

THE QUEER COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION: MARIKO ŌHARA'S "SHŌJO"

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This article analyses Mariko Ōhara's short story "Shōjo" (1985) and its attempt at deconstructing the sex-gender system, focusing on the three main characters: Gil and his two sexual/love interests, Kisa and Remora. By examining the story from both gender and animal studies, the aim is to reflect on how the ideas of sex, gender and performativity are inserted into a vaster social construction that also merges with class and animality. We also consider how the recurrent image of decadence and what can be considered a return to a heteronormative situation do not undermine the overall process of deconstruction and social critique offered by the story.

KEY WORDS: Mariko Ōhara, performativity, gender, queer, science fiction.

Colapso queer de la civilización: "Shōjo" de Mariko Ōhara

Este artículo analiza el relato breve de Mariko Ōhara "Shōjo" (1985) y cómo el relato trata de deconstruir el sistema de sexo-género. Nos centramos en el análisis de los tres personajes principales: Gil y sus dos intereses sexuales/amorosos, Remora y Kisa. A través del análisis del relato tanto desde una perspectiva de género como de los "estudios animales", el objetivo es reflexionar acerca de las ideas sobre sexo, género y performatividad insertas en una construcción social mayor en la que el género se entremezcla con nociones de clase y animalidad. Consideraremos también de qué modo la recurrente idea de decadencia y lo que puede considerarse como un posible retorno a la heteronormatividad no llega a debilitar el proceso general de deconstrucción y crítica social que la obra ofrece.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Mariko Ōhara, performatividad, género, queer, ciencia ficción.

"Shōjo", originally published by *Hayakawa SF Magazine* in June 1985, falls within what is known as feminist science fiction, which arose —along with the second wave of feminism— during the sixties and seventies.¹ Feminist writers and critics saw science fiction (SF) as a potential ground for thought experiments and, thus, as a way to explore notions of sex and gender, as well as to create new possibilities for social organization and sex-gender conceptualization.

¹ An English translation by Alfred Birnbaum ("Girl") was published in 2007 in the volume *Speculative Japan vol.1*, edited by Gene van Troyer and Grania David with Kurodahan Press. All references to Ōhara's story are taken from this translation.

After this brief contextualization of the connections between SF and feminism, I proceed to examine the radical deconstruction of the gender system in "Shōjo". Through its main character, Gil, Ōhara's story underlines the performativity of gender and stresses how gender intertwines with class, body and humanness itself through the character's link with animality. I will therefore make explicit the connections between the narrative and the two theoretical frameworks from which I approach it: gender and animal studies.

As Sherryl Vint points out, the term SF is perceived as quite self-evident, since it evokes a vast variety of themes, images, works, and patterns. However, reaching a definition including all of them has proven to be difficult, to say the least (Vint, 2014: 2). Nevertheless, it is accepted that while the genre has a wide range of possibilities, it revolves mainly around imagining different forms of life, possible futures, different societies, and all sorts of extrapolations. Arguably, the most famous and influential definition of the genre in this sense is that of Darko Suvin, according to whom SF is "the *literature of cognitive estrangement*" (Suvin, 1979: 4; emphasis in the original). Fictional worlds would thus work as deautomatizing tools allowing the identification of internalized ideological assumptions and social constructions. This definition has been, nevertheless, challenged or reframed by authors like Carl Freedman, who claims that, rather than "cognitive estrangement", it is the "*cognition effect*" what defines SF: "The crucial issue for generic discrimination is not any epistemological judgment external to the text itself on the rationality or irrationality of the latter's imaginings, but rather [...] the attitude of *the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed" (Freedman, 2000: 18; emphasis in the original).

Despite the various views on the genre, its potential to problematize social constructions has not gone unnoticed in different kinds of social criticism, among which the feminist movement was one of the first and most powerful. Until the rise of feminist SF and feminist criticism of SF, women or gender issues were not considered something SF should examine. Kingsley Amis writes in his *New Maps of Hell* (1960):

Amid the most elaborate technological innovations, the most *outré* political or economic shifts, involving changes in the general conduct of life as extreme as the gulf dividing us from the Middle Ages, man and woman, husband and wife, lover and mistress go on doing their stuff in the mid-twentieth-century way with a kind of brutish imperturbability. [...] Though it may go against the grain to admit it, science-fiction writers are evidently satisfied with the sexual status quo. (Amis, 2012: 83-84; emphasis in the original)

A well-known example of SF's intimate relationship with the defiance of social assumptions is *Star Trek*. The first three seasons of *Star Trek* (1966-1969)

