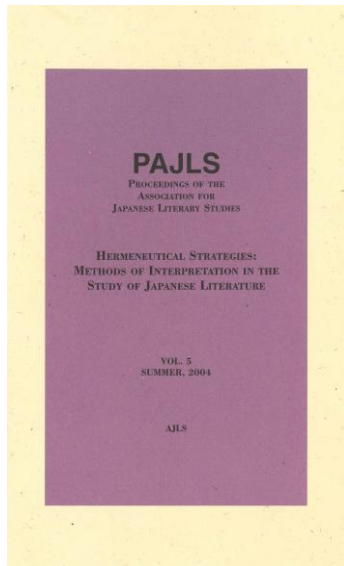


“How Housewives Shatter a Narrative: Tawada
Yōko’s *The Bridegroom Was a Dog*”

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**HOW HOUSEWIVES SHATTER A NARRATIVE:
TAWADA YŌKO'S *THE BRIDEGROOM WAS A DOG***

Robin Tierney

As a Japanese writer who claims to have no interest in "maintaining the beauty of the Japanese language," and who writes prolifically in German—a language she learned in her mid-twenties—Tawada Yōko has received increasing critical attention in the United States, Germany and Japan. Her focus on the slippery nature of language brings both lighthearted humor and theoretical rigor to her cross-cultural tales. Her narrators frequently struggle with new languages and rarely present a reliable or cohesive picture. This opacity is clearly intentional. "I would like," Tawada asserts, "to make my words as strange as musician's words."

The young children attending the Kitamura School in Tawada Yōko's 1992 Akutagawa Prize-winning *The Bridegroom was a Dog*¹ relay their somewhat unusual learning to their mothers on a daily basis. The first account, similarly to those which follow, involves excreta: "Miss Kitamura says that wiping your nose with snot paper you've already used once is nice, because it is so soft and warm and wet, but when you use it a third time to wipe yourself when you go to the bathroom, it feels even better" (11-12). While the mothers feel uncomfortable upon hearing this and think that, perhaps, they should scold their children, their only explicit response is to focus on the words and admonish their children to say 'tissue' instead of 'snotrag.'² The cultural divide that already exists between the sensual and independent Mitsuko Kitamura and the decorous housewives is emphasized by the geographical separation of the school which is located in the old, southern part of town and the homes of the students and their families in the new modern housing complexes in the northern part of town. Language, as a reliable and stable means of

¹ Quotes from this Japanese novella, *Inumukoiri*, will come from Margaret Mitsutani's English translation, "The Bridegroom was a Dog," unless otherwise noted.

² In the Japanese, the word 'tissue' is rendered in the phonetic *katakana*, which is used for words 'borrowed' from foreign languages and can have the effect of making a word or concept appear fancy and modern. 'Snotrag,' *hanagami* (鼻紙) is rendered in Chinese characters.

communication across these divides, is immediately thrown into question by the housewives' superficial interest in the propriety of words.

In a complicated process of meaning-making, in which the telling of an erotic pre-modern tale becomes the springboard for the spreading of rumors in a newly built and highly sanitized residential complex, Tawada examines the ways in which myths, and words as individual myths themselves, are constructed. Ōe Kenzaburo—who sat on the decision-making panel that awarded Tawada the Akutagawa prize³—admires the way in which Tawada creates her own palpably strange style by re-telling an old tale in modern language. In doing so, he claims, she makes an abstraction concrete (Ōe 419). The abstraction that she renders concrete is the physicality of “the past” that the present tries to expel. Tawada employs wordplay, unreliable narration, and a focus on bodily functions, to contest the fixity of meaning that supports a specifically modern sensibility from which physicality has been largely evacuated. Repeatedly, it is the housewives, who occupy the housing complex during the day, that perform the tasks of cleansing the language and policing the meanings that emerge from words. Tawada's choice of such historically recent concepts as “the housewife” and the “high-rise residential complex” allows a pre-modern tale to be refracted through the “myths” of modernity. Ultimately, the distinction between a chronologically distant “past” and a late twentieth century “present” becomes unsettled.

