Japanese Language and Literature
Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese
jll.pitt.edu | Vol. 58 | Number 2 | October 2024 | DOI: 10.5195/jll.2024.325
ISSN 1536-7827 (print) 2326-4586 (online)

Breastfeeding, Folklore, and Nature: Reading Oyamada Hiroko's "Spider Lilies" and Matsuda Aoko's "Enoki"

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Introduction

Breastfeeding seems to be given even more limited attention in contemporary Japanese literature than pregnancy, childbirth, and mothering. It may be viewed as a minor, almost accessory element to those experiences, but there are narratives that challenge such a notion. Depictions of breastfeeding, breasts, and breastmilk certainly stand out in works by Itō Hiromi 伊藤比呂美 (b. 1955), also known as the "childbirth poet," who is considered a pioneer when it comes to letting bodily experiences spill over into poetry. More recently, authors like Kawakami Mieko 川上未映子 (b. 1976) and Murata Sayaka 村田沙耶香 (b. 1979) have also addressed issues of embodiment and reproduction in their fiction.[1] Oyamada Hiroko 小山田浩子 (b. 1983) also tackles the themes of parenting, fertility, and reproduction, focusing on its challenges and pains, while paying special attention to breastfeeding. Oyamada mentioned in a 2014 interview that "on a personal note, I experienced pregnancy and childbirth last year for the first time. Just as I did my best in *Ana* to capture the smell of grass, I hope to someday write successfully about pregnancy and childbirth in a novel."[2] An author's personal experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting can indeed affect their literary imagination of those experiences. Itō, Kawakami, and Matsuda Aoko 松田青子 (b. 1979), for example, have written narratives of pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and mothering out of their own personal experiences, which constitute a realistic, nuanced, and diverse approach that may elicit relatable responses from certain readership.[3] In *Jibun de nazukeru* 自分で名付ける (I give the name, 2021) Matsuda has an entire section dedicated to "breastmilk, ready-made formula, and mothers' bags," in which she shares her own experience of feeding her child—including feelings of ambivalence—and questions dominant discourses around breastfeeding.

Oyamada has said of breastfeeding: "When I had a baby, I felt like my breasts were a public asset. Strangers kept asking me: 'Is the milk coming?'"[4] Therefore, it is likely that both authors' personal experiences have influenced to some extent their literary renderings of society's obsession with breastfeeding.

This article focuses on depictions of breastfeeding that move beyond both idealization and realism. These depictions do not necessarily elicit an empathic, personal connection with the reader, but rather, I argue, engage with Japanese folklore and nature to create the distance necessary to critically explore the question of breastfeeding within a feminist framework. I analyze the fantastic treatment of breastfeeding through its fictional representation in two short stories: "Higanbana" 彼岸花 (2014, translated as "Spider Lilies," 2014) by Oyamada Hiroko,[5] and "Enoki no isshō" エノキの一生 (2019, translated as "Enoki," 2020) by Matsuda Aoko.[6] One of the key features of both Oyamada's and Matsuda's writing is how they bring together fantastic events within realistic settings, blending realism and science fiction, the human and the non-human, the ordinary and the extraordinary. In the selected stories, both authors play with traditional beliefs and popular stories transmitted by word of mouth as well as featuring personification and imagery of plants, flowers, and trees. This literary quality—problematizing "nature" and folklore while blending fantasy and reality—can be read as a subversive strategy, concealing, and enabling potential feminist critique. The blurring of boundaries addresses liminality and ambiguity, while also challenging androcentric storytelling. Hence, I read their depiction of breastfeeding as a fantasy grounded in reality, that allows for unraveling affects of shame and disgust often associated with breastfeeding and moving towards a reproductive justice framework.

Storytelling and Reproductive Justice: Curing Stones

Oyamada's playful acts of creating alternative realities and Matsuda's acts of retelling and revision foreground storytelling in relation to reproductive justice, and can be read through Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "curing stones," which I will explain below. Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger introduce the notion of storytelling as acts "of subversion and resistance," and they argue that "storytelling is a core aspect of reproductive justice practice because attending to someone else's story invites us to shift the lens—that is, to imagine the life of another person and to reexamine our own realities and reimagine our own possibilities."[7] This framework

informs my reading of Oyamada's and Matsuda's works, as they too invite us to explore multiple lenses, standpoints, and voices with regards to the sociocultural obsession with breastfeeding.

Matsuda looks back at old stories and challenges and modifies them to subvert and deconstruct patriarchy while enabling new realities, whereas Oyamada looks at multiple stories within a story, enabling the entire spectrum of possibilities. Both Matsuda and Oyamada share a particular emphasis on the power of storytelling and the effect of stories on human thought, values, and behavior, and highlight the changing nature of stories and truths. These narratives resonate with Anzaldúa's characterization of debilitating, negative images, destructive stereotypes and false ideas about oppressed groups as "old dead metaphors"—and her emphasis upon the need to extract and replace them.[8] Anzaldúa writes that these acts of displacement and substitution will be "the cure": "Because we use metaphors as well as *hierbitas* or curing stones to effect changes, we follow in the tradition of the shaman…. If we're lucky we create, like the shaman, images that induce altered states of consciousness conductive to self-healing."[9]

In both Oyamada's and Matsuda's stories we find the use of new metaphors to effect change in the characters, readers, and society at large. While Oyamada offers the spider lily as a polysemic metaphor which may represent that which needs to be extracted but also that which has the very potential to cure, Matsuda reinvents the storytelling tradition, connecting the past and the present. Both leave us with a sense that both stories and histories are always open, unfinished, and thus subject to transformation.

Pride, Shame, and Family Dramas by Oyamada Hiroko

Oyamada's texts often deal with fertility issues, parenting, and with the role of young women and the family in the post-modern world.[10] Her fiction has been described as "light horror" or representative of "the uncanny," but she has contended that she wants to write reality; in Oyamada's telling, she is not trying to send a specific message or write "positive" or "negative" depictions, but just writing about what goes on in the world.[11] As Motoyuki Shibata points out, referring to the way Oyamada describes her own work, "what is mostly labeled 'fantasy' is certainly 'reality' for those involved (the characters and/or author). And of course, as the characters face and cope with the 'reality' of married life and the workplace, the very illusion and absurdity of that 'reality' is revealed."[12] This seems to be true for the characters in "Higanbana," who

are coping with their family reality, and the absurdity of societal pressures is revealed in the stress and tension exerted on the narrator by the mother-in-law and, in turn, the stress and tension exerted on the mother-in-law by her mother-in-law—a vicious cycle or downwards spiral which is a common theme in other major books like *Ana* 穴 (2014, translated as *The Hole*, 2020).[13] In "Higanbana," Oyamada certainly plays with such pressure; breastfeeding occupies an uneasy, contested territory between the stories told by the narrator, the mother-in-law and the grandmother-in-law, and the unreliability of each narrator and the way each narrative calls the others into question prevents a precise or stable triangulation. Crucial to this depiction is the imagery of flowers, and the interplay between notions of pride and shame.

