

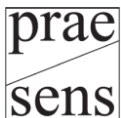
Between the Back and the Front: Male Love in Humorous Tales of the Edo Period

Angelika Koch

Abstract

The present article explores representations of male-male sexuality and eroticism in humorous tales of the Edo period. The point of departure for the discussion is the metaphor of 'back' and 'front', which delineated the sexual options available to a grown-up man, namely anal sex with males and vaginal sex with female partners. A brief preliminary overview of the custom of male love (nanshoku), which forms the unifying theme of the tales under discussion, is provided. After an introduction to the genre of Edo-period humorous tales (shōwa or kobanashi), the article centres on the depiction of male-male intercourse and eroticism in this type of literature, and argues that certain discrepancies, relevant from a gender perspective, become discernible in the respective representations of the two partners of a nanshoku relationship. It is shown how the metaphor of 'back' and 'front' is grounded in sexual practice, how it functioned and how it is employed for the achievement of a comic effect in the tales. The article then goes on to address the question of the extent to which male sexuality can be said to move 'between the back and the front', and some thoughts on gender and desire in the Edo period are offered.

Keywords: male homosexuality, *nanshoku*, humorous tales, *shōwa*, *kobanashi*



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Introduction

One humorous tale of the Edo period tells of an unsuccessful male prostitute (*yarō* 野郎) and an equally luckless woman of the pleasure quarters. The story relates how both pray to Kannon to make them more popular with customers. To this purpose they visit the temple on seven consecutive days, and in the case of the woman her request is granted by the deity at the end of this period. The male prostitute on the other hand does not rise one notch in the customers' favour after this week of worship at the temple. He therefore feels resentment towards Kannon, and that he is being treated unfairly, considering the good fortune that has befallen his female counterpart. He complains bitterly that the wish of the woman has been granted, whereas his own prayer has apparently fallen on deaf ears with the deity. Upon this, Kannon appears in front of the *yarō* and deflects the prostitute's criticism with the words: 'You cannot switch your front for your back' (original in Miyao 2006: 212, translation in Levy 1973: 193).

'Back' and 'front' were, as will be discussed in some detail in this article, meaningful metaphors closely connected to the floating world of the pleasure quarters, tropes which revolved around services offered in the demi-monde and other phenomena linked to this milieu. The humorous aspect of the tale, as such completely cryptic to the modern Western reader, would have hit the target with a Tokugawa-period connoisseur of the pleasure quarters at once – and would probably have wrung a smile from his lips. The point of the tale at hand rests on a double entendre: on the one hand, in everyday parlance 'not being able to switch your front for your back' was a proverb signifying that one had to give something up in order to get something else in return, and was roughly equivalent in meaning to the English phrase, 'you cannot have your cake and eat it.' On one level the deity therefore reins in the *yarō* and shows him his place as a mortal human who should practice deference, being dependent for the fulfillment of his wishes on the benevolence of the gods.

In an erotically charged context, however, which is inevitably conjured up in the story by figures like the *yarō* and the female prostitute, this admonition voiced by the deity becomes fraught with sexual innuendo and comprises an additional layer of meaning. In this connection, the 'back' stood for the side that earned the male prostitute his living with male customers; the 'front' on the other hand was the side of a female prostitute that harboured her sexual attractions. 'Back' and 'front' therefore came to connote male and female sex partners (as seen from the viewpoint of a male subject), or in a wider sense the sexual act with a male or female partner. What Kannon thus tells the *yarō* on a second level of meaning is essentially that he cannot have his cake and eat it sexually either. The *yarō* makes his living with his 'back', and he will never be able to earn money with his 'front' like the female prostitute, a feat as impossible as the fulfillment of his wish. The female prostitute got what she

had prayed for and he simply did not. The preference shown to the woman seems a divine whim – without which the pun at the end would not work, as should be noted. As long as the *yarō* cannot simply turn into a female prostitute by ‘switching sides’, this discriminatory state of affairs cannot be redressed and that is the end of it, as the deity’s statement implies. Not only does Kannon thus show the male prostitute his place as a mere mortal, but at the same time he also silently allots him a position in a gendered matrix laid out by the dichotomy of ‘back’ and ‘front’ – a position which in this case spells trouble for the *yarō* and renders the fulfillment of his wish impossible.

The present discussion proposes to explore representations of male same-sex love in humorous tales (*shōwa* 笑話) of the Edo period, which means that it is more concerned with the ‘back’ than with the ‘front’, if one wishes to continue the metaphor here. This dichotomy, so fateful for the *yarō* in the above tale, will guide the reader through the article as a red thread, as is already suggested in the title. After a brief overview of the genre of humorous tales, this thread will wind through an exploration of male-male sexuality and eroticism, which forms the background for the metaphor, before it is finally unravelled. It will be shown how this trope functions, how it is used for the achievement of a comic effect in the tales – and most importantly, why it is appropriate to speak of the sex-gender system of the Edo period as ‘between the back and the front’. In its outlook the article largely confines itself to the more erotic aspects of male love, since ‘back’ and ‘front’ as concepts belong to the realm of the sensual and sexual. This should, however, not give rise to the impression that male love was exclusively or even principally perceived of in terms of carnal pleasures; quite the contrary, as the essay *Inu tsurezure* 犬つれづれ points out, claiming that in the course of one or two years ‘it’ could happen once or maybe twice – and sometimes not at all (quoted in Pflugfelder 1999: 43). These other facets of male-male relationships lie, however, outside the scope of the present article.¹

Male love, termed *nanshoku* 男色 or *shudō* 衆道, the ‘way of loving youths’, in Japanese,² generally designated a relationship between the so-called *nenja* 念者, an adult man understood to have undergone the coming-of-age ceremony (*genbuku* 元服), and a youth or *wakashu* 若衆. *Nanshoku* thus denoted a bond between males that would nowadays fall under the label of ‘male homosexuality’ – a translation that, however, holds some pitfalls, as Gregory Pflugfelder has already pointed out (Pflugfelder 1999: 23-25), and which will therefore be avoided in the present article. One major objection to this anachronistic rendering of the term is that in contrast to the Western concept of homosexuality, which is understood to be a digression from the prevalent heterosexual norm and one forced into what Judith Butler has called a

1 For a discussion of other, non-erotic aspects of male-male relationships in the genre of humorous tales see Koch 2008, especially pp. 60-102.

2 Pflugfelder gives a detailed definition and etymology of these two terms; see Pflugfelder 1999: 24-27.

‘zone of inhabitability’ (Butler 1993: 3), *nanshoku* in Edo-period Japan generally carried no such stigma (Leupp 1995: 145-170, Pflugfelder 1999: 97-145). It was stylised as a cultivated discipline or ‘way’ (*dō* 道), the ‘way of loving youths’, and met with a vivid reception in the art and especially the popular literature of the period, which produced a substantial textual corpus of roughly 600 works dealing with male love³ – a tiny fraction of which the present article is going to explore.

This type of practice between males had come to be associated with a certain social milieu in the popular mind of the Tokugawa period, a circumstance the humorous tales on *nanshoku* drew on heavily in their comic effects.⁴ On the one hand, this was of course the demi-monde of prostitution, a context the reader has already encountered in the tale quoted above, peopled by figures like the male prostitute (*kagama* 陰間) or the *kabuki* actor-prostitute (*yarō*). The booming pleasure quarters of the Edo period did not only offer the services of courtesans, as in the illustrious Yoshiwara 吉原, but also met customer demand for male prostitutes. Someone eager for an adventure with a youth in Edo would haunt Yoshichō 芳町, Sakaichō 境町, Yushima Tenjin 湯島天神 or Shiba Shinmei-chō 芝神明町, where special *nanshoku* teahouses (*kagama-jaya* 陰間茶屋) proliferated. In Kyōto, Miyagawa-chō 宮川町 was known to be a hot spot for male prostitutes. Its equivalent in Ōsaka was Dōton-bori 道頓堀.⁵ These teahouses were often situated conveniently close to the newly established *kabuki* 歌舞伎 theatres, which furnished the *nanshoku* establishments with attractive young actors, whose services were sought after by paying customers. *Kabuki* actors were widely known to supplement their incomes by selling sexual favours, and it is safe to assume that some of them charmed audiences less with their artistic talents on stage than with their physical attractions after the curtain had fallen.

Another stratum of society that was closely associated with male love was the Buddhist clergy, who could look back on the first substantial *nanshoku* tradition in Japan. This pre-dated the Edo period by several hundred years and had already earned the priests a reputation as boy lovers in medieval times.⁶ So intimate was the link between the clergy and *nanshoku* by the Edo period, that Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism in Japan, was credited, among other wondrous inventions like the Japanese syllabic alphabet, with the introduction of the custom of boy love from China into Japan in the 9th century AD – a legend which was widespread at the time, but nevertheless void of historical truth (Schalow 1992). The fact was, however, that women were generally not available in the often remote

3 For a complete bibliography of these works see Iwata 2002: 327-482.

4 For an in-depth exploration of the different traditions of *nanshoku* in the Edo period see the two monographs on *nanshoku* by Pflugfelder (1999) and Leupp (1995).