Structurally, Tawada uses the format of a story-within-a-story to highlight the fictionality of both narratives and to project the “otherness” of the pre-modern interior tale onto the overarching narrative set in postwar Japan. Both the frame narrative and the story-within-the story are a re-telling of a largely forgotten myth, *inumukoiri*, in which a daughter is promised to a dog in return for services the dog performed for the family. Margaret Mitsutani's English translation of the title “The Bridegroom was a Dog”, is a faithful and effective rendering of Tawada's Japanese title *inumukoiri*, which means ‘the adoption of a dog-bridegroom.’ What is unavoidably lost in the English title, however, is the sense of *inumukoiri* belonging to a genre of myth—*iruikon*, literally ‘marriage to other species’—in which non-humans are accepted into families as brides or bridegrooms, usually as a repayment for kindness. Within the genre of *iruikon* there are stories of monkeys and snakes as bridegrooms, and these stories are entitled ‘the adoption of a monkey-bridegroom,’ or “the adoption of a snake-bridegroom” (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Tales*,

³ The Akutagawa Prize is the most prestigious literary prize for contemporary literature in Japan. Many Japanese writers who are popular in the West, such as Nobel-prize winning Ōe Kenzaburo, and Kōbo Abe, have received this prize.

76). The generic nature of the Tawada's choice of title is significant in that it immediately places the story in the larger cultural and literary context of *iruikon* tales, in which "The Bridegroom was a Dog" is clearly a "minor" tale in comparison to the well known, and thoroughly patriarchal, tale of "The Crane Wife".

When Mitsuko Kitamura tells the story of *inumukoiri* to the students who attend her *juku*,⁴ she introduces the tale by saying, "Maybe the only story you know about a human marrying an animal is 'The Crane Wife,'" but there's another one called 'The Bridegroom was a Dog' (13). The manner in which the children retell the controversial content of the tale to their mothers establishes the basis for examining how the housewives mediate the meaning making process. The reader is never made privy to the version that Mitsuko tells her students because the narrator immediately moves on to the ways in which the students subsequently retell the tale. The young ones, who are unable to keep so much information in the same order, and the older ones, who were embarrassed to relay the story without censoring it, wind up creating new versions of *inumukoiri*. That only two of the multiple new versions the children create are shared with the reader further emphasizes the fragmentary nature of our knowledge as readers. Denying the reader access to the "original" version told by Mitsuko, Tawada questions the notion of "truth" that exists beyond the intervention of human foibles and concerns.

While Tawada herself does not include a concise and uninterrupted account in her novella, I cite one here to provide a sense of how she tinkers with the "common" reading. Below is a traditional version of *inumukoiri* that has been recorded by historian Takada Mamoru:

A young girl does not wipe herself after urinating or defecating. The dog of the house is exhorted to wipe her and is told that the girl will become his bride. The dog happily complies. Years later the dog attacks the first suitor who comes to the house and the parents realize that the dog took their promise seriously. Crying, they give their daughter to the dog. The daughter, herself, is not upset and she goes deep into the mountains to live with the dog. One day a mountain priest wanders by and is shocked to see such a beautiful woman married to a dog. He then secretly kills the dog. After waiting

⁴ *Juku* is usually translated as 'cram school.' *Juku* are learning programs that take place outside of school hours, but they do not always involve cramming for official tests. As in the case of Kitamura's *juku* they can also involve non-academic interests and hobbies.

a few days he knocks at the woman's door and ultimately he marries her. After raising seven children together the priest decides that it is safe to tell his wife the truth and he confides that it was he who had killed the dog. The woman is furious and kills the priest. The common wisdom that "A woman won't forgive you even after you have given her seven children" springs from this story (quoted in Aman 125, my translation).

The differences between this little-known tale and the popular "The Crane Wife" are noteworthy. In her article "*Ifuku toshite no nihongo*" (The Japanese Language as Clothing,), Tawada writes that "The Crane Wife" has become the standard form of the *iruikon* tale, but that it is not a narrative that lends much power to a female writer (1995, 209). For whereas "The Crane Wife" features a animal-bride who passively acquiesces to the needs of her human-husband and his family, 'The Bridegroom was a Dog' features a female character who experiences sensual pleasure and who ultimately executes her own definition of justice by killing her human-husband because he shot her beloved dog-husband. In *inumukoiri* neither female sexuality nor female agency is denied.

