

Motoya Yukiko: The Body, Gender and Japanese Fiction

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Topics for today

A bit about me (+gender and Japanese literature studies)

Introduction to Motoya Yukiko

'Ideal' bodies and gender in contemporary Japan

Marriage and intimacy in the story

Quick introduction!

Current research: how does contemporary Japanese fiction imagine a 'good' and 'normal' life? What gendered values underpin these constructions?

Gender and Japanese Literary Studies

(Feminist/Gendered) Discourse Analysis : cultural gender norms/values as either presented or challenged by an author

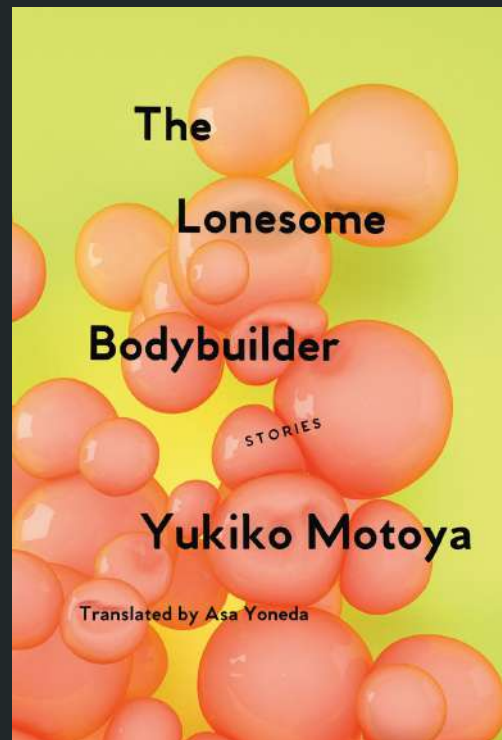
- Role of language in gender construction
- What roles are assigned? Who has value? Who speaks?
- Power dynamics; division of labour; emotional and sexual intimacy

What is 'normal'?

- what behaviours or choices do not require explanation? (Alexy 2019, pg. 3)
 - 当たり前・常識・普通
- heteronormative 'demarcated life path'

Motoya Yukiko

The Lonesome Bodybuilder
哀しみウェイトトレーニー



Motoya Yukiko (1979 ~)

Born in Ishikawa Prefecture

Author, playwright, theatre director, voice actor, radio show host

Started her own theatre company
(Gekidan, Motoya Yukiko)

Mishima Yukio Prize (nominated three times), Noma Prize, Oe Prize, Akutagawa Prize (nominated three times)

Translated into French, Norwegian, Spanish, Chinese and English



Film adaptations



2018



2010



2007

Publishing and translation comments

「哀しみウエイトトレーニー」, published in 『嵐のピクニック』 (2015)
Translated and published into English (2018) by Asa Yoneda
Highly positive reviews

Not much research yet, much more on 異類婚姻譚 (Akutagawa winner), with
some mentions for comparison
Nothing in English

Characters are speaking, BUT they are appearing within the narration, NOT direct quotation

Common in Motoya's writing

Absent from the English translation

しく鳴らされている。どちらの選手もパンチで顔が切れたのか血まみれで、コーナーの椅子に座った途端、水をセコンドの人に頭からかけられていた。

「ね。ね。すごい。動物の水浴びみたい。野蛮ね」

野蛮ね、の響きがなるべく嫌味に聞こえないようにしたつもりだったが、夫は敏感に感じ取ってしまった。こういう男がいいんだろ、本当は。え？ なんのこと。とぼけるなよ、知ってるんだぞ、お前が本当は野蛮な男にめっちゃくちゃにされたいと思ってること。え、何それ、私が文化系の男が好きなの知ってるでしょ、体育会系の男なんて嫌よ、繊細さがなくて。彼は握りしめていたりモコンをテーブルに戻すと、セーターの袖をまくって脈を確かめるように自分の手首にきゅつと指を巻いた。夫の手首は確かにボクサーの男たちとは比べものにならないくらい細かった。いいじゃない、アーティストっぽくて。私はわざとからかうような口調で彼を励ました。彼は憐れまれることが何より嫌いだから、あえてそういうジョークっぽい言い方をしたのだ。

じゃあお前、もしこういう男たちから誘われてもなびかないのかよ。彼がまた話しかけてきた。なんでもいいから自信を取り戻させるようなことを言わなくちゃ。そう思いながら、私はテレビの中の男たちに完璧に目を奪われかけていた。血が増量され

Discussion in small groups:

- 1) How are bodies described in the story? What did you find interesting or striking about them?
- 2) Are they similar to the kinds of bodies we see in Japanese media?

