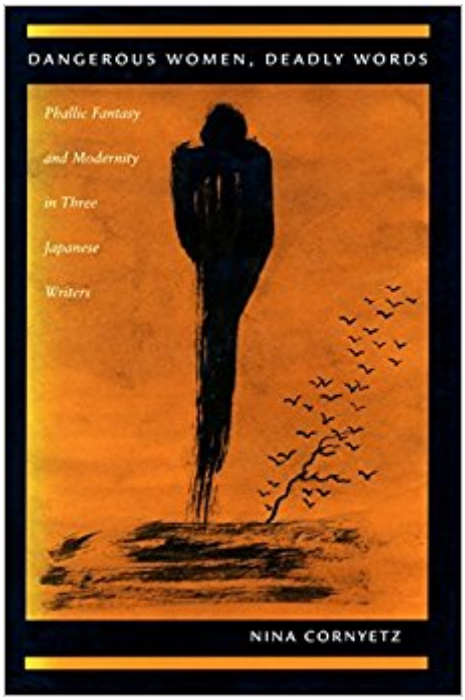
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Dangerous Women, Deadly Words: Phallic Fantasy And Modernity In Three Japanese Writers



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Synopsis

Dangerous Women, Deadly Words is a materialist-feminist, psychoanalytic analysis of a modern Japanese literary tropeÃ¢â ¬â ¢the dangerous womanÃ¢â ¬â ¢in the works of three twentieth-century writers: Izumi Kyoka (1873-1939), Enchi Fumiko (1905-86), and Nakagami Kenji (1946-92). Linked to archaisms and magical realms, the trope of the dangerous, spiritually empowered woman culls from and commingles archetypes from throughout the Japanese canon, including mountain witches, female shamans, and snake-women. In radical opposition to the conventional interpretation of the trope as a repository for transhistorical notions of "female essence" and "Japaneseness," the author reads the dangerous woman as connected in complex ways with twentieth-century Japanese epistemological upheavals: the negotiation of modern phallic subjectivity, modernization of a homosocial economy, the radically changed status of women, reified maternity, compulsory heterosexuality, and the function of literature.The dangerous woman enabled the literary birth of a modern, phallic, national subject as its constitutive Other, the locus of "originary" desire, thus the domain of the Lacanian Real and, accordingly, the abject. Determined by the cultural abhorrence that gives shape in language to the earliest psychic processes of separating self from not-self, the dangerous woman is also the locus for jouissance, a type of erotic pleasure that threatens the stability of the experiential subject.The book’s close literary readings are deeply anchored in the gendered cultural and literary characteristics of three periods in Japan’s modernity. The author traces the trope of the dangerous woman through its establishment as a male imaginary by gothic storyteller Kyoka, its subsequent cooption for female erotic agency by Enchi, and its ultimate destabilization by Nakagami through a phallic retroping of archaisms partly dependent on an equation of the social discourses on outcaste pollution with those of homosexual and female abjection.

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Customer Reviews

"Rigorous use of psychoanalytic and feminist theories, coupled with close textual analyses, make Nina Cornyetz's exploration of a literary trope of the "dangerous woman" a stimulating study. . . . Cornyetz's book marks a significant contribution, not only to the field of Japanese literary studies, but also to the psychoanalytic and feminist theories as well." (The Journal of Asian Studies)

Dangerous Women, Deadly Words is a materialist-feminist, psychoanalytic analysis of a modern Japanese literary tropeÃ¢â ¬â •the dangerous womanÃ¢â ¬â •in the works of three twentieth-century writers: Izumi Kyoka (1873-1939), Enchi Fumiko (1905-86), and Nakagami Kenji (1946-92). Linked to archaisms and magical realms, the trope of the dangerous, spiritually empowered woman culls from and commingles archetypes from throughout the Japanese canon, including mountain witches, female shamans, and snake-women.In radical opposition to the conventional interpretation of the trope as a repository for transhistorical notions of Ã¢â ¬Å“female essenceÃ¢â ¬Â• and Ã¢â ¬Å“Japaneseness,Ã¢â ¬Â• the author reads the dangerous woman as connected in complex ways with twentieth-century Japanese epistemological upheavals: the negotiation of modern phallic subjectivity, modernization of a homosocial economy, the radically changed status of women, reified maternity, compulsory heterosexuality, and the function of literature.The dangerous woman enabled the literary birth of a modern, phallic, national subject as its constitutive Other, the locus of Ã¢â ¬Å“originaryÃ¢â ¬Â• desire, thus the domain of the Lacanian Real and, accordingly, the abject. Determined by the cultural abhorrence that gives shape in language to the earliest psychic processes of separating self from not-self, the dangerous woman is also the locus for jouissance, a type of erotic pleasure that threatens the stability of the experiential subject.The bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s close literary readings are deeply anchored in the gendered cultural and literary characteristics of three periods in JapanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s modernity. The author traces the trope of the dangerous woman through its establishment as a male imaginary by gothic storyteller Kyoka, its subsequent cooption for female erotic agency by Enchi, and its ultimate destabilization by Nakagami through a phallic retroping of archaisms partly dependent on an equation of the social discourses on outcaste pollution with those of homosexual and female abjection.