5 For *kagama-jaya* and male prostitution in Edo see Hanasaki 2006.

6 See, for instance, Margaret Childs’ article on *chigo monogatari* 稚児物語, a medieval genre that depicted relationships between monks and their acolytes (Childs 1980).

Buddhist temples, nor did females have a very high standing in Buddhist thought, which tended to regard women as morally inferior and intrinsically bad. Priests were strictly forbidden any sexual contact with the other sex, a crime for which severe punishment awaited them if caught (Faure 1998: 180-181),⁷ but ‘since their hearts were, after all, made of neither wood nor stone’, as Kitamura Kigin 北村季吟 wrote in sympathy with their situation (quoted in Schalow 1993: 10), it was only logical according to him that they should turn to their acolytes (*chigo* 稚児) instead, which was considered a somehow lesser evil. Boys who were sent to the temple by their parents to receive an education or take Buddhist vows therefore became a target for the advances of their older brethren.

Male love was, however, not only a prized commodity in the pleasure quarters and the passion of the clergy, it was also the ‘flower of the samurai’ (*bumon no hana* 武門の華), as *Nanshoku yamaji no tsuyu* 男色山路露 puts it (Nankai no Sanjin 1988-89: 46). Among the warrior class a tradition of same-sex love developed from medieval times onwards, running parallel to the custom of male love in Buddhist temples. The male love of the samurai was, at least in popular depictions of the Edo period, steeped in the strict warrior code of honour (*bushidō* 武士道), the core of which was formed by the central notion of *giri* 義理, the obligations imposed on the warrior by his honour. *Giri* was owed by the warrior to his lord and his comrades. A woman was not considered capable of such noble feelings, which is why a relationship with her could never reach the same depths as the brotherly connection between a samurai and his comrades. In an ideology that glorified the (per definition male) warrior and his loyalty towards lord and comrades, there was not much space left for women. On the contrary, the latter were regarded a bad influence on the warrior spirit, since they kept a man from courageously laying down his life for his lord, or deprived him of the strength he needed in battle by exhausting his manly powers in the bedroom at home (Ujiie 1996: 116). The male love of the samurai was thus, as in the case of the Buddhist clergy, nurtured by a misogynous ideological basis and fuelled further by the glorification of masculinity in the *bushidō*.

Humorous tales of the Edo period, which are a mirror of popular ideas of their times, make liberal use of this inventory of characters and constantly play on their widespread associations with male love. Since the stories were rather short, as is illustrated by the example quoted at the beginning of this article, reference points for readers were scarce in the texts and explanations virtually non-existent, which is why a relatively high degree of cultural knowledge was required to understand these

7 The Jōdo sect formed an exception here and traditionally tolerated women. It should be noted that in the literature of the time the Buddhist clergy were often depicted as not averse to the attractions of the female sex. Monks, in disguise so as to escape punishment, were known to frequent the courtesan quarters, and in some humorous tales the ban on women also does not keep priests from devising ways of smuggling females into the temple (see for instance Mutō, ed. 2004, vol.2: 359-360).

stories. An Edo-period reader possessed this kind of knowledge. He would have certain expectations if the protagonist of a story was an acolyte (*chigo*), especially where the boy came in a pair with a monk. He would draw certain conclusions if a tale revolved around a good-looking *kabuki* actor – which were probably rather far removed from the image of a performer in this highly stylised theatrical form nowadays. It is therefore vital for the understanding of humorous tales dealing with the topic of male love, which form the core of this article, to keep these Edo-period associations in mind.

Erotic laughs etc.: the genre of *hanashibon*

So far all that has been pointed out about humorous tales is firstly their relative shortness and secondly the difficulties they hold in store for modern readers, but what were these stories like? What sort of genre will this article be dealing with?⁸ The introduction to one of the oldest, and at the same time also the longest collection of humorous tales with over a thousand stories, *Seisuishō* 醒睡笑 (1623), by Anrakuan Sakuden 安楽庵策傳, gives a first glimpse of what is to be expected:

Ever since I was a young novice I have written down stories I heard and found interesting or funny on random scraps of paper. Today I am 70 years old and lead a secluded life in the north-western part of the Seigan temple. I am called Anrakuan, he of the hermitage of peace and happiness. In this way I live peacefully every day in my hut with the brushwood door, and when I read again what I once noted down, the sleepiness passes and I cannot help laughing. (My translation; original in Anrakuan 2004: 3)

In this quote, Anrakuan clearly underlines the entertainment value of the stories, which are capable of banishing sleep and, more than that, can even provoke loud laughter, as he remarks. The principal aim of the genre is thus easily discovered: the amusement of the reader. *Shōwa* can accordingly be defined as short tales, simple in structure and language, that aim to entertain the reader with mainly humorous contents. For this purpose, various aesthetic means such as poems, puns or homophones are employed in order to create a comic or witty effect (Haußer 2001: 75-83). In fact, some of the names applied to the tales, which were alternatively called *hanashi* 話/噺/咄 (‘stories’), *karukuchi-banashi* 軽口話 (‘humorous stories’), *kobanashi* 小話/小咄/小噺 (‘little stories’) or *otoshi-banashi* 落とし噺/落とし咄 (‘stories with a punch line’) allude to their humorous function. The same is true for the general term *shōwa*, ‘laughing stories’, which will be the preferred term to refer to this kind of humorous tales in the present article.

8 For a more detailed investigation of the genre see Haußer 2001, also Mutō 1984 and the explanatory notes in Mutō 2004. Translations of selected tales into English can be found in Levy 1973 and Schalow 1996.

The collections containing these stories, the *hanashibon* 噺本, constituted a highly popular literary genre of the Edo period, as is already attested to by the sheer number of more than a thousand titles published throughout the roughly 250 years comprised by this era. In his quote Anrakuan also gives the reader a first impression of how these *hanashibon*, or rather the tales contained in them, were created. As he points out, a compiler of a collection would hear stories being told, take a liking to the most original ones, jot them down, maybe tell these tales to others and, in the end, edit them in book form. In fact, most tales circulated orally before they were written down and published on the thriving literary market of the time.

The Edo-period art of humorous storytelling, which emerged from the late medieval oral tradition of the so-called *otogi-shū* 御伽衆, professional entertainers of feudal lords and powerful generals, was closely connected to oral forms from its inception. Most of the early *hanashibon*, for instance, were indebted in their creation to the sphere of the Buddhist clergy, who sometimes made long, dark autumn nights in lonely mountain temples more bearable by telling funny stories that dissipated the boredom. These were subsequently written down on account of their originality, as the introduction to *Ikkyūbanashi* 休話 (1668), another early collection, relates (Haußer 2001: 80). Later, as *shōwa* spread from more elitist circles like the clergy to a broader audience, storytelling contests (*hanashi no kai* 噺の会) became the rage among commoner townspeople. Especially in the 1770s, a vogue, which has been called ‘explosive’, for humorous tales developed (Mutō 2004/2: 10). Making up entertaining tales and reciting them at these amateur competitions became a fashionable hobby among the urban bourgeoisie, and the prime exponents of these meetings were, once again, written down and published (Mutō 1984: 98). Thus, a close interaction and interdependence between *hanashibon* and oral forms remained observable throughout the whole of the Edo period.

The success of such a tale, as has been pointed out above, resided in its entertainment value for the audience. The aim was to capture the attention and arouse the interest of the reader, and one strategy to achieve this was what may be called the Edo-period equivalent of ‘dirty jokes’, erotic humorous tales or *enshō-shōwa* 艶笑笑話,⁹ which represent the type of humorous tale the present article will mostly be dealing with. Eroticism and humour had been going hand in hand since the, to use Howard Hibbett’s words, ‘legendary prototype of a striptease’ (Hibbett 2002: 14) of the goddess Ame no Uzume in the 8th-century chronicle *Kojiki* 古事記. This was the erotic dance that provoked laughter so loud and hearty in the onlookers that the sun goddess Amaterasu 天照, who had shut herself up in a cave and refused to come out, was finally lured out of her place of hiding. In the Edo period itself, erotic

9 For details of this type of humorous tales see Miyao’s article in Miyao 2006: 468-479, whence the following information on erotic *shōwa* is taken. It should be noted that the term *enshō-shōwa* was not in use in the Edo period, but was introduced by literary scholars at a later date.

humour enjoyed enormous popularity in the literature of the time, exemplified for instance by the *kōshoku-bon* 好色本 of Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴, such as *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男 (1682) and a host of other *ukiyo-zōshi* 浮世草子.

The *hanashibon* were by no means exempt from this trend, and from the earliest collections onwards, such as the above-mentioned *Seisuishō* or the *Kinō wa kyō no monogatari* 昨日は今日の物語 (ca. 1615-30), erotic humour was a stock theme in the stories. Some *hanashibon* of the 17th century even collected indecent tales in a separate volume (*kan* 巻) at the end of the book, which gave rise to the impression that this was more or less a supplementary volume or an appendix to the ‘real book’. The reason for this is explained by the author of one of these *hanashibon*, the *Karukuchi ōwarai* 軽口大わらひ (1680):

Concerning the circumstances in which I have entitled this volume ‘with reserve’ [*enryo*], the following has to be said: Since I have collected in this section things which are indecent [*sashiai*], this title serves the purpose of informing the reader of this. This is not something to be read in broad daylight. (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 471)

As becomes clear from the quote, the point of gathering all tales with erotic contents in a single volume was to be able to put it aside, because the stories included were not suitable for perusal ‘in broad daylight’, i.e. in front of other people, but were rather meant for some private nook, where others could not possibly take offence.

