

Gothic heroine rather than the progenitor of one of the most enduring of all Gothic tales. It could be argued, as David Punter does in *The Literature of Terror*, that:

The elements which seem most universal in the genre are the apparent presence of a ghost [...] the very real presence of one or more members of the aristocracy, with castles and props to match; and a dominant love plot, generally set in the past but with very little historical distancing [...] and sometimes the interpolation of references to actual historical events (Punter, 1980, p. 2).

All of these seem to apply to Mary Shelley's representation in *Frankenstein Unbound*, *Haunted Summer*, *Rowing with the Wind*, *Gothic* and *The Frankenstein Chronicles*. Indeed, as the author negotiates the serpentine London streets and the labyrinthine corridors of the Villa Diodati, in the company of Lord Byron and the once-titled but disowned 'Lord' Percy Shelley, closely followed by the monster made manifest and the ghosts of her lost loved ones, it becomes clear that she is figured not as an author at all, but merely as another lost and ineffectual Gothic heroine within a classical Gothic plot not of her own making. Even though she is, for the purposes of history, now regarded as the unlikely eighteen-year-old female author of *Frankenstein*, as opposed to the once held belief that the tale was in fact penned by her husband Percy, nonetheless, her representation challenges her agency leading to questions as to whether the feminist movement (in many ways spearheaded by Mary Wollstonecraft) has not lead to a foreword progression, but instead a maze, much like those omnipresent in Gothic fictions that more times than not lead not to an end-point, a conclusion, but instead back to the beginning.

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## Chapter 9

# Illusion, Reality and Fearsome Femininity in Takashi Miike's *Audition*

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Director Takashi Miike states in his introduction to the DVD version of *Odishon / Audition* (Japan: 1999) that he does not consider his work to be a horror film. Miike adds that he sees the film as fundamentally different from other contemporary Japanese horror blockbusters like *Ringu/Ring* (Japan: Hideo Nakata, 1998) and *Ju-on/The Grudge* (Japan: Takashi Shimizu, 2002). In fact, Miike, who is known for his unwillingness to conform to the rules of genre, was sought out by the movie's production company as someone who had never before directed a horror movie and who would be able to depart from the formulaic nature of the films of the current horror boom (Mes, 2004, p. 200). Despite Miike's unwillingness to brand *Audition* as a horror movie, the film's screening in several locations in Europe, including the Rotterdam Film Festival of 2000, resulted in audience walkouts and even viewers who passed out and needed to be taken away by ambulance (Hantke, 2005, p. 55). One explanation for *Audition's* intense effect on its audience is its shift in genre from romantic comedy to horror about halfway through the movie. Because viewers have been lulled into complacency by *Audition's* 'formal, almost clinical structure' there is 'no safety net to catch the audience as they reel in horror at the unfolding scenes of torture' that constitute the climax of the film (Mes, 2004, p. 201).

As *Audition's* title suggests, one of the film's major themes is how people present certain images of themselves and how willing others are to accept these constructed images as real. In fact, *Audition's* audiences have been especially horrified by the ending of the film because they were willing to accept the innocuous atmosphere reminiscent of a home drama which they were presented with during the first hour of the movie. Directly linked to *Audition's* presentation as either a home drama or a horror movie is the presentation of Asami Yamazaki (Eihi Shiina), a 'tall, otherworldly waif' who at first seems to be a 'demure, sensitive, and artistically trained' (Morris, 2001) young woman but turns out to be a vengeful murderess. Asami's transformation from the kind of woman who would make an ideal wife into an insane *femme fatale* is intended

to shock the viewer, as her pretty face, virginal white dresses, soft voice and kind words conceal her disturbing past and equally disturbing intentions for a large portion of the film.

