

# In Search of the Listener: Mizumura Minae's *Shishōsetsu from left to right*

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**Abstract:** For all the reading models that reader response criticism posited in its heyday, one issue has largely escaped notice. This is the relationship between multilingual texts and their readers. How can we theorise a place for the monolingual (or effectively monolingual) reader of a multilingual literary text? As theorists continue to grapple with the geopolitical fact of unequal linguistic and cultural exchange, it seems likely that this type of reader will feature increasingly in both literary theory and Translation Studies. This essay applies the sociological concept of voice to the literary text in order to illustrate the difficulties that underrepresented writers face in making themselves heard. Taking Mizumura Minae's 1995 novel *Shishōsetsu from left to right* as a case study, this essay posits several reasons why a writer might intentionally complicate an already unpredictable reception scenario by producing a multilingual literary text where a monolingual one is expected. These include drawing attention to problems of contemporary linguistic ecology, reinforcing thematic struggles at the formal level of the text, and critiquing native literary forms.

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## 1 Voice and Power

How does a voice reach its listeners? To ask this question is to realise that how we speak and how we get people to listen are one and the same issue. If one's voice is to count, someone out there has to hear it. An audience is essential. In this essay,<sup>1</sup> I will approach the search for listeners from a communication perspective in which language does not always equal power.

A long-standing question about the voice has been, how can we speak out? This type of question is speaker-oriented, setting its sights on the narrative act itself; as such, it is concerned with how people can break silences, gather the requisite courage to speak, and find allies to speak alongside them. In the case of the feminist movement, the initial question was how people could do this as women and feminists. However, it soon became clear that pigeonholing all women and feminists together would be problematic, and the resulting push and pull of ideas within women's and feminist discourse gave rise to a diverse new array of voices, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in agreement with established voices. Tackling the problem of how to speak out also revealed how vulnerable to misappropriation a voice could be in certain contexts. As Judith Butler points out by way of Althusser, there is always the possibility of misrecognition when one is addressed or interpellated,<sup>2</sup> so in this sense we may say that the issue of subjectivity is also implicated in how we make ourselves heard.

The other major type of question is one that aligns itself with the listener, and it concerns how we can discover underrepresented voices, how we can hear voices that have been silenced. This naturally leads to questions of how we can represent such voices without exploiting them. But then 'represent' may not be the best word. One proposed solution has been to try to foster conditions that make it easier for concerned parties to speak to the problem at hand. Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'<sup>3</sup> is a pointed interrogation of this matter, examining the question of accountability in communication from a number of different angles.

The assumption behind these questions is that language is power. As Frantz Fanon wrote, 'there is an extraordinary power in the possession of a language'.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely because language signifies power that women and feminists have given pride of place to the role of speech in their struggles to overturn dominant gender

systems. At the same time, the condition of voicelessness has often been equated with powerlessness and enforced silence. Having a voice signifies dominance, while the voiceless are relegated to a position of inferiority. Again, what I would like to argue here is that having a voice does not, in itself, translate into power. This is because speech is so contingent; everything from the way we speak to the people we address depends on social factors. One strategy of the disadvantaged in trying to acquire agency is to use the language of the powerful. Fanon cites the frequent adoption of white speech by black speakers, for example. But of course this contains a cruel irony. In the use of the language of the powerful by disadvantaged speakers, Fanon observes a reinscription of the dynamic of racism. The following scenario is also possible. This is when the disadvantaged assert themselves in the language of the disadvantaged. However, if the disadvantaged use their language in a context in which that language is expected, the addressee listens from a position of power, the speaker speaks from a position of vulnerability, and these categories are merely reproduced. Even if one manages to speak out, the same relations endure. The linguistic hierarchy is merely maintained, so that when the disadvantaged utilise the language of the disadvantaged, this ensures that they will be addressed as such in turn. As Fanon observes, 'making [a black person] speak pidgin is tying him to an image, snaring him, imprisoning him as the eternal victim of his own essence, of a *visible appearance* for which he is not responsible'.<sup>5</sup> Once the listener has the speaker pegged, it is only natural for the listener to hear only what she wants to hear. It is impossible to separate the language people use from the circumstances in which they use it. Whether a voice has any agency will depend largely on the circumstances of the utterance.

