Kervan

International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies

29

2025

KERVAN - International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies

KERVAN is an international and multidisciplinary discussion platform, dealing with the history, politics, economics, sociology, geography, visual culture, languages and literatures of Asian and African countries. KERVAN publishes theoretical studies, reviews and surveys, as well as detailed empirical studies, critical editions of texts and translations, by both young researchers and established scholars.

All **submissions** to KERVAN undergo double blind peer-review.

KERVAN's Policies and Code of Ethics are available here.

KERVAN is listed in ERIH PLUS and indexed in SCOPUS.
Since 2016 KERVAN is rated **Class A** journal for the Italian National Scientific Qualification (ASN, disciplines 10/N1 and 10/N3).

Contact:
mauro.tosco@unito.it

ISSN:
1825-263X

Cover by Marta Tosco

Kervan

29

(2025)

General editor:

Mauro Tosco

Table of Contents

Articles

Talking justice and peace

Notes and squibs

Texts and translations

Reviews

Data and tools for research

Articles

Kawakami Mieko's *Natsu monogatari* as a global novel

Form, themes and transnational circulation

Francesco Eugenio Barbieri

This paper explores the possibility of interpreting Kawakami Mieko's *Natsu monogatari* as a global novel. Following an introduction that seeks to summarize the major positions of an ongoing debate surrounding the definition of the global novel, I will provide a tentative definition of this literary genre and analyze Kawakami's novel to argue that it aligns with this classification. Finally, I will draw attention to the process of creation and promotion of the novel outside the Japanese literary market, into the global literary market.

Keywords: Kawakami Mieko, global novel, *Natsu monogatari*, *Breasts and Eggs*.

1. Introduction

At present, critical debates on Japanese literature contend that two writers, Murakami Haruki and Tawada Yōko, can be considered global authors; or, at the very least, that each of them has written a novel that fits within the category of 'global novel.'

In order to contextualise this assumption, it is helpful to take some perspectives on the global dimension into consideration. On one side, Matthew Strecher (2016: 131–133) maintains that Murakami Haruki can be defined as a 'global writer' for his ability to present stories that can speak cross-culturally to a wide range of national and international readers. Adam Kirsch states that the global vocation of Murakami lies in his capacity to grasp and represent the reality in which we all live and read (Kirsch 2016: 51). In addition, Kono Shion underlines that Murakami is often regarded as a writer of *gurobaru bungaku* (global literature) due to his cosmopolitan lifestyle and writing style influenced by American literature, whereas there is also a local element in Murakami that becomes apparent only when his works are read in Japanese or by someone with a deep knowledge of Japanese culture (Kono 2017: 88).

Concerning Tawada, on the other hand, I believe that *Kentōshi* can be defined as the writer's first true global novel, primarily for its thematic characteristics (Barbieri 2022). This is not only because it draws inspiration from real historical events whose echoes have resonated throughout the world, but also because it deals with daily issues whose relevance is tragically evident on the global level.

Besides, both Murakami and Tawada have lived a long time abroad, and both have had a massive exposure to foreign languages, English the former and German the latter. As it is known, Murakami has a deep love for American culture and has lived in the United States for many years. Tawada, for her part, graduated in Russian but relocated to Germany since the 1980s; from the beginning of her writing career, she has been using a double language: her mother tongue, Japanese, and the foreign language of the country she chose to live in, German. Due to their background, the global inspiration at the core of their literature might seem quite obvious and could be easily taken for granted.

The considerations on Murakami and Tawada can be used as touchstones for other contemporary Japanese authors, to whom similar assumptions might be made. One of these authors can arguably be Kawakami Mieko.

Born in Osaka in 1976, Kawakami Mieko is widely recognized as one of the most prominent literary voices in contemporary Japan. Alongside authors such as Murakami Haruki and Tawada Yōko, she has garnered significant critical and commercial success not only in Japan but also on a global scale. This international recognition has been largely facilitated, in the last few years, by the translation of her long novel *Natsu monogatari* (2019) into many different languages. Its English version (*Breasts and Eggs*), translated in 2020 by Sam Bett and David Boyd, played a pivotal role in the widespread acclaim of the novel, securing its place as both a critical and commercial success.

Differently from Murakami or Tawada, Kawakami has always lived in Japan, and her stories are profoundly rooted in the culture of her native land. Nevertheless, I maintain that her international success, shaped by the very positive reception of *Natsu monogatari* worldwide, is due to her ability to shape her work in a more global form.

The aim of this article is to situate Kawakami's novel within the critical debate that, over the past few years, has developed around the literary category of the global novel. I argue that reading *Natsu monogatari* as a global novel allows us to further and better understand the reasons behind the novel's international success, and sheds light on some key factors that have contributed to it. I further contend that the deliberate rewriting of the novella *Chichi to ran* into *Natsu monogatari* was undertaken not only to facilitate its international circulation in promotional and editorial terms, but also to reach the widest possible readership for the powerful and urgent messages that the text seeks to convey.

While the themes addressed in the work can certainly be associated with the global novel, they actually precede and motivate the decision to reshape *Chichi to ran* into a form more consonant with this category. As we will see, the alignment with the global novel is not merely thematic; the work's formal recalibration plays a decisive role in enabling its global resonance.

In order to better understand what qualifies a work as a global novel—and to fully appreciate why Kawakami's *Natsu monogatari* can be situated within this category—it is necessary to first examine the defining features of the global novel itself.

2. The global novel: defining an ongoing debate

Rita Barnard, in her seminal essay *Fictions of the Global* (2009), does not yet refer to the global novel in a strict sense but begins to explore the formal features a novel might take if it were not confined to a national literary form. She considers how a novel could extend beyond a single nation, such as Japan or the United States, to encompass a broader spatial dominion. What set of rules would be proper for a fiction that pertains to the dominion of the world? Barnard moves away from the transnational migration novel and the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* and hypothesizes a new form that she defines as the emergent fiction of the global (Barnard 2009: 207–208). She identifies three precise structural recurrencies of what she calls a global narrative form (Barnard 2009: 211). First, the chronotope in the narration is twisted or otherwise disregarded, and the authors use frequent time jumps, because this almost schizophrenic space-time configuration can adequately render the temporality of the globalized present. Second, the point of view expressed in the novel of the global age is that of a shifting first-person narrator, which can change during the story, often resulting in an experientially limited and partial viewpoint (Barnard 2009: 211–212). Finally, the novel of the global is addressed to readers in an imagined community (Barnard 2009, 213) that is much larger than the author's national space, even if it is not written in the language of the whole community. Therefore, those who are reading the text in translation must imagine that the characters are speaking in a language that is perhaps not the one in which they are speaking in the novel.