The persona that Asami displays during the eponymous audition and continues to promote during all but her last interaction with the film's protagonist, Shigeharu Aoyama (Ryō Ishibashi), is modelled after the 'traditional' Japanese ideal of femininity promoted by the government during the Meiji period (1868–1912) and perpetuated during the Shōwa period (1926–1989) through the medium of home dramas. As numerous literary and cinematic works from both historical periods suggest, the ideal of respectable femininity embodied by the demure and obedient young woman who marries to become the 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) was never anything more than an artificial image created by a patriarchal society and adopted by numerous women hoping to succeed within their societal environment by conforming to its gender roles. Just as an actress will attempt to put forth a certain image of herself in an audition in order to get a part, modern women have enacted variations on a feminine ideal in order to be awarded a high position in society. Because the feminine ideal is nothing more than an act, however, it can be cast aside as easily as *Audition's* Asami discards her white dress for a black rubber apron in order to torture Aoyama. Similarly, the ideal of the polite young 'office lady' hoping for marriage during the 1980s has become the image of the cute and irresponsible sexual carnivore of the closing decade of the twentieth century, and the patient and caring housewives of past generations are beginning to age as younger generations of women increasingly refuse to marry or bear children.

Asami's transformation in *Audition* reflects anxieties concerning the deterioration of the image of demure femininity in Japan, and the film's shift from home drama to horror reflects a male-gendered attitude regarding this change. By examining three important character images generated in *Audition*, namely, the film's presentation of Aoyama as a representative of the world of Japanese home drama, Asami's presentation of herself as an innocent young woman who would fit perfectly into Aoyama's ideal social environment, and the film's final presentation of Asami as a vengeful *femme fatale*, I illustrate the transformation of the Japanese ideal of femininity during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This chapter investigates not just the film *Audition*, but also the cultural influences of its tropes, which can be found in its precedents in Japanese television, graphic novels, and early modern theatre.

### Aoyama as Representative of Classic Home Drama

The emotional environment of a Japanese home drama is comfortable, inoffensive, and generally conservative. Agnes Niyekawa quotes Takashi Hoga, a representative of the New York Office of Fuji Telecasting Company, as describing home dramas as 'family-oriented and watched by everyone from grandmother to little children' (Niyekawa, 1984, p. 62). These programs became common in the early 1960s, when an increasing number of households owned television sets,

and were initially based on American shows like *I Love Lucy* (1957) and *Father Knows Best* (1958). Hideo Hirahara (1991) states that like their counterparts in these American television shows, 'the personalities of the central characters [of Japanese home dramas of the 1960's and early 1970's], women more than men, were based on conservative principles.' In her discussion of the mid-seventies serial program *Daikon no hana III* (1972–1973), a home drama centred around an aging Pacific War veteran and his attitude towards his son's fiancée, Niyekawa (1984) found that 'among the traditional values reinforced in the serial are *oyakōkō* (filial piety) and the close relationship between relatives, friends, and associates.' For example, 'seldom is a major conflict resolved by individual effort. Relatives and friends get involved in trying to solve the problem.' Although both of these scholars describe home dramas on television instead of on the big screen, many cinematic manifestations of the genre, such as the dozens of instalments in the postwar *Otoko wa tsurai yo* ('It's tough being a man') series of comedy films, incorporate the same comfortable, conservative worldview. The aim of a home drama is to be entertaining yet socially educational while allowing viewers to work out their personal problems along with the likeable and ordinary characters on screen. More often than not, these problems are resolved by means of marriage and the reinstatement of patriarchal authority over the family, which is welcomed with gratitude by the kind and wise women who appreciate the hard work of their men while excusing the quirkiest aspects of their personalities.

Film critics G. Morris (2001) and Steffen Hantke (2005) have drawn a connection between the genre of the Japanese home drama and the opening of *Audition*. Morris states the first hour of the film 'has the look and feel of a classic Japanese family drama à la Ozu' (2001) and Hantke points out that the 'medium shots and naturalistic lighting' combined with the 'consistently slow' pace of the film's first hour gives it a certain 'made-for-television aesthetic (2005, p. 56).' Moreover, the slightly plump, round-faced protagonist of *Audition*, Shigeharu Aoyama, is an almost stereotypical protagonist of a Japanese home drama. Aoyama is a sympathetic figure not only because he serves as the viewer's entryway into the world of the film but also because he is a genuinely likeable man. As Hantke points out, 'Aoyama, though far from perfect, does nothing to deserve Asami's ferocious violence. On the contrary, Miike goes to great lengths to present him as a well-intentioned, decent man' (Hantke, 2005, p. 59). When his wife dies during the opening scene of the movie, Aoyama appears to be deeply grieved. No tears form in his eyes, but the expression on his face makes it clear that his sadness is profound. He is left to raise his young son Shigehiko (Tetsu Sawaki) alone, but the next scene makes it clear that he will be a good father. Aoyama and Shigehiko walk down the sidewalk silently and at some distance from each other on the way home from school; but, when Shigehiko pauses to examine something he sees on the ground, Aoyama turns and waits for him, and the two join hands as the title 'Audition' appears in red along the right side of the screen.