As Mitsuko's students put their own spin on the already marginal tale, *inumukoiri* further undermines patriarchal values. In *Yugamushintaijosei sakka no henshinkon* (*The Distorted Body: Women Writers and the Theme of Bodily Transformation*), Katorin Aman points out that the two children's versions that we do learn of break even more societal taboos (Aman 105). In both variations, the daughter, a princess, *actively* looks forward to marrying the dog. This active desire on the part of the daughter already disrupts the patriarchal structure of most *iruikon* tales in which the adoption of a bride or bridegroom takes place in order to preserve the stability or longevity of the paternal lineage. While the first variation holds true to the traditional telling, with the exception of the daughter's desire, the second variation goes on to break taboos of bestiality and incest. In this version the parents fly into a rage when they find the dog licking their daughter's bottom and send them both into exile on a deserted island. There, the two procreate and produce a son of mixed species. When the dog dies before producing any more offspring the woman has sex with her son in order to keep the new race alive. Neither new hybrid races nor instances of incest appear in canonical *iruikon* tales, in which, if children are born, they are inevitably human (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Tales*, 76). By showing alternatives to the canonical reading of *iruikon*, and specifically to *inumukoiri*, Tawada exposes myth-making as a site of

meaning-production that is heavily informed by culturally dominant patriarchal values.

But Tawada's project in "The Bridegroom was a Dog" is not simply one of historical revisionism whereby mainstream values are supplanted with marginalized ones. The positing of counter-myths with which to shake the firmly entrenched position of the canonical one, is only one of Tawada's strategies in de-stabilizing the power of culturally validated mythology and language. Notably, the mothers did not violently silence their children's unintentionally subversive renditions of *inumukoiri*. While many were initially uneasy with the way in which their children now avidly licked their ice-cream cones in imitation of the dog in the story, their anxieties were allayed when one housewife reported that she had heard of the *inumukoiri* tale in her course on folklore at the Cultural Center. With the social sanctioning provided by the Cultural Center the mothers decided that they did not need to worry about their children becoming "strange" under the tutelage of Mitsuko Kitamura. The authority of the Cultural Center overrides their own personal and physical reactions—some mothers had felt sick when they heard their children barking between licks or simply slobbering on their hands when they studied—and they did not confront the challenges to their values presented by the tale in any direct way. What did take place, however, as a result of the *inumukoiri* event, was the spread of rumors regarding Mitsuko Kitamura's background.

As in the case of the advice regarding the "snotrag," the mothers did not engage with their children about the contents of Kitamura's teachings, and the children soon forgot the tale altogether. The rumors that housewives begin to spread in reaction to hearing *inumukoiri* profoundly shape the entire narrative. Kitamura's picture, it was said, was seen on a sign of "Wanted" terrorists at the airport. She is also allegedly connected to aphrodisiac-selling hippies. Thus, the unmarried teacher living outside of the modern housing complex, is connected with the excesses—in this case, sex and violence—that the nuclear family, consumer-oriented lives of the housewives are structured to ignore.

On the basis of this flurry of rumors, several critics argue that the remainder of "The Bridegroom was a Dog" is largely a collective hallucination of the housewives'. Taneda Wakako contends that the sexual relationship that develops between Mitsuko and Tarō, is no more than an illusion created by fragments of the housewives' gossip (Taneda 61). Kitamura's intention in telling the *inumukoiri* tale, Taneda claims, was simply to have the children enjoy eating their ice-cream more. The subsequent overlaying of *inumukoiri* onto Kitamura's life represents the toppling of the narrative over into the grasp of the housewives. Indeed,