The discussion on what constitutes a global novel has been flourishing ever since. As Caracciolo (2023: 332) reminds us, if the definition of a global novel must necessarily be asymptotic, the debate on its possibility and reality has become increasingly dynamic and resonates within contemporary critical literary discourse. Rotger and Puxan-Oliva (2021) acknowledge that the concept of the global novel remains an evolving and contested category within literary criticism, providing a valuable systematic overview of the scholarly discourse surrounding this genre. Their analysis highlights the lack of a unified definition as well as the considerable variation in the terminology used to describe it. Among

the most frequently employed terms—each carrying distinct formal and thematic nuances—are *global*, *world*, and *planetary* (Rotger and Puxan-Oliva 2021: 288). Broadly speaking, the global novel is commonly understood as a narrative that engages with relevant global concerns (Rotger and Puxan-Oliva 2021: 291).

Kirsch argues that the global novel cannot be defined by shared formal characteristics; rather, it is better understood through the themes it foregrounds—issues that resonate with a transnational audience by addressing humanity at the level of the species and reflecting globally shared problems (Kirsch 2016: 25). These themes include immigration, terrorism, environmental degradation, and sexual exploitation (Kirsch 2016: 24). However, it is evident that any issue relevant to contemporary human experience may fall within the thematic scope of the global novel, thereby contributing to a more refined and dynamic definition of the category.

More recently, Caracciolo (2023: 325) has maintained that multilinearity is a crucial tool for comprehending the complexity of contemporary phenomena and a key element of today's global narratives. Multilinearity defines the presence in the same novel of a distinct number of narratives that remain, for at least some parts of a larger work, unlinked: they progress independently and can be comprehended individually (Caracciolo 2023: 328). To facilitate the convergence and understanding of individual and separate storylines, authors employ a range of narrative techniques. Among these, three overarching macro-categories were identified: linkage, distribution, and focus. Linkage refers to the micro-textual strategies employed by authors to connect stories; distribution refers to the spatio-temporal separation of storylines; and focus denotes the underlying theme that ensures coherence with the general narrative structure (Caracciolo 2023: 328-330). Each of these categories can be further divided into narrative subcategories that clearly specify the narratological operation at stake, the variety of which will be presented within the analysis of the novel.

For the purposes of this paper, I understand the global novel as a contemporary literary work that engages with global challenges. Following Kirsch, I conceptualize it as a text that resonates with a transnational audience by addressing issues that are broadly recognizable as globally relevant. However, this resonance does not stem from thematic concerns alone: the global novel also relies on specific narrative structures and formal strategies that enable it to communicate effectively with readers across linguistic and cultural boundaries, including in translation. In this sense, global novels can be identified not only by their thematic scope (Kirsch 2016) but also by the formal features that shape their narrative architecture, such as those outlined by Barnard (2009) and, more recently, by Caracciolo (2023).

In Japan, scholarly debate has traditionally focused on defining the parameters and implications of *sekai bungaku* (world literature), while the concept of the 'global novel' has not received the same degree of critical attention as it has outside Japan. At the same time, recent discussions on *sekai bungaku* demonstrate a lively and productive spectrum of critical positions.

Works aimed at global circulation, particularly those written in languages other than English or French, inevitably depend on translation and on mediation through one of the major languages of the international publishing market. As Inaga observes, a central trait of world literature is the capacity to "read the distance" between the original text and its translation, a practice he terms "distance reading" (Inaga 2008: 117).

3. From *Chichi to ran* to *Natsu monogatari*: Kawakami and feminism

Kawakami's *Natsu monogatari* can arguably be defined as a global novel both in terms of formal and thematic features. Nevertheless, we must consider that Kawakami's phenomenon is different from that of Tawada and Murakami mentioned above.

Within this broader theoretical landscape, indeed, the cases of Murakami and Tawada offer interesting contrasts. Murakami's global reception is complicated by the multilayered negotiations between his writing practices, which are consciously oriented toward addressing a global readership, editorial interventions, and critical framings. Tawada's latest novels, by contrast, can be productively read through the lens of the global novel primarily as a critical framework rather than as a reflection of any other authorial intention (Barbieri 2022).

I believe that Kawakami, however, occupies a position similar to Murakami: in her case, I would suggest that these two dimensions—the articulation of globally resonant concerns and the deployment of formal strategies enabling transnational legibility both for audience reach and for marketable reasons—must be considered simultaneously. Only by holding them together can we fully account for the reason behind the deliberate recasting of *Chichi to ran* into the form of a global novel and for the remarkable international success that followed. The decision to reshape the work was not driven solely by the desire to convey urgent messages to the widest possible readership; it also operated as a commercial and editorial strategy, consciously embraced by the author and her publishing team. Reading these motivations together illuminates both the aesthetic logic of the novel's transformation and the effectiveness of this choice in securing its global circulation and reception.

Kawakami Mieko is a writer that has always been very active in her homeland, since her literary debut with the publication of *Chichi to ran* in 2008. Nevertheless, her works have recently experienced a surge in popularity outside of her native Japan. Following the widespread international success of

Breasts and Eggs, the English translation of *Hebun*, titled *Heaven*, was published in 2021. Originally released in Japanese in 2009, this novel explores the theme of school bullying. It is the second work by Kawakami to be translated into English, by the same two translators who had previously worked on *Natsu monogatari*. In 2022, *Heaven* was shortlisted for the International Booker Prize, further consolidating Kawakami's global reputation as an international representative of Japanese literature on a global scale. As stated on its official website, the prize is aimed not only at celebrating the work of international authors and their translators, but also at encouraging English-speaking readers to access fiction from all over the world.[1]

As said above, the most significant contributing factor to Kawakami's global success was the novel *Natsu monogatari*, published in Japan in 2019. Its translated title in almost any foreign language follows the English adaptation *Breasts and Eggs,*[2] but the most correct translation would literally be *Summer Tale*, a play on the name of the main protagonist, Natsuko, and the Japanese word *natsu* ('summer').

The title chosen for the English version of the novel, reflected also in the editions in other languages, is in fact the translation of the title of the original novella, written in 2008, that was successively elaborated and adapted into the novel as it is in its present form. The long novel *Natsu monogatari* actually represents a rewriting and the continuum of Kawakami's short story *Chichi to ran*. The English title *Breasts and Eggs* was taken from the original short story, arguably, to give the reader an immediate idea of the contents of the book. But perhaps the choice was due to the fact that, in any other foreign translation, the pun with the name of the main character would be lost unless the main protagonist's name was also translated as 'Summer.'

Chichi to ran was published over a decade before the novel's official release. It quickly gained immense success in Japan due to its unconventional use of Kansai dialect, complex syntax, and numerous themes that were groundbreaking for Japan in 2008, as it will be briefly explained hereafter.[3]

As mentioned above, the Japanese title of the novella is *Chichi to ran*, directly corresponding to the English *Breasts and Eggs*. The title itself constitutes an indication of the stratification of meanings put on the scene in the novella itself: its primary meaning clearly refers to the breasts—and thus to the

[1] https://thebookerprizes.com/international-booker-prize (last accessed November 11, 2025).

[2] For example, in German, it is *Brüste und Eier*; in Spanish, *Pechos y Huevos*; in Italian, *Seni e Uova*; and in Swedish, *Bröst och ägg. En Sommarberättelse*, one of the few cases in which the original title is maintained.

