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Baby Daddies, Ghosts, and Second Chances:

The Figure of the Single Mother in Japanese Literature, 1970s-2010s

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Senior Honors Thesis

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2014

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Janice Bardsley for her help as my thesis advisor this year. Her enthusiasm and optimism were extremely important to my work, and her advice gave me direction which helped to focus my research.

Second, thanks to Dr. Nadia Yaqub for her work as the class leader for this year's Asian Studies honors thesis students. Her unique perspective helped to broaden my thinking and allowed me to look at my readings in a new light.

Finally, thanks to Dr. Elisheva Perelman for her time as the second reader for my thesis. Her comments were enlightening, and my experience in her class during my first semester also served to focus the aim of my thesis.

Abstract

Motherhood enjoys an exalted place in Japanese society. No relationship is considered as close or as important as that between mother and child. Yet Japan is currently experiencing a demographic crisis in which relatively few children are being born and the proportion of elderly is on the rise. Increasingly fewer women wish to marry, and many doubt they will become mothers. The stigma against single mothers reduces the chance that a woman will have a child without first marrying. Although little moral stigma accompanies premarital sex, bearing a child outside of wedlock is a source of shame, inciting most women who find themselves unintentionally pregnant to opt for abortion rather than carrying the child to term. The treatment of unwed mothers in fictional narratives, however, has changed over the course of history. Using Jaber F. Gubrium's assertion that narratives are both shaped by the social phenomena upon which they are based and simultaneously shape those same phenomena, I use close readings of several works of literature and film to explore more deeply the views of single mothers in Japan. My analysis pays special attention to the social context of the works, issues of dependency, control, and victimhood, and the depictions of womanhood and motherhood. In Chapter One, I introduce the current landscape of Japanese demographics and discuss the use of the narrative to understand social conditions. Chapter Two explores two works by Tsushima Yūko from the 1970s to illustrate the introduction of the idea that single motherhood is a potential source of agency and awakening for women who learn that they can live without men. Chapter Three, in a different vein, analyzes single mothers plagued by hauntings in the Japanese horror film *Ringu* and the 2010 novel *Manazuru* to understand moments in which the feasibility of single motherhood is again questioned. Finally, Chapter Four gives readings of the 1988 Banana Yoshimoto work *Kitchen* and the 2001 movie *Hasshu!* to show the potential happy future for families that do not fall into the unconventional norms of traditional nuclear families. Through

my research, I discovered that fictional discourse about the single mother has changed over time, from simple narratives that naively assume that single mothers need only willpower to thrive without husbands, to those that question the vulnerability of women without a partner, and finally to those that offer unconventionality as a way forward. I conclude that the changing discourse of the single mother has the power and potential to change popular opinion regarding real-life single mothers, which may help Japan as it struggles to deal with changing demographics.

Keywords: Single Mothers, Japan, Conventional and Unconventional Families, Haunting, Control, Dependency

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Chapter One: Introduction

Fast demographic change in Japan has brought the plight of children, young women, and the elderly to the nation's attention. The population of young people is decreasing as young women avoid marriage and motherhood in favor of work, and the elderly population is living longer than ever. The burden of care for the elderly, along with the responsibility to produce the next generation, falls to young women today. These alarming trends have caused many Japanese to fear for the future of their country. How do these changes offer opportunity for new interpretations and views of the family? This thesis seeks to explore the depiction of families in these changing times by analyzing Japanese fiction and film from the 1970s to today. In particular, it will focus on the depiction of single mothers within those films. This chapter will introduce the demographic changes causing concern in Japan over the choices of young women regarding motherhood. I will then briefly discuss the use of literature as a tool to understand social changes, and finally I will introduce the works that I choose to analyze in this thesis.

In recent years, scholars of Japanese culture and society have noted a strong decline in the number of marriages and childbirths in Japan, and the rapid aging of the society is considered a serious economic and social problem. Indeed, Japan has the world's third-lowest birth rate: the 2014 estimate of the birthrate shows only 8.07 children born per 1,000 population.[1] At the same time, as a rapidly aging society, Japan faces a host of serious economic and social problems such as concern over the feasibility of continuing the country's social security program, lack of support and care for elders isolated from their families, and economic concerns due to having a

[1] Central Intelligence Agency. 2014. "Country Comparison:: Birthrate." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2054rank.html>. Web. April 1, 2014. The only two countries with lower rates of birth are Saint Pierre and Miguelon, with 7.70 children per 1,000 population and Monaco, with 6.72 children per 1,000 population.

too-small population of potential workers. Much of the discourse on these problems has focused on the choices of young women—whether they choose to marry and have children, and the ways in which they choose to do this. This thesis explores how the single mother as a figure has risen, and how this figure interacts with the changing demographic realities in Japan today.

In discussing the choices made by young women about motherhood, it is normally assumed by families, employers, friends, and the women themselves that they must either choose motherhood or career, not both. Certain laws and social expectations make maintaining both a career and raising a family a daunting task for the average woman. According to political scientist Leonard Schoppa, this pushes most women to choose one or the other, rather than combining both.[2] Increasingly, women have chosen the economic and social benefits of work over what they perceive as the increasingly unsatisfying life of service as wives and mothers. Single mothers, a group who defy the traditional expectations of mothers due to their very status, are important for study because they can indicate the feasibility of other options for women who wish to pursue both work and family. In this environment, asking how pop culture views and interprets the single mother can help us to understand the views of motherhood taken by larger Japanese society, as well as the images many young women face as they make important life decisions. Single mothers, and the struggles they are depicted as facing in literature and film, can help us understand the situation of Japanese women as a whole, and in turn many of the current challenges of Japanese society.

To fully understand concerns about Japan's birthrate, we must first understand its status as an "aging country," one with a low death rate for the elderly and a low birth rate. Like many industrialized countries, Japan has seen an increase in life expectancy at the same time as a drop

[2] Schoppa, Leonard. 2006. *Race for the Exits.* Ithaca, NY. Cornell University Press: 29.

in the fertility rate. In their 2007 article, Date Yusuke and Shimizutani Satoshi noted that Japan's fertility rate hit an all-time low in 2003, with only 1.29 children per woman.[3] They succinctly describe why this is a problem by saying,

> Fertility rate decline causes an imbalance in the demographic composition between the productive population (people ages fifteen to sixty-four) and the dependent population (young people under fifteen and seniors sixty-five and older). This development may increase the per capita social security burden and negatively impact Japan's long-term economic performance. Some European countries that have likewise experienced falling fertility rates have seen those rates recover. In Japan, however, there is no recovery currently in sight. Instead, the fertility rate is expected to decline consistently over the next thirty years.[4]

This reproductive decline is part of a larger trend of women asserting more independence and control over their lives in contemporary Japan. Leonard Schoppa's 2006 book, *Race for the Exits: The Unraveling of Japan's System of Social Protection,* explains in detail the choices made by young women who desire more out of life than to be housewives and mothers to at least two children. According to Schoppa, "The proportion of unmarried women aspiring to be full-time housewives has fallen sharply, from 34 percent in 1987 to 19 percent in 2002."[5] Although this continues to be the socially sanctioned life path for women, it is clear that many do not find it appealing.

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[3] Date, Yusuke, and Satoshi Shimizutani. 2007. "Why Has Japan's Fertility Rate Declined?." *Japanese Economy* 34, no. 1: 4-45. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, 5.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Schoppa 73.

Date and Shimizutani focus their explanation of the decline in fertility on the lack of effective government policies regarding childcare. They cite in their analysis efforts such as the 1992 Child Care Leave Law and the 1994 and 1999 Angel Plan, both of which increased the amount of childcare leave employed persons could expect, as well as the 2001 Zero Child Care Waiting List Campaign and the 2003 Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation.[6] They conclude, however, that these measures were insufficient. Each policy addresses directly the difficulty for young people to balance work and family. However, they seek to force businesses to change their policies without calling for more widespread change in general societal attitudes towards family. In order to see real population change, the authors argue that the government must "prepare a diverse policy menu containing options that are easy for individual families to use. It must also develop an environment in which policies are not only enacted, but enacted in such a way that they can be realistically taken advantage of by families."[7]

Encouraging single motherhood would be one such policy with a particularly high chance of sparking population growth. Single-mother families, after all, require only one adult to invest her time and resources into raising children. In 2005, however, only 2 percent of Japanese children were born outside of wedlock. This compares to 43 percent in both the United Kingdom in 2005 and the United States in 2004.[8] In her book *The Japanese Family in Transition*, Ochiai Emiko notes that, although Japanese divorce rates seem low compared to many Western

[6] Date and Shimizutani, 33-34. The Child Care Leave Law gave employees with new children the right to one year of child care leave. The Angel Plan increased the level of compensation received by those on child care leave, lengthened child care times for government employees, and widened the window of time in a child's life during which child care compensation could be claimed. The Zero Child Care Waiting List Campaign increased the number of child care facilities in order to offer more opportunities for parents needing child care. The Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation sought to support company changes that would foster greater reproductive success for both male and female employees.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Hertog, Ekaterina. 2009. *Tough Choices : Bearing an Illegitimate Child in Contemporary Japan.* Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press. 2.

countries, "divorce rates taken out of context can be a misleading indicator, because there can be no divorce without marriage."[9] Nevertheless, a rise in divorce beginning in the 1970s initially inspired a moral crisis, but eventually has gained greater acceptance. Even as divorce becomes more acceptable in Japan, single mothers are extremely rare, an anomaly among other similarly wealthy nations, especially those of Western Europe. This rarity speaks to the strength of ideas about the conventional family and the lack of support for single mothers. Next, I will discuss what conventions are expected of families, and the strength to which people cling to the notion of "family" as defined by the nuclear family unit living together and led by the father.

Tough Choices

Why is the rate of single motherhood in Japan so low, even while it has been on the rise in other industrialized countries? In her 2009 book, *Tough Choices: Bearing an Illegitimate Child in Japan*, sociologist Ekaterina Hertog finds a gap in the research on single mothers in Japan; although scholars often explain the low number of single mothers with expected economic hardship, legal discrimination, and the ease of abortion, most don't base their explorations of this issue on the lived experiences of real single mothers.[10] Hertog employs a series of in-depth interviews to explore this uncharted territory. The interviewees fill a variety of social positions. Some were unwed mothers, others divorcees, and still others women who were unmarried and without children. Although her sample was very small (sixty-six unwed mothers, twelve divorced mothers, and sixteen unwed women without children[11]) and the results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the whole of Japan, the experiences of Hertog's single mothers

[9] Ochiai Emiko. 1994. *Nijuisseki kazoku e: Kazoku no sengo taisei no mikata, koekata. (The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan)*. Tokyo, Japan: Yuhikaku Publishing Co. 171.
[10] Hertog 2.
[11] Ibid 11.

revealed interesting trends. Based on her interviews, Hertog concludes that societal pressure and shame play a much larger role than do economic pressures, legal troubles, and the ease of abortion in keeping the number of children born out of wedlock low in Japan.

In her study, Hertog creates a clear dichotomy between two types of single mothers—those who desired motherhood, even if while single, and those who did not intend to become single mothers. Those who did not become single mothers by choice generally had positive views of traditional marriage and family and chose to have children as a way of buying into these beliefs. For instance, some women believed that, due to age or health complications, they would have no other chance to have a child if they did not carry to term a (usually unintended) pregnancy that occurred out of wedlock. Others believed that they would be married to the child's father at some point, if not by the time of birth, and realized that they could not marry only when they were past the point of being able to safely abort the child.[12] Some of those in the minority of women who chose to have children without pursuing marriage cited a negative opinion of traditional marriage and family due to bad experiences in childhood. Others explained that they held feminist views that led them to have children as a part of their resistance of patriarchal society.[13]

These findings led Hertog to negate the commonly offered explanations for the low rate of single motherhood: economic or legal difficulty and the ease of abortion. On economic troubles, she says,

> The additional disadvantages of unwed mothers relative to divorcees are small and do not seem to provide an adequate explanation for the huge difference in their numbers… This

[12] Ibid 39-42.
[13] Ibid 44-45.

suggests that a decision to have a child outside wedlock may not be as sensitive to the economic environment as is often implied.[14]

Hertog does note that 21.3 percent of never-wed single mothers cease working once they have children, a figure much larger than the 5.9 percent of divorcees and 6.3 percent of widows.[15] Never-wed mothers who maintain their employment, however, make only roughly $1000 less per year than divorced mothers, so the actual difference in their circumstances may be negligible. Hertog thus corrects assumptions about the financial situation by citing that 7.1 percent of unwed mothers, 5.6 percent of widows, and 4.8 percent of divorcees make above about $54,500 per year. These facts contrast with the strongly ingrained association of single motherhood and poverty.[16] Thus it may not be the actual economic reality that dissuades potential single mothers. Rather, it could be that they expect to become poor if they have a child out of wedlock.

Although some legal discrimination against the children of single mothers does exist, Hertog does not find this to be a strong disincentive for women to have children out of wedlock. One of the most prominent of legal barriers Hertog examines is the Family Registry (*koseki)* system. Since 1871, the Family Registry has recorded details of every family unit in Japan, including the members' names and relations to one another, the member designated as head of household, and even the order of marriage and birth within a family. "Legitimate" and "illegitimate" births are visible through this registry. Consequently, a mother's unwed status and the illegitimate status of her child are obvious to those who read the Family Registry. A similar but less discriminatory registry, the Household Registry (*jūminhyō*), records only the names and addresses of members of a household and therefore does not reveal whether or not a woman is

[14] Ibid 76.
[15] Ibid 60.
[16] Ibid 68.

single or divorced.[17] A process to make children legitimate in the Family Registry does exist: women who have children out of wedlock can have their child acknowledged by the father and entered into his Family Registry. If the father resists, however, the resulting legal process to prove paternity is long and complex.[18] In her conclusion, Hertog notes that, though certainly harsher than that of many industrialized countries, laws regarding single mothers in Japan have become significantly less harshly discriminatory recently. Yet younger women who are now at risk of single motherhood are actually less aware of potential legal troubles for themselves and their children than women in the past. Thus, "if legal discrimination was the only or most salient factor precluding women from giving birth to children outside wedlock, we should have observed a growing number of births in the past decades."[19] Since no more children have been born out of wedlock today than in years when legal discrimination was harsher, Hertog looks elsewhere to explain the low birthrate for single mothers.

In contrast to the assumptions made about economic and legal difficulty, Hertog offers qualitative explanations for why women in Japan would avoid having children outside of wedlock. Her explanation takes into account feelings of both shame and guilt. In regard to shame, Hertog argues that the younger generation of women has relatively little fear of approbation from society at large for being single mothers. They do, however, fear criticism from their parents and hesitate to become shameful in their eyes by becoming single mothers. These parents are of a generation in which the shame of single motherhood was much greater, and thus they naturally try to influence their daughters away from an action that, in their understanding, is permanently

[17] Ibid 78-79.
[18] Ibid 86.
[19] Ibid 95.

socially damaging.[20] Nevertheless, the reported role of shame has decreased overall for current single mothers, and will likely continue to decrease in the future. As women cease to depend on their parents to cue them on how to act, they gain greater control over their reproductive choices.

Guilt toward their children, on the other hand, plays a stronger role in single mothers' perceptions of their situations. Since the conventional nuclear family is held in high esteem in Japan, it is assumed that to lack a father figure is to suffer a devastating loss for a young child. It is often assumed that this loss will lead to emotional problems as the children grow. This explains why abortion, which in Japan is not marked by a strong religious taboo, is often considered the morally responsible choice for a woman faced with the possibility of having to raise a child without a father.[21] In practice, however, women are able to hide their stigmatizing status as single mothers by glossing over their living situation and relying on others to lack curiosity about their background. They are also able to negotiate maintaining proper employment and legally protecting their child without extreme difficulty. Thus, according to Hertog, the guilt single mothers cite failed to materialize.

The Single Mother in Japanese Literature and Film

If perceived guilt is such a strong influence on potential single mothers in Japan, where do these perceptions come from? Literature, although not as easily consumed as more immediate forms of communication available through social media, often aids in shaping and reflecting public opinion. Using Hertog's assertion that it is the perception of struggles facing the single mother that have kept their numbers so low, I will analyze several novels and films to better understand the depictions and expectations of single mothers. In other words, this thesis reads

[20] Ibid 124-126.
[21] Ibid 146.

popular culture to understand how perceptions of single motherhood are formed in contemporary Japan. One might argue that, as in Hertog's study, these works will show me only the stereotypes of single motherhood that aid in keeping births so low. Drawing on literary critic Jaber F. Gubrium's 2005 article "Narrative Environments and Social Problems," however, I will consider how popular culture and media can challenge common assumptions. Gubrium claims that narratives can affirm current perceptions of their topics as well as change those perceptions. On the discourse of social problems in media, he writes,

> The process of identification and rhetorics of persuasion take place in communicative context—in narrative environments whose accounts and resources variously serve to affirm or challenge both old and new stories about social conditions.[22]

Thus, although narratives are influenced by prevailing views on their subjects, they also influence views and thus engage in a dialog between those who interpret real social phenomena into fiction and those who engage with the same phenomena in their day-to-day lives. According to Gubrium, stories are "sites of both affirmation and challenge from the start, where narrative clarification always already calls out old, new, and potential stories of our inner lives and social worlds."[23] It is these changing inner lives and social worlds I hope to encounter in my research. In this thesis, I will explore several examples of Japanese novels and cinema from the 1970s until the present day to better understand how each work reflects prevailing understandings of the struggles of single mothers at the time of publication, and how these in turn may have offered new conceptualizations of single motherhood.

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[22] Gubrium, Jaber F. "Narrative Environments and Social Problems," *Social Problems* , Vol. 52, No. 4 (2005), pp. 525-528. Accessed Mar. 18, 2014. Doi: 10.1525/sp.2005.52.4.525. 527.
[23] Ibid.