It was common to entitle these separate volumes ‘*enryo*’ or ‘*sashiai*’, in order to warn the reader that something indecent and objectionable (*sashiai* 差し合い) was to follow and that he should if necessary treat this section with reserve (*enryo* 遠慮). Being similar in function to an ‘R-rated’ label on video films nowadays, these terms drew the attention of the reader to the fact that ‘the following material was not suitable for persons under 18 years of age’; in other words was not for tender-hearted minds. *Sashiai* was originally used in the context of *renga* 連歌 and *haikai* 俳諧 poetry, where it referred to a rule stating that similar words could not be used in direct proximity to each other. In a figurative sense it therefore acquired the meaning of something uncultivated or inelegant – of something not corresponding to good taste, just like a badly composed poem. Thus, the reader was conscious of the fact that he would be confronted with something that was not wholly in tune with good mores, whenever he came across a title of this sort in a *hanashibon*. That this was by no means a rare experience for a reader of this genre can be judged by the fact that Tsuyu no Gorobē 露の五郎兵衛 apparently deemed it necessary to emphasise the immaculate propriety of his own collection of stories by adding the note ‘*sashiai nashi*’, ‘no indecent stories’, to the title page of *Karukuchi gozen otkoko* 軽口御前男 (1703).

From the An’ei era (1772-81) onwards, when the genre of *shōwa* as a whole reached its pinnacle of vitality and humorous tales became the fashion in Edo, as

was briefly pointed out above, single-volume collections began to appear that specialised solely in erotic stories. The colourful titles of these works often left no doubt about their explicit contents, such as *Sashi makura* さしまくら (1773), *Karukuchi bobo dangi* 軽口開談義 (1775), *Mame darake* 豆だらけ (1775) or *Mame dango* 豆談語 (1777), all of which refer in some way to the bedroom and its mechanics, *mame* and *bobo* being slang words for the pubic parts of a woman. These books were not regular publications, but were printed in small numbers and sold to amateurs of erotic literature, which is why only relatively few of these collections survive today. The tales in these works were usually accompanied by fairly explicit illustrations meant to encourage the reader to read and look further. Contrary to *shunga* 春画 prints of the day these erotic depictions were in black and white, and by comparison also less detailed.

In these erotic *shōwa* two different types of relationships were generally represented: on the one hand those between man and woman, for instance in the shape of husband and wife, husband and servant girl, man and female prostitute or wife and lover; on the other hand those between two members of the male sex. Just like male-female relationships, the depictions of male-male love affairs also came in various constellations and were mainly depicted as taking place between monk and *chigo*, samurai and *wakashu*, or customer and male prostitute, since these were the social groups most intimately linked to *nanshoku* practices in the popular mind of the Edo period, as has been pointed out in the previous section. It is this kind of relationships between males that will be the focus of the present discussion, which will now turn to the often explicit contents of the tales themselves and explore the workings of the ‘back’ and the ‘front’.

Lust and frustration: male-male intercourse in the *shōwa*

Since this article proposes to deal with the erotic domain of male-male relationships, the following sections are figuratively speaking going to throw open the paper screens of the bedroom and investigate the sexuality of our unequal couple, which generally consisted of an adult man and a youth. What was an intimate *tête-à-tête* between a *nenja* and a *wakashu* like? What aroused a man’s sexual interest? What, on the other hand, was considered a passion-killer? And what was the preferred way of doing ‘it’, anyway? All these spicy details will be revealed in the sections to come, which is why it would be appropriate, if one were to adopt the Edo custom of warning readers in advance of explicit contents, to print ‘*sashiai*’ in big bold letters over the following and to recommend people to abstain from reading it in a too public place. However, in order to get to the bottom of the metaphor of ‘back’ and ‘front’ and the sex-gender system it represents, it is necessary to look into sexual mores prevalent at the time.

In the Edo period, the preferred sexual technique between partners of the male sex was anal penetration, a theme that has already been discussed in detail in authoritative works on the topic (Pflugfelder 1999: 41-42, Leupp 1995: 109). This state of affairs is also evident in the *shōwa*, which depict mainly this form of sexual intercourse. One example of a tale could be found where interfemural sex (*sumata* 素股) is mentioned (cf. Miyao 2006: 104), a sexual practice consisting in the insertion of the male member between the thighs of his partner. This technique, however, conjures up a context lacking in cultivation in this particular tale, since the story centres on an ‘uncouth’ man who virtually rapes a youth. In fact, a fairly negative attitude towards this type of intercourse seems to have prevailed in general in the Edo period, as Pflugfelder and Leupp, relying on other literary sources, have pointed out (Pflugfelder 1999: 41, Leupp 1995: 109). *Sumata* was thus relegated to the position of a sexual option in practice feasible, but which in the discourse on *shudō* was considered as marginal. In consequence, the range of sexual techniques commonly practised in *nanshoku* relationships did not allow for a lot of variation and was in essence limited to anal sex.

These restrictive boundaries of permissible sexual acts are playfully extended by the following humorous tale, which depicts other, socially unsanctioned forms of sexual gratification:

A page in a samurai household had an intimate relationship with another employee of this household, whose name was Kumon. One day Kumon was on watchman’s duty. He felt lonely and when he secretly peeped through an opening in the paper sliding doors into the next room, he saw the page he had become intimate with there, all alone. The *nenja* thought, ‘Luckily I am on my own here, too, and if everything goes well, I shall kiss him.’ He put saliva on the paper sliding door and made a hole in it with his finger. Secretly he called to the *wakashu*, ‘No one is here. Get it out.’ ‘Yes!’ replied the *wakashu* and thought this could only mean one thing. At once he bared his buttocks and put them against the hole. The *nenja*, intending to kiss him, sucked at the backside fondly. Both partners were startled and as the *wakashu* quickly put his mouth to the hole, the *nenja* got out his thing, and soon the *wakashu* had his mouth full. (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 95)

This *shōwa* transgresses sexual norms with the aim of creating a humorous effect. A misunderstanding between the partners gives rise to sexual constellations usually not represented in the discourse on male love and accounts for the entertainment value of the tale. The page thinks his partner expects to have intercourse and therefore puts his bare buttocks to the opening, thereby silently complying with the prevailing sexual standard of anal penetration between men.¹⁰ His intimate friend, however, merely wishes to kiss his partner, another form of intimacy accepted by the canon of

¹⁰ This rather uncommon position, which involves penetration through a hole in the paper sliding doors, is also depicted in *Koi no mutsugoto shijū-hatte* 恋の睦言四十八手 (1679), by Hishikawa Moronobu 菱川師宣, under the title ‘through the paper sliding doors’ (*shōji-goshi* 障子越) (Screech 1999: 196).

male love (Pflugfelder 1999: 41). There is no intention on the part of the characters to undermine the established norms, on the contrary, both behave in accordance with the rules of sexual interaction; the breach of accepted standards is brought about by a miscommunication. This leads to a mismatch in the conventional combinations of mouth-mouth in kissing and penis-buttocks in anal sex, whereby other, uncommon forms of sexual stimulation are created involuntarily, in this case anilingus and fellatio (Pflugfelder 1999: 42).

Even though the tale in question thus suspends sexual norms in order to get laughs from the reader, who naturally tended to be amused by novelties and curiosities, this does not change the fact that anal sex was the rule. Anal sex involved the penetration of the anal opening of one partner by the penis of the other partner, which implies that basically both partners could assume the role of inserter as well as insertee, since both were physically equipped for either part. However, sexual roles in a *nanshoku* relationship tended to be fixed, the *wakashu* invariably being allotted the passive function of insertee (Leupp 1995: 109, Pflugfelder 1999: 41). How these respective roles were constructed in the *shōwa* is exemplified by the following tale:

A customer, who was new in Yoshichō, went to bed [with a *wakashu*], and when his sexual excitement was heightening, he said, 'I am coming now. How about you? I am coming, I am coming!' To this the *wakashu* replied, 'He is gone, he is gone, lalala.' (My translation; original in Mutō 2004/2: 176)

Set in Yoshichō, a part of Edo famous for its *kagama* teahouses, this tale revolves around a sexual encounter between a new customer and a male prostitute. The role of inserter is unequivocally depicted as pleasurable, a fact hardly to be overlooked, since the customer in the *shōwa* reaches orgasm, as he lets his partner know in no uncertain terms. The *wakashu*, for his part, notably does not respond with an expression of sexual ecstasy, but with a verse from a well-known popular song of the period (Mutō 2004/2: 176). The point of the story is to be found in the juxtaposition of the verb *iku* 行く (literally 'to go', and if referring to sexual acts equivalent to the English expression 'to come'), put into the mouth of the *nenja* to indicate that he is approaching orgasm, with its opposite *kuru* 来る (literally 'to come'), which was not used in a sexual context.