though no tangible transformation occurs in the style of narration, it is possible to retrace the allegiance of the third-person narrator and realize that the narration had always been aligned with the purview of the housewives. The narrative begins in the courtyard, the deepest recess of the residential complex, and thus the southern part of town where the Kitamura School is located is immediately established as the "other." The reader is told that neither before the school opened, nor after it permanently closed, did any of the residents have occasion to go to the old part of town. Information about Mitsuko is always learned from a housewife's glimpse of her—reading Polish under a tree, for example—or via a child's account. It is not until Tarō, Mitsuko's dog-like human lover, appears on the scene that the reader has access to scenes of Mitsuko in which neither a child or a housewife is present. The argument that the bulk of the ensuing narrative is full-fledged fantasy resonates with Tawada's project of examining the process of meaning production. It is further supported, I would add, by the fact that it is at this particular point in the frame narrative, when the rumors begin, that the term 'housewife' (*shufu*) is used for the first time. Up until this point in the story the narrator had always referred to these women as "mothers" (*hahaoya*). The Japanese term for "housewife," *shufu*, is a mythological construction in its own right and therefore contributes to the fictionality of the narrative that the housewives construct.

The possibly fantastical narrative that unfolds after the housewives start the rumors regarding Mitsuko's lurid past, largely follows the structure of the *inumukoiri* tale itself. Mitsuko rises to the defense of a student, Fukiko, who is bullied by the other students, and Tarō appears at her door and moves into her house. Daily, Tarō cooks, cleans and has sex with Mitsuko. In retrospect, once we learn that Tarō is intimately involved with Fukiko's father, the *iruikon* pattern of a spouse being offered in return for a kindness rendered, can be seen. In keeping with the *iruikon* form, Tarō is physically very animal-like; he has prominent canine teeth, his body does not sweat and he largely operates through his sense of smell, which has him more interested in cats than in humans (33). The nature of their first sexual encounter is reminiscent of the *inumukoiri* tale:

...the man slipped off his shorts as easily as drawing a handkerchief out of his sleeve, laid her on her back, and very politely, still in his shirt and pants, fitted his body on top of hers, then gently, pressing his canine teeth against the delicate skin of her neck, began sucking noisily, with Mitsuko's face growing paler all the while until she suddenly flushed crimson and the beads of sweat standing out on her forehead got sticky

from the shock of feeling a thing with both the flexibility and indifference of a vegetable slide into her vagina, but as she withed, struggling to get away, he flipped her over and, easily grabbing her thighs, one in each hand, raised them up and *began licking her rectum*, now poised precariously in midair. The sheer size of his tongue, the amount of saliva dripping from it, and the heavy panting were all literally extraordinary... (26-27, italics not in the original).

The housewives' interests are piqued by the arrival of Tarō and they encourage their children to drop by the school, even when it is out of session, in order to bring back more information. Eventually, the housewives themselves stop by unannounced. At this point, one of the mothers, Mrs. Orita, sees Tarō for the first time and recognizes him as Mr. Inuma,⁵ a former colleague of her husband who had mysteriously disappeared three years prior. At first she attempts to reconcile Tarō with his wife, Ryōko, but when that fails she tries to persuade Mitsuko to marry Tarō in order to quell the rumors of his homosexuality. In yet another variation of the *inumukoiri* tale, however, the narrative ends with two same-sex pairs, Tarō and Fukiko's father, and Mitsuko and Fukiko, separately fleeing town. By the end of the story the reader has encountered *inumukoiri* in a variety of forms; as a non-canonical *iruikon* tale overshadowed by "The Crane Wife," as multiple stories reconstructed by individual children, and as a purportedly true narrative about real people, namely Mitsuko and Tarō. The reader is also made aware that there are versions of *inumukoiri*, such as the rendition that Mitsuko gave her class, that have not been shared with them.

The articulation of multiple versions of the same myth highlights the reality that all these possible versions—which condone women's sexual pleasure, incest, bestiality and homosexuality, respectively—are not equally embraced by society. The conformity, or the constructed nature, of the canonical myths is thrown into relief by the presence of so much hitherto silenced variation. Careful not to simply install new "truths" once the old truth has been supplanted Tawada emphasizes the flights of fancy that words enable. The seemingly random manners in which tales are spun, through the jumbled words of young children, or the unfounded rumors of

⁵ The name 'Inuma' (飯沼) phonetically contains the Japanese word for dog, 'inu.' This foreshadowing of Tarō's dog-like state disrupts the binary opposition between his previously mainstream life and his later "dropping out" of respectable society.

housewives, soundly mocks the notion that language disinterestedly reflects reality.