[3] Unfortunately, and differently from other works by Kawakami, according to the *Nihon bungaku honyaku sakuhin dētabēsu* (https://jltrans-opac.jpf.go.jp/), there are only few translations available of this novella, as of July 2025: a partial English version, and complete translations in Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, French, Spanish, Norwegian and Albanian. All the translations, except for the Albanian one, have been published before the publication and the international success of *Natsu monogatari*.

breast augmentation surgery that Makiko wants to undergo—as well as the eggs, i.e., Midoriko's first menstruation and the meaning that this event has in her fragile psychological balance. As noted by Alzate (2020: 515) the first kanji of the title 乳と卵 *Chichi to ran* also means 'milk,' so for the unaware, the title might indicate a light story, somehow dealing with pastry or cuisine. In addition, thanks to a careful interplay between homophones one could understand it as 父と乱 *Chichi to ran*, namely 'father and battle,' which connects to the antagonistic figure of the sisters' father (Yoshio 2015 in Alzate 2020: 516).

The story is a rewriting of Higuchi Ichiyō's *Takekurabe* (1895-1896, translated as *Growing Up* in Edward Seidensticker's 1956 English translation, and *Child's Play* in Robert Lyons Danly's 1981 version). The presence and the importance of intertextual reference to Higuchi's work in Kawakami's *Chichi to ran* has been widely discussed by critics (see, for instance, Abe Auestad 2016, Alzate 2020). Kawakami herself recognizes the primary importance of Higuchi in her literary formation to the point that she defined her as an 'A-series influence' (Iwakawa 2019: 176): she had read *Takekurabe* before becoming a writer and she was greatly influenced by the pseudo-classical rhythm of Higuchi's prose.

Set in the Meiji Era, Higuchi's novel narrates the coming of age of Midori. The story has an open ending that, throughout the years, was subject to many interpretations: Midori's transformation from a lively child to a silent woman was hypothesized as the consequence of the first menstruation, or of her turn into a courtesan, or even of her first unwanted sexual experience (Alzate 2020: 517).

The significance of Higuchi's influence on Kawakami can be observed, first of all, in the choice of the protagonists' names in *Chichi to ran*. Natsuko, Makiko, and Midoriko, the three main characters in Kawakami's novella, create an explicit intertextual reference to characters in Higuchi's work. Midoriko's name recalls Midori, the protagonist of *Takekurabe*, whose older sister, Ōmaki, is echoed in Kawakami's character Makiko. While in Higuchi's story Midori and Ōmaki are sisters, in Kawakami's version the relationship is transformed into that of daughter and mother. Kawakami preserves the age dynamic between the two: Midori remains the younger character, while Ōmaki's role is transposed onto Makiko, now the mother figure. Yet Makiko's social conditions mirror those of Ōmaki, albeit reinterpreted according to a different historical and social context: whereas Ōmaki is a courtesan, Makiko works as a hostess in a bar in Ōsaka. Finally, the character Natsuko evokes Higuchi's real name, Natsuko (Matsumoto 2011: 227; Alzate 2020: 519).

The language used in *Chichi to ran* is another element that echoes Higuchi's style: as Abe Auestad noted, the continuous use of suspensive forms (*ren'yōkei*) with the frequent omission of the subject is done with the precise intention to mirror the language used in *Takekurabe* (Abe Auestad 2024: 117).

Through all these narrative devices, the novella acquires a high level of storytelling that is able to stimulate a strong affective response from the reader (Abe Auestad 2016: 531).

Alzate (2020: 517) underlines that with these very straightforward references, Kawakami stresses the fact that the very same themes pointed out by Higuchi, whether women have the freedom to make choices about their own lives and exercise autonomy over their own bodies, are still relevant in contemporary Japanese society. Government discourse and policy echo Japan's pre- and post-war eugenic framework by maintaining control over reproduction through the institutional reinforcement of heteronormative marriage as the normative standard, and by restricting access to AID exclusively to married heterosexual couples (Van Buuren 2024: 48).

These various elements composing *Chichi to ran* can also be traced almost ten years later in *Natsu monogatari*. Some additional considerations on this novel are necessary in order to further contextualize its wide reception.

The English version of *Natsu monogatari* was released in 2020 and marked the author's international success, thanks to its strongly feminist and highly topical themes. Following the immense success of the English version, the novel was translated into approximately twenty different languages between Europe and Asia, and new versions in additional languages are still appearing today.

Kawakami herself provides a summary of the themes of the work in a short story/essay entitled *Sono isshun no tame ni* (*For That Moment*), originally written for the Toronto International Festival of Authors in 2020 and later published in English in the literary journal *Astra Magazine*. Kawakami subsequently shared the original Japanese piece on her social media accounts, posting it on Instagram and X on July 23, 2022. Narrating the very close relationship with her grandmother, in this short piece she discloses the level of autobiography and fictionality employed in *Natsu monogatari*. This brief passage is extremely functional to this discourse:

> 時は流れて、わたしは小説家になり「夏物語」という小説を書いた。生殖倫理をベースに、フェミニズムや貧困、反出生主義や階級問題について書かれた物語であると紹介されることの多いこの小説は、三世代の女性たちの関係と語りが軸になっている。
>
> Time passed, and I became a novelist and wrote a novel called "*Natsu monogatari*." This novel, often introduced as a story based on reproductive ethics and addressing themes such as feminism, poverty, antinatalism, and class issues, revolves around the relationships and narratives of three generations of women [Kawakami Mieko, Instagram post, July 23rd, 2022; my translation].

In this statement, Kawakami underlines that the prevalent interpretation of the novel as a feminist work—a lens through which her literature has been widely perceived and analyzed—is largely shaped by the audience. This passage highlights that Kawakami's goal, as an author, is to tell the story of three

generations of women; the novel, however, is often perceived by the public as a tale of feminism and other relevant issues. For Kawakami, therefore, the focus is the story of the three women rather than the broader themes present in the novel that resonate with a global audience.

In an interview with literary scholar Yoshio Hitomi, Kawakami explicitly states that although she is a feminist, she does not aim to purposely promote a certain agenda in her writing, as she views feminism as a state rather than an attitude. She remarks that her primary intention is not to write a masterpiece dealing with feminist instances but rather to focus on a very complicated matter, which is life itself (Yoshio 2020: 42). In representing reality as it is, she, as a writer, is just pointing out the state of things of the contemporary world, a world in which women are systematically oppressed and discriminated against in many fields: from family life to the work environment.

In addition, she seems to avoid being identified as a 'feminist,' because she notes that feminists in Japan are often perceived as individuals who constantly complain, in contrast with what they really do, i.e., just pointing out the harsh reality of women in today's world (Yoshio 2020: 42).