I will first consider *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains*, two well-known novels by 1970s writer Tsushima Yūko, analyzing the ways in which her protagonists must fight against prevailing societal pressure to feel shame and guilt in order to assert agency through their single motherhood. I will then explore a backlash against the powerful messages of works such as Tsushima's in works that evoke "hauntedness" as the outcome of a lonely, hard life as a single mother. Where Tsushima's works inspire confidence in the power of hard work and determination for single mothers, these works take a more pessimistic view. In introducing haunting aspects to the stories, they question whether or not single motherhood is, in fact, as feasible as Tsushima's works would have us believe. In particular, I will interpret the 2009 Kawakami Hiromi novel *Manazuru* and the 1998 Japanese horror movie *Ringu* (*The Ring*). Finally, I will explore Banana Yoshimoto's 1988 novel *Kitchen* and the 2001 movie *Hasshu!* (*Hush!*) to see how recent works respond to the possible haunting nature of the past by offering new, unimagined family structures as equally valid and viable options for potential single mothers. Ultimately, I will argue that these works of fiction have reflected prevailing social attitudes about single motherhood while also affecting change in those attitudes. Although single motherhood is currently stigmatized and reviled, works such as those I discuss have a hand in eliminating stereotypes and fostering a new environment in which single motherhood can gain acceptance in Japan.

Chapter Two: Mothers Seeking Independence in the Fiction of Tsushima Yūko

How does fiction frame the harsh reality of single motherhood in Japan? In this chapter, I illustrate how two works by renowned author Tsushima Yūko depict single mothers as manipulating their status to gain control over their lives. They do this in different ways, both by rejecting their dependence on others and by embracing others' dependence on themselves. Although single mothers today face their own unique set of circumstances, they have long been a popular topic for literary exploration. One writer famous for her depictions of single mothers, and for her status as a single mother herself, was Tsushima Yūko. Born in 1947 to the famous novelist Dazai Osamu, Tsushima came of age in Japan's vibrant postwar economy of the 1950s and 1960s. Because her father committed suicide the next year, Tsushima herself was well acquainted with the experience of children growing up without fathers. Tsushima began her own writing career and published her first novel, *Chōji* (*Child of Fortune),* in 1978. It was translated into English by Geraldine Harcourt in 1983 and was followed by a number of writings throughout the 1980s, including *Yama o Hashiru Onna* (*Woman Running in the Mountains),* which was published in 1980. Tsushima's writings typically deal with the struggles of mothers on the fringes of society. The two books that I will explore in this chapter, *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains*, deal specifically with women who elect to have children outside of wedlock.

Through the analysis of these two works, this chapter argues that Tsushima views single motherhood and pregnancy as ultimately empowering, if challenging. Her protagonists take a certain pleasure in asserting their own agency and controlling their own lives, no matter how much pain accompanies these changes. They also find that men are unnecessary, and often unwanted, in their lives. In asserting their agency, however, the two protagonists differ. One

takes vicious pleasure in her complete independence, while the other finds satisfaction in learning that others need her. After a brief summary of the plots of *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains,* I will introduce the main English literature on Tsushima's work. I will then proceed to my own analysis of her treatment of men, the physicality of pregnancy, and women's assertion of agency in these novels.

Child of Fortune follows the story of Kōko, a 36-year-old divorced piano teacher who experiences a psychosomatic pregnancy as her pubescent daughter, Kayako, withdraws from Kōko to draw closer to her aunt, Shōko. Shōko is Kōko's conventional sister who can offer Kayako a private-school education and material comforts. Throughout the novel, Kōko encounters people who, like her sister, are appalled by her unconventional life choices and admonish her for being selfish and childish. She reminisces repeatedly about her relationships with three men: Hatanaka, the father of her daughter; Osada, his friend; and Doi, perhaps the only man she actually loved. Near the close of the novel, Kōko learns that the pregnancy that she had believed to be Osada's child had only been a physical manifestation of her emotional state, and she is not pregnant at all. Following this realization, Kōko rejects a proposal of marriage from Osada, who mistakenly believes she has tried to manipulate him into marrying her.

Woman Running in the Mountains tells the story of single motherhood through Takiko, a 20-year-old woman who believes that her pregnancy out of wedlock will help her achieve independence from her unhappy working-class family. She goes through labor at the outset of the novel, setting up her story as one in which the audience has never known her not to be with child. The rest of the narrative explores her life after giving birth as she navigates rocky relationships with her father and mother, struggles to find an appropriate daycare for her new son, Akira, and tries to obtain a job that will give her enough flexibility to care for her son and

enough income to support him. On top of this, her father attacks her physically and also admonishes her for continuing her casual sexual relationships with men, which he finds promiscuous due to Takiko's status as a mother. Eventually, Takiko matures into a mindset of peace and independence, despite very little actual change to her living situation. She gets a job at Misawa Gardens, a company that delivers potted plants to local businesses. There, she finds community with her coworkers, especially a man named Kambayashi who has a young son with Down's syndrome. Although Takiko fails in an attempt to seduce Kambayashi, the novel ends positively as the two manage to continue their friendship without awkwardness. Her son Akira's health also returns when a hernia problem that has plagued him throughout the book is finally cured. This happy resolution appears to indicate that Takiko, despite a number of societal forces that attempt to limit her ability to raise a child on her own, has carved out a successful path for herself. Her anger at her family and embarrassment in the eyes of those who would judge or attempt to control her are sublimated into confidence and self-efficacy by the close of the novel. Despite a huge number of difficulties with her family, her status as an unwed mother, and her struggles to find sufficient work, Takiko's perseverance enables her to find fulfilling work and develop meaningful relationships with her family and coworkers.

Critical Work on Tsushima

Criticism of Tsushima's work varies in content and appraisal but often focuses on analysis of single mothers' attempts to assert their will being read as instability by those around them. Critics read these themes as a resistance to stifling expectations for maternal self-sacrifice prevalent in Japanese culture in the 1970s. Reviews from 1991 of translations of *Woman Running in the Mountains* by both Ihab Hassan and Leza Lowitz find that Takiko's struggles to assert her identity against economic, familial, and social pressures provide an accurate view of

the lives of single mothers in the 1970s. Hassan reads Takiko as "smothered by the tedium of her existence, by loneliness within and conformity all around, this young woman, seemingly so mediocre, will not shirk or bend."[24] Lowitz is similarly appreciative of Takiko as a rebellious character, saying she "breaks out of such [conventional] constraints, her head held high."[25] Lowitz has perhaps a more nuanced view of the treatment of Takiko, as she acknowledges her character flaws more readily than Hassan. For instance, in noting that Takiko fails terribly at a job as a door-to-door makeup saleswoman, Lowitz cedes that "her struggles here are both humorous and poignant, providing some of the best scenes in the book."[26] Thus it appears that, while Lowitz acknowledges Takiko as more human and complex than Hassan does, both appreciate Tsushima's depiction of the struggles of single motherhood in the 1970s as being difficult, but possibly rewarding because of Takiko's ultimate freedom to pursue her own desires.

An earlier assessment, Sakurai Emiko's 1984 review of *Child of Fortune*, however, speaks to a different understanding of Tsushima's intentions in writing about single mothers. Sakurai takes issue with the fact that "at least in the first half, the author's subjectivity interferes with the proper development of her characters and plot."[27] In the concluding line of her review, Sakurai states that:

[24]Hassan, Ihab. "Woman Running in the Mountains by Yūko Tsushima; Geraldine Harcourt," review of Woman Running in the Mountains by Tsushima Yūko. World Literature Today. Vol. 65, No. 4, Autumn 1991. P. 773.
[25] Lowitz, Leza. "Woman Running in the Mountains by Yūko Tsushima; Geraldine Harcourt," review of Woman Running in the Mountains by Tsushima Yūko. *Manoa*. Vol. 3, No. 2. Autumn 1991. 222.
[26] Ibid 223.
[27] Sakurai, Emiko. 1984. "Child of Fortune by Yūko Tsushima; Geraldine Harcourt," review of Child of Fortune by Tsushima Yūko. *World Literature Today.* Vol. 58, No. 2. 326.

> Tsushima is clearly trying to say in *Child of Fortune* that Koko [*sic*], thirty-six years old and a mother of a daughter about to enter high school, is still the mischievous brat she had been with her loving retarded brother and that she wants no change.[28]

Granted, this review takes issue with a different novel than the one praised by Hassan and Lowitz, but it is likely that the time in which the review was published also contributed to Sakurai's negative interpretation of Tsushima's intent in writing it. Hassan and Lowitz, each writing in 1991, perhaps were more accustomed to Tsushima's writing, and therefore did not take the same naïve view as Sakurai that Tsushima is simply writing her own selfishness through her protagonists.

Tsushima herself would likely have a response for Sakurai about the perceived "selfishness" of herself and her protagonists. In a 1989 interview, Tsushima remarked, "Women figures I created in my novels also don't compromise with reality. They may appear stoic, but they are strong enough to search for their own happiness in their own ways."[29] In her comments, Tsushima also explains what the value of single motherhood is. It is not necessarily happiness, but rather personal growth. Tsushima writes,

> I have never written about happy women. This is not because I like unhappiness, but it comes from my firm belief that misfortune is not always bad. Happiness can spoil people. Happy people can lose sensitivity, and as a result they become poor in terms of human qualities. On the contrary, people can become rich by unhappiness. Unhappy

[28] Ibid 326.
[29] Kuriki, Chieko. 1989. "Yuko Tsushima: I am not Pessimistic about the Future of Women." *Chicago Tribune.* Found at < http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1989-01-22/features/8902270344_1_yuko-tsushima-love-read>.

> people are given a chance to discover true human nature. It's like we realize a stone only after we stumble over it. I know it's hard, but people can grow through hardships.[30]

Thus for Tsushima, the value of her protagonists comes precisely from their struggles. In suffering a difficult life, they also progress towards a greater understanding of themselves. According to Tsushima, this, and not a simply happy life, is one worth living.

A 2002 article by Megan McKinlay entitled "Unstable Mothers: Redefining Motherhood in Contemporary Japan" deals with both *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains* in much greater depth than any of the three previous reviews, as well as introduces work on several other novels by Tsushima. Differences in her analysis of the works and the understandings expressed by Hassan, Lowitz, and Sakurai likely have to do both with the more recent timing of McKinlay's work as well as its academic quality, which differs from that of a book review. McKinlay interprets Kōko's actions in *Child of Fortune* with more sympathy than Sakurai, but still acknowledges the degree of selfishness involved in Kōko's mothering strategies. Specifically, McKinlay points out an instance in which Kōko asks "how Kayako expects to 'repay these sacrifices.' "[31] McKinlay interprets Kōko's mothering strategy as humanly imperfect, writing,

> Her behaviour throughout the pregnancy, however, indicates her inability or unwillingness to live up to this ideal as she continues to drink, smoke and swallow

[30] Ibid.
[31] McKinlay, Megan. "Unstable Mothers: Redefining Motherhood in Contemporary Japan." Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context 7 (2002): n. pag. Web. 28 Aug. 2013. p. 10.

> painkillers with relative abandon, suggesting that while the maternal ideal may be persuasively romantic, it is, for her, a fundamentally unrealistic notion.[32]

Yet McKinlay avoids passing judgment on Kōko by pointing out that her actions are actually reactions to a culture that idolizes but also constrains mothers into very specific modes of behavior.

In discussing *Woman Running in the Mountains,* McKinlay notes that Takiko lacks the emotional conflict so central to Kōko's struggle in *Child of Fortune.* She argues that "the narrative remains non-emotive and non-judgmental"[33] in a way that the narrative of *Child of Fortune* does not. She argues that this characteristic seems to indicate a progression in Tsushima's thought from fears about social stigma to a greater sense of confidence in single mothers' ability to confront and ignore such stigma. That is not to say that references to stigmatization do not exist in *Woman Running in the Mountains*. In fact, McKinlay points out that "the older generation in *Woman Running in the Mountains* is significantly affected by the social gaze as regards motherhood and conventional family structure."[34] In my assessment of the novel, I found that this "social gaze" from older generations forms a large part of the pressure to conform to expected norms that Tsushima's protagonists, as single mothers, must push back against. This sense of the social gaze corresponds to the relationship between Kōko and her sister Shōko in *Child of Fortune*, who represent "the conflict between the social ideal of family and mother and its deviant version,"[35] in McKinlay's view.

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[32] Ibid 12.
[33] Ibid 18.
[34] Ibid 25
[35] Ibid 27.

McKinlay's final assessment of Tsushima's novels flies in the face of Sakurai's blunt assertion that Kōko is "bratty" in her actions throughout the novel, but also fails to completely agree with Hassan and Lowitz that Tsushima's depiction of single mothers is a simple one of bravery in the face of social stigma. In choosing to write on motherhood, Tsushima avoids the trend of other feminists of her time period, who reject motherhood entirely as limiting. According to McKinlay, however,

> Rather than rejecting maternity itself, Tsushima questions the context in which it operates as a discourse, and what many critics consider a valorisation of motherhood functions equally as a critique of the assumptions which accompany it.[36]

Thus, in McKinlay's view, Tsushima's protagonists are not heroes who stand up against social injustice to single mothers, nor are they the selfish women criticized by Sakurai as being bratty. Rather, they straddle the divide between rejecting social norms and still demanding the ability to undertake actions associated with those norms, such as mothering. Related to this approach, a 2003 article by Amy Christiansen argues that Tsushima's frequent use of "idiot brothers" as archetypical characters enables her heroines to exist in a "bare human" state removed from social norms, and as " 'bare human beings,' these two heroines are baffled by the socially constructed behavior of the people around them."[37] Thus, these heroines, stripped of normal expectations of social convention, are more creative in achieving their life goals than those around them who have been indoctrinated into the socially acceptable modes of living.

Although McKinlay addresses many salient points on the treatment of single mothers in Tsushima's fictional work and I agree with her argument, she also leaves out several themes that

[36] Ibid 32.
[37] Christiansen, Amy. 2003. "Tsushima Yūko." *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*. New York: Columbia University Presss. 248.

I find important and worth exploring. In discussing the role of men, particularly in *Woman Running in the Mountains,* McKinlay focuses on Kambayashi's role as a surrogate mother to his mentally disabled child, and argues that while the novel "depicts qualities of selfless nurturing as absent in the mother and present in the father, it does not ultimately challenge the conventional positioning of the mother as assumed primary caregiver."[38] This is a fair point, but I believe there is still more to be said on the treatment of men and their role in childrearing in both *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains.* Specifically, I found that Kōko's assessment of the men who surround her is largely a discussion of whether or not they are truly necessary in her life and the life of her child. This hints at the larger discussion of the need for a "father figure" in the nuclear family model considered to be ideal in Japanese culture, and implicitly raises the question of whether a family with a different structure can still be good for the children.

Another topic often discussed in literature on Japanese writing, and Tsushima in particular, is the physical nature of motherhood and the meaning this has in relation to social expectations of mothers in Japan. Tsipy Ivry, in her 2010 book, *Embodying Culture: Pregnancy in Japan and Israel*, characterizes Japanese views on pregnancy as highly conformist. Obstetricians, for example, treat physical changes in the mother's body as signs of the progression of her pregnancy, and also use these signs to control the mother through her body. For instance, expecting mothers are given a laundry list of proper and improper behavior during pregnancy. According to Ivry,

[38] McKinlay 20.

> A pregnant woman should avoid breathing bad air, avoid excessively long journeys, not wear sleeveless clothing, not wear high heels, not eat salty foods, always be sure not to chill her pelvic area, and, therefore, always wear socks or stockings.[39]

These responsibilities are summed up in what Ivry calls the "causal theory of gestation"—the idea that pregnant mothers are in direct control and therefore have direct responsibility for the outcome of their pregnancies, based on their actions during gestation. This understanding of pregnancy leads to the expectant mother being treated as an environment—both physical and mental—for her fetal child. As an environment, the mother is responsible for correctly feeding herself and putting herself in emotional circumstances that are said to be most healthy for the development of the child. All of these factors come together to put enormous pressure on pregnant women to eschew their own desires and sacrifice much comfort to create optimum circumstances for the birth of their children. Takiko and Kōko challenge these expectations and more during their pregnancies.

Ivry's sociological work focuses on societal expectations of mothers, but much of the literature on pregnancy has less to do with how women's physical bodies are perceived by others than with what the physical nature of pregnancy means to the mothers themselves. Yoshiko Enomoto's article "The Reality of Pregnancy and Motherhood for Women: Tsushima Yuko's 'Choji' and Margaret Drabble's 'The Millstone' " argues that it is by rejecting the societal expectations emphasized by Ivry that Kōko, along with the protagonist from Margaret Drabble's *The Millstone*, are able to find meaning and self-actualization in pregnancy and motherhood, rather than becoming subsumed by a socially prescribed role. A particularly relevant point

[39]Ivry, Tsipy. 2010. *Embodying Culture: Pregnancy in Japan and Israel*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. 127.

Enomoto makes is that, "through the experience of imagining a pregnancy, Koko [*sic*] has faced herself, examined her past and present life and the nature and meaning of motherhood, and even accepted the meaninglessness of life. She has now become self-sufficient."[40] Thus, although Ivry argues that pregnancy forces women into very constrained social roles by shaming them for endangering their children if they do anything for their own pleasure, Enomoto finds that, through experiencing a pregnancy without relying on others for financial help or moral support, Kōko is able to escape being pigeonholed into the narrow mothering role Ivry would expect.

Writing on *Woman Running in the Mountains* shows that Takiko, like Kōko, is able to navigate motherhood in such a way as to avoid being swallowed up in the role. More time is spent by critics in analyzing exactly how this end is achieved in Takiko's case than in Kōko's. In her article "Writing the Body of the Mother: Narrative Moments in Tsushima Yūko, Ariyoshi Sawako and Enchi Fumiko," Barbara Hartley argues that motherhood has been a complicated matter for feminists in Japan to discuss because it can represent a loss of self. Nonetheless, she states that

> the corporeal experiences of conception, gestation, and birth remain the province of physical maternity, enabling the woman writer who is also a mother to draw upon this exclusive experiential aspect of corporeal femininity in a powerful and sometimes unsettling way. Texts produced in this context often have the potential to contest processes of social inscription and thus suggest transformatory possibilities for all readers, not just those occupying an embodied maternal space.[41]

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[40] Enomoto, Yoshiko. "The Reality of Pregnancy and Motherhood for Women: Tsushima Yuko's "Choji" and Margaret Drabble's "The Millstone"" *Comparative Literature Studies*35.2 (1998): 116-24. 122-123.
[41]Hartley, Barbara. 2003. "Writing the Body of the Mother: Narrative Moments in Tsushima Yūko, Ariyoshi Sawako and Enchi Fumiko," *Japanese Studies* 23, no. 3: 293-305. 295.

