JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

48

SUMMER 2006

Japanese Book News is published quarterly by the Japan Foundation mainly to provide publishers, editors, translators, scholars, and libraries with up-to-date information about publishing trends in Japan and brief descriptions of the content of selected new books. The opinions and views expressed in the essays and new title summaries are not necessarily those of the Japan Foundation or the advisory board.

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JAPANFOUNDATION 国際交流基金

The Global Distributed Self-Mirroring Subterranean Neurological Soul-Sharing Picture Show

Richard Powers

On March 25 and 26, a symposium titled "A Wild Haruki Chase: How the World Is Reading and Translating Murakami" was held at the University of Tokyo's Komaba Campus, bringing together people from around the world who have translated the works of Murakami Haruki. American writer Richard Powers delivered the keynote address, the main points of which are summarized below.

* * * * * *

In a laboratory in Parma 10 years ago—around the time that Murakami Haruki was writing his masterpiece, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*—a team of international neuroscientists stumbled upon one of the most remarkable discoveries about mental functioning in our lifetime. The researchers, under the lead of Giacomo Rizzolatti, were exploring the premotor cortex of macaques—that area of the monkey's brain responsible for moving its muscles. They sunk an electrical probe into the monkey's brain to detect the firing patterns of individual neurons.

Rizzolatti's researchers located a neuron in the macaque's brain that gave off a steady signal whenever the monkey reached out to grab an object. When the monkey's arm rested, the neuron fell silent. They had located an individual neuron involved in moving the animal's arm. This surreal scene already presents a Murakami-esque image: a small, defenseless creature wired up to detection devices, the faint signal passing back and forth between the flashing, high-tech outside and the murmuring network within. And the truth that the researchers uncovered could almost be a Murakami theme: in the fantastic landscape of representation, reality begins.

But the neuroscientists were shocked when one of their animals, during a break between experiments, began signaling from its premotor cortex even when its arm was at rest. The monkey's brain was moving *something,* but it wasn't the monkey's muscles.

Even stranger: this stream of motor-neuron activity happened only when the *experimenters themselves* reached out to grab the same objects. Just seeing another creature move triggered internal symbolic movement inside the monkey. The arm in the world and the *idea* of an arm in symbol space were both controlled by the same neurons.

Rizzolatti's crew named their new discovery "mirror neurons." Here was something never before suspected: Electrical impulses moved muscles, while images of moving muscles made symbolic muscles move, all on the same strange, tangled loop of mental circuitry.

Experiments soon revealed that humans, too, were crawling with mirror neurons. Mirror systems grew tendrils, snaking into other higher cognitive processes—speech and learning, facial decoding, threat analysis, the perception of emotions, and the formation of social intelligence. Doing and imagining were not independent processes, but two aspects of the same circuitry. As John Skoyles and Dorian Sagan write:

> The primary visual cortex takes up more blood when imagining something than when actually seeing it . . . When we imagine ourselves running . . . our heart rate goes up. In one study, a group of people imagining physical exercises increased their strength by 22 percent, while those doing the real thing gained only slightly more, by 30 percent. [Skoyles, John and Dorian Sagan, *Up From Dragons,* pp. 36–38]

Now keep this looping, mirroring, collaborative model of the mind in your prefrontal cortex as Murakami describes how he conceives of the dream landscapes that fill his novels:

> We have rooms in ourselves. Most of them we have not visited yet. . . . From time to time we can find the passage. . . . We find strange things . . . old phonographs, pictures, books. . . . They belong to us, but it is the first time we have found them. . . . I think dreams are collective. Some parts do not belong to yourself. [Thompson, Matt, "The Elusive Murakami," *The Guardian,* May 26, 2001, reprinted in the August 2001 issue of *World Press Review* (Vol. 48, No. 8)]

Communal dreams, interior rooms furnished with other people's possessions: this sounds like Jungian collective unconsciousness. And until recently, Jung remained the most sweeping account of how the individual self is stitched together from vast, shared spaces and times. Now, in the looping, shared circuitry of mirror neurons, science has hit upon an even richer description of our communal, subterranean truths, the truths that Murakami's mirrorscape of symbols brings into existence as we read him.

Murakami's fiction deploys, side by side, as part of one marvelously webbed story, distinct—if multiply connected—independent narrative frames. Some of these story frames could pass for conventional social realism. A contemporary, urban world much like Tokyo, filled with references to mass consumer culture and peopled with wonderfully realized "realistic" characters, provides the

grounding for the unfolding story. But alongside this story—folded through or *underneath* it—fantastic, chthonic worlds spring up and seep into normal existence, entwining realism in their weird tendrils. "There's another world that parallels our own," Ōshima assures Kafka in *Kafka on the Shore,* "and to a certain degree you're able to step into that other world and come back safely. As long as you're careful. But go past a certain point and you lose the path out. It's a labyrinth [and] the principle of the labyrinth is inside you." [p. 326]

Murakami's characters, set loose between these intersecting worlds, are forced to embark on detective spelunking. They venture downwards into walled enclaves, climb into deep wells, or drop below the surface of seismically-shaken cities, searching for the rules that connect the banal and the fantastic, the material and the mental. They climb up into volcanic craters or hide themselves on Greek islands. Where else can they go but into these subterranean terrains of symbol and surprise? As the neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga estimates, "Ninety-eight percent of what the brain does is outside of conscious awareness."

Even in Murakami's most realistic narratives, the opening into the underworld is never far away. In *Norwegian Wood,* Watanabe Tōru describes a threatening well that Naoko, the woman he loves, insists lies somewhere nearby, invisible, just off the path that they walk along. Watanabe explains:

> I have no idea whether such a well ever existed. It might have been an image or a sign that existed only inside Naoko. . . . Once she had described it to me, though, I was never able to think of that meadow scene without the well. . . . It was deep beyond measuring, and crammed full of darkness, as if all the world's darknesses had been boiled down to their ultimate density. "It's really, *really* deep," said Naoko, choosing her words with care. . . . "But no one knows where it is." [p. 5]

These striking sentences might have come directly from Rizzolatti's lab in Parma: Naoko's imagination becomes as palpable to Watanabe as if he himself had fallen into it. And in a sense, he has, in the world of mental mirrors.

The 1990s, proclaimed the Decade of the Brain, produced numerous discoveries as strange and marvelous as any Murakami plot. Where once the mind was a unitary thing, subsequently split by Freud and Jung into two or three independent parts, it is now divided into *hundreds* of distributed subsystems, every one of them a discrete, signaling agent of a loose and tangled confederation.

In place of simple brain hierarchies with one-way flows of control, contemporary neuroscience gives us constellations of areas, each sharing reciprocal relations with many others. Eight mental maps are used to process hearing, and at least 22 areas combine to perform vision. Recognizing a face requires the coordination of dozens of networked regions. Even speaking a word is like getting dozens of musicians to perform a symphony. Clearly the self—floating on this jumble of processes—is not an identity, but a noisy parliament, negotiating itself into being, constantly updating and updated by all those other external selves that it brushes up against.