If one leaves the entertaining aspect of the youth's reply aside for the time being, the one feature that strikes one about it is its passivity. The youth's utterance does not represent an expression of his own pleasurable sensations, but only a comment on the sexually aroused state of his partner – and a rather distracted and indifferent one as such. While the *nenja* is nearing orgasm, the prostitute seems to let his thoughts wander off and hums a song. The pleasure the *wakashu* derived from sexual interaction was apparently fairly limited and was certainly not considered an integral element of the sexual act (Pflugfelder 1999: 41-42). On the contrary, the

role of insertee was often depicted as disagreeable, painful and plagued by health problems such as, for instance, haemorrhoids:

When an acolyte first came into a temple, he suffered from a severe case of haemorrhoids. Since the boy did not look healthy at all, the abbot called the monk responsible for this boy and scolded him. 'It is shameless to suck out a boy's energy like this.' To this the monk replied, 'May all the big and small Gods of Japan, particularly Sannō-daishi, the God of Hie shrine, be my witnesses! I did not suck at him, I only tore him when I pulled my thing out.' (My translation; original in Odaka 1970: 109)

As can be surmised from this tale, the sexual practices of male love were not always very tender on the youth, who is even made to cry out with the pain of being penetrated in some tales. Lustful cries, on the other hand, being the acoustic expression of sexual excitement, as well as the orgasm itself, were exclusively reserved for the *nenja* in the *shōwa* – who, judging from his behaviour in the tales, apparently took great pleasure in penetration. A reaction on the part of the *wakashu*, be it of a verbal or other nature, was apparently not expected, and certainly not a pleasurable one.

Signs of sexual arousal in the youth were, on the contrary, depicted as rather unusual – when depicted at all:

'I am not going to hurt you, so do as I say!' Thus someone made a *wakashu* comply with his wishes. He bared the youth's buttocks, but since his glans did not glide in smoothly, even though he had moistened his thing well, he thrust a little harder, and then his penis slipped in easily. When he laid hand on the front side of the *wakashu*, the latter got an erection. [Upon this, his lover cried out], 'For Heaven's sake, I have pierced him with my thing!' (My translation; original in Miyao (ed.) 2006: 221)

Whereas the lustful cry was the acoustic token of arousal, an erection was its unmistakable optical proof. This is precisely what the latter is, however, and is not received in a very pleased manner by the *nenja* in the tale. The older partner apparently plays with the penis of the *wakashu*, who gets an erection as a result. However, this reaction of sexual excitement seems so unexpected that the *nenja* thinks he has pierced the *wakashu*, having thrust too hard. He seems to assume that the only erect penis in sexual intercourse must invariably be his own, since the male member of the youth had generally no business in male-male intercourse. The sexual pleasure of the *wakashu* is thus indirectly represented as a singular case – and a rather unfortunate one.

This tendency to marginalise the sexual lust of the younger partner can be detected in other literary texts of the period as well. Pflugfelder has pointed out that in the rare cases where the younger partner is permitted a pleasurable sensation in intercourse, this is represented as unorthodox or eccentric. *Kōshoku kinmōzui* 好色訓蒙図彙 (1686) for instance describes the erection of a youth as 'bothersome' (*urushashi*) for the penetrating partner (Pflugfelder 1999: 42). Edo-period images showing

the sexual act between man and youth corroborate this picture by representing the *wakashu* as a rule with a penis that is not erect – even though one can find some examples of *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 depicting the older partner masturbating the youth (see for instance Hayakawa 1998: 50, 52, 70).

The general impression conveyed is, however, that intercourse was mainly a treat for the *nenja*. In ‘male-male’ intercourse ‘male’ apparently did not automatically equal ‘male’. A clear hierarchy was discernible that granted the older partner the sexual privilege of penetration, thus fixing *nenja* and *wakashu* in an active-passive dichotomy. The *nanshoku* relationship appears sexually tailored to the needs of the older partner, and the younger partner becomes merely the object assisting in the satisfaction of the *nenja*. The youth’s sexual excitement was not considered an integral part of intercourse, on the contrary, it was branded as strange and eccentric. Whereas the *nenja* moans, thrusts and comes, the *wakashu* remains silent, is being ‘torn’ in penetration or cries out with pain. The active role of the penetrating *nenja* is always depicted as a gain in pleasure, while the penetrated *wakashu* is denied any sexual gratification and is even made to suffer in some of the tales. The sexual act can therefore be said to move between the lust of the *nenja* and the indifference, or in the worst case the frustration, of the younger partner.

The youth’s best side: the backside and its metaphorical implications

The male member of the youth was thus eclipsed in the sexual act and did not play any part. It was the anal opening, or by extension the part of the body adjacent to it, namely the buttocks of the *wakashu*, that provided the *nenja* with sexual stimulation and the metaphorical ‘back’ with its basis, as will be discussed in detail in this section. Since the buttocks occupied so central a position in male-male intercourse, they were the prime erotic attraction for adult males keen on the pleasures of the way of boy-love:

A man bought Sanogawa Ichimatsu and amused himself with the actor. He thought to himself, ‘Well, no one can compare to Ichimatsu. However, this is to last only as long as I am here, once I bid him farewell and head home, I will be left with nothing. I would like to get a token reminding me of him before I leave.’ Thinking this, he applied black ink to Ichimatsu’s buttocks and made a print of them. He returned home and looked at this image carefully. His wife noticed it and asked, ‘What is this?’ The husband replied, ‘This is Ichimatsu.’ ‘What, it looks rather like a pattern of *karamatsu* [Japanese larch]. (My translation; original in Mutō 2004/2: 173-174)

The customer buying the company of the *kabuki* actor Sanogawa Ichimatsu 佐野川市松 for a night craves a souvenir reminding him of this brief and blissful encounter with the young man. What could be a more suitable token to refresh his memory

after having parted with his idol than the latter's buttocks, this principal bodily attraction of every youth? Thus the man makes a print of it in ink and walks away with this prized picture of Ichimatsu's backside. After his return home he contemplates it for his personal aesthetic pleasure. His wife, however, misinterprets the reply of her husband and takes 'Ichimatsu' to mean the Ichimatsu pattern, a check pattern actually named after the actor, who used this design in his clothing. She points out that the print looks more like a pattern of *karamatsu* 唐松, which consisted of stylised leaves of the Japanese larch, that in fact bore a certain resemblance to the shape of buttocks (Mutō 2004/2: 174). In a humorous way Ichimatsu's backside is thus turned from a mere erotic body part into an object of aesthetic appreciation, as if it were a real print.

The contemplation of the buttocks from afar, as a quasi-aesthetic object, is also depicted in the following tale in a highly satiric manner:

Someone went pleasure boating with a handsome *onnagata*, an impersonator of female roles in the kabuki theatre. On the boat the youth excused himself, because he felt the need to empty his bowels all of a sudden, and did so from the bow of the boat into the river. A water sprite [*kappa*] and his son, Lil' Water Sprite, emerged together from the water. As they were standing there, carefully contemplating the buttocks of the *onnagata*, the little water sprite could not stand it any longer and held out his hand to finger the buttocks. Daddy Water Sprite scolded him a good deal and said, 'This is for sale, so don't touch it!' (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 169)

According to Japanese folklore, water sprites (*kappa* 河童) had their mind set on snatching the *shirikodama* 尻子玉, 'ass jewels' supposed to be hidden in the human anus, from unsuspecting victims. This association of the mythical creatures with the anus probably accounts for the popular belief of the Edo period that *kappa* were fervent boy-lovers (Leupp 1996: 88). Hiraga Gennai's 平賀源内 biting satire *Nenashigusa* 根無草 (1763), created a few years before the tale quoted above, for instance describes a love affair between such a water sprite, who has taken on human form, and the popular *kabuki* actor Segawa Kikunojō II 瀬川菊之丞 (Hiraga 2002: 462-486). This conceptual link eventually became so strong that *kappa* apparently even came to be used as an expression for a *nanshoku* enthusiast in the jargon of boy-love (Hanasaki 2006: 51).

If the father and son pair of water sprites therefore admire the buttocks of the *onnagata* 女形 in this tale, this fascination is sparked by the liking for beautiful boys popularly ascribed to them. The little water sprite, however, is not satisfied with merely looking. In a situation probably familiar to many parents nowadays from the supermarket, the little one attempts to touch the fascinating object, but is admonished by his father, since this is still 'for sale'. This infantile gesture and the paternal rebuke encapsulate a thinly veiled satiric jab at the commercial milieu of *nanshoku*, whose main commodity was 'buttocks', that is to say the sexual favours of youths,

which were not available for free but had their – sometimes rather exorbitant – price. The little boy-lover is therefore disappointed in his naive belief that he can simply reach out for the desired object, which turns out to be out of bounds for him.