The very title of the story, "Higanbana," falls into broader representations of "red spider lilies" in Japanese literature and cultural products. The literary symbolism of the *higanbana* (彼岸花, spider lilies) echoes Li Kotomi's 李琴峰 (b. 1989) Akutagawa Prize-winning novel *Higanbana ga saku shima* 彼岸花が咲く島 (An island where red spider lilies bloom, 2021), which depicts life on an island where these flowers play a significant economic and cultural role. Here too they are portrayed as having positive and negative features, as the island's crop that has both healing and addictive properties. These crimson spider lilies are also depicted in the background of popular anime series such as *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no yaiba* 鬼滅の刃 (2019), *Dororo* どろろ (2019), and *Jigokushōjo* 地獄少女 or *Hell Girl* (2005–2009). The multiple names for this flower in Japanese reveal the multifaceted nature of its rich symbolism. For example, in the beginning of the story, the flowers are connected to death, as the narrator's father calls them *shibitobana* (死人花 dead person's flower). It is worth noting that the very word *higan* connotes a liminal state between life and death, as in Buddhism it refers to 'the other shore,' and it is also a week-long festival, celebrated twice a year, in which people offer respect to the dead.[14] In addition, since the flower contains poison in its bulbs, flowers, stems, and leaves, it is sometimes called *dokubana* (毒花 poisonous flower), and due to this, it has been used as a tool for animal control as well. This double-edged meaning, as something both useful and harmful, is also present throughout the story.

The story is divided into four sections: the first two recount the encounters that Yuki, the narrator, has with spider lilies before she gets married; and the third and fourth those encounters which come after marriage, first when her husband is hospitalized because he has had a car

accident, and then when she is back home on her own. The first time Yuki sees spider lilies is on her paternal grandmother's grave, where they grow in clusters. As a child, she watches how her father desperately and furiously pulls them away, as they symbolize death. The second time she sees them is in the garden of her future parents-in-law. This story was later republished within a collection of stories titled *Niwa* 庭 (Garden, 2018), and it is worth noting that the garden is a recurring setting in several of Oyamada's works: an ambiguous, liminal site where the boundary between the outside and inside of the house is blurred, as our bodily fluids—including breastmilk—blur the boundary between the outside and inside of our bodies.

The garden is the setting of the first encounter between Yuki, her parents, and her soon-to-be husband's parents. The theme of generation and family expansion is present in the description of the garden and gardening as a tradition that is passed down to the coming generation. Here, at her future parents-in-law's house, Yuki finds out that her grandmother-in-law feels a strong connection with the spider lilies. She is told a story that presents the spider lily as a medicinal plant good for breasts and eye styes—not the flower, not the stalk, but the root. In contrast, later in the story, Yuki's mother-in-law shares an alternative version to the story told by the grandmother-in-law, and Yuki learns that she has removed the spider lilies from the garden. Yuki, our slightly unreliable narrator, is then caught in the middle, and it is only through her interactions with her mother-in-law, grandmother-in-law, and her husband that readers can appreciate the ways shame and pride are entangled with images of breastmilk and breastfeeding.

The grandmother-in-law tells Yuki about the medicinal powers of the root of the spider lily: "You grate it and set it on oil paper as a poultice for breasts." [15] The narrator asks, with a hint of incredulity: "Breasts? (*ochichi*)," only to hear back:

> Yes, breasts. When they get hard and swollen, the poultice works wonders. I always had plenty of milk. Raised six children, too. One died young, but I had so many, one right after the other without much time between them, seemed like I was nursing for years…. Why, I had so much milk, people used to stop by and ask if I had extra to share. Back then we didn't have nutritious baby formula like you can get now. I used to marvel at how much milk I produced, whether it was for my own baby or someone else's.[16]

In the Japanese, Yuki asks in katakana, "*ochichi*?*"* (オチチ？), and the grandmother-in-law answers in hiragana and kanji: "*sō ochichi, oppai"* (そうお乳。おっぱい "Yes, breasts"). This subtle, perhaps untranslatable difference can be interpreted as conveying a certain distance between Yuki and her breasts, which is accomplished by writing in katakana, a script usually reserved for foreign words. This is in contrast with the grandmother, who displays a closer relationship to her body and, in fact, massages her breasts when she speaks about them. In this passage, the grandmother is certainly proud of her bodily ability to produce "plenty of milk." Yet her story moves away from idealizing breastfeeding as it incorporates the loss of a child, the pain of swollen and hard breasts, and how she helped other babies that were not her own. Thus, breastmilk is not depicted in a fixed, normative way—as a substance that simply passes from birth mother to biological child, discreetly, and for a limited amount of time. Also, baby formula is referred to in a non-judgmental fashion, even as a technological achievement for future generations. The narrator, Yuki, thinks fondly of her grandmother-in-law but has trouble imagining how nursing for so long and in such quantities would feel since she has not been pregnant and has never breastfed. However, throughout the story there is an underlying expectation that she too, will get pregnant and become a mother, as shown in the next dialogue with her grandmother-in-law:

> I hope you'll be the same way, Yuki. It's *terrible* when the milk won't come. The baby cries in frustration, and you just feel so *ashamed* of yourself if you have nothing to give. But when there's too much milk, now and again the breasts swell up and turn hard, like there's stone inside. When that used to happen to me, my husband would go out and dig up a spider lily—the root is like taro—and he'd grate up the root real fine and make me a poultice. But, you know, she added, spider lilies are poisonous, too.[17]

Here, the grandmother addresses one of the main problems associated with the promotion of breastfeeding; that is, the "shame" attributed to not producing enough milk. Campaigns that promote breastfeeding are said to "produce shame and compromise women's agency."[18] The expression used in Japanese is *fugainai* (腑甲斐ない), which conveys "disappointment" and "humiliation," and it is often used to express that inner tension of being "ashamed of oneself" for being, in this case, somehow "inadequate." In addition, the grandmother also addresses, realistically, one common problem with breastfeeding: engorgement, which can also lead to

uncomfortable situations that may be embarrassing. And it is for this problem that the spider lily is presented as a solution. From the viewpoint of the grandmother, there is a contrast between herself and her daughter-in-law, Hiroyuki's mother:

> Sure enough, first she had trouble conceiving a child, then she had trouble with the delivery, and then barely a drop of milk . . . She used formula from the very first. I said to myself, "Well, now isn't that handy, but. Then I remembered the old days and it just tore me up. I breastfed other people's children, didn't I? I'd have gladly fed my own grandson, but by then I had nothing left to give him. Of course not—I was an old lady by then".[19]

The grandmother laughs while saying this, minimizing the expressed tension between her and the daughter-in-law. However, the passage still dramatizes that tension and addresses the aging of the female body in relation to its (re)productivity. Here, breastfeeding is seen as a reproductive activity and reproductive labor. In the grandmother's story, echoes are heard of the difficult realities experienced by wet nurses of the past. Her story incites the question of having alternatives or not, problematizing the rhetoric of "choice." Furthermore, there is a sort of longing for something that is beyond her control: a wish to breastfeed one's grandchild, which challenges normative views on breastfeeding. According to Erin N. Taylor and Lora Ebert Wallace, both bottle-feeding and breastfeeding mothers experience guilt or shame, one for "failing at breastfeeding and opting for formula" and the other as they engage in public "shameful performances."[20] Certain bodies seem more apt for pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding than others, but here such capabilities are not necessarily conflated with the act of mothering. Also, there is a recognition of the convenience and freedom that come with formula feeding. Later, just like the spider lilies themselves, the grandmother affirms that the mother's milk itself also has dual functions and meanings, as both medicine and poison, which leads to the conception of breastmilk in the story as a potential site of both pride and shame.

According to Yuki's grandmother-in-law, breastmilk makes good eye drops. It can heal only when freshly squeezed and delivered directly into the eye; if it drops from the finger, it stings, like poison. Thus, just like spider lilies themselves, breastmilk can be both healing and poisonous. This is a lesson that the grandmother has learned from her own mother-in-law. So, Oyamada explicitly shows that beliefs and customs regarding breastmilk are passed through generations via word of mouth. During an interview, when asked about the medicinal power of breastmilk, Oyamada

responded:

> I seem to remember hearing this story from someone, probably my own grandmother, but when I mentioned it in an interview some other day, a person said that there was a story like this in a novel by Tsuboi Sakae, and since I used to read her works, it probably wasn't my grandmother, but I must've read it in one of her books.[21]

There is indeed a novel that suggests that breastmilk can work as an eye medicine, *Haha no nai ko to ko no nai haha to* 母のない子と子のない母と (Motherless child and childless mother, 1951), for which Tsuboi Sakae 壺井 栄 (1899–1967) earned The Ministry of Education Award in Literature, and in 1952 a film version was also produced.[22] Yet, somehow, Oyamada remembers it as a story traveling by word of mouth, indicative of a larger feature of the story concerning breastfeeding and breastmilk: the coexistence of multiple truths based on experience and perspective, and the polysemic nature of breastfeeding and breastmilk, captured in the very symbolism of the spider lilies.

When the grandmother shares the story of how she squeezed some breastmilk directly into her father-in-law's and husband's eyes, she points out that even though it was her own mother-in-law who taught her this, as she delivered the milk, she glared at her. In the context of breastfeeding, it is often the act of glaring and the policing gaze of those around the lactating or bottle-feeding mother, that are perceived as signs of disapproval, judgment, and even coercion. In response, this is the narrator's inner monologue: "I imagined the scene with *horror*. Even if my mother-in-law begged me, I would never, ever take out my breast, stick it in my father-in-law's face."[23] This reaction draws attention to the unsettling quality of the tale, as it seems to expose the contradictory or conflicting view of breastfeeding breasts: the sexualized female breasts and the desexualized breastfeeding breasts, both subjected to judgment and shaming practices.

The latter part of the story, when Yuki is already married, challenges the story told by the grandmother, the truth of which we—as readers—had taken for granted. She visits her husband in the hospital and when she notices that he has got a stye in his eye, a significant scene takes place in which Yuki enters almost a dreamlike state that disassociates the breastmilk-producing breast from the maternal, breastfeeding breast:

> My pulse was racing. I touched my chest, then quickly withdrew my hand. My breasts were swollen, painful and hot. It was a pain I'd never felt

> before, as if under my clothes a force were pressing on my breasts as if something inside them were swelling. It wasn't air, it was more like having concrete poured into me. My body felt moist, heated. My breasts felt transformed, *no longer belonging to me*. Cautiously I brought a hand to my chest. A sharp pain ran through me. There was something straining against my breasts. Milk, mother's milk, was about to come gushing out of me. Although I'd never experienced such a thing, I could imagine it all too vividly.[24]

Besides showing the possibility of producing breastmilk without the purpose of feeding, it is worth highlighting two aspects of this passage. First, the transformation of the body or a body part into something that does not belong to oneself, which challenges notions of cohesive subjectivity. Second, the emphasis on pain, which is key to its depiction as an embodied experience, also speaks of Oyamada's awareness of the need to highlight the link between pain and breastfeeding and open further conversations. In a sort of trance, Yuki sees her mother-in-law, with a look of hatred on her face, followed by the face of the woman who was in the hospital upon hearing that her husband has had an accident; and then this vision turns out to be the face of a middle-aged nurse. Therefore, this scene also plays with the multiple gazes that police the female body and emphasizes the loop between generational mothers-in-law. Towards the end, her mother-in-law contradicts her own mother-in-law:

> Yuki dear, when Hiroyuki was a baby, I had so much milk! If I'd only known it was a cure for a stye, I'd have used it…. So much milk that after I fed Hiroyuki, I had to squeeze out the rest or my breasts would ache. Or they'd swell, and they'd hurt, and I'd get a fever. Hiroyuki couldn't keep formula down; he could only take the breast. It was an ordeal. I used to be in an agony until the swelling went away.[25]

Once again, an alternative vision is offered which problematizes the question of choice, this time through the mother-in-law, Yoko: even when formula milk is available there is no guarantee that it is going to work out. Pain, agony, and hardship are also emphasized in this fragment. Yuki, our narrator, ends up being utterly confused: How is it possible that Yoko did not know the folktale about the spider lilies and, in the end, removed the whole garden? Yuki lies to her mother-in-law and says she has heard this tale from her own grandmother, adding her own strand to the web of family secrets and dramas. Her mother-in-law tells her: "Now some day when you have a child, there'll be space for a pool or whatever you want."[26] Yuki is

somehow freed from the drama around the spider lilies, yet motherhood is still, if not a mandate, an inescapable expectation.