The movie then jumps 'seven years later' to show Aoyama and his high school-aged son teasing each other and laughing while horsing around on a fishing trip. When Shigehiko brings his new girlfriend home in the following scene, Aoyama tells his son to give her his dinner and flashes him an 'okay' sign with

his thumb and forefinger after he has spoken with the girl. He also enjoys a friendly relationship with his housekeeper Rie (Toshie Negishi) and is affectionate to the family dog, Gang. Although Aoyama is the busy president of a television production company, he does not conform to the typical Japanese image of the workaholic, absent father and instead seems to genuinely value his family.

The one blot on Aoyama's record is his failed relationship with his secretary, which the viewer can infer from her use of the intimate second-person pronoun *anata* to address him when she catches him alone after work. In Aoyama's prolonged hallucination later in the movie, his secretary appears within his fevered vision and accuses him by saying: 'You made love to me only once. I expected something from you. Was I stupid?' Aoyama apologizes to her with a pained expression on his face, and her appearance in his hallucination is more than likely a manifestation of the guilt that he feels toward her. The relationship between the two is certainly strained during the scenes at Aoyama's office, but he treats her with respect and regards their failed affair with embarrassment instead of condescension.

When Aoyama chooses Asami based on her resume, he does not seem to be playing the part of the sexual predator. He flips through resumes, glancing at several sexually alluring headshots of young women, but is not entranced by any of them. The look on Aoyama's face, as well as his heavy sigh, suggest that he is not only overwhelmed by his task of choosing thirty candidates out of the piles of resumes on his desk but also unhappy and a bit disgusted by the process. His face is pained as he turns the picture of his wife away from him. It is only when he wipes some spilled tea from her resume that he discovers Asami, whose headshot reveals a mildly pretty young woman in a plain white blouse against a plain white background. Soft piano music begins to play as he sets aside her picture and begins to read her essay. Although Aoyama 'selects' a woman in a rather disingenuous way, he is by no means a patriarchal monster. Certainly, he is less interested in having sex with pretty young things than he is in finding the perfect woman by means of her moving essay.

Within the first twenty minutes of the movie, Aoyama is presented as an extraordinarily sympathetic character who could easily star as the male lead in a televised home drama, and Miike gives his audience many reasons to like the man. The various elements of the story so far, such as the marriage-centred plot, the quirky yet nonsubversive characterisation, and the soft piano and violin music central to the score, seem to have been engineered to present the audience with the comfortable and familiar atmosphere of a home drama. The scene in which Shigehiko teases his father about looking old and encourages him to remarry is filmed in a style highly reminiscent of director Yasujiro Ozu's classic cinematic home dramas, such as *Tōkyō monogatari/Tokyo Story* (Japan 1953). The scene is shot from a low angle, as if from the viewpoint of someone sitting on the floor, and neither the camera nor the two characters move over the course of the long conversation. Through his use of a melodramatic plot, a cast of likeable characters typified by Aoyama, and his choice of certain cinematic conventions, Miike tempts the audience to settle down into a sweet, charming home drama. When Asami walks into this carefully constructed atmosphere centred

around the 'nice guy' character of Aoyama, her identity as a living image of the feminine ideal expressed by Japanese home dramas seems only natural.

