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# The Female Gaze in Contemporary Japanese Literature

Kathryn Hemmann

*University of Pennsylvania*, [khemmann@gmail.com](mailto:khemmann@gmail.com)

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# The Female Gaze in Contemporary Japanese Literature

## **Abstract**

The female gaze can be used by writers and readers to look at narratives from a perspective that sees women as subjects instead of objects. Applying a female gaze to discourses that have traditionally been male-dominated opens new avenues of interpretation that are empowering from a feminist perspective. In this dissertation, I use the murder mystery novels of the bestselling female author Kirino Natsuo and the graphic novels of a prolific four-woman artistic collective called CLAMP to demonstrate how writers are capable of applying a female gaze to the themes of their work and how readers can and have read their work from the perspectives allowed by a female gaze.

Kirino Natsuo presents a female perspective on such issues as prostitution, marriage, and equal employment laws in her novels, which are often based on sensationalist news stories. Meanwhile, CLAMP challenges the discourses surrounding the production and consumption of fictional women, especially the young female characters, or *shojo*, that have become iconic in Japanese popular culture. Likewise, the female consumers of popular media are able to view and interpret popular texts in such a way as to subjectify female characters and emphasize feminist themes. In addition, the erotic elements of a female gaze may be used to apply a subversive interpretation of the overt or implicit phallocentrism of mainstream media.

The male gaze should not be taken for granted in the study of literary texts and graphic novels, and an awareness of an active female gaze can change the ways in which we understand contemporary Japanese literature and popular culture. Female readers and writers can find enjoyment and create messages of feminist empowerment even in works with flawed and problematic representations of femininity. The female gaze thus acts as a mode of resistant reading that allows alternate methods of reading, viewing, and interpreting the female characters and the gendered themes and issues of a text, regardless of the gender of the creators or the gender of the reader.

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THE FEMALE GAZE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE LITERATURE

Kathryn Hemmann

A DISSERTATION

in

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

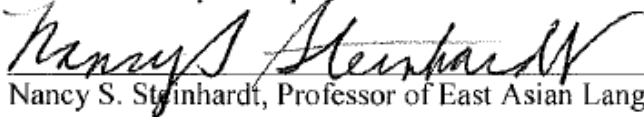
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Supervisor of Dissertation:



Ayako Kano, Associate Professor of East Asian Languages & Civilizations

Graduate Group Chairperson:



Nancy S. Steinhardt, Professor of East Asian Languages & Civilizations

Dissertation Committee

Linda H. Chance, Associate Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

Susan J. Napier, Professor of Japanese Studies



*for my mother,  
who fights for love and justice*

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**ABSTRACT**

## THE FEMALE GAZE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE LITERATURE

Kathryn Hemmann

Ayako Kano

The female gaze can be used by writers and readers to look at narratives from a perspective that sees women as subjects instead of objects. Applying a female gaze to discourses that have traditionally been male-dominated opens new avenues of interpretation that are empowering from a feminist perspective. In this dissertation, I use the murder mystery novels of the bestselling female author Kirino Natsuo and the graphic novels of a prolific four-woman artistic collective called CLAMP to demonstrate how writers are capable of applying a female gaze to the themes of their work and how readers can and have read their work from the perspectives allowed by a female gaze.

Kirino Natsuo presents a female perspective on such issues as prostitution, marriage, and equal employment laws in her novels, which are often based on sensationalist news stories. Meanwhile, CLAMP challenges the discourses surrounding the production and consumption of fictional women, especially the young female characters, or *shōjo*, that have become iconic in Japanese popular culture. Likewise, the female consumers of popular media are able to view and interpret popular texts in such a way as to subjectify female characters and emphasize feminist themes. In addition, the erotic elements of a female gaze may be used to apply a subversive interpretation of the overt or implicit phallogentrism of mainstream media.

The male gaze should not be taken for granted in the study of literary texts and graphic novels, and an awareness of an active female gaze can change the ways in which we understand contemporary Japanese literature and popular culture. Female readers and writers can find enjoyment and create messages of feminist empowerment even in works with flawed and problematic representations of femininity. The female gaze thus acts as a mode of resistant reading that allows alternate methods of reading, viewing, and interpreting the female characters and the gendered themes and issues of a text, regardless of the gender of the creators or the gender of the reader.

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## NOTES ON JAPANESE NAMES, TITLES, AND WORDS

The names of all Japanese writers, artists, directors, and creators who publish and release their work in Japanese are written in Japanese order, with the surname first. For example, in the case of Kirino Natsuo, the writer's family name is Kirino. The names of all writers and artists who publish in English will be given in Western order, with the personal name first.

When an author or artist publishes under a pen name, such as in the case of the member of the CLAMP member Mokona, she or he will be referred to by this name.

The names of fictional characters are given in Japanese order, regardless of how their names are presented by English translations. These characters will be referred to by the name most commonly used by the text in which they appear. For example, the protagonist of *xxxHolic*, Watanuki Kimihiro, will be referred to by his surname, Watanuki.

The first time the title of a work originally published in Japanese appears, its romanized Japanese title and original year of publication will be provided. After this first instance, the work may be referred to by a common abbreviation. For example, the manga *Sentō bishōjo Serā Mūn* will be referred to as *Sailor Moon*. If no official English translation of a title exists, my personal translation of the title will be offered when the work is first mentioned. The Japanese title will be used exclusively thereafter.

If no English translation for a title is provided, such as in the case of the manga *Kimi ni todoke*, this means that the official title of the English-language release is the same as the original Japanese title. If no Japanese version of a title is provided, such as in the case of the manga *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*, this means that the official Japanese title of the work uses English words represented by Roman characters.

Japanese words that I have judged to have entered common English usage, such as "anime," "manga," and "otaku," will not be italicized. Other Japanese words that might be familiar to a fan or specialist but not to a general reader, such as *shōnen*, *shōjo*, *fujoshi*, and *dōjinshi*, will retain their italics.

"There is no art in turning a goddess into a witch, a virgin into a whore, but the opposite operation, to give dignity to what has been scorned, to make the degraded desirable, that calls for art or for character."

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



## CHAPTER ONE

### **Interrogating the Text from the Wrong Perspective: Female Writers and Female Gazes**

The female gaze can be used by writers and readers to look at narratives from a perspective that sees women as subjects instead of objects. Applying a female gaze to discourses that have traditionally been male-dominated opens new avenues of interpretation that are empowering from a feminist perspective. In this dissertation, I use the murder mystery novels of the bestselling female author Kirino Natsuo and the graphic novels of a prolific four-woman artistic collective called CLAMP to demonstrate how writers are capable of applying a female gaze to the themes of their work and how readers can and have read their work from the perspectives allowed by a female gaze. Kirino Natsuo presents a female perspective on such issues as prostitution, marriage, and equal employment laws in her novels, which are often based on sensationalist news stories. CLAMP challenges discourses surrounding the production and consumption of fictional women, especially the young female characters, or *shōjo*, that have become iconic in Japanese popular culture. Likewise, the female consumers of popular media are able to view and interpret popular texts in such a way as to "subjectify" female characters and emphasize feminist themes. In addition, the erotic elements of a female gaze may be used to apply a subversive interpretation of the overt or implicit phallocentrism of mainstream media.

Even though this dissertation is about contemporary Japanese fiction and graphic novels, I would like to introduce the concept of the female gaze with a brief discussion of American fantasy literature. The title of this chapter, "Interrogating the Text from the

Wrong Perspective," comes from a famous bit of fandom lore involving the American writer Anne Rice, who is perhaps best known for her 1976 novel *Interview with the Vampire*. In September of 2004, Rice's novel *Blood Canticle*, the then newest book in her *Vampire Chronicles* series, received a number of extremely critical reader reviews on Amazon. Rice responded to these reviews by creating her own account on Amazon and posting an unpunctuated tirade saying unkind things about her readers, whom she apparently considered unable to appreciate her creative genius.<sup>1</sup> One of the author's comments that is still satirically bandied about on blogs and online messages boards is the expression "You are interrogating the text from the wrong perspective." One of the reasons why Rice's accusations of "interrogating the text from the wrong perspective" is still current is because it is often conflated with the author's strong statements concerning fan fiction. For example, in April of 2000, Rice posted the following admonition on the front page of her personal website:

I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes.<sup>2</sup>

Rice subsequently took measures to ensure that all fan fiction based on her published work was removed from fan fiction hosting sites such as FanFiction.net and Archive of Our Own. Other American fantasy writers, most notably George R.R. Martin and Diana

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<sup>1</sup> The incident is summarized in Sarah Lyall's article "Fan Power Takes on New Meaning."

<sup>2</sup> This statement, as well as its broader context, are archived on the "Anne Rice" page of the *Fanlore* wiki, which also contains links to Rice's posts on Amazon.

Gabaldon,<sup>3</sup> followed suit in taking action against allowing their readers to share any interpretations of their texts that the writers themselves did not consider to be canonical.

Readers of fantasy literature, who have in the past decade formed global networks both deep and wide through online message boards and communities on sites such as Livejournal and Dreamwidth, considered this attitude of hermeneutic dogmatism to be hubris of the highest order. Who is a writer, after all, to tell readers how his or her work must be interpreted? Indeed, what can publishers do, and what can critics do, and what can academics do, to force readers into a certain canonical interpretation of a text? The satirical use of the phrase "interrogating the text from the wrong perspective" is thus often used to counter attempts to argue for a "correct" interpretation of a text based on stated authorial intent or simply what is on the page. The expression has thus come to playfully represent a practice known as "resistant reading," or interpreting a text in ways that the text itself does not immediately suggest or for which the text does not provide overt evidence. This so-called resistant reading, or interpreting a text from the "wrong" perspective, has implications for a gendered reading of literary texts that extend far beyond any sort of Barthian "death of the author." Specifically, it can be a way for female readers to claim agency over texts and discourses that have traditionally excluded them.<sup>4</sup>

In the first half of this dissertation, I examine the murder mystery novels of the bestselling Japanese author Kirino Natsuo and demonstrate how the writer uses her fiction to provide alternate readings of sensationalist news stories by telling these stories

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<sup>3</sup> Martin's statement may be found on his personal webpage. Gabaldon deleted her essays on fan fiction from her webpage, but they have been archived by Kate Nepveu on her Livejournal post titled "Diana Gabaldon & fanfic followup." See also the "Professional Author Fanfic Policies" on the *Fanlore* wiki.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the necessity of resistant reading and its relation to feminist literary criticism, see Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*.

from the viewpoints of the female victims and villains. I argue that Kirino contributes an important female perspective to what are typically phallogentric discourses on gender-related issues such as sex work, sexual violence, equal employment, and Japan's falling birthrate. What Kirino is doing is essentially interrogating these issues from the wrong perspective, which is to say the perspective of what Japanese feminist Ueno Chizuko calls "the people concerned" (*tōjisha*) instead of the political and media agents who usually have the privilege of telling stories about women in Japan.<sup>5</sup> Although Kirino's novels do not offer feminist solutions to social problems, her novels allow the female objects of political and media discourses the subjectivity necessary to unmask and overturn the misogyny that underlies such discourses, thus leveling the playing field for a re-evaluation of gendered social and political issues.

The second half of this dissertation deals with the manga of a four-woman team of writers and artists that call themselves CLAMP. Although CLAMP's manga outwardly conform to genre conventions, the group in fact subverts many genre tropes relating to gender, thus offering a pointed feminist critique of these tropes. Female writers and artists subverting gender-related tropes is certainly nothing new, but what CLAMP is doing is interesting and important because such tropes are so systematically entrenched both in the way manga is published and in the way manga is read. This dissertation will demonstrate how CLAMP uses the female gaze to interrogate common gender-related genre tropes from the wrong perspective while simultaneously encouraging the female gaze of its readers.

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<sup>5</sup> See Ueno Chizuko and Nakanishi Shōji's co-authored volume *Tōjisha shuken*.