Writing on *Woman Running in the Mountains* in light of this argument, Hartley turns her consideration to the powerful physicality of motherhood. Intriguingly, she discusses the role of light as it interacts with Takiko's pregnant body. She argues that Takiko's body is not a surface against which light reflects, but rather that "light creates a space in which desire might be articulated and expressed. Accordingly, the absence of light signals a wretchedness, a despair of unexpressed or misshapen desire that seeks to erase rather than celebrate the erotic."[42] Thus, according to Hartley, Takiko, whose pregnant body is filled with and illuminated by light, is able to escape the desexualizing and controlling aspects of Japanese motherhood while still maintaining a relationship with her child. Light also appears in Takiko's world when she is out walking by herself—traveling to the hospital alone to deliver her child, working at Misawa Gardens, and caring for her child—and is notably absent when she is at home with her family. The family, which repeatedly attempts to quash Takiko's desire for freedom, is thus contrasted with her experiences in the outside world. The dichotomy between the lightless family that represents the strictures of social norms and the light outside where Takiko pursues her goals with complete agency thus illustrates how single motherhood in *Woman Running in the Mountains* is not a death knell, but a chance to assert agency.

In sum, the critical writing on Tsushima's work has focused on the ways in which the protagonists Kōko and Takiko assert their agency, and the symbols that convey their struggles to the audience. Themes such as masculinity and physicality in these novels, and how they both relate to the agency of single mothers, have not been as closely analyzed. As a gesture in this direction, I will focus the remaining pages of this chapter on how each protagonist analyzes and

[42] Ibid 298.

evaluates her male acquaintances and the ways in which physical experiences contribute to the experience of single motherhood in *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains.*

Baby Daddies and Womanhood

Although the protagonists of *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains* are of dissimilar ages—Kōko is 36 and Takiko is 19—they share certain characteristics, and one of these is their way of relating to men. Of particular importance to each work is the discussion of the necessity of a "father figure," either as a partner for a mother or simply as something necessary to the healthy development of a child. Normally, a mother would depend upon the father of her child for help in supporting that child's growth, but such dependence requires that she give up part of the control she has over the raising of her child. The single mothers of both novels interact with a number of male characters, and their experiences lead them to a conclusion radical at the time the books were released: that fathers are not necessary.

Men in *Child of Fortune*

Three male characters drive the discussion of mother-father relationships in *Child of Fortune.* Two of these, Hatanaka and Osada, are fathers who fail to measure up to Kōko's ideals, although in Osada's case the child does not really exist. The third, Doi, never has the potential of having a child with Kōko. Instead, he has a child and marries his girlfriend around the same time that Kōko's daughter is born and she marries Hatanaka. Doi, however, is repeatedly noted to be fatherly, while the other two men are not. Most evidence of Kōko's assessment and comparison of the three men occur throughout the novel in her moments of reflection. Memories of her relationships with each of the three men show different views and values that Kōko has attached to each. In the end, however, each is shown to be unnecessary as a husband or father.

Hatanaka, the father of Kōko's teenage daughter Kayako, is depicted as charismatic but childish. At first, Kōko is charmed by Hatanaka like everyone else and believes him to be "someone dependable, a man with a future,"[43] but once the two are faced with the responsibility of a child and marriage, his immaturity surfaces. Early on in their time together as parents, Hanataka accuses Kōko of neglecting Kayako when she cries. While his harsh words are not completely misguided, Kōko counters this uncomfortable acknowledgment of her own flaws by thinking, "But Hanataka himself had been too attached to his own youth; it came before everything else."[44] Hanataka moves away from Kōko and Kayako shortly after this incident and eventually divorces Kōko, becoming the kind of father who rarely sees his daughter and only sends presents occasionally. Thus, it appears that the only man actually to father a child with Kōko is not useful or necessary in the raising of that child, and is in fact something of a child himself.

In dramatic contrast to the appealing Hatanaka, the character Osada, a college friend who eventually becomes Kōko's lover, is not spontaneous at all. Where Hatanaka is childish and impulsive, Osada is cautious and methodical, perhaps overly so. In considering her affairs, Kōko naturally compares the two:

> [Osada] was a realistic young man, quite free from the kind of pretensions in which Hatanaka was tightly ensnared. And yet perhaps his approach was too cautious, for he'd had no luck with the job, nor with his marital prospects. At present, after trying a number of other jobs, he was a reporter on a small trade paper; and he was still asserting that *next* year he'd get himself a wife. Whenever she saw them together in

[43] Tsushima Yūko. 1983. *Child of Fortune.* Trans. by Geraldine Harcourt. New York: Kodansha International. 13.
[44] Ibid 8.

> the old days, Kōko used to wish Hatanaka would learn a thing or two from Osada. But the scene was always the same: Osada waiting on Hatanaka. And in spite of her irritation, Kōko would catch herself behaving as Hatanaka did, letting the bachelor Osada do the dishes and help clean up.[45]

Indeed, if Hatanaka is all charisma without responsibility, then Osada is a responsible man without a shred of sex appeal. When Kōko and Osada sleep together for the first time, Kōko is immediately certain that "whatever it was she wanted from Osada, if anything, it was not sex."[46] Following their intimate moments in one scene, Kōko smokes a cigarette while he sleeps, subverting traditional gender expectations. She looks down on Osada's face and muses that "something is terribly wrong if even sex like this can lead to pregnancy."[47] It is interesting that Osada, practically sexless in Kōko's eyes despite their affair, is the man whom she assumes is responsible for her false pregnancy. In fact, he is necessary only as a sperm donor, and even his sperm produce nothing but a "pregnancy" that exists only in Kōko's mind. Osada's lack of either virility or necessity as a father in *Child of Fortune* render him a useless, unattractive male.

The fatherly Doi, in contrast, appears to be a more necessary presence to Kōko and Kayako, as well as to his own wife and child. I would argue that, to Kōko, he symbolizes the appropriate balance between the charisma of Hatanaka and the responsibility of Osada. Kōko reminisces repeatedly throughout the novel about times when Doi acted like a surrogate father to young Kayako, despite not being her father. For instance, Kōko recalls how Doi dealt well with her decision to bring Kayako along on a winter trip to Karuizawa six years before the time of her false pregnancy. However, Doi produces ambivalence in Kōko. She feels that Doi would

[45] Ibid 46.
[46] Ibid 48.
[47] Ibid.

introduce dangerous instability to Kayako's childhood because he has a family he must support. However, she simultaneously wants "the child to adore Doi, want[s] him to be loving to her."[48] Thus, she rationally understands that there is no future with Doi for her, and that seeking a future would be dangerous to her child. Nevertheless, her emotional attachment to Doi and her desire for Kayako to experience positive male influence complicate her feelings on the matter. These conflicted feelings manifest again in Kōko's assessment of Doi as a father. She feels pity for the situation of both Doi and his wife, because they are bound together by a child but are so incompatible that each time Kōko sees them she cannot help but wonder "when would they split up."[49] At the same time, Kōko "wanted to give her blessing to the small peace she saw in that new scene [of domestic happiness], not least for the sake of the woman who had become his wife."[50] Elsewhere, however, Kōko takes on a more negative view of Doi's fathering, such as when he takes Kayako to the zoo and Kōko worries that he is neglecting his duties to his own family, wondering, "Why was he humoring Kayako when it was making his own child unhappy?"[51] Doi is the one man Kōko loved, but he is also the man whose child she chose to abort during college.[52] In the end, these conflicting feelings about Doi's fathering competence and worth as a man boil down to one thing: that "it was Doi's child she'd wanted to have."[53] The fact that there was never a chance at a child with Doi, and that Kōko aborted the one chance that she had at both a child with Doi and marriage to him, indicates that, while she loves Doi more than any other man, he is not necessary to her happiness and may, in fact, be detrimental. Her emotional involvement with him indicates to Kōko that he is capable of controlling her,

[48] Ibid 11.
[49] Ibid 10.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid 37.
[52] Ibid 39.
[53] Ibid 49.

something that is dangerous to her. For that reason, Kōko is more careful with Doi than with anyone else, avoiding becoming too close. Her experiences with each of the three men, however, have something in common, as I will discuss.

Although Kōko finds relative levels of value in each of the men with whom she becomes involved, her experiences with them as she raises Kayako on her own lead her to a controversial conclusion. She decides against revealing her pregnancy to Osada even though she believes he is the father because "it stood to reason, if she was going to keep the baby on her own."[54] Once it seems that he has fulfilled his purpose and caused Kōko to achieve pregnancy, Osada has no further value to her, and his desires to help her raise the child are not relevant in Kōko's decision-making process. When Hatanaka leaves Kōko, she does not mourn, and later rejects any attempt on his part at reconciliation: "She regretted what she was doing to Kayako's father, but that was all."[55] In her view, once the promise of financial support was withdrawn, Hatanaka became completely unnecessary to both Kōko and her daughter. Finally, the case of Doi seems to indicate that Kōko intentionally avoids needing him, as it is clear that her feelings for Doi are more complicated and stronger than her feelings for either Hatanaka or Osada. Kōko is only careful to avoid pregnancy with Doi because she would begin to need him and rely on him if she were to have his child, in a way that would not be true of her relationship with the other two men. In short, Kōko's view on the role of men in her life is best summed up as she rejects Osada's marriage proposal, a mere gesture of pity that occurs at the end of the novel, saying, "You know, if you'd said the same thing to me a year ago, I might have shown the gratitude you seem to expect—I might have jumped for joy. But now… no… I'm afraid I've been a nuisance,

[54] Ibid 108.
[55] Ibid 142.

Osada."[56] The men in her life view Kōko's (false) pregnancy as a desperate maneuver to achieve the social and financial stability of marriage late in life. For Kōko, however, these three men are sometimes sperm donors and sometimes playthings, but never supports on which she must rely. In short, they are unnecessary.

Men in *Woman Running in the Mountains*

Takiko's reaction to men in *Woman Running in the Mountains* differs from Kōko's in that she does not seem to assess the men in her life and rank them against each other. Still, her relation to men as well as her own development as a character indicate that Takiko's experiences lead her to a similar conclusion. She, too, decides that marriage, and men in general, are unnecessary to motherhood and happiness.

The actual father of Takiko's son, Maeda Hiroshi, is mentioned in the novel only cursorily, giving the reader just enough information to conclude that he has not been and will not become an important figure in Takiko's life. Even during their affair, Takiko has no passion for Maeda, feeling simply that

> she wanted to part quickly from him. Maeda's desire must be released with no resistance. Though she couldn't really have said why, Takiko looked to a man's desire with sympathy. She could think of it only as pitiful, and thus not for her to violate. Maeda's desire seemed somehow not to belong to Maeda himself.[57]

[56] Ibid 158.
[57]Tsushima Yūko. 1991. *Woman Running in the Mountains.* Trans. by Geraldine Harcourt. New York: Random House. 33-34.

Even once she finds herself pregnant, Takiko has no wish to contact Maeda. In fact, "she preferred to think she'd had no connection with Maeda in the first place."[58] Near the end of the novel, during most of which he has not been mentioned, a letter comes from Maeda, but Takiko's response is to waver on whether or not to finally save the letter, which is about business matters. Finally, she preserves it in a notebook from her son's nursery, thinking, "Now I can safely forget his name."[59] Although this preservation of his name and communication could be read as some lingering emotional attachment, it is actually the final step Takiko needs to completely sever their relationship. Once the letter and Maeda's name have been secured in Akira's baby book, Takiko can reference them if asked but is otherwise freed of the emotional and mental burden of holding on to memories of her tryst with Maeda. Thus, through her terse discussion of Maeda's role in Takiko's life, Tsushima underscores the assertion that a biological father is not necessary, and may even be slightly annoying, to the mother of his children.

A second figure who promotes the idea that fathers and men are hindrances to the hard work of mothers is Takiko's father. Clearly unstable, he takes out his frustrations on Takiko repeatedly throughout the novel in moments of violence that are shocking breaks from the placid, calm pacing of the rest of the book. A typical run-in between Takiko and her father begins with his drunken criticism of Takiko's choice to keep Akira being met with increasing derision from Takiko, whose confidence as a mother grows along with her exasperation with her own family throughout the novel. The tension between father and daughter culminates in physical violence against Takiko by her father. One particularly troubling scene in which Takiko's father beats her against the tatami mats in a drunken rage ends with Takiko finally voicing her views of

[58] Ibid 34.
[59] Ibid 211.

fatherhood, frankly saying, "A whole lot of good you are! I'm sick of your father act. Who needs it, when you can have a baby just fine without it."[60]

Takiko's father and mother contrast sharply throughout the novel in their attitudes toward their daughter. The father drinks and expresses his disapproval through violence, while the mother carries her college-aged son, drunkard husband, and pregnant daughter on her back by working extra hours at an age when she should be relaxing. Moreover, though she urged Takiko to abort Akira, the mother speaks lovingly of him and offers to care for him once he is born. Although Takiko identifies with her mother's sacrifices after becoming a mother herself, she never thinks to blame her father for forcing her mother to make those sacrifices. After a fight, Takiko muses,

> She didn't need to be reminded that her father had been tired and edgy since starting his new job at the amusement park, nor that he'd had to start this job because of her mother's health, which might never have taken a turn for the worse if she'd had a normal summer.[61]

Takiko recognizes that her father is a burden to her mother, but holds herself to a higher standard in acknowledging and facing the consequences that her choice to have Akira has had on her family. Although she wishes to make it up to her mother, Takiko's assessment of the meaning of her own actions is perceptive. She realizes that "regrets were not permitted."[62] By holding herself to higher expectations, Takiko indicates her value in comparison to her father, whom she expects to be nothing but a burden on her mother. Her rejection of her own father's parenting is therefore a stark example of the worthlessness of fathers in Tsushima's works. Thus, Takiko's father, like

[60] Ibid 118.
[61] Ibid 180.
[62] Ibid 181.

Maeda, indicates how Takiko deals with men who are absent at best, and easily become burdens on already overworked women.

Clearly, Takiko's one-time lover Maeda and her father both serve as examples of fathers who have no real meaning in the lives of their children or mothers. Interestingly, however, there is one positive counterexample of masculinity in *Woman Running in the Mountains.* Takiko talks herself into a job delivering potted greenery to local businesses at Misawa Gardens that, although intended for a man and physically strenuous, is very satisfying. There, she meets Kambayashi. Although they do not hit it off at first, Takiko is drawn to him once she realizes that he has a son with Down's syndrome. In Kambayashi, she finds someone who affirms her as a parent, because "Kambayashi had accorded to her own child a weight equal to his retarded child's."[63] He also is the first positive father figure in her life. In fact, "she didn't want to know what Kambayashi was like as a person. He was a father who had come to shun any other identity."[64] Eventually, Takiko develops an attraction to Kambayashi which conflates his fatherly nature with sexual attractiveness. Even when she attempts to seduce him, her attraction to him takes on an incestuous flavor as she thinks, "I want to sleep nestled close to that body…like a child in its father's arms."[65] Kambayashi is thus a viable replacement for Takiko's violent father. She feels a strong desire for fatherly tenderness from Kambayashi, although she has never wished for such tenderness from her own father. It is interesting that Kambayashi is an ideal father for Takiko, when his fatherly affection differs from her experiences with most men and fathers. In fact, as McKinlay notes, Kambayashi is an excellent father because he is able to care for his child when his mother cannot. This conflation of motherly and fatherly characteristics separates Kambayashi

[63] Ibid 206.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid 238.

from characters who are completely and uselessly "male," and therefore unable to caringly parent. His reaction to Takiko is a reflection of his androgynous ability to care for others. Although she pursues Kambayashi, he proves himself different from other men in the novel by suppressing his own sexual desire and refusing to sleep with her. Takiko is confused but eventually comes to terms with the fact that "Kambayashi would become simply a father with whom she could talk unreservedly about her child, and she a mother who had no one else to confide in."[66] Thus, he is the first man Takiko meets with the same priorities she comes to hold as a mother; that is, he puts his own desires aside in favor of responsibility to his family. Thus, Kambayashi represents a different model of manhood than Maeda and Takiko's father, much less the three men of *Child of Fortune.*

It appears that fathers in *Woman Running in the Mountains* have more potential for both decency and depravity than they do in *Child of Fortune.* The three men in Kōko's life have a narrow range of personalities from childishly selfish to responsible but aloof, while Takiko's senselessly violent father offers a sad contrast to Kambayashi's disciplined restraint and genuine love for his child. Still, in all cases, the two women react with derision to any assertion by male characters that their presence or help is needed in the raising of children. Although Kambayashi seems vital to his child in a way that other male characters are not, it is important to note that, as Megan McKinlay argues, "while this text posits a male in the nurturing role, it is careful to stipulate that this occurs only because of the mother's failure to fill this role herself, as a result of her inability to cope."[67] Thus, even when men are necessary in Tsushima's world, it is only because they are acting as mothers.

[66] Ibid 256.
[67] McKinlay 19.

Tsushima's flat rejection of the nuclear family as being ideal was especially radical given the period in which these novels were published, a time in which divorce and single-parent homes were considered even more shocking and uncommon than they are today. Although both Kōko and Takiko reach similar conclusions about the men in their lives, the way each character develops into a woman who can stand alone is very different, and in each case part of this development is done by undergoing the physical strain of motherhood, as I discuss in the next section.

The Physical Bodies of Mothers

Although both Kōko and Takiko use physicality to avoid being forced into constricting roles, it is interesting that only Takiko's physical motherhood is real and Kōko, although she manifests all of the physical symptoms of pregnancy, is only responding to an internal desire. The "truth" of Takiko's pregnancy and "falsehood" of Kōko's correspond to the ways in which the characters grow in their respective works—Kōko by letting go of things she cannot control and Takiko by taking control of herself and her life.

Bodies in *Child of Fortune*

For Kōko, differences between male and female bodies serve as the main way in which men and women distinguish themselves. She observes how her daughter's classmates, all at the outset of puberty, are simultaneously avoidant and aware of the opposite sex. She finds this tension regrettable because it is a socially imposed phenomenon that prevents them from becoming self-actualized by appreciating their own bodies. Her first thought on observing the interest with which her daughter's classmates view each other's maturing bodies is, "Let their breasts fill out and their voices break, well and good; but why must they be so acutely sensitive

to the other sex that they hadn't time to heed the changes in themselves?"[68] She is also uncomfortable because her acute awareness of the teen's sexuality makes her realize that "her mind must have been twisted if sexuality was all she could find, even for a moment, in that happy gathering of children."[69] Thus, Kōko's understanding of bodies and sexuality is a complex one that assigns highly negative connotations to the gendered constraints attached to female bodies, particularly her own. Kōko wishes to control her body and sexuality, and through it, her life.