Writer Richard Powers addresses the symposium participants. Photo: Takagi Atsuko

Murakami knew all this, well before the Decade of the Brain. Hence his characters who move through a landscape unable to tell whether they are following external physical rules or are internally constructing them. As Kafka learns at the beginning of *Kafka on the Shore,* "this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you. Something *inside* of you." [p. 4]

In contemporary neuroscience, a break between two brain subsystems can upset the entire construction of self, producing a plethora of symptoms which might serve for a Murakami plot. People cease to be able to identify familiar objects. They grow unable to tell whether oranges are smaller or larger than cherries. They lose their ability to distinguish between two faces. They deny that their left arms belong to them. They duplicate physical places, believing that their own, familiar houses are mere copies. They lose the use of concrete words while retaining abstract ones. They think that they are blind when they aren't, or that they can see when they're blind. They believe that their loved ones have been replaced by impostors. They hallucinate cartoon characters in a sea of actual people. They believe that they have actually visited places that they merely heard about, and they think they have done things that happened only in dreams.

Such states of consciousness sound familiar to any Murakami reader. Think of Miu, stranded on top of the Ferris wheel in *Sputnik Sweetheart,* staring down on her own apartment and seeing herself making love to a man she abhors. Or think of the narrator of *A Wild Sheep Chase:* "The more I thought about it, the more that other me became the real me, making this me here not real at all." [p. 288]

Perhaps more than any other living writer, Murakami understands the paradox of the modular and distributed brain: Consciousness is only ordinary, only solid, only predictable when you remain unconscious about what it is constantly doing to you. As Okada Tōru realizes, down at the bottom of his cavernous well in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle:*

> This person, this self, this me, finally, was made somewhere else. Everything had come from somewhere else, and it would all go somewhere else. I was nothing but a pathway for the person known as me. [p. 262]

Murakami's every sentence knows the world is not as real

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION

Himeno Kaoruko

Born in 1958. While studying literature in Aoyama Gakuin University's graduate school, released her first novel titled Hito yonde Mitsuko *[A Girl Named Mitsuko]. A popular writer who has released essays and novels written in a unique style and perspective that has been called "hyper literature" and "Himeno-ish."*

Haruka eiti [Haruka Eighty]

By Himeno Kaoruko

Bungei Shunjū, 2005. 190x130 mm. 468 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-16-324340-2.

Ono Haruka, who was born Mochimaru Haruka in Saga Prefecture and turned 80 in 2002, was the original *moga,* or "modern girl" of Japan in the 1930s. This novel, which was nominated for the Naoki Prize, tells the story of half of her life, from her youth up through her middle-age years.

After attending normal school, Haruka became an elementary school teacher and entered an arranged marriage at the age of 20. After the end of World War II, she gave birth in her parents' home in Saga, and moved to live in Osaka. Her husband founded a business, but because she was worried about the future, she took a job working at a kindergarten. Her husband's business did not go well, and there were signs he was having an affair. Once women fell in love with Haruka's husband, they came to her to beg for money. Nevertheless, Haruka believed that life was something to be enjoyed. She was always searching for ways to have fun and was fun to be around. Even after turning 80, people still referred to her affectionately with the diminutive "Haruka-chan," with men 50 years younger than her shortening that still more to "Ruka-chan." Her father named her after the Meiji era (1868–1912) literary giant Tsubouchi Shōyō, taking the character for "yō," which can also be read as "haruka."

For Haruka, the dark time of war, the chaos of its aftermath, and the hurly-burly of the ensuing period of rapid economic growth were all enjoyable. Her pleasure comes to life through the author's faithful depictions of the surroundings, manners, relationships, and values of the times.

Kai no ho [Shell Sail]

By Maruyama Kenji

Shinchōsha, 2005. 200x145 mm. 565 pp. ¥2,500. ISBN 4-10-419208-2.

Maruyama Kenji is rare among modern Japanese writers in that he eschews ties with the literary circles in Tokyo and lives far away in Nagano Prefecture. There he refuses requests to write for magazines and newspapers, choosing instead to write long novels at his own pace in which he observes the world. His newest novel, *Kai no ho,* is a massive work more than 560 pages long. In previous efforts, Maruyama has used experimental methods in his novels to tell the story from a non-human point of view, such as through a motorcycle, a tree, or the wind.

The narrator of this story is "a soul at once single and more numerous than the stars." This soul resides within an unborn child in its mother's womb, and the novel spans a period of 280 days—the length of time from conception to birth. The narrative unfolds in the form of a journal.

The family includes the mother, her husband, who is a good-for-nothing postal worker, the husband's father, who is in the early stages of dementia, and the couple's daughter, who acts out by repeatedly shoplifting and running away from home. As the family lives in a sense of quiet desperation, supernatural changes occur, and the wife of this postal worker suddenly falls passionately in love with a young man who has appeared out of nowhere as though he came from space. This novel, in which "birth pangs and death throes mix to form a balanced seed, resulting in the unfolding of the multicolored, grand and undying tapestry of life," is a powerful anthem for the world.

Maruyama Kenji

Born in 1943. Won the Akutagawa Prize in 1966 for his debut work, Natsu no nagare *[The Flow of Summer]. With a tough style of writing that eschews emotion, has opened the door to his own literary world. Lives in Azumino, Nagano Prefecture. His works include* Azumino no shiroi niwa *[White Garden in Azumino], a collection of essays devoted to gardening.*

Itoyama Akiko

For her biographical information, please refer to her interview in "In Their Own Words" on page 16.

Oki de matsu
[Waiting Off the Coast]

By Itoyama Akiko

Bungei Shunjū, 2006. 195x135 mm. 108 pp. ¥952. ISBN 4-16-324850-1.

Itoyama Akiko is one of the most attention-getting female authors in Japan today. She made her debut as a writer just three years ago, and has since then received high marks for her use of differing literary styles in each subsequent work to vividly portray the lives and psychology of Japanese living in modern society, winning the Akutagawa Prize for the short story "Oki de matsu."

This book, which also goes by that title, includes that short story and another titled "Kinrō Kansha no Hi" [Labor Thanksgiving Day]. In this story, the protagonist is an unemployed woman. She previously did managerial work in a corporation, but became furious when her mother was sexually harassed by her boss. She gets fired after hitting him with a beer bottle. The woman lives her life with great strength while reviling no-good men.

In the title work, the story of a pathetic man is fleshed out in detail, with warmth and humor, from the perspective of a woman who works in the same company with him. The tale begins in a flabbergasting manner with the appearance of an apparition suffering from hiccups. This sense of fantasy is placed within a framework of reality throughout the entire work. Both of the stories realistically portray the troubles of strong working women in modern Japanese society, at the same time providing the reader with a sense of escapism through Itoyama's unique humor and sense of the fantastic.

Tōkyō kitanshū
[Mysteries of Tokyo]

By Murakami Haruki

Shinchōsha, 2005. 195x135 mm. 210 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 4-10-353418-4.

Murakami Haruki's latest offering, *Tōkyō kitanshū* [Mysteries of Tokyo], is a collection of five short stories, all of them urban legends set in Japan's capital. Scary stories have long been a tradition in Japan, and at the hand of a mature Murakami, the techniques of the modern novel are exquisitely harmonized with the Japanese love for these tales. The first story is about a surprising coincidence experienced by a gay piano tuner. The second involves the appearance of the spirit of a young surfer eaten by a shark in Hawaii. The third traces the fate of a middle-aged man who vanishes without a trace in the stairwell of a high-rise apartment. The fourth story takes up the mysterious subject of a "liver-shaped stone" that suddenly gains the ability to spontaneously move. And in the fifth and final story, titled "Shinagawa zaru" [trans. "A Shinagawa Monkey"], a supernatural being makes its appearance: a monkey that steals people's names.