In a following interview with Joshua Hunt, published in *The New York Times* in February 2023, Kawakami stated that instead of being labeled a feminist writer, she prefers the more neutral term 'human writer' (Hunt 2023). As Seaman notes, with this statement Kawakami tries to situate herself within a broader trend among many Japanese women writers who seek to avoid the label of 'women's literature,' while nonetheless remaining sympathetic to the struggles faced by women in contemporary Japan (Seaman 2024: 173–174). But I also believe that the term that she uses, 'human,' can shift the focus to a more general dimension that is universally applicable, thus connecting the author to a global dimension of literature. As a 'human writer,' then, she aims to indicate that through her literature she shares positions and issues that resonate globally.

As mentioned before, *Natsu monogatari* focuses on the relationships and stories of three generations of women. However, readers can easily discern that the novel also operates on multiple levels of interpretation. It foregrounds issues that have taken on enormous relevance today, such as antinatalism, as well as more distinctly feminist issues, such as femicide, the desire of pregnancy without having a man, or even women's capacity of self-determination against the social expectations on their choices—often confining them to the role of caretakers, wives and mothers.

4. *Natsu monogatari* as a global novel: structural features

It is acknowledged that the global novel cannot be defined solely in terms of its themes and issues. Before embarking on an analysis of the thematic aspects that contribute to the novel's global status, I want to focus on the structural features of the novel that convey its global identity.

From a structural perspective, the characteristics of the global novel, as identified by Barnard, are all present in Kawakami's *Natsu monogatari*. Primarily, the work is divided into two sections from a time span of eight years and contains frequent references to the childhood and adolescence of the protagonists. This introduces a temporal and spatial distance into the narrative, establishing a polarity between two locations where the narrative action takes place: the Tokyo of the fictional present and the Osaka of the mythical and difficult past that encompasses the two sisters' childhood.

The narrative perspective in the novel is that of a non-omniscient first-person narrator who does not assume the role of an informed guide for readers. Nevertheless, the protagonist Natsuko is representative of a pervasive and systematic attitude that is evident in her personal experiences. Despite the novel's initial polyphonic perspective, which is evident in Natsuko's interwoven narrative with her granddaughter Midoriko's diaries, the narrative ultimately comprises two non-omniscient first-person accounts that do not appear to exert control over the narrative arc.

Finally, the original novel is written in Japanese but, within the text, there is an extensive use of the Osaka dialect, which is inevitably absent from the translation.

Despite the extensive and intricate narrative structure, the novel has achieved immense popularity worldwide, because it addresses some of the most pressing and discussed concerns of the present era.

Although *Natsu monogatari* cannot be classified as a multilinear novel in the sense defined by Caracciolo, his above-mentioned categories prove highly useful for analyzing the narrative structure of the work, as many of them are present within the text. I believe that Kawakami purposely employed these techniques to more effectively depict contemporary reality and convey her messages to a broader audience outside her homeland. By integrating these forms, she is able to critically engage with the issues explored in her novel.

First, the novel is divided into two main sections. The first is set in summer 2008 and is covered by chapters 1-7 of the book. It also contains many flashbacks of the previous life of the two sisters. The second part of the novel is set from summer 2016 to summer 2019 and is narrated in chapters 8-17. Natsuko lives in Tokyo, where she relocated from Osaka to pursue a career in writing. Applying Caracciolo's definition of distribution, it becomes clear that the two primary storylines are separated both temporally and spatially. The temporal separation is evident in the fact that one storyline occurs many years after the other.

The spatial dimension of public places plays a crucial role in *Natsu monogatari*. As Yoshio (2024: 87) observes, the novel operates through three distinct types of spaces: physical, commercial, and linguistic. This can be put in relation with Caracciolo's definition of one subcategory of linkage, the

physical location where storylines converge, which he defines the *knot*, while spaces that connect events thematically are referred to as *connectors*. Given this framework, space emerges as a key narrative element in the global novel. All spatial types identified by Yoshio can thus be interpreted as narrative connectors and knots. Among them, I argue that Natsuko's small house in Tokyo, introduced at the novel's outset, functions as a significant physical knot where storylines intersect and unfold anew.

Additionally, the spatio-temporal separation is remarked in the numerous flashbacks that take us back to the two protagonists' childhood in Osaka. The two houses—Natsuko's in Tokyo, where the three women meet, and the protagonist's childhood house in Osaka—can be considered to have the function of locations within the context of the narrative.

Caracciolo (2023: 331) stresses that readers are always looking for the category of focus as they enjoy a work of literature, because it helps them navigate the complexity of multilinear narratives. Within the macro-category of focus, kinship is the other major principle that Caracciolo highlights for multilinear narratives. Not only is there a familial relationship among the three protagonists—two sisters and a daughter/nephew—but frequent flashbacks to their past also introduce other forms of kinship, such as a grandmother or a husband, reinforcing a multilinear narrative structure.

In addition, as mentioned, Makiko's employment as a hostess at a bar makes her establish a kinship-like relationship with the other colleagues, becoming what Alzate and Yoshio defined a "fictive kin" (Alzate and Yoshio 2022: 470). The *sunakku* ('snack bar') can be seen as a place that, while representing the exploitation of both female labor and bodies by male customers, also fosters a familiar bond among the women who work there, as they rely on their mutual support and care to survive (Yoshio 2024: 93–94).

Caracciolo (2023: 328) defines multilinearity as a structural configuration in which multiple narrative trajectories coexist within a novel, maintaining a degree of autonomy and remaining formally unintegrated for a significant portion of the text. This narrative strategy is evident in both the first and second parts of the novel, where distinct storylines unfold and occasionally intersect, yet largely retain their independence.

In the second part, this multilinear structure becomes particularly salient through the inclusion of two extended narrative digressions. The first occurs in Chapter 12 when Natsuko, during a Christmas dinner in an *izakaya*, listens to her friend and former colleague Konno recounting her life story: she is forced to leave Tokyo and move to Wakayama, to live with her husband's parents, as he has fallen into a severe depression. Konno is thus compelled to give up her own life for the sake of the family and to support her husband. This embedded narrative displays clear thematic parallels with the main

storyline: a depressed father, a mother subjugated by her husband, and a fragile bond between Konno and her little daughter—echoing the dynamics between Midoriko and Makiko.

A second instance appears in Chapter 13, where Aizawa narrates the story of his family and the circumstances surrounding his birth. After his father's death, Aizawa continues to live with his mother and grandmother in the family home in Tochigi. He eventually moves to Tokyo to study medicine and, concerned for his increasingly distressed mother, who struggles to live under the same roof as his husband's mother, tries to bring her to live with him. In response, his grandmother reveals that Aizawa was conceived through artificial insemination, a fact that had been kept secret to protect the father's reputation, given his infertility. Rather than disowning him, she uses the truth as a weapon to hurt him. This story mirrors several elements of the main narrative: once again, the father is absent, and the grandmother plays a central role—but unlike in the first part of the story, where the grandmother is a supportive figure, here she becomes a source of emotional harm.

These lengthy interpolated narratives exemplify the multilinear form as theorized by Caracciolo, and offer structurally and thematically autonomous segments that enrich, rather than directly advance, the primary narrative arc.