—known as *Star Trek: The Original Series* after the appearance of new products within the franchise— were revolutionary, since they depicted not only a gender-equal future but also a future where racism no longer exists. Both issues merged in the emblematic figure of lieutenant Uhura (promoted to lieutenant commander and later to commander during the series), as part of Gene Roddenberry's plan to create an interracial and egalitarian environment. Played by Nichelle Nichols, Nyota Uhura was a groundbreaking character, a black woman playing a major role on primetime. As Shannon Mizzi explains in *Star Trek's Underappreciated Feminist History* (2014), Roddenberry's first pilot of *Star Trek* was in fact a bolder attempt than the one that finally aired. This original pilot was rejected due, in part, to the unwelcome reaction from the audience to the female characters, who wore a unisex uniform and showed what was perceived as "masculine qualities" such as leadership skills.

Despite early efforts in SF to move towards gender equality, it was still a predominantly male environment, where women were mainly absent. In 1971, renowned SF author and critic Joanna Russ, one of the leading figures that introduced feminism in the SF milieu, published an essay called "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" (originally published in the SF magazine *Vertex*), where she discusses how women have been written in SF, pointing out that most of the time, writers either "see the relation between the sexes as those of present-day, white, middle-class suburbia" or, like in a space opera, "return to the past for *its* models" (Russ, 2017: 201; emphasis in the original).

Russ identified seven common themes: 1) "a feudal economic and social structure", 2) "women are important as prizes or motives", 3) "active or ambitious women are evil", 4) "women are supernaturally beautiful", 5) "women are weak and/or kept off stage", 6) "women's powers are passive and involuntary", and 7) "the real focus of interest is not women at all" (Russ, 2017: 202-203). She writes, at the end of the essay, that despite the variety of "images of women in science fiction", there were "hardly any women" (208).

However, feminism did take roots in SF and a special affinity with the genre was created thanks to people like Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Connie Willis, Pamela Sargent, James Tiptree Jr. (pen name used until 1977 by Alice B. Sheldon), and many others. Feminist SF became a well-established subgenre of SF by the eighties. The WisCon, a feminist SF convention founded in 1977, is still held each year, while the James Tiptree Jr. Award is a literary prize for works of SF that contribute to exploring and expanding views on gender. It was with these authors that the opposition human vs. alien, traditionally explored by authors like Wells, came to be reread as connoting man vs. woman. Furthermore, not only women but a multitude of alterities were embedded in the alien metaphor. The alien is, in this sense, every unintelligible being, every object being, every outcast from a system that establishes white, non-working class, straight man as the symbolic non-marked existence (Kotani, 2004: 17). Sarah

Lefanu writes in *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988):

Science fiction seems to me most at ease when it deploys a sceptical rationalism as its sub-text. Indeed, that is perhaps another reason why feminist ideas are able to flourish within SF despite reader resistance, for feminism is based upon a profound scepticism: of the "naturalness" of the patriarchal world and the belief in male superiority on which it is founded. (Lefanu, 1988: 92)

Japanese women's SF arose contemporary to this feminist SF, but not as intimately related with feminism. Japanese SF was forged during wartime, but it was in the post-war era when it saw real success. The "golden age" of Japanese SF took place in the seventies, with a variety of products, from literature to comics and videogames (Harada, 2015: 13). Although SF was still a predominantly male genre, themes such as "the search for national identity (hybridity), technological ambition and anxiety, represent the feminization and infantilization that Japan underwent after the defeat of World War II", and SF animation showed an ambivalent attitude towards gender, depicting "cute and/or sexualized" feminine figures, as well as "stronger female figures and ambiguously gendered figures" (13). In "Space, Body, and Aliens in Japanese Women's Science Fiction", Mari Kotani explains that, despite the frequent reflections on sex and gender in Japanese women's SF, the problem with finding nearly any work that propagandizes for feminism is probably due to the fact that Japanese mass media spread "a distorted image of feminism as an obscene mode of thought imported from the outside" (Kotani, 2007: 47). In Japanese media, two main contrasting images of feminism were presented: on the one hand, "feminism as an intellectual discipline that is the purview of ivory-tower scholars", and, on the other hand, "a movement led by non-intellectual, emotional, and uncontrollable activists" (47).

Women were not, however, unaware of or indifferent to social issues regarding their place in society. Kotani analyses three main themes on Japanese women's SF: "The Utopia of Women" (Kotani, 2007: 49), "The Transformation of Women into Monsters" (57), and "The Alteration of Masculinity" (67). Regarding women's utopia, she pointed out the works of Suzuki Izumi and stated that it was Izumi who inaugurated "the age of women's SF" (52), where women's exploration and problematization of femininity itself takes place. Among the works examined in the part dedicated to the transformation of women into monsters, Mariko Ōhara is related to the image of cyborgs and hybrids (60).