This book, an appealing collection of stories blending fantasy and humor, draws readers into a world of amusing fables. The mechanisms at play in each of the works bring to life the human relationships in a modern metropolis. While city life may appear glamorous at first glance, Murakami carefully and meticulously fleshes out the darkness that lies beneath the surface.

Murakami Haruki

Born in 1949. Opened the jazz cafe Peter Cat in Kokubunji while studying theater at Waseda University. Made his debut as an author in 1969 with Kaze no uta o kike *[trans.* Hear the Wind Sing*], which won the Gunzō Prize for New Writers. Became a full-time author in 1981. Won the Noma Literary Prize for New Writers in 1982 for* Hitsuji o meguru bōken *[trans.* A Wild Sheep Chase*]. Has translated into Japanese works by such authors as Raymond Carver and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Has numerous fans around the world, as his works have been translated into more than 30 languages.*

ESSAY

Sotooka Hidetoshi

Born in 1953. Won the Bungei Prize for his novel Hokkikō *[Return North] while he was still a student in the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Law. Joined the Asahi Shimbun Co. after graduation and is presently chief of the paper's European bureau. Works include* Amerika no shōzō *[Portrait of America] and* Nichi-Bei dōmei hanseiki—anpo to mitsuyaku *[A Half-Century of the Japan-US Alliance: The Security Treaty and Secret Pacts].*

Bōkansha kara no tegami: From London 2003–2005 [Letters from an Onlooker]

By Sotooka Hidetoshi

Misuzu Shobō, 2005. 195x135 mm. 247 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 4-622-07157-6.

The author is a journalist who works as the European bureau chief for the *Asahi Shimbun*. This book brings together 55 essays he wrote in the form of letters while working in London from 2003 to 2005. The first letter describes the feverish excitement of a massive antiwar demonstration in London, and the last brings home in vivid detail the terrorist attacks that took place in his final year there.

This book covers a period when news was dominated by the war in Iraq and terrorism, but the author's skilled touch always gives the reader a sense of his refined intellect. The topics he addresses go beyond politics and the state of society, as he casts a broad glance at subjects ranging from morals to art, music, and culture, reporting from various locations in Europe, such as Berlin, Oslo, and Kiev. His writing is extremely literary, and the titles of the essays collected in this book are all taken from some work of literature. In the author's own words, writing this book was similar to "creating a modern form of traditional Japanese paper by hand" in that he ran topical issues through the filter of history and literature. Through this book—whose title was taken from a work by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955)—readers will be able to see the shining intellect of Japan in the setting of "old Europe" and understand how it coolly observes the world.

BIOGRAPHY

Karaoke o hatsumei shita otoko [The Man Who Invented Karaoke]

By Ōshita Eiji

Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2005. 195x140 mm. 276 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-309-01730-4.

In 1999, the American newsweekly *Time* carried a feature titled "The 20 Most Influential Asians of the Century." It included six Japanese: Emperor Shōwa, Toyota Motor Corp. founder Toyota Eiji, film director Kurosawa Akira, Sony Corp. founder Morita Akio, fashion designer Miyake Issey, and Inoue Daisuke, the man who invented karaoke.

Time introduces Inoue thusly: "With his now ubiquitous karaoke machine, this laid-back Japanese inventor provided the soundtrack for millions of wannabe Sinatras and Madonnas." The magazine profiles him as a friendly, relaxed inventor who hit on the idea of putting accompanying music onto a machine. Inoue was 59 when *Time* ran the feature. He started out as a band member working in a cabaret club in his younger days. He became the president of the company employing his five band mates, and he developed a method of putting accompaniment onto a tape for one of his customers to sing along with. This became the model for karaoke.

Inoue viewed karaoke as a tool that musicians could rely on to remain in business as they aged, not as a product that could make him rich. He therefore did not file a patent for his invention. The creation of this laid-back inventor has changed the night forever.

Ōshita Eiji

Born in 1944. After graduating from Hiroshima University with a degree in French literature and then working as a reporter for the weekly magazine Shūkan Bunshun, *made his debut as a writer with the 1981 work* Shōsetsu Dentsū *[Dentsū: The Novel]. Has released a number of "fictionalized documentary" works, such as* Ishihara Shintarō no sensen fukoku *[Ishihara Shintarō's Declaration of War] and* Koizumi Jun'ichirō saigo no kake *[Koizumi Jun'ichirō's Last Gamble].*

Kita Yasutoshi

Born in 1960. While working at a securities company, taught at Chuo University and Kyoto University and researched financial theory, including asset securitization. Is also active in chronicling the history of Shirasu's hometown of Mita City in Hyōgo Prefecture. His works include ABS tōshi nyūmon *[Introduction to ABS Investing] and* Rangakusha Kawamoto Kōmin *[Western Scholar Kawamoto Kōmin].*

Shirasu Jirō: Senryō o seotta otoko [Shirasu Jirō: The Man on Whom the Occupation Rested]

By Kita Yasutoshi

Kōdansha, 2005. 195x140 mm. 405 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 4-06-212967-1.

In the words of one-time Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi, Shirasu Jirō was postwar Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru's "insubordinate advisor." Shirasu came to play a role in history in the immediate aftermath of World War II when he was selected at the age of 43 by the new foreign minister, Yoshida, to liaise and negotiate with the occupying forces.

Yoshida tapped Shirasu because of the latter's linguistic and negotiating abilities and his keen diplomatic sense. Yoshida believed that Japan could "win" diplomatically even though it had lost the war, and he needed Shirasu's ability to make this a reality. While many people during the Occupation tried to flatter and grovel before those in power, Shirasu steeled himself with pride and resolve and negotiated with the occupiers. As a result, he earned himself quite a reputation, becoming known as "the Japanese who chewed out Douglas MacArthur" and the first Japanese man to wear jeans. His style and good looks that won the heart of Masako, his bride-to-be, are also brought to life by the author.

The most interesting part of the book is the one dealing with constitutional revision. At a time when the country had been robbed of its sovereignty, Shirasu faced the difficult task of having to construct the principles of the state. This was Japan's war under the Occupation, a war without weapons.

Tensai kantoku Kinoshita Keisuke [The Genius of Director Kinoshita Keisuke]

By Osabe Hideo

Shinchōsha, 2005. 195x145 mm. 517 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 4-10-337408-X.

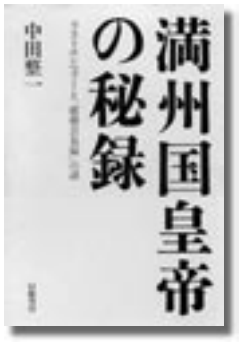
Kinoshita Keisuke ranks alongside Mizoguchi Kenji, Kurosawa Akira, and Ozu Yasujirō as one of the giants of postwar Japanese cinema. Born in 1925, this director, who was a homosexual and lifelong bachelor, used his films to portray ordinary families. Typical scenes include a mother frantically chasing after the train carrying her son away after he has been conscripted into military service; a father who, unable to understand that the patriarch of a family had completely lost his authority in the aftermath of Japan's defeat, experiences one humorous failure after another; and an elementary school teacher trapped in profound despair at the loss of her former students who had been killed in battle.