The way of looking and reading that the work of Kirino Natsuo and CLAMP allows may be termed "the female gaze" following Laura Mulvey's definition of the "male gaze" as set forth in her classic 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema."

Mulvey writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly.<sup>6</sup>

Mulvey's concept of the male gaze is based on a phallogocentric psychoanalytic model, in which the female is always lacking. This model has been roundly criticized by feminist scholarship such as Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). Nevertheless, Mulvey's description of the male gaze is useful in that it may be used to define what it might mean to look at something from a female perspective:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/female and passive/male. The determining female gaze projects its phantasy on to the male form which is styled accordingly.

According to the principle of the female gaze, the female is a subject and the male is an object. By granting narrative privilege to female characters and thus allowing them to become the heroines of their own stories, they no longer serve as passive victims or the mere objects of legal and political discourse. Female characters exercising narrative privilege, and the writers who write them, and the readers who read them, can also turn a female gaze on phallogocentric discourses and economies of desire. The female gaze can therefore operate at multiple levels of the text, with each level inspiring and adding possibilities to diverse textual elements.

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<sup>6</sup> Mulvey.

## Constructing the Feminine in Japanese Literature

One of its primary tasks of feminist literary criticism, headed by studies such as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), was to uncover the sexism and sexist representations of women inherent in texts written by men. Another of its goals, undertaken by works like Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), was to discover and validate texts that had been written by women and marginalized by a patriarchal system of evaluation, criticism, and canonization. Other studies, such as Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), demonstrated exactly how male dominated literary establishments have repressed the writing of female authors. The feminist critical movement quickly acquired self-reflexivity, analyzing how both phallogentric modes of thought, as well as resistance to them, surface in the works of female authors. For example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) demonstrates that the insanity and violence of female characters that do not conform to bourgeois notions of femininity are not only a way of punishing and othering these characters but also, in the novels of Victorian writers such Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, a cry of protest against a society that confines powerful and creative women to its margins. In France, a trend in feminist thought crystallized in Hélène Cixous's *Le Rire de La Meduse* (1975) demanded an *écriture féminine*, a style of writing that would spring forth from the very bodies of women and provide an alternative to the previously unrivaled male mode of expression that had dominated the world of letters before the first wave of feminist literary criticism in the 1970s.

Western scholarship on Japanese female writers has followed the same patterns of inquiry. Noting the failure of the first generation of American scholars to mention almost any female authors, poets, or diarists after the close of the Heian period in literary overviews like Donald Keene's *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (1987), feminist scholars of Japanese literature have attempted to establish female writers as equally deserving of translation and scholarly attention while criticizing the sexist representations of women and femininity in the works of canonized writers such as Kawabata Yasunari and Tanizaki Junichirō. Victoria Vernon's monograph *Daughters of the Moon: Wish, Will, and Social Constraint in Fiction by Modern Japanese Women* (1988) is an example of this type of re-appropriation that has inspired many academic essayists while also partially carving out a new canon of post-war Japanese writers. Nina Cornyetz's study *Dangerous Women: Deadly Words: Phallic Fantasy and Modernity in Three Japanese Writers* (1999) expands on the project of examining sexist literary representations of women, turning an equally critical eye on the fictions of both male and female authors. Finally, scholars such as Sharalyn Orbaugh and Atsuko Sakaki have delved into the "female language" of contemporary writers like Kanai Mieko and Kurahashi Yumiko, tracing themes of subversion and empowerment through depictions of the body and antirealist writing styles. The positions of Vernon, Cornyetz, Orbaugh, and Sakaki on female writers and female writing are an important and useful foundation for any discussion of gender in Japanese women's literature.

Early feminist scholarship on Japanese women's writing sought to demonstrate how feminist concerns are handled by female authors of literary fiction. For this purpose,

Victoria Vernon's *Daughters of the Moon* focuses on three female writers: Higuchi Ichiyō, Sata Ineko, and Kurahashi Yumiko. These three writers are fairly disparate in terms of historical background, with Ichiyō active in the closing years of the nineteenth century, Sata writing proletarian literature before the Pacific War and more personal short stories through the rest of the twentieth century, and Kurahashi publishing experimental novels and short fiction during the post-war decades. Vernon justifies her choice of authors by asserting that, although there is little stylistic common ground between the works of these three women, each has experienced various social constraints that have accompanied changing gender roles in Japan over the past hundred years. Vernon posits that the limitations imposed on these women in the real world have motivated them to write in a way that portrays their social and historical milieux through their fiction.

In the case of Higuchi Ichiyō, Vernon provides a brief explanation not only of the political modernization Meiji period but also of the drive to modernize literature, as well as the repercussions that these modernizations had on the lives and writing of women. Vernon is especially interested in the idea that Ichiyō's stories are successful because they fit into comfortable notions of literature as defined by men. She quotes Hiratsuka Raichō's derision of Ichiyō's work as being attractive to men because of its beautiful yet pitiful female characters, who are hardly a model for the independent modern woman. While Vernon agrees that Ichiyō's stories do not challenge accepted female roles, she argues that works like "Takakurabe" (1896) clearly demonstrate an attitude that questions these roles by showing the social and economic constraints they place on their female characters. According to Vernon, it is Ichiyō's sensitive depiction of these female



characters, equally tinged with romanticism and desperation, that give her writing a uniquely feminine sensibility. Sata Ineko also demonstrates the experience of her constraints as a woman with her proletarian stories, which suggest that the oppression of the working class, especially its female contingent, is imposed both by the government and by the power structures implicit in family relations. Vernon argues that, even in her later fiction, such as the sedately bourgeois short story "Yuki no mau yado" (1972), Sata subtly exposes how women suffer from their economic dependence on men, thus criticizing the modern institution of the family.

Despite the claims of many feminists that women's writing should find its place in negativity and resistance, Rita Felski argues that the pseudo-biographical confession and the realist novel of self-discovery have been crucial in the formation of female subjectivity, as they explore questions of personal and gender identity while engaging with a political movement and voicing a plurality of femininities. Felski references Toril Moi's conclusion from *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) that writing by women should be judged neither by its fidelity to a political stance nor by its commitment to a revolutionary or deconstructive style of writing, but she concedes that an awareness of women's interests in social and historical context is one of the defining characteristics of what might be considered feminist writing. Vernon's analysis by and large coincides with this view of women's writing by concentrating on how metatextual context shapes textual reality for women writers and their female characters. This dissertation follows the models established by Felski and Vernon model in its discussion of the social and political contexts within which Kirino Natsuo structures her novels. Although Kirino

does not openly resist societal misogyny, the anger and frustration with which she handles the topic through her descriptions of the lives of her female characters is a feminist reaction analogous to those of earlier female writers who did not expressly identify themselves as feminist.

Another method by which feminism finds expression in literature is through the critique of the portrayal of female characters authored by male writers. Nina Cornyetz furthers the interrogation of female characters in the works of male authors with her analysis of Izumi Kyōka in *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*. Using what she terms as a "psychoanalytic-based materialist-feminist" style of analysis, Cornyetz argues that the modern male subject in literature was created through the abjection and othering of the feminine and maternal, a process that can be traced through the trope of the "dangerous woman." By her own admission, Cornyetz is reacting in part to the body of Japanese scholarship on Kyōka that does not question the embodiment of the dangerous woman as the essence of femininity, which thus perpetuates the stereotype without acknowledging its constructedness. Through her readings of Kyōka texts such as *Kōya hijiri* (1900) and "Kechō" (1897), Cornyetz demonstrates that the author's female characters are directly linked to a fantastical, erotic realm of imagined pre-modernity, which throws the shadow that proves the existence of a rational and male modernity. This masculine modernity is just as imaginary as the magically dangerous woman; but, as Kyōka's readers distance themselves from the blatantly otherworldly feminine, they come to identify with the conquering masculine, which seems infinitely more solid and plausible. Specific ways in which Kyōka renders his dangerous women abject are through their close associations

with their bodies, which are never clean and whole but rather bestial and watery, and through their association with a pre-modernity replete with sexual shamanesses and the various monsters *Kyōka* culled from Japanese folklore. Although it would seem that the outwardly nurturing and alluring nature of these women privileges pre-modernity, Cornyetz argues that they signify loss of self-control, a state of mind from which *Kyōka*'s male characters must free themselves at all costs. The "nostalgic uncanny" embodied by these female characters is an object of desire even as it is a site of the abject, an other that must be perpetuated yet distanced in order for the modern, rational, masculine subject to come into its own.

Likewise, Michael Bourdaghs's study of Shimazaki Tōson suggests that the use of female characters by male authors often carries ideological connotations. Bourdaghs demonstrates that Tōson in particular had a clear agenda in his role as an author of semi-autobiographical novels and as the editor of a journal for women's literature. In *The Dawn That Never Comes* (2003), Bourdaghs argues that, in his semi-autobiographical novels *Haru* (1908) and *Shinsei* (1918), Tōson used the feminine as a symbol of what an emerging Japanese national literature had to cast aside as other in order to more clearly define and legitimate itself. Bourdaghs holds that "masculine literature, both as gender and genre, could only aim at identity by distinguishing itself from its various others, so that the ground of its identity lay outside itself."<sup>7</sup> Not only was literature written by women (*joryū bungaku*) marginalized in order to serve the center, which consisted of national, masculine, pure literature (*junbungaku*), but female characters and the themes associated with them were downplayed at the expense of male characters and themes.

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<sup>7</sup> Bourdaghs 117.

Bourdagh describes this type of treatment as "a double economy of assimilation and exclusion, one that situated women as both object and abject."<sup>8</sup> In other words, female characters had to be included in novels so that they could be controlled. Tōson seems to have felt that women had their own niche in the literary world that was subordinate to that occupied by male writers, and he used the female characters of his fiction to define that niche and to discourage women from venturing outside of it. He also appropriated female characters in order to use them to symbolize male fears and desires.

Susan Napier similarly argues that male writers such Natsume Sōseki and Tanizaki Junichirō use female characters and the feminine to symbolize the secure cultural harbor of the past and tradition. In Sōseki's short story cycle *Yume Jūya* (1908) and Tanizaki's novel *Yume no Ukihashi* (1977), for example, "a woman who is explicitly linked to a lost past of refinement and traditional artistic and erotic attainments beckons to the male characters to forget the modern world around them."<sup>9</sup> This fictional trope is not intended to be representative of "real" women but rather functions as a symbolic embodiment of a wish-fulfilling fantasy on the part of the male authors. Even further distancing these female characters from mimetic reality is their association with "a clearly prewar, indeed premodern 'dream world'" within the fictional narrative.<sup>10</sup> Because the authors feel threatened by the dictates and demands of modern society, they envision surreal, flower-like women who can provide them with the regressive shelter they seek. In this way, these writers subvert "modernity both through presenting obvious alternatives to it in the form of the garden enclosing a traditional woman, and also by

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<sup>8</sup> Bourdaghs 121.

<sup>9</sup> Napier (1996) 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 41.

contrasting the keepers of tradition with ordinary human beings who belong to the mundane world outside the garden gates."<sup>11</sup> In their view, female characters are the opposite of "ordinary human beings" and must be enclosed in a premodern world of tradition.

According to Napier, if prewar Japanese male authors view female characters as providing a refuge, then postwar male writers use them to symbolize that which they wish to escape. Napier argues that, in the immediate period of Japanese literature, "women in general are frequently seen as agents of entrapment or humiliation," and mothers in particular "are seen as emasculators, criticizing the male until he appears to have no choice but to flee into madness or grotesque fantasy in order to escape the demands of marriage and social responsibility."<sup>12</sup> As in the case of prewar literature, female characters are employed to symbolize an uncanny other against which the male writer/protagonist can act out his desires. If these desires are reactionary and subtly erotic in pre-war literature, then they are anti-social and violent in post-war literature. In the work of Kawabata Yasunari, Tsutsui Yasutaka, Abe Kōbō, Nakagami Kenji, and many others, female characters are raped, murdered, beaten, and abandoned. Furthermore, in a more sinister form of violence against women, male writers use female characters to symbolize the inhumanity of modern society, as "all forms of love, from maternal to sexual, seem to become grotesque parodies of themselves, emphasizing the lack of connection between human beings."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the female characters in the work of

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<sup>11</sup> Napier (1996) 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 59.

these writers are not embodiments of sensitive and conscientious gender performances but merely tools used to satisfy the violent and reactionary urges of the male authors.