The buttocks of a *wakashu* were thus a highly eroticised body part that was depicted as an aesthetic attraction and as the place of sexual satisfaction for the older partner. After all, the *nenja*, just like the little *kappa* in the tale quoted above, was not satisfied merely with looking, but in the end also expected to touch, as has been demonstrated in detail in the previous section on male-male intercourse. From a physiological point of view, however, the anus also functioned as an excretory organ. The tension thus established between the erotic-sexual aspect and the physiological aspect of the anus is often exploited for humorous purposes in the *shōwa*, which created laughs by freely moving between the two functions, as is the case in the following tale:

A man had a *wakashu* bend over and inserted his thing all the way. As he was just in the middle of using his hips and was sliding in and out smoothly, the *wakashu* asked, ‘Could you pull it out briefly?’ ‘I am going to come, I cannot pull it out.’ ‘Please, I need to fart and it is urgent. This is really embarrassing.’ ‘Still, I am coming now, so suppress it a little bit longer!’ Just as he was saying this, the older brother burped. (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 179)

The two functions of the anal opening, being all of a sudden both called for at the same time, come into conflict with each other here, and the comic tension of the tale is thus created. The idea is that the fart suppressed by the *wakashu*, its normal escape route being blocked, is finally released through another orifice, namely the mouth of the older partner, in the shape of a burp.

In any case, this double-faced aspect of the anus as excretory organ and sexual orifice was a rich source of faecal humour that ranged in variety from farting to the products of defecation per se. In the context of the present discussion, however, it is its sexual function that is of interest, since it fashioned the anus or by extension the buttocks as the central symbol of *shudō*. Any mention of this part of the body in a sexual context invariably implied anal sex and in consequence *nanshoku* and male-male intercourse, since anal sex represented the standard sexual practice between males. On account of this chain of associations a close conceptual link existed between the buttocks, anal sex and *nanshoku*, as is mirrored in the jargon of connoisseurs of male love of the period. This jargon contained an abundance of expressions referring to this body part sexually so central. Apart from the term *shiri* 尻 that denoted the buttocks in common parlance, the anus was called by colourful names like *nyake* 若気 (‘youthful energy’) or *kikuza* 菊座 (‘chrysanthemum seat’), an expression that alluded to the resemblance the anus held with the inner part of this iconic

Japanese flower. Other terms that were in use, such as *subari* 窄 ('tight hole') or *o-kama* 御釜 ('pot') underlined the property of the anus as an orifice.¹¹

A large part of these metaphors woven around the youth's buttocks by the vocabulary of *shudō* denoted the body part per se as well as the *wakashu*. *Nyake*, *subari* and *o-kama* were expressions referring to the anus as well as by extension to the whole youth, the owner of this iconic body part of male love. On a lexical level, the buttocks thus became virtually a *pars pro toto* for the *wakashu*, the *wakashu* thereby being indirectly defined merely as the young man attached to this part of the body that was such a strong presence in the discourse on male love. It is unnecessary to mention which 'side' was considered the youth's 'best side'. The body of the youth is often reduced to this one part that harboured sexual pleasures for the older partner, not only on a word level, but also in the erotic *nanshoku* discourse as a whole, which centred on the buttocks. In this way, the *wakashu* is silently shaped by the desiring male gaze¹² of the older partner, who projected his fantasies and wishes on to the youth's body, only seeing what he wanted to see.

This chain of associations of anus/buttocks-anal sex-*nanshoku* was, however, not yet complete as such and was spun further on a metaphorical level. As a result of a process of continuing abstraction, not only the buttocks and the anus, but the general term 'back' in the sense of the whole rear side of a *wakashu* came to connote a certain type of sexual practice and a certain kind of sex object:

Someone came to a well-off merchant house, accompanied by a good-looking youth of 14 or 15 years of age, in order to ask for employment for the boy. 'Who was your previous employer?' – 'I have worked for a monk for about ten days.' – 'Well, since you are pleasant to the eye, I will let you work for me, but first I want to see if you are suited to walking around in the reception room and serving guests. Stand up and let me see!' – 'Of course.' – 'Now turn around and let me look at you from behind.' – 'Oh no, if I have to turn around and show you my back I might as well stay with the monk.' (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 157)

Automatically the boy associates the request to turn around (*ushiro muku* 後ろ向く), coming from the mouth of an older man, even though completely harmless in this case, with sexual acts and points out that under these circumstances he prefers staying with his previous employer, where services of a sexual nature obviously also ranked among his duties. Thus, the mere mention of 'back' (*ushiro* 後ろ) in all possible variants, such as for instance 'back gate' (*kōmon* 後門, *uramon* 裏門), in any remotely sexual context inevitably implied anal sex with a male partner and consequently *nanshoku*, a connotation that *shōwa* eagerly exploited to create humorous double entendres.

11 For more expressions see Leupp 1995: 110-112.

12 On the concept of the male gaze see Mulvey 1975.

As such the term represented one half of an antithetical pair, its counterpart being ‘front’, which referred to vaginal sex and therefore to female sex partners, as is illustrated by the following tale:

A monk from the surroundings of Kiyomizu regularly visited [the teahouses specialising in male love in] Miyagawachō and entered into an intimate relationship with a *yarō* named Tatsunosuke. At this time he also became close to a *maiko* named Sashirono for some reason, a fact he kept hidden from Tatsunosuke. One night the patron of the bordello said to him, ‘Honourable priest, I cannot understand why you favour a female prostitute all of a sudden.’ Pretending to be completely ignorant the monk replied, ‘Ever since this public display of the Kiyomizu Kannon I have revised my ways and turned to the front.’ (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 151)

Questioned about his sudden change of mind concerning the choice of sex partners, the monk replies jokingly that he has been enlightened by the sight of the Kiyomizu Kannon, and has since reconsidered his sexual preferences. He has turned his back on the ‘back’, that is to say anal sex with youths, and now prefers the ‘front’ of a woman in vaginal penetration.

This dichotomy implicitly demanded an adult male subject, represented in the tale above by the character of the monk, from whose perspective sexual practices are seen. The complementary relationship of ‘back’ and ‘front’ would not hold, at least not in the same form, when viewed from the angle of a *wakashu* or a woman. ‘Back’ and ‘front’ as metaphors thus structure the domain of desire of a male adult, which is seen as divided in two on the basis of the different sex objects available. Strictly speaking, this dichotomy represents a distinction between two sexual practices, namely anal sex and vaginal sex. This distinction, however, because of prevalent sexual norms, automatically implied a certain sex of the sex object. In other words, ‘back’ and ‘front’ depended as metaphors on the standard sexual techniques an adult man would practise with female and male partners respectively. Digressions from these standards certainly existed in practice, as can be for instance gathered from images depicting anal sex with women,¹³ but these less common forms were obliterated by the metaphor of ‘back’ and ‘front’, which thus represents a generalisation of the norm.

An exception to this norm is for instance portrayed in the following tale, where a female prostitute extends the range of her standard services in order to heighten her allure for a certain section of customers:

A certain monk passed through the courtesan quarter. A prostitute clung to his sleeve. ‘What are you doing?’ he asked angrily. ‘I took Buddhist vows when I was five or six and have not accepted anything from the hands of a woman ever since that time. Let go of me at once!’ The courtesan replied, ‘Of course, but I am not asking you for anything that

¹³ See, for instance, Hayakawa 1998: 32-33.

would be against your vows. I have heard that monks make use of *wakashu*. I can also make my buttocks of service to you.’ Hearing this, the monk said, ‘I had not thought of that. How much do you charge?’ ‘Let’s see. Since I like it from the front, I will take whatever you can pay for that. An attack on the back gate requires more of an effort on my part and therefore costs a little more.’ The monk said, ‘As you can see, I am a penniless and weak old monk. I am not fit for the difficulties of an attack on the back gate anymore. So let’s assault the front gate with my lance!’ And soon they were at it. (My translation, original in Odaka 1970: 138)

The courtesan is aware of *nanshoku* practices in Buddhist temples and the sexual preference for boys in this context. Being a business woman, she naturally seeks to attract customers and therefore adapts the range of her services to the demands of the monk. However, since anal sex does not correspond to the sexual norm of vaginal sex practised with female partners, she charges a higher rate for this ‘extra service’. Upon this, the customer, who represents the humorous type of the sex-obsessed monk, quickly relinquishes his previously negative attitude towards women and braces himself for ‘an assault on the front gate’. Even though the sexual status quo is thus restored at the end of the tale, the prostitute nevertheless lays claim to the erotic domain of the *wakashu* with her strategies to win customers. In fact, a type of female prostitute called *kagama-onna* 陰間女 did exist, who imitated *wakashu* in their appearance and invited customers to make use of their services with the words ‘My buttocks are at your disposal’, as *Shikidō ōkagami* 色道大鏡 (1678) relates (Leupp 1995: 176). The reference point for the dichotomy of ‘back’ and ‘front’ are thus sexual standards, which were, however, not always upheld.

