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Poetry as a Means of Survival: why do we still need “women’s poetry”?

Poetry can give voices to those who are unheard, unrecorded and unspoken. Though more and more contemporary women poets are reaching the wider reading public in recent years, many women are still forced to be silent. Especially in the country like Japan, which ranks 120th out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap index in 2021, women are still struggling to speak out.

This presentation examines those unspoken stories of silenced women from some of the recently published poetry collections of Japanese women poets, *Soon to Become a Witch* (2021) by Kawaguchi Harumi (b.1962), *Go, Alone* (2021) by Park Kyongmi (b.1956) and *Fly Low Marvelously* (2019) by Abe Hinako (b.1953), and discuss how they use startling and disturbing imagery to depict women’s lives, which are so often untold and unheard. These collections present the stories of women, mothers, daughters and schoolgirls who are unable to verbalize or even to recognize their own pain or angst; a girl facing sexual assaults from her father, a wife suffering from domestic violence, a control – freak mother who cannot control her jealousy over her daughter’s sexual attractiveness, a Korean – Japanese woman who is trapped in a family curse passed down from her female relatives.

These women’s stories are transnational. In Anglophone poetry, these women’s issues may be considered ‘out of fashion’ and some may even argue much has changed. However, it does not mean they are all solved because we know these issues still exist in many regions of the globe. Silenced women tend to become isolated because they cannot share their own stories. I argue poetry can connect those isolated women and reassure they are not alone. By analyzing these recently published poems, I hope to argue the importance of (re)telling, (re)imagining and (re)sharing women’s experiences through poetry.