

## Book Review

Harada, Kazue. *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures: Women's Speculative Fiction in Contemporary Japan*. Leiden: Brill, 2021. 214 pp. (ISBN: 9789004468832)

Kazue Harada's *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures: Women's Speculative Fiction in Contemporary Japan* makes an important contribution to Japanese pop cultural studies, and particularly speculative and science fiction studies. This book at once builds on existing scholarship on gender, sexuality, technology, and posthumanism in Japanese and global SF and models novel and deeply interdisciplinary ways of thinking about these themes in and across works of the genre. Harada focuses on a selection of Japanese women creators (Hagio Moto, Ueda Sayuri, Ōhara Mariko, Murata Sayaka, and Shirai Yumiko) who to date have received inadequate attention among English-language scholars. In exploring their work, she adeptly applies diverse theoretical approaches ranging from the work of queer theorists Lee Edelman and José Esteban Muñoz to that of feminist psychoanalytic critics and theorists Kotani Mari, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, Donna Haraway's writings on cyborgs and interspecies kinships to perspectives drawn from evolutionary biology (to name a few).

Chapter 1, "Imagines Beyond X/Y: The Desire for Biological Diversity and the (Re)productive Burden," explores SF that uses gender variance and sexual diversity to imagine paradigms of embodiment, reproduction, sexual expression and desire, and community beyond the "narrow scope of Darwinian sexual selection" (29). Through readings of Hagio Moto's manga *There Were Eleven!* and *Marginal* and Ueda Sayuri's novel *The Cage of Zeus*, Harada reveals how these creators use nonbinary and/or sexually variant characters to reflect on the material and psychological tolls of gender essentialism, misogyny, evolving reproductive technologies, and the marginalization of non-binary communities in Japan from the 1970s forward. In the process, this chapter also provides a useful account of contemporary Japanese cultural, political, and scientific discourses on transgender identity (and their entanglement with reproductive ideologies and legislation), rendering it of interest not only to SF scholars, but also historians of gender in modern Japan. Ultimately, Harada stresses Hagio and Ueda's attention to sociocultural ambivalence surrounding the female body—a vital site of biological and cultural reproduction, but also one that might elude patriarchal control. She also underscores how these works, while far from utopic, urge us to imagine affirmatively the biological and cultural value of gender and sexual diversity.

Chapter 2, "Playing with (Re)productive Process and Time: Cyborg Gender Panic and Simulacra of the Daughter-Mother Continuum," offers a close reading of Ōhara Mariko's Seiun Award-winning novel *Hybrid Child*. Harada positions Ōhara as a cyborg theorist and cyberpunk visionary, emphasizing her construction of "hyper worlds" marked by gender fluidity and racial ambiguity (84). She analyzes how the novel adopts and adapts conventional theoretical and science fictional tropes, including Baudrillard's simulacra, Kotani Mari's "techno-gynesis," and the phallogocentric logic of conventional psychoanalysis. Harada hones in on the figure of the ever-evolving cyborg in *Hybrid Child* as one that inhabits unstable gender identities; relatedly, she also explores the cyborg in terms of racial and cultural identity, underscoring its ambivalent and contradictory position between Japaneseness and whiteness—a reflection of Japan's long history of adopting and adapting Western culture, but also, as Harada notes, a rejection of the techno-Orientalism (and

its fetishization of Asian women's bodies) so frequently seen in Western SF and Western culture more broadly. The second half of this chapter turns to an analysis of the mother-daughter dyad in the novel, applying feminist psychoanalytic (and adjacent) thought to underscore how Ōhara challenges the phallogocentric imagination of the mother-daughter relationship. Finally, Harada emphasizes how *Hybrid Child* sustains its ambiguity through its conclusion, eliding resolution into either utopia or dystopia and instead imagining a future in which gendered and (re)productive logics might continue to obstruct the possibility of a post-gender, non-(re)productive world.