In the following tale the opposite case is depicted, and the *wakashu* enters the female erotic domain by turning role expectations upside down, thus also upsetting the established contrast of ‘back’ and ‘front’ for the sake of humorous effect:

When a man tried to seduce a *wakashu* inexperienced in the ways of boy-love, the youth complied quickly and even stayed over. When the man had the *wakashu* turn around to his back under the covers, the youth said, ‘It is better from the front.’ He had the man lie on top of him and pulled his legs up. From the very beginning he said, ‘Push violently, push violently!’ and took great pleasure in it. Weirdly enough, his partner could not stand this and came on the spot. He pulled out his thing and said to the *wakashu*, ‘I have another request. Would you let me insert my finger?’ The *wakashu* agreed and abandoned himself to the *nenja*. ‘I have yet another request. Let me look at you by light.’ – ‘Why do you insert your finger and want to look at me by the light of a torch?’ – ‘It is rather strange that this feels so good, so I want to see if there is not a vagina somewhere.’ (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 188)

In his inexperience, the *wakashu* in this tale, described as a *jiwakashu* 地若衆, that is to say a non-professional youth, apparently falls short of expectations of how a youth should act. At once willing to abandon himself completely to the man, he also seems to enjoy sexual interaction greatly, which was considered rather uncommon

for the penetrated partner, as has been pointed out. Lustful comments, normally only to be heard from the *nenja*, are here put into the mouth of the youth, a reversal of roles that contributes to the overall narrative strategy of the tale to construct the youth as an unorthodox bed partner.

With his eccentric sexual preferences the youth also breaks up the established dichotomy of ‘front’ and ‘back’, by letting the man, who actually intends to take him from behind, go about it from the front. Thus, he approaches the female domain, since the front unequivocally carried connotations of femininity and normally implied vaginal sex. In his behaviour the youth therefore undermines the role expectations applying to a *wakashu*, which finally culminates in the questioning of his biological maleness at the end of the tale. The youth apparently stretches gender boundaries to an extent that the man feels he needs to be reassured by physical facts – and wants to make sure if there is not maybe a vagina somewhere, rather than an anus.

While the main attraction a man looked for in a woman was thus the female sex organ alluded to in the metaphor of the ‘front’, the prime point of interest a *wakashu* had to offer was to be found at the ‘back’, in the shape of a body part that was not his sex organ. This is typical of the discursive representation of the *wakashu* that makes one look for the male member of the youth in vain. In the rare cases where the penis of the *wakashu* is mentioned, it is implied that it should actually not be there at all and is depicted as out of place, as has become clear in the tales discussed above. On a more subtle linguistic level, metaphors and symbols revolving around the *wakashu* also refer mainly to this one part of the body considered the very thing for a good time with a youth, only that this is not his ‘thing’, but his backside. The penis of the *nenja*, on the other hand, is present in the *shōwa*, it is being moistened, thrust, inserted, pulled out. The male sex organ was a fairly popular topic in the *shōwa* in general, and some tales even depict the literal comparison of penis lengths (cf. for instance Mutō 2004/2: 196). Even the vagina as the female sex organ, which had by definition no place in a *nanshoku* relationship, is suspected in the anus of a boy, as was illustrated in the tale above. But what about the male sex organ of the youth?

The latter is conspicuously absent in the erotic *shōwa* on male love, and looking for it remains a rather futile venture. Since the desiring male gaze of the *nenja* had no use for it, the penis of the *wakashu* plays virtually no role in the texts. Thus, the primary sex organ, this icon of the seemingly untouchable Western concept of the duality of the sexes, is written over in discourse and virtually replaced by another part of the body. The locus in discourse usually reserved for the penis remains nothing but a blank spot in the representation of the *wakashu*. This metaphorical fig leave was, however, not attached out of some prudish sense of shame, since *shōwa* generally did not display any second thoughts about depicting sexually explicit facts.

Rather it can be seen as due to a lack of interest, the gaze being directed towards the ‘back’ and the sexually more attractive bodily regions situated there.

Moving between: desire and the two ways of love in the *shōwa*

‘Back’ and ‘front’ thus represented sexual possibilities available to an adult man: vaginal sex with women and anal sex with boys. The universe of desire of an adult male in the Edo period appears as divided in two, as expressed by a whole set of dichotomies that were used at the period to classify the sexual domain. In *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, Saikaku, for instance, speaks of ‘two ways of love’ (*shikidō futatsu* 色道二つ) (Ihara 1992: 3), referring to *shudō* 衆道 and *nyodō* 女道, the ‘way of youths’ and ‘the way of women’. These twinned terms were used basically interchangeably with the expressions *nanshoku* 男色 and *joshoku* 女色, ‘male love’ and ‘female love’, which expressed the same dualism.

What these word pairs shared with the dichotomy of ‘back’ and ‘front’ was the angle of the male adult subject that served as a point of reference. Accordingly, the ‘way of youths’ was little if at all concerned with how youths loved, but merely with how they were being loved by an adult male; and the ‘way of women’ did not pay much attention to the desire of the female sex. All these terms were categorisations of sexual options open to an adult man. Youths and women, the dividing point in these paired expressions, were in both cases the objects of male desire alone (Pflugfelder 1999: 25-28). The same applies to the dichotomy of ‘back’ and ‘front’, which makes women and youths disappear even more linguistically, and only vaguely hints at these two categories as the objects behind certain sexual practices.

‘Back’ and ‘front’ basically represent the same dualism as *joshoku* and *nanshoku* or *nyodō* and *shudō*, even though these terms were by no means congruent. The metaphor of ‘back’ and ‘front’ configured the partners implied in the dichotomy purely as sex partners, whereas the other terms incorporated the sexual aspect of a relationship in their meaning, but generally referred to a wider range of interactions between male partners (Pflugfelder 1999: 43). The basic aspect common to all of these paired expressions is that the picture they draw of male desire is divided in two. However, this did not mean that a man had to be satisfied with only one half of the picture, and these terms were therefore not pairs of opposites in the strictest sense, contrary to the modern dichotomy of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Rather, men could move between the domains of *joshoku* and *nanshoku* without being stigmatised, a practice they subscribed to fondly, as has become evident in several of the tales discussed. Men moved freely between courtesans and male prostitutes, and when they returned home from a *tête-à-tête* with a *kabuki* actor, they were often expected by their wives.

An adult man thus had in principle both ways of love open to him and moved in this sense between the ‘back’ and the ‘front’, between male and female sex partners. But did the same apply to the *wakashu*? Did he have any choice, or was this, like other things in the hierarchically structured *nanshoku* relationship, a privilege of the *nenja*? Was the *wakashu* permitted the same flexibility of sex partners the *nenja* enjoyed? In tales dealing with male love the *wakashu* was naturally mainly configured as the partner of an adult male, and in this context it was always his ‘back’ that remained of sexual interest, since he invariably performed the role of insertee.

Away from the male gaze of the *nenja* and outside a *nanshoku* relationship, the *wakashu* could, however, potentially act as a penetrating partner with women and entertain sexual relations with the other sex. In the genre of humorous tales, as well as in the popular literature as a whole and in images of the period, representations of sexual encounters between *wakashu* and women are to be found. These were often set in a commercial context, where women purchased the sexual favours of a *kabuki* actor or a male prostitute. One comic verse (*senryū* 川柳), for instance, comments that ‘the audacious widow chiefly travels the path of *shudō*’ (quoted in Pflugfelder 1999: 27). Another one quips: ‘The widow hurries off to buy a female role actor’ (quoted in Leupp 1995: 175). Female customers were apparently typically widows, who were often caricatured as having an insatiable sex drive in the humorous literature of the period, but the ladies-in-waiting from the shogun’s castle were also reputed to have a soft spot for *wakashu*. Both represented types of women who neither had the opportunity to have sexual contact with men in everyday life, nor were subject to the male control of a husband. Tanaka Yūko, however, takes the view that not only these two groups, but women from all walks of life took advantage of the services of male prostitutes (Tanaka and Shirakura 2003: 20).

The following tale revolves around a group of ladies-in-waiting, who are depicted as highly enthusiastic and persistent fans of an idolised *kabuki* actor:

‘Ogawa Kichitarō, who specialises in roles of rich men fallen into the lower classes [*yatsu-shi*], is really indescribable, there are no words.’ Such was the opinion of the ladies-in-waiting and they fell in love with the actor. Kichitarō grew tired of this popularity and went to the *kyōgen-kata*, a person performing various stage duties during a *kabuki* performance. ‘What should I do about this?’ Kichitarō asked him. ‘If you hold a raffle and take the winner as your wife, the others will surely bear no grudge.’ ‘I understand, this sounds reasonable,’ said Kichitarō and planned a raffle. Today was the day, and when the drill with the pierced wooden tag [with the winning number on it] was lifted out of the box [that contained all the numbers for the draw], voices were heard shouting out: ‘Here, that’s me!’ One after the other a whole bunch of ladies-in-waiting came up to Kichitarō, plucking at Kichitarō’s sleeve and making much noise. ‘Well, what is the meaning of all this? There is only one pierced wooden tag, how can this be?’ ‘The ten of us bought our raffle ticket together.’ (My translation; original in Miyao 2006: 164)

Ogawa Kichitarō 小川吉太郎, a *kabuki* actor of the second half of the 18th century, obviously enjoys enormous popularity with women in this tale. His sly scheme meant to ward off the ladies-in-waiting who burn with passionate love for him backfires on him in the story. The raffle does not achieve the desired result of curbing his appeal for the female sex, since no less than ten ladies win the first prize, in this case Kichitarō himself – to the latter's utter amazement and dismay. The ladies-in-waiting had shared the ticket price, as was not uncommon a practice back then, which meant that in the event of a win the prize would be distributed equally among the holders of the ticket. While this did not pose a problem with prize money, the allotment of shares became comparably more difficult with a human first prize. Kichitarō thus becomes the target of laughter, since his supposedly cunning plan makes him jump out of the frying pan into the fire.