It is significant that the red spider lilies are gone, and Yuki is left in the hospital with a white spider lily, a symbol of "purity," or a blank canvas, free to start anew. Oyamada's stories are often open-ended, leaving the reader as confused as the narrator. This confusion can only be relieved by acknowledging the ambivalence, and the multiplicity of experiences, stories, and truths. Nature and folktales are not pillars of a given, objective, fixed reality, but rather create a moving, fluid one. Other works display Oyamada's use of nature and the non-human, and the way it creates a distance that allows for unraveling myths of motherhood. For example, "Itachi naku" いたちなく (2014, translated as "The Last of the Weasels," 2022) contains a striking scene depicting the killing of a mother weasel, incorporating a non-human figure to create such critical distance.[27]

Finally, let me introduce the short story "Yuki no yado" ゆきの宿 (2014, translated as "Yukiko," 2022), in which the unnamed narrator and his wife spend the night with their friends Saiki and Yoko, new parents to baby Yukiko.[28] The interaction between two women characters—Yoko and the narrator's wife—assists in unpacking Oyamada's larger literary portrayal of breastfeeding. Not only is there an intertextual link between "Yuki no yado" and "Higanbana" due to the similarity of names (Yukiko and Yoko), but there is also a thematic link in terms of its treatment of breastfeeding myths and tales. Yoko, the new mother, says that her daughter is gaining weight, and the narrator's wife specifically asks "How's your milk?" and hears back: "Actually, it's been really good for a while now. The midwife had nothing but nice things to say. She said she was impressed. We don't need formula anymore."[29] Here too there is a tension between breast milk and formula, and there are several references to the mother feeding the baby and an underlying worry related to the feeding and the external gaze. For example, the narrator's wife says: "I know she said the baby's gaining weight, but she's so small. I wonder if the baby's really okay at home like this, if the milk she's getting is enough."[30] Worrying about having enough milk seems to be a pressing, recurring issue that dictates what breastfeeding mothers should or should not eat, connected to policing women's bodies and behavior. In "Yukiko," there is also an older woman who brings *inarizushi* because it is supposed to help with the production of milk. These are special ones made with *okara*, and it is the soybeans that are supposed to be "good for mother's milk."[31] This attention to a simple dish, a meal, situates breastfeeding in

the quotidian, and perhaps elicits a more relatable response than "Spider Lilies" with its overall eeriness and multiple truths.

A Feminist Critique of Androcentrism by Matsuda Aoko

Whereas Oyamada's writing alludes to gender issues without discussing them at length, Matsuda's works are characterized by an explicit treatment of gender issues from a feminist perspective. Matsuda's debut book *Sutakkingu kanō* スタッキング可能 (Stackable, 2013), nominated for the Mishima Yukio Prize and the Noma Literary New Face Prize, deals with personal struggles in connection to societal pressures and expectations.[32] Her novel *Jizoku kanō na tamashii no riyō* 持続可能な魂の利用 (The sustainable use of our souls, 2020) articulates the anxieties faced in a patriarchal society in a realistic way within the science-fiction premise of the disappearance of all middle-aged men from the country.[33] *Obachan tachi no iru tokoro* おばちゃんたちのいるところ (2016, translated as *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 2020) is a collection of short stories populated by ghosts, described as feminist retellings of traditional Japanese folktales, and its English translation by Polly Barton received the 2021 World Fantasy Award and the Firecracker Award.[34] In this collection, Matsuda rewrites stories in a way that makes sense to her; hence, the whole collection can be read as a critique of the folktale and storytelling canon, as she creates a world where women can be free from patriarchy.

This collection can also be read from a "feminist revisionist mythmaking" lens. Alicia Ostriker proposes the term "revisionist mythmaking," which she defines as: "Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible."[35] Matsuda uses stories and figures previously accepted and defined by Japanese culture, and as such, the tales she engages with are mythic. In addition, all the stories are concerned with the possibility for transformation on personal and societal levels, which supports framing Matsuda's work in terms of feminist revisionist storytelling.[36]

"Enoki no isshō" is one of the few stories without characters that recur among other stories, so it can be read as a stand-alone short story. Nevertheless, I suggest it can be interpreted as a feminist commentary upon and critique of androcentrism and the heterosexist and patriarchal

norms of motherhood, themes that permeate the whole collection. This article mainly analyzes "Enoki no isshō" because its problematization of breastfeeding stands out, followed by a brief introduction to "Kuzuha no isshō" クズハの一生 (2016, translated as "A Fox's Life," 2020) and "Kanojo ga dekiru koto" 彼女ができること (2016, translated as "What She Can Do," 2020), as both stories address gender societal pressures and expectations related to, but not limited to, parenting and caregiving.[37] These three stories display some of the strategies Matsuda uses to carry out their feminist critique of androcentrism: humor, sarcasm, and intertextuality.

"Enoki no isshō" is a feminist dramatization of the rakugo *Chibusa no enoki* 乳房の榎 (The breast tree, or the wet nurse tree). In the rakugo that inspired this story, Shigenobu, his wife Okise, and their son Mayotarō are victims of the intrusion of Sasashige, who eventually persuades the house servant to kill Shigenobu, and becomes Okise's second husband.[38] Sasashige then asks the servant to kill Mayotarō, but when the servant is about to throw the baby into a river, Shigenobu's ghost saves him, so the servant decides to raise the child in secret on his own. The servant and the child survive by living next to an *enoki* (榎 Chinese hackberry) that was said to produce curative milk in Akasaka-mura. Okise has another child with Sasashige, but the baby dies. Okise develops growths on her breasts, which the *enoki* resin cures temporarily, but Shigenobu's ghost comes to her in dreams, causing her much suffering. Sasashige attempts to drain the pus in Okise's breasts with his sword but ends up killing her. Sasashige goes mad and is finally killed by Mayotarō and Shigenobu's ghost.