Mariko Ōhara was born in 1959 in Ōsaka. She debuted in 1980 at the Hayakawa SF Contest with *Aruite Itta Neko* ("The Cat Who Walked Alone"). In 1991, *Hybrid Child*, arguably her most famous work, won the Seiun Award, a prize similar to the Hugo Awards, given by fan groups to the best SF. In 1994, *Sensō o enjita kamigamitachi* ("Gods Who Performed Wars") won the Nihon SF

Taishō Award (Japan SF Grand Prize). Ōhara's works are intimately related to cyborgs and hybridity, in close relationship to Donna Haraway's ideas. Harada points out that "stimulation of gender identity, and hyperbolic feminine performance" (Harada, 2015: 129-130) are amply used in her works to problematize gender and sex, which resonates with Butler's idea of performativity, one of the central notions of the analysis of "Shōjo" in this paper.

"Shōjo" tells the story of an encounter between Gil, a male dancer with mammalian breasts, and Kisa, a beautiful alien girl with pure white skin and black hair. The short story opens with Gil drinking alone at a bar. Upon leaving, he meets Kisa and goes to her place. After a brief conversation about her past, she suddenly asks Gil to leave. Back at home, Gil tells the story of the girl to his roommate Remora, a man with six penises instead of fingers on his left hand, and sleeps with him. However, this talk has broken a tacit agreement of not bringing their own affairs back home, so the next day Remora is gone. Eight months later, as Gil is dancing, he sees the girl again among the audience and runs away with her. The story ends with both of them standing in the ruins of a church.

"Shōjo" can be summarized as a (sort of) love story set in a dystopian(ish) city, but it is the characters portrayed in the story, as well as the relationship between them, what offers an interesting deconstruction of the gender/sex system this paper aims at addressing. "Shōjo" revolves around a genderqueering /alienating process, and ideas of construction and performance, as well as gender, class and animality, constantly resonate throughout the narrative.

Gil: Gendered animal labour power

Taking notions of gender performativity, class, and embodiment as axes, I first examine Gil's character from two different perspectives: a visual approach starting with the idea of "male gaze" proposed by Laura Mulvey; and an animal approach that highlights the continuity between discourses of gender and animality.

As previously stated, the story begins with the main character, Gil,² drinking alone. In this first scene, he is portrayed in a "feminine way", in the sense that he replicates some of the general traits associated with femininity, such as delicacy and sensitivity. The way he is first described physically, and the visual power of this description, is reminiscent of the presentation of any traditional feminine character from the perspective of what Laura Mulvey conceptualized as the "male gaze":

GIL PROBED a long tongue into the bottom of the Venetian cutglass stemware for the last of the nectarine pulp. Sitting with his platinum-

² In the English version published in *Speculative Japan, vol.1*, it is written either Gil or Jill, depending on whether he is identified as Gil or as the dancer Jill Abel. The Japanese original does not contemplate this difference since both are written *Jiiru*.

mink-encased genitals exposed, he could sense the attention he was drawing. Every nerve ending in his body tingled, almost painfully, from the repeated caresses of staring eyes.

Gil knew his own charms better than anyone. The smooth, honey-colored curve of his back from his shoulders on down, his wispy-cinched queen bee waist, his wind-teased shock of straight blond hair, and, only slightly darker, his amber-hued eyes.

Even more, he knew, his was a beauty in motion, a fluid grace to his movements that had been there from birth—the same as his mother's. (Ōhara, 2007: 153)

In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Mulvey states that "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female", so that it is the active "male gaze" that "projects its phantasy on to the female figure" (Mulvey, 1989:19). Further, Wendy Arons writes about this objectifying process of the female body, explaining that "the focus on the body—as a body in ostentatious display of breasts, legs, and buttocks—does mitigate the threat that women pose to 'the very fabric of... society' by reassuring the (male) viewer of his privileged position as the possessor of the objectifying gaze" (Arons, 2001: 41). Gil's initial appearance is precisely that: an ostentatious display of the body, "the objectifying gaze" placed on the body in a strong sexual way as a means of pleasure for the bearer of the look, in this case, either the reader or the people at the bar. He is displayed in the "traditional exhibitionist role" that Mulvey identifies, where women's appearance is "coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (Mulvey, 1989: 19).

This confrontation with the queerization of Gil's character from the very beginning, both in his physical and psychological portrayal, also poses a confrontation with the readers' own assumed notions of gender and sex identity. The scene is destabilized by the identification of Gil as a "he". Gil's position as the object of the gaze, in fact, as the object of the "male gaze", since he is being looked at by other men, also emplaces him in a position of "being" the phallus in the same way the camera does with the character of the drag in *Paris is Burning*, according to Judith Butler. Like the position of the camera, the reader is also given the "privilege of the disembodied gaze", a disembodied gaze that, nevertheless, objectifies and produces bodies (Butler, 1993: 136).