Questions about the proper communicative setting naturally lead us to consider what kind of audience we should address. The critic Jung Yeong-hae is wary of frameworks in which the disadvantaged address the powerful, proposing instead that 'the most crucial thing is not to speak to the majority as a minority [...]'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as the following passage shows, she is acutely aware that language does not always wield power: 'Ironically, the act of not speaking can raise minorities up to a position of subjectivity, regardless of whether their exclusion by the majority is intentional'.<sup>7</sup> When silence is wielded this way, it too can be power. On the issue of whom minorities should address, Jung has the following to say: 'Minorities should discuss their experiences at length with other minorities. [What is needed now] is to shed light, through dialogue, on the differences that exist among all those who find themselves lumped together under the catch-all term "minority"'.<sup>8</sup> In order to disrupt frameworks in which the disadvantaged address the powerful (and here I recognise the dangers of equating Jung's 'minority' with 'the disadvantaged', but do so only for the sake of illustrating the dynamic we have

been talking about), we must ask ourselves whom we ought to be addressing, and strive to foster the conditions under which the disadvantaged can address the disadvantaged. Jung quotes Spivak: 'For me, the question "Who should speak?" is less crucial than "Who will listen?" "I will speak for myself as a Third World Person" is an important position for political mobilization today'.<sup>9</sup> As Jung describes it, 'speaking to myself, to ourselves' would almost certainly be one way to do this.<sup>10</sup> The main concern of Jung's argument is how to become someone who speaks, but we can say that her approach involves overturning assumptions about listeners.

I would like to focus a little more here on the addressee problem. It bears repeating that this audience, as signalled by the term 'ourselves,' is figured as a plurality, an aggregate of differences. Fanon wrote of his audience: 'Many Blacks [sic] will not recognize themselves in the following pages'.<sup>11</sup> Just because an addressee belongs to the same category as the speaker in the context of what is narrated does not mean they will think alike. Some addressees will undoubtedly respond positively toward the speaker. And there may also be some interlocutors on the other side of the aisle, who despite not being addressed, happen to hear and agree with the speaker. And of course, there will be unreceptive listeners who merely reinforce the existing power structure. The point is we cannot group all listeners into the same category. It is true that no speaker can fully know her audience. But it is also true that this audience will never be monolithic to begin with. The Spivak quotation that Jung cited above ('I will speak for myself') continues: 'But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously'.<sup>12</sup> Jung reads this 'self' in Spivak as a minority audience, but at the same time, the people on the receiving end of this 'real demand' are also 'the hegemonic people, the dominant people'.<sup>13</sup> The audience is the speaker herself, as well as a diversely constituted 'us' and a diversely constituted 'them.' It is always to this kind of stratified audience, an audience of diverse listeners who are not easily reconcilable, that the speaker speaks.

As I have described it above, this plural nature of audiences makes things harder on the speaker. So perhaps we should not be surprised if a speaker, confronted with this flaw inherent in all communicative acts, feels trepidation, confusion or fear—even the occasional bitterness—jostling up against the ardent demand and sincere hope to be heard. My reason for considering audience plurality from the speaker's point of view is this: the complexity of speech acts in ever-changing communicative scenarios calls for something other than the conventional view of speech as power. In investigating the issue of listeners from the speaker's perspective, and in considering communication as experienced by speakers who cannot easily tell their story, yet who yearn to be heard, I hope to contribute to the

framing of communication as a site for the negotiation of relationships rather than as an arena where power is contested.

## 2 Writing a Literary Text

Literature is a form of communication. In the literary communicative circuit, the writer addresses the reader.

By securing a place for the reader in literary theory, reader response criticism has contributed to the notion of a productive textuality wherein the reader is accorded an active role. While theories differ in the ways in which they conceptualise the reader, work in this area has considerably advanced our understanding of how the writer or text draw the reader into the textual world. I have outlined the salient features of these theories elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> but generally speaking, when it comes to describing how readers relate to specific textual techniques, these theories tend not to show any lack of fit in reader-text relationships. Even if some disparity is noted, it is attributed to the productivity of the text. However, taking the view that the communication between a text and its readers is always imperfect requires one to confront specific readers who do not fit into the theoretical model. It also requires one to confront dominant conventions of reading which would turn the open Text into a closed Work.