5. *Natsu monogatari* as a global novel: thematic features

Thematically speaking, in *Natsu monogatari*, Kawakami addresses issues that are extremely relevant today. First, the novel proposes a very lucid view of the patriarchal system of contemporary Japan, but whose echoes resonate globally. This is the main reason for the widespread interpretation of this literary product as a feminist work. Through the voices of three generations of women, the violence of the male gaze on the female body, constantly reified, is problematized as leading to extreme consequences: for example, the need to undergo excruciating cosmetic procedures, such as nipple-bleaching. Another central theme in the first part of the narrative is breast augmentation surgery in order to enhance one's physical appearance for the consumption of the male gaze. As noted by Yoshio (2024, 91), through the character's obsession with her breasts, Kawakami explores the consequences of idealized female body images in media. These depictions cause frustration among women who, through what Yoshio defines as 'feminine narcissism,' derive pleasure from the objectification of their bodies by the male gaze (Yoshio 2024: 91).

In a particularly poignant scene from Midoriko's diary, the theme of the first menstruation is experienced by twisting the common social expectations. Midoriko does not perceive the beginning of her menstruation as a positive or joyous event, contrary to how it is depicted in the book she is reading for school. Instead, she views it as connected to the imposition of the patriarchal society's expectations

on women as child bearers, a role that constrains her corporeal dimension. Midoriko does not believe that a woman's body gains value solely after her first menstruation occurs. This is because, she thinks, a woman's value is not determined by her possibility to bear children. Ultimately, she does not believe that a woman's value should be shaped by the societal norms on reproduction and motherhood.

Midoriko does not feel the urge to become a mother. Instead, she perceives motherhood as a constraint imposed on her by society.

> In most books where a girl 'gets' her first period (they always make it sound like it's some kind of present), there's always this scene where the girl is like, great, now I can be a mum, thanks for having me, Mum. I'm part of the circle of life now, I'm so happy to be alive. The first time I saw a story like that, I couldn't believe my eyes. [...] It feels like the books are trying way too hard to make it look like a good thing. These books are for girls who haven't had their period yet, right? It seems like all they want to do is make girls think it's all going to be fine.
>
> The other day, at school, between classes, I forget who, but someone was saying, "I was born a girl, so yeah I definitely want to have a baby of my own eventually." Where does that come from, though? Does blood coming out of your body make you a woman? A potential mother? What makes that so great anyway? Does anyone really believe that? Just because they make us read these stupid books doesn't make it true. I hate it so much.
>
> It feels like I'm trapped inside my body. It decides when I get hungry, and when I'll get my period. From birth to death, you have to keep eating and making money just to stay alive. I see what working every night does to my mom. It takes it out of her. But what's it all for? Life is hard enough with just one body. Why would anyone ever want to make another one? I can't even imagine why anyone would bother, but people think it's the best thing ever. Do they, though? I mean, have they ever really thought about it? When I'm alone and thinking about this stuff, it makes me so sad. At least for me, I know it's not the right thing.
>
> Once you get your period, that means your body can fertilize sperm. And that means you can get pregnant. And then we get more people, thinking and eating and filling up the world. It's overwhelming. I get a little depressed just thinking about it. I'll never do it. I'll never have children. Ever. (Kawakami 2020: 43–45)

The novel also offers, throughout the narrative arc, a purely negative portrayal of the male counterparts.

In the first part, *Summer 2008*, male characters are almost absent, and where they are present, they have a secondary function. I am thinking, for example, of the descriptions of Natsuko's and Makiko's father, a character with no narrative role and whose function is fulfilled precisely by the absence of agency. The 'absent' father is depicted in an extremely negative way, as he is a violent man who intimidates and hits his wife. Another male figure who, from a narrative perspective, can be seen as useless is the Ferris wheel operator on Book One, chapter 6, reduced to a mere mechanical tool.

The second part, *Summer 2018*, on the other hand, presents more problematic male figures, such as the editor who subjects Natsuko to psychological violence by denigrating her writing skills and pushing her into deep despair.

> The last time that we talked was on the phone. He called me up in the middle of the night. When I picked up the phone, I could tell that he was drunk. After telling me every last thing he thought was wrong about my stories, he added this: "I think it's the right time, so I'll come out and say it. I think you're missing something, something a writer needs. It just isn't there. I guess it's ambition, genuine ambition. That's what's keeping you from writing something that matters. That's why you'll never be a great writer. I've always thought so, and somebody has to tell you. It's never going to happen for you. Never. Let me put it this way—how old are you? I know age has nothing to do with writing. Well, except it does. Say you're going on forty, right? Are you really about to turn around and produce something incredible? I sincerely doubt it, at least in your case. That's how I see it. And I'm telling you I'm right. I mean, it's my job to know these things. I can see it coming, I can see it."
>
> I barely slept that night. For the next week, his voice played over and over in my head, making it hard for me to focus. What if after all these years, when I finally started writing, everything just fell apart like this?—The thought of it was infinitely depressing. (Kawakami 2020: 157)

Again, during the phone call with Naruse, his condescending tone serves as a thinly veiled excuse to mansplain the disastrous effects of the triple nuclear catastrophe, accusing her of failing to understand the magnitude of the event and its effects. He ultimately scorns her work as a writer, deeming it too superficial:

> Naruse was starting to sound upset.
>
> "Are you there?" he asked, openly perturbed. "Do you even understand what I'm saying?"
>
> "No, yeah, of course," I said.
>
> "What's gonna happen when the ocean gets messed up beyond repair? We won't have anything to eat. Think about how important the ocean is to Japan. It's so much of what we eat, so much of our culture."
>
> I wasn't sure what to say. I had my own opinions about the earthquake and the meltdown, and I understood what he was saying, but I had a hard time linking these outbursts with my idea of Naruse, which was disturbing to say the least. Hearing this voice I knew so well go after the government and energy industry for their incompetence made me feel like I was talking to a stranger.
>
> "Hey, though, weren't you writing a column in some magazine?" he asked. "About whatever you've been reading, crap like that..."
>
> Naruse cleared his throat.
>
> "Why are you wasting time on stuff like that? I mean—you're supposed to be a writer now. Is that really the best way for you to use your platform? In times like these, isn't there something more

> meaningful for you to write? People are looking for information, online and everywhere. Do you know what I mean?"
>
> He was referring to a short series of essays that a print magazine had hired me to do, but he didn't realize that the one he had read came after several I had written on the earthquake. I explained that he had stumbled on a lighter piece that I'd written to give readers a little room to breathe, but Naruse wasn't buying it. He said I wasn't trying hard enough and assured me even he was doing more to get the word out, through his Facebook page and blog. He asked me if I'd taken part in any protests. Signed any petitions. Told me that whatever I was doing, it wasn't enough. I had to do more." (Kawakami 2020: 177–178)

The central theme of the second part of the novel is the protagonist's desire to have a child outside the framework of a heteronormative relationship and marriage. This section centers on Natsuko—whose name also inspires the title of the work—now portrayed as a moderately established writer struggling with creative stagnation. Concurrently, Natsuko experiences a growing disinterest for sexual contact and ultimately withdraws from physical relationships altogether, thus affirming her asexuality, while still longing for emotional connection (Alzate and Yoshio 2022: 475).