In this connection with the drag, Gil's performance "has the potential to interfere with naturalized categories" (Harada, 2015: 179). The defiance of these "naturalized categories" is immediate in the initial presentation of a character that is identified, by other characters and himself, as a "he" but whose depiction is nonetheless recognized as that of a traditional female character. Along with the focus on his body, the psychological portrayal—as a fragile, emotional, weak

character— emphasizes a traditional femininity: “Gil fancied cut glass. It elicited a resonance in his delicate soul. So like him: edgy, hypersensitive, close to the point of breaking” (Ōhara, 2007: 154). Even the drink echoes with the whole strongly visual setting of Gil’s presentation, close to a movie opening scene: (action!) An outstanding beauty drinks alone at a bar. Her (his) curves and sensual feline movements draw the attention of all the customers. She (he) takes a sip of her (his) sophisticated cocktail, looking fragile, nervous, intimidated by all that attention (cut!). This scene sounds familiar, or it would were it not for the constant reminders that we are talking about a “he”. The masculine pronoun grates on the reader every time, like a wrong note in a melody.

The struggle to see Gil as man or woman, this tension that Ōhara creates between the reader and Gil, results in a radical problematization of the notion of gender. We see the collapse of “the *reality* of gender” (Butler, 1999: xxiv) portrayed in the first encounter between Gil and Kisa, in which she asks if he is human and then, if he is a male. It is the moment in which “usual cultural perceptions fail” and knowing if the body encountered should be classified as female or male becomes impossible (Butler, 1999: xxii). In other words, it is at this moment when the malleability of gender reveals itself, showing how it is a naturalized, historically marked notion, but open nonetheless to be changed and reshaped.

The expectations created by the constructed notions of sex and gender may suggest an initial unconscious identification of Gil as a female, or at least, a feminized man. If gender is a “cultural meaning” assumed by sexed bodies, if it is a social construct built by the repetition of a set of norms, then we could consider Gil as feminine gender appearing in a male body through the becoming of gender into a “free-floating artifice” (Butler, 1999: 10). He is, in this sense, the incarnation of the performativity of gender. What the possibility of conceiving him as feminine or being thought of as female, rather than male, makes explicit is precisely the constructedness of the system of gender and sex. It is this constructedness that makes possible female incarnations of masculine gender and masculine incarnations of female gender, which work simultaneously as destabilizers and deconstructors of the system that created the conditions that make it possible for them to exist (Butler, 1999: 10).

As an embodied subject, Gil is also living in a state of in-betweenness that puts him near the figure of both the drag and the hermaphrodite: “Gil’s chest boasted two voluptuous mammalian protuberances. Much bigger than the girl’s own budding breasts. And at the same time, he displayed a male organ swaddled root-to-tip in fur” (Ōhara, 2007: 157). As Harada suggests, this display of Gil’s masculinity is rather connected with femininity, that is, with the display of female bodies and thus “from the perspective of a heteronormative society in which metaphysics of being are fixed, Gil’s maleness is inverted” and his gender “flexible and performative” (Harada, 2015: 180). However, I wish to consider the main

idea of femininity outside the male/female duality and inserted into a wider range of social power relations.

From a social point of view, gender is engaged in a dialectical relationship with the social perception that interpellates individuals while constraining their possibilities of action. It needs recognition. We may think of the struggle for the transgender collective to be recognized as "real" men or women because their sex is not perceived as "natural", as well as the images of *fags* and *butches*, whose non-normative gender performance makes them unable to be recognized as "real" men or women. To be placed as a normative subject (or we may simply say as a subject), both embodiment and performance must be emplaced within the coordinates of the normative. Gil's inner struggle to conceal his identity as a man, his queer body, and his feminine(ish) gender performance point to Foucault's theory of biopower. As long as "the body can be used to produce a specific type of subjectivity within that body" and "is integrally linked to the discourses that make it intelligible" (Vint 2007: 18-19), Gil is moving inside the non-normative spectrum of the system in more than his gender performance. Recovering de Beauvoir's statement that the body is both "a thing of the world and a point of view on this world" (de Beauvoir, 2012: 24), Gil, with his queer body, cannot produce a proper male performance and subjectivity because his point of view is that of a non-normative body.