Within cultural studies, research on reader and audience reception has placed a heavy emphasis on the study of real readers. The cultural studies approach has had a significant influence on literary studies. In concentrating on actual readers situated in society and history, cultural studies (and the literary research related to it<sup>15</sup>) has drawn attention to the role of recipients who deviate from producers' ideal image of readers. Yamaguchi Makoto writes the following about the possibilities enabled by Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding. It is thanks to this model that we can now 'conceive of media as not simply a transparent conduit of information with a sender and receiver at either end, but as a site of contest over the social meanings and values involved at the encoding and decoding stages of messages—messages which are produced and received in an intricately linked series of events'.<sup>16</sup> Reader (audience) research in cultural studies has rediscovered the reader as an arbiter of value and meaning in her own right. While this line of argument makes it possible to posit the receiver as a resistant subjectivity, it also enables us to examine the system by which hegemonic forces attempt to construct recipient identities via mass media; thus, the relationship between senders and receivers of information is conceived as a struggle.

With the idea of communication as a struggle for meaning in mind, I would like to return now to the issue of the literary text. Where would we place the literary text within the above encoding/decoding model? I would like to note that this is no straightforward matter. First of all, as literature is also a subset of mass media, it would be possible to align it with the position of sender. However, at the same time, the writers of literary texts are themselves beholden to certain conventions, for example, the expectations of the genres they are writing in, so we can also say there is an aspect of the literary text that should be aligned with the receiver position. The more attention we pay to this struggle for meaning, the more difficult it becomes to assign the literary text to one side or the other. After all, any power a literary text acquires as a kind of sender is inextricable from the compromises it makes as a kind of receiver. The party with whom the writer negotiates in the act of writing is what we have been calling 'the reader.' Faced with the plurality of listeners contained therein, the speaker must constantly reckon with how to respond to their various expectations, sometimes falling in line with them, sometimes keeping her distance. In keeping with this cultural studies approach, what I would like to examine here, albeit in relation to the literary text, is the figure of the speaker faced with this kind of audience. As I wrote above, I am approaching communication not as struggle for power but as an opportunity for the negotiation of relationships. In refusing to treat the literary text as inherently fixed to the speaker side of the model, but as something rather more liminal that only speaks once it acquires an audience, I hope to show that the presence or absence of voice need not correspond to the possession or lack of agency. In contrast to the diversity of response illustrated by audience research, which is to say diversity among readers, I am foregrounding the notion of reader plurality in order to draw attention to diversity of response within the individual writer (who is also a reader). The 'model' reader and the real reader together form just one stratum of the readership that a writer faces while writing. That is, there is a sense in which even real readers are abstractions, drawn as they are from a particular sociohistorical context. There are multiple levels between the general and specific at which we may posit readers. Not all of these readers will be looking forward to what the speaker has to say. Once we recognise that not all who speak wield power, we can begin to think about what it is like for speakers struggling to tell unwanted truths. I submit that in trying to tell their stories in spite of everything, they open up the possibility for non-adversarial communication.

Incidentally, several approaches in literary studies have actively focused on readers who do not conform to the expectations signalled by writers and their texts. Feminist literary criticism, concerned with the difference of reading as a woman, is one of these approaches. Rather than the productivity of the text,

feminist criticism has tended to grapple more with the ideological underpinnings of literature. And when we think about the role of women as writers in addition to readers, the true complexity of the situation becomes all the more evident. This is because women who write are also readers who have departed from dominant modes of reading. It is clear that 'women's writing' [*joryū bungaku*] is a marginal category, and women who write are consigned to it by default. Survival within such a system can only be a matter of negotiation. The writing woman [*kaku onna*] is someone who has taken it upon herself to question, eschew and reinterpret the strictures around womanhood. The writing woman is thus already estranged from other women. This is because, as feminist criticism has thoroughly explored, 'woman' has been synonymous with silence. If we recall one of the foundational ideas of contemporary feminism, the insistence on the heterogeneity of women as a category, then the writing woman as well as the feminist occupy a position at the periphery. Because of their remove, they are attuned to the necessity of negotiating with the system. This is not to say, of course, that they exist outside the system. We all live within this system. We cannot say someone is outside of it simply because they deviate in a certain respect under certain conditions, just as we cannot say someone is a part of it simply because they conform in a certain respect. However, the starting point of feminist thought is asking why people who do not accept the terms of the category, or else who reject being completely defined by it, are nevertheless consigned to it.