Matsuda's story is told from the perspective of Enoki, a hackberry tree that narrates its own life journey from popularity to oblivion. The tree has two burrs in its trunk and suddenly became popular with people who gathered around it. These people believe that the resin oozing from its burrs has supernatural healing powers and nurturing properties. Enoki is certainly a non-human figure with maternal aspects or roles, as featured in myths and other sacred narratives, but this role is rejected by Enoki and changes over time. Unlike Oyamada's "Higanbana," where the flowers are not personified and remain voiceless, here the tree is not only personified but is the dominant voice.[39]

Enoki's resin is not only viewed as milk but also as a special fluid that could help with lactation problems by stimulating milk production when rubbed on breasts. Matsuda writes: "When it first occurred to Enoki that people saw her burrs as breasts and her resin as milk, she shuddered. Even

now, when she recollects that day, there is only one word to describe her feeling, and that word is *disgust*."[40] The repulsion felt by Enoki can be read as a twofold moment. First, it echoes Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject," or that which blurs the boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, causing a strong negative response of disgust and unease towards reminders of the perceived loss of distinction between subject and object, such as bodily fluids.[41] The link between the abject and breastfeeding, and leaky maternal bodies at large, has resulted in a long cultural practice of repudiating bodily functions and processes, known as "somatophobia" (fear of the body or 'flesh-loathing'), and representations of the reproductive female body as horrifying and abject.[42] Breastfeeding in particular, as Williamson notes, "has a long history of provoking cultural anxiety and discomfort," which Enoki seems to embody.[43]

Second, within the narrative, this *disgust* (*kimochi warui* 気持ち悪い and *kimochi no warusa* 気持ちの悪さ) is further articulated as a rejection of androcentric myths and stories, and the human compulsion to impose meaning on nature. The following passage clearly illustrates this point:

> People loved to see things in other things. Enoki knew that very well…. After years mulling over her inexplicable sense of *disgust*, Enoki concluded that what she truly objected to was the way in which humans used their own yardsticks to affix meanings onto things that had nothing to do with them. They did this to objects around them, and even to elements of nature.[44]

Here, Matsuda moves from depicting bodily abjection towards articulating ecofeminist critiques of the treatment of nature as a "resource" for human needs.[45] In this case, the resource is configured specifically as a natural breastmilk that shocks its so-called producer:

> And then to cap it all, they turned to Enoki, who wasn't even a mother, and their mouths formed the words "breast milk." Enoki hated the very sound of it: *breast milk*. There was a precariousness to it. It could ruin you if you weren't careful. She couldn't explain it, but Enoki knew that instinctively. She hated that she'd been dragged into all of this—that *parts* of her had been dragged into all of this.[46]

This passage is powerful because it uses strong affective language such as "hated" (*imawashiku kanjita* 忌まわしく感じた) making its social commentary quite effective. Again, it can be read as a twofold moment: first, we may read the disgust and hatred as directed towards breastmilk

itself, and perhaps the pressure on it and devotion to it, but on a second look, we read the disgust and hatred as directed towards the way humans are using Enoki's body. From an ecofeminist viewpoint, Enoki's sense of disgust may be interpreted as a way to condemn the division of "personhood into various bodily parts," in this case breasts, "which can be commodified by 'choice' and manipulated in concert with Western culture's control of 'nature' as a path to human liberation."[47] Here, Greta Gaard is mainly referring to the shortcomings of the framework of reproductive choice and shifting the rhetoric from "choice" to reproductive and environmental justice. Gaard's arguments work in this context too, as Matsuda also problematizes discourses of "choice" and is deeply concerned with justice. This concern can be seen in the compassion felt by Enoki for the women who came to her for help:

> And yet, the sadness those women felt – that was different. That was real. Enoki can still vividly recall the faces of all the women who came to visit her. She feels awful for women who lived back then, before formula milk existed. Of course, nowadays, with the humans' deep-rooted devotion to the religion of breastfeeding, women still suffer a lot, but the invention of formula must have improved the situation at least a little. There is a big difference between having something to serve as a replacement when the chips are down, and having no such thing. Having other options is crucial. Women suffered in the past because they had none.[48]

Here, Enoki tells us about the pain caused by not being able to breastfeed as a historical and contemporary reality for many women. Breastmilk and formula are not presented as a hierarchy or a dichotomy. Even when presented as options and alternatives, breastfeeding or bottle feeding is not reduced to a personal, individual choice. Matsuda introduces the tale of Okise as a single example of the tragedies that could have been prevented by having more options:

> Okise, on the other hand, subsequently gave birth to the child of her new husband, but because she couldn't produce milk, the baby died. Not long after, a mysterious growth appeared on Okise's breasts, and she went crazy and died too. Why is it that a woman who was repeatedly raped, then had her child stolen away from her, had to meet with such a cruel fate? Why did a series of such awful things have to befall her breasts? Well, gods? Don't you think that's overkill?[49]

Okise's tale is retold within the story, a clear example of intertextuality within the text, and through this retelling Matsuda points out the injustice experienced by Okise. Within an androcentric and patriarchal world,

Okise's breasts are sites of failure and pain, her body is a site of violence, and her death also touches upon a common trope in myths, folklore, and literature: that of the "absent mother," like Izanami, the goddess that is sealed forever in the Yomi after dying from giving birth to the fire god, or Queen Mahamaya, mother of the Buddha, who dies seven days after childbirth.

A key point in the retelling of Okise's tale is Enoki's realization that if Okise had access to formula milk, she would have been saved, like many of those who went to Enoki for help and were saved, despite Enoki's worries that the resin may have an adverse effect on a human body or conviction that the baby that drank the "milk" coming out of her "breasts" and grew well must have been drinking something else:

> Enoki has never for a second believed that she has the special powers that everyone thinks she has, but just hypothetically speaking, if she had, then she would have served a function not dissimilar to that of formula milk in the days before it existed. With this in mind, she feels she can finally accept the crazy commotion that had descended on her back then.[50]

Therefore, within the story, Enoki can be read as a substitute for formula milk. In the end, Enoki has become a legend of the past; time has passed, reality has changed, and Enoki's role has changed too: "Enoki isn't lonely. If anything, she is relieved. The pressure on her has finally lifted. Like it has always been, really, her resin is now just resin, and her burrs are just burrs. At last, Enoki can be just a tree."[51]

There are multiple ways to read Enoki: as a metonym for formula milk, as an advancement that helped many, but does not need to become the only option; as a metonym for breastmilk; as an embodiment of liberation from pressure to produce breastmilk or feed infants a certain way. I tie the ending to Peter Bichsel's story "Ein Tisch ist ein Tisch" (1995; translated as "A Table Is a Table," 2017), the story about a man obsessed with creating a new language that initially brings him joy, but gradually becomes so immersed in his newly created world that he stops being able to communicate with others.[52] The ending and the story elicit a discussion of the relationship between language and reality and allows for a deconstructive view of the ways language and cultural assumptions intervene in the creation of meaning. Therefore, Enoki's embodiment of multiple meanings via dislocation and substitution of static and fixed notions of breastmilk and breastfeeding can be read as cathartic and liberating.