Furthermore, among the cultural forces working on the shaping of subjectivity, class and race play an important role. The system that privileges white, straight, non-working class men as creators of meaning, as "having the phallus", also works for the feminization of women, black, or genderqueer people as dispossessed entities. Gil's body is intimately connected with his work as a dancer, a situation that results in him being objectified even outside his workplace, when he is off stage but still "performs different aspects of conventionally constructed femininity in a heteronormative system" (Harada, 2015: 180). The fact that he works "selling" his body emplaces him in a further vulnerable social position. From this perspective, gender appears not only as performative but also as related to a specific position, a vulnerable position, inside the network of power relations. Thus, his femininity would not be connected with any specific sexual orientation; it is the arousal of an entity disempowered by both his non-normative embodiment and class. This feeble position inside power relations is made evident by the scene of the sexual assault at the bar:

Someone had tripped him, he knew, intentionally, but he was helpless to do anything about it. His left elbow hit hard, the pain returning him to his senses for a brief instant.

"You okay?"

The John who'd tripped him was lifting him in a gentle embrace, caressing his genitals. Must be slipping, the thought, letting some guy he'd never even seen before climb all over him. Mustn't get too aroused... would be my own fault... my guilt.

"How 'bout it, like now?"

How many times had he surrendered to the momentary rapture of being touched there?

That utterly irresistible shudder of pleasure.

Inadvertently, he pushed the guy's heavy breastplate aside. The John was disoriented at first, then flew into a rage. Gil grabbed for the back of a chair and pulled himself up to his feet. With the John clinging fast to his collar, Gil's soul began to flood with tears. Have mercy, have mercy... (Ōhara, 2007: 154-155)

This episode triggers a multitude of connections with female rape culture and points to a system in which some bodies are for sale. This position, the being owned, links these characters with the position of women in heteropatriarchal societies. It puts him then, as stated earlier, in the situation of "being the phallus", instead of possessing it. In this sense, the idea of "being/possessing the phallus" is constructed just like the idea of gender. It is not natural sex that marks the characters' positions but their coordinates in a web of power relations. What we perceive as a "feminine" depiction of Gil may be understood as an example of the way dispossessed bodies and disempowered individuals come up as subjects, or, we might say, as "abjects" (Butler, 1999: 169). Gil's identification of himself with the image of decadence and collapsing civilization is also an interesting question to which I will return later. This episode starring a male like Gil is made thinkable by the queering process of the character and the previous portrayal of him in a "feminine" way, as well as one of "those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered" (Butler, 1993: 8). His inner thoughts of self-blame about the assault also resonate with the tendency to blame rape victims for the rape, the constant state of suspicion inherent to the rape culture system that puts into question the humanness of dispossessed beings, since it distinguishes between proper humans with rights and less-than-humans, where a variety of different race, class, and sex-orientation embodied differences are applied. The main reason why this scene appears plausible is precisely the non-normative, disempowered position of Gil.

I would now like to take one step further in the connection between gender submission and social power relations at large and insert our analysis into the vaster perspective of the whole human/animal dichotomy.

As well as displaying both female and male sexual traits, as a dancer, Gil plays the role of the Sphinx, the mythical creature with a human head (a female head in Greek mythology and a male head in Egyptian mythology) and the body of a lion. His link with the image of the Sphinx also presents him as a mythical creature, the unthinkable abject come to life, and relates him to the image of the animal, which I would like to consider further.

There is a continuity between animal and gender difference, or rather, between animal and all forms of alterity. It is interesting how the figure of the alien, which is one of the main points of encounter between gender studies and SF, is also a main point of encounter between SF and animal studies. Aliens, women, animals, and queers all merge as representations of alterity, as beings that inhabit the frontiers of the human and the inhuman, the less-than-human. As embodiment of queer posthuman beings, the characters of "Shōjo" are also inhabitants of the edge of humanity, but Gil suggests a position one step further than the others and closer to an animal existence.

In *Animal Alterity. Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (2010), Sherryl Vint points out that one of the questions that human-animal studies (HAS) has raised is how the discourse that legitimates the exploitation of animals has also legitimated the animalization and marginalization of some groups of humans (Vint, 2010: 4). Philosophy has reflected on animals mainly through the idea of a lack—in a similar way to how women have been conceptualized by what their bodies lack, or how they stray from the image of the unmarked human that is the male body—pointing out their lack of reason (Descartes), voice (Lacan), or face (Levinas), or describing them as being "poor in world" (Heidegger), which means that animals are capable of only acting in the world and that the ability to form the world is reserved for humans. Simply put, the notion of animal has set the coordinates that mark to which living beings we owe responsibility, and to which we do not. This idea is clearly portrayed in the fact that it is only humans who can be murdered. In a less extreme example, it is the idea that underlies discourses of supremacy and domination that justify relations of power and arise as sexist and xenophobic attitudes even when they do not lead to murder. It is being white, heterosexual, and non-working class (as the image of the human) that makes all living beings outside this category fall into different degrees of non-concordance with (less human than) the ideal. The degree of non-conformance with the ideal also marks a degree of proximity to what is not human, that is, to the animal. In this sense, Gil's non-normative body and bisexuality put him far from the human model. Moreover, from a class perspective, he is the lowest rank of labour-power sellers, those who see themselves in the position of having to "sell" their own body. The accumulation of deviant features in the character leads almost naturally to a connection to the animal field.