Feminism addresses both men and women. There is no confining its audience to one gender or another. The feminist voice is not to be understood as the voice of one side—women—addressing another—men. Whether or not someone is receptive to a feminist voice is not determined by gender. Supporters and detractors come in a variety of genders. There are female and male listeners sympathetic toward feminism, just as there are female and male listeners who are not. We must also not forget that gender systems do not operate in isolation, but are bound up with other systems like class and race. Speakers simply cannot hope to reach all listeners in the same way. Careful consideration given toward one group of listeners may not apply toward others. Because a speaker's audience is actually a plural one stratified according to various criteria, such a complex web of negotiations ensures that not all utterances will gain traction. The crucial thing is to persist in speaking in spite of this.

Returning now to the topic of literary texts, I would like to discuss a narrative which exemplifies what I have discussed above, exhibiting both a disconnect from its listeners and the desire to reach out to them anyway. The object of my analysis is Mizumura Minae's novel *Shishōsetsu from left to right* (1995),<sup>17</sup> and I will approach it as a text in search of the right listener.

### 3 *Shishōsetsu from left to right*

*Shishōsetsu from left to right* records a day in the life of its narrator, also named Minae, as she reflects on the twenty years that have passed since her arrival in America at the age of twelve; interspersed throughout the text are numerous phone conversations with her older sister, Nanae. Unable to adapt to American life, Minae has spent her time wrapped up in Japanese literature, aspiring to write a novel of her own in Japanese. Turned off by English, she has chosen to pursue a graduate degree in French literature, though the end of the novel finds her resolving to return to Japan to write. This is a novel that speaks to how one becomes a writing woman.

It becomes apparent as one flips through it that the book is written in an extremely unorthodox form. While it is indeed a Japanese novel, the text runs horizontally from left to right, with no small amount of English—in Roman script—mixed in. The opening page is almost entirely in English. Announced in the very title of the novel, this gambit is a deliberately provocative one, and its critique of conventional Japanese literary form is hard to miss. It is also clear that the novel's form makes it hard to read as a work written in Japanese. This lack of readability is a bold choice.

The inclusion of so much English has alienated some Japanese readers. Although Mizumura received the Noma Literary New Face Prize [sic] in 1995 for this novel, there was no shortage of acerbic commentary from the awarding committee.<sup>18</sup> For instance, one judge, the literary critic Akiyama Shun, remarked: 'I found it tough going. To be blunt, I was bored. The reason for this can be found at the sentence level. This style just does not make for good prose in a novel. The phone conversations, for instance, were rather irritating'.<sup>19</sup> The phone conversations contain the bulk of the novel's English. The philosopher Karatani Kōjin was similarly negative about this formal 'device', remarking: 'It may look like a literary (linguistic) experiment, but it is not. If you approach it as one, you will only be disappointed'.<sup>20</sup> The critic Takahashi Hideo was even more severe: 'As a judge for an award [...] I just could not accept a novel with so much English mixed in'.<sup>21</sup> The novelist Tomioka Taeko wrote, 'If the protagonist, so fond of Japanese literature, really wanted to write a Japanese *shishōsetsu* [I-novel], she could at least have taken the trouble to turn these horizontal letters vertical'.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the editor and critic Miura Masashi wrote, 'I don't think it has a good title. Also, I struggled with the style, with its combination of horizontal typesetting and English prose'.<sup>23</sup> Writing in an idiom studded with English seems to have inspired major aversion

in readers who only read and write in Japanese. But that was likely the point. So, then, how are we to approach this wilful unreadability?