This tale takes up an aspect that should not go completely unnoticed, notwithstanding the previous discussion of the *wakashu* as the younger partner of a *nan-shoku* relationship: youths also had the occasional flirtatious eye for the female sex – and were certainly eyed fondly by women, as is the case in the tale above. Ogawa Kichitarō, however, proves less than thrilled with his status as sex symbol with women, even to the extent where he would like to put an end to the star cult the ladies-in-waiting have built around his person. In Saikaku's *Nanshoku ōkagami* 男色大鏡 (1687), virtuous *kabuki* boys also turn up their noses at relationships with women, shunning all advances of the ladies in their loyalty to the way of boy-love. The fact is, however, that women apparently had an interest in the good-looking youths, even though this was often portrayed in negative terms, ridiculed and smiled at in the male-dominated discourse on male love – provided it was portrayed at all.

Literary depictions of relationships between *wakashu* and women are far less common than representations of *nanshoku*. This may on the one hand be due to the structures of the literary market of the period, where male authors wrote from a male perspective for consumers of in this case erotic texts, who were also mainly male. Another factor was that most (married) women certainly did not have the freedom to frequent the pleasure quarters to the same extent men did. Nevertheless, women, particularly the already mentioned higher-ranking ladies, were also known to patronise *kabuki* actors (Shively 1978: 38). In the third month, when the ladies-in-waiting customarily received vacations, theatres would even especially put on plays on classical topics in order to cater to the tastes of this clientele (Shively 1978: 29). Tanaka Yūko assumes on the basis of pictorial evidence of the period that about half of the audience of a *kabuki* performance was female (Tanaka and Shirakura 2003: 18). That interactions between the artists and their female fans did not always remain innocent is illustrated for instance by the notorious scandal involving the lady-in-waiting Ejima 江島 and the actor Ikushima Shingorō 生島新五郎, whose affair went on for nine years before it was discovered in 1716 (Shively 1978: 29-32).

But what were these sexual encounters between *wakashu* and woman like for the *wakashu*? Even though often treated with disdain, an attitude that sprang from the strict *nanshoku* ethos in texts on *shudō*, an active sexual part seems to have held some physical pleasures for the youth, as is for instance related in the *Yarō kinuburi* 野郎絹篩 (1710): ‘It is needless to say how fortunate a *yarō* is when bought by a lady-in-waiting. Being paid for doing something pleasant – that is almost scary’ (my translation of the original quoted in Shirakura 2005: 49). Contrary to the role of insertee allotted to the *wakashu* in male-male intercourse, the sexual act with female partners is thus characterised as ‘something pleasant’ (*yoi koto*) for the youth – as long as interactions between women and *wakashu* were not condemned on ideological grounds.

The youth therefore stood between a passive sexual role in intercourse with adult men, that was seen as rather disagreeable, and the active, more lustful role he could assume with female partners. From this point of view he also moved between the ‘front’ as vaginal sex with women and the ‘back’ as anal sex with men, even though not in the same sense as the *nenja*, from whose perspective the metaphor was mainly configured in the Edo period. The adult male had a free choice of partners of both sexes as well, but for him these options represented active and pleasurable sexual activities. Thus, both partners of a *nanshoku* relationship moved in a certain sense between ‘back’ and ‘front’, only what it meant for them was different. The pleasures of the ‘back’ belonged by definition to the adult man, while the youth was always on the painful, passive receiving end of male-male sexual interaction.

Conclusion

The point of departure of this discussion was the dichotomy of ‘back’ and ‘front’ – two terms that have sent the reader on an article-long tour through the realm of male-male sexuality and eroticism. Simple as it might seem at first sight, this metaphor encapsulates a whole body of erotic facts, starting with the realities of male-male (and male-female) intercourse, and ranging all the way to the nature of desire in the Edo period. As far as the *nanshoku* relationship is concerned, the metaphor implicitly draws the picture of a truly unequal couple, a couple where the older partner was ‘more equal’ than the youth, and where his viewpoint was imposed on the younger partner. Accordingly, the *nenja* enjoyed certain privileges that came with this position of power in a *nanshoku* relationship. Foremost among these was the claim he had on the inserter role, which was considered the one part in male-male intercourse that held the promise of sexual fulfilment. His young companion meanwhile was not meant to enjoy sexual interaction to the same extent, and if he did derive pleasure from it, against all role expectations, this was depicted as a sign of eccentricity in the youth.

However, the older partner had the licence not only to touch, but also to look, judge and shape the youth. After all, the 'back' stood for the body part of a youth the adult male yearned for, and it was the latter's wishes that were channelled into the metaphor. It is a striking fact that none of the tales cares to comment on how dashing and handsome the *nenja* is, while the youth and his physical charms are under constant scrutiny – imposed by those who had an interest in peeping, namely adult men. This male gaze of adult men functions on several levels; it is not only the eyes of the *nenja* within the narrated world of the stories that rest upon the youth, but ultimately those of the mostly adult male readers and authors as well. Erotic *nanshoku* texts constituted a 'literature of the *nenja*' (Pflugfelder 1999: 54), and it is the fantasies and wishes of the adult male that shape the stereotypical picture of the attractive and highly eroticised *wakashu* as represented in the tales.

The youth's desires and erotic ideals, on the other hand, were generally accorded no importance in the texts. The tales did not address the question if the *nenja* was good-looking, or possibly even repulsively ugly, since the *wakashu* apparently did not possess the right to assert his gaze. Besides, such straying from the adult male viewpoint would not have catered to the tastes of the prototypical consumers of these texts, who represented mainly the *nenja* half of a *nanshoku* relationship. The same applies to sexual intercourse, which was primarily configured as the older partner's playground, while the youth seemed a mere toy in it. Behind all this, a certain underlying tenor becomes easily discernible: the adult male penetrates, the youth is penetrated; the adult male looks, the youth is looked at; the adult male judges, the youth is judged. Thus, the youth appears as the passive counterpart of his older partner, a passivity that is not merely a grammatical one, but extends to representations of male-male intercourse as well as male-male eroticism, as has become apparent in the previous discussion.

This dominance of the adult male is also evident in the construction of the youth's body, which was generally characterised by the discursive absence of the male phallus, this icon of the masculine. While the *nenja* sports an erection prominently in some tales, not only is this denied to the youth, but his male sex organ is of little importance in general, in whatever state of arousal. This omission might on the one hand be accounted for by the lack of interest the male gaze of the *nenja* showed in this part of the youthful body, but could also be seen as a strategy on the part of the adult male to assert power. After all, only one partner could 'wear the breeches' in the relationship, that is to say, lay claim to male dominance, sexually and otherwise. In order to be able to dominate, the *nenja* per definition needed someone he could dominate. In order to keep the *nenja* in a position of power, the youth had to be deprived of his masculinity to some degree – so why not emasculate him discursively?

In his passivity, the youth approached the domain of the other, ‘non-adult male’ in the universe of desire of a *nenja*, namely women – a category he was distinct from in most other respects, though. He shared characteristics with both women and men, but was naturally neither the one, nor yet the other, which left him in a somehow ambiguous situation. Moreover, outside the boundaries of male love the youth could also leave this passivity behind when he interacted with female partners, as has been discussed above – which made his gender status even more ambivalent. It has therefore been suggested that the youth constituted a separate ‘third gender’ alongside adult men and women.¹⁴

Irrespective of whether one subscribes to this view or not, it is precisely this quality of ‘between-ness’ that seems characteristic of the Edo period, a fluidity of gender and a flexibility of sexual desire unfamiliar to the Western observer, whose options are delineated by a comparatively rigid ‘matrix of intelligibility’ (Butler 2007: 23-24), able to produce only a limited number of ‘intelligible’ genders, namely those based on a coherence of sex, gender and desire. While from a Western hetero-normative viewpoint a biological male is thus supposed to behave according to standards considered ‘manly’, and to desire like a man, which is equivalent to desiring women, the metaphor of ‘back’ and ‘front’ tells a completely different story. Both youth and adult men could move freely ‘between back and front’, between male and female sex partners, without being stigmatised. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that every youth would eventually become an adult man, who could potentially take over the role of *nenja* in a *nanshoku* relationship, and enjoy the pleasures of anal penetration denied to him in his earlier days as *wakashu*. Thus, despite the God Kannon’s claim voiced in the tale quoted at the very beginning of the article, there was certainly a lot of ‘side switching’ going on, in various directions.