Interestingly, physical pregnancy is a tool that helps Kōko escape her own sexuality. She finds pregnancy distressing and even threatening, yet the very physicality of the experience stimulates Kōko to realize a more powerful and meaningful role for herself. For instance, as Kōko expects to be pregnant, her body manifests the outward signs of pregnancy. The appearance of her body as it reacts to her expectations is one way in which Kōko asserts herself through the subversion of societal expectations. Through her false pregnancy, Kōko calls attention to various ideas associated with the female body. She then breaks down these expectations with her reactions and decisions. By the time she visits her daughter at her sister's house, Kōko has gained enough weight to earn the reprobation of her sister, who exclaims, "How much do you weigh now, for heaven's sake? You must be over a hundred and thirty pounds."[70] Rather than feeling the shame her sister wishes to instill, Kōko is pleased by her ability to alarm Shōko. This desire to shock is even stronger in Kōko's dealing with men:

> It might have been her age, thirty-six, that made Kōko think like this. She was proud of her resolve. The only way she could escape the molten lava of her own sexuality

[68] Tsushima, *Child of Fortune,* 109.
[69] Ibid 110.
[70] Ibid 86.

> had been to conceive and have the baby. And when she remembered the looks she'd had from Osada and her sister, and Doi and Hatanaka before them, it was with anger this time. Giving birth to this baby was the only way to show Doi why she wouldn't become pregnant during her time with him, and how badly she had wanted to escape the power of sex. To Doi her body must have seemed as safe as mud.[71]

Because she cannot control men with her sexuality, or even her own sexual desire, sex is dangerous to Kōko. Although she has purposefully chosen an unconventional life, it seems that day-to-day living has gotten away from Kōko, and her frustration increases throughout the novel as she is unable to control situations with her daughter, her sister, her job, and the men around her. Her unruly sexual desires are another part of her life that Kōko cannot control.

This unusual use of pregnancy to escape sexuality, and with it the pressure Kōko experiences when societal expectations of her as a woman and her own sexuality come into conflict, comes crashing down when the doctors reveal that the pregnancy has merely been imagined. The pregnancy is actually only a psychosomatic reaction, simply a physical manifestation of her emotional state, and Kōko is not pregnant at all. The male doctors tell Kōko that her mysterious female body has caused the false pregnancy, saying,

> The female body, unlike the male, is so intricately and delicately organized that it can only be called mysterious. Almost all women's ailments—menstrual problems,

[71] Ibid 112.

morning sickness, miscarriage, the menopause, and even breast and uterine cancer—are deeply associated with the mind.[72]

These doctors agree with Ivry's argument that the mother's actions are directly responsible for the physical progression of pregnancy. Kōko's mental outlook on her daughter and the men in her life is directly responsible not for her pregnancy but for the growth of her body into something resembling pregnancy, and this growth in turn is responsible for her irrational mental state at the end of the novel. Thus, Kōko is forced to realize that, although she attempted to assert control over her situation with her powerfully pregnant body, her body ended up being controlled by the realities of her situation. This realization, however, is not enslaving but rather freeing for Kōko. Once she has given up on her desire for perfect control, Kōko is freer to consider what is important in her life, and freer also to pursue those things. When Osada and Hatanaka together meet with Kōko to extend a proposal of marriage, her angry rejection of them is a result of her coming to an understanding, through her body, that she does not need men or her daughter to be fulfilled, and in fact clinging to these people simply hurt her. Thus, Kōko's development in *Child of Fortune* is one of learning to accept the things she cannot control. Takiko, however, learns a very different lesson.

Bodies in *Woman Running in the Mountains*

Takiko's experience in *Woman Running in the Mountains* is a much more positive one. Unlike Kōko, Takiko does not become defiantly independent, but rather matures and eventually takes pleasure in the understanding that others need her. Reasons for the difference between their experiences are that Takiko is much younger than Kōko, that this is her first child, and that her

[72] Ibid 120-121.

pregnancy is real, not imagined. Regardless of the reasons behind it, Takiko's physical experience as a mother is empowering in a way that puts her in charge of others, whereas Kōko's empowerment frees her from responsibility towards others. Nevertheless, there are some similarities in the methods each woman employs to assert her own agency.

Like Kōko, Takiko takes some pride in subverting social expectations, in making others uncomfortable with her appearance. This is not often accomplished with merely her pregnant body, because those she wishes to unsettle are often strangers who assume she is married and therefore do not find her pregnancy disturbing. Takiko's turbulent relationship with her father, however, provides her with ample opportunity to face others brashly and with an obstinate pride. For instance, she carries bruises her father left on her face with pride:

> As she studied her face in the mirror and remembered the previous night's fight with her father as a surprising yet dreamlike event, she began to find a powerful consolation in the repeated sight of her bruised face, which she accepted as the event's inevitable aftermath. She might have a vivid welt right in the middle of her cheek, where it was most obvious, or blood still dripping from her nose, but she wouldn't stay in the house even if she had to stuff tissue paper in her nostrils. She went out as usual, and if passersby noticed her face she returned their stares.[73]

Despite her father's abuse, Takiko grows into a caring mother. As she grows into motherhood, Takiko finds meaning in the interdependence she develops with her son, Akira. For instance, as she begins nursing, her mother and nurses encourage her to persevere even if she feels pain, as, they argue, the act of nursing will eventually relieve the pain, because "apparently

[73] Tsushima, *Woman Running in the Mountains,* 31.

the baby was the only thing that could save her from the pain of her engorged breasts."[74] As Akira grows, this symbiosis strengthens until Takiko is unable to distinguish his pain from her own. Such is her feeling of responsibility for Akira that Takiko is relieved to discover that her child has a hernia, if only because she has finally identified the reason behind his crying. Her frantic search of every minute part of his body for the source of his cries mimics the fear that a person feels as they encounter symptoms they do not yet understand in their own body. Her search culminates as "Takiko began blindly caressing the baby's naked body. Was this to be the answer she received, she who had given birth to this baby? The thought began to illuminate Takiko's face, like light from Akira's body."[75] This metaphor of light for the relationship between mother and child recalls Hartley's argument about the role of light as a space in which Takiko is able to realize her own desires and achieve self-actualization, and thus indicates that, in mothering Akira, Takiko finds meaning and worth.

Takiko's body functions as a site of negotiation between societal expectations and self-actualization in the matter of her choice of career. While she is working as a door-to-door cosmetic saleswoman, Takiko uses many of these cosmetics herself. Tsushima frames this job as one that does not help anyone because profit comes from convincing others to pay money for non-essential items. Takiko's mother comments on her daughter's new physical appearance very negatively, saying, "Oh dear, do I have to get an eyeful of that face first thing every morning? You're so much prettier without all that. Can't you find yourself a decent job?"[76] The trappings of this leech-like job do not suit Takiko any more than the makeup does, and she is correspondingly unsuited to the work. It is only when she finds a job at Misawa Gardens that she

[74] Ibid 51.
[75] Ibid 114.
[76] Ibid 172.

seems to find her place. The work is both physically strenuous and nurturing, as Takiko is responsible for the lives of plants in a way that mimics her duties as a mother. Her body responds with changes of its own: "She liked the idea of her body gradually growing stronger, her arms thicker, but she was impatient with her muscles: Couldn't they get past this pain any faster?"[77] In her journey through motherhood, Takiko also grows in maturity and respect for her body. She begins with an understanding of the power of her own female physicality to unsettle others and question social norms, but grows through her role as a mother to someone who understands the importance of her body to others. She finds a comfortable space to inhabit only when she resolves the nature of her job with the power of her body.

Both *Child of Fortune* and *Woman Running in the Mountains* play with notions of female physicality and the heaviness of pregnancy. Pregnancies imagined and real inspire Kōko and Takiko to push back against social pressures. Rather than succumbing to societal pressures, illuminated by Ivry, that would have them function only to produce and care for offspring, the two mothers find meaning through their bodies regardless of reproductive success. Their different experiences of pregnancy teach them much about their relations to others, and each develops agency as a result. Clearly, these novels wholeheartedly reject any societal attempt to force women into constrained roles as mothers. Rather, they assert that single motherhood is to be embraced and celebrated, not feared. A backlash against such confidence, however, rears its head as single mothers find themselves literally and figuratively haunted by their pasts in other works of Japanese literature in the following chapter.

[77] Ibid 196.

Chapter Three - Haunted Mothers in *Ringu* and *Manazuru*

Is single motherhood as simple as Tsushima would have us believe? Her novels would have us believe that the only thing separating single mothers from married mothers is self-confidence. Perhaps there is truly no reason that women should fear becoming single mothers in Japan, and perhaps, as Tsushima suggests, the men in their lives are truly not necessary to their happiness and safety. Horror film and literature, however, present another picture. Works of horror dealing with single mothers often depict them as haunted by figures from the past. In this chapter, I will show how fantastic literature highlights a different, vulnerable side of the single mother. Single mothers have no one upon whom they might depend, but are the sole persons upon whom their children rely. This should give them complete control over their relationship with their children, but in stories of horror, I find that the opposite happens. In seeking dependence in all personal relations to fill a void left by husbands, the single mothers of horror movies actually relinquish control over their personal relationships and lives. I will discuss how horror in fiction is connected to social issues, particularly those of single motherhood, before I analyze two well-known works of horror literature.

Horror fiction, especially cinema, often explores current social issues and anxieties in a fantastic environment. Jay McRoy's *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* explains how horror tackles social issues:

> As a substantial component of Japanese popular culture, horror films allow artists an avenue through which they may apply visual and narrative metaphors in order to engage aesthetically with a rapidly transforming social and cultural landscape.[78]

Many contemporary works of horror, including the two that I explore in this chapter, as well as *Honogurai mizu no soko kara (Dark water)*, and such American classics as *Psycho*, *The Exorcist*, and *Carrie* center on the families of single women. The prevalence of such works indicates some level of societal unease surrounding current configurations of family structure; specifically families without a father. I will explore two works that express this anxiety fantastically by depicting the single mother as haunted. One, *Ringu*, is a 1998 movie that is firmly entrenched in the horror drama genre, while the other, *Manazuru*, is a novel published in 2010 that drifts between horror, mystery, and family drama. I will show how these works question the wisdom of choosing single motherhood that Tsushima took for granted. Although they do not condemn the protagonists, these works present a counterargument to the confidence of the previous chapter by emphasizing the scary side of raising a family alone.

The Story of *Ringu*

Ringu, or *The Ring* as it is known in the U.S., is a Japanese horror movie first released in 1998 that follows single mother Reiko as she attempts to unravel the roots of a mysterious urban legend as it threatens to claim her life as well as the life of her young son, Yoichi. The film begins with an incident involving a group of high-school students who have recently been on an overnight trip. Each of them is found dead at the same time, and their classmates gossip that they viewed a cursed video that ended in their receiving a phone call informing them that they would

[78] McRoy, Jay. 2008. *Nightmare Japan : Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*. Amsterdam; New York, NY: Rodopi. 4.

die in seven days. Reiko, a reporter investigating these claims, has a highly personal connection to the incident because her niece, Tomoko, is one of the dead. Reiko begins her investigation by traveling to where the teenagers stayed, and views the allegedly cursed tape, which ends with her receiving a call predicting her death. Reiko accepts the reality of the curse without much hesitation and contacts her ex-husband, Yoichi's father, Ryūji, to enlist his help on the case. Ryūji also views the tape, bringing the curse upon himself. Brought together by their shared curse, the two puzzle together about the source of the tape, discovering that it is the island of Oshima. They also find a connection to a deceased psychic named Shizuko and her daughter Sadako, who is identified as the center of the curse. They return to the cabin that the high-school students stayed in and unearth Sadako's corpse, revealing that it is her angry ghost that haunts people after her murder at the hands of her father. Although Reiko is saved, Ryūji still perishes on the predicted day of his death. Reiko realizes that the only way to lift the curse from a person is to have them copy the tape and show it to another person, thus spreading the curse like a disease. She makes Yoichi, who inadvertently viewed the tape, copy it and thus saves her son from certain death.

Good and Bad Mothers in Horror

A broader look at mothers in horror film is useful to my analysis of *Ringu.* In her 2013 book, *Maternal Horror Film: Melodrama and Motherhood,* Sarah Arnold distinguishes between "Good Mothers" and "Bad Mothers" of horror film. In her analysis of several American horror films including *Psycho* (1960) and *Poltergeist* (1982), Arnold finds a clear pattern:

> Regardless of whether the Good Mother is reproduced or questioned within these texts, these maternal horrors persist in constructing a correlation between maternity and utter

> devotion to childcare. Similarly, the Good Mother is more often than not overshadowed by a more powerful agent: the father, who either threatens or secures the family.[79]

Her argument then follows that the Good Mother functions to question and separate motherhood from fatherhood, and to give motherhood greater value, which Arnold believes is often overlooked when thinking of the role. The Bad Mother is then described as

> a multifaceted and contradictory construct. In some instances she is indeed punished for rejecting her traditional function of self-sacrifice and devotion, yet at times the very horror of the film can be found in the mother's fanatical conformity to the institution of motherhood.[80]

This raises the question of whether or not the same pattern can be discovered within Japanese horror films, and whether or not the single mothers who find themselves "haunted" by their pasts can be satisfactorily characterized as Good or Bad. In my exploration of the two works, and *Ringu* in particular, I find that, while the single mothers align more with the Good side of motherhood, they maintain moral ambiguity because their status endangers those in their care.

Arnold, who does treat Japanese films as well as American ones in her book, acknowledges the cultural differences between Japanese and American film. She asserts that a comparison of a Japanese original and American remake of the same movie will illustrate that, "although maternal themes may appear universal (since they are translated from Japan to the US), each culture engages with this maternal discourse in radically different ways." The two films Arnold uses to support this point are *Dark Water* (2002) and *Ringu*, or *The Ring*, as it is known

[79] Arnold, Sarah. *Maternal Horror Film : Melodrama and Motherhood*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013., 37.
[80] Ibid 68.

in English. Arnold claims that, because the Japanese original of *Ringu* plays out more closely from the mother's (Reiko's) perspective, it is more sympathetic to her situation. On the other hand, the American remake is shown from the child and father's perspective, and thus casts the central mother figure (Rachel) as a typical Bad Mother of horror. Arnold argues that this difference is due to Japan's having a shorter history of nuclear family structure and therefore emphasizing the dangers of single motherhood less in the media in recent decades. She claims that

> Japan, as a society relatively new to the single family unit, does not seem to share the same negative discourse about single mothers or career mothers. This is not to suggest that single/working mothers do not face discrimination but simply that, given that the figure is so low, there has not been much focus on the issue in the Japanese media. The US, on the other hand, has much higher instances of single and working mothers, who have been given much more media attention over the last 30-40 years.[81]

Although I find some aspects of Arnold's argument useful for my analysis, I strongly disagree with her argument about *Ringu*'s representation of the single mother. It is clear from my research that single motherhood in Japan is closely associated with the same fear of child endangerment that Arnold cites as key to American views of single motherhood. There is every reason to expect that both Reiko and Rachel feel the same levels of guilt and shame at exposing their children to a life without a father. It is very likely that the same amount of guilt and shame over exposing her son, Yoichi, to the world without a father figure can be expected from Reiko as can be expected from Rachel. That Reiko avoids the condemnation that Arnold reads into Rachel's portrayal likely has something to do with the differing levels of social stigma attached to

[81] Ibid 142.

Japanese and American stereotyping of single mothers. Like we will see from *Manazuru's* Kei, Reiko is somewhat forgivable because she is divorced. Thus, the blame for putting Yoichi in such a situation must be shared between Reiko and her husband, Ryūji.

When turning to the second mother/child pair (Shizuko and Sadako in *Ringu,* Anna and Samara in *The Ring),* Arnold again asserts that, where the American version tends to vilify the mother figure for inner flaws, the Japanese version instead highlights flaws in society that force women and mothers into impossible situations. Shizuko is thus, unlike Anna, held responsible for the curse but also pardoned because the viewer understands that she is controlled by the people around her. According to Arnold, "As Good Mother Shizuko is exploited and abused, as Bad Mother she is vilified."[82] She is both a threatening, magical figure who has contributed to the curse that falls upon Reiko's family and a sympathetic mother who was unable to protect her own child. Another reason that Arnold does not cite, but surely one that has an impact on the depiction of the villainous mother in each iteration of *Ringu*, is the role of the father in creating the curse. While the American mother, Anna, depicted as flatly selfish and villainous by Arnold, is directly responsible for trapping her daughter, Samara, in a well and thus triggering the curse that spreads to Rachel and her son, Shizuko is not so culpable. Rather, it is Sadako's father who pushes her into the well and thus triggers the curse. Because both Sadako and Shizuko are psychics who are feared for their great powers, they are both victims in the story. This differs from the American version, in which the mother obviously becomes the villain when she murders her daughter. Thus, Arnold's main argument, that Japanese maternal horror seems less intent upon defining the mother as "Good" or "Bad" in favor of realistically depicting the impossible pressures placed upon single mothers, is correct.

[82] Ibid 151.

This is not to say that Reiko is completely absolved of blame in the haunting that she faces. The film calls into question the fact that, but for her investment in her career, Reiko might have been able to prevent her son ever coming to any harm. The scene in which Reiko awakes to find Yoichi finishing the film at once removes blame from her, as she is asleep and unaware of what is happening when he begins watching the tape. Nevertheless, the scene also subtly reminds viewers that she has opened the door for such danger to befall her son by exposing him to the tape and taking him with her on business trips. Slightly later in the film, Reiko comments to Ryūji as they make their way to Oshima that, but for her interference, the curse would have ended with her niece Tomoko and her high school friends. Both of these indicate that the film condemns perhaps not Reiko herself, but the role in which Reiko has been placed. After reaching her second-to-last day of life and feeling hopeless about resolving the curse before her death, Reiko becomes hysterical and begs her ex-husband, Ryūji, to stay with her in her final moments. The pair's closeness and Reiko's reliance on Ryūji, despite their failed marriage, contradict Tsushima's assertion that men are completely without a role in the raising of a family. Rather, Ryūji is depicted as necessary even after their divorce. He provides a rational, steady figure who will protect and help Reiko as she seeks to raise her son and fulfill a conventional mothering role. The necessity of her having a career as well is to blame for the curse falling upon all three member of her family.