This book is a critical biography written by a novelist who, as one of the late Kinoshita's contemporaries, brings a strong empathy to his subject. This is not film analysis in the strict sense; rather, the text provides crucial insights into understanding the works of this director who grew up in prewar Japanese society and captured postwar Japanese society in his films. It also introduces a number of important anecdotes concerning the people around him. People familiar with Kinoshita's movies will likely understand the impact that these episodes had on character development in his films. While numerous books on Kurosawa exist, very few have been written about Kinoshita, making this a highly significant work.

Osabe Hideo

Born in 1934. After working as a reporter for the weekly magazine Shūkan Yomiuri, *became a movie critic. Won the Naoki Prize for his works depicting the life of a legendary folk singer from northern Honshū:* Tsugaru yosare bushi *[Farewell, Tsugaru Song] and* Tsugaru jonkara bushi *[Tsugaru Festival Song]. Wrote the story and screenplay for the 1989 movie* Yume no matsuri *[Dream Festival], which he also directed.*

HISTORY



Nakata Seiichi

Born in 1941. Worked for over 30 years as a producer for NHK, during which time he was involved in the production of historical documentaries, with a focus on modern history. At present makes use of his experience as a journalist, teaching modern political history at Taisho University.

Manshūkoku kōtei no hiroku [The Secret Records of the Emperor of Manchukuo]

Nakata Seiichi

Genki Shobō, 2005. 195x140 mm. 335 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 4-901998-14-5.

When Japan created the puppet state of Manchukuo in Manchuria in 1932, Puyi was installed as the leader and became its emperor a few years later. After World War II ended, he wrote a famous autobiography translated into English as *From Emperor to Citizen*. Many parts of this were self-serving, though. He argued that he had been compelled to ascend to the throne by the Japanese military, while in reality, Puyi was intent on becoming emperor.

This book, cast in the words of Puyi himself, covers the early period of Manchukuo's history, stretching from November 1932 to April 1938, the year after Japan invaded China proper. This work fleshes out Puyi's relations with the Kwantung Army and more generally with Japan.

The material on which this book is based comes from secret records of the meetings between Puyi and the Kwantung Army that were kept by Hayashide Kenjirō, an interpreter at the Japanese Embassy in Manchukuo, and later delivered to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hayashide was fired from his position by chief of staff of the Kwantung Army Tōjō Hideki, but he took copies of the secret records back to his home before the originals were destroyed. The author viewed these copies in the back room of Hayashide's old house in Wakayama Prefecture. According to the records, Puyi and his younger brother Pujie had a relationship of trust with Japanese Imperial Army General Yoshioka Yasunao, though they spoke ill of him elsewhere. Through its presentation of historical material relating to Manchukuo, this book should spur a reevaluation of what is known.

Yoshitsune no Ajia [Yoshitsune's Asia]

By Kojima Tsuyoshi

Bensei Shuppan, 2005. 180x130 mm. 189 pp. ¥950. ISBN 4-585-07119-9.

Minamoto no Yoshitsune, a tragic hero who tore through twelfth-century Japan, is still popular today. This book examines the various images of Yoshitsune that have been circulated and the truth of the Genpei War (1180–85) between the Taira and Minamoto clans in the context of East Asia, presenting a standpoint that goes beyond existing conceptions of Yoshitsune and the Taira-Minamoto conflict.

Yoshitsune was born in 1159, the same year his father was defeated in battle and then betrayed and killed by one of his retainers. Afterward, Yoshitsune and his half-brother Yoritomo vanquished the Heike clan, their family's old enemies. Yoshitsune received no rewards for this achievement, though; what is more, he had his land confiscated. He tried to set off on his own, but he and Yoritomo ended up in conflict with each other. Yoshitsune became a fugitive and was eventually hunted down and killed. Those relatives who protected him were also wiped out. This drama involving Yoshitsune, his father, and his half-brother extended over a 30-year period in the late twelfth century, when Japan moved from ancient to medieval times. In addition to being a transitional period in Japan, the latter half of the twelfth century represented a turning point for China and East Asia. The author of this work contends that the glory of the Taira and the rise of the Minamoto clans should be viewed in this context. This is a provocative examination that will overturn conventional understanding of the Genpei War, Bushido, and the legend of Yoshitsune.

Kojima Tsuyoshi

Born in 1962. Associate professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology. Examines the political and social roles that Confucianism has played in world history and the meaning of the modern period in Japan and China. Became the head of a research project designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology for a special grant for regional studies titled "Maritime Exchange in East Asia and the Formation of Traditional Japanese Culture."

POETRY

Tawara Machi

Born in 1962. After working as a high school teacher, became a poet. Her Sarada kinenbi *sold 2.8 million copies and won the Modern Japanese Poets Association Award. Won the Murasaki Shikibu Prize for Literature in 2004 for* Ai suru Genji monogatari *[The Beloved Tale of Genji].*

Pū-san no hana
[Winnie the Pooh's Nose]

By Tawara Machi

Bungei Shunjū, 2005. 190x135 mm. 152 pp. ¥1,238. ISBN 4-16-367540-X.

With her 1987 bestseller *Sarada kinenbi* [trans. *Salad Anniversary*], Tawara Machi touched off a tanka boom all over Japan. She deserves a great deal of credit for transforming the tanka from a weighty poetic form of solemn expression to a more approachable type of poetry by using the plain words of an average woman.

When I put this two
kilogram bag of rice from
Akita into
my shopping cart it reminds
me of how much you weigh now

This book is Tawara's fourth tanka collection, and it was put together when she had an infant and was approaching middle age. The title comes from the name of the bear in the classic children's tale, with the author revealing a scene from her everyday life, as she watches her child grab the nose of a stuffed Winnie the Pooh doll.

The subject matter of Tawara's poems goes beyond maternal love. Her works always contain a plethora of descriptions of food and provide details helpful for understanding the eating experiences of average Japanese consumers, as well as their self-awareness in that regard. This book contains an especially noteworthy series of poems involving the boxed lunches sold at different stations along Japan's railways. Tawara's humor, which is steeped in a critical eye, demands notice.

SOCIETY

Irezumi bokufu
[Tattoo Master]

By Saitō Takushi

Shunpūsha, 2005. 195x135 mm. 292 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 4-86110-053-4.

Saitō Takushi

Born in 1948. Graduated from the Chuo University Faculty of Law and from the Faculty of Letters at Bukkyo University with a degree in history. After serving as curator at the Anjō City Museum of History and head of the city's historical office, now works in the administration department. Co-author of such works as Aichi-ken shi *[History of Aichi Prefecture] and* Anjō-shi shi *[History of Anjō City].*

Japanese tattoos are known internationally for their uniqueness and beauty, but to date there have been few books fully exploring their allure. This book is a compact volume that takes up tattooing from the perspective of folklore, examining it from its origins and history to what it has become today.