### Asami as an Ideal Demure Young Woman

It can be argued that Japanese women, especially those of the upper classes, have been forced to play a domestic role based on their gender ever since the late Kamakura period (1185–1333), when the Mongol invasions of 1274 and 1281 forced warrior families to consolidate land and power in an increasingly militarised society through the practice of male unogeniture. By the end of the Muromachi period (1336–1573), women of the warrior class no longer inherited the titles to the land that formerly brought them income and a small degree of political influence (Tonomura, 1990, pp. 592–623). As a result, each succeeding generation of women lost more power and autonomy until they became nothing more than assistant managers of households and vessels for the son that would inherit his father's legacy. Non-samurai women were freer to work outside the home and have sexual liaisons outside of marriage (Farris, 2006), but even they fell under the influence of the phallogocentric ideology of Neo-Confucianism in the Edo period (1600–1868). The popular Confucian educational tract *Onna daigaku* instructs women that 'the great lifelong duty of women is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and style of her address should be courteous, humble, and conciliatory, never peevish and intractable', and so on (Paulson, 1976, p. 11). Furthermore, 'houseworker and lover were considered entirely distinct roles, and they were held to be mutually incompatible', partially because 'children were no more than reminders of the unpleasant burden of everyday life for Edo period men' (Saeki, 1998, p. 178). Therefore, a woman could not hold a respectable place in the society of the Edo period while at the same time indulging in romance or in any other way allowing her ego free reign.

The social role played by the ideal woman in modern Japan is to be that of the obedient, self-sacrificing housewife; and, even though the Meiji period (1868–1912) saw several advances in the status of women, the moulds of the old social roles proved difficult to break. For example, primary-level education was made compulsory for children of both sexes in 1872, theoretically allowing boys and girls the same degree of education, but home economics classes were compulsory for girls until 1949, and women were not admitted into Japan's national universities until after the Pacific War. In addition, Meiji law stated that a woman could be tried and sentenced to a prison term for adultery, although it held no such provision for adulterous males (Paulson, 1976, p. 14). Even in the Meiji period of 'civilization and enlightenment,' women were still expected to marry and become 'good wives and wise mothers,' an expression that became a popular catchphrase of the day.

This image of femininity carried over into the postwar period by means of popular media like the comic strip *Sazae-san*, a 'story of a family that makes simple mistakes – the kind that everyone laughs about later' due mostly to the efforts of *Sazae-san*, a kind of somewhat scatter-brained housewife who manages

to hold the multiple generations of her family together with her infinite kindness and patience (Drazen, 2003, pp. 140–141). In his discussion of changing images of Japanese women, Michael Berger points out that contemporary home dramas feature ‘an entirely different Japanese woman than the one we are accustomed to seeing in classical films. This woman is not weak, but assertive, often domineering and always a major character, because she is presented within her sphere of influence, the family’ (Berger, 1998, p. 59). Acknowledging that perhaps modern women are not content to limit their ‘proper sphere of influence’ to the family, Berger adds that ‘within the traditional arts [...] women not only play an active role but often a dominant one. They have both a culturally and, equally important, psychologically acceptable outlet.’ According to Japanese gender roles of the immediate postwar period, then, mature, adult women must relegate themselves to the ‘culturally acceptable’ realms of the family and the traditional arts, which are more often practiced on a private and local level instead of a public and national level and emphasise adherence to traditional form.

As Chizuko Ueno remarks, however, ‘women are not just passive victims of man-made illusions but active accomplices who work together with men to promote historical processes’ (Ueno, 2005, p. 254). In other words, mothers socialise their daughters to conform to the feminine ideal, and daughters themselves adjust their personalities in order to meet the expectations of their parents and the society in which they live. Through the medium of television and film home dramas, young women of the 1980s were fed the image of the cheerful and obedient housewife along with their family meals as an ideal to which they should aspire. The image of the demure young woman trained in the traditional arts was marketed by the families of these young women in order to arrange a suitable marriage for their daughters. Yukiko Tanaka posits that as many as one third of all postwar Japanese marriages are arranged marriages that begin with the process of *miai*. *Miai*, which literally means ‘looking at each other,’ used to be no more than that in earlier times but is now a much more extensive process; ‘a photo, along with a resume, will be exchanged, and, if the match seems a good prospect, the young people will agree to meet. They date for six months to a year, and, if both agree, they marry’ (Tanaka, 1995, p. 15). The process of *miai*, with its exchange of photos and resumes, and with its arranged dates made expressly for the purpose of a future marriage, seems directly alluded to by the way that Aoyama meets Asami in *Audition*.