Reiko is not depicted as being responsible for her divorce, and is repeatedly shown to try hard to protect and nurture her son despite lacking time due to her career. Her "innocence" as a divorcee, as well as her good-faith effort to care for her son as she should, shield her from viewers who would judge her. Thus Reiko isn't required to stand up against moral criticism, but the real-life impact of single motherhood on her life and the life or her son is not minimized in

Ringu. Although she is not Bad for being divorced, the situation in which she finds herself force the audience to questions any beliefs they might have had, similar to those in Tsushima's works, that women do not need men or social acceptance to be effective and happy mothers. Where Tsushima takes for granted that all mothers are strong enough to fend for themselves, *Ringu* and other works of haunting question this belief.

A Haunted Family Drama: *Manazuru*

It seems that similar themes to Tsushima's work play out in *Manazuru*. Written in 2009, *Manazuru* follows the story of Kei as she seeks to find closure after being left by her husband and seeks to understand her changing relationship with her growing daughter. The views taken in *Manazuru* and *Child of Fortune* on the physicality of motherhood and the sadness of the natural separation that forms as children age are very similar. For instance,

From *Child of Fortune:*

> At one time, she could have taken her in her lap like a baby, stroked her head and murmured "You poor, poor thing" until the tears stopped. Now, however, Kayako refused to cry openly in front of her mother, and her mother couldn't put her arms around her. Kōko was moved with pity for the child on whose shoulders rested the fate of growing up. Kayako's back was lean, though the backbone was solid.[83]

From *Manazuru:*

> My chest is perfectly white. Everything hidden is white. Momo's skin is so much darker. Sometimes I want to touch her skin, so taut it looks as if it has been stretched. But she

[83] Tsushima Yūko, *Child of Fortune* 43.

> won't let me touch her anymore. Even though she and I used to be together, talking to each other, walking side by side, one of us falling behind, from time to time, moving ahead, from time to time. I was with her then, not with the woman.[84]

At first glance, these two passages appear to tell the same story. A mother reminisces about the physical closeness she enjoyed with her daughter because she is becoming ever more aware how this closeness is ending as her daughter enters puberty and adulthood. Kei, the protagonist of *Manazuru* and speaker in the second passage, appears to inherit the distresses of Kōko from *Child of Fortune*, feverishly worrying about how her child is leaving her. These two women, however, have drastically different reactions to their status as single mothers. Kōko finds freedom in her choice to raise her daughter, and even potentially a second child, on her own. Kei, on the other hand, is both figuratively and literally haunted by her situation.

Plotlines in *Manazuru*

Kawakami Hiromi's 2009 novel *Manazuru* follows the journey of narrator Kei as she navigates her life as a single mother. Unlike the women in the works by Tsushima, Kei is not a single mother by choice, but rather was abandoned by her husband, Rei, years before the main action of the novel takes place. This abandonment places her in a position similar to, but not entirely equivalent to that of Kōko and Takiko. Since she had no intention to disadvantage her child by not giving her a father, Kei is able to avoid the stigmatization that would have come with her actively choosing to become a single parent. In being abandoned, Kei maintains her position as the righteous parent and shifts some of the blame to her husband.

[84] Kawakami, Hiromi. 2010. *Manazuru*. Trans. by Michael Emmerich. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.104.

Yet Kei is a troubled woman. She spends her time divided between living with her aging mother and her daughter, Momo, meeting with her editor Seiji with whom she is embroiled in a love affair, and traveling to the seaside town of Manazuru, which has a nostalgic allure that calls to her. Although she carries out a normal day-to-day life, writing for a living, she is frequently visited by otherworldly guests. Whether they are ghosts, spirits, or something else entirely is unclear; Kei only ever speaks of them in the vaguest of terms. One haunting is particularly persistent. Called "the woman" throughout the novel, a shadowy figure reappears to Kei most frequently on her trips to Manazuru, often goading her into traveling alone to places of the woman's choosing with promises that she will disclose information about Kei's lost husband.

Kei's relationship with her daughter and mother is strained as she repeatedly ventures to Manazuru, seeking something she does not understand and so cannot explain to them. Her romantic relationship with Seiji also comes to an end because he is frustrated that she cannot get over her husband's betrayal. Eventually, Kei distances herself from her real life and enters a kind of spirit realm inhabited by "the woman." In this fantasy space, Kei comes to terms with the fact that her husband had probably been conducting an affair when he left her. She comes to terms with the fact that he is permanently gone from her life. She recalls fond memories of her daughter's childhood and some of the happy time she spent married to Rei. She is even offered the choice to move on to the spirit realm which he, or at least Kei's memories of him, now inhabits. In the end, Kei decides that she would rather move forward from this fantasy space and live the life she actually has with her mother and daughter. She rejects "the woman's" offer to stay in Manazuru and returns home. There, it is hinted that Momo also has at least some ability to see the same "visitors" that plague Kei, another indication that the haunting of single mothers extends past themselves to also affect those they care for. She meets once more with Seiji and

they have a proper parting. When Kei discovers that her mother is beginning to show signs of old age, she ties off her loose ends with Rei by attending a funeral service to declare him, at least legally, dead.

Criticism of *Manazuru*

Reviewers, too, consider how *Manazuru* explores the relationship between memory and haunting in the life of a single mother. As a debut novel published in translation in 2010, *Manazuru* has yet to receive treatment in English outside of the realm of standard book review fare. Nevertheless, reviewers all seem to have hit on the same questions. Annie Tully in her review for *The Booklist* says, "the fantasy has purpose as a manifestation of Kei's sense of displacement, and of her estrangement from her daughter and mother."[85] The *Kirkus Reviews* understanding of *Manazuru* is similar, saying, "as Kei is drawn deeper and deeper into this quest for closure, that she runs the risk of losing herself--as well as the people who care most for her."[86] *Publishers Weekly* does not interpret the meaning of the book as much, simply saying that "Kawakami has a remarkable ability to obscure reality, fantasy, and memory, making the desire for love feel hauntingly real."[87] These reviews all noted the interplay of memory, history, and fantasy in *Manazuru*, as well as the choice that Kei finds herself faced with—whether she will choose her daughter and mother, and thus the future, or the memories of her former husband that have clung to her despite her attempts to move on from her past.

[85] Tully, Annie, "Manazuru," review of *Manazuru,* by Hiromi Kawakami, *Booklist,* Sept. 1, 2010.
[86] "Manazuru," review of *Manazuru,* by Hiromi Kawakami, *Kirkus Reviews,* August 15, 2010.
[87] "Manazuru," review of *Manazuru*, by Hiromi Kawakami, *Publishers Weekly,* July 26, 2010.

Human Connections and Haunting in *Manazuru*

My reading of Manazuru, however, focuses on the terms with which Kei describes relationships between people. Of particular interest to Kei is her relationship, or "closeness," with those around her, which she discusses in great detail at various points throughout the novel. To understand Kei, it is important to understand how much she values "closeness," and how this differs from other assessments of relationships. Kei distinguishes "closeness" from being romantically involved with a person. The people whose closeness she concentrates on most are her daughter Momo, her absent husband Rei, and her current lover Seiji. Although she does not concern herself much with being close to her own mother, Kei empathizes with her mother in ways that she does not with other characters. This sense of empathy may indicate that Kei understands that both struggle with the same issues in their lives.

In discussing her past and current relationship with her daughter Momo, Kei is careful to distinguish adoring love with the "closeness" that she values more. For instance, Kei remembers:

> When Momo was born, as she fed at my breast, I thought: She is so close. How close this child and I are. She is closer now, I thought, than when she was inside me. She was not adorable or loveable, that wasn't it. She was close.[88]

This mysterious feeling of "closeness," which Kei herself does not seem to fully understand, is elucidated further in a memory of bathing her infant daughter. She finds that "closeness" is similar to the feeling of interdependence that develops between mother and child:

> When she was a newborn, I bathed Momo in a wash basin. For the first month of her life, I never put her in the bathtub, I would clear the table and set a metal basin filled

[8888] Kawakami, *Manazuru*, 7.

> with warm water there, and wash her in the basin. … The moment I lifted her from the water, she grew heavy, recovering the weight of her substance. I laid her on the towel I had spread out and rubbed her dry. Then, right away, I opened my blouse and gave her my breast. She seemed thirsty, and gulped as she sucked. No, loveable was not the word. For a second the heat of her lips repulsed me. I learned then that disgust and tenderness do not stand in opposition. I had never felt such a disgust for the male body. I had thought the male body, my husband's body, was unquestionably necessary. The feeling that welled within me when I held Momo's body was not need, but tenderness[89].

Here, the difference Kei draws between being "adorable," being "necessary," and being "close" become somewhat clearer. "Adorable" is the normal adjective one would expect to hear used in describing an infant. Implied in the normal use of the word is a certain amount of physical charm. Infants and small animals are adorable because their vulnerability and innocence are pleasing and appeal to the protective nature of the viewer. They have large eyes, stubby limbs, and a head that is large in proportion to their bodies. An "adorable" baby is one that is clean and beautiful, but helpless. A "necessary" being stands opposite to one that is "adorable" because it is not helpless at all. In fact, that being provides some needed service to others. For instance, Kei found her husband Rei's body "necessary" because of his adult beauty as well as the economic support it provided her. The less-than-perfect aspects of "necessary" bodies can be overlooked due to the value placed in the work they can do and the utility they can provide. The value of an "adorable" body comes from its appearance, so when this expectation is broken, as it is when Kei is disgusted by nursing Momo, the feeling is not one of "adorableness" or "necessity," but of "tenderness." "Tenderness" also differs from the other two modes of affection in that it is an

[89] Ibid. 12-13.

active feeling towards a subject, a kind of caring. Both “adorableness” and “necessity” are passive qualities seen in a subject. One can look upon another person and find them “adorable” or “necessary,” but emotions felt towards those people might be described as “tenderness” instead.

“Tenderness,” thus, differs from both the charming nature of “adorableness” and the reliance of “necessity,” and becomes instead the value a person takes from being needed, rather than needing something. Although Kei feels some measure of disgust at nursing her daughter, she also takes pleasure in the knowledge that, during her daughter’s infancy, the only thing standing between the helpless baby and death is her own willingness to keep the infant alive. Dissecting the differences between the types of affection Kei ponders while bathing her daughter leads us to a larger conclusion. The type of relationship Kei defines as “closeness” is nearer to her understanding of “tenderness” than to either “adorableness” or “necessity.” Both of the latter two are forms of conditional love—they refer to situations in which one is only beloved because one can offer economic benefits or are pleasing to look upon. Such situations do not require personal sacrifice on the part of Kei, or any real communication between the two parties. “Tenderness,” however, implies a sense of pity that also necessarily includes some level of empathy. Kei is able to feel “tenderness” for her daughter even as she is disgusted by her physical qualities because she has an understanding of her daughter’s physical helplessness and her own power over life and death. Momo depends completely on Kei, and this gives Kei complete control in the early stages of their relationship. This inspires feelings of pity towards the helpless and off-putting infant Momo, but also implies some level of empathy on Kei’s part. Her choice to feed the baby establishes a symbiotic relationship in which Momo receives physical nourishment and care and Kei has the benefit of feeling needed and important. This

symbiosis becomes what Kei defines as "closeness," an aspect of human relationships which she prizes, but ruminates on more than any other.

This discussion of "closeness" as a form of personal connection is reminiscent of the Japanese social concept of *amae.* In the 1973 translation of his 1971 work *The Anatomy of Dependence (Amae no kōzō)*[90], Doi Takeo defines and explores the origins and implications of *amae.* According to Doi, *amae* is present when an infant is born:

> *Amae*, in other words, is used to indicate the seeking after the mother that comes when the infant's mind has developed to a certain degree and it has realized that its mother exists independently of itself.[91]

This seeking is characterized by Doi as a necessary part of parent-child bonding:

> The concept, in short, serves as a medium making it possible for the mother to understand the infant mind and respond to its needs, so that mother and child can enjoy a sense of commingling and identity.[92]

Amae is also necessary to adults, according to Doi, and problems in forming adult relationships are rooted in problems with *amae:*

> Even after adulthood, in the forming of new human relationships, *amae* is invariably at work at least at the very outset. Thus *amae* plays an indispensable role in a healthy spiritual life. If it is unrealistic to close one's eyes completely to the fact of separation, it

[90] Doi, Takeo. 1991. *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Trans. by John Bester, 1993. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
[91] Ibid, 74.
[92] Ibid.

> is equally unrealistic to be overwhelmed by it and isolate oneself in despair over the possibilities of human relationships.[93]

It is Kei's desire to eliminate any separation in her relationships with others, even when not appropriate, that troubles her. Her wish for completely merged relationships with others also open her and leave her vulnerable to dangerous supernatural influences.

Kei becomes troubled when closeness begins to fade. As Momo ages, the ways and degree to which she relies upon Kei also changes. Because Kei is pursuing the symbiosis of a "close" relationship, she has left herself purposefully vulnerable to Momo for the purpose of reaping the other benefits of their relationship. As Momo relies less and less on Kei for her subsistence, however, and instead seeks independence, Kei feels bereft. Momo's desire for independence translates into wounds for Kei, who still expects to be needed. On being verbally rebuffed in a mild argument, Kei thinks:

> Only Momo can wound me like this. She is merciless. She presses, unconcerned, into the softest places. Ignorant of the oozing pus, the scars. Because with her, I can reveal only the softness. The parts of me I ougt to cover, crust over, protect. I remember how, very long ago, she was of my body, and I am unable to raise a barrier, rebuff.[94]

The perceived damage done to their mother-daughter "closeness" as Momo grows up continues to follow Kei throughout the novel, as I will discuss later. Kei's emotional reaction to changes in their relationship is also mirrored in her relationships with others. Kei evaluates her relationships with her absent husband, Rei, and lover, Seiji, based on her desire for this same "closeness."

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[93] Ibid, 75.
[94] Kawakami, *Manazuru,* 30.

An obvious comparison to Kei's faltering relationship with her daughter is her feelings on being abandoned by her husband, Rei. A married couple is expected to be inter-dependent, and being abandoned without warning by someone who is supposed to be a close ally is naturally a denial of "closeness." Kei comes to terms with the uncomfortable loss of intimacy:

> Him, Rei. He is separate from me. A barrier stands between him and me. Yet I always knew the barrier was there. I knew it, but it comes as a shock, having to confront it. I am emotionally seared, as when a flame licks forward, and you leap back.[95]

Clearly, "closeness" is linked to having an understanding of the other party. As the abandonment painfully indicated for Kei, however, this emotional openness and understanding had been absent in her marriage for some time. Since she had believed she understood Rei, Kei was surprised when he left without leaving so much as a message. This abandonment caused a shock which caused her to re-imagine their entire history as one in which an invisible barrier had always existed. The destruction of the once perceived marital "closeness" is complete when Kei erects her own barriers. She does this by forgetting her husband over time, and in the end, Kei is surprised to have done this successfully. She thinks, "Sometimes, of late, I forget him. It's strange, when his presence used to be so thick. When his sudden departure only made his presence thicker."[96] Though Kei's progression towards a life in which she does not mourn her husband would normally be seen as positive growth, she worries about what it means that she can so easily forget a love that was once central to her life.

The final relationship in which Kei closely monitors "closeness" is that with her lover and publisher, Seiji. Perhaps tempered by her already existing concerns about the distance that

[95] Ibid, 54.
[96] Ibid 8.

has imperceptibly grown between her and her daughter and dramatically occurred through her abandonment, Kei's view of her relationship with Seiji is jaded from the beginning. When they meet to sleep together, Kei envisions their bodies and souls:

> When we embrace, I feel as though I am only the outline of my body. My body's outline traces Seiji's. Two outlines almost fusing, but without dissolving, only what is contained within is swept together, leveled, blown again into a heap.[97]

Although she can care deeply about Seiji and invest her own happiness in his, allowing the contents of her body to freely flow into and mix with his, the fact that Kei cannot envision the outline of her body, the literal definition of her self, dissolving into Seiji's, or vice versa, indicates that she is much more aware that perfect "closeness" cannot be attained.

In fact, she may not want to attain closeness with another man, opening herself once again to emotional vulnerability. While Kei expresses much concern at the distancing both of her daughter and husband, when it comes to Seiji, she thinks, "Lately, Seiji is growing closer. When he gets closer, I need more distance. Or I want us to be as close as we can. The truth is, I don't want it either way. I like it exactly as it is"[98]. With Seiji, Kei believes she has found a sweet spot between the point of "closeness" at which a couple should break up because they are not close enough and the point at which their yearning for each other becomes impossible to bear. Though Seiji does not share this view and eventually breaks things off with Kei because he wishes for greater emotional intimacy than she can give, the fact that they are able to meet once more on good terms and continue at least a professional relationship indicates that Kei's decision to avoid complete "closeness" with Seiji may have been a wise one. Because Kei will not allow Seiji to

[97] Ibid 43.
[98] Ibid 77.

meld into her, just as she will not allow herself to depend upon him, she maintains control over the relationship.

"Closeness" and Haunting

Kei's conflicting feelings and the lack of closure she has over the "closeness" in her various relationships contributes to the sense of haunting that follows her throughout much of the novel. In some cases, it is nothing more than the specter of her personal history refusing to allow her to move forward. When her relationship with Seiji becomes tense and they cease interacting for a while, the following conversation occurs:

> 'I get jealous because he's not around," Seiji said. 'I get jealous because he's not around, yet he follows you,' he corrected himself. He follows you. I started at those words. 'You know about them, following me?' I asked. 'Following you,' Seiji repeated vaguely. I saw that he had only chanced upon those words, he didn't know. I don't want Seiji to know, I thought.[99]

Kei is startled because, although she has never mentioned it to anyone, she does see the figures of ghostly beings from time to time. Most references to these mysterious figures, who are never definitively called ghosts, spirits, or anything else, are casually introduced and not dwelt upon as Kei matter-of-factly describes her surroundings. One in particular returns again and again, however, and appears to accompany Kei on an emotional journey towards the acceptance of a different mode of human relationships. This "visitor," as mentioned above, is called "the woman," and appears most often when Kei has traveled to the seaside town of Manazuru by herself, usually called there on impulse or to seek a greater understanding of her past. Understanding

[99] Ibid 67.

how Kei is haunted as a single mother requires taking "the woman" into account, which I do below.