Enchi Fumiko's postwar fiction is perhaps not so concerned with the delineation of the modern subject, but Cornyetz argues that she still employs the trope of the "dangerous woman" as an attack on the modern myth of woman as loving mother. While challenging the expected gender roles of her female characters, however, Enchi simultaneously subjects them to a process of abjection that solidifies their place as outsiders in a phallogentric economy of sexual desire. In other words, Cornyetz argues that, although Enchi attempts to deconstruct patriarchal myths and power systems, she merely perpetuates them through the abject bodies of her older female characters. Although Enchi, in what might be called a feminist gesture, seems to have unconsciously sought to rebel against Japanese dominant restrictive notions of maternalized femaleness, she nonetheless usually reproduced femaleness within the confines of an already circulating, differently restrictive, trope of vengeful otherness.<sup>14</sup> Despite the fact that the protagonists of works like *Onnamen* (1958) and "Hebi no koe" (1970) shatter the stereotype of a transcendent, unconditional love common to all mothers, they still resent younger women for replacing them in the libidinal economy of desire. Furthermore, Enchi forces her characters to act within the limited scope of phallogentric tropes such as the "dangerous woman," thus curtailing feminist empowerment through a repetition of gendered imagery.

Rita Felski cites Julia Kristeva's *Desire in Language* (1980) as making much the same point as Cornyetz; namely, that language and the idioms and tropes it creates are

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<sup>14</sup> Cornyetz 102.

restrictive and socializing, two functions that complement each other. To write without any consideration of the gendered aspects of established linguistic tradition, states Kristeva, is naïve. A writer like Enchi Fumiko may therefore seek to challenge a male-dominated linguistic and literary tradition; but, in confronting this tradition, the writer must engage with it and reproduce many of its elements. Felski therefore muses that a utopian attempt to forge a female language is doomed to fail by its own terms, as an attempt to establish female difference by opposing a male language reifies the concept of male as central and female as other. Felski also points out that if the mark of a uniquely female language is its deconstruction of language, with nonlinear syntax, a loose association between ideas, and a refusal to directly name things, then canonical male writers like James Joyce and William Faulkner have become the primary arbiters of female language. It is impossible, Felski argues, to create something so radically different and so radically other that it completely excises all traces of existing cultural and literary traditions, and the most vocal advocates of *l'écriture féminine* seem to be ignoring the ways in which repetition offers the greatest possibilities for modification and lasting change. Cornyetz's argument that Enchi's writing is somehow not sufficiently feminist in a structuralist sense therefore fails to take into account the transgressive potential of the re-appropriation of masculine language, cultural tradition, and power structures.

In her essay "The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction," Sharalyn Orbaugh interprets Kristeva's message in *Desire in Language* in a much more open and positive manner. Orbaugh understands that to be feminist in terms of one's writing is to resist and defy patriarchal powers in any way; and, since the women living in many

cultures have been discouraged from writing by these same power structures, any writing composed by any woman who has lived her life in a patriarchal society can be interpreted as feminist writing. Two common methods that female writers employ as a means of resistance are the description of current configurations of power and the inversion of these configurations. Orbaugh draws on the work of Foucault in stating that one of the primary ways in which human beings experience social and cultural repression is through their bodies, and she sees female writers as both describing and inverting this repression through images of the bodies of their characters. Referencing a wide range of postwar female authors such as Kōno Taeko, Ōba Minako, Takahashi Takako, and Kanai Mieko, Orbaugh describes the violence many of them have performed on or through the bodies of their fictional characters. Because psychosocial violence against bodies is performed in the real world by moral, legal, and medical abstractions, Orbaugh views these writers as reiterating the same violence with the bodies of their characters, thus transforming the nebulous into the visceral to quite disturbing effect:

By taking the power paradigms that are abstract, and therefore difficult to see, and returning them to the physical plane implicit in all of them, writers can expose the violence of women's bodies and identities inherent in these paradigms. [...] These stories do not employ physical violence to advocate physical violence. Rather, the graphic embodiment of selected elements of various power structures is a way of revealing the gaps and absurdities that riddle those structures, even though men and women are still relentlessly trapped within them.<sup>15</sup>

Orbaugh thus agrees with Felski that writing by women need not conform to a certain political or linguistic ideologies in order to be feminist. Felski points out that, even though scholars fully conversant in feminist theory may be dismissive of the expressions of frustration and declarations of subjectivity found in the work of female authors, such

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<sup>15</sup> Orbaugh (1996) 153, 154.



expressions will continue to be written as long as women continue to feel oppressed by the cultures and societies in which they carry out their lives. Orbaugh therefore circles back to Vernon's idea of a shared female experience that shapes the writing of women in unique ways. Any sort of writing that resists patriarchal power structures and configurations of self can therefore be considered feminist writing, regardless of its repetition of phallogentric language, imagery, or literary tropes. Representation is itself an act of defiance as long as this representation is troubled or challenged in some way.

In her various essays on Kurahashi Yumiko, Atsuko Sakaki addresses the issue of whether the category of "women's writing" itself might be able to resist the paradigms of power within the literary world or whether it is simply another limitation on the self-expression of female writers. Sakaki's 1999 essay "(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko: Toward Alternative Perspectives for 'Modern' 'Japanese' 'Literature,'" tackles the male-dominated literary establishment of the immediate postwar decades. By following the public debates between Kurahashi and Etō Jun, Sakaki demonstrates that, in Japan, the category of *joryū bungaku* has been limited by romantic standards of realist literature; namely, male critics defended the position that women should write about their experiences of being women, which are centered around their bodies and their families. Kurahashi's anti-realist fiction, which fulfill French ideals of *l'écriture féminine* by challenging the very standards to which the literary establishment holds mimetic writing, was not accepted by the male literary establishment because it did not conform to the conventions of *joryū bungaku*.

Kurahashi envisions herself writing about an anti-world (*han-sekai*), a postmodern discursive realm that encompasses notions of pastiche and metafiction. Sakaki reads Kurahashi's anti-world as an analogy for both the social subordination of women and for the performativity of fiction itself, with the writer's frequent female body imagery closely connected to the act of writing fiction. In other words, Kurahashi's writing lines up neatly with many of the new ideas emerging from critical theory in the 1960s, and Sakaki argues that her work could have easily become part of the Japanese literary canon were it not for opposition from the male literary establishment. The idea of feminist writing therefore engenders a curious paradox. As Vernon and Orbaugh have demonstrated, female writers tend to express their experiences of sexism through their fictional treatment of the body. However, to suppose or enforce a commonality between women writers can be erroneous and harmful, as Felski and Sakaki argue. Female re-inscription of the phallogentric tropes discussed by Bourdagh and Napier, such as the nostalgic uncanny and the monstrous woman, can be damaging to the possibility of female empowerment, as mere textual aggression and violence devoid of a solution seems bleak in terms of a feminist worldview.

The following chapters will attempt to address complaints regarding the limitations female writers place on their own writing while seeking out positive and empowering readings championing the creation of non-phallogentric agency for both men and women. The existence and validity of "women's literature" as a category will be challenged, along with the constructedness of "pure literature" itself. By including works from different literary registers in its discussions, and by bringing readers and ways of

reading into the equation, this dissertation aims to achieve a better understanding of the creation of gendered subjectivity by examining the literary discourses on women's bodies, women's social realities, and women's fantasies.

In *Literature after Feminism*, Rita Felski muses that, despite the arguments against authorship made by postmodern scholars such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, the gender of the author(s) of any given work still matter.<sup>16</sup> "Of course," she states, "any critic who sees the author's gender as the alpha and omega of literary meaning does veer dangerously close to criticism as theology. But we can think of gender as one important layer in a work rather than as a magical key that will deliver the ultimate truth and clear up all ambiguity."<sup>17</sup> This project focuses on the work of the bestselling novelist Kirino Natsuo and a four-woman artistic team called CLAMP, as well as the responses of female fans of the stories of these creators. The female identities of these writers and artists should most certainly not be taken as an "ultimate truth" that guarantees any sort of "female authenticity," but background information on both Kirino and CLAMP is useful for understanding the context of their work.

### **Kirino Natsuo**

Kirino Natsuo is the pen name of Hashioka Mariko, who was born in in 1951 in Kanagawa City. Her family moved frequently when she was a child but settled in Tokyo when she was fourteen years old. She graduated with a law degree from Seikei University,

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<sup>16</sup> The two primary essays Felski references are Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1977) and Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1977).

<sup>17</sup> Felski (2003) 62.

a private university in the suburban neighborhood of Kichijōji in western Tokyo. After her graduation, she worked at several marketing jobs. After she married and had children, she began to write romance novels and won the Sanrio Romance Prize for *Ai no yukikata* (The Ways of Love) in 1984. By the early 1990s, however, Kirino had turned to crime fiction. As she explains the transition, "As a romance novelist, I could not make a living because there was no market for the genre in Japan. Also, romance novels weren't really what I wanted to do as a writer."<sup>18</sup> Her 1993 debut mystery novel under her current pen name, *Kao ni furikakaru ame* (Rain Falling on my Face), won the Edogawa Rampo Award for mystery fiction, but it was her 1997 novel *OUT* that became a breakout success, winning the Mystery Writers of Japan Award and being nominated for the 2004 Edgar Allen Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America when it appeared in English translation. Her novels have continued to be commercially successful while winning ever more prestigious literary awards, such as the Tanizaki Junichirō Award (for her 2008 novel *Tokyojima*) and the Murasaki Shikibu Literary Award (for her novel *Joshinki*, also published in 2008).<sup>19</sup>

In *Bodies of Evidence*, Amanda Seaman connects Kirino's work with a larger wave of women's mystery fiction that began to swell in the last decade of the twentieth century. Seaman sees the rising tide of female crime writers as being fueled by a concomitant increase in the number of women joining the workforce and other public spheres. As Seaman explains, "Due in no small part to the Equal Employment

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<sup>18</sup> Duncan.

<sup>19</sup> Information on Kirino's life and literary career can be found on her website, *Bubblonia* (<<http://www.kirino-natsuo.com>>), as well as in Seaman (2004), pp. 18-20. Madison Davis's essay "Unimaginable Things" also provides a short overview.

Opportunity Law of 1985 and to Japan's booming economy until 1992, record numbers of women entered all levels of the workforce. While the end of Japan's bubble economy slowed (and even reversed) this progress, women are still working in all sectors."<sup>20</sup> In her introduction to *Murder Most Modern*, Sari Kawana quotes Yumeno Kyūsaku as saying that "detective fiction is like the serum for diphtheria."<sup>21</sup> Kawana explains this statement by commenting, "It was if the Japanese reading public was suffering from some kind of diphtheria, and the patients sought out detective fiction as treatment."<sup>22</sup> Just as crime and mystery fiction was a way of combatting what were perceived as the social ills afflicting Japanese society at the beginning of the twentieth century, so too may detective fiction act as a means of addressing the challenges faced by women in Japanese society at the turn of the twenty-first century. Kirino herself is very concerned with double standards relating to gender, especially the economic disparity in the earning power of women and men. In an interview, Kirino stated that one of the biggest problems facing women in Japan are economic. "I worry that a lot of women are just going to wind up enduring poverty. [...] Japanese men don't see women their age as equals."<sup>23</sup> One of the most prominent themes in Kirino's work is the pain and frustration young women suffer on account of societal double standards and misogyny, and her stories give voices to marginalized women who would otherwise go unheard.