When the viewer first encounters Asami, she presents herself as nothing less than the Japanese ideal of femininity expressed and popularised by various forms of mass media throughout the Shōwa period. She could be a shy student at a regional women’s college, a newlywed politely greeting a neighbour in a grocery store, an office lady graciously delivering cups of tea to her senior co-workers, or the sprightly young woman who informs Japan about the weather at the end of the morning news. Asami is pretty but not strikingly beautiful, wears light makeup and small, tasteful earrings, and has straight, unstyled hair and a friendly, yet slightly reserved smile. She speaks softly yet articulately using polite language, and she appears to take great care with her posture and her movements. When Asami appears for her audition in front of Aoyama and Yoshikawa, the viewer is reminded of the type of quiet, demure woman who

appears as a young wife or widow in various home dramas. This sort of woman is not necessarily interested in romance but would make a good romantic partner because of her willingness to sacrifice her own needs and defer to the wishes of others in order to resolve conflict. Although she may possess a depth of character, this archetype of gentle femininity is without superfluous ego and otherwise unremarkable.

During Asami’s first date with Aoyama, in which she is as careful with her speech and movement as she was in her audition, she flatters him with words like ‘You only ask of me to enjoy this nice food and talk? That’s the best request I’ve ever had.’ When Aoyama asks her about the contact that she had listed on her resume, the music producer, Shibata, whom he has not been able to track down, she answers in an extremely apologetic voice while alternating between looking down at her lap and hesitantly meeting Aoyama’s eyes. Her hair is tucked sensibly behind her ears, and her white collared blouse is buttoned all the way up, making her look much younger than her twenty-four years and arousing the audience’s sympathy. The viewer later comes to understand that she is lying, as she has in fact murdered Shibata and his girlfriend, but her soft voice, combined with her innocent words and adolescent gestures, lead both Aoyama and the audience to believe that she is not to blame for a small untruth on her resume. Soothing piano accompanied by a female vocalist provides the background music for this scene and serves to create a peaceful atmosphere in which the audience is lulled into accepting the image that Asami presents of herself.

This acceptance is tested during Aoyama’s second date with Asami, which follows three cut scenes showing Asami crouching in a filthy room, staring at the telephone and slowly sliding into a demonic grin when it rings. In addition, there are several strange split-second editing cuts that interrupt the flow of the movie while Asami talks to Aoyama about her past, as well as an odd moment toward the end of the conversation in which the other patrons of the restaurant and the street traffic outside all disappear. Everything except the couple fades away when Aoyama reveals to Asami that the movie she auditioned for might never be made and thus confesses in so many words that he has asked her to dinner simply to see her. The audience might therefore interpret the vanishing outside world as simply a cliché visual convention depicting the budding romance between the two characters, while the unsettling cuts from earlier in the scene might be viewed as nothing more than preludes to a weird, yet benign plot twist. Asami’s virginal white dress, kind words, and subtle revelation of her own attraction to Aoyama stand in direct contrast to the phantom with dishevelled hair and shadowed eyes of the cut scenes, so the audience is allowed to continue to accept Asami’s image as the ideal young woman, although at this point they do so at their own risk.

### The Presentation of Asami as a Mad Woman

After Aoyama has had several dates with Asami, he invites her to spend the weekend with him at a hotel in the mountains. As soon as Aoyama wakes up

after having had sex with Asami, *Audition* ceases to bear any resemblance to a home drama or a romantic comedy and has entered the realm of horror. The soft piano music of the previous scene has been replaced by the shrill ringing of the hotel room's telephone, and the innocent young woman in a billowing white dress looking out over the cloud-rimmed mountains has vanished and left Aoyama with a headache and a strong sense of disorientation. The Aoyama who smiled and joked with his son while telling him that he intended to go away with Asami for the weekend is now sullen and defensive in front of his colleague Yoshikawa, who tries to console him about Asami's disappearance by telling him to forget about the girl, whom he does not trust.