Most of the stories in Matsuda's collection are interlinked by

characters working at the same mysterious company, mostly staffed by women with some sort of supernatural powers. The company is a space that blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead. The protagonists in "Kuzuha no isshō" and "Kanojo ga dekiru koto" have positions at this company, and the stories herein presented are also multilayered as they are inspired by old tales of the Japanese *yōkai* world.

"Kuzuha no isshō" features Kuzuha, a woman-fox, and already from the first page, we find out that her parents and sister resembled another shape-shifting animal, the *tanuki* (or raccoon dog). Animal figures like the fox and the raccoon dog are rife in Japanese folklore. One of their features is their ability to impersonate human beings and trick humans. As Melek Ortabasi points out, animals depicted as "other" often serve as canvases on which can be projected questions about human identity: "This externalized exploration of interiority is particularly prominent in fox and raccoon dog tales, because so much of their appeal resides in the exposure of these transgressive others who can—and *do*—challenge the boundaries of the human self."[53] The blurring of boundaries appears to be a recurring strategy that challenges binary thinking, thus questioning patriarchal heteronormativity. Matsuda's story focuses on the fox-shifting woman and her exploration of interiority and identity. Kuzuha encounters freedom after following and then veering off the "easiest path" for a woman; that is, becoming a housewife and a mother, renouncing her career, and constantly diminishing her abilities. Matsuda raises her voice against gender inequality in school and the workplace by pointing out how, no matter how hard a woman tries, the road ahead would always be blocked.

In addition to incorporating supernatural elements within the story, Matsuda engages directly with reality by referencing the Glico-Morinaga scandal, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Law coming into force.[54] The narrator even describes this law as being "a bunch of empty promises."[55] Kuzuha's persistent self-talk—*"I'm a girl. I'm just a girl, after all"*—shows how gendering one's life justifies or determines one's choices.[56] In addition, the narrative is filled with insights exposing gender inequality. For example, Kuzuha says: "How unfair society was! Male employees had to pretend to be capable of doing things they couldn't do, while female employees had to pretend to be incapable of doing things they actually could do. Over the years, how many women had seen their talents magically disappearing in that way?"[57] This passage deals with the specific hardships women face in a patriarchal, male-centered, capitalist society, in which it is easier for a woman to downplay her strengths. This

becomes a survival strategy: the shortcut, a woman's only option.

Marriage and parenting are depicted as part of Kuzuha's shortcut in life. There is no depth nor complexity in Matsuda's depiction of Kuzuha as a wife and/or mother: she excels at it, as she finds "childrearing, the housework and other matters of home economics a piece of cake."[58] There is a sense of detachment in her relationships with her husband and son, exemplified by her reaction when they would give her red carnations for Mother's Day, and she would think to herself: "*huh*, *interesting*." It is these kinds of situations that articulate the experience of "pretending to be a regular woman."[59] The act of imitation—pretending to be ordinary—is Kuzuha's life path, the shortcut, until one day she looks at her aging face in the mirror and it occurs to her "that maybe she really was a fox—a fox who had totally forgotten that she had transformed into a person at some point along the line."[60] This is brushed off as a funny thought, but then a voice from within urges her to "escape" and "get out." Other stories in the collection use a similar motif: an inner voice that urges you to abandon the tamed self, to embrace the wilderness within.

"Kanojo ga dekiru koto" offers a unique take on the folk legend of *Kosodate yūrei* 子育て幽霊 (The child-raising ghost, retold in English as "The Ghost Who Bought Candy").[61] This legend belongs to a larger folk tradition that confines pregnancy and childbirth to the realm of folktales and ghost stories, such as the *ubume* or the ghost of a woman who dies in childbirth.[62] *Kosodate yūrei* belongs to one of those tales in which a child is discovered surviving underground in their mother's grave. Hank Glassman explains that this legend is related to the practice of "postmortem fetal extraction" founded on the belief that a pregnant woman buried with a fetus in her womb cannot attain salvation.[63]

Matsuda mentions that even though female ghosts seem miserable and sad, they are also incredibly powerful. In fact, "the child-rearing ghost" was one of Matsuda's favorite ghost stories growing up, perhaps because she liked candy, or she found humor in the image of a ghost buying candies. Yet nowadays, when looking back at this tale, it is a mother's desire and desperation to save a baby that stands out.[64] This drive for survival may resonate with mothers today. Drawing empathic bonds between the past and the present, Matsuda reinvents this powerful ghost to give mothers in need the extra hand they may need.

The wink to the legend is rather straightforward. After the mother goes to work, the ghost watches over the child, tidies up a little, and interacts with the child by giving her a sweet: "Sweets are her secret weapon. With

sweets, she always manages to win children over. For a long time, she used to pay daily visits to the sweet shop, but at some point, she realized it was an ineffective way of going about things, and instead started to carry a stockpile around with her."[65] This updated, efficient ghost is rather humorous, but the key part of the story is how the ghost finds purpose in making bonds of friendship: "Soon, they are like old friends. After all, in the past, the woman had gone by the name of The Child-Rearing Ghost. That wasn't a title they gave you for nothing."[66] In Matsuda's world the child-rearing ghost has a second chance not only to survive but to live in a purposeful way: "As soon as she began babysitting, she felt absolutely certain that this was what she'd been born (and had died) to do."[67] Her job goes beyond babysitting; eventually she will make herself seen by the mother and she will befriend the mother too. The story depicts affectionate touch between the ghost and the child, and the mother and the child, building bonds of care between them.

Through the ghosts' insights, Matsuda makes a commentary on societal judgments and urges people to dig beneath the surface. Here, friendship, care, and solidarity—or perhaps sisterhood— are presented as an alternative to the nuclear family. Thus, Sara Ahmed's definition of feminism, in terms of "how we pick each other up," seems fitting, and the reading deepens when applying the idea of feminist theory as "a lifeline: it can be a fragile rope, worn and tattered from the harshness of weather, but it is enough, just enough, to bear your weight, to pull you out, to help you survive a shattering experience."[68] With this in mind, Matsuda's critique of androcentrism takes on strong feminist overtones.