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<sup>20</sup> Seaman (2004) 62.

<sup>21</sup> Kawana 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>23</sup> You.

## CLAMP

CLAMP has four members. Ōkawa Nanase (大川七瀬, b. 1967), who acts as the director of the group, writes the *name* (scenarios, scripts, and rough layouts) for the majority of the group's manga, designs the opening splash pages of their serialized work, and works closely with editors and publishers on marketing. Ōkawa changed her pen name from Nanase to Ageha (緋芭) in 2004 but reverted to Nanase in 2008. Nekoi Tsubaki (猫井椿, b. 1969), who is often described as the co-director of the group, assists Ōkawa in story and character planning and acts as a lead or assistant artist, depending on the series. In 2004, Nekoi changed her penname from Tsubaki to Mick (みっく) but had reverted to Tsubaki by 2006. Mokona (もこな, b. 1968), sometimes known as Mokona Apapa (もこなあぱぱ), is in charge of character design and coloring. She and Nekoi switch off as lead artist, depending on the manga series. In *xxxHolic*, Mokona drew the female characters, while Nekoi drew the male characters. Igarashi Satsuki (いがらし寒月, b. 1969), who permanently changed the characters used to write her name (from 五十嵐さつき) in 2004, assists the rest of the group with artistic duties, has acted as the lead character designer for *Chobits*, and oversees the artistic design of the collected *tankōbon* versions of the group's work.<sup>24</sup>

CLAMP began life as a *dōjin* circle, or amateur manga group creating *dōjinshi* parodies of popular manga. The group coalesced under the name Clamp Cluster during

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<sup>24</sup> The profiles of the group's members may be found on their website, CLAMP Net, at < <http://www.clamp-net.com/html/contents/profile/>>. Chih-Chieh Chang's "Interview with Ageha Ohkawa and Mitsuhsa Ishikawa" gives more information on why the members of the group changed their pen names in 2006.

the mid-1980s with a membership of eleven women and several temporary guest artists. Their *dōjinshi* were largely based on Kurumada Masami's *shōnen* series *Saint Seiya* (Knights of the Zodiac); but, by 1987, they had begun work on *RG Veda* (*Seiden Rigu Vēda*), their first original work. They submitted a sixty-page draft of another original story to the *shōjo* magazine *Wings* in 1989. This short story was rejected, but an editor of the magazine was impressed with the group and invited them to submit again. They submitted the opening chapter of *RG Veda*, which was quickly picked up for serialization. *RG Veda* was serialized in *Wings* until 1996. During this serialization, CLAMP began work on additional shorter series, such as *Nijū Mensō ni onegai!!* (Man of Many Faces) and *Tokyo Babylon* (*Tōkyō Babiron*). As the group continued to produce work as a professional studio, its members who wished to remain amateurs left; and, by the time the group was solicited to serialize a story in 1993 by *Nakayoshi* magazine, a major *shōjo* magazine that was running *Sailor Moon* at the time, the core members had been reduced to four women.<sup>25</sup>

These four women have since gone on to create multiple stories that have found devoted audiences across the world. As of March 2013, CLAMP has serialized more than thirty titles and published more than one hundred and fifty *tankōbon* volumes of manga, which together have sold more than one hundred millions copies worldwide.<sup>26</sup> One of the reasons for CLAMP's success is that the group has serialized manga in magazines targeted at different demographics, from teenage girls to adult men.<sup>27</sup> Concerning a

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<sup>25</sup> Information about the group's early history can be found in the interview published "North Side" volume of CLAMP's 2002 art book, *CLAMP no eshigoto*, pp. 154-58.

<sup>26</sup> Pink.

<sup>27</sup> Most manga artists specialize in creating stories that clearly fit into a single demographic genre.

common association between female writers and genre fiction, Felski states that "one of the tasks of feminist criticism has been to take seriously books that are aimed at female readers. Such books have often been seen as less significant, less valuable, less geared to the universal because of their concern with romantic love, female friendship, domestic life, and other 'trivial' themes."<sup>28</sup> Although CLAMP has published stories clearly targeted at male audiences, their body of work as a whole still suffers from the stigma of being in graphic form. Despite a growing appreciation for "classic" manga artists such as Tezuka Osamu and Mizuki Shigeru, manga remain unanthologized and largely unacknowledged by scholars of Japanese literature in America. In fact, the editors of the Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature write in their introduction, "Whatever the level of young people's interest in manga [...] may be, literature, as opposed to simple entertainment, often remains the best way to grapple with the problems, and ironies, of the present generation of Japan."<sup>29</sup> Far from being "simple entertainment," however, CLAMP's manga maintain a high standard of artistic integrity, featuring complex characters and thematically rich stories filled with symbolism and allusion. Furthermore, the group does not merely recycle tropes in order to generate entertainment for an unintelligent and uncritical audience but instead challenges gendered genre conventions, as well as the gender-related ideologies behind them, and engages with a readership that is perfectly willing to interrogate texts from multiple perspectives.

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<sup>28</sup> Felski (2003) 48.

<sup>29</sup> Rimer and Gessel, xvi.



The first half of this dissertation examines how the work of Kirino Natsuo responds to discourses on real women and social issues in contemporary Japan. Chapter Two shows how Kirino's novels *Real World* and *Grotesque* tell sensationalist news stories from the perspectives of the women involved, thus linking crimes committed against women and by women to societal misogyny. Chapter Three focuses on the theme of financial and emotional precarity in Kirino's short story *Sabiru kokoro* (Rusted Heart), which demonstrates that the economic and social standing of housewives is not as stable as voiced by public discourse on women and employment. Chapter Four shifts the topic of the dissertation from crime fiction to fantasy manga and illustrates how the work of female creators such as CLAMP contradicts the models of narrative production and consumption proposed by male cultural theorists. Chapter Five provides further examples of how CLAMP is able to upset cycles of narrative production and consumption by subverting gendered genre conventions and granting *shōjo* female heroines the interiority they often lack in male-authored media. Chapter Six details how female readers are able to reframe narratives through *dōjinshi* fan comics, which decenter the primacy of the male subject and queer many of the genre conventions associated with media targeted at a male audience.

The central argument of this dissertation is that the male gaze should not be taken for granted in the study of literary texts and graphic novels, as an awareness of an active female gaze can change the ways in which we understand contemporary Japanese literature and popular culture. Female readers and writers can find and create enjoyment and messages of feminist empowerment even in works with flawed and problematic

representations of femininity. The female gaze thus acts as a mode of resistant reading that allows alternate methods of reading, viewing, and interpreting the female characters and the gendered themes and issues of a text, regardless of the gender of the creators or the gender of the reader.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Sexuality, Politics, and Misogyny in the Work of Kirino Natsuo**

In July of 2003, former Japanese prime minister Mori Yoshirō stated that women without children should not receive welfare benefits. "It is truly strange that we have to use tax money to take care of women who don't even give birth once, who grow old living their lives selfishly and singing the praises of freedom," Mori explained in a speech addressing Japan's falling birthrate, which had reached an all-time low of 1.29 children per woman.<sup>30</sup> October of the same year saw the publication of the book *Makeinu no tōboe* (Howl of the Loser Dogs), in which its 37-year-old author, Sakai Junko, did in fact sing the praises of the freedom of older unmarried women, or at least tried to dispel unpleasant stereotypes of women who had left their twenties behind without marrying. Although women who fail to breed might indeed be seen as "loser dogs" by politicians like Mori, Sakai argues that the personal incomes that accompany greater access to the workplace have supported a revolution in women's lives, as which women are no longer pushed into undesirable marriages by economic necessity. Sakai's justifications for the pleasures of the single lifestyle touched a nerve in Japan, and her book quickly sold hundreds of thousands of copies.<sup>31</sup>

Although it's true that *Makeinu no tōboe* is filled with sarcasm and self-deprecating humor and is far from a rallying cry for women of the twenty-first century, what Sakai was able to do was to put an empowering feminist spin on Japanese social issues, such as rising marriage ages and falling birthrates, for which "selfish" women

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<sup>30</sup> Faiola.

<sup>31</sup> Yamaguchi 109.

were generally regarded as being the cause. Although such positive messages of feminist empowerment are a necessary remedy to male-centered discourse, anger at the sexist discourse and double standards imposed by society is also an acceptable response, and the contemporary author Kirino Natsuo puts this sense of frustration to literary use in her bestselling crime fiction. In Kirino's murder mystery novels, the real mystery is not who committed a murder, but rather why the murder was committed. In *Grotesque* and *Real World*, these murders revolve around female sexuality. In both novels, Kirino contrasts the commodified sexuality of young women with the wasted sexuality of women in their thirties and forties. Through *Grotesque* and *Real World*, which were originally published in 2003, Kirino responds to several strands of discourse on women and public morality that came to the fore in Japan at the turn of the century. Women were blamed for the low birthrate that was commonly held to be a factor in the country's continuing economic depression, while legislation that made provisions for equal employment policies was accompanied by derision concerning career women who grew older without marrying. Meanwhile, an increased public awareness of feminist issues was followed by a conservative cultural backlash. At the center of these debates was women's sexuality, which politicians and the media alternately worshipped and villainized depending on the age of the woman. This chapter examines how Kirino critiques the contradictions inherent in these discourses by demonstrating their effect on women, who find themselves trapped in a cycle of outwardly imposed misogyny and internalized self-hatred that they in turn direct toward other women.

By allowing women to narrate their own lives, Kirino explores both the agency and the deception involved in storytelling. The tradition of mystery and detective fiction places great emphasis on the narrator, who controls what the reader knows and does not know. This narrator is also able to guide the reader's interpretation of events and influence the reader's perception of other characters. Describing the role of the narrator of crime fiction, Rebecca Copeland writes, "Generally narrating his story from a first-person perspective, the private eye decides what constitutes truth. He locates it, names it, orders it, and acts on it."<sup>32</sup> Such privileges are typically considered to be masculine, Copeland argues, and in many of the detective stories of the twentieth century, the narrator is indeed a man. In *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*, Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones illuminate an alternate tradition of mystery novels with female detectives, and they demonstrate that "when women's detective fiction uses the first-person perspective [...] the gaze and the voice is female."<sup>33</sup> The narrators in Kirino's *Real World* and *Grotesque* are not detectives or private investigators, however, but rather the accomplices and victims of the crimes that form the cores of both novels. Kirino thus ascribes narrative agency to characters who usually remain silent as merely objects or plot devices in someone else's story. Since the stories these characters tell may be their only way to achieve subjectivity, the stakes are high. Both the teenage narrators of *Real World* and the adult narrators of *Grotesque* seek to win the reader's sympathy and understanding as they attempt to explain their anger and frustration with social structures that confine them, even as Kirino encourages the reader to criticize the self-deception and

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<sup>32</sup> Copeland (2004) 251.

<sup>33</sup> Walton and Jones 14.

internalized misogyny of her narrators. Therefore, in Kirino's mystery novels, the villains are not individual women, but rather the widespread societal misogyny that drives these women to crime.

### **Real Girls in *Real World***

Kirino Natsuo's *Real World* has five narrators: a high school senior who kills his mother and the four female high school students who become involved with him as he flees from home immediately afterwards. These four young women, Toshi, Yuzan, Kirarin, and Terauchi, attend the same school and have been friends with each other for years. They are drawn into the escape attempt of the boy, who attends a different high school, after he steals the bike and cell phone of Toshi, who lives next to him and indirectly witnessed the murder. Each of the novel's eight chapters is narrated by one of these girls or by the boy himself. At the end of the novel, Kirarin is killed in a car accident resulting from the boy's failed plan to hijack a taxi, and Terauchi is driven to commit suicide by the guilt she feels in the wake of the incident. The stress causes Yuzan to run away from home without graduating from high school, and a bitter and dispirited Toshi is left to pick up the pieces.