The narrative centers on her aspiration to become a single mother through artificial insemination, a deliberate rejection of the conventional model of parenthood grounded in hetero-normative and patriarchal conceptions of partnership that have been dominant in Japan since the Meiji era. By portraying acts of resistance to normative motherhood—first through the character of Midoriko, and now through Natsuko—Kawakami constructs a counter-narrative to the *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother') ideology, which remains deeply ingrained in contemporary Japanese society (Van Buuren 2024: 38).

Finally, the global novel is a literary product that also reflects on the creative process and the publishing dynamics in which it is embedded (Kirsch 2016: 45-46). *Natsu monogatari* is, in a way, a novel about the dynamics of creating a literary work: it lingers on long passages that give the reader a glimpse into the creative process as well as the publishing world. In Chapter 11, Natsuko tells the story of how she became an established writer. At first, she contacted a small publishing house, which accepted to publish her work without much re-elaboration on it. Back then, nobody expected that this collection of stories would have such a big impact. Later on, her book was presented by a TV show and received the praise of some TV personalities, all events that gained her a certain popularity. Thanks to this, she was contacted by editor Sengawa Ryōko, who explains what she believes to be the secret of the success of her soon-to-be novel:

> "What made that work special? What made it yours? It wasn't the setting or the theme or any of the ideas. It wasn't any of that. It's your voice, the writing, the rhythm. It has incredible personality,

> and that matters more than anything if you're going to keep writing. You need to hold on to that, your rhythm."
>
> [...]
>
> "I am glad the book was a success," Sengawa said, "but you can't count on celebrities who read one book every five years to help you find your base. I'm not saying sales don't matter. It's just that the readers matter a whole lot more. You need to find real readers, the kind who will seriously stick with you, who will stick with you after the hype is down. [...]" (Kawakami 2020: 159-160)

Sengawa offers a lucid reflection on the dynamics of production and promotion of literary works: its primary goal is to foster loyalty within its target audience. Put in other words: it is important to be able to convey messages through writing in the most effective way possible, in order to elicit a heartfelt response in the readers and to make her writing resonate especially with her most dedicated fans.

Also, for Kawakami, language and rhythm are very important: as seen before, she declared that she was influenced by Higuchi's rhythm; in the narration, the theme of the rhythm of language is present, as one of the key strengths of the protagonist's writing, according to Sengawa.

From all these considerations, it seems evident that Kawakami's works exhibit specific thematic and stylistic structures that can be attributed to the genre of the global novel, which contributed to the dissemination of her literature among an audience that is not only Japanese but also international.

Furthermore, the genesis of *Natsu monogatari* itself is noteworthy. The novel is made of different sections: its first part, titled *Summer 2008* (*Book one* in the English translation), was an extended and completely rewritten version of *Chichi to ran*; to this, a newly written second part, titled *Summer 2016* (*Book two* in English), was added. This second part is a sequel to the story and has the same characters. As anticipated, it is set in 2016, eight years after the original story. The operation of completely rewriting the original core of *Chichi to ran* for *Natsu monogatari* was carried out after a decade. Kawakami herself narrates that she deliberately revisited the material present in the original work to make it available in translation for a global audience (*sekai no dokusha*, world readers in the original Japanese text). Therefore, it can be argued that the creative process behind *Natsu monogatari* was shaped by the awareness that its distribution would be global (Yoshio and Alzate 2021: 96).

Despite these premises, Kawakami stresses that she did not write the novel with the intention to make it easily translatable. Yet, I believe it would not be incorrect to state that this is a novel that is 'born translated,' according to the definition proposed by Walkowitz (2015: 3–4). Even though Kawakami claims that she did not adjust the style or content at all (Yoshio and Alzate 2021: 96), the dissemination of *Natsu monogatari* in foreign markets was a precise condition of its production, and the novel approached this condition opportunistically. Moreover, it was precisely the project of its release in the English translation that determined the occasion of its creation.

What Kawakami was able to do is to write a novel whose themes resonate globally: these topics are crucial not only for contemporary Japanese society but as global issues. Specifically, the theme of reproductive ethics has become a central issue of mainstream political discourse (Alzate and Yoshio 2022: 473) as in first world countries the birth rate has dramatically decreased.

Nevertheless, even if it may be interpreted as a commercial operation, the result is that we now have the opportunity to enjoy a splendid piece of literature that has the merit of drawing international readers' attention to a series of issues and themes that are more crucial than ever in today's global world.

Considered all the above, this work can positively be defined as a global novel, not only for the structural composition of its narrative and the thematic concerns it engages with, but also for its capacity to resonate beyond national borders. At the same time, however, it remains deeply rooted in its national context. This rootedness is manifest, first and foremost, in the setting, which is unmistakably Japanese; in the thematic articulation of issues that are primarily embedded in Japanese social and cultural realities; in the use of the Osaka dialect, which presents a significant challenge for translators; and, above all, in the novel's intertextual dialogue with the national literary canon—most notably with Higuchi Ichiyō's *Takekurabe*. Yet, as David Damrosch has argued, Higuchi's own work exemplifies the paradox of national literature becoming world literature. Although Higuchi was neither interested in foreign languages nor directly influenced by Western texts—her education being firmly grounded in classical Japanese literature—she wrote in the midst of a rapidly transforming Meiji society, shaped by international currents. It is precisely this historical condition that enabled her writing to transcend national boundaries and enter the sphere of world literature (Damrosch 2020: 340). Nevertheless, as Matsumoto (2011: 229) notes, it is not necessary to recognize the internal references to *Takekurabe* in order to understand or appreciate Kawakami's narrative. While familiarity with Higuchi's work may enrich the reading experience, Kawakami's novel stands on its own in terms of thematic depth and emotional resonance.

On the other hand, Kawakami reflects on the fact that the circulation of this work outside both Japan and her native language in this specific case differs from that of her previous writings. Since *Natsu monogatari* was created having an international audience already in mind, it cannot be categorized in the same way as the novels she made before, which were written for a Japanese audience and only later translated into foreign languages (Yoshio and Alzate 2021: 96–97).

This series of events strongly suggests that the global distribution of Kawakami's work, starting in particular with *Natsu monogatari*, was carried out in the wake of the significant international success of books dealing with topics such as the conditions of women and the perception and representation

of women's bodies, all themes that were already present in Kawakami's first works, such as *Chichi to ran*. It also coincided with the rising prominence of other well-known feminist novelists on the contemporary literary scene, such as Elena Ferrante, with whom she shares the same international or anglophone publishing house, Europa Editions.[4] In a press release published on the website of the Italian branch Edizioni E/O, the publisher announced that they had acquired the copyrights of all of Kawakami's works in a six-figure pre-empt at the 2017 Frankfurt Book Fair.[5] This operation was likely encouraged by the highly positive endorsement recently expressed by Murakami Haruki. To reinforce this decision, the press release even includes, immediately after the announcement, a quotation by Murakami in its Italian translation. This quotation came from a statement by Murakami, published on Literary Hub on the 4th of October 2017, just a few days before the Frankfurt Book Fair (Murakami 2017). This temporal proximity suggests that the publishing house may have placed such a substantial bid in direct response to Murakami's remarks.