Iwakawa Arisa's reading of Matsuda's *Jizoku kanō na tamashii no riyō* within the framework of feminist literary criticism, echoing Shoshana Felman (1993), emphasizes its revolutionary potential in its creation of a "bond of reading" that allows for sharing stories, for calling and responding to each other.[69] For her part, Felman theorizes the feminine existence as a traumatized existence and argues that autobiographical writing is thus a testimony to survival; as such, "its struggle is to testify at once to life and to the death—the dying—the survival has entailed."[70] In Matsuda's ghostly women, these tales also address the liminality between life and death, and they remain split, open, and unfinished.

Conclusion: Beyond Folklore and Nature

The engagement with Japanese folklore, nature, and the non-human in the selected stories by Oyamada and Matsuda serve to open up spaces within

which breastfeeding—and its attendant questions of shame, disgust, and reproductive justice—can be rethought critically and from a feminist perspective. Their open-ended stories insist on representing breastfeeding, and the maternal experience at large, as potentially ambivalent. In both "Higanbana" and "Enoki no isshō," there seem to be multiple layers of meaning, there seems to be something behind, hidden, beneath the surface of what the reader first encounters. In these stories, the boundaries between humans and nature are blurred via imagery and personification. They both use non-human natural figures, such as flowers, trees, and/or animals, to solve the problems and dramatize the tales and legends of breastfeeding and mothering. In these stories, breastfeeding is not based upon essentialized notions of femininity, and the focus is not on the breastfeeding child. Yet, despite bringing the supernatural into play, these stories cannot be read as escapist fantasies as they critically grapple with the problem of breastfeeding and family relations.

Oyamada's and Matsuda's use of humor, sarcasm, intertextuality, their attention to folktales and word of mouth, and creative use of natural imagery build a critical distance to explore the question of breastfeeding through a feminist lens. Both authors then problematize folklore, "nature" and that which is rendered "natural," while bringing together fantasy and reality, moving away from reproducing narratives of shame and disgust, and instead, open the possibility of narrativizing breastfeeding within a reproductive justice framework.

NOTES

[1] See Juliana Buriticá Alzate, "Shocking Readers and Shaking Taboos: Maternal Body and Affects in Itō Hiromi's work," in *Maternal Regret: Resistances, Renunciations, and Reflections*, ed. Andrea O' Reilly (Coe Hill, Ontario, Canada: Demeter Press, 2022), 75–92; Juliana Buriticá Alzate and Hitomi Yoshio, "Reimagining the Past, Present, and the Future of Reproductive Bodies in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction: Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* and Sayaka Murata's *Vanishing World*" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Reproductive Justice and Literature*, eds. Beth Widmaier Capo and Laura Lazzari (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022), 465–486.

[2] Oyamada Hiroko, interviewed by Yamada Yosuke for *Bestseller's interview,* 56 (2014), *Sinkan JP*, 2014. https://www.sinkan.jp/special/interview/bestsellers56.html. Accessed April 2, 2024.

[3] See Itō Hiromi, *Ii oppai, warui oppai* (Tokyo: Kanzenban, 2010); Kawakami

Mieko, *Kimi wa akachan* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2017); Matsuda Aoko, *Jibun de nazukeru* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2021).

[4] "Readers in the West are Embracing Japan's Bold Women Authors." *The Economist* (London), 2023. https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/04/27/readers-in-the-west-are-embracing-japans-bold-women-authors. Accessed April 15, 2024.

[5] Oyamada Hiroko, "Higanbana," in *GRANTA JAPAN with Waseda Bungaku 01* (Tokyo: Waseda bungakkai, 2014), 117–35; Oyamada Hiroko, "Spider Lilies," trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter, *Granta 127: Japan*, ed. Yuka Igarashi (London: Granta, 2014), Kindle edition, chapter 9.

[6] Matsuda Aoko, "Enoki no isshō," in *Obachantachi ga iru tokoro* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha, 2016); Matsuda Aoko, "Enoki," in *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, trans. Polly Barton (London: Tilted Axis Press, 2020).

[7] Loretta J. Ross and Rickie Solinger, *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction* (Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 2017), 59.

[8] Gloria Anzaldúa in AnaLouise Keating, *Transformation Now!: Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 124. For more see: Gloria Anzaldúa, "Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman," in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating, (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1990/ 2009), 121–123.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Oyamada Hiroko, *Kōjō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2013); *Ana* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2014); *Niwa* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2018); *Kojima* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2021). See also: Oyamada Hiroko, *Weasels in the Attic*, trans. David Boyd (London: Granta Books, 2022). There are three stories translated here: "Death in the Family," which can be found in the book version of *The Factory* (*Kōjō*), "Last of the Weasels" and "Yukiko," which can be found in the book version of *The Hole* (*Ana*), written around the same time as the novellas that give the title to those collections. As they are published in separate collections, they are not available in Japanese as a single book, however, these three stories are considered to be a trilogy by Oyamada. Therefore, I may treat them as a single work as the stories are strongly interlinked.

[11] JFNY Literary Series Episode # 4: Hiroko Oyamada x David Boyd, 06/25/2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-mjl885tN4. Accessed April 2, 2024.

[12] Shibata Motoyuki, "Assari nōmitsu ni," *Nami* (April 2018), https://www.shinchosha.co.jp/book/120543/. Accessed April 2, 2024.

[13] Oyamada, *Ana*; Oyamada Hiroko, *The Hole*, trans. David Boyd (New York: New Directions, 2020).

[14] "higan /彼岸." *Encyclopedia of Japan*, 2002. Japan Knowledge. Accessed April

2, 2024.

[15] Oyamada, "Spider Lilies;" Oyamada, "Higanbana," 123. I am citing Juliet Winters Carpenter's translation.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 123–4; emphasis mine.

[18] Robyn Lee, *The Ethics and Politics of Breastfeeding: Power, Pleasure, Poetics* (Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 55.

[19] Oyamada, "Spider Lilies;" Oyamada, "Higanbana," 124–5.

[20] Erin N. Taylor and Lora Ebert Wallace, "For Shame: Feminism, Breastfeeding Advocacy, and Maternal Guilt," *Hypatia* 27.1 (Winter 2012): 76.