Because he can no longer contact Asami, Aoyama begins to investigate her personal history in an attempt to locate her. At this point in the film, the viewer is increasingly unable to distinguish between what is happening in the 'real world' and what is happening solely inside Aoyama's mind. Miike exacerbates this sense of disorientation by 'using machinegun editing and exotic colour filters', and otherwise altering his previously understated style of filming (Morris, 2001). In his pursuit of concrete information about Asami, Aoyama breaks through the boards covering the entranceway of a derelict ballet studio, where he has an uncanny interview with the ghost of an old man with hideously deformed feet. He then descends into the poorly lit hallway in front of a dingy underground bar, which closed a year ago due to the violent murder of its owner. As if these scenes alone were not indicative of *Audition's* shift in genre, the hideous hallucinations of a drugged Aoyama, which include Asami feeding a dog bowl of vomit to a filthy, tongueless man that she keeps in an oversized canvas laundry bag in her apartment, certainly clue the audience in to the fact that everything has changed; everything until this point in the movie, including Asami's presentation of herself as a demure young woman, has been nothing more than an illusion.

In a sense, the movie has started over from the beginning. After the audience has experienced this second introduction to the film, it is ready to witness the second introduction of Asami, who has not changed at all but simply revealed her true colours. After Aoyama, who has been drugged by a powder Asami surreptitiously mixed into his whiskey, falls to his living room floor, unable to move or speak, a metallic rustling announces the entrance of Asami, who is half-glimpsed through a partially opened door, a visual analogy to the audience's perception of her up to this point. Her back is clothed in her usual white dress; but, as she turns, the viewer catches a flash of black. When Aoyama groans, Asami turns her head to look at him. He sees her imperfectly, or not at all, from his prone position on the floor, but she can see him without obstruction. In effect, the pair's earlier positions of power in the audition process are reversed. Now it is Asami who is free to gaze at Aoyama, dissect him, and do with him what she wishes.

Asami strides into Aoyama's living room wearing black boots with tall heels, pushes an armchair aside while ignoring his attempts to call her name, and fills a syringe that she has taken from a large leather bag. Here again the director has Asami turn to face Aoyama, emphasising her 'change of face.' The new profile

of Asami is a striking departure from her earlier presentation of herself. She does not smile as she looks down from above, and her eyes are cold. The actress's makeup emphasises her voluptuous lips and gives her cheeks a subtle flush that was absent in her earlier appearances. The next shot reveals that Asami is wearing a black rubber apron over her frilly white dress and black rubber gloves running up her arms past her elbows. The apron is attached to her upper waist by three straps, which create a silhouette that draws attention to her feminine figure. Her tall gloves are also strapped around her wrists and right above her elbows, emphasising her slender arms. When she sits down in the traditional Japanese *seiza* position and draws Aoyama's head into her lap to jab her horribly long needle into his tongue, and when she straddles his hips to cut open his sweater and unbutton his shirt, the scenes undeniably contain elements of the erotic as well as the horrific.

Although Asami has effectively transformed into a classic *femme fatale* 'characterized by her potent sexuality and destructive power', she still retains certain facets of her earlier, 'ideal woman' personality (Ima-Izumi, 1998, p. 123). In the film's climatic and excruciatingly visceral torture scene, Asami talks in a 'hushed, almost comforting voice' as she strides around in her black boots, manipulates Aoyama's body as if he were no more than a slab of meat, sticks acupuncture needles into his face and belly, and saws off his left foot with cheese wire (Mes, 2004, p. 201). She continues to call Aoyama by the familiar second-person pronoun *anata* and to address him in polite, yet somewhat more informal, speech throughout the entire episode, and her voice never loses the soft, articulate quality that the audience has come to associate with her. Her instruments of torture, acupuncture needles and cheese wire, are also delicate and feminine. Moreover, Asami's quality of innocent adolescence surfaces in the attitude of blithe playfulness expressed by her grinning face as she tortures Aoyama. Her words as she carefully sticks acupuncture needles into Aoyama, '*kiri kiri kiri kiri kiri*', are almost cute, especially in conjunction with her gleeful smile. The moment in the scene when, without even seeming to pay special attention to what she is doing, Asami tosses Aoyama's severed foot across the room and into a glass door, which it hits with a *thud* and smear of bright red blood, is even darkly humorous. Asami's voice and appearance are no longer that of the ideal young woman belonging to Aoyama's world of the home drama but have become those of the sexually free and socially irresponsible young women who have usurped the former Japanese ideal of femininity.