First, we should point out that this unreadability goes the other way, too. The likelihood that an Anglophone reader would be able to read the Japanese is, after all, very slim. So not only has Mizumura refrained from writing an English-language novel, though she could if she wanted, but she has furthermore anticipated the issue of translation; in light of this, her choice to mix in English takes on an extra significance. As she writes:

Indeed, it would be possible to translate *Shishōsetsu from left to right* into any other language in the world, be it Korean, Polish or Arabic, and still replicate its bilingual form by leaving the English sentences intact. The only language into which it would be impossible to translate the work would be English.<sup>24</sup>

In writing a novel that actively resists English translation, she has highlighted the asymmetrical relationship between Japanese as an exceedingly local language and English as a universal one. She knows the form of the novel will pose singular problems for Anglophone readers, which is why she chose it.

By virtue of being written in Japanese and English, the novel is difficult to read in either Japanese or English. This resistance to being read is tied up in the identities of both narrator-protagonist Minae and her sister Nanae. The narrator is depicted as an inveterate outsider. 'Any way you look at it, we'll never be American', says Nanae (p. 309). To be sure, they are not white. But they also harbour serious reservations about being labelled people of colour.

[...] saying Japanese people and black people are both 'colored'<sup>25</sup> is like saying women and the moon are both examples of *yin*, it's entirely to do with ideology—not anything you could ever deduce from the physical world. It's merely a concept sustained by the fact that in the modern period the speaking subjects of Western languages decided to call themselves 'white,' while anyone who looked different from them was 'colored'. (pp. 262-263)

So, then, what about an Asian category instead? This, too, provokes a deep discomfort.

When I say I was shocked to learn I was Asian, I mean the shock of being lumped in with people who were just as much an Other to me as they were to the Westerners who told us we were different. Moreover, I mean the shock—and the

humiliation—of being lumped in with people who were secretly glad I was not one of them. (p. 254)

Minae's own discriminatory gaze makes it extremely difficult for her to accept being labelled Asian. It is not only that she and her sister do not consider themselves Asian, but they no longer feel Japanese, either. Minae describes her surprise at seeing Nanae, home from college one summer: 'To my eyes, she could have been Hispanic or Filipina or Indian or Chinese or Vietnamese or take your pick—the only thing she didn't look was Japanese. [...] I never could have guessed how strange she would become' (pp. 127-128).

She relates a similar impression of her sister, from a point in time closer to the narrative present: 'What I saw there was a lone Asian woman, no longer young at all' (p. 264). That is to say, not a Japanese woman. But neither is she completely Asian. 'Her air was peculiar, not the air given off by American-born Asians. Hers was the air of a foreigner unable to put down roots or connect with other people' (p. 265). Thus she seems to drift more and more toward that category reserved for people who just do not belong: foreigner. As a woman whose face is 'not exactly ugly, but dried up' (p. 306),<sup>26</sup> she can no longer be mistaken for one of the Asian-Americans who 'show up on campus year after year in ever-greater numbers, their faces brimming with confidence' (p. 307). Not only are the sisters no longer Japanese, they are not even returnees. 'Anyway, those days were long gone. To the boys and girls brought by their parents to New York these days, our nostalgia would have seemed as antiquated as Meiji-era folk tales—and rightly so' (p. 123).

The changing times are a source of tremendous unease. Moreover, men and women of the same generation had two different experiences. The 'grief' [*hiaī*] the sisters share is 'entirely bound up with [their] being sisters and not brothers' (p. 143). If they had been men they could have returned to Japan. But as middle-class Japanese women, the pressure on them to return to Japan was less urgent than the pressure to find a Japanese husband. As Nanae remarks, 'I don't have to go to a Japanese university, but to make up for it, I'm supposed to marry a Japanese guy' (p. 144). However, the two end up 'gradually departing from Japanese norms' (p. 145), with neither one marrying a Japanese man or returning to Japan. 'How did it all end up like this?' (p. 137) becomes a kind of muttered refrain. Nanae remarks: 'It's like something's gone wrong with me because I came to America. Here I am, reduced to eating all my meals alone, in America' (p. 164). Class, race and gender become intertwined, while the sisters' links to various categories fall away one by one, leaving only 'loneliness' [*kodoku*] (p. 402). They are left with lives that 'didn't turn out the way anyone expected' (p. 156).