Once the book was published, even the 2020 English editions featured on their front cover the very same endorsement by the most globally acclaimed Japanese writer. The adjective 'breathtaking,' from that statement, appears prominently just beneath the title. In this sense, the legitimization of Kawakami for an international audience is mediated through another 'global novelist' with an already consolidated base of devoted readers, who acts as guarantor of its value.

Murakami's appreciation for Kawakami's writing, in the 2017 Literary Hub statement, however, referred specifically to *Chichi to ran*, well before its expansion and reworking into the longer novel *Natsu monogatari*. At that time, the term 'breathtaking,' for instance, was used by Murakami to describe not only the original *Chichi to ran*, but specifically its stylistic qualities, lexical choices, and the skillful use of the Kansai dialect (Murakami 2017)—features that are, as mentioned above, only partially conveyed in translation.

At that time, the publishing house was still in the midst of the so-called 'Ferrante Fever:' the literary world was captivated by the Italian writer's *Neapolitan Novels*, published between 2011 and 2015, which had achieved remarkable global success. Debates about the identity of the mysterious Italian novelist were proliferating, and Ferrante had become a literary phenomenon. It is legitimate to consider that the acquisition of Kawakami's work may have been motivated, at least in part, by the

[4] Europa Editions, the publishing house based in the United States that acquired the rights for translation and publication of Kawakami's works, was founded by the same owners of the Italian Edizioni E/O. Both the Italian and the American branch are well known for being the publisher of Elena Ferrante.

[5] https://www.edizionieo.it/news/1401/le-edizioni-e-o-ed-europa-editions-acquisiscono-l-opera-di-kawakami-mieko (last accessed December 4, 2025)

desire to replicate Ferrante's success. The parallels are striking: a woman writer from a non-anglophone linguistic sphere, narratives set in urban environments marked by social and economic hardships, and stories that deal with violence, particularly violence inflicted on the female body. In this sense, Kawakami's global circulation can be read not only as a stand-alone phenomenon but also as part of a wider editorial logic already tested, and spectacularly validated, with Ferrante.

At the publishing of the book, Ferrante herself directly praised and validated Kawakami's work by inserting *Natsu monogatari* among her 40 favorite books by women writers soon after its publication (Cain 2020). Kawakami is the only Japanese author in the list, alongside other prominent literary figures of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as Margaret Atwood, Tony Morrison, Jhumpa Lahiri, and renowned Italian women writers like Anna Maria Ortese and Michela Murgia.

Kawakami is also very active on social media: as of July 2025, her Instagram page has more than 78,000 followers and her X account has more than 95,000 followers. Through her social media, Kawakami maintains a relationship with her fanbase worldwide; for instance, she usually reposts and comments on stories made by her global followers, in which they show their love for her books and tag her. These fans are mostly women, from any part of the world. This is another proof of the fact that her novel can talk to a transnational audience.

On these channels, she not only promotes her books and her literary career but shares moments of her everyday life with her fans, thus creating a direct and almost personal relationship with her audience. She also works as a testimonial and brand ambassador for several international luxury brands, such as Valentino and Chanel.

6. Conclusions

Natsu monogatari has achieved remarkable global success, not only due to its compelling narrative and literary craftsmanship but also because it engages with themes that are more urgent and relevant than ever. As observed in relation to the original novella (Abe Auestad 2016: 531), I believe that *Natsu monogatari* displays a high degree of narrativity and possesses the capacity to elicit affective responses from readers across cultural and national boundaries. Its emotional resonance with a broad transnational readership aligns with what Strecher has theorized in regard to Murakami Haruki's fiction, namely, defining works that are able to engage a wide range of readers by presenting narratives that are culturally meaningful to every audience, allowing for a localized internalization of meanings that circulate on the global level (Strecher 2016: 132).

For this reason, I argue that Kawakami's transformation of the concise and impactful novella *Chichi to ran* into the expansive and multifaceted novel *Natsu monogatari*, which stages various themes

that have great appeal today, can be understood in a dual sense. On one hand, it facilitates the global promotion of a well-established national literary phenomenon, positioning Kawakami within a transnational network of acclaimed women writers, such as Elena Ferrante and Margaret Atwood. At the same time, through the process of adaptation and rewriting, Kawakami herself has seized the opportunity to expand her readership and convey her messages to a wider, global audience. To achieve this, she reworked her original text into a novel with the scope and formal qualities necessary to resonate with a global public.

Kawakami's work, I argue, offers a compelling and conceptually rich example of the global novel as theorized in recent literary scholarship. Her writing not only contributes to validate and refine existing definitions of the global novel but also expands the geographical and cultural scope of the category by foregrounding a Japanese literary voice. This case is particularly significant in light of an enduring marginalization of non-Western literatures within global literary criticism—a marginalization often reinforced by the disciplinary divide that relegates Japanese literature to the domain of area studies rather than integrating it into the broader field of transnational literary theory.

Moreover, Kawakami's work opens up new avenues of inquiry by prompting us to consider whether there are specific formal, thematic, or linguistic features that distinguish a global novel written in Japanese. In this sense, her fiction not only participates in the global literary field but also invites a rethinking of its contours from within a non-Western literary and linguistic tradition. While such questions deserve further exploration—particularly in relation to the role of language, translation, and cultural specificity—this goes beyond the scope of the present contribution.

Regardless of its commercial status and any other critical definition, it is important to recognize the ability of *Natsu monogatari* to bring various issues to the reader's attention. These include not only the status of women in contemporary Japan, but also their conditions worldwide, as well as the representation and perception of the female body, and the role of motherhood especially in non-heteronormative families.

These topics are of interest not only in the context of Japan but also in other countries of Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world. In light of the current global context, collective discussion and awareness of these issues are more important than ever, and Kawakami is one of the artists who has been able to ignite this conversation.

References

Abe Auestad, Reiko. 2016. "Invoking affect in Kawakami Mieko's *Chihi to ran* (Breasts and Eggs, 2008): Higuchi Ichiyō, playful words and ludic gestures." *Japan Forum* 28 (4): 530-548.

Abe Auestad, Reiko. 2024. *Affect, Emotion and Sensibility in Modern Japanese Literature: From Natsume Sōseki to Ishimure Michiko*. London: Routledge.

Alzate, Juliana Buriticá. 2020. "Embodiment and Its Violence in Kawakami Mieko's *Chichi to ran*: Menstruation, Beauty Ideals, and Mothering." *Japanese Language and Literature. Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese* 54 (2): 515-549.