Numerous times in the text the housewives carefully settle upon certain words in order to deflect their immediate visceral reaction. The first such instance, mentioned above, is when the mothers hear their children talk about re-using the same tissue three times for the purpose of wiping their nose and then their bottoms, has already been discussed. The mother's response upon hearing what their children learned at school was to completely ignore the propriety of the act and to focus on the words that represent the act. "Don't say 'snotrag,' say 'tissue' they scolded" (12). Likewise, when their children tell them the tale of a dog who eagerly licks the unwiped bottom of his human bride-to-be, the housewives collectively decide that a teacher who would share this story with her pupils was 'unique': "although the word 'unique' did not sound quite right, most of them tended to agree and there was a general sigh of relief" (16). And while the woman who ran the general store was telling everybody that "Mitsuko Kitamura had 'got herself a man'" the housewives found that expression too "crude." Their immediate response was to try using the word 'boyfriend' (32-33). Notably, in all three of the above cases the carefully chosen words—"tissue," 'unique,' and 'boyfriend'—are rendered in *katakana* and pronounced to approximate the sound of the English word.⁶ *Katakana*, the Japanese syllabary used for foreign 'loan' words, can have the intended effect of making words and concepts sound "modern" or "fancy."

Articulating the fabricated nature of language at both the visual and conceptual level are important components of Tawada's project. "I would like to make words even more awkward," Tawada declares, "I would like to make them as unnatural as a magician's words" (Wada 215). In his article "*Tawada Yōko: tokeru chizu, matou kotoba*" ("Tawada Yōko—Maps that Melt and Words you can Wear"), Wada Chusan writes that Tawada seeks to separate words from the "everyday" because she loathes the excess of meaning that emotions bring to them. "One by one (she) rips the masks off of words, " explains Wada, "And by shaving the meaning off of words, (she) truly faces them" (Wada 218). Dwelling on the word selection of the housewives, and ultimately rendering their choices in *katakana*, Tawada accentuates the material, as well as the conceptual, layering that is constitutive of language.

The fixity of language that is achieved when "proper" words are collectively determined, as in the case of the housewives, serves to further

⁶ "Tissue" would be pronounced as "ti-shu," "unique" as "yu-nī-ku," and "boyfriend" "bo-i-fu-ren-do."

distance language from the volatile physical realm. The instances in which the mother's felt the need to sanitize language were those at which phlegm, feces and sex were involved. The excess of emotion, which Wada sees Tawada trying to jettison, stems from the women's desire to silence the physicality found there and to render it harmless through beautification. Tawada's choice of women to perform this task is hardly accidental. In her essay "*Oitachi to iu kyokō*" ("The fiction called 'Biography'") Tawada wryly poses the question, "Just how thin would a Japanese dictionary titled 'Swear-Words for Women' be?" (35). Commenting on the notoriously small selection of 'denunciations' deemed acceptable for women in middle class Japanese society, Tawada implies that silences are also fabrications whose maintenance requires active vigilance.

While women in general are a fruitful subject to examine because of the highly surveyed nature of their speech in Japanese society, the choice of "housewives" resonates especially well with Tawada's implicit commentary on the fictionality of language. The use of the housewives as the agents of language fabrication, who both "gossip-monger" and rigorously beautify, is particularly effective because the institution of "the housewife" itself is a modern construction whose ideologically motivated naming process occurred relatively recently. Tracing the genealogy of the term "housewife" within the Japanese context, one can see at work the very process of myth making in which Tawada's housewives engage. The making and monitoring of societal norms was an essential component of the process that saw "*shufu*," the Japanese word for "housewife," become part of popular parlance in the rapidly industrializing postwar era. It is this "norm-alizing" quality that is thus projected onto the fiction that the housewives in the novel create, both through their rumor-spreading and their careful patrolling of language.