Although Kei is haunted by some sort of supernatural being and followed by the woman throughout the novel, this haunting is not a frightening one. She is able to converse with the woman normally, and the two exchange information and thoughts, negotiating a unique relationship that is not friendship, enmity, or love. I argue that Kei's desire for a "closeness" that is unattainable in human relationships, and her disappointment when she cannot achieve such intimacy, have left her open to outside forces such as these spirits. Boundaries frustrate Kei in her relationships with both Rei and Seiji. In fact, it is her failure to construct these boundaries in her dealings with the larger world through which Kei has invited the hauntings. Yet these hauntings offer a closeness of their own: the woman seeks to fuse with her and exchange emotions and thoughts in the way that two humans in a perfectly "close" relationship might.

"The woman" clearly has an emotional impact on Kei. The first time she sees "the woman," a chance encounter in a department store Kei immediately vomits from the flood of emotion that fills her.[100] She decides that this woman may wish to communicate with her. Although her reasoning is not clear, the next step for Kei in her search to understand the haunting is to travel again to Manazuru, where she expects to communicate more easily with the woman. She is not disappointed. Kei's visceral reaction to the woman's presence is the first indication that she has not adequately constructed boundaries to protect herself from the "closeness" that outside forces, such as hauntings, would impose on her.

[100] Ibid 27.

This point is made more evident when "the woman" visits Kei and Momo while they are in Manazuru. She steals food, although she cannot physically move or consume it, from each of their plates:

> She stayed for dinner, too. Snatching food, eating. Momo's food, mine. She appeared to be fond of shrimp, kept plucking them from a plate of seafood in tomato sauce. She stole the same pieces repeatedly, as long as they stayed on the plate. The food itself remained even after she had taken and eaten it, so she could steal it again and again.[101]

The sharing of food, an intimate act that seems natural between family members, is imposed upon Kei, as well as upon her unwitting daughter. Because "the woman" does not have a corporeal form, Kei has no power to stop her, and her ghostly consumption of food does not hinder Kei and Momo from their own physical feast. Nevertheless, "the woman" taking their food even spectrally is symbolic of the liberties she feels intimate enough to take, and thus indicates that Kei does not have the proper boundaries in place to defend herself, let alone her child, from outside forces. To take the food of another is to dominate, and to haunt is to control. Although Kei and "the woman" have a surface relationship based on equal give-and-take, the reality of the situation is that Kei gives control to the woman in order to become "close."

Kei's vulnerability to "the woman" shifts from the irritations of mild inconvenience to real danger at the climax of the novel. On a solo trip to Manazuru, Kei gets caught in a storm. Although "the woman" disappears as Kei seeks shelter from the rain at a local restaurant, she soon reappears, stronger than ever:

[101] Ibid 35.

> 'I'm all wet, aren't I?' the woman asks. She remained dry the whole time we traipsed through the driving rain, and yet now she is sopping. 'I've become closer to you, I guess,' the woman says with a lovely smile.[102]

This new physical development is a stark change from the woman who was unable to actually consume any of Kei's shrimp at the restaurant. In physically inhabiting the same space as Kei, "the woman" has drawn much "closer."

Although this is vaguely and imaginatively articulated, it appears that the moment in which "the woman" is able to physically inhabit Kei's world is also the moment at which Kei enters "the woman's" world. Kei finds herself able to communicate with "the woman" without speaking out loud and thus drawing attention to herself. Do the two women inhabit the same body? Kei never answers this for herself, but does mention finding it hard to draw a line, or construct a boundary, between where she ends and where "the woman" begins:

> Did the woman ask, or was I the one who posed the question, did the woman answer me, or was I the one who answered her, unable to say, the two of us, indistinguishably intermingled, set out. Lightning bridged the vast distance from sky to ocean, describing a sharp, beautiful line.[103]

Kei then leaves the restaurant, which appears to soon collapse, destroyed by the power of the storm. Kei believes, however, that it is not the physical storm that has destroyed the building, but rather her departure from her own world and entry into "the woman's" world caused the collapse. Kei also holds on to the belief that if she were able to turn around and escape back to her own realm, the restaurant would still be there. Kei walks along the beach even as she risks being

[102] Ibid 97.
[103] Ibid 98.

washed out to sea. Although she attributes her ability to avoid this fate to "the woman" "holding her," the question of whether or not "the woman" has controlled her, even forcing her to this dangerous point also exists.

Finally, Kei and the woman assimilate, transcending personal boundaries even more fully than before, as "The woman tightens her grasp. She blurs into me. An even larger wave comes, and I fade"[104]. Kei and "the woman" then enter their final power struggle, in which "the woman" attempts to coerce Kei into abandoning her human life. She jeers repeatedly at Kei and her "miserable" life and points out all the times in which Kei willfully ignored her own isolation. Kei resists "the woman's" attempts at control and finally breaks free by remembering Momo's birth. She likens her resistance of "the woman's" taunts to the painful endurance of labor when she had to wait to push out her baby:

> Five minutes' endurance was an eternity. And now, in much the same way, I am enduring. My body yearns unbearably to flood. Cross another line, just one more, focus my strength, close my eyes, concentrate on the core of the blurring, and I will lift instantly to the summit. And yet I don't go.[105]

Here, Kei comes to an understanding of her own desire to break boundaries and achieve "closeness" with others, with "the woman" just as much as with her daughter. In the end, however, she decides to resist the temptation to break boundaries, which protects her from being completely subsumed in the will of "the woman."

A central feature of *Manazuru* is Kei's struggle to find "closeness" with other humans, which she feels she lacks partially due to the loneliness of being a single mother. This desperate

[104] Ibid 100.
[105] Ibid 102.

desire for “closeness” leaves her open to forces with which she should not engage. Kei’s encounters with “the woman” illustrate how her desire to be close to anyone, no matter their relationship to her, has made her vulnerable to deception and control by others. In this way, *Manazuru* represents a backlash against the kind of single motherhood depicted by Tsushima. Where the characters of Kōko and Takiko and their final resolve seem to push back against social strictures, claiming that all resistance towards single motherhood is nothing more than an attempt to control the bodies and choices of women, *Manazuru* appears to espouse a more conservative view. Kei’s difficulty in dealing with her familial and romantic relationships once her husband has left indicates that single motherhood may actually be an unstable position for women in society. While she is able to financially support herself, Kei lacks a close human confidante. Her hunger for this close relationship opens her to outside dangers, such as “the woman,” who might work her harm.

Conclusion

Thus although the single mothers of *Ringu* and *Manazuru* are not vilified for being single mothers, the two works do exploit fantasy to raise important questions about the dangers of such a position. Reiko, from *Ringu*, is not at fault for her divorce, but still her position in life as a single mother with a demanding career endangers both herself and her son. As a result of this danger, she must rely on her ex-husband for support, a strategy which characters in the works by Tsushima would have ridiculed. Kei is equally blameless when her husband leaves her, but *Manazuru* still expresses the fear that, out of a desire to fill the vacuum her husband left behind, she has left herself open to outside influence that, in normal circumstances, she might be more equipped to resist. In other words, each case of haunted motherhood shows us how the single mother is depicted as needing to depend upon others for something—whether it is emotional

support or aid in solving a mystery. In depending upon others, Kei and Reiko must cede control over part of their lives. Fictional discourse surrounding single motherhood does not end at this point of unsettled haunting, however. In the next chapter, I will explore hopeful works that point to the rejection of convention as a way for families to find happiness despite lacking perfect traditional structures.

Chapter Four- Visions of Unconventional Families in *Kitchen* and *Hasshu!*

If popular literature often depicts single mothers as literally haunted, does it imply that single motherhood is so fraught with danger that it is impossible for "normal" Japanese women to consider? Perhaps, if women choose to give up on more traditions than just marriage, they can still form a family around themselves. If they seek support in figures other than the traditional husband, perhaps women who desire children outside of marriage can still achieve their goals. By shifting the focus of their dependence, or spreading it among more people, single mothers may be able to reach a compromise between the complete control they appear to have in Tsushima's work and the complete lack of control that I illustrated in my analysis of horror. This chapter explores such possibilities by looking at fictional interpretations of unconventional families that include single mothers. I begin by analyzing *Hasshu!*, a 2001 movie about a woman who attempts to have a child with a pair of gay men. I then discuss Yoshimoto Banana's famous 1988 novel *Kitchen*, about a young woman who moves in with an unconventional family after the death of her grandmother. I conclude that the sympathetic portrayal and the likelihood of a happy ending for the protagonists of these works indicate a shift in the portrayal of single motherhood as an option for Japanese women in the contemporary era.

Hasshu! and its Unconventional Protagonists

Released in 2001, the film *Hasshu!*, (*Hush!)* explores a method of childrearing that falls outside of the completely independent life espoused in Tsushima's novels. It contains none of the fears associated with the lonesome life of a single mother as seen in *Manazuru* and *Ringu.* The protagonist of *Hasshu!*, Asako, is not thrust into the role of mother through a chance occurrence like the women in the other works I have explored, but rather decides for herself to approach a

man, Katsuhiro, with the express intention to have a child with him. In fact, she does not desire a sexual or romantic relationship with him at all. Rather she wishes him to be nothing but a sperm donor. This is a boon for Katsuhiro because he is gay and newly involved in a relationship with dog-groomer Naoya. The film follows the lives of the three young adults as their stories gradually intertwine and they face the prospect of forming an unconventional three-parent family together.

What motivates Asako to take this unconventional path? Throughout the film, Asako repeatedly experiences negative encounters with heterosexual men in a variety of ways. A younger man follows her home from a convenience store and coerces her into sex without a condom. When she visits a doctor to consult about health worries, he shames her over the two abortions she has already had. He encourages her to have her ovaries removed, implying that her lifestyle is so promiscuous and her mental health so fragile that a child would only be a hindrance. Asako seriously considers following the doctor's advice to remove her ovaries, and visits her father for advice. He coldly ignores her as she tries to consult with him, reacting only to shame her for having sought psychological help in the past. In contrast, Katsuhiro and Naoya strike her as kind, loving men. Asako first encounters the couple when she overhears their loving conversation at a noodle shop. When all three leave during a rainstorm, Katsuhiro lends Asako an umbrella after she realizes her own has been stolen. This caring gesture marks a departure from Asako's normal experience with uncaring, harsh men. This opens the door for her relationship with the pair.

Asako is not the only openly unconventional character in the film. Naoya, the least emotionally complicated of the three, is able to live an openly gay life due to his unconventional career as a dog groomer. He maintains a functional relationship with his coworkers and his boss.

His mother is aware of and accepts his sexual orientation, although she does not fully understand it and assumes that he wishes to have a sex change operation. Naoya frequents gay bars and has a set of friends in the gay community with whom he is able to engage in open dialog about various aspects of his life. His romantic encounters with other men never amount to more than one-night stands until his developing relationship with Katsuhiro offers him the chance at long-term love.

In contrast to Asako and Naoya's less constrained lives, Katsuhiro holds an elite job as an engineer and therefore must hide his sexual orientation in his day-to-day life. An unintended result of his passing occurs when a female coworker, Emi, develops a romantic obsession with him. She is convinced that she can persuade him to date and marry her. Yet, his own sexual identity aside, Katsuhiro is skeptical of marriage in general. This becomes clear when he attends a friend's wedding in his hometown, where his sister-in-law explains how her own arranged marriage to his brother is cold and loveless and encourages him to avoid marrying unless it is with the right person. Scenes following this conversation illustrate to Katsuhiro, as well as the viewer, just how cold the relationship is between his brother and sister-in-law. When Katsuhiro's brother returns home from work, he hands off his tie and work shirt to his wife without speaking to, or even looking at, her. She is waiting to receive these, and it is clear that their interaction is a highly practice, choreographed routine that has grown between the two as they fulfill their expected roles without any real affection.

Events in *Hasshu!*

The film's plot revolves around Asako's attempts to have a child with the help of Katsuhiro, yet it also makes frequent comments about the problems with conventional marriages and families, as well as the intolerance of sexual diversity. Asako approaches Katsuhiro and

explains that she wishes to have a child with him, although she knows he is dating Naoya. She promises that she does not wish to come between the two men. Although Katsuhiro is initially shocked by her request and turns it down, he later admits to Naoya that he has never considered fatherhood or family as a possibility but that it has a certain appeal for him. Naoya is opposed to the plan at the start, fearing that Katsuhiro will end their relationship in favor of one with Asako. He takes to the idea, however, after Asako meets with the two of them together and gradually wins him over. From that point, the three act as a unit, bonding over bowling and shopping for baby clothes. Their happy unconventionality is disrupted by Emi, who resents Katsuhiro's affection for Asako. She introduces a wrinkle into the plot by sending Katsuhiro's brother a report claiming, among other things, that Asako has a history of psychological trouble, two abortions, and a suicide attempt. When Katsuhiro and Naoya's families come to confront the three about their living arrangements and plans, Asako reveals that the report is, in fact, true. She slides into a depression and returns home, but Katsuhiro and Naoya travel to her apartment to cheer her up. Following this scene, Emi pushes her pursuit of Katsuhiro over the line when she purchases an expensive tie in a last-ditch effort to win his affections. Bolstered by Naoya's support, Katsuhiro is finally able to assert to Emi that he is not, and never will be, interested in her. He then returns home to learn that his brother has died suddenly. Despite the challenges to the lives the "unconventional family" built together, *Hasshu!* ends on a positive note. The final scene of the film skips forward several months to a housewarming party for Asako. Naoya and Katsuhiro, after helping her move, cook dinner and wonder exactly where Asako is. She returns to reveal that she has been shopping for better syringes, which she jokingly hopes to use for the insemination process. She reveals that she has purchased one each for Katsuhiro and Naoya because she now plans to have a child with Naoya as well, and the three laugh together.

Characters Embracing Tradition

Several secondary characters exist in *Hasshu!* who serve as a conventional foil to Asako, Naoya, and Katsuhiro's unconventional family group. These characters are depicted negatively, which prompts viewers to question the validity of traditional values. Katsuhiro's sister-in-law Yōko, initially so supportive of Katsuhiro in his quest to find a person who loves him rather than to marry for money, social gain, or procreation, changes her tune entirely when she learns of Asako's plans to become a single mother. Asako's counter argument, that she has lived a depressing life but the human contact she has gained from interacting with Katsuhiro and Naoya has brought her great happiness, is especially abhorrent to Yōko. She calls the three irresponsible and advises Asako that, though her idealization of motherhood is admirable, children are a great responsibility. She maintains that Asako should not pursue single motherhood because she does not have a pragmatic understanding of the realities of raising a child. Thus Yōko's outlook on motherhood is complex, as she clearly cares very much for her daughter Kaoru but finds her arranged marriage cold and unsatisfying. No doubt Yōko is surprised when her own daughter speaks out in support not of her mother, but of the unconventional trio. Kaoru forces her way into a very adult conversation and sides outspokenly with Asako, inciting her parents to attempt to silence her. Kaoru's rejection of her mother's orthodox outlook delegitimizes such an argument on motherhood in the world of *Hasshu!* Yōko is but one of a number of examples *Hasshu!* uses to question the widespread acceptance of heterosexual romance as an ideal and a requirement for motherhood.

Film Analysis

Several scenes in *Hasshu!* illustrate the flaws of conventional relationships and marriages. Unconventional relationships such as that shared by the three protagonists of *Hasshu!* are commonly criticized as damaging to those within them as well as their children and the reputations of the families. This expectation, however, is turned on its head in several striking scenes in *Hasshu!*

The film introduces comic examples of perverse sexuality pursued by conventional people. Naoya's boss at the dog salon expresses an unsavory interest in a female customer who repeatedly visits the store with her dog, Love. The customer exploits this interest to gain favors at the salon, all of which further her goal of breeding Love to earn money for a new car. Although she brings her own young daughter along with her to the salon each time she visits, the customer neglects to care for the girl in a motherly way, interacting with her only to brusquely shove her head down to bow properly to the employees. Her character is also developed by her focus on large brand-name labels, such as a garish puffy white coat with a large brand name emblazoned on the back. Thus the woman, although she is a conventional mother, obviously focuses on material gain at the expense of her child. This character therefore easily functions as a criticism of conventional motherhood, and contrasts with Asako's unconventional, but better-intentioned style of motherhood.

One scene in particular highlights the distance between society's idealization of conventional motherhood and the real-life actions of this conventional mother. The relationship between the dog salon owner and his special customer culminates in a scene in which Love, the customer's dog, is finally bred with another dog in a back room of the salon. The scene is made

intensely uncomfortable by the active participation of Love's owner and the salon owner, as well as the daughter, who sits on a counter observing. Although the breeding session is ostensibly about the dogs, those who appear most sexually excited are the two human adults. A red light illuminates their sweating faces as they pant encouragement to the dogs, which sit stoically and appear unmoved by the situation. The juxtaposition of the panting humans and dogs adds a distasteful sense of bestiality to the scene, moving the viewer to question the uncritical support for "normal" heterosexual couples, represented by both the dogs and the humans. These questions are only furthered by the fact that, although the dog is named "Love," there is absolutely no love to be found in the breeding of the two dogs. The scene closes after the daughter, obviously disturbed and confused by the scene she observes, vomits and is rescued from the room by an employee of the salon. The motherly employee comments that it is not appropriate to put a child in such a situation. As a result, the audience may begin to question the ease with which they give heterosexual relationships a free pass while they condemn less conventional couples as unsavory.

Katsuhiro's coworker Emi also takes on heterosexual romance itself as the basis for stable marriages. Emi acts obviously to express her interest in Katsuhiro throughout the film, but these advances become increasingly desperate as he declines to respond. Emi's neurotic attempts to force a relationship—by threatening to destroy his reputation with her damaging report on Asako and eventually by offering him a gift of an expensive necktie and then throwing a weeping fit when he will not agree to date her—only serve to underscore the dangers of normal heterosexual romance typically emphasized by characters seeking to convince any of the three protagonists to choose a more normal life.