[21] Oyamada Hiroko, "Wakate chūmoku sakka wa 'kimeserifu' o kakanai. Oyamada Hiroko shinkan *Niwa* o kataru," interview by Yamada Yosuke, *Sinkan JP*, May 28, 2018. https://www.sinkan.jp/news/8573?page=1 (my translation). Accessed April 2, 2024.

[22] Tsuboi Sakae, *Haha no nai ko to ko no nai haha to*, revised ed. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1958); *Haha no nai ko to ko no nai haha to*, directed by Mitsuo Wakasugi (Tokyo: Shintōhō Co., Ltd. Production, 1952).

[23] Oyamada, "Spider Lilies;" Oyamada, "Higanbana," 126; emphasis mine.

[24] Ibid., 131.

[25] Ibid., 134.

[26] Ibid.,135.

[27] Oyamada Hiroko, "Itachi naku," in *Ana* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2014); "The Last of the Weasels," in *Weasels in the Attic*, trans. David Boyd (London: Granta Books, 2022).

[28] Oyamada Hiroko, "Yuki no yado," in *Ana* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2014); "Yukiko," in *Weasels in the Attic*, trans. David Boyd (London: Granta Books, 2022).

[29] Oyamada, "Yukiko," 52–53.

[30] Ibid., 57.

[31] Ibid., 62.

[32] Matsuda Aoko, *Suttakingu kanō* (Tokyo: Kawade bunko, 2016). See: Daniela Moro, "A Silent Fight to Challenge the Norm in Matsuda Aoko's 'Suttakingu kanō' (2012)," *Japan Forum* 35.4 (2023): 410–433.

[33] Matsuda Aoko, *Jizoku kanō na tamashii no riyō* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha, 2020). See: Letizia Guarini, "Voices against Gender-based Violence in Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Analysis of Two Novels by Kaoruko Himeno and Aoko Matsuda," in *Voiced and Voiceless in Asia*, ed. Halina

Zawiszová and Martin Lavička (Olomouc, Czech Republic: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2023), 461–490.

[34] Matsuda Aoko, *Obachantachi ga iru tokoro* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha, 2016); Matsuda Aoko, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, trans. Polly Barton (London: Tilted Axis Press, 2020).

[35] Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking," *Signs* 8.1 (Autumn 1982): 72.

[36] Matsuda Aoko and Polly Barton, "Wild Women: An Interview with Aoko Matsuda and Polly Barton," interview by Sophia Stewart. *Asymptote*, November 23, 2020, https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/2020/11/wild-women-an-interview-with-aoko-matsuda-and-polly-barton/. Accessed April 8, 2024.

[37] Matsuda Aoko, "Kuzuha no isshō" and "Kanojo ga dekiru koto," in *Obachantachi ga iru tokoro* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronshinsha, 2016); Matsuda Aoko, "A Fox's Life" and "What She Can Do," in *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, trans. Polly Barton (London: Tilted Axis Press, 2020).

[38] See: Polly Barton, "Inspiration for Stories," in Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, trans. Polly Barton (New York: Soft Skull, 2020).

[39] In the original Japanese the tree remains genderless, but in the English translation by Barton the tree is rendered feminine. In the Spanish translation, the tree is rendered masculine due to grammatical conventions. All three versions seem to work in different ways to destabilize and defamiliarize the maternal body.

[40] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 174; Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 216. Emphasis in the translation.

[41] See Lee, *The Ethics and Politics*, 22.

[42] Rachel Williamson, *21st-Century Narratives of Maternal Ambivalence* in a series entitled *Palgrave Studies in (Re)Presenting Gender* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 111–12.

[43] Ibid., 134.

[44] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 175; emphasis mine. Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 217.

[45] See Greta Gaard, "Reproductive Technology, or Reproductive Justice: An Ecofeminist, Environmental Justice Perspective on the Rhetoric of Choice," *Ethics and the Environment* 15.2 (Fall 2010): 108.

[46] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 176; emphasis in the translation. Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 218.

[47] Gaard, "Reproductive Technology, or Reproductive Justice," 108.

[48] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 176; Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 218.

[49] Ibid., 178; Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 220.

[50] Ibid., 179; Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 221.

[51] Ibid., 180; Matsuda, *Obachantachi*, 221.

[52] Peter Bischel, "A Table is a Table," trans. Lydia Davis, *The White Review* (March 2017), https://www.thewhitereview.org/fiction/a-table-is-a-table/. Accessed April 2, 2024.

[53] Melek Ortabasi, "(Re)animating Folklore: Raccoon Dogs, Foxes, and Other Supernatural Japanese Citizens in Takahata Isao's *Heisei tanuki gassen ponpoko*," *Marvels & Tales* 27.2 (2013): 255.

[54] The Glico-Morinaga incident refers to the two confectionary manufacturers, Glico Corporation and Morinaga Corporation, which were victims of intimidation and blackmail from a group known as "the mystery man with the twenty-one faces." For more on this case see Marilyn Ivy, "Tracking the Mystery Man with the 21 Faces," *Critical Inquiry* 23.1 (1996): 11–36.

[55] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 148.

[56] Ibid., 149; emphasis in the translation. In the original, Matsuda writes: そうそう、私は女の子。私はただの女の子 *Sōsō, watashi wa onna no ko. Watashi wa tada no onna no ko* (*Obachantachi,* 127-8).

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 151.

[59] Ibid. Emphasis in the translation.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Yoda Hiroko, "The Ghost Who Bought Candy," in *Japanese Ghost Stories* (London: Flame Tree 451, 2023), 234–237.

[62] Amanda C. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low Fertility Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 5.

[63] Hank Glassman, "At the Crossroads of Birth and Dead: The Blood Pool Hell and Postmortem Fetal Extraction," in *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*, eds. Jaqueline Stone and Mariko Namba Walter. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017), 175–206.

[64] Deirdre Coyle, "A Short Story Collection about Monstrous Women and Female Ghosts." *Electric Lit*, January 25, 2021. https://electricliterature.com/aoko-matsuda-where-the-wild-ladies-are-stories/. Accessed April 2, 2024.

[65] Matsuda, *Where the Wild Ladies Are*, 167.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 2017), 1; 12.

[69] Iwakawa Arisa, "Yobikake to ōtō. Feminizumu bungaku hihyō to iu kakumei," *Etosetera: Watashitachi wa kankoku dorama de tsuyoku nareru* 5 (Spring/Summer 2021): 98–103.

[70] Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 16.

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