The trope of the good woman turned bad is no stranger to the world of Japanese theatre. An entire genre of premodern Nō plays, called *kyōjo-mono* ('mad woman pieces'), is devoted to demonic women, and the Kabuki theatre of the late Edo period, with its 'aesthetic of cruelty' (*zankoku no bi*), has no shortage of tortured women returning from beyond the grave to wreak havoc on the living. Their anger as well as their appearance is fearsome, as 'the monstrous women who permeate Noh and Kabuki are motivated through revenge or grief, or are, especially in the case of the supernatural female, inherently evil' (Hand, 2005, pp. 20–21). In modern film history, this type of demonic woman has appeared numerous times in works such as *Ugestu monogatari/Tales After the*

*Rain* (Japan 1953: Kenji Mizoguchi) and the numerous adaptations of the famous Kabuki play *Yotsuya Kaidan*. A special category of films ranging from *Onibaba* (Japan 1964: Kaneto Shindo) to *Honogurai mizu no soko kara/Dark Water* (Japan 2002: Hideo Nakata) feature the trope of the *bukimi na haha* ('uncanny mother'), 'the nightmare mother who has a special link to madness or the supernatural' (Goldberg, 2004, p. 373).

As horror is an essentially conservative genre that punishes transgressors, whether they be werewolves or zombies or sexually adventurous teenagers, and ultimately restores the accepted social order at its conclusion, this long line of 'madwoman pieces' can be seen as an expression of a patriarchal society's fear of empowered women. Many critics have interpreted the trope of the demonic woman as an expression of the feelings that women are denied by their adherence to the Japanese feminine ideal. *Audition* has been given a feminist interpretation,<sup>1</sup> but Aoyama is no marauding avatar of Japanese patriarchy, and Asami is not empowered or misunderstood but quite clearly insane.

One of the primary goals of a successful horror movie is to render its villain as a horrible creature feared and reviled by the audience, and Miike makes Asami as frightening as he possibly can. It is not just Asami's insanity that causes the audience to see her as dangerous and frightening, but also her beauty, the softness of her voice and words, and her strange qualities of cuteness and adolescence. In other words, the very elements of her personality that once disarmed the audience by creating an image of the ideal woman now add a terrible edge to Asami's insanity. Her sexuality, which appears for the first time in the film as she tortures Aoyama, lends an extra degree of intensity of to the scene. Clearly, then, when Aoyama's son Shigehiko returns home and pushes Asami down a flight of steps, an action which results in her death, it is not just her insanity that is being punished by the film. Her eroticism, her desire to do whatever she wants with men, and her cuteness and childishness not in keeping with her age are also criticised by association with her bestial and unhinged mind.

## Conclusion

Unlike past generations, many contemporary Japanese women refuse to conform to the Japanese ideal of femininity. Many married women, for example, choose to work outside the home: 'The female labour force used to be characterized by young and single women but now married and middle-aged women are joining the ranks' (Meguro, 1990, p. 62). Both Meguro and Berger, citing government statistics, assert the existence of tens of millions of working women in Japan who have had an increasing average age and an increasingly higher percentage of married women in their ranks. In addition, fewer young women

<sup>1</sup>See Mes (2004, pp. 202–203) and Hantke (2005, pp. 60–61). To give an example, Hantke says: 'If we see Asami as a figure in the Japanese tradition of the female avenger, her capacity for violence and destruction is directed against Aoyama as a proponent of a reactionary ideology of the family.'