Emi embodies traditional femininity even in her dress, and the obvious contrast between Emi and Asako in scenes when they meet creates a clear visual dichotomy between the two characters. Emi's look throughout the film contrasts with Asako's. Emi generally wears pink cardigans, ballet flats, and skirts. Asako, on the other hand, wears dingy earth tones and heavy, powerful shoes. Emi is the ubiquitous Japanese office lady, who will indubitably stop working when she marries. Asako is a self-supporting dental technician. Where Asako's hair is dyed and stringy, Emi's is black, glossy, and impeccably kept. Each character shapes how society will view her by managing her appearance. Asako rejects conventional expectations of herself as a woman by dressing in ugly, manly clothes, avoiding makeup, and treating her hair without much attention. Emi, on the other hand, embraces society's expectations of her and fills the role to perfection by paying exquisite attention to each detail of her personal appearance. Thus Emi serves as a foil to Asako, the conventional norm to Asako's unconventional exception. Yet it is Emi, not Asako, who is seen as neurotic, and even dangerous.

Throughout the film, Emi's intense crush on Katsuhiro becomes more and more controlling and obsessive as he continues to assert his disinterest in her. A scene, which highlights the manipulative nature of Emi's pursuit of Katsuhiro, happens as she fishes for information about his relationships at their workplace. They work for a firm which engineers boats to withstand strong waves at sea, and much of Katsuhiro's job involves testing model boats in a wave pool. In one scene, Emi, while asking Katsuhiro if he has someone he likes and other leading questions, follows him out onto the walkway over the pool. She removes her shoes to reveal that she has a limp caused by legs of uneven length. Although Emi intends this move to attract Katsuhiro by revealing her vulnerability, Katsuhiro responds only by cutting off her discussion of shoes to hint that "shoes go on your feet." He goes about his work and Emi throws

one of her shoes into the wave pool while his back is turned. Although he responds kindly to her apologies while fishing it out, the camera frames the two characters so that Katsuhiro's face, in the foreground, is invisible to Emi but not the viewer. In reaction to Emi's words, Katsuhiro rolls his eyes and scowls. He clearly has seen through her ruse, finding it childish and annoying. This scene serves to illustrate how much of what is considered normal courtship is based on deception and manipulation. Katsuhiro, like many Japanese people, sees through Emi's attempts to initiate romantic situations and finds these attempts childish and pointless. Thus this scene is a comment on the unnecessary lengths to which modern courtship forces people, especially women, to go in order to secure a mate, and rejects the use of such tactics as inauthentic.

A final scene draws together characters symbolizing a wide variety of experiences of parenthood and sexuality. In this climactic scene, the families of the two men are drawn together after receiving a report about the relationship between the three protagonists, which I have already discussed. Katsuhiro's sister-in-law takes the side of tradition, and is most strongly opposed to such an unconventional arrangement. Katsuhiro's brother is much less outspoken than his wife in his disapproval of Katsuhiro's plan. In fact, he eventually encourages Katsuhiro to decide his own fate, giving his approval for an arrangement which is sure to reflect poorly on his own family. He even goes so far as to reveal that he has long suspected that Katsuhiro was gay, implying that Katsuhiro's sexual orientation has always had his blessing. Katsuhiro's niece, who represents a younger generation, voices her approval of Katsuhiro's decisions even more readily than her father. In doing so, she indicates that future generations of Japanese might see less resistance to breaks with tradition. Seated opposite this family for most of the conversation is Naoya's mother Katsumi, who as earlier discussed, is fairly liberal in her general opinion of her son's sexuality, if a little confused about the details. This woman, more urban and

cosmopolitan than Katsuhiro's family, represents another viewpoint regarding unconventional members of Japanese society such as Katsuhiro, Naoya, and Asako. Nicholas James Hall, in his 2013 thesis "A World Like Ours: Gay Men in Japanese Novels and Films 1989-2007," makes much of Katsumi having "literally enrobed herself in tradition"[106] by donning a traditional kimono and sitting on the floor when she comes to discuss the scandal as a metaphor for social control. This is too simple a reading. Katsumi's motivations must also be examined. It is only when she is confronted with a family she perceives to be much more conservative than herself that Katsumi bothers with such proper dress. In fact, she goes further than Katsuhiro's rural relatives in preparing herself to discuss the situation with them properly. Katsuhiro's brother and sister-in-law sit on a couch and are dressed in Western clothing that fits the hot summer weather. Katsumi, on the other hand, dons heavy traditional Japanese clothing and sits on the floor, struggling to maintain decorum in the heat. Katsumi, although well-intentioned, is bumbling and often mistaken in her understanding of her son's life. She represents many urban Japanese who, although they personally have no reason to condemn unconventional choices in others, are thrown off guard and revert to strong traditional opinions when confronted by changes within their own families.

In the conclusion of the confrontation scene, all the characters leave in different spirits. Naoya's mother is sent away early and scolded for being a nuisance, and she leaves without much resistance. Katsuhiro's brother gives him a reluctant blessing, albeit away from the prying ears of his wife. The sister-in-law, on the other hand, leaves after an upsetting struggle in which she provokes Asako, making her faint, and is slapped by her husband for taking her own indignation to the extreme. Kaori, Katsuhiro's niece, leaves willingly with her mother, perhaps

[106] Hall, Nicholas James, "A World Like Ours: Gay Men in Japanese Novels and Film, 1989-2007," (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), 117.

not agreeing with her perspective but willing to put her own opinions on hold until she reaches adulthood. Asako leaves, assuming that she has been rejected and no longer has a chance to form a family with Katsuhiro and Naoya. For their part, the two men feel ambivalent but eventually seek Asako out and attempt to lure her from her apartment, where she retreated in depression.

The great divergence of perspectives and feelings of characters expressed in this scene can be read as reflecting the diversity of opinions on unconventional relationships and marriages in Japanese society. Many people, such as Katsuhiro's niece and brother, as well as Naoya's mother, have relatively weak opinions in support of others forming such unions. Others, such as Katsuhiro's sister-in-law, remain adamantly opposed to such arrangements. Still others, portrayed by the protagonists themselves, are highly invested in seeing new family arrangements gain acceptance due to their own interests. For viewers of *Hasshu!*, the feasibility of such families seems assured, though the film does not minimize the struggles they are sure to face.

Real-life Gay Men and Stereotypes

But can we reliably believe that such a setup—a woman residing with two gay men to form a family devoid of romance—would really be ideal, or even palatable, to the real-world counterparts of Asako, Katsuhiro, and Naoya? Most viewers of *Hasshu*! would agree that Asako's relationship with Katsuhiro and Naoya is highly unrealistic. She is not personable, but nevertheless the two go out of their way not only to form a unique friendship with her, but later to draw her back out of her depression. Their general attitude towards Asako can be characterized as a one of nurturance and empathy. Although this may or may not reflect real-life views of homosexual men towards heterosexual women in Japan, a chapter of Mark McLelland's book, Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan provides useful social context for considering this

fictional bond. The chapter, entitled "Gay Men as Women's Best Friends and Ideal Marriage Partners," explores common stereotypes of the gay male personality in Japan, and how these stereotypes lead to a particular idealization of marriages between gay men and straight women.[107]

A key to understanding the appeal of such a union is to first understand what McLellan claims to be a fundamental difference in the ways Japanese and Western cultures view marriage. The traditional view of marriage in European and American societies is based on romantic love—a couple, usually a man and a woman, falls in love, grows together, and eventually commits to each other as a sign of their bond. They then raise a family together, but the romantic aspect of marriage is not put aside. The Japanese view of marriage differs surprisingly. According to McLelland, "[in a Japanese marriage,] love, emotional sharing and eroticism have not been prioritized in this construction and sexual and romantic satisfaction have not been considered priorities, particularly for women.[108]" Rather, McLelland argues, women marry in order to fulfill social obligation and ensure their economic survival. With increasing economic opportunity for women, however, the traditional role of the wife and mother who subsumes her own desires and sexuality in caring for her family has become less attractive to young Japanese women. They are now more likely to require emotional connection and partnership from a husband. The economic prospects of Japanese men, however, have not changed and neither has their outlook on gender roles within marriage or their attitude toward marriage as a bond formed for social respectability rather than love.

[107] McLelland, Mark J. *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan : Cultural Myths and Social Realities*. Richmond: Curzon, 2000.
[108] Ibid 98.

Against this backdrop, a stereotypical view of gay men as feminine makes them appear much more desirable as marriage partners. McLelland quotes his interview with an anonymous female translator of gay fiction as saying "For us, images of male homosexuality are the only picture we have of men loving someone else as an equal. It is the kind of love we want to have" He analyzes this quote by saying "gay men, who are understood to be woman-like and therefore more sympathetic to women and their problems, are sometimes represented as a woman's ideal partner."[109] McLelland then uses several films (*Okoge*, 1992 and *Kira Kira Hikaru*, 1993) similar to *Hasshu!* in theme to illustrate this fetishization of the gay male as woman's best friend. In each, a heterosexual woman with severe emotional problems forms an exceptionally close bond with one of a pair of gay male lovers. Although they are faced with trials from the more conventional forces of society, in the end the woman and her male interest are able to protect and maintain their relationship. In the case of *Okoge*, this means that the male becomes a surrogate father for a child born of rape, completing a traditional-looking nuclear family with the woman, although there is no sex between the two. In *Kira Kira Hikaru*, on the other hand, the two actually wed and stand together against their families' demands that they divorce. Thus in both cases discussed by McLelland, as well as in *Hasshu!*, gay men become loving best friends and potential family members to women who seek to avoid the constraints of more socially accepted marriages and partnerships.

What of the feelings of real gay men in Japan towards such depictions? Although it is clear that some women feel an affinity for gay men in Japan, McLelland cites several opinions offered by gay men themselves that show a level of discomfort when being treated like a spectacle or object to be pursued. He concludes that, "on the whole, gay men do not regard the

[109] Ibid 98.

invasion of gay space by heterosexual tourists, either male or female, particularly favourably and do not seem to feel the same empathy for straight women as some women do for them[110]." This view does not extend to all gay men, however, and some still desire to marry an understanding, or unwitting, female partner in order to both fulfill their social obligation and to gain the satisfaction of family life. Thus for both certain gay men and certain heterosexual women, the unconventional life of a "friendship marriage" is a more hopeful ideal than traditional marriage. It remains uncertain how this new focus on intimacy and emotional closeness within marriage will play out in the future. Yet the willingness of people on the fringes of society to pursue unconventional marriages may point to greater acceptance of a wide range of lifestyles.

Hasshu! **as a Useful Social Criticism**

Despite the criticism of those who would balk at the depiction of Katsuhiro and Naoya as inherently nurturing and accepting of Asako because of their status as gay men, it seems that others consider this depiction to be useful in breaking down social stigma associated with homosexuality. In "A World like Ours," Nicholas James Hall analyzes the way in which the characters of *Hasshu!* resist the pressure to conform. According to Hall,

> Despite its cliché theme of a gay male couple whose relationship is endangered by a woman, Hasshu! is notable for its implicit criticism—and more importantly, explicit rejection—of social norms that discriminate against gays and other socially marginalized populations, and for the degree of independence its three main characters seek to assert over their own lives and desires[111].

[110] Ibid 111.
[111] Hall, 112.

Thus *Hasshu!* differs from both Tsushima works, as well as both *Ringu* and *Manazuru* in that characters are completely successful in their ability to assert independence. While all works I have discussed thus far offer some level of social criticism of the institution of marriage as well as parenting, it is only when characters reject such norms outright that they are able to fully assert their own will. *Hasshu!,* with its upbeat tone and hopeful conclusion, imagines success for all three parties who exist on the fringes of society. Asako, a woman with a history of psychological trouble and a potential single mother, finds community and family with two gay men instead of the standard single male heterosexual partner, and is likely to achieve her norm-breaking goal of having a child with at least one of them. Katsuhiro, repressed in his sexuality due to the nature of his career, is able to face his own sexuality and gain acceptance and support from his brother. Naoya is able to combat the stereotypical problem of couples in the gay community by forming a stable family unit with Asako and Katsuhiro that will not dissolve due to waning sexual attraction on the part of one of the two men. Although Asako's choice to have a child with Katsuhiro and Naoya appears to give her a happy ending, the ethics of using gay men as "perfect fathers" are questionable. Nevertheless, the unconventional family built by the three offers a hopeful future for unconventional families. Women who feel stifled by pressure to become perfect housewives to stereotypically cold and absent husbands, as well as gay men who wish to avoid discrimination by passing as straight or simply want a family may view the family structure of *Hasshu!* as an ideal. A family formed by two gay men and one woman is certainly unconventional. The basic roles of "father" and "mother," however, appear to be preserved in *Hasshu!*. At best, the film can offer a chance to build a family that provides conventional parental identities for unconventional men and women who normally would struggle to find acceptance.

Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*

Although the three-parent configuration of the central family in *Hasshu!* is certainly unique and unusual, well-known literary portraits of unconventional family structures have also offered new configurations of the family to their audience. One of the most famous of these is Banana Yoshimoto's first novel, *Kitchen* (1988). After providing a brief plot summary, I will review related criticism in the scholarly literature on *Kitchen*, and then offer my own analysis. Specifically, I will show how the three main characters of *Kitchen* reallocate roles in order to form a closely-knit but unconventional family.

Events of *Kitchen*

Kitchen follows Mikage, a twenty-something woman after the death of her grandmother. Now an orphan, Mikage is paralyzed by the enormity of all the decisions facing her without the support of a family. Fortunately, a young man named Yuichi, acquainted with Mikage's grandmother through his job at a flower shop, comes to her rescue and invites her to move in with him and his transgendered mother, Eriko. The three settle into a warm, comfortable family life, with Eriko maintaining a hectic, glamorous life and supporting the family as the owner of her own bar, and Mikage taking over the more domestic work of housekeeping, most notably the feeding of the family. Eventually it is revealed that Eriko was not born a woman, but rather was Yuichi's father and opted to have a sex change operation following the death of Yuichi's biological mother. Eriko is tragically murdered by a customer outside of her bar. The second half of the story follows Mikage's deepening relationship with Yuichi following Eriko's murder. Although it lacks a definite conclusion, the novel closes with Mikage and Yuichi likely moving towards a romantic relationship. To tie this novel to my own argument, I will discuss the ways in

which traditional motherhood is deconstructed and redistributed between Mikage and Eriko in *Kitchen.*

Kitchen is often treated as high literature because of the realistic view it gives into the values and attitudes of 1980s youths. Rather than focusing on elegant expression or profound emotion, *Kitchen*, like many Yoshimoto works, provides a realistic glimpse into the mind of contemporary young women of the 1980's. Often noted aspects of her writing style include the breezy, carefree attitude of the narrator towards emotionally loaded situations and the unconventional lives these protagonists pursue. Many of Yoshimoto's characters are orphans or lack a "traditional" mother and father, but they handily build new support structures and surrogate "families" around themselves. I have chosen to discuss *Kitchen* in this chapter on alternative family structures and hopeful futures for single mothers because of the unusual family structure built by the protagonist, Mikage. I will illustrate how the family she builds subverts traditional expectations of gender roles to an even greater degree than understood by many critics.

***Kitchen* and the Family in Academic Discourse**

Scholarly reviews of *Kitchen* make much of the unconventional family structure built by Mikage, Yuichi, and Eriko. Gesa Doris Mihm's dissertation 1998, "Shojo and beyond: Depiction of the World of Women in Fictional Works of Banana Yoshimoto," uses a number of Yoshimoto works to argue that the protagonists represent the struggles faced by many young Japanese women in a changing society. By focusing on these changes and how they affect the marginalized in society, Yoshimoto uses psychological trauma and struggle as a laboratory to illustrate how such struggles offer an opportunity to assert agency. Hardships and struggles are equally hard on everyone. Yet Mihm argues that, after society expels an individual from a

normative path, that person can experience agency by creating her own path. Mihm's overall argument thus becomes that Yoshimoto acts as a spokesperson for today's young Japanese women. Of particular relevance to my own thesis is the role of single mothers as a particular subset of contemporary young women. Mihm claims that "people who do not fit into the 'system' of Japanese culture and norms and who, therefore, are confined to life at the margin of society"[112] are the most beloved of Yoshimoto's characters. If anyone fits this description, it is the single mother. In particular, *Kitchen's* Eriko and Mikage can both be considered single mothers of a type so unconventional as to force the audience to question critically the orthodoxies surrounding the role of motherhood.

When discussing *Kitchen* in particular, Mihm notes the absence of a father figure as contributing to the upbringing of both Mikage and Yuichi. She argues that this lack forms families that:

> are often centered on one central person, who seems to hold everything together, most frequently the mother. Thus, while men are not necessary anymore for a functioning family apart from their financial support, women are vital to the family. This is also demonstrated in the fact that Yuichi's father in *Kitchen* has a sex change after the death of his wife so that he can take on the role of 'mother' for his/her son.[113]

This assertion seems contradictory at first. How can the family be centered on the mother, when the father is traditionally the financial support? Mihm's argument assumes that emotional caretaking of children is somehow more important than their physical well-being, and that only mothers can provide adequate emotional support. Therefore when the mother is absent, the father

[112] Mihm, Gesa Doris, "Shōjo and Beyond- Depiction of the World of Women in Fictional Works of Banana Yoshimoto," (Master's Thesis, University of Arizona, 1998), 111.
[113] Ibid 33

often cannot care properly for the children while also pursuing his career. Thus, it may be necessary for a father to take on more of a mothering role upon the loss of his wife than a mother would need to in the absence of a father. Through this lens, it seems obvious that Eriko, who cared immensely for her son, would choose to become a woman in order to provide him with the parent with the greatest chance to give him all the care he needed to grow up successfully. Mihm's argument about parental roles in *Kitchen* is that Eriko has shifted from the paternal role to that of the mother, and it is a simple parental role reversal.

In her own dissertation, "Rewriting Japanese women: Survivors, escapees, and defeatists in the fiction of Banana Yoshimoto," Laura Faith takes a much less optimistic view of the ability of women in postmodern Japan to craft their own paths in the absence of societal guidance. She agrees with Mihm's point on Yoshimoto that "her female characters seem to be trudging through the residual muck of a society whose strict relegation of women to the domestic realm has fostered a culture of dependent men and children ever seeking the indulgence and safety of the idealized mother-figure."[114] Unlike Mihm, however, who appears to believe that Yoshimoto's dissatisfied women seeking a new possible life path is generally positive, Faith is skeptical. She uses Yoshimoto works to illustrate how, like many protagonists, Japanese women are often lost and end up choosing between three options. They can allow themselves to be consumed by traditional roles, escape from tradition toward less ideal roles such as working, or choose the path of self-defeat in which they allow their quest for identity to define them.