Chapter 3, "The Re-engineered Heterosexual Family and Engineered Sexless (Re)productive Kinships," provides a sustained analysis of Murata Sayaka's *Vanishing World*. This novel imagines a society in which reproductive technologies have de-coupled sexual intercourse and reproduction. Harada highlights how the novel not only defamiliarizes traditional familial structures, but also models alternative kinships against the backdrop of a growing trend toward "sexlessness" in Japanese society: for examples, in its depiction of human relationships mediated by a mutual love of the moe-adorned characters of manga and anime, and in its portrayal of close female friendships as the basis for re-imagined domestic and emotional relations. Finally, Harada probes the novel's portrayal of an egalitarian community structure—one that on the surface appears to subvert heteronormative familial paradigms, but which, she notes, "produces a homogenized kinship that erases difference and diversity" (129). As in her previous reading of *Hybrid Child*, here Harada underscores the irresolution of *Vanishing World*, arguing that it mirrors contemporary Japanese anxieties concerning how reproductive choice and reproductive technologies might be wielded by the state.

Chapter 4, "Defamiliarizing Wombs and Imagining New Surrogacy in the Colonial State," examines Shirai Yumiko's Nihon SF Taishō Award-winning manga *Wombs*. Harada analyzes how the manga plays on interconnected historical discourses concerning gender, technology, and militarism to elaborate a critique of the reproductive ideology of (and thus the leveraging of reproductive policies and technologies by) the Japanese state. This reading centers how *Wombs*, as a viscerally body-centric text, lays bare and challenges dominant assumptions concerning the maternal body and maternal identity (with the enduring concept of maternal love being an especially significant example) and, from there, employs the SF trope of "childbearing machines" to develop a critique of the self-sustaining pursuits of colonization and war. Along the way, however, Harada also illuminates more optimistic elements of this narrative, revealing how it models possibilities for resistance against the exploitation of women and others' bodies as a means of perpetuating the state.

Chapter 5, "Queer Family and Queer Futurity: No Future for Humanity?," returns to the work of Ueda Sayuri, this time focusing on her *The Ocean Chronicles* series. Harada hones in on Ueda's queer configurations of "family" (a theme visible also in *The Cage of Zeus*) as subversions of the heteronormative family espoused by pro-natal rhetoric and supported by pro-natal policies in contemporary Japan. In a prime example of this book's interdisciplinarity, this chapter beautifully interweaves literary and socio-cultural analysis, highlighting how Ueda's futuristic vision at once mirrors real-world anxieties about the extinction of human civilization (as constructed in the heteropatriarchal imagination) and proffers a provocatively open-ended vision of the future,

reminiscent of José Esteban Muñoz’s “queer futurity” in that it is contingent upon radical vulnerability, inter-species collaboration, environmental kinships, and change.

If *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures* has any shortcomings, they are in my view minor. The organization of the book at times feels constraining: some chapters are arranged into what feel like too many sections and sub-sections that artificially disunite inextricable character studies, narrative arcs, and themes. This is a relatively minor quibble, however, and one that, I think, stems from the complexity of the works analyzed therein and the overall ambition of this study. A more substantial critique might underscore the book’s lack of comparative/contrastive discussion of male-authored Japanese SF. Male-authored (and male-centric) Japanese SF routinely (though not always, of course) reinforces heteronormative patriarchal paradigms of identity and relationality. More nuanced discussion of how Japanese women’s SF engages with and, as Harada deftly underscores, subverts conventions of the genre (with reference to high-profile texts) would have been useful here, particularly for readers with little familiarity with the broader corpus of Japanese SF.

On the other hand, the time is ripe for a book-length study that explores Japanese women’s SF in its own right, and *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures* is refreshing and engaging in this regard. Harada carefully balances nuanced readings of the primary texts—attending to both literary and, where applicable, visual elements—with discussion of evolving historical discourses on gender, embodiment, and nation. In doing so, she both highlights the political commitments of these works and accounts for their popular appeal, underscoring how they employ “the future” as a site for critiquing and imagining resistance to heteropatriarchal ideologies, from the “pro-natal” logic of the Japanese state specifically to rigid gender, sexual, racial, familial, and communal paradigms of identity and relationality more broadly.

Reviewed by

**Raechel Dumas**

Department of History  
San Diego State University