The male narrator of *Real World*, whom Toshi has unflatteringly dubbed "Worm" (Mimizu), is loosely based on "Sakakibara Seitō," the pen name of a fourteen-year old junior high school student who killed an eleven-year-old boy in Kobe in 1997. Three days after the murder, Sakakibara impaled his victim's head on the front gate of the boy's school along with a letter declaring his hatred of compulsory education. Sakakibara then

sent a similar letter to the *Kobe Shinbun* newspaper, taunting the police and justifying himself with confused statements such as, "Maybe if I had been able to be myself since birth, I wouldn't have had to do things like leave the severed head in front of the junior high school's main gate."<sup>34</sup> After being captured by the police, Sakakibara confessed to four other attacks. The victims of these attacks were girls, one of whom was found bludgeoned to death. The violence of these crimes set off a debate in Japan concerning, among other things, the vulnerability of girls and young women to male predators.<sup>35</sup> In *Real World*, Kirino associates Worm, her Sakakibara stand-in,<sup>36</sup> with four girls, but each of these girls has her own story to tell about Worm. None of the four girls is particularly frightened of him, and none of them considers herself his victim.

The narrator who opens the novel is Toshi, whose full name is Yamanaka Toshiko. Toshi is the only daughter of a middle class family that lives in a newly developed suburban area in the Sugunami ward of West Tokyo.<sup>37</sup> During the summer break of her senior year of high school,<sup>38</sup> Toshi commutes to an extracurricular *juku* cram school in order to prepare for her college entrance exams. Toshi is hyper-conscious of the commodification of her status as a female high school student, and she's disillusioned with the college entry process, which she sees as just another form of commodification. In order to protect herself from the people who want to buy and sell her, Toshi has created the pseudonym Hori Ninna, which she uses when she is asked for her personal

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<sup>34</sup> Hurley 164.

<sup>35</sup> Leheny 59-63.

<sup>36</sup> Like Sakakibara, whose real name has been withheld from the media according to child protection laws, Worm is not given a real name in *Real World*. Toshi's unflattering description of Worm is similar to Sakakibara's photo, which was leaked to the press and easily accessible online, just as Terauchi's younger brother is able to find a picture of Worm online.

<sup>37</sup> This is similar to the newly developed suburban area where Sakakibara's family lived.

<sup>38</sup> The Japanese school year begins in April and ends in March of the following year.

information by strangers such as the marketing survey agents who approach her outside the train station. Although being treated as an abstract concept is bad, Toshi finds the possibility of becoming the sort of adult who sees teenagers as nothing more than statistics to be equally depressing.

Toshi's friend Kaibara Kiyomi, who goes by the nickname Yuzan,<sup>39</sup> has her own issues with adult authority and her status as a teenager. Yuzan's mother died of cancer when she was still in middle school, and she lives with her father and grandparents. While her mother was dying, Yuzan's father was almost never at home, and Yuzan was left to deal with her mom's deteriorating health and emotional instability. When she entered high school, Yuzan realized that she was a lesbian; and, although she has become a regular at a lesbian bar in Shinjuku and made friends with other girls her own age there, she has been unable to come out to her family and to her high school friends and classmates. The mental stress of her dual identity has rendered her unable to even think of applying to college, and she deeply resents the pressure put on her by her father.

Higashiyama Kirari, who goes by the cutesy nickname "Kirarin," also lives a double life related to her sexual identity. With her high school friends, Kirarin is positive and cheerful, and she is characterized as being able to smooth over the rough edges in her friends' personalities. After the school day ends, however, Kirarin travels to Tokyo in order to go on dates with the men she meets on online dating sites, which she accesses from her cell phone. When she was a sophomore, Kirarin lost her virginity to a college student named Sakatani Wataru, who left her for another college student shortly

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<sup>39</sup> This nickname comes from the character Kaibara Yuzan, the demanding and curmudgeonly father figure and antagonist of Kariya Tetsu's long-running manga *Oishinbo*.



thereafter. Heartbroken and overcome with a sense of inferiority in relation to Wataru, Kirarin actively accumulates sexual experience in an effort to prove to herself that she is superior to her friends, as well as superior to the constraints and expectations that accompany her status as a female high school student, which she outwardly embraces through her artificially upbeat and bubbly persona.

Terauchi Kazuko, who goes by "Terauchi," is the most emotionally astute of the four friends. She has already figured out the secret identities of Yuzan and Kirarin, but she conceals her knowledge out of a sense of respect. Because of her keen insight and sensitivity, Terauchi feels that she must conceal a great deal of what she knows, and she admires Toshi for her ability to deal with the world around her with candid frankness. When she was a child, Terauchi uncovered the fact that her mother is involved in an ongoing extramarital affair. She is contemptuous of her father, but she can't bring herself to resent her mother, whom she loves but also accepts as a human being. Like Toshi, Terauchi distrusts most adults and sees college entrance exams as meaningless, but she still plays by the rules of the system and conforms to expectations of correct social behavior for a female high school student, even though she feels that this role is beneath her.

These four young women, who distrust adults and resent the expectations of adult society, thus see no reason not to help Worm flee from the police. After Worm kills his mother with a baseball bat one summer morning, he follows Toshi to the train station on her way to her prep school and steals her bike from the station bike lot, along with the cell phone Toshi had forgotten in the bike's basket. As Worm rides the bike away from

the greater Tokyo area, he calls Toshi's friends Kirarin and Yuzan. Both end up talking to him at length. When Toshi makes her displeasure at her friends' nonchalance at the theft of her bike and phone clear, Yuzan takes the train to give Worm her own bike and a cell phone that she has brought especially for his use. Kirarin later takes a train to meet up with him as well, and she ends up paying for his meals and a night in a hotel. While Kirarin accompanies Worm, he uses her cell phone to call Terauchi, demanding that she write a story from his perspective in order to properly convey his intellectual complexity and heroic motives. Terauchi instead makes an anonymous call to the police alerting them to Worm's present location. A surveillance ring is created around the area; and so, when Worm and Kirarin enter a taxi with the intent of returning home, the taxi driver tries to take them to a police station. Worm threatens him with a knife, and he crashes the car. Kirarin dies, and Worm is critically wounded. The four girls are thus guilty not only of obstructing justice, but also of facilitating the circumstances that ultimately lead to the death of the cab driver and one of their own.

The main action and driving suspense of *Real World* does not concern Worm's run from the law, however, but rather the motives Toshi and her three friends use to justify aiding his escape. The novel is thus a character study examining the lives and motivations of four unhappy high school girls and, as a juxtaposition, an extremely unhappy high school boy. Worm's own motivation for killing his mother is a combination of school-induced stress aggravated by an underlying mental imbalance, but the disgust he felt towards his mother certainly plays a role as well. Each of the four girls helps Worm, or at least does not immediately report him to the police, because of a

dissatisfaction with her own life that inspires curiosity if not admiration for a teenager who has acted on his desire to kill an annoying parent. It is significant that the parent who dies is Worm's mother. Although the four girls are unhappy with much more in their lives than their parents, each has a tendency to project her negative thoughts onto adults, especially adult women. Both Worm and the four female narrators abject older women as a means of expressing their own anxieties concerning their futures as adults. By tacitly pardoning Worm for killing his mother, the four girls are also complicit in the enactment of violence against their own future identities as older women.

For Worm in particular, the crime is directly related to misogyny. Worm attends K High, a prestigious all boys school associated with one of Japan's highest ranking private universities,<sup>40</sup> hates his mother for hungering after status even though she herself is all but worthless. Although she constantly monitors her son's behavior and scholastic performance, Worm believes that she has no qualifications to do so. Regardless, she still has the authority to move her family away from a neighborhood where Worm felt comfortable in her blind hunger for elite social status. When he enters high school, Worm thus loses the friends he grew up with because of his mother's desire to compete in a social hierarchy determined by the educational and professional qualifications of men. Not understanding that his mother cannot personally compete on this gendered playing field, Worm resents her deeply:

When I was in fifth grade, I started to have my doubts whether she'd cleared any of the hurdles on the road to becoming outstanding. Let's face it, she wasn't especially smart or pretty. She had zero sense of style. Zero athletic ability. And making an effort? Forget about it. So where did she get off lecturing me? Finally,

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<sup>40</sup> K High School is more than likely Keio Senior High School (Keiō Gijuku Kōtū Gakkō), an extremely selective high school with a student body of around 2,200 young men.

though, I realized something. Mom was convinced she was an outstanding person. She was convinced she was smart, pretty, from a good family. And besides, she was married to a doctor, with a smart son, and worked hard every day. I was just a kid, but I was shocked all the same. She's not playing with a full deck, this old lady. (67-68)

As Worm correctly perceives, any special status or "outstanding" qualities his mother might have come from her husband, who works as a doctor, and her son, who attends a famous high school. Without her husband and son, Worm's mother has nothing of her own with which to establish her social rank, and her ambitions make her even more despicable to Worm, since she claims the authority to lecture him based only on the reflected achievements of the men in her life.

Worm views not just his mother as a lesser type of creature but all women. Girls are "a different life-form" entirely, and an inferior life-form at that (72). Worm sees girls and women as occupying an intellectual position below even that of himself, even though he readily admits that he's "not the sharpest crayon in the box" (68). To be held in contempt by such an degraded specimen of humanity as his mother is unbearable; and, when he kills his mother, Worm feels "light and airy, like a balloon" (85). By killing his mother, Worm feels as if he has released himself from the social pressures she represents, such as the expectations that he be a model student and model son. There is a sexual element to the murder as well, since Worm's mother represents a constraint on his sexual development in her insistence that he focus solely on his studies at an all-male high school. Since she had openly demonstrated fear and disgust concerning Worm's sexual development,<sup>41</sup> Worm considers her almost pornographic; and, having killed her, he

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<sup>41</sup> Worm's mother insisted that the family move away from the housing complex where Worm grew up because of her desire to live in a stand-alone, single-family house, which she considered commensurate to

declares it his intent to "mow down all the rest of the pornographic women in the world" (114). Worm has thus transferred his hatred and anxiety regarding his mother, as well as the sexual frustration he associated with her, to all women.

The female character closest to Worm in the second half of the novel is Kirarin, who hates female sexuality just as much as Worm does, even though she has styled herself as a caricature of a sexually aggressive teenage girl. Although Kirarin initially sympathizes with him and provides him with the money to continue his exodus from Tokyo, Worm hates her just as much as he hates his mother. "I wanted to wipe out all the noisy women, all the sluts in the world," he says, "but now I had one right in front of me who was a total pain in the ass" (127). Worm has convinced himself that he is a Japanese soldier fighting a vaguely defined but righteous fight, or perhaps the protagonist of a suspense novel like *The Running Man*,<sup>42</sup> and he is able to temporarily draw Kirarin into his fantasy of acting according to a higher purpose and escaping from mundane reality. Once Worm has convinced Kirarin to accompany him, however, she proves her incompatibility with Worm's fantasy of masculinity almost immediately. Worm is contemptuous of the femininity she represents, observing that, "In her school uniform she

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the status she imagined her family to have. The actual move, however, was precipitated by the adolescent Worm's interest in the wife of a newlywed couple that had just moved in to the apartment next door. Even in their new house, once Worm's mother has caught her son trying to spy on the teenage girl next door (Toshi), she still closely monitors his behavior. As Worm explains, "She was constantly smothering me. When I was in the bath myself, for instance, she'd be hovering outside next to the sink and I couldn't even come out when I finished" (83).