The narrator rejects every category we might expect to inform her identity. The difficulty of the text is bound up with this negation. Minae insists upon the uniqueness of her own experience. Unable to identify with anything where she lives, she extends no sympathy and expects none, and her text, accordingly, rejects readability. If Minae has always wanted to become a novelist, then the longer she has spent in America, the fewer listeners she has with whom she shares this experience, and for whom it could be said that she speaks. It would seem harder and harder to find the kind of recipient postulated by her work among any actual reading public.

That said, we must not lose sight of the fact that this is a novel. A novel cannot exist without a reader. It needs a reader to be called a novel. And while this one shuns facile sympathies, it nevertheless calls out to be read. Moreover, it announces right in its title that it is a *shishōsetsu*, or 'I-novel,' a form crucial to the development of modern Japanese literature.

The 'I' here is first and foremost a reader. The decisive factor in the narrator's idiosyncrasies, the very basis of them, has been her reading. As a young woman in America she has single-mindedly read modern Japanese literature. This was the starting point of it all: her estrangement from America, from Japan, and from the present day. When asked whether she can write in Japanese, she always gives the same answer: 'I used to read nothing but Japanese' (p. 114), or 'I've been reading Japanese all these years' (p. 382). Writing is predicated on reading. To put it another way, it is clear that any novel she goes on to write will need a reader. Tellingly, it is not the 'trendy' (p. 168) sort of book likely to attract young Japanese readers, that is, a 'feel-good novel where the world of Japanese and the world of English simply blur together—no hint of friction between them—in Japanese script, the customary mix of kanji and hiragana and katakana snaking down the page' (p. 170); neither is it the kind of story she thinks would be embraced by American readers, for instance, a story of immigrants finding freedom in America (p. 373); it is a *shishōsetsu*.

As Suzuki Tomi has pointed out, the *shishōsetsu* can be defined as 'a mode of reading'.<sup>27</sup> According to Suzuki, '[c]ontrary to the arguments of previous studies, the so-called I-novel is not a genre that can be defined by certain referential, thematic, or formal characteristics', but is a 'mode of reading that assumes that the I-novel is a single-voiced, "direct" expression of the author's "self" and that its written language is "transparent" [...]'.<sup>28</sup> With the mode's supposed transparency linking author, text and era, the *shishōsetsu* ostensibly brings the reader into direct contact with the author. The reader of the *shishōsetsu* reads the real-life author into the text. In actively bringing extra-textual information to bear on the text, the

reader furnishes it with meaning, thereby attaining a kind of textual insider status. In reading *Shishōsetsu from left to right*, we naturally link the narrator, Minae, to the author, Mizumura Minae; inasmuch as the novel ends with the narrator resolving to become a writer, we assume that she goes on to become Mizumura Minae, the Japanese novelist. If we want to read the book like this, there is nothing really standing in our way. On the contrary, the reader seems to be encouraged to fill in the blanks with information from the author's life.

Mizumura would go on to define *shishōsetsu* in her next novel, *A True Novel* (2002):

*A shishōsetsu* is a work that, regardless of whether the author is actually writing about her life, and regardless of whether it is ultimately a work of fiction, has been conceived in the expectation that the reader will—in some way or other—read the author herself into the work.<sup>29</sup>

As Mizumura herself says, the content of the book is not the issue. Because she has written *A True Novel* in a different mode altogether, the speaker and addressee we encounter therein—two characters named 'Katō Yūsuke' and 'Mizumura Minae'—are fictional conceits. Meanwhile, in the case of *Shishōsetsu from left to right*, it is clear that the position of the reader is constructed in a kind of collusion with the real author outside the text.

In combining two features that pull in opposite directions, namely, unreadability and the I-novel framework, the novel complicates the relationship between writer and reader. Japanese readers and American readers are probably the first two categories of potential readers that come to mind, but as I have demonstrated above, the novel resists the sympathies of both sides. In Mizumura we have a writer who cannot tell her story without also highlighting the sociohistorical divisions between herself and her readers. At the same time, on a more fundamental level, she has chosen the most intimate mode of writing to do this. We may say, then, this is the novel of a speaker who is trying to reach listeners despite the fact that her life has placed them out of reach. Even in deploring the lack of appropriate recipients for her work, she needs someone out there to be listening, or she cannot become a writer. Thus we may say that her choice of the *shishōsetsu* mode, so central to the development of modern Japanese literature, demonstrates an intense desire to create her own listeners.