Long ago, Japan was part of the East Asian cultural sphere, and tattoos were an acceptable part of the culture. Later, however, tattoos were prohibited, and there was a time when they survived only as a form of punishment for criminals. In Edo in the seventeenth century and afterward, the *ukiyoe* [woodblock print] thrived, providing a great deal of potential material for tattoo designs and giving this practice an artistic foundation.

In Japan today, many talk about tattoos as the exclusive province of "outlaws" like the *yakuza*. The reality, though, is different. As can be seen in the works of writers ranging from Tanizaki Jun'ichirō to the up-and-coming Kanehara Hitomi, the enduring appeal of the tattoo has found its way into an endless number of literary works. The author of this book is not content to restrict himself to a rich study of literature; he frequently visits tattoo parlors and talks with artists and customers, and the book is filled with these enlightening episodes. This is a valuable work for knowing this aspect of Japan's traditional arts.

Miura Atsushi

Born in 1958. After working at Parco Co., a company that operates urban shopping complexes, served as editor-in-chief of the marketing magazine Akurosu *and then worked at the Mitsubishi Research Institute. In 1999 established Culture Studies, a think-tank dedicated to consumption, urban areas, and culture. Has attracted attention for his work in developing the unique field of suburban sociology, which cuts across issues relating to families, consumers, and cities.*

Karyū shakai
[Downwardly Mobile Society]

By Miura Atsushi

Kōbunsha Shinsho, 2005. 170x105 mm. 284 pp. ¥780. ISBN 4-334-03321-0.

The title of this book is a coinage of the writer that reflects the changes that have come to Japan, a place where rapid economic growth once made the vast majority of the population middle class. "Downwardly mobile" goes beyond low income alone and refers to people with low communicative abilities and few desires in life, including a lack of the will to work or study.

The author makes use of a wealth of data to empirically demonstrate, from the standpoint of marketing analysis, that Japan is being transformed from a nation that was once dominated by the middle class into a downwardly mobile society. He makes the case that economists and sociologists who have researched social classes to date have neglected the concept of consumption, so he conducted his own fieldwork in November 2004 and May and June 2005, asking people whether they considered themselves upper, middle, or lower class and analyzing their consumption trends according to their class self-identification.

His results show that the downwardly mobile trend is strong among the second baby-boom generation, whose members are now in their early thirties. As this was the first generation born after Japan had developed a middle-class consciousness, these people grew up not knowing a gap between society's haves and have-nots, which the author says has led to a lack of desire to improve their station. This book will become an important source of data for understanding contemporary Japanese society.

Shōjo kikai kō
[A Consideration of Girls as Mechanisms]

By Abe Casio

Sairyūsha, 2005. 190x130 mm. 292 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-7791-1108-0.

In Western societies, girlhood is seen as nothing more than a transitional period on the way to becoming a mature woman. In Japan, though, girlhood itself is a self-contained phenomenon. From the Takarazuka Revue (a theater in which all the roles are played by women) to manga and literature, girls are taken as thematic material by cultural arts that are produced by and consumed by girls.

This book grasps the actual state of girl-related subculture in Japan in the 2000s and analyzes the meaning that this has in a postmodern society. Up through the 1970s, girls were seen through the eyes of others, and they were consigned to the realm of a mysterious and secret eroticism. Beginning in the 1980s, however, girls were aware of the concept of girlhood, and they were conscious of the fact that they themselves could become a type of cultural product that trades on fetishes.

Artists have hinted at this situation. The 19-year-old writer Kanehara Hitomi won the Akutagawa Prize for her story "Hebi ni piasu" [Snakes and Piercings], which took its title from body modification including splitting the tongue to emulate a sexual organ. Painter Aida Makoto emphasized the affinity that girls have with animals, and anime master Miyazaki Hayao showed the interchangeability of girls and old women in his film *Howl's Moving Castle*. In her music pop singer Shīna Ringo highlights the vulnerability of girls, in whom self-mutilation can lead to prostitution. Abe argues that these examples show that girls are at the heart of the structuring of late-capitalist society in Japan.

Abe Casio

Born in 1958. In 1986 joined Seiyu, a member company of the Seibu-Saison group, where he was involved in production, planning, and publicity for movies. Moved to a movie magazine publisher, Kinema-Junpo Co., in 1990. Presently lectures at Waseda University and Rikkyo University on such topics as subculture. Major works include Kitano Takeshi vs. Bīto Takeshi *(trans.* Beat Takeshi vs. Takeshi Kitano*). Official fan site: http://abecasio.s23.xrea.com*

MANGA

Katsumata Susumu

Born in 1943. Manga artist and illustrator. Majored in nuclear physics at the graduate school of the Tokyo University of Education. Made his debut as a manga artist in 1966 in Garo, *a monthly manga magazine that churned out a number of talented artists. In addition to manga, has produced a number of writings and illustrations, including the picture book* Tōno monogatari *[The Tale of Tōno].*

Akai yuki
[Red Snow]

By Katsumata Susumu

Seirin Kōgeisha, 2005. 210x150 mm. 231 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 4-88379-201-3.

Japanese manga are known internationally for their extreme portrayals of sex and violence. What is not as well-known, however, is that there also exist artistic manga that continue to speak in low tones about a Japanese culture that is disappearing. Along with Tsuge Yoshiharu, Katsumata Susumu is an important creator active in this genre.

The story told in *Akai yuki* is that of a hot-spring town in the mountains of northeastern Japan in the 1950s. A lonely woman beggar, a girl who gets her first period and a boy who does not understand what has happened, a sprite who lives in a giant tree, and a *kappa,* or river imp—the desperate lives of the characters who appear in this work are fleshed out via the author's imaginative flair for folklore. The author is a researcher who studied nuclear physics, but continued to write candidly about the seasonal sides of his hometown, which is slowly dying. One short story describes in detail both the process of brewing Japanese sake in a snowy village and the appearance of a giant mountain goddess who evokes the image of an earth mother. In another short story, the life of an old prostitute—her past murky and unknowable—is told through depictions of the land of the hot-spring area and the warmth of the water. This book takes the lineage of the traditional Japanese first-person novel and brings it into the new genre of manga.

JOURNALISM

Terebi wa sensō o dō egaite kita ka
[How Has TV Portrayed War? The Archives of Images and Memory]

By Sakurai Hitoshi

Iwanami Shoten, 2005. 195x140 mm. 444 pp. ¥4,000. ISBN 4-00-024015-3.

Sakurai Hitoshi

Born in 1946. Joined NHK in 1969. Is presently an executive producer at NHK's Special Programs Center. Mainly produces educational programs and documentaries.

The author of this work is a TV producer who has been involved in the creation of a number of documentaries for Japan's public broadcaster NHK. In this book he genealogically introduces TV documentaries on war created over the past 50 years, analyzing what these programs portray and what they do not. This work takes a comprehensive look at how the documentaries have handled such topics as World War II, the atomic bomb, the people whose lives were torn apart by war, the emperor in the context of the history of the Shōwa era (1926–89), and the issues of war responsibility and compensation. Among these, TV documentaries dealing with World War II tended to overemphasize defeated Japanese soldiers' personal tales of starvation and other privations, as those who returned home alive were too embarrassed to address the true nature of the war. The author thus doubts whether the media have provided an accurate view of history. On other issues as well, the author focuses less on the production values of works and more on how keenly the creators are aware of the issues involved. Sakurai's regrets that TV documentaries have been prevented by the broadcast code from showing the nature of the crimes against humanity that war brings make this a serious look at TV documentaries.