Bodily expectations

The 'sexed body' (sexual reproductive organs/genetics) gains significance because we socially assign it certain meanings and values

- 'Masculine body' does not just refer to 'what parts' someone has, but rather to certain other attributes which are technically available to both male and female sexed bodies

A woman with large muscles, a deep voice, tall, wide shoulders can be 'read' as masculine, but that does not mean 'not female'

So-called 'soft' masculinity anxieties



Dish (<https://dish-web.com/profile>)



Official Hige Dandism
(<https://higedan.com/profile/>)



Women's bodies: Control and expectations

Ehara Yumiko (1990s debates):

“A woman's right to self-determination is not an assertion of absolute and total control over her own body but an assertion of her right to have her decision valued by those around her” (Kano 2016, pg 58)

Japanese beauty standards

Change regularly, however some elements are consistent

Strong emphasis on thinness: high rates of bulimic tendencies (Izydorczyk et al 2020)

White skin has been dominant since the 1990s, strong presence within skincare market (Yip, Ainsworth and Hugh 2019)

Women athletes as 'gender outlaws' (Shilling & Bunsell 2009)

Bodybuilding and other 'strongman' sports require 'less feminine' bodies, therefore women who participate can face prejudice, social censure, and 'gender policing' behaviours daily

Male bodies in the story

Significant consideration and contestation over bodies, as well as the impact of the gaze: what a male/female body looks like, and what it ought to do

Different 'types' of male bodies:

- "the big one" (でかい)
- "the little one" (チビ)
- "brute" (野蛮な男) vs an "intellectual" (文化系の男)
- the trainer: "he'd been an athlete since childhood. He'd played rugby at university"
- the husband: "What do you think of my body?" (俺の体のことどう思ってるんだよ)

Gaze

The awareness that people in society are an object of gaze: looked upon, classified, objectified, sexualised

And in response police our own behaviour, or perform a self shaped by this gaze (impact of Foucault)

“(Women) exist first through and for the gaze of others, that is, as welcoming, attractive and available *objects*.” (Bourdieu 2001, pg. 66)

Female body in the story

- Conscious and purposeful transformation of her body: slim housewife to muscular body builder
- Encounters unexpected gaze: children, customers, her boss
- Encounters gendered assumptions about what kind of body she would want, and why
 - “Women in their thirties usually come looking to lose weight, so I assumed...” (pg. 7)
 - “At first I thought you might be pregnant, but... perhaps you’re taking some kind of medication that doesn’t agree with you? Something for the menopause. Are you experiencing side effects?”

Creating her new body

New food consumption practices (protein powder; raw eggs)

New bodily practices (push-ups, sit-ups, squats)

New beauty practices (tanning, tooth whitening)

“I was cultivating muscle in pursuit of an ideal of beauty” (pg 11)

Discussion in small groups:

3) The main relationship in this story is an unhappy marriage, but what traits or characteristics suggest it is unhappy?

Marriage in contemporary Japan

Shaped by a history of gendered division of labour (サラリーマン・専業主婦)

- Breadwinner and the housewife (Dasgupta 2013)

Reality: since 2000s majority of households are two-income

- Women's role within the economy (Abe's so-called Womenomics)

A 2019 survey found that working women do 7x more domestic labour than their male counterparts

Although the number of women in the workforce has increased, they are not ascending the ranks (demonstrated most clearly in boardroom numbers and political representation) (Steel 2019)

Intimacy/intimate relationships (Alexy 2019)

“common social tropes of family roles continue to impact Japanese people today, even as families are reshaped in light of the falling birthrate, aging population, later marriages, and changing patterns of divorce” (pg. 9)

Concerns over: sexless marriages; later-in-life divorce; delayed marriages

- Matters of ‘intimate relationships’ and choices; how ‘intimacy’ is navigated

‘Intimacy’ as a technical term difficult to define in Japanese

Marriage in the story

Two-income household, husband primary breadwinner

- Husband is emotionally and mentally absent, overworked
- Wife is a shop assistant, responsible for the household

Currently sexless, no physical affection (スキンシップ)

“Marital affection was pretty much nonexistent.” (pg. 9)

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“He held me tight and stroked my hair, over and over.” (pg. 20)

Happy ending

A romantic alternative is offered with the couple retaining their old roles, but integrating her new bodybuilding into time spent together

They spend time together as she tans, go for walks, holding hands
Her co-workers appear to understand and support her new hobby

The Self

Her sense of self and self-confidence are low due with troubling dynamics within the marriage, and her self-definition. Bodybuilding allows her to change that.

“explanations for insufficient selfhood are being levelled as reasons for divorce” (Alexy 2020, pg. 33)

- “I decide who I am, and never consider other possibilities.” (pg. 5)
 - “a quiet girl like me” “someone like me”
 - “I’d acquired the habit of dismissing myself” (pg. 13)

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“ *This is me* I tried to tell him. I’m not a boring housewife. I’m not the kind of wife her husband can ignore.” (pg. 19)

『強制的な「正しさ」の前で』 倉本さおり

「本当の私」を理解してほしいーそれはまさしく、すべての本谷作品に通底する切迫したメッセージだったはず (pg. 113)

This is a common theme across Motoya's works, and in Japanese discourses in general: 「私らしく生きたい」

Final thoughts

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