This book is refreshing. It is grounded on a series of readings by three modern fiction writers. Each of these (Izumi KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka, Enchi Fumiko, Nakagami Kenji) centerpieces a modern type of female character, one that often draws on the stylistics of pre-modern archetypes. "The dangerous woman" is the focus for Cornyetz's development of an understanding of how three moments of modern narrative have drawn on, yet re-formulated, the moment of encounter with the pre-modern. They have done so, she writes, in the service of contemporary critiques of their respective patriarchal orders. Crucial in each of the triptych's parts is an analysis of how the "dangerous woman" also corresponds in some fashion (negation, abjection, other relation, etc.) to a maternal figure. The use of psychoanalytic criticism in this book differs from many psycho-biographical narratives (e.g. that focus on KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka's maternal complex) that reflect authorial consciousness onto characters as a kind of therapy. She analyzes how language that has been troped as "feminine" opens a proliferation of meanings. But at the same time, this potential opening often channels a line of narrative that tries to re-attach language to a kind of "Real," but can only do so by abjecting a female (not a "feminized") body. The argument is clearly written, and upfront about its own critical investments; it goes through focused explications of the Lacanian concepts that are necessary to apply to the readings it offers; I even found the Structuralist-influenced charts that compare various concepts quite helpful. The book is useful and actually teachable because many of the works it cites by each author are translated; moreover, it succinctly summarizes the main line of many currents of Japanese scholarship hard to get one's hands on outside of major metropolises. I liked the KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka section in particular, because it works THROUGH the logic of the textual systems, apart from a priori assumptions about history or the author's personal history, before relating her readings to the historical period/regime of power in question. Lastly, it perodizes lit crit in some helpful ways too--e.g. the reception of particupar KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka or Nakagami critical paradigms. In short, highly recommended, useful, and one of the least hysterical books about hysteria you are likely to read for a while.

Cornyetz takes three seemingly disparate writers and shows how they are all implicated in the creation of the modern Japanese subject through a process of othering and abjecting the "dangerous woman". The book makes several sorely needed contributions. First, it brings rigorous critical vocabulary to a field that often uses loose, impressionistic language to talk about femininity in Izumi KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka (1873 - 1939), Enchi Fumiko (1905 - 1986), and Nakagami Kenji (1946-1992). Second, it reveals how more sophisticated recent criticism - especially on Nakagami - tends to

erase gender as it becomes more theoretical. Perhaps most impressive, it steers clear of using feminism either to celebrate or condemn the texts themselves. Instead it highlights the ambivalent politics of their simultaneous reliance upon and interventions into the foreclosure of women's bodies and women's pleasures from Japanese modernity.The three authors receive four or five short chapters each. Those on KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka situate his nostalgia for mothers and enchantresses in relation to Meiji social, economic, political, linguistic and literary reforms. Those on Enchi focus on vengeful uses of the sacred and the profane by middle-aged women in the immediate post-war period, when state-sanctioned maternity was enforced anew to make non-reproductive female sexuality almost inconceivable. The chapters on Nakagami describe the author's treatment of 1960's jazz, the Buraku outcaste class, male homoeroticism, and pre-Buddhist oral tales. In each case Cornyetz draws from a range of recent and canonical writings to provide precise sociocultural and literary-critical contexts. These expository elements give her narrative a fine historical grain, delivering a great amount of information with authority and clarity.The book's main achievement is to draw these elements into a compelling account of why sexual excess, maternity, voice and the monogatari form are integral to each writer precisely in their systematic codings as feminine, and abject. KyÃƒÆ'Ã Â´ka is often said to be fascinated with an erotic female other and at the same time "feminine" in his own prose style. Cornyetz argues that these "femininities" are not oppositional to but in fact devalued byproducts of the genbun'ichi consolidation of modern male subjectivity in a new phonocentric writing system. She demonstrates how a similar gendering of premodern language lies behind the "discovery" of an exotic, erotic, and necessarily absent Japan in a number of cultural projects, from Meiji ethnography to Edo kokugaku. Her discussion of Enchi pivots on the feminization of Heian literary genres. Drawing from important work by Mizuta Noriko, it shows how Enchi uses Heian "women's" writing to access a disruptive female rage that is always framed by the same phallocentric logic it is meant to resist. Of the three writers, Nakagami emerges as the most self-reflexive in his knowledge that the premodern "women's" voice is ultimately neither dangerous nor deadly. His identification of the male outcaste with the female other is the most ambivalent instance of "phallic fantasy" in the book.

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