Literally "main woman," the term *shufu* previously meant "the most powerful woman in the house," which would customarily be the first wife of the patriarch or the oldest woman in an extended family. Many women, therefore, including mothers who dedicated their whole lives to their families, were not *shufu*. The entry for '*shufu*' in the 'Japanese Dictionary of Folklore' quotes the well-known folklore scholar, Yanagita Kunio, as saying that the power of the *shufu* significantly decreased with the rise of the nuclear family (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Folklore*, 832). Yanagita claims that the shrinking in size of the average family corresponded to the shrinking in the traditional *shufu*'s realm of power (833). The usage of *shufu* to denote the vast majority of middle-class married women arose at the same time that the power held by any single *shufu* was declining. This, however, is not the only fissure between the lived reality of *shufu* and the meaning the term itself attempts to convey.

Again, the entry for *shufu* in *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Folklore* states that the term gained wide currency when the model of the Western housewife, meaning one housewife to one nuclear family, became widespread (833). As Imai Yasuko points out in her article "The Emergence of the Japanese *Shufu*: Why a *Shufu* is More Than a 'Housewife,'" the term *shufu*, which did not etymologically correlate to the wife in a single-family home, was most likely kept in place in order to provide a counterpart to the English term "housewife." Considerable differences between the Japanese "*shufu*" and the Western "housewife" exist. Japanese mothers, for example, engaged in significant wage employment are regularly referred to as "*shufu*." Despite the significant differences, however, an equivalency is asserted between these two terms. "*Shufu*," it can be argued, is a term that relates to the family structure of an earlier era, or to that of a foreign culture, but that does not very neatly conform to the late-twentieth century Japanese women to whom it is popularly applied. Whether this disjuncture springs from an effort to advance the internalization of the modern housewife role, or to portray parity with the West, is unclear. The gap between physical existence and language, that the housewives in "The Bridegroom was a Dog" so painstakingly maintain, however, is already present in the very term that denotes them themselves.

Shufu is a rich term to unpack not only because of the history of the signifier, but also because of the extremely recent development of this neo-traditional concept. Nowhere is this new-ness more obvious than in the housing developments—*danchi*—that the housewives in the novel inhabit. When wage employment eclipsed family enterprise for the first time in the mid-1950's industrialization's need for mobile and concentrated housing far outstripped the available supply (Ueno 167). Massive development of *danchi* was undertaken to meet the new needs of this major economic shift. Many young married women, who would have previously worked in the family enterprise, now occupied single-family apartments far from their extended families. Thus arose the conditions for the maternally-defined model of the 'housewife' in which mothers no longer had access to the family business or to the multiple caregivers provided by the extended family (Uno 21). Far from being an essentially natural and timeless tradition, the Japanese mother's role as the primary caregiver for her offspring has been created by a distinctly modern process of industrialization and ideologically congruent government policy. The Japanese tax system, for example, explicitly benefits single-income households. Furthermore, a legalized two-tiered system of employment in which the 'clerical' track, almost completely comprised of women, has little room for advancement, combines to make providing 'free' care to

young children and aging parents the most ‘rational’ choice for married mothers (Orpett-Long 160-161). The *danchi*, where “the quality of life of mothers and children are prioritized” are, literally, the concrete manifestation of these economic and political phenomena (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Folklore*, 74).

And yet the *danchi* are not always comfortable with their intentionally fabricated nature or with the express rationality of the demands that they were created to fulfill. For the first time, on such a large scale, families from different geographical areas with fathers engaged in different occupations were living in extremely close proximity to one another. Desire to ease this strangeness created the concept of ‘create your hometown’—*furusato tsukuri*—whereby new community bonds were structurally encouraged (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Folklore*, 73). Adapting to changing circumstances is hardly a novel idea, but what is striking about ‘create your hometown’ is the contradiction of creating one’s origins. Or rather, what is striking is the willingness to ignore such a contradiction. A new uninhabited *danchi* can be instantly turned into a ‘town’ the day that tenants move in and the power is turned on. Intentionally planned to efficiently use a limited amount of space, and to furnish that space with all the necessary amenities, *danchi* contain schools, parks, clinics and post-offices, within their walls (*The Encyclopedia of Japanese Folklore*, 73).