No. 3: Japanese Art

In his *Nihon bungakushi josetsu* [trans. *A History of Japanese Literature*] (Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 1999), the internationally renowned literary critic Katō Shūichi stresses the important role that literature and the visual arts play in Japanese culture. Knowledge of Japanese art is essential for understanding Japanese culture, since the Japanese have long excelled at the creation of physical objects rather than abstract thought or music. Many of the forms created clearly reflect the preferences of the Japanese. At times they seem to compete with each other in terms of the beauty and interest of their appearance, making them playful, enjoyable works to experience.

Plunging into Japan's Art World

Japanese art has a different richness from that of European or Chinese art. ***Nihon bijutsukan*** **[Japanese Art Museum]** (Shōgakukan, 1997), by Aoyagi Masanori et al., is a very useful one-volume overview. This text uses color illustrations and concise explanations to trace the history of architecture, sculpture, paintings, prints, photography, crafts, and calligraphy from the Paleolithic era to the modern age. Although compact, this is a complete treatment of the subject. The topics, each of which span two pages, address almost every conceivable facet of the field.

Nihon bijutsukan differs from previous overviews and collections in its devotion of a large number of pages to the modern age, beginning with the Meiji era (1868–1912). Nearly 100 experts contributed to the writing of this extremely interesting work, making it reflect the latest research trends in each of the different areas. The text offers a wealth of accurate information, but inevitably lacks a single unified viewpoint for grasping the totality of Japanese art history; it may be too dense to read straight through.

With Japanese art history and research as compartmentalized as it is at present, it is a major undertaking for one person to write a history that spans everything from the pottery of the Jōmon period (ca. 10,000–300 B.C.) to the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao. This is just what Tsuji Nobuo has done in ***Nihon bijutsu no rekishi*** **[History of Japanese Art]** (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005). Knowing that it would be used as a textbook, the author greatly limited the amount of space devoted to different topics, so the book may leave something to be desired in certain places. Additionally, he strives to present information objectively, and the descriptive contents tend to adhere to old conceptions. Nevertheless, the material is chosen from a single author's personal perspective, and Tsuji's efforts to present and evaluate art do make this a coherent, easy-to-read overview.

Tsuji lays out his view of Japanese art more clearly in *Nihon bijutsu no mikata* [How to View Japanese Art] (Iwanami Shoten, 1992), which might be a better place to start. He devotes one part of this work to comparing Chinese and Japanese art. Another book that thoroughly discusses this issue with regard to paintings is Toda Teisuke's *Nihon bijutsu no mikata* [How to View Japanese Art] (Kadokawa Shoten, 1999). Even for art specialists, this book offers a number of fresh insights.

Books for Generalists

There are also works intended for people who would like just to get their feet wet when it comes to Japanese art history. One six-volume series that contains somewhat specialized essays, but also conveys in an approachable manner the interesting points in considering Japanese art, is ***Kōza Nihon bijutsu shi*** **[Studies in the History of Japanese Art]** (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005), which I edited. Each volume takes one particular aspect, such as the examination of artworks, traditions and changes in form, and creation and appreciation, and examines art spanning from ancient to modern times. Another helpful work, Sakakibara Satoru's *Nihon kaiga no mikata* [How to View Japanese Paintings] (Kadokawa Shoten, 2004), presents unparalleled specific guidance as it explains the types of problems the author has encountered while examining works of art.

Mizuno Keizaburō's ***Nara, Kyōto no koji meguri*** **[Old Temples in Nara and Kyoto]** (Iwanami Shoten, 1985), meanwhile, provides an introduction on how to view Buddhist statues. This book is more than 20 years old and has gone through several printings. Although its small size makes it appear intended for junior and senior high school students, the level of the content is quite high, providing readers with an understanding of the changes in Buddhist statues between the seventh and thirteenth centuries via representative selections. For an introduction to Buddhist statues that can be readily understood by younger students, Soejima Hiromichi's *Butsuzō ni ai ni ikō* [Going to See Buddhist Statues] (Tokyo Bijutsu, 1997) is recommended.

Other Approaches

I have omitted works that focus on individual areas or specific periods in history in favor of introducing books that deal with Japanese art as a whole. Finally, however, I would like to break with that and introduce a number of worthy books published within the last 10 years that are not overly technical. Kasuya Makoto's *Bukkyō setsuwaga no kōzō to kinō* [The Structure and Functions of Paintings of Buddhist Scriptures] (Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 2003) and Sasaki Kōzō's *Shintō mandara no zuzōgaku* [Iconology of Shinto Mandala] (Perikansha, 1999) provide overviews of religious artistic traditions in Japan. Takahashi Noriko's *Suibokuga ni asobu* [Fun with Ink Painting] (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2005) and Kuroda Hideo's *Nazo toki rakuchū rakugai zu* [Unraveling the Mysteries of Folding-Screen Paintings of Kyoto] (Iwanami Shoten, 1996) explore specific genres with a significant impact on the country's art history.

Other treatises on Japanese art forms include Takeda

Kōichi's *Nihon no nanga* [Japan's *Nanga* Paintings] (Tōshindō, 2000) and Asano Shūgō's *Nishikie o yomu* [Understanding Colored Woodblock Prints] (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2002). Finally, readers can learn about aspects of art in its historical and social contexts in Kinoshita Naoyuki's *Bijutsu to iu misemono* [Art as a Spectacle] (Chikuma Shobō, 1999); Satō Dōshin's *Meiji kokka to kindai bijutsu* [The Meiji State and Modern Art] (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1999); and Kitazawa Noriaki's *Kyōkai no bijutsu shi* [History of Art on the Borders] (Brucke, 2000/2005).

(Satō Yasuhiro, Japanese art history researcher, professor, University of Tokyo)

Nihon bijutsukan [Japanese Art Museum]

By Aoyagi Masanori et al.

Shōgakukan, 1997. 300x240 mm. 1,248 pp. ¥15,750. ISBN 4-09-699701-3.

This book comprises nine chapters spanning the time between the ancient era, from the Paleolithic to the Tumulus period (from the fourth to the eighth centuries), and the modern age. Each chapter is assigned to a different editor, and multiple writers take up individual topics. This is not simply an overview or a collection of pictures displaying changes in art by laying out individual works; there are a number of sections on such topics as the relationship between art and society and the interchange between Japanese and foreign art. This book is a valuable reference that brings together a number of viewpoints on its subject matter.

Nihon bijutsu no rekishi [History of Japanese Art]

By Tsuji Nobuo

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005. 210x150 mm. 480 pp. ¥2,940. ISBN 4-13-082086-9.

The author provides a history of Japanese art focusing on its characteristics of decorativeness, playfulness, and animism. He does not force his view of history on the reader, however, instead depicting a variety of phenomena in an impartial manner. The first section on the Jōmon period and the final section on the modern era are particularly dynamic. The back of the book contains a guide to other literature for people who would like to know more about Japanese art history.