Alzate, Juliana Buriticá and Hitomi Yoshio. 2022. "Reimagining the Past, Present and Future of Reproductive Bodies in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction: Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* and Sayaka Murata's *Vanishing World.*" In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Reproductive Justice and Literature*, edited by Beth Widmaier Capo and Laura Lazzari, 465-486. London: Palgrave McMillan.

Barbieri, Francesco Eugenio. 2022. "Toward a 'Global Novel:' An Ecocritical Reading of Tawada Yōko's The Emissary." *Kervan* 26: 563-585.

Barnard, Rita. 2009. "Fictions of the Global." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42 (2): 207-215.

Caracciolo, Marco. 2023. "The Global and the Multilinear: Novelistic Forms for Planetary Processes." *Studies in the Novel* 55 (3): 325-340.

Damrosch, David. 2020. "Interliterary Communities: From Higuchi Ichiyō to Mitsuyoshi Numano." *Renikusa* 10 (1): 339-350.

Inaga, Shigemi. 2008. "Ima 'Sekai Bungaku' wa kanō ka? 'Chikyūka' no naka de nijūisseiki no hikaku bungaku no genzai o tou"「いま、<世界文学>は可能か?:<全球化>のなかで 21 世紀の比較文学の現在を問う」[Is 'World Literature' Possible Today? Questioning the Present State of Twenty-First-Century Comparative Literature within 'Globalization']. *Hikaku Bungaku Kenkyū* 92: 104-121.

Iwakawa, Arisa. 2019. "Kawakami Mieko ga erabu, 9-nin no warawanai onna to 10 no hen'ai" 川上未映子が選ぶ、9 人の笑わない女と 10 の偏愛 [Selected by Mieko Kawakami: Nine Women Who Do Not Smile and Ten Favourites]. *Kawade mokku bungei bessatsu Kawakami Mieko: Kotoba no tamashii wo oi motomete KAWADE* ムック文藝別冊 川上未映子: ことばのたましいを追い求めて [KAWADE Mook Bungei Supplement Mieko Kawakami: In Pursuit of the Soul of Language]: 170-185.

Kawakami, Mieko. 2020. *Breasts and Eggs.* Transl. by Sam Bett and David Boyd. London: Picador.

Kirsch, Adam 2016: *The Global Novel. Writing the World in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Columbia Global Reports.

Kono, Shion. 2017. "Sekai no dokusha kara yomu Nihon bungaku: futatsu no 'yomi no mōdo' no hen'yō" 世界の読者から読む日本文学 —ふたつの「読みのモード」の変容 [Reading Japanese Literature as 'a Reader of the World:' Transformations of Two Modes of Reading]. *Border Crossing: The Journal of Japanese-Language Literature Studies* 5 (1): 83-90.

Matsumoto, Kazuya. 2011. *Gendai josei sakka ron* 現代女性作家論 [Studies on Contemporary Women Writers]. Tokyo: Suiseisha.

Rotgers, Neus, Marta Puxan-Oliva. 2021. "The Novel after the Global Turn. Decentered Perspectives from the Spanish Literary Field." *Studies in the Novel* 53 (3): 285-305.

Seaman, Amanda C. 2024. "Financing Fertility: Pregnancy and Precarity in Contemporary Japanese Literature." *Japanese Language and Literature* 58 (2): 171-195.

Strecher, Matthew. 2016. "Epilogue". In: *Haruki Murakami. Challenging Authors*, edited by Matthew Strecher and Paul L. Thomas, 131-134. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Van Buuren, Anne. 2024. "Undermining Japan's Pro-Natal Expectations and Practices. Re-Examining Reproduction and Pregnancy in Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs.*" *Junctions* 8 (2): 37-53.

Walkowitz, Rebecca. 2015. *Born Translated. The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Yoshio, Hitomi (2020). "An Interview with Mieko Kawakami." *Wasafiri* 35 (2): 39-44.

Yoshio Hitomi. 2024. "Envisioning Community through Women's Spaces. Body, Precarity, and Language in Kawakami Mieko's Natsu Monogatari (Breast and Eggs, 2019)." In: *Reading Desire in a New Generation of Japanese Women Writers* edited by Nina Cornyetz and Rebecca Copeland: 96-105. New York, NY: Routledge.

Yoshio, Hitomi and Juliana Buriticá Alzate. 2021. "Kawakami Mieko *Natsu monogatari*. Jendā to hon'yaku" 川上未映子『夏物語』—ジェンダーと翻訳 [Kawakami Mieko's Breast and Eggs: Gender and Translation]. *Jendā & Sekushuariti: Kokusai Kirisutokyō Daigaku Jendā Kenkyū Sentā Jānaru* ジェンダー&セクシュアリティ：国際基督教大学ジェンダー研究センタージャーナル [Gender & Sexuality: Journal of the International Christian University Gender Studies Center] 16: 95-125.

Websites and links

Cain, Sian. 2020. "Elena Ferrante Names her 40 Favourite Books by Female Authors." In: theguardian.com:
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/nov/21/elena-ferrante-names-her-40-favourite-books-by-female-authors (last accessed December 4, 2025).

Hunt, Joshua. 2023. "Breasts and Eggs' Made Her a Feminist Icon. She Has Other Ambitions." In: nytimes.com:
https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/07/magazine/mieko-kawakami.html (last accessed December 4, 2025).

Kawakami, Mieko. 2022. *Sono isshun no tame ni.*
https://www.instagram.com/kawakami_mieko/p/CgV3ByyPXqE/ (last accessed December 4, 2025).

Murakami, Haruki. 2017. Haruki Murakami on His Favorite Young Novelist: Mieko Kawakami. Literary Hub.
https://lithub.com/haruki-murakami-on-his-favorite-young-novelist-mieko-kawakami/ (last accessed December 4, 2025)

Nihon bungaku honyaku sakuhin dētabēsu
https://jltrans-opac.jpf.go.jp/ (last accessed December 4, 2025).
https://www.edizionieo.it/news/1401/le-edizioni-e-o-ed-europa-editions-acquisiscono-l-opera-di-kawakami-mieko (last accessed December 4, 2025)
https://thebookerprizes.com/international-booker-prize (last accessed December 4, 2025)

Francesco Eugenio Barbieri is an assistant professor of Japanese Language and Literature at the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Bergamo. He obtained his PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Bologna, where he discussed a thesis in literary theory. From 2014 to 2016, he was a postdoctoral researcher at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, thanks to a research grant awarded by the JSPS (*Japan Society for the Promotion of Science*).
His current research interests include cont'emporary Japanese literature, specifically the relationship between literature and globalization, and transcultural literature (ekkyō bungaku). He has published essays and contributions on the work of the Japanese writer Tawada Yōko and a monographic volume in Italian on the representation of urban space in a selection of contemporary Japanese authors (*Forme e funzioni della città globale nella narrativa giapponese contemporanea.* Sarzana – Lugano: Agora & Co.: 2023).
Francesco can be contacted at: francesco.barbieri@unibg.it