While the speaker's relationship to her potential listeners remains fraught, she does manage to establish one stable connection. In the end, it seems there is only one category with which the narrator feels at ease. This is the *yamamba*.<sup>30</sup> As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>31</sup> the figure of the *yamamba* can be seen as the prototypical

writing woman.<sup>32</sup> Here the *yamamba* is invoked not as an emblem of difference, estranged from other women, but as a figure linking women together:

[...] the women came running from deep in the mountains, kicking up a blizzard with their bare feet. Over the ridgeline now, wild hair streaming, they descended on the valley. *Yamamba* running in the dead of night, risen from the grave. They were my grandmothers, and my great-grandmothers, and my great-great-grandmothers—all of them there, all connected to me. (p. 11)

In a novel about all the categories she has come to defy, this connection has been there from the very beginning. The novel ends with a similar description: '[...] a mad yearning for life flared through my body, and in that moment, the thunder of *yamamba* roared in my ears: *yamamba* leaping out of their graves, tearing barefoot down the mountainside, wild hair streaming' (p. 460). The *yamamba* are the novel's true audience, the ones who exhort the writing woman to 'wake all hope / wake all desire' (p. 462). They complete a communicative circuit linking the speaker to a distant time and place. And in addressing them, the narrator feels her desire, long dormant, return to the surface. We may be sure that such listeners exist among the pluralistic audiences we address, as well.

Enmeshed as we are in relationships of various kinds with various listeners, our voices may not always result in the power to make people listen, but they can be a thoughtful declaration of the intent to change these relationships for the better. Our complex feelings toward listeners are an expression of the desire to be heard. This is how we search for our listeners.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: the present essay appears as Chapter 4 in Iida Yūko, *Kanojotachi no bungaku: katarinikusa to yomarerukoto* (Nagoya: The University of Nagoya Press, 2016), 95-110.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 106-131.

<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313.

<sup>4</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Jung Yeong-hae, *Tamigayo seishō: aidentiti, kokumin kokka, jendā* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Questions of Multi-culturalism', in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 59-60.

<sup>10</sup> Jung, *Tamigayo*, 33.

<sup>11</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Spivak, 'Questions of Multi-culturalism', 60.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Translator's note: the author refers here to Chapter 3 in Iida, *Kanojotachi no bungaku*, 79-94.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Wada Atsuhiko, *Yomu to iu koto: tekusuto to dokusho no riron kara* (Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobō, 1997) and, by the same author, *Media no naka no dokusha: dokushoron no genzai* (Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobō, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Yamaguchi Makoto, 'Media (Audience)', in *Chi no kyōkasho: karuchuraru sutadizu*, ed. Yoshimi Shunya (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001), 59.

<sup>17</sup> Mizumura Minae, *Shishōsetsu from left to right* (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> 'Daijūnanakai Noma Bungei Shinjinshō happyō', *Gunzō* 51, no. 1 (1996), 462-466.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Minae Mizumura, 'Authoring *Shishōsetsu from left to right*', accessed 28 February 2017, <http://mizumuraminae.com/pdf/AuthoringAPersonalNovel20080303.pdf>. Originally published in *PMAJLS: Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies* 4 (1998).

<sup>25</sup> Translator's note: the terms 'colored' and 'white' appear in the original in Roman script, with the rest of the passage written in Japanese.

<sup>26</sup> Translator's note: this quote comes from a passage in which the narrator is describing an earlier generation of Japanese women in America.

<sup>27</sup> Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Juliet Winters Carpenter, trans., *A True Novel* by Minae Mizumura (New York: Other Press, 2013), 230.

<sup>30</sup> Translator's note: an archetypal figure from Japanese folklore, often translated as 'mountain witch'.

<sup>31</sup> Translator's note: the author here refers to her preface in Iida, *Kanojotachi no bungaku*, 1-19.

<sup>32</sup> See also Mizuta Noriko, *Monogatari to hanmonogatari no fūkei: bungaku to josei no sōzōryoku* (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1993).