For Tawada Yōko, at least, the “create your hometown” idea was clearly not a success. Having moved into a *danchi* when she was entering elementary school, Tawada writes that she would never use the word “hometown” to describe the housing complex in which she grew up (Tawada 1995, 33). Noting the discrepancy between self-image and physical reality that language allows, she recalls that students who lived in stand-alone individual houses were said to come from “regular homes” even though almost the entire student body lived in the apartment complex. Significantly, the *danchi* in ‘The Bridegroom was a Dog,’ is set in Tamagawa, the area in Tokyo where the largest housing complex is located. Named ‘Tama New Town’ and pronounced ‘ny-ū ta-u-n’ to approximate the English words, this complex houses between 350,000 and 400,000 residents (*Encyclopedia Japonica*, 731).

The architectural concept of the *danchi*, the societal role of the housewife, and the cultural norms that these two factors merge to create, are relatively recent and highly regulated aspects of Japanese life.⁷ Both

⁷ *Danchi* were publicly supported with the adoption of the Public Housing Law of 1955 and several reference sources cite the mid-50’s as the time period in which the term *danchi* becomes popularized. 1955 also marks the year that the “Housewife Debate” began in the print media. Starting on the *pages of Fujin*

the newness and the regulation are obscured by the representative use of historical terms such as *shufu* (housewife) and *furusato* (hometown). While the frame narrative of "The Bridegroom was a Dog" problematizes meaning making at the level of myths by presenting multiple, and equally compelling, versions, Tawada further complicates the process of meaning making at the level of individual words by focusing upon highly constructed and ideologically driven terms.

Mitsuko Kitamura's identity as a non-housewife and non-*danchi* resident, presents a striking contrast with the housewives who 'narrate' the story. Kitamura's sexuality and her familiarity with excreta consistently mark her as *not* belonging to the world of the housewives. Indeed, as early as the second page of the text, excrement is indirectly defined as 'that to which the housewives have no connection.' The narrative begins with a description of the inner courtyard of the housing complex in which 'pigeon shit' has splattered all over the sign for Kitamura's school, and where a drunk had left a "pile of turds" (10). These remain, we are told, either because they were "too filthy to touch, or out of loyalty to the tradition, firmly established in the thirty years since the complex had been built, of not worrying about how dirty things outside were, as long as the area around your apartment was clean" (10).

George Batailles's concept of 'Heterology' proves helpful when looking at the role that bodily waste plays in Tawada's text. Bataille sees 'excretion' and 'appropriation' as two polarized human impulses. The process of appropriation, he writes, is characterized by a homogeneity of the author of the appropriation, whereas *excretion* presents itself as the result of a heterogeneity, and can move in the direction of an ever greater heterogeneity, "liberating impulses whose *ambivalence* is more and more pronounced" (372). The homogeneity, or "static equilibrium," of the "author of appropriation" is geared towards "objects as final result." The housewives, who are consistently depicted as one single homogenized body, focus their attention upon the maintenance of individual family space and the raising of children. Relocating to a housing complex, intentionally planned for the most efficient use of limited land, so that their husbands can fill the needs of an industrialized economy predicated upon wage-labor, the housewives are thoroughly implicated in a system driven by "final results." No difference, either in terms of physical appearance or in terms of opinion, is ever described as existing between the mothers in the story. The *Danchi*, which creates an image of living

Kōron and moving to the *Asahi Journal*, this debate about the proper women's role and the nature of housework comprises more than 30 major essays and spans three decades (Bardsley 3).

space made up of hundreds or thousands of identical units, further intensifies the homogeneity that characterizes the housewives in the novel. Not even family size is provided as a marker of heterogeneity. Indeed, the only child who Tawada identifies with a specific name is the girl, Fukiko, whose mother-less family falls outside of the collectivity of housewives.