<sup>42</sup> *The Running Man*, first published in 1982 under one of King's pseudonyms, Richard Bachman, follows a desperate game show participant who must survive for thirty days despite being chased by a team of hunters acting on tips called in by the show's viewers. The novella reflects fears of a society in which a powerful and pervasive national media has led to increased desensitization to both real and fictional violence. It is interesting to note that *The Running Man* is frequently associated with another Bachman novella, *Rage*, a story of a teenage boy who holds the members of one of his high school classes hostage at gunpoint. After the Heath High School shooting of 1997, a tragedy in which the male teenage shooter was supposedly influenced by *Rage*, King and his publisher allowed the book to go out of print, a position King explains in his 2013 essay "Guns," which was published in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

looked even more like a 'li'l sis.' Long hair, slightly droopy eyes, and a perplexed look. Her lips pouty, pretending to be sweet and innocent. The exact kind of girl the perverts in my class would drool over" (130). Far from being proud of possessing a girl his classmates would be envious of, Worm resents Kirarin's female sexuality and what he perceives as her feminine weakness and stupidity. When it turns out that Kirarin is equally displeased with Worm during their unconsummated night at a love hotel, Worm can do nothing but spew curses and ineffectually threaten her with a knife. Through Worm's narration, the reader is allowed to see teenage and adult women from a highly misogynistic male perspective. Women are "pornographic" in the sense that there is an element of shame and disgust projected onto their sexuality, and it is frustrating for Worm that women are able to exert control over men despite being weak and unintelligent. Worm's view of women could easily be dismissed as a symptom of the mental anxiety plaguing an already disturbed teenage boy, but this extreme misogyny is also expressed by the female characters of *Real World*.

At first glance, Toshi seems to be the most normal and socially well-adjusted of her friends. She lives with both of her parents, who for the most part treat her with love and respect. Unlike her three friends, she is not living a hidden life in Tokyo. She talks with her peers on her cell phone, she has plans to take the entrance exam for a top-tier private college, and she attends an extracurricular prep school in order to raise her already high scores in English. She cares for her friends and her parents, and she understands the direction her life will take. Toshi also understands the consequences of being noticeably different from her peers, and she understands that people who are

unique are often the targets of school bullies and adult predators. "People won't stand for others being different from them. Since I'm a little different from other people, I learned this early on," she explains (22). Toshi has thus developed survival mechanisms for deflecting unwanted attention, such as maintaining the friend group she has formed and developing a "nothing sort of look" that will allow her to escape the attention of male strangers and the judgment of her female peers (9). Toshi is thus trapped within the role she is expected to play as a teenage girl by her understanding of the difficulties she will face should she test its boundaries in any way.

Adequately conform to social expectations does not make Toshi's life any easier, however; and, even though she takes care not to stand out, Toshi still feels herself the target of unwanted attention. Her alias, Hori Ninna, is accompanied by a false cell phone number, which she uses on unnecessary paperwork, such as store membership card forms and usage agreements for karaoke rooms. "You have to be careful," Toshi advises, "or you'll wind up in some database. Then adults will *control* you" (11).<sup>43</sup> Toshi feels threatened by the men and women who loiter outside train stations with the intention of snaring teenage girls into completing questionnaires and surveys, and she's even more wary of "all the stalkers and perverts, all the horny men, both young and old," who proposition teenage girls in public places (12). Toshi understands that she is constantly in danger of being on the receiving end of the unwelcome attention of strangers not because she stands out but rather because she is an ordinary high school girl, a commodity that is

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<sup>43</sup> Toshi herself is given this advice by Terauchi, who, along with her little brother, is quite proficient in combing online digital databases for personal information. Although the story touches on Terauchi's younger brother only briefly, he represents the culture of online stalking and personal information sharing that came to light in the wake of the Sakakibara incident.

highly sought after and extremely profitable by both marketing executives keen to tap into the perceived purchasing power of young women and scouts for various shady entertainment industries hoping to lure young women into exploitative contracts.

If being a teenage girl is bad, being an adult woman is worse, and the possibility of graduating from high school and continuing to college, does not improve Toshi's outlook on her life and her position in society. Toshi sees college entrance exams, as well as the rhetoric and pressure surrounding college entrance exams, as pointless.<sup>44</sup> If the societal emphasis on scores and status is ridiculous, then the teachers and peer advisors at her prep school, who seem to wholeheartedly embrace such inane goals, are even more so. The prep school's peer advisors, former students who successfully passed the exams for an elite university and have returned to the school in order to serve as cheerleaders, "looked like Disney dolls, with toothy pasted-on smiles" (13). The superficial exuberance and manic positivity of the employees of Toshi's prep school have a corporate and sinister undertone for her, as she understands that they are in no way sincere. "They smile like mad but they couldn't care less about me. They're in it for the money," Toshi muses, "or out to pick up somebody" (15). In Toshi's eyes, the exam system that exerts such an undue influence on high school students borders on absurd, and the motives of the people involved in the industry catering to prospective exam takers are anything but pure. Everyone from the government to high school teachers to the peer advisors attached to prep schools is out to take advantage of the naiveté and emotional vulnerability of high

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<sup>44</sup> Kirino takes care to justify Toshi's attitude to the reader. For example, on being told that she can raise her English test score by ten points if she studies for twelve hours a day, Toshi is nonplussed by the idea that anyone would spend so much time and effort on such a miniscule non-achievement and upset by the expectation that she herself will do so. Kirino therefore presents Toshi's frustration with the Japanese education system as rational and reasonable instead of the whining of a lazy teenager.



school students. Worm characterizes the pressure to build academic credentials as a burden specific to young men, but Toshi's narration makes it clear that she suffers from the weight of middle class educational expectations as well.

Although Toshi understands that the education system exploits high school students, she still cannot extricate herself from this system without facing severe consequences. Toshi therefore feels threatened on all sides, as most adults, from her teachers to random strangers she meets outside the train station, want to profit from her or use her in some way. Meanwhile, even within her peer group of other high school girls, she and her close friends are "basically surrounded by enemies and have to make it on our own" (22). Although her parents, and especially her mother, try to shield her from the hostility confronting young women, Toshi feels that the situation faced by her generation is unique. "The sense of danger we all feel is something my mother can't comprehend," Toshi argues. "She has no idea of the threats that surround kids these days, how much we're bullied, and how much this hurts" (15). Everyone in Toshi's group of friends has some form of defense against bullying. Kirarin exerts sexual power over older men and resists the value system that prizes the innocence of teenage girls by secretly going on compensated dates in Tokyo, and Yuzan acts tough and manly as a way putting off the crisis she believes she will cause when she finally comes out as a lesbian to her father and grandparents. The defenses of both Kirarin and Yuzan are not a sufficient bulwark against their own discontent, however, and both ultimately flee from their friends and families in order to escape the pressures they face from the gender norms of middle class femininity.

Toshi is similarly betrayed by her own defense, which she constructs through hyper-critical assessments of the adults around her, especially adult women. She believes that her mother is too innocent to be an effective ally, and she is convinced that her high school teachers and the employees of her prep school have no concern for her welfare. When a female police detective visits her house after Worm murders his mother, Toshi instinctually distrusts this woman as well. She resents the officer's comforting promise that she can be trusted, and notices that "the color of her face and the skin of her neck were five degrees off," as if the woman she is supposed to trust does not possess even the degree of competency necessary to apply makeup correctly (31). For Toshi, the detective's inexpertly applied makeup is a representation of the woman's lack of ability as a professional. It is as if her failings as a woman are indicative of her failings as a human being in general. Toshi's reaction towards the female police officer is representative of her judgment of older woman by their conformity to feminine standards. For example, in her annoyance with one of the people who approaches her at the train station, Toshi lists all the negative aspects of the woman's appearance:

She had a mound of black hair, chopped off in a bowl cut, and no makeup. Her upper lip was dripping sweat. White sweat stains showed in the armpits of her faded black blouse. It was steaming out, so I could hardly blame her for that, but it was so hot and uncomfortable all I could think of was shoving her out of the way. (11)

Toshi's feelings of being threatened by the people around her are thus crystallized in a highly critical assessment of this woman's appearance and grooming. By projecting the sexualizing gaze she feels coming from male strangers onto other women, Toshi associates the unpleasant qualities of the adult women she encounters with their failures

of femininity. Her naïve mother is incapable of understanding her child, the awkward detective cannot apply her makeup properly, and the solicitor who accosts her at the train station is sweaty and wearing ugly clothing. Because Toshi has trained herself to judge adult women so severely, she is incapable of treating them as allies, and her frustration with older women extends to her classmates and friends as well. When she reflects on Worm's matricide, Toshi confesses that "there are tons of people I hate so much that I wouldn't mind taking them out. Even Terauchi and Yuzan – sometimes I hate them and want to kill them" (30). The hatred Toshi feels towards her friends is a projection of the compulsion she feels to act like a normal high school girl around them, even though she is fully aware that they are suffering too.

Although Toshi is intensely critical of women, she barely notices men. As much as Toshi has to say on the subject of her mother, she barely comments on her father at all. The female detective who annoys Toshi is accompanied by a male detective, but he is of no interest to her, and she says nothing about him save that he is present. She is wary of male strangers, but she never bothers to describe any interactions with them. The only male Toshi discusses at any length is Worm, and even then her descriptions of him are more limited than those of her friends. Since male role models are out of the question, Toshi directs her sharp gaze exclusively toward women, and what she sees disappoints her. Toshi hates adult society, and she is highly critical of the manner in which adult women perpetuating the gender norms that guide social interactions.

Like Toshi, Terauchi distrusts adults. Unlike Toshi, however, her distrust is based on specific events instead of a vague sense of uneasiness. Whereas Toshi merely fears the

attention of strangers on the train, for instance, Terauchi has actually fallen victim to them. Since she was in elementary school, Terauchi has commuted to school by train. Accompanied by neither of her parents, "a tiny girl lugging a heavy backpack on a packed train," Terauchi was directly accused of inconveniencing the other passengers (149). As she grew older, however, the "unfair maliciousness" of the adults inconvenienced by a small child on the commuter trains of the morning rush hour lessened while "worse things began to happen" (149, 150). By the time she was in middle school, Terauchi found herself surrounded by men who would "stroke my bare thighs" or "press my breasts, which were just beginning to show" (150). Even more frustrating than the perverts, however, were the rest of the adults on the train. Just as people had looked at Terauchi with disgust when she was an elementary school student struggling to get off at her stop, everyone ignored her when she shouted or otherwise tried to call attention to the men who were molesting her. At the time, Terauchi was unable to tell her parents. She confesses that "I worried about them finding out that they'd put me in a situation where I had to suffer like this;" but, considering the unwillingness of either of her parents to make the commute with her, Terauchi was probably more concerned about forestalling the anger and disappointment she would feel if, having told her parents, they did nothing to ameliorate her situation (151). Since Terauchi was a young child, sexual harassment has been a fact of life, and neither her parents nor adult strangers are to be trusted.

Like Toshi, Terauchi has a complicated relationship with her mother. While Toshi laments that her mother will never understand her, Terauchi actively tries to understand her mother. What she understands, however, is that her mother wants very little to do

with her family. An active and career-driven woman, Terauchi's mother resented being coerced by Terauchi's father to stay home in order to raise Terauchi and her brother. "I sensed that when she was home, her mind was on some destination far away from us, and it started to scare us" (154). Terauchi is proud of her mother's career, and she is impressed by her mother's energy and assertiveness. "For thirty-eight, she was still young and beautiful," Terauchi admits. "She was a forceful person, overflowing with energy; since she never hesitated to argue with Dad, it's no exaggeration to say that in our family she was the one in charge" (152). Terauchi still resents her mother's affair and attempts to internalize her bitterness so that it does not interfere with her admiration and respect. Her inner struggle to maintain a positive attitude despite her pain has shaken her perception of her own identity, which is divided over her feelings for her mother and the adult femininity her mother represents.

