



Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan

Amanda C. Seaman

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Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan is a wide-ranging account of how women writers have made sense (and nonsense) of pregnancy in postwar Japan. While earlier authors such as Yosano Akiko had addressed the pain and emotional complexities of childbearing in their poetry and prose, the topic quickly moved into the literary shadows when motherhood became enshrined as a duty to state and sovereign in the 1930s and '40s. This reproductive imperative endured after World War II, spurred by a need to create a new generation of citizens and consumers for a new, peacetime nation. It was only in the 1960s, in the context of a flowering of feminist thought and activism, that more critical and nuanced appraisals of pregnancy and motherhood began to appear.

In her fascinating study, Amanda C. Seaman analyzes the literary manifestations of this new critical approach, in the process introducing readers to a body of work notable for the wide range of genres employed by its authors (including horror and fantasy, short stories, novels, memoir, and manga), the many political, personal, and social concerns informing it, and the diverse creative approaches contained therein. This “pregnancy literature,” Seaman argues, serves as an important yet rarely considered forum for exploring and debating not only the particular experiences of the pregnant mother-to-be, but the broader concerns of Japanese women about their bodies, their families, their life choices, and the meaning of motherhood for individuals and for Japanese society. It will be of interest to scholars of modern Japanese literature and women’s history, as well as those concerned with gender studies, feminism, and popular culture in Japan and beyond.

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