When discussing *Kitchen*, Faith agrees with Mihm that the missing piece that Mikage finds with Yuichi and Eriko is a mother figure. She says, "All alone, she lacks the Japanese

[114] Faith, Laura S., "Rewriting Japanese women: Survivors, Escapees, and Defeatists in the Fiction of Banana Yoshimoto," (Master's Thesis, California State University Dominguez Hills, 2008), 1.

person's most basic bastion of comfort and nurturing: the mother."[115] She illustrates just how unconventional Mikage's approach to the family is when she says "What is surprising is Mikage's creative approach to redefining the family to suit her particular needs,"[116] and again when she remarks that:

> Mikage's fluid notion of family suggests that her yearning for familial ties owes less to social status and more to the *amae* mentality that fosters in the Japanese a craving for intimate, familiar affection. That Mikage has a new 'family' to feed and nurture helps her overcome the grief of having lost her last blood relative.[117]

Faith ends up contending that Eriko "subtly mirrors the often-absent salaryman father-figure,"[118] and thus has not fully rescinded her claim to fatherhood, despite her sex change. Faith describes Mikage as taking over the "wife" role due to her romantic interest in Yuichi, and claims that Mikage feels deep unhappiness before her relationship with Yuichi is more solidified because she nurtures him like a wife might nurture a childlike husband without receiving any emotional reciprocation.[119] The view that *Kitchen* takes on Mikage and Eriko's complimentary "mothering" might indicate a new future for Japanese women who might wish to do more than their roles can allow.

Literary scholar John Treat argues in his 1993 article "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shojo Culture and the Nostalgic Subject" that Yoshimoto's works are steeped in a certain sense of nostalgia, and *Kitchen* is no exception. According to Treat:

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[115] Ibid 71.
[116] Ibid 72.
[117] Ibid 73.
[118] Ibid 75.
[119] Ibid 76-77.

> The 'nostalgic subject,' if I may theorize one, is an ideological subject produced in and by contemporary Japanese socio-cultural discourses. It is recognized by its equivocal accommodation with 'everyday life' through a retreat into the past *and* by its resistance to that same life through its longing for another sort of life, one that never actually 'was' because no such life ever 'is.'[120]

Indeed, it seems as though *Kitchen*, for all its longing for the traditional comforts of family, imagines not a past, but a potential future in which the parental roles might be divided and shared in ways other than the traditional domestic mother and working father. The academic works by Mihm, Faith, and Treat which I have discussed are excellent analyses of the gender relations in *Kitchen* to a certain extent, but they fail to recognize that the roles have not simply reversed in Eriko and Mikage. Rather, certain aspects of motherhood, single womanhood, and fatherhood have been allocated to each without preserving the traditional gender role one might expect, as my analysis will show. In freely choosing only the roles that they wish to perform, both Mikage and Eriko exercise total control over their own life without depending upon society to dictate their duties.

The Breakdown of Traditional Roles- Eriko as "More Female than Female"

Throughout *Kitchen*, Eriko is described as "more female than an actual female." Japanese arts have a long tradition of playing with gender. *Kabuki* theater is traditionally performed by men alone, and the *onnagata* actors who specialize in portraying females are often said to be more proficient at depicting perfect femininity than actual women. The *Takarazuka* revue is a more modern type of theater with an all-female cast. Actors typically specialize as

[120] Treat, John Whittier, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shojo Culture and the Nostalgic Subject," *Journal of Japanese Studies,* 19, (1993): 384.

otoko-yaku, those who portray men, or *musume-yaku*, those who play female parts.[121] The actors responsible for playing the opposite gender in each case are found incredibly attractive, often by both men and women. By embodying her chosen femininity, Eriko greatly resembles the *onnagata* of Kabuki. She consistently looks incredibly beautiful, and the trappings of female life suit her far better than Mikage. When the two first meet, Mikage thinks:

> *This* was his mother? Dumbfounded, I couldn't take my eyes off her. Hair that rustled like silk to her shoulders, the deep sparkle of her long narrow eyes; well-formed lips, a nose with a high, straight bridge—the whole of her gave off a marvelous light that seemed to vibrate with life force. She didn't look human.[122]

Eriko, although born a man, is unabashedly gorgeous, even sexy, to the point where Mikage can barely recognize her as human. This makes Mikage, a real woman, seem weak and neuter in comparison. Thus Eriko, through her flamboyant femininity, drains all other parts of the physical attractiveness of womanhood from those around her and claims them for her own. This is not entirely an aspect of motherhood, as marriage and motherhood in Japan are distinctly separated from, and often in opposition to, the sexual attractiveness of single women. Still, Eriko sees herself as a woman and mother in every way. In a note she gives to Yuichi upon her death, she mentions that "I guess I thought that even though I've lived all these years as a woman, somewhere inside me was my male self, that I've been playing a role all these years. But I find that I'm body and soul a woman. A mother in name and in fact."[123] Thus Eriko acts as a mother, only insomuch as she fulfills the requirement for beauty expected of women.

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[121] McLelland 102.
[122] Yoshimoto, Banana. 1993. *Kitchen*. New York: Grove Press. 11.
[123] Ibid 52.

Yet Eriko performs one decidedly "fatherly" role for her family as well. She owns a bar specifically targeted towards a transgender clientele, and she manages the business of the bar as well as the careers of several employees. It is her work at this bar that draws the attention of a particular customer who becomes obsessed with her, only to murder her when he discovers that she was once a man.[124] This sacrificing of one's self for career is very typical of the Japanese father, stereotypically a salaryman who is nearly absent from the home in order to devote himself entirely to his company and financially support his children and wife. Thus Eriko, visually and emotionally entirely female, still performs the stereotypically masculine fathering role of acting as breadwinner for his family.

The Breakdown of Traditional Roles- Mikage as a Wife, Mother, Daughter, and Sister

Mikage, on the other hand, is decidedly domestic. She steps naturally into the role of housewife one day when Eriko suggests that they order takeout. Without thinking, Mikage naturally replies, "Would you like me to make something?"[125] Until she leaves the house to live on her own again, Mikage happily nurtures Eriko and Yuichi with the loving preparation of food. Even following Eriko's death, Mikage's level of care infantilizes Yuichi and focuses on the caring aspect of their relationship. When he rambles about looking at the moon, she affectionately tells him "You're just like a child."[126] It seems that this aspect of their relationship is precisely what she cherishes most. Mikage thus takes over the romantic side of womanhood by pursuing Yuichi, and does not allow this side of her to be washed away in the tide of domesticity that takes her when she moves in with Eriko and Yuichi.

[124] Ibid 44
[125] Ibid 17.
[126] Ibid 61

This infantilization of Mikage's romantic partner and eroticization of the mother-son bond is reminiscent of Anne Allison's 2000 book, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan.*[127] In it, Allison analyzes a string of highly sensationalized tales of mother-son incest that were popular in the 1980s, close to when *Kitchen* was originally published. These stories differ from *Kitchen* because the mother and son are biologically related and, in each case, their sexual relationship begins when the son is distracted by sexual desire from his studies. The eroticization of the mother-son relationship, however, bears resemblance to Mikage and Yuichi's relationship. According to Allison:

> Women denied entry themselves into a symbolic of male workers and political rights are preparing their sons to assume their place as adults in the social order. The both do and do not want their sons to become differentiated from them. Boys too desire both identity as successful adults and the narcissistic mergence with mothers that such identity will cut off.[128]

Mikage's nurturing attitude towards Yuichi strongly resembles these incestuous stories. This is precisely because, unlike most socially accepted mothers, Mikage is able to take on a mothering role while maintaining her sexual identity because she is not actually related to Yuichi. Thus while most women attempting to be both mothers and sexual beings are depraved because they stoop to incest, Mikage is able to successfully balance these drives due to the unconventionality of her family. The three-person family thus has two mothers who are at once nurturing and sexual.

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[127] Allison, Anne. 2000. *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
[128] Ibid 126.

Restructuring of Motherhood

The two mother figures—Eriko and Mikage—are not entirely disparate. They both value courage and hard work in the raising of things, be they children or plants, as single mothers. Eriko admits that she sometimes failed Yuichi while raising him, but maintains that "I wanted above all to make a good kid out of him and I focused everything on raising him that way. And you know, he is. A good kid."[129] Later in their relationship, Eriko laments that being a woman is hard, but tells Mikage that "If a person wants to stand on her own two feet, I recommend undertaking the care and feeding of something."[130] Thus Eriko seems to at least understand what it is to mother by nurturing a child, although she leaves most of the actual nurturing up to Mikage.

In the case of *Kitchen*, Eriko embodies both the money-making aspect of the rarely-seen father figure as well as the sexualized, beautiful elements of femininity found in some, but certainly not all, mothers. Mikage then takes on only the nurturing and domestic aspects of motherhood, with none of the financial responsibility of parenting. In fact, she is not entirely responsible for the nurturing of the whole "family," as Eriko serves as a nurturing force to Mikage, who in turn nurtures Yuichi. Mikage is not simply a "mother," but also a love interest to Yuichi, thus recombining the roles of mother and lover that are so often divorced in Japanese society. The success and happiness of this unconventional family, temporarily marred by the death of Eriko but still promising in the budding relationship between Yuichi and Mikage, indicates that this deconstruction and recombination of parental and romantic roles is a viable option for a new family structure.

[129] Yoshimoto 19.
[130] Ibid 41.

Conclusion

Thus we learn from *Hasshu!* that an unconventional family can be formed by pairing together men and women who, for whatever reason, are not on a path to marry or form families in the normal way. These men and women could likely fulfill the traditional roles of mother and father, provided that they can obtain a willing partner or partners. A subset of Japanese women have embraced the idea of marrying gay men rather than more traditional straight men as a way to achieve a more caring and equal relationship. Whether their hopes will be met by gay men, who may feel patronized by women's views of them, remains to be seen. From *Kitchen*, we learn that families may also be formed outside of traditional gender roles. A father may become a mother, but still act as a breadwinner. A daughter may fulfill all the domestic roles that a mother needs, while also viewing her surrogate brother as more of a husband. While the ending is ambiguous, the happy, loving family of *Kitchen* leaves the audience very little room to doubt whether Mikage finds a comforting sanctuary with Eriko and Yuichi. More than Tsushima's independent women or the haunted, indifferent women of *Manazuru* and *Ringu*, the women, and even men, of this chapter seem to have found a way to make single motherhood work. These unconventional families offer a ray of hope that the single motherhood problem of Japan's aging society may be solvable if alternate paths become open.

Chapter Five- Conclusion

The figure of the single mother in the late 20th and 21st centuries appeals greatly to the imagination of Japanese novelists and filmmakers. Their stories likely help shape and inform the opinions of young Japanese women who face reproductive decisions. Stories about single mothers who break away from unhappy families and eschew the help of men, women who are haunted by the isolation that comes with single motherhood, and possible happy endings for women who choose unconventional families all influence and reflect the real decisions and stories of women in Japan. In all these fictional cases, single mothers are the testing ground for what it means to be a woman in Japan today. They must negotiate a balance between reliance on others and independence. They must try to control their lives as best they can, but naturally fall short of perfect independence and must rely on others for some help. By exploring how the literature of single mothers treats this balancing act, we can better understand the narratives women consume as they make choices about motherhood.

My thesis has argued that narratives about the single mother have shifted in their depiction since the 1970s. The understanding of single motherhood held by society has also changed, from the optimism shown by Tsushima's plucky protagonists to the more negative view of works containing hauntings. The last chapter offers a new view of single mothers, one in which they can achieve greater happiness by completely giving up on convention. This conclusion will tie together my research thus far by suggesting how my findings could be further examined in future avenues of research. To achieve these ends, I begin my conclusion by briefly summarizing the key arguments of each chapter to illustrate how this thesis explores the figure of the single mother in Japanese popular culture. I finish with ideas for future research on this topic

through transnational investigation and further examination of the writers and directors studied here.

Chapter One analyzed how Kōko and Takiko, protagonists of Tsushima Yūko's novels *Child of Fortune* (1983) and *Woman Running in the Mountains* (1991), experienced freedom as they chose to turn away from men and from societal expectations for women's bodies. In directly challenging others' beliefs about what they should do, Kōko and Takiko embrace their new, independent lives, despite their difficulties. Kōko's rejection of a marriage proposal at the end of *Child of Fortune* indicates that what she truly wishes is to assert her own agency in the world, not achieve security through either emotional or financial dependence on a man. Takiko's more obviously positive conclusion in *Woman Running in the Mountains* gives readers a sense that by finding community and acceptance in her workplace, Takiko has created a life for herself in which she can raise her son without worrying about a father figure. The women of Tsushima Yūko‘s fiction thus show their audience that single motherhood is, in fact, possible. Indeed, life as a single mother may actually offer these women more freedom and happiness than those women tied to a husband.

Chapter Two showed us the more vulnerable side of single motherhood by introducing the potential for haunting by outside elements in the absence of a protective male influence. Although Reiko from *Ringu* (1998) is innocent of any wrongdoing, her unfortunate single status as a divorcee leads to her haunting. The haunting is not figurative, but actual. Not only is she haunted, but she must rely on her ex-husband for help in solving the mystery of the ghost and protecting her son. Although one would assume that the father would share the responsibility of protecting the child, he only takes part in Reiko's mission to pacify the ghost because she asks. She remains the parent who puts in the greatest effort to protect their child. Similarly, Kei, the

protagonist of *Manazuru* (2010) is the parent left with all responsibility for her child Momo after her husband disappears. This responsibility strains the relationship between Kei and Momo, and Kei is also haunted by questions about her husband's disappearance. These works force an audience that might have wholeheartedly believed in the can-do attitude evident in Tsushima's work to instead acknowledge the difficulties attached to raising a child as a single parent.

Chapter Three challenges the hauntings from the previous chapter with a possible solution. Women who choose to completely avoid the traditional nuclear family structure may find happiness in an unconventional family of their own making. Although the romantic ending is ambiguous, Yoshimoto Banana's novel *Kitchen* (1988) shows lead character Mikage forming a happy family by embracing only the domestic side of motherhood. Eriko, the other "mother" of the family, assumes only the sexual, aesthetic aspects of motherhood while still performing the bread-winning aspects of fatherhood by supporting the family. Further blurring convention, Yuichi, in his roles as Eriko's son and Mikage's romantic prospect, exhibits characteristics of both a child and a husband. Their family is harmonious, if unusual, for the time they live together. If *Kitchen* offers a somewhat ambiguous prognosis for the unusual family, the film *Hasshu!* (2001) shows us an unconventional family with a far more positive ending. Protagonists Asako, Katsuhiro, and Naoya reach the end of the film as a happy trio of potential parents who like each other and have gained at least partial acceptance from Katsuhiro's family. Thus these relatively recent works hint that greater societal acceptance of unconventional lifestyles may indicate new possibilities for single mothers.

Since fictional narratives draw from the world around them, we can conclude from the creative works examined in this thesis a sense of what has changed for single mothers from the 1970s until today. On top of that, narratives can also influence the behaviors they describe. If

more people are exposed to narratives in which single mothers gain acceptance and community through choosing unconventional routes, they may themselves become more accepting both of single mothers and of other unconventional groups. Clearly, women today might avoid single motherhood because, as Hertog has told us, they have seen news articles or read or viewed fictional accounts of single mothers who encounter trouble because of their status. These same women, however, may well change their views on single motherhood if exposed to more positive stories such as those analyzed in Chapters One and Three. Narratives regarding single motherhood are important in Japanese society because they can show us some of the current attitudes toward the role of mothers. Only time will tell the effects of these narratives on actual demographic change in Japan. Certainly other forces, social and economic, will play important roles as well. Greater acceptance of single motherhood in turn would make it more feasible to support single motherhood as another possible avenue towards solving population problems in contemporary Japan.

Potential Avenues for Future Research

My research for this thesis has focused on the analysis of contemporary literature and film about single mothers. Some of the authors that I have explored, particularly Tsushima Yūko, have created more works on single motherhood than those I have used here. Any of these could be examined for more extended research on the development of her ideas over time. Although the director of *Hasshu!*, Hashiguchi Ryōsuke, is not a single parent himself, he is unconventional as a gay filmmaker who often produces films centered on gay protagonists. Investigating his other works offers an interesting avenue to more fully explore the unconventional lifestyle in Japanese popular culture, as does reading further works by Yoshimoto Banana.

This thesis has focused on Japan because Japanese social issues are the most familiar to me. My research more broadly on the single mother, however, indicated that there is much speculation on the single mother as a literary figure in a variety of cultures. Other Asian countries, such as the Republic of Korea, provide provocative cases for further exploration of single motherhood in a transnational scope. Korean single mothers, like Japanese single mothers, face stigma. The Republic of Korea shares a similar cultural background with Japan, but their more recent economic development may lead to different depictions of single mothers in fiction. Single mothers beyond East Asia, such as those in India and in the African American community, are also the subject a substantial body of fiction and film that could be interesting to examine. Clearly, we have an idea of why concern attaches to the single mother in Japan, including fears of damaging children with the absence of a father and demographic changes that lead to desire for greater numbers of children. What are the issues that cause single mothers to be objects of concern and reflection in other cultures? If fictional single mothers in other literatures successfully pursue unconventional paths, what might we learn about those paths? A transnational view of the single mother, including works from Japan, might also give insight into the treatment of the children of single mothers in fiction across the world.

Finally, although I focused on fiction in this thesis, with more funds or a better location, interviews with real single mothers would be an interesting way to get their accounts of their experiences. Given time and money to travel to Japan, a series of interviews would give me an excellent opportunity to ask exactly the questions I want answered by single mothers. Although my thesis concentrates on reading works of fiction, it is informed by my reading of history and sociology. To further this interdisciplinary approach, future research could combine interviews with single mothers, or even young women who are not yet mothers, in Japan with the reading of

an expanded list of fiction. To directly ask women what stories about single mothers they are absorbing, and what those stories mean to them, would be a great step towards understanding the interaction between fictional narratives and the stories people tell themselves about true life situations.

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