As far as such ‘moving between’ is concerned, the metaphor of ‘back’ and ‘front’ tells a tale of tolerance. Same-sex relationships between males were widely accepted at the time – an attitude that is mirrored in the *shōwa* dealing with male love. These humorous tales were therefore by no means the Edo-period equivalent of bad ‘gay jokes’ that made fun of same-sex practices. Far from it, the *shōwa* depicted male love as a cultivated erotic discipline, the pursuit of which was considered a sign of a fashionable man about town. Accordingly, the laughter in the stories is directed at those men who misbehave in their advances towards a youth – or those who do not follow the way of boy-love at all. This is to be illustrated by one last tale, which provides a fitting conclusion to a discussion of male-male sexuality, because it captures the attitude towards male love in the Edo period in a nutshell. It pokes fun at an adult man so ignorant of the etiquette of male-male intercourse that

14 See, for instance, Mostow 2003. Pflugfelder argues against such an approach, since the category of *wakashu* constituted a temporary status (Pflugfelder 1999: 36).

he mistakes the moistening of the male member with saliva, meant to facilitate anal penetration, for a very different, everyday act:

A certain man exclusively liked women and was not familiar with youths at all. 'What a boor you are! Probably you are also completely ignorant of how to treat a boy.' Thus his friends would say and laugh at him. Upon this he replied: 'That is true. But I have watched others doing it, and I have noticed something strange. They take something, completely absorbed in it, and eat it. That I don't understand at all.' (My translation; original in Odaka 1970: 98)

Thus, an obvious lack of knowledge about the intricacies of 'the back', together with an unwillingness to 'move between' the two ways of love, could apparently even make a man a laughing stock.

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GLOSSARY

Amaterasu Anrakuan Sakuden	天照 安楽庵策傳	Shintō sun goddess (1554-1642) Buddhist priest and compiler of the <i>Seisuishō</i> the warrior code of conduct acolyte, temple boy 'acolyte tales', a medieval literary genre that depicted relationships between monks and acolytes 'way', a cultivated discipline pleasure district in Ōsaka (1681-1741) a court lady who served the shōgun's mother, famous for her scandalous love affair with the kabuki actor Ikushima Shingorō 'reserve', an expression indicating erotic contents erotic humorous tale coming-of-age ceremony duty, obligation comic linked verse (humorous) tale storytelling contest collection of humorous tales (1728-1779) writer and <i>rangaku</i> (Dutch studies) scholar (1618-1694) a Japanese painter and printmaker (1642-1693) a writer of fiction and poetry 'Tales of Ikkyū' (1668), a collection of humorous tales literally 'to go', and if referring to sexual acts equivalent to the English expression 'to come' (1671-1743) a kabuki actor who became involved in a public scandal when his love affair with the court lady Ejima was discovered 'Dog Essays in Idleness' (1653) an amateur (as opposed to a profes- sional) youth 'female love', the love between man and woman traditional Japanese theatre male prostitute
<i>bushidō</i> <i>chigo</i> <i>chigo monogatari</i>	武士道 稚児 稚児物語	
<i>dō</i> Dōtonbori Ejima	道 道頓堀 江島	
<i>enryo</i>	遠慮	
<i>enshō-shōwa</i> <i>genbuku</i> <i>giri</i> <i>haikai</i> <i>hanashi</i> <i>hanashi no kai</i> <i>hanashibon</i> Hiraga Gennai	艶笑笑話 元服 義理 俳諧 話/噺/咄 噺の会 噺本 平賀源内	
Hishikawa Moronobu	菱川師宣	
Ihara Saikaku	井原西鶴	
<i>Ikkyūbanashi</i>	一休話	
<i>iku</i>	行く	
Ikushima Shingorō	生島新五郎	
<i>Inu tsurezure</i> <i>jīwakashū</i>	犬つれづれ 地若衆	
<i>joshoku</i>	女色	
<i>kabuki</i> <i>kagema</i>	歌舞伎 陰間	

<i>kagama-jaya</i>	陰間茶屋	teahouse offering the services of male prostitutes
<i>kagama-onna</i>	陰間女	female prostitute who imitates the appearance of a youth
<i>kan</i>	巻	volume, book
<i>kappa</i>	河童	water sprite
<i>karamatsu</i>	唐松	Japanese larch
<i>Karukuchi bobo dangi</i>	軽口開談義	‘Comic Cunt Teachings’ (1775), a collection of erotic humorous tales
<i>Karukuchi gozen otoko</i>	軽口御前男	‘The Comic Honourable Gentleman’ (1703), a collection of humorous tales by Tsuyu no Gorobē
<i>Karukuchi ōwarai</i>	軽口大わらひ	‘Comic Loud Laughter’ (1680), a collection of humorous tales
<i>karukuchi-banashi</i>	軽口話	humorous tale
<i>kikuza</i>	菊座	buttocks
<i>Kinō wa kyō no monogatari</i>	昨日は今日の物語	‘Today’s Tales of Yesterday’ (ca. 1615-1630), a collection of humorous tales
<i>Kitamura Kigin</i>	北村季吟	(1624-1705) a poet, writer and scholar
<i>kobanashi</i>	小話/小咄/小噺	humorous tale
<i>Kōbō Daishi</i>	弘法大師	(also known as Kūkai), founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism
<i>Koi no mutsugoto shijū-hatte</i>	恋の睦言四十八手	‘Forty-eight Positions in the Secrets of Love’ (1679)
<i>Kojiki</i>	古事記	‘Records of Ancient Matters’ (712), a chronicle
<i>kōmon</i>	後門	‘back gate’, anus
<i>Kōshoku ichidai otoko</i>	好色一代男	‘The Life of an Amorous Man’ (1682), an erotic work by Saikaku
<i>Kōshoku kinmōzui</i>	好色訓蒙図彙	‘An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Love’ (1686)
<i>kōshoku-bon</i>	好色本	books on love or sexual pleasures
<i>kuru</i>	来る	to come
<i>Mame dango</i>	豆談話	‘Clit Discussions’ (1777), a collection of erotic humorous tales
<i>Mame darake</i>	豆だらけ	‘Full of Clits’ (1775), a collection of erotic humorous tales
<i>Miyagawa-chō</i>	宮川町	pleasure district in Kyōto
<i>nanshoku</i>	男色	‘male love’; the love between males
<i>nanshoku ōkagami</i>	男色大鏡	‘The Great Mirror of Male Love’ (1687), by Ihara Saikaku
<i>Nanshoku yamaji no tsuyu</i>	男色山路露	‘The Dew of Male Love on a Mountain Path’ (1730)
<i>Nenashigusa</i>	根無草	‘Rootless Weeds’ (1763), a satiric novel by Hiraga Gennai
<i>nenja</i>	念者	the older partner in a male-male relationship

<i>nyake</i> <i>nyodō</i>	若気 女道	anus; youth; male prostitute 'the way of women', the erotic 'way' of loving women
Ogawa Kichitarō <i>o-kama</i> <i>onnagata</i> <i>otogi-shū</i> <i>otoshi-banashi</i> <i>renga</i> Sakaichō	小川吉太郎 御釜 女形 御伽衆 落し噺 / 落し咄 連歌 境町	(1737-1781) a kabuki actor buttocks; male prostitute, youth female-role actor in the kabuki theatre professional entertainer and storyteller humorous tale linked verse ward in Edo known for male prostitu- tion
Sanogawa Ichimatsu <i>Sashi makura</i>	佐野川市松 さしまくら	(1722-1762) a kabuki actor 'A Wooden Pillow' (1773), a collec- tion of erotic humorous tales
<i>sashiai</i>	差し合い	expression placed at the beginning of a volume to indicate that 'something objectionable' (i.e. erotic) was going to follow
Segawa Kikunojō <i>Seisuishō</i>	瀬川菊之丞 醒睡笑	(1741-1773) a female-role kabuki actor 'Laughs to Banish Sleep' (1623), a collection of humorous stories com- piled by Anrakuan Sakuden
<i>senryū</i> Shiba Shinmei-chō	川柳 芝神明町	a genre of comic verse ward in Edo known for male prostitu- tion
<i>Shikidō ōkagami</i>	色道大鏡	'Great mirror of ways of love' (1678), a guide to the pleasure quarters
<i>shiri</i> <i>shirikodama</i>	尻 尻子玉	buttocks 'ass jewels' supposed to be hidden in the human anus
<i>shōwa</i> <i>shudō</i>	笑話 衆道	humorous tale 'the way of youths'; the way of lov- ing youths
<i>shunga</i>	春画	'spring pictures', erotic prints and paintings
<i>subari</i> <i>sumata</i> Tsuyu no Gorobē	窄 素股 露の五郎兵衛	(tight) anus; youth; male prostitute interfemural sex (ca. 1644-1703) well-known profes- sional storyteller from Kyōto
<i>ukiyo-e</i>	浮世絵	'pictures of the floating world', a genre of Japanese woodblock prints and paintings
<i>ukiyo-zōshi</i>	浮世草子	'books of the floating world', a major genre of Japanese fiction between the 1680s and 1770s
<i>uramon</i>	裏門	'back gate', anus

<i>wakashu</i>	若衆	a youth; the younger partner in a male-male relationship
<i>yarō</i>	野郎	kabuki actor – prostitute
<i>yarō kinuburui</i>	野郎絹篩	‘The Silken Sieve of Actor-Prostitutes’ (1710)
Yoshichō	芳町	ward in Edo known for male prostitution
Yoshiwara	吉原	the licensed pleasure quarter of Edo
Yushima Tenjin	湯島天神	location in Edo known for male prostitution