If the mothers represent the authors of appropriation within Bataille's schema of "Heterology," then Mitsuko symbolizes the force of excretion. Mitsuko is the only individual in the story with whom the reader becomes intimate; we see her interact with a variety of children and adults, we learn about her sex life, and her home is the only one to which we have access. As an unmarried thirty-nine year old Japanese woman who reads Polish, and who may or may not have been involved in acts of terrorism or the selling of aphrodisiacs, Mitsuko most clearly does not belong to a homogeneous community. And because she appeared out of nowhere one day and then within less than a year disappears again, the trajectory of her life—as the reader learns of it—is seemingly disconnected from "appropriation" and "final results."

Mitsuko is, however, consistently linked with excreta. Her stories involve rectum-licking dogs, and her advice to students includes the repeated use of the same tissue for blowing one's nose and wiping one's bottom. She applies a poultice of 'chicken shit' in order to soothe her stiffened shoulders and hands a young boy a notebook, a 'snotbook,' to use in lieu of a handkerchief (23). Suggestions of anal sex and homosexuality, as in the case when Tarō licks and tickles Mitsuko's rectum or when Tarō's wife, Ryōko, kisses away the pain that she has inflicted upon her and in so doing causes Mitsuko to blush, imply that the sex acts Mitsuko engages in are not oriented towards the "final result" of reproduction. Occupying a position that is clearly outside of the rationalized economic schema, Mitsuko embraces the elements which that system excretes. Namely, waste products and non-reproductive pleasure.

Bataille explicitly connects "rational consumption" with the forces of homogenization when he critiques systematic attempts at representation:

"Above all heterology is opposed to any homogenous representation of the world, in other words, to any philosophical system. The goal of such representation is always the deprivation of our universe's sources of excitation and the development of a servile human species, fit only for the fabrication, rational consumption, and conservation of products" (373).

Tawada's text, thus, echoes Bataille's "Heterology" both at the level of content and at the level of form. If the housewives are the homogenizing, and homogenized, forces geared towards production, then Mitsuko signifies the non-productive sexual and excremental forces. Placing this binary opposition within an over-arching philosophical system, however, might mean depriving us of the "universe's source of excitation" described by Bataille. Even when suggesting this opposition of forces, Tawada does not succumb to the temptation to depict them as complete or binary. She does not assume that the narrator can stand outside of the system in order to narrate the story "as it happened." In "The Bridegroom Was a Dog" the narration itself contests "homogenous representation" by bringing to light a marginalized tale, shattering the already marginal tale into a variety of interpretations, and ultimately toppling the main-auxiliary relationship of the frame narrative to the interior tale by projecting the latter onto the former. Neither the initial reclaiming, the re-interpreting that follows, nor the movement from an auxiliary position to a main one, are portrayed as being uncontestedly "real." They are all presented in the form of second-hand accounts, fragments of children's conversation or fantastical rumors. Excreta, at the content level, resonates with the heterogenizing force of excretion at the structural level, where any single system of representation and meaning is subjected to its "liberating impulses whose ambivalence is more and more pronounced."

"The Bridegroom was a Dog" begins with a neat distinction between the tidiness of the area around each housewife's apartment, and the "pigeon-shit" and "vomit" that is left alone in the nearby places that nobody claims as their own. This spatial dichotomy takes on a chronological dimension when the practicality of the housewives' mode of living intersects with the "strangeness" of the past in the form of the *inumukoiri* myth and the old part of town in which it is first told. But the mothers are not as successful at blocking out the sexual allusions of the story as they are at turning a blind eye to the physical waste in the *danchi*. While the housewives repeatedly use words as one might a water plug—to maintain stasis and prevent meaning from flowing in directions outside of one's line of vision—their own fantasies about Mitsuko's sexual relationship with Taro show that such a process of homogenizing meaning is not a viable one. The resurrection of a marginal tale and the shattering of that tale into multiple versions is certainly a powerful critique on the political process of canonization. But the many forms of unreliable narration and the persistent appearance of that which is defined by its "need to

be expelled,” namely, excreta, questions the possibility of any representational strategy to refrain from indulging in its own fantasies and excisions. It is not only the housewives’ ideas about Mitsuko’s sexual activities, but language itself, at the level of individual words, which are presented as collective fantasies in “The Bridegroom was a Dog.”

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