Kōza Nihon bijutsu shi 3: Zuzō no imi [Studies in the History of Japanese Art Vol. 3: Iconology]

By Satō Yasuhiro (ed.)

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005. 210x150 mm. 337 pp. ¥4,200. ISBN 4-13-084083-5.

The third volume of a six-volume series, this book is composed of 10 discussions that examine the meaning of images ranging from the statues of the Four Guardian Kings in the temple of Hōryūji to lacquer boxes from the Heian period (794–1185) and up to the oil paintings of Kishida Ryūsei (1891–1929). A number of issues are discussed in depth, such as the ways that works break with convention while being composed according to certain rules, forms that hold double meanings, and reality seeping into artistic images.

Nara, Kyōto no koji meguri [Old Temples in Nara and Kyoto]

By Mizuno Keizaburō

Iwanami Shoten, 1985. 175x105 mm. 224 pp. ¥780. ISSBN 4-00-500089-4.

From the statues of the Shaka triad in the Hōryūji Golden Hall to the various statues in the Kōfukuji North Hall, this book takes up 15 major Buddhist statues in chronological order. The text of this easy-to-understand book is somewhat sparse, but its content is detailed enough to make this one standard history of Japanese sculpture. While touching on forms and creative methods to explain the beauty of the Buddhist statues, this book also mentions the circumstances in which they were created.

(Continued from page 3)

as it seems, not as simple as our raucous 200-module brains pretend it to be. Murakami's children move, underground, by flashlight, bumping up against the end of one world even while stumbling upon the start of another. Yet strangely and wonderfully—and herein lies the secret of his astounding literary success—Murakami's protagonists respond to the disintegration of old certainties not with terror, but with a widening thrill of discovery. His stories find remarkable comfort in inhabiting a distributed self, a new cosmopolitanism, even as old states vanish. Where can we hope to live, in the age of the universal refugee? No place but everywhere. In homelessness is our freedom to inhabit any place in the world, for all places everywhere arise from the mirroring negotiation of mind.

It comes as no surprise, then, to realize how dominated Murakami's stories are by all the varieties of love: romantic, platonic, familial, companionable, comic, sexual, nostalgic, kinky, archaic, lonely, selfish, selfless—as many kinds of love as there are brain regions. If his work says *yes* to the uncanny oddity of existence, certainly the oddest thing it must affirm is the outlandish possibility—make that the *outrageous necessity*—of connection. If his work could be said to have one overriding theme, one irresistible attraction, it must be this deep and playful knowledge: No one can tell where "I" leaves off and others begin.

The maze of mind will always stand between us and the real. But the inescapable cavern of the brain leaves a single way out: the empathetic leap, the mirroring neuron. We can never know the world, but in our shared bewilderment, we can know each other.

Murakami's fiction claims what the enlightened of every era and country have always claimed: existence is fleeting; certainty is illusory; thought is stranger than you can think; reality is a running compromise; the self is a house on fire, so get out while you can. Even where we have no home to go back to, we might yet inhabit a better place. An improvised place, provisional, tentative, forever inexplicable. One where the movement of our very muscles—not least of all the heart—somehow in fact embody all of the fictional empathetic resonance that our cells perpetually manufacture. A place where seeing and being share the same circuitry. A place infinitely larger than the old small self. Call it the mirroring motor cortex. Call it the core of symbolic connection. Call it that chief of strangenesses, the interlocking dream, the alien reality parallel to, folded through, or *underneath* this world: love. "Love can rebuild the world," Ōshima tells Kafka. "So everything's possible when it comes to love." [p. 209]

Events and Trends (April to June 2006)

Symposium Report

Photo: Shibanaga Office

On March 25 and 26, 2006, the Japan Foundation invited 20 translators and other figures from the publishing industry to take part in "A Wild Haruki Chase: How the World Is Reading and Translating Murakami," a symposium in Tokyo on the works of Murakami Haruki. Some of the participants, who hailed from 16 countries and regions around the globe, also took part in programs held in Sapporo and Kobe on March 29. Thanks to the long-lasting popularity of the author's books, as well as strong press interest in the worldwide "Murakami boom" taking place in recent years, the gatherings attracted a total of more than 1,200 spectators. This gave the general public a chance to enjoy the high level of discussion at the symposium programs.

Through this discussion, participants reached a number of conclusions about the impact of Murakami's literature. First, they defined his writing, with its treatment of human existence in the age of globalization, as being on the cutting edge in its presentation of new worldviews and concepts of human relations. Second, they noted the tremendous diversity in the way readers interpret his works, touching on the depth in his writing that prevents it from being encapsulated easily with the "cosmopolitan literature" label. And third, they agreed that the still-growing Murakami boom is likely to cause fundamental shifts in the concept of Japanese culture as it stands in the flows of globalization.

The keynote address, given at the Tokyo program by the American writer Richard Powers, appeared in Japanese translation in the May issue of the monthly magazine *Shinchō,* and

descriptions of the proceedings appeared in the June issue of the literary journal *Bungakukai*.

Perhaps the most important result of this event was the focus of fresh attention on the efforts of translators to share Japanese literature with the rest of the world, as well as the formation of a new network among them. The Japan Foundation hopes this network will allow them to build further bridges between the people of Japan and other nations.

Information on the symposium can be found at: <http://www.jpf.go.jp/e/intel/topics/murakami/>

Murakami Wins Kafka Prize

The Czech Republic's Franz Kafka Society is giving its 2006 literature award to Murakami Haruki. The Franz Kafka Prize, named for the Prague writer (1883–1924), will be formally presented to the 57-year-old Japanese author in a ceremony at the Old Prague Town Hall on October 28 this year.

The prize, which was founded in 2001 and carries a $10,000 monetary award, will be presented for its sixth time this year. It is given to authors whose works contribute to understanding of the importance of ethnic culture, among other criteria. The winners in 2004 and 2005—Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek and British playwright Harold Pinter—both went on to win the Nobel Prize for literature in the same year.

2006 Hon'ya Prize

The Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize is awarded to the book selected by bookstore clerks from across Japan via Internet voting as the work they would most like to sell to readers. This year's prize went to Lily Franky's autobiographical *Tōkyō Tawā, Okan to Boku to, tokidoki, Oton* [Tokyo Tower: Me and Mom, and Sometimes Dad] (Fusōsha, 2005). Franky, a popular illustrator, wrote this first novel on the theme of memories of his late mother. *Tōkyō Tawā* sold 1.3 million copies; the runaway bestseller is slated to hit the small screen as a serialized drama in July this year.

The Hon'ya Prize aims to bring new vigor to Japan's publishing industry. This year 11 works published between December 2004 and November 2005 were tapped as candidates, and 368 bookstore employees from 286 shops across the country voted to select the winner.

The first two books to win this annual prize enjoyed massive leaps in sales—Ogawa Yōko's *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* [The Equation the Professor Loved] (Shinchōsha, 2003) had an additional print run of 400,000 after winning the award, bringing total sales to a half-million, and Onda Riku's *Yoru no pikunikku* [Nighttime Picnic] (Shinchōsha, 2004) saw sales triple to 300,000. All eyes will be on *Tōkyō Tawā* to see what the Hon'ya Prize does for this book's already impressive figures.

