

STAFF PICK

HEAVEN

NOVEL BY MIEKO KAWAKAMI

Another powerful novel by Mieko Kawakami (after the highly acclaimed *Breasts and Eggs*, English translation of *Natsumonogatari*, 2020) that makes you think after reading. I first thought this would be another story of a teenage protagonist going through bullying in Japan, but I was wrong. Set against the cruelty of bullying common in Japan, the novel gives voice to each character and their unique set of ethics and values, encouraging its readers to compare and re-evaluate their own views.

The story begins when a 14-year old boy who is constantly bullied receives a letter from a girl in the same class who is also being bullied. The two feel a strong connection to each other as their friendship grows. However, it is gradually revealed that their key stances differ: although both passive victims, the boy simply doesn't know

how to avoid or confront bullies while the girl chooses to accept getting bullied. Despite being the victim, she believes she is the one who holds "true" strength in this conflict. She encourages the boy to think the same, but he finds he cannot. In turn, when the boy faces one of his bullies, they argue on what is "right" in bullying and being bullied. Their perspectives are utterly dissimilar, further prompting the boy to question whose ideology is right. The three characters—the two victims and the bully—make you think about the strong vs. the weak, right vs. wrong, and desires vs. rights. The bullying scenes are so brutal and overwhelmingly shocking, and I almost wanted to stop reading, but it is depicted so well that I couldn't stop. The English translation is coming out in May. I cannot wait for English-speaking readers to take this book.

— Ayumi, Library Manager
January, 2020

ABOUT AUTHOR

Born in Osaka prefecture in 1976, **Mieko Kawakami** (川上 未映子) began her career as a singer and songwriter before making her literary debut in 2006. Her first novella *My Ego, My Teeth, and the World*, published in 2007, was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize and awarded the Tsubouchi Shoyo Prize for Young Emerging Writers. The following year, Kawakami published *Breasts and Eggs* as a short novella. It won the Akutagawa Prize, Japan's most prestigious literary honor, and earned praise from the acclaimed writer Yoko Ogawa. Kawakami is also the author of the novels *Heaven*, *The Night Belongs to Lovers*, and the newly expanded *Breasts and Eggs*, her first novel to be published in English.

— from Publisher



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Translated by
Sam Bett and David Boyd
(translated Mieko Kawakami's
Breasts and Eggs (2020))