It is this tension between competing attitudes – respect and anger – that has caused Terauchi to develop the psychological defense of hiding her real feelings, especially her distrust of others. Terauchi has become so adept at manipulating her emotional state that, when taking the psychological profiling test routinely offered to seniors at her high school, she was able to play the test like a game. "I decided to see how far I could fool people, so I deliberately made a total mess of it," she confesses (136). As a result, she is called in to meet with the guidance counselor, before whom she also performs the role of a normal high school student with normal concerns. While Terauchi still loves her mother, she has no reason to feel any affection for the guidance counselor. "Each time I met her I became more and more frightened of adults. She just listened

silently to my made-up stories, smiling. I was frightened by the optimism of adults, their stupid trust in science to treat a troubled heart," she says (137). Although Terauchi admires her mother's positive energy and professional enthusiasm, she finds the optimism and "trust in science" of the sort of adult woman typified by the guidance counselor repellant. Like Worm and Toshi, Terauchi's distrust of adults finds its most specific and immediate expression in disgust directed towards adult women. When confronted with the societal misogyny advocated by Worm, young women like the four female narrators of *Real World* hate high school but still cling to their social identities as high school girls.<sup>45</sup>

In *Japan Unbound*, John Nathan runs through a long list of social pressures facing Japanese students. Like the four female protagonists of *Real World*, many children grow up in a nuclear family separated from the extended family of either parent. Mothers are left at home all day by their husbands, who must socialize with their co-workers after working overtime at the office. The abandoned mothers vent their frustration on their children; and, because, an increasing number of households have only one child, the set-upon child usually does not have any siblings with whom she can talk. Nathan states that "turmoil at home and pressure at school, which includes rampant bullying, has created reclusive children who are unable to build friendships with peers."<sup>46</sup> Adding to this situation is the fact that many students commute to school and therefore do not live close

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<sup>45</sup> Discourses on fictional young women, or *shōjo*, commonly hold that that the *shōjo* is so appealing because she exists in a liminal state on the cusp of sexuality and adult responsibility (such discourses will be discussed in later chapters). The vehemence with which the four female narrators of *Real World* deny adult female identity and juxtapose themselves against all adults suggests that they do not view themselves as existing in a liminal state, but rather firmly to one side of the line dividing girlhood and adulthood. In other words, while *shōjo* status may be magical to outside observers, the young women themselves absolutely do not perceive it as such.

<sup>46</sup> Nathan 43.

to their classmates. Moreover, many students change schools between elementary school and middle school, and then again between middle school and high school, thus decreasing the likelihood that they can create the type of close, lasting friendships that develop over years.

The employment statistics regarding the children of Baby Boomers in Japan have many social critics and government officials worried that their attitudes and behavior will result in societal change more serious than a temporary glitch in the status quo. Words like "freeters" and "parasite singles" have been developed to describe the increasing number of young people who, after graduating from high school or college, refuse to take a full-time job or live apart from their parents. Even more alarming are the hundreds of thousands of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), who rely on the goodwill of their families instead of working to earn money for themselves. Young men and women are waiting much longer than their parents to get married, and they are producing far fewer children, a demographic trend that has economists all over the world worried about of the country's future.<sup>47</sup> Young men and women are aware the something is seriously wrong with their society and the roles that they are expected to fill. In his 2003 novel *In the Miso Soup*, Murakami Ryū clarifies this sentiment through the words of his young freeter protagonist: "We don't live the way you tell us to because we're afraid that if we do we'll grow up to be like you, and the thought of that is unbearable. It's

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<sup>47</sup> For example, see "Without Babies, Can Japan Survive," "Gender Issues Key to Low Birth Rate," and "The Dearth of Births."

all right for you because you'll be dead soon anyway, but we've still got another fifty or sixty years to live in this stinking country."<sup>48</sup>

A commitment to girliness, which is often typified by an adherence to cuteness, allows young women to cope the harsh system of societal mores and expectations whose foundations were set in place by a generation that experienced radically different economic and political circumstances. Cuteness can be used to criticize adulthood, and high school girls engaging in cute culture have "created a visible, vocal 'girls-only' culture that fetishized and caricatured their weakness as a way to scorn supposed male superiority," says Emily Sekine.<sup>49</sup> Kinsella adds that young women flaunt their girliness "almost as a means of taunting and ridiculing male condemnation and making clear their stubborn refusal to stop playing, go home, and accept less from life."<sup>50</sup> As cuteness connotes "qualities associated with comfort and warmth,"<sup>51</sup> it stands in direct contrast to the exam-centered, highly competitive environment of school and the pressure to succeed forced on students by their families. Because neither home nor school can provide students with "comfort and warmth," young people must attempt to generate these qualities on their own.

Regardless of the empowering aspects of girl cultures, the visible manifestations of such subcultures have come under harsh scrutiny for being excessively commercial. Numerous Japanese corporations have capitalized on the desire of Japanese consumers for cuteness. In her essay on cell phone culture in Japan, Larissa Hjorth states that "the

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<sup>48</sup> Murakami 200.

<sup>49</sup> Sekine 152.

<sup>50</sup> Kinsella (1995) 250.

<sup>51</sup> Allison (2004) 40.



use of *kawaii* [cute] features to familiarize new commodities or technologies has been common practice in the material culture of post-war Japan."<sup>52</sup> For the Japanese market, "cute style gives a warm, cheer-me-up atmosphere. What capitalist production processes de-personalize, the cute goods design re-personalizes."<sup>53</sup> The purchase of cute clothing and the acquisition of cute goods forms the foundation of a girlish image, and younger generations of women have been stereotyped as mindless material girls. The *kogal* of the 1990s, for example, were perceived as caring for nothing except the newest Louis Vuitton accessories, and the news media was filled with stories of *kogal* going on "compensated dates" with older men in order to earn the money "to fulfill their only desire, which was to own brand name goods."<sup>54</sup> The association between high school girls and commercialism has become so strong in Japan that schoolgirls are taken as direct symbols of commerce by many companies, who use images of high school girls to sell the physical manifestations of girl culture. The four young women of *Real World* are well aware of their status as commodities, and they find the commodification of their status as female high school students extremely stressful as it plays out in their daily lives.

Feminist scholars have blamed cultures of girlishness and cuteness for perpetuating and solidifying traditional patriarchal gender roles in the face of the possibility of progressive social change. As Brian McVeigh states, "Images of cuteness [...] connect up with normative principles, notions of power, and gender definitions."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Hjorth, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Kinsella (1995) 228.

<sup>54</sup> Kinsella (2002) 229. This stereotype has been perpetuated into the present day by young female writers such Sakurai Ami and Muroi Yuzuki, who take the materialistic motives of young casual prostitutes as the theme of their novels.

<sup>55</sup> McVeigh 308.

Cuteness conveys messages of obedience, docility, and inferiority; and so, by aggressively identifying themselves as "girls," young women acquiesce to the subordinate social position to which Japanese society has relegated them. McVeigh argues that young women performing girlishness project an image of powerlessness and naiveté that functions as an invitation for those with power and knowledge (namely, older men) to take care of them and take advantage of them. A woman can use this position in order to receive special favors from her superiors, whom she expects to give her "the same lenience and indulgence accorded to an unschooled child," but it is demeaning that she does so by pandering to the sexist stereotype that women are "unsure, weak, or less powerful."<sup>56</sup>

In *Think Global, Fear Local*, David Leheny demonstrates that, although the 1999 Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and for Protecting Children (*Jidō poruno jidō kaishun kinshi hō*) was passed partly because of foreign criticism of Japanese sex tourism, it was also enacted in response to domestic fears concerning *enjo kōsai* and the breakdown of social order represented by the young women engaging in practices associated with "compensated dating." It was never entirely clear what these practices, which ranged from phone calls conducted through "telephone club" services to visits to love hotels, specifically entailed; but, as the legal age for sexual consent in Japan is thirteen, it would have been difficult to classify them as strictly illegal. Measures taken to prevent *enjo kōsai*, such as increased police presence in youth centers like the Ikebukuro neighborhood of Tokyo, were less concerned with law and order than they were with protecting notions of childhood innocence associated with high school

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<sup>56</sup> Miller (2004) 152.

girls. As Leheny states, "Children are seen not just as vulnerable – and therefore in need of protection – because of their size and lack of experience, but also as innocent, and therefore less deserving of the world's myriad cruelties than adults."<sup>57</sup> Ideas regarding innocence and freedom from "the world's myriad cruelties" are associated much more with young women than they are with young men, and the legislators who proposed and passed the 1999 law were much less interested in protecting young women (who often become victims of the law) than they were with protecting their own image of young women as innocent and virginal.

In *Real World*, Kirino deals with themes of youth vulnerability and innocence by basing her story on the Kobe Child Murders. By giving the young male murderer four female accomplices, the writer specifically challenges ideas concerning female vulnerability and innocence, demonstrating that young women are not sweet and pure but instead acutely conscious of social pressure and the disappointments of the adult world. By banning together into an all-girl group and rejecting the adult world, the four female narrators of *Real World* are not retreating into a fantasy of cute girliness but instead expressing their frustration and disappointment at the fate that awaits them as adult women. Terauchi, the most sensitive of the four, commits suicide at the end of the novel upon realizing that, as a woman, she will never be able to live without compromising her individual identity. In her suicide note to Toshi, she writes:

I'm living in the middle of an unfamiliar transformation, I guess you'd call it, something mankind's never experienced before, with the role of family getting more messed up than anybody imagines, changing day by day, growing more complicated and individualistic, something nobody can really comprehend, and I have to pretend to fill all these roles every day. Otherwise I can't survive. That

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<sup>57</sup> Leheny 54.

totally wears me out. In the reality of everyday occurrences I've had to submit to people in order not to lose them. (183)

Toshi fully understands Terauchi's despair over the roles she must pretend to fill in order to be considered normal. If the life of a student studying for exams is stressful, the realization that the results of these exams are all but meaningless to young women, who are still defined by their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, is even more stressful. Toshi's anger, Terauchi's suicide, Kirarin's death, and Yuzan's escape into the Shinjuku underworld are thus a literary form of revenge against cultural ideologies that expect young women to be innocent and misjudge girl cultures as nothing more than superficial, commercial, and infantile.

### **Working Girls and Working Women in *Grotesque***

In *Grotesque*, Kirino extends the female gaze from discourses on high school girls to discourses on career women. By turning her female characters into narrators instead of victims or villains in someone else's story, Kirino frees them from the anonymity of statistics and gives them agency as individuals while simultaneously demonstrating their lack of freedom within an overwhelming system of phallogentrism. Within this system, women measure themselves by their value to men, either through their sexual desirability or through their adherence to male standards of success that they can never meet because they will never be considered the equals of men. Since women lose value as they get older, young women hate older women while older women attempt to preserve their youth for as long as possible. The narrative violence and bitterness with which the lives

of the female characters of *Grotesque* are portrayed betrays a blindness of the part of the fictional narrators to outward systems of misogyny that are internalized as self-hatred. Like the teenagers in *Real World*, the main narrator of *Grotesque* sees her mother as a disappointment and a failure and views other older women with disdain. Also, like the teenagers of *Real World*, the narrator views high school life as vicious and dangerous, as everyone struggles to meet an impossible ideal of beauty and desirability that, when carried to its logical conclusion, prostitution, will only lead to failure and disappointment. In *Grotesque*, the system by which a woman's value is measured is revealed to be fundamentally flawed.

The narrator of *Grotesque* is an unmarried thirty-nine-year-old woman who lives with her elderly grandfather in his government-subsidized apartment complex in the "P Ward" in the eastern part of Tokyo. She works part time in the P Ward Office in the day care section of the welfare division, where she investigates wait-listed applicants for the ward's forty-eight licensed day care facilities, which are all operating at full capacity. The story is set in motion by the death of the narrator's sister Yuriko, a prostitute who was murdered by an illegal immigrant named Zhang Zhe-Zhong. Zhang also killed the narrator's former schoolmate Kazue, who, despite having graduated from a prestigious university and working at a famous corporation, had been moonlighting as a freelance sex worker. During Zhang's trial, the narrator is approached by another former schoolmate, Mitsuru, who has just been released from prison after being involved with the terrorist activities of a shady religious group. The lives of these four women were tied together in

high school, and *Grotesque* reveals how all of them have been betrayed by the phallogocentric ideologies they embraced when they were younger.