Mishima Film Found

April 2006 saw the publication of a DVD edition of a short film by Mishima Yukio that had gone undiscovered for more than three decades. *Yūkoku* [Patriotism] has been included in the 44-volume complete works of Mishima compiled by publisher Shinchōsha over a five-and-a-half-year period.

The celebrated writer wrote, produced, directed, and acted in the 30-minute black-and-white film, which contains scenes foreshadowing his suicide in 1970. The original print was thought to have been destroyed by Mishima's widow until its discovery in August 2005 at the late author's home.

Did you enjoy a particular feature in this issue of *Japanese Book News*? Do you have any suggestions on how we can improve our publication? Let us know!

What is your general impression of this issue of *JBN*?

☐ Very interesting ☐ Not so interesting
☐ Somewhat interesting ☐ Not interesting at all

Which feature in particular did you enjoy? _____

_____

Were there any features you found uninteresting? _____

_____

What topics would you like *JBN* to cover in future issues? What genres of writing? What authors? _____

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Send your comments by email to <booknews@jpf.go.jp> or by fax to +81-3-3519-3519. Thank you for reading!

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief
Sakurai Tomoyuki, Managing Director
Arts Department
The Japan Foundation
ARK Mori Bldg. 20th Fl.
1-12-32 Akasaka, Minato-ku
Tokyo 107-6020 Japan
Tel: +81-3-5562-3535; Fax: +81-3-5562-3500

Editing, Translation, Design, and Production
Japan Echo Inc.

Printed in Japan on recycled paper

ISSN 0918-9580

A Vigorous New Voice in Japanese Fiction

Akutagawa Prize winner Itoyama Akiko used to drive a bland company car, selling modular kitchen furnishings. Today she chases down anecdotes for her works in a flashy Fiat coupe. In her books this saleswoman-turned-author takes her readers on a smooth ride with her snappy writing, engrossing plot lines, and plenty of wit.

Itoyama debuted in 2004 with *Ittsu onrī tōku* [It's Only Talk] (Bungei Shunjū), a story about a woman and her odd relationships with four male friends: an impotent old classmate, a pervert she uses for occasional sessions of wild sex, her suicidal younger cousin, and a taciturn, depressed gangster. Itoyama's dialogues are modern and at times slangy, but her language realistically portrays the plight of young misfits in Japan.

Like the protagonist of this story, Itoyama was struck by bipolar disorder in 1998. This affliction put an end to her 11 years of corporate life. The sudden reversal of fortune also brought out Itoyama's hidden writing talent, though. After picking up a pen out of boredom in her hospital room, she went on to become what her publisher hails as a "top-notch talent found only once in a decade."

Itoyama's smooth transition to her writing career was perhaps not so surprising, though. She has been a bookworm ever since elementary school, reading hundreds of books a year. This flavors her own writing: among her sources of inspiration are the French writer Michel Butor and the Anglo-Irish novelist Lawrence Durrell, whose works inform her second collection of short stories, *Fukuro kōji no otoko* [Dead-end Man] (Kōdansha, 2004).

This book begins with the title work, a story about a woman who has been madly in love with a man for years. No matter how she begs, the man, Odagiri Takashi, never allows the relationship to become physical. Strangely enough, the two never fully drift apart, although they never come too close to each other. In this novella Itoyama employs the second person "you" to refer to Odagiri, creating a deliberate tension that implicates the reader in the story line. This is followed by a third-person tale, "Odagiri Takashi no iibun" [Odagiri Takashi's Case], written mainly from the male character's perspective. Itoyama says her approach in this collection owes much to Butor's *La Modification* [trans. *Second Thoughts*], a novel famous for the second-person narrative, and Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet,* a set of four novels, each of which describes the same events from a different viewpoint.

For each of her works, most of which have been nominated for noted literary prizes, Itoyama deliberately changes her writing format. She never introduces the same cars, songs, and food—her favorite tools to evoke realistic scenes and characters—in her stories because she hopes to "break down the reader's preconceptions," she says.

While her writing style varies, there is a recurring theme in her books, including her Akutagawa Prize–winning novel *Oki de matsu* (see p. 5): a delicate relationship, intimate but not romantic, that develops between a man and a woman. Her male characters are often indecisive and lacking in positive force. They are encouraged by her female protagonists, who, while tough and a bit bossy, remain spontaneously warmhearted. A fledgling female writer in *Nīto* [*NEET*] (Kadokawa Shoten, 2005), for example, brings a jobless man into her apartment and takes care of him. Here again, the two are more than friends, but less than lovers.

In the hands of a less-gifted writer, this thematic material might easily become boring, as nothing passionate happens between the characters. But in the writing of Itoyama—with her sharp eye for the truly important, her accurate ear for dialogue, and her deep empathy for the subject matter—they sing with a rare fidelity and beauty.

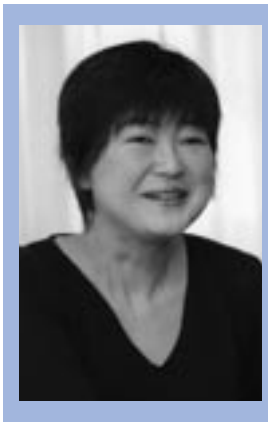
Itoyama admits that the process of crafting her novels can take an inordinate amount of time. To make sure the details work, she drives around the locations she chooses for her stories, plays the music mentioned in them, and tries to inhabit her characters, body and soul.

Once she delivers the last sentence, though, she says she cuts off this connection completely, detaching her feelings from her characters. There has been one notable exception: a misbegotten spirit named Fantasy introduced in her first full-length novel, *Umi no sennin* [Sea Hermit] (Shinchōsha, 2004). This enigmatic creature stays within Itoyama, just as it affects the future of humanity within the book's protagonists. "I sense that my association with Fantasy will last for a long time," states Itoyama.

Toward the end of *Tōbō kuso tawake* [Runaway Piece of Shit] (Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), the main characters encounter a creature like Fantasy after escaping from a psychiatric hospital. This time, the spirit appears as a baldheaded, muscular sea goblin in red bathing trunks. He has a clean-cut face, along with a penchant for walking around uttering gems of knowledge.

Unafraid to experiment with genres, Itoyama is now writing a children's book. Her satirical style comes through even in the phonetic hiragana characters used for children's stories. She is also working on a "fairy tale for adults" featuring elephants, and plans to tackle a story on Palestine as a decade-long project. Now in her third year as a professional writer, Itoyama's talent as a versatile author is firmly established. She has more stories to tell, and her readers certainly want to hear more tales from this promising new voice.

(Kawakatsu Miki, Japan Echo Inc.)



Itoyama Akiko

Born in 1966. Graduated from Waseda University's Faculty of Political Science and Economics. Joined Inax Corp., a maker of household appliances, and worked in sales in the cities of Fukuoka, Nagoya, Takasaki, and Ōmiya, mastering a range of local dialects she often uses in her novels. Has published essays and illustrations in a number of magazines. Posts her diary, essays, and sketches on her website, <http://www.geocities.co.jp/Bookend-Akiko/9882/>, together with book reviews written by her readers.