married and had children during the 'lost decade' of economic decline in the 1990s, a social phenomenon directly related to the discursive construction of *parasaito*, or 'parasite singles,' a term commonly used at the turn of the century to refer to women who live rent-free with their parents instead of marrying and starting a family. Michael Zielenziger reports that, 'according to the Health Ministry's estimate [...] nearly 90 percent of Japanese women in their late twenties and 60 percent in their late thirties are estimated to be *parasaito*', a trend which has resulted in a decreasing birth rate for more than three decades, leaving Japan with a birth rate of 1.32 in 2003 (Zielenziger, 2006, p. 161). Young women in Japan feel that they cannot integrate their personal aspirations into a traditional marriage, and so 'they [prefer] to stay single rather than compromise' (Tanaka, 1995, p. 26). The women who have started families, on the other hand, 'are allowed public expression of their negative feelings towards their children, or even toward having a family at all, without fear of retaliation' (Ueno, 2005, pp. 259–260). Contemporary women therefore mutilate the traditional Japanese ideal of femininity, just as Asami mutilates Aoyama and the conservative social environment of the home drama with which he is associated.

In *Audition*, the *fin de siècle* Japanese woman who is socially, economically, and sexually liberated from the sexist ideals of a patriarchal society is viewed with horror as she proceeds to torture Aoyama, a representative of the home drama atmosphere in which the old feminine ideal still held sway. Because *Audition* has become a horror movie by the time Asami strips away her pretensions as an ideal woman and dons her black rubber apron, the audience cannot help but regard the disintegration of the feminine ideal with a mounting sense of terror. In 1999, the year that *Audition* was released into theatres, Japanese society was beginning to confront the reality of its parasite singles and its decreasing birth rate, along with the deterioration of the feminine ideal that it had cherished for so long. Although it is quite possible to read *Audition* as a self-referential parody that critically mocks the conventions of cinematic romance,<sup>2</sup> the visceral terror and disgust experienced by the audience are attached to the demonic figure of Asami, the horrific representative of this deterioration. In conclusion, I believe that the fear and outrage that an audience feels in the wake of Asami's performance closely mirrors the anxieties surrounding a new social national identity in the post-bubble years of Japan. To return to one of its earliest scenes, the producer Yoshikawa encapsulates the attitude of the film with his rhetorical question, 'Where are all the good girls? Japan is finished.'

<sup>2</sup>Such a reading of the film is supported by Ryū Murakami's novel *Audition* (1997), on which the film is loosely based. Murakami's portrayal of Aoyama's thoughts of Asami, which range from innocent bliss (conveyed in the style of a teenage romance novel) to crude and open lust (conveyed in the manner of an adult magazine), is a caustic mockery of the character and his phallic ideals of women and romance.

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## Chapter 10

Masculinity, Human Hierarchy and American Exceptionalism in *World War Z*

Kelly Doyle

Based on Max Brook's (2006a) *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, Marc Foster's (2013) film *World War Z* promotes American-centric human exceptionalism. It chronicles the mission of United Nations operative Gerry Lane (Brad Pitt) as he traverses the world in search of the etiology of a zombie pandemic that threatens to eradicate governments, armies, institutions and nations; in other words, the infrastructure of human societies and humans themselves on a global scale. The zombies threaten human existence but more importantly the anthropocentric, masculine human figure which takes precedent over racialised others and women. *WWZ*<sup>1</sup> positions Lane, who does not even exist in the novel, as the epitome of the human subject: he is fit, Caucasian, handsome, able-bodied, male, heterosexual, and played by an A-list actor who embodies ideal American masculinity. Lane is also ideal in deed and nationality – his centrality as the only 'complete' human being is emphasised again and again via military experience and sheer ease of mobility – creating a patriotic, gendered, and racialised hierarchy in the film that reifies American exceptionalism and reaffirms the nation's moral and military superiority. However, the association between masculinity and worthy life in both film and novel is problematic. In the novel, the emphasis on anecdotes from survivors around the world provides a more nuanced representation of gender, although its emphasis on male and military recollections at times reinforces and undermines traditional masculinity.

*WWZ* reasserts the idea that the United States is heroic, a galvanising global force that is capable of leading the planet in the defeat of zombies (terrorists). It is superior even to the United Nations, which despite providing the resources for the execution of Lane's mission, must rely on America and Lane to save the world. The focus on American courage, perseverance, leadership and capability

<sup>1</sup>To avoid confusion, I will refer to the film as *WWZ*

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