through an opposition between what is seen and what is heard. Indeed, the cases examined above, when set side by side with oracular religion, send us back to the fundamental problem of epistemology alluded to above, namely, that what is said (legible) is purported to be “seen,” not by the fleshly ocular globes, but by the eyes of the mind, and is given to all as something first to hear, and then to see in writing (all oracles were written down and then presented to the emperor). The fundamental epistemological distinction is, therefore, between sight and hearing, morpheme and phoneme.

### *Concluding Remarks*

What the Japanese of the classical periods present to us as a supernatural space (the world beyond) is in fact a mere spatial metaphor for the hidden dimensions of the subliminal repository of fundamental human experiences that serve as the prescriptive ground for the inscription of social codes. It is proper to qualify the three entities *Yomi no kuni*, *Takamahara*, and *Tokoyo* as being “beyond,” provided two requirements be met: first, that each be defined in such manner that their structural differences evidence their discrete functions; and second, that we understand that the term “beyond” always means beyond a line to be transgressed and beyond commonly accepted social codes, rather than, merely, beyond death. In the three cases examined above, concealments that were supposed to be temporary turned out to be absolute ruptures. Under the form of divorce, exclusion, elimination, and separation, these ruptures meant, cosmologically, the formal opposition between death and life, between death and survival, between water and air, and between

short life and eternity; they meant, socially, the segregation of male and female roles as the perfect mirror-image of the spectatorial split between subject and object; ritually, they meant the codification of purification either as an act of creation or as an act of restitution; and epistemologically, they refer us to the tracing of boundaries between nature and culture and to a register of different modes of knowledge and of power.

I would submit that the fact that early Japanese cosmography was the spatial projection of certain types of experiences of violence and transgression is of more than passing interest to the historian of religions. In each of the cases analyzed above, this violence ended up codifying women as the natural locus of pollution and as the cultural bearers of propriety in virtue of their having posted the first no-trespassing signs, and men as the perpetrators of a transgression that is deeply rooted in desire—in Japan, of a desire to see. And so it is that the voyeuristic intrusions of males have caused women to be clairvoyant, to see what nobody else can, and to treat death as a translucence, while men were left to contemplate the consequences of their acts and to derive some insight, not from the spectacle at hand, but from the memory of their blind desires.

In this optic, therefore, the cosmology of travel and forbidden chambers is the mental map of a social code, the genealogical ground of relations of power between the sexes, as much as it is the object for an etiology of the pathological modes of representation that form what has been called ecstatic religion.

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