The novel opens with the narrator's portrait of her dysfunctional family. She and her mother don't get along well, and she blames this on her younger sister Yuriko, who is so beautiful that the narrator calls her a monster. Neither the narrator nor the narrator's mother knows how to handle Yuriko, and the interactions between the three are characterized by an awkwardness laced with hostility. The narrator's father is a Swiss national; and, when his business fails and he decides to move his family to Switzerland, the narrator escapes by applying to Q High School for Young Women, an elite private preparatory school associated with Q University.<sup>58</sup> The narrator moves in with her maternal grandfather, who is retired and receives a pension. For a short time she is happy, comfortably surrounded by the slightly decrepit atmosphere of her grandfather's subsidized housing complex and the easygoing negligence of her grandfather himself. Having been told that a large part of the ward used to be under the ocean by her grandfather's probation officer shortly after she moved in with her grandfather, the narrator muses:

And now at last I had found my release in this new life that I shared with my grandfather, a life that was the sea itself. My decision to live with my grandfather in his tiny pomade-permeated apartment, the fact that I had to listen to his ceaseless chatter and live in a room surrounded by bonsai, was for me the sea, the very sea itself. This coincidental congruence made me happy, and that's what led me to decide to stay in the area. (35)

In contrast to the wealthy expatriate community of her parents and the elite atmosphere of her high school, the narrator finds her grandfather's low budget lifestyle open and

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<sup>58</sup> "Q University" more than likely alludes to Keiō Gijyū Daigaku, a top-tier private university in Tokyo.

embracing, like the sea. His impotent masculinity is a reprieve from the stern dominance of her father, the neurotic dominance of her mother, and the monstrous sexuality of her younger sister. Likewise, the decrepit atmosphere of the Shitamachi is a welcome reprieve from the slick and polished environment of Q High School.

In the work of Kirino's contemporary, Miyabe Miyuki, the Shitamachi area of eastern Tokyo is almost a nostalgic homeland, where family ties are strong and the social and technological pressures of contemporary Tokyo are kept at bay.<sup>59</sup> Amanda Seaman describes the Shitamachi in Miyabe's 1992 novel *Kasha* (All She Was Worth) as a "working-class neighborhood circumscribed by the kinds of employment and lifestyle of its inhabitants. [It is] not the world of brand name goods and foreign goods; rather, its inhabitants are focused on the needs and demands of everyday existence."<sup>60</sup> In addition to the comforting familiarity of the area, the narrator's grandfather's apartment is a masculine but not sexualized space, so it is for the narrator comfortably genderless. As long as she does not have to worry about the role she occupies in relation to her gender, she can float in the warm sea of uncommercialized and nonsexualized adolescence. If her grandfather's run down, government-subsidized apartment is the sea, the narrator is like a fish out of water at Q High School. Like the elite private high school attended by the four female narrators of *Real World*, Q High School is a battleground where students must blend in and avoid unnecessary attention in order to survive. Although maintaining a decent academic standing is part of the game, the major standard to which students are held is appearance, which involves both personal grooming and uniform customization.

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<sup>59</sup> This information, along with the narrator's description of P Ward as being right across the river from Chiba Prefecture, suggests that the area is modeled after Edogawa Ward.

<sup>60</sup> Seaman (2004) 31.

The narrator views the two students closest to her, Mitsuru and Kazue, as perfect examples of succeeding and failing to blend in, respectively. Although most of the elite students of Q High School, "the most urbane, charming, and wealthy," have been in the school system since elementary school, Mitsuru had entered in middle school (52). Slender and attractive, Mitsuru is good at sports and has many friends, and her test scores are always at the top of her grade. Although naturally talented, Mitsuru exerts herself in private while maintaining an air of calm gentleness. Mitsuru, who lives in an apartment rented by her bar hostess mother so that her classmates will not know she comes from the Shitamachi, understands that appearance is everything and that overt effort will be ridiculed. "Here we have a class-based society in all its repugnant glory," Mitsuru explains to the narrator. "It must be worse here than in anywhere else in Japan. Appearance controls everything" (54). Whereas men might be fooled by appearances, women cannot fool other women, and thus women become the strictest enforcers of classist notions of gender and femininity.

The narrator, who cannot afford a separate apartment, understands that faking an appearance will only go so far, especially with limited financial resources. Moreover, her experience with her sister Yuriko has taught her that "brains and talent will never stand up against a girl who is physically attractive" (46). Cynical and impatient with pretense, she defends herself by simply not caring about the social hierarchy of Q High School. She compares Mitsuru to a round-cheeked, bushy-tailed squirrel who energetically



gathers and stores nuts "to stave off winter" (58). Meanwhile, she compares herself to a gymnosperm:<sup>61</sup>

I would not be the kind of flowery tree that welcomes birds and insects to gather in its branches like blossoms. I was a tree that simply existed for itself, alone. I was an old tree, thick and hard, and when the wind blew through my branches the pollen stored up there scattered of its own accord. (58)

If Mitsuru is an adorable, energetic animal that works hard to prepare for the future, the narrator rates herself as a more passive and less highly evolved organism of the high school ecosystem. She compares herself to "an old tree, thick and hard" that does not welcome anything into its branches with flowers or fruit but exists "for itself, alone." Like the spiked seed cones common to gymnosperms, the narrator armors herself in hostility in order to discourage unwanted attention. True to her analogy, the narrator does nothing to make herself more physically attractive nor employs sexuality as a means to make herself stand out. Although she has a casual friendship with Mitsuru, she doesn't go out of her way to be friendly or to excel in academics or sports. Like the teenagers in *Real World*, the narrator of *Grotesque* develops a strong defense mechanism in order to survive high school, and her self-enforced apathy to the value system guiding her school's social structure is her defense, just as Mitsuru's tact and natural talent is hers.

Although the narrator never directly compares herself to her sister, the reader suspects that she refuses to make herself pretty and cheerful partially because she knows that she would only come off as a pale imitation of her beautiful sister. Likewise, although the narrator never rates herself against Mitsuru, she feels that any attempt she

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<sup>61</sup> A gymnosperm (*rashi shokubutsu*) is a type of tree whose seeds are "naked" in the sense of not being enclosed in fruit. Gymnosperms evolved before angiosperms (flowering plants), and many evergreen trees and palm trees belong to this group.

might make to put forth effort in order to stand out could only be seen as artificial in light of Mitsuru's performance, which is so studied that it appears artless. The narrator knows that both physical beauty and girlish charm must appear completely natural in a young woman; so, by giving up on attaining these two "natural" attributes of a high school girl, the narrator in effect gives up her identity as a female, which is absolutely not acceptable at Q High School.

Knowing that she will always fail on some level if she tries to fit into a social system that fundamentally rejects her, the narrator, like an ancient tree covered in thick bark, exists for herself. As heartless as she resolves to be, however, the narrator is still moved to pity for Kazue. Although Kazue is not naturally pretty or exceptionally brilliant, and although she does not possess the grace and cultural capital that comes from growing up among the wealthy and privileged, Kazue is convinced that she will be able to assimilate into the social milieu of an elite private high school for the daughters of rich families if she tries hard enough. The harder she tries, however, the more ridiculous she appears to the other students, who bully her. For example, when she embroiders a designer logo on her uniform socks in order to mimic the designer socks of the other students, her socks are stolen from her gym locker and mocked. When she joins the ice skating club, she is milked for club dues and made to carry around equipment without ever being given a chance to go out on the ice. Convinced that she will eventually be accepted by the other girls if she simply keeps trying, Kazue fails to realize that it is her very effort that makes her a target of ridicule. "Kazue had nothing to cultivate," the narrator says – neither beauty, nor intelligence, nor Mitsuru's sense of style and tact (60).

She does not even possess the narrator's own ability to accurately perceive the social hierarchy of high school. The narrator explains that "there was in Kazue a violent insensitivity [...] there was something about her that was fundamentally weak" (60). This insensitivity and weakness end up breaking Kazue, and she becomes more alienated and even develops an eating disorder in her efforts to find friends and pursue a student from the boy's school who is obviously out of her reach.

Kazue invites the narrator to her house, and the experience gives her insight into her classmate's character. Seeing the deference Kazue's mother and sister demonstrate towards her, the narrator quickly realizes that there is a clear pecking order in her classmate's family. Kazue confirms this impression by bragging that her father attended Tokyo University, while her mother went to a "really good" women's college (82). Since her mother only graduated from a two-year program, however, Kazue considers her to be less intelligent and capable than her father. Also, since Kazue's younger sister isn't enrolled in the Q School system, Kazue gloats that "'she's not as smart as me'" and treats her like a nuisance (83). Kazue explains that her "her greatest joy in life" is to improve her test scores so as to maintain her father's love and her position of dominance over her mother and sister in the household. "Mother and daughter lined up in competition with each other. Wasn't that absurd? But Kazue was deadly serious," the narrator observes (85). Just as in Worm's family in *Real World*, competition outside of the home has seeped into Kazue's family structure, and the family is no refuge from the pressure to pursue an ever higher social position at the expense of others.

When Kazue's father comes home later in the evening, however, the narrator is not impressed. "Kazue's father leered at me" as he brags about his daughter, the narrator says, perceiving that he is sizing her up and ranking her family according to his own hierarchy of status (92). Kazue's father explains to the narrator that she is "not an appropriate friend for one of my daughters" (92) and that he never wants to see her in his house again. The narrator is amused by the care Kazue's father thinks that he is putting into his daughter's education, even though he does not seem to understand Kazue's social position in the hierarchy of high school or what it means that the narrator, whom Kazue's father has declared an inappropriate friend for his daughter, is the only person whom Kazue has brought home to visit. Kazue's mother, who, as a graduate of a woman's college, might be better able to understand what the narrator calls the "internal affairs" of Q High School, is treated disdainfully by her daughter. "She uses being a woman as an excuse for not getting ahead in life," Kazue tells the narrator, highly critical of her mother's failure to pass the entrance exam for medical school (85). Kazue seems to believe that an innate intelligence, when tempered by relentless effort and the will to succeed, will carry her through life, and that the merit-based hierarchical system that has allowed her father to attend a prestigious university and gain employment at a well-known architectural firm will also accommodate her even if it rejected her mother. The narrator, who observes Kazue being mocked and bullied for her obsequious demonstration of effort, understands that the hierarchical system and social expectations that govern the lives of young women are different from the ones that apply to young men. Even as the narrator is rejected by Kazue's father, she scoffs at his own lack of

understanding and powerlessness over his daughter's life. "He was one self-centered son of a bitch," she says (93). Kazue's family is characterized by the same hunger for elite social status as Worm's family, and Kazue's father is similar to Worm in his estimation that the only success that matters is success in a man's world. Kazue has internalized this attitude, which ultimately drives her to destroy herself.

The narrator is able to make clear assessments of the relationship between the members of Kazue's family partially because they reflect the dynamics of her own family. The narrator feels as if she has to compete for her mother's affection with her beautiful younger sister, while her mother is subservient to her father. The narrator's father is a Swiss national who, having failed to succeed in business and to integrate into Japanese society, ignores his children and verbally attacks his wife for not meeting his standards. "My father controlled my mother. If my mother ever talked back he would lash out at her with a volley of words," the narrator says (6). According to the narrator, her mother thus "worshipped her beautiful daughter" Yuriko, the only thing for which she is praised (18). Although the narrator does not resent her mother as Kazue does, she is still not able to communicate with her mother because, in her mind, her sister has clearly won the competition for her mother's attention and affection. When the narrator's father's business fails and he moves the family back to Switzerland, however, the narrator's mother sacrifices the household budget so that she will be able to pay for the narrator's tuition at Q High School. In the letters she sends her daughter, the narrator's mother expresses her love and pride. "I can't believe you made it into such an elite high school! I brag about you whenever I run into another Japanese person here" (36). Picking up on the narrator's

