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Body in transit, body as foreign, body in rebellion: Murata Sayaka and the “female” challenge

One prominent feature of the contemporary Japanese literary scene is the emergence of female writers impacting the readership with a renewed sensibility of the bodily self, challenging the normative understanding of the body with boldness of imagination that throws into question the very meaning of the human. At the forefront of this trend is Sayaka Murata, who made a sensational debut with her prize – winning work, *Convenience Store Woman* (2016). Murata brings to light the illusion of normality that dominates our everyday life and “unmasks” the human in simple, easy – to – read language. In *Earthlings* (2018) Murata urges us to look at the mechanism of propagation of the inhabitants of the planet earth, seemingly suggesting that we break down the gender binary altogether. And it is not Murata alone who has embarked on such audacious challenge against the normal. Her female precursors who struggled to liberate themselves from the expectations of traditional “women’s literature” also dealt with the body, sex and the pressure to reproduce. What is particularly striking, I argue, is that Murata’s work, together with new writings by her fellow female poets and novelists, appears to be enjoying wide resonance in a way earlier female writers did not, as the humanity is being forced to question the very meaning of the human, of propagation and of a belief in progress.