



UNIVERSITY  
OF TASMANIA

**More than Skin Deep:  
Masochism in Japanese Women's Writing  
1960-2005**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

University of Tasmania, November 2012

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## Abstract

This thesis investigates the use of masochistic imagery and masochistic scenarios in the narratives of Kōno Taeko, Yamada Eimi and Kanehara Hitomi, and also in the visual imagery of ‘ladies’ comic’ artist, Watanabe Yayoi. The textual production of these women is examined against the background of the social, economic and cultural conditions at the time of publication. Without making claims to any kind of teleological development, I argue that there is a chronological genealogy that connects the work of the women listed above through the different eras in which they were writing. Kōno is a key writer from the late Post-war/pre-Bubble period of the 1960s to 1970s;<sup>1</sup> Yamada invokes the heady ‘Bubble *jidaï*’ years of the 1980s and early 1990s;<sup>2</sup> while Kanehara is a product of the so called ‘Lost Decade’ of the 1990s and the early 2000s.<sup>3</sup> While all three also produced a considerable body of narrative and essay material outside the times identified above, it was during these periods that each author produced what are arguably their representative works. The chapter on ladies’ comics overlaps chronologically with the discussion on Yamada Eimi in that it loosely covers the period from the early 1980s, when the first manga of this genre was published, to the early 2000s.

In addition to textual analysis chapters on the works of Kōno, Yamada, Kanehara and Watanabe and, occasionally, their contemporaries, the thesis examines theories of masochism as found in both Japan and the west. While avoiding a closed understanding of the term – which can alter according to the social context – I argue that masochism is not simply pleasure in pain, but pleasure in the *expectation* of pain. It is this expectation that is the key to the pleasure of the masochistic experience. I further demonstrate that, contrary to popular interpretation, in the relationship between the masochist and their chosen consort/partner/torturer, it is the masochist who very often holds the balance of power.

While providing an overview of the contribution made to understandings of masochism by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Sigmund Freud and Theodor Reik, I draw principally on Gilles Deleuze, in particular his essay “Coldness and Cruelty,” to demonstrate that masochism can be a personal choice made by women in order to resist the social expectations and restraints placed on them.

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<sup>1</sup> Orbaugh 1996, p. 126; Bullock 2010 a, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> McCargo 2004, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Driscoll 2007 a, p. 169.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and guidance of Barbara Hartley and the staff of the School of Asian Languages and Studies, University of Tasmania. Nor would this document be in its current form without the advice of Maria Flutsch.

I am also indebted to the guidance and support of the late Kan Satako of Ochanomizu University who was kind enough to act as my supervisor during my time as a Japan Foundation Fellow and to the late Kazuko Takemura who encouraged my work on masochism and violence with great enthusiasm.

Chapter Three was influenced by Atsuko Sakaki's insightful comments on a paper that I gave at the University of Toronto in 2010. At the same conference, Thomas Lamarre's throw-away line about 'that weird short story by Amy Yamada' helped to keep things in perspective.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Tomoko Aoyama for many things, chief among them for inviting me to participate in my first conference/workshop, 'The Girl, the Body, and the Nation in Japan and the Pacific Rim.' This workshop confirmed my desire to pursue a doctorate degree.

I would not have been able to complete my thesis without the help and distraction of my Thesis Family: the members of Tomoko Inc.; Captain Mark, Lucy-Called-Alice, Kasia and Emily; Mistress Sophia; Katsu; the ever stylish Victoria; Kan Sensei, Kayo-sama and Kawaharazuka-san; the wonderful Machiko; and Doctor Annie.

Thank you also to Ma and Da for the endless cups of tea and coffee and for building my house around me as I wrote this thesis.

To my lovely husband, thank you for being crazy enough to marry me in the midst of all the PhD madness.

To Belladonna Maria and Daphne Elizabeth, thank you for only clawing and chewing some of my books and not all of them.