This link between Gil and the unnatural animal is also emphasized by the coincidence in name with Kisa's robotic pet named Sphynx. It stresses the constant

connection of Gil with the irrational, linking him to characteristics such as sensitivity, sexual pleasure, or emotion. This is again evident in the episode at the bar when he thinks of how many times he had “surrendered to the momentary rapture of being touched”, in line with the traditional conception of women as irrational beings, unable to control their appetites. Therefore, opposed to the rationality considered men’s —and thus humans’— main characteristic (again, what leads to the exclusion of women from the category of human and closer to the animal field):

In the cosmogony prior to the one which introduces the receptacle, Plato suggests that if the appetites, those tokens of the soul’s materiality, are not successfully mastered, a soul, understood as a man’s soul, risks coming back as a woman, and then as a beast. In a sense woman and beast are the very figures for unmasterable passion. And if a soul participates in such passions, it will be effectively and ontologically transformed by them and into the very signs, woman and beast, by which they are figured. In this prior cosmogony, woman represents a descent into materiality. (Butler, 1993: 40)

Another mechanism at work that we must consider, related to the implications of Gil and the notions of gender and animals, is the process of commodification that operates on both women and animals, but also on any person who sells labour power. Vint explains that “in learning to hunt and thus kill another being with violence for our own consumption, we also learn the ability to objectify another as an object rather than a fellow subject” (Vint, 2010: 39). I suggest that the objectifying process that takes place in the act of consumption is, in fact, similar to the objectification of bodies that sell labour power and bodies that are for sale, for the responsibility towards those bodies is lost in the passage to products for consumption.

If the marketization of labour power supposes in itself a dispossession from the workers’ own capabilities, Gil is in the position of those radically dispossessed from not only their labour power but their own existence through the dispossession of their bodies. The whole construction of Gil’s character, which deprives him of the ownership of his own body, establishes a critique that is the intersection of class, gender, and animality, all at once. If working-class males can experience alienation of their labour power and bodies —the latter just to a certain degree— the utter dispossession and alienation of their own bodies is reserved for female and animal bodies. The female body has been medicalized and legislated, its sexuality and reproductive function viewed as a commodity for sale. In a similar way, industries related to animal products have made the animal body equally a raw material and a commodity. Animals are dispossessed from their bodies, their capability to feel neglected, their status as living sentient beings erased. In this sense, putting Gil in a not equal but similar position of dispossession from

his own body poses a problematization of other discourses of the management of bodies.

All this almost exaggerated succession of what we could deem as cliché “feminine traits” in Gil, as well as his proximity to the figure of the drag, creates a parody of the whole system that creates and manages gender/sex identification within the heteropatriarchal frame. If Gil’s femininity has nothing to do with the identification of himself as female, since he speaks of himself as male, this femininity identified in him reveals that it is not only performative, but also absolutely disconnected from sex and sexual identity. Gil is objectified not only as queer female(ish) embodiment, but also as close to the animal in his representation of the Sphinx and, furthermore, as a dancer that sells his body. He does not perform “feminine traits” because he recognizes himself as such. What he recognizes is his inappropriateness, and reacts as if conditioned by it when interpellated. His body thus represents a female body to be possessed, an animal body to be consumed, and a labour-power body to be bought.

Remora and Kisa: Male human, female alien?

However, Gil’s queering process is not individual, but surrounded and emphasized by the figure of the two main sexual/love interests in the story, which I consider next: Remora and Kisa. In relation to Gil, Remora and Kisa act as buttresses of the problematization of Gil’s gender. If we can think of Gil as a sort of *in-between* being, Remora and Kisa work as the images of the (also, not exactly) male and the (almost) female. They not only emphasize the construction and performativity of sex and gender but also introduce the figure of the alien connected to the female ideal, embodied by Kisa. In *Alien Bedfellows* (2004) Mari Kotani explains how that which defines the “us” is constructed, in fact, by that which we are not, and this, in turn, is imbued in the alien. Thus, it is through alien figures that what we consider normal emerges, and is revealed as, in fact, no more than a set of conventions. If, as Butler says, the process in which the human is constructed “produces the more and the less ‘human’, the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable”, Gil’s inability to “appear properly gendered” brings his “very humanness into question” (Butler, 1993: 8), in a way that he may be considered less-than-human. On the other hand, Kisa’s identification as an alien being places her, and thus the female body/subject she personifies, as inhuman from the very beginning. However properly gendered she may appear, she is always already inhuman, no questions raised. Kisa stands in an ambiguous position as image of the pure female, image of the mother (as far as she constantly reminds Gil of his), but also as a desired sexual partner and a whore:

Gil cracked open his eyes to confirm his image of the woman. But what he saw made him gasp. It wasn’t a woman; it was a girl. No, not simply a girl. Her skin, soft and creamy white.

The girl looked angelic in profile. But weren't angels boys? A girl, the image of a boy.

For a moment, he stood there blankly. There could be no doubt about it. The girl was a whore, named Kisa.

Kisa laughed enchantingly, like a fairy sprite... yes, that was it... Mother was something of an enchantress. Which explained his attraction to the girl. (Ōhara, 2007: 155)

In opposition to Gil's hypersexualized portrayal, Kisa is, in a certain way, the image of the pure, innocent female (and also the Japanese ideal of beauty with her extremely white skin and pitch black hair). She is not a woman, but a girl. This initial pure look and the identification with an angel distances her from the material existence of Gil, even though her (supposed) work as a *whore* reinserts her in the frame of social outcast, and of embodiment. Although she says she is not a human, everything in her physical and psychological description triggers an immediate identification of her as such, blurring the frontier between human and not human.

Remora's description, on the other hand, presents strange traits, but his, unlike Gil's, point to an emphasized masculinity: "Remora was genetically male, the proof being that the fingers of his left hand, all six of them, had been remodeled into cocks. When asked, 'Why the left hand?' his only reply was that if it had been his right hand, he wouldn't have been able to hold his chopsticks" (Ōhara, 2007: 162).

He is also depicted as a brutish, "outworlders" hater:

On the screen in the black oceanic depths of space, a half-crushed silver hull drifted "shipwrecked." Disemboweled scraps of sheared metal glinted in the light of a distant sun.

"Dirty outworlders! Bet it's some 'droid plot!"

In spite of himself, Gil's expression lightened at his irrepressible outburst —yes, there were good folk on this planet, even if they had no education, no refinement, no table manners, even if they were bigots to the core.

[...]

Floating useless in the void, the half-dismembered corpse looked strangely erotic.

The darkened room gave them the illusion that they themselves were lost in space.

"Hey, you heard the latest sex rave 'mong them outworlders?"

[...]

"They swim out in the zero-G and jack sperm globules all over 'emselves just like fish."

Cheap thrills. Gross, but the idea did get him off, Gil had to admit.
 "Sort of a urological partita, hmm?"
 "Huh? Howzat?"
 Remora's vocabulary didn't extend that far.
 "Kinda like a golden shower spree." (162)

Remora was a die-hard outworld-hater. Probably got dumped real hard by some bitch when he shipped out on the interplanetary routes. Or else, maybe he was hiding a past—maybe he'd been an outworlder himself until his twenties, and so he hated his own origins. Just like Gil detested being a dancer. (163)

Through his brief appearance, Remora's identification as male seems to be based on the ambiguous link between being genetically male and having remodeled his fingers into penises. It is utterly unclear if, from a normative sex identification point of view, he is a "real" man, meaning in this case that he had a penis before the remodeling of the hand, or not. In fact, there is no mention of something usually considered basic to determine someone's sex as his genitals. Remora is identified as male and also portrayed as a bearer of what are typically considered male traits in the traditional portrayal of male-female relations: a brute who takes pride in exploiting women, who would dump anyone after sex, and someone unable to create emotional attachments. Even further in this queering characterization, he is said to have "six fingers", and is also self-identified as an "earthling", or non-outworlder, suggesting the question of whether it is actually possible to make a connection between being earthling and being human. Further, the identification he makes between outworlders and sex deprivation is rapidly destabilized by the immediate sexual response of Gil, after seeing the dismembered bodies in space, and hearing about the zero-G golden shower spree. Remora is himself an exaggeration, a parody of how the image of the Other is constructed in a sort of nationalistic way, identifying others as uncivilized and deviant beings.

The connection between Gil's attraction for Kisa and her resemblance to his mother can be considered a clear expression of the Oedipal complex. However, Gil's recognition of his beauty and the "fluid grace" of his movements as being the same as his mother's points to not only an Oedipal desire of Kisa as the image of the mother, but also to an identification of him with the mother. Considering Gil's gender performance through the story, he seems to fluctuate between his identification with the mother and his desire for her, that is, a feminine gender performance when confronted with what appears as properly gendered males and his emergence as a male when confronted with properly gendered women, especially Kisa. Gil's process during the story runs fairly parallel to the scheme proposed by Butler to summarize Agacinki's position towards gender and the Oedipal complex: unable to find a substitute for the mother, Gil himself becomes his

mother until he meets Kisa, and, with the discovery of a substitute for this desire, he achieves gender (Butler, 2004: 120).

Gender, aliens, and the collapse of civilization

To conclude, I wish to examine two final elements that may be considered as undermining the process of queering and deconstruction of gender we have followed: the recurrent association between the City of the story and of Gil himself with the image of decadence, and the return to a rather traditional heterosexual relationship.

While Gil has heterosexual as well as homosexual encounters, he appears to consider them immoral, mere attempts to meet other people's expectations, and this leads him to think of himself as a "social excretus" and as the personification of decadence, an image that is linked to the City itself:

The CITY was an overripe fruit about to drop. Rotting outward from deep in the core, its putrid flesh was held by only the barest shell.

Once the City fell, no one knew what would become of it. If things degenerated any further, even hell would close its borders. For the City's inhabitants, there was no escape [...] Jill Abel, the dancer, spent excretus of the City's dazzling decadence, high civilization tottering on the edge of collapse. (Ōhara, 2007: 153-157)

This association suggests anxiety about the collapsing of the system, which is undermined through the story. Gil's incarnation of the unintelligible queer figure and the image of decadence can be understood as a link between the end of all the assumed patterns by which the idea of humanity and the idea of civilization are constructed. With Gil's insertion in this dystopian setting, the possibility of identification turns problematic. Since he is always related to the idea of the collapse of civilization, he does not seem available for identification in a civilized world. In the end, it seems like the emergence of the fear before the abyss of a new and unknown way of constructing subjectivity.

Before the final narration of the City being destroyed by bombs, we see Kisa and Gil reunited in their final scene in the church. The whole sequence of their reencounter at the show is reminiscent of a traditional happy ending: a man and a woman that do not really know each other, but are united by love, run away together to share a future. The end seems a return to a more or less traditional heterosexual love story, particularly because of the somewhat passive female portrayal of Kisa and the recovery of Gil's maleness, reborn from the monster mother of the show. Moreover, the church is said to be run by an "organization of psychics" who "homed in on souls in crisis, places in need of love, wounded hearts, battlefields of all kinds" (Ōhara, 2007: 168). In this sense, the last scene can be read as an attempt to return to the heteronormativity that will heal Gil's and Kisa's

wounds, their need for love. However, is it romantic heteronormative love that they achieve at the end of the story?

When they reach the church and Kisa explains that it is M/F On-Call Network Church, Gil's thought is: "What in this City had they sensed calling out for *parental love*?" (Ōhara, 2007: 168; emphasis added). A few lines later we read: "He heard Kisa's voice asking, could he really give milk? He didn't know. Why didn't she just suck?" (Ōhara, 2007: 168). Therefore, although we see what appears to be a love story between the two, this final scene suggests that it might be parental, rather than romantic, love what they long for and seek in each other. It seems that the ending is at least open to such a reading.

Conclusion

Through works portraying different forms of embodiment, the spectrum of possible models of identification widens. Not only are ideological representations a normalizing strategy, but they may also operate as a destabilizing strategy. In "Shōjo", we do not only have a representation of a genderqueer subject in a non-normative body made available for identification; through this body, the reader is also forced to confront their own assumed processes of conceptualizing the construction of the subject, of the human being, in that universalizing idea that erases most bodies and subjectivities.

Moreover, the connection between the three characters blurs the main distinction between human and alien. The fact that Gil is not perceived in any way to be more human than Kisa (or Remora, whose humanness is also ambiguous) points directly towards the alien as something far closer than the traditional image of living beings from other planets.

"Shōjo" offers a constant disruption and subversion of the assumed patterns in which the subject is constrained to be able to appear as a subject, and thus as human, or through which many beings are rejected as unintelligible, that is, less-than-human or inhuman. The fact that to make a character like Gil thinkable it is necessary to place him at the crossroads of different levels of disempowerment also reveals how gender is imbricated in a wider net of power relations. Although the image of decadence can be considered to undermine all efforts to problematize gender, the extent to which the story makes evident its constructedness through Gil, as well as the social implications that are intertwined with the question of gender, is much more powerful overall. By highlighting the instability of the sex-gender system and heteronormativity, Ōhara's story opens up a way of thinking about gender anew and exploring different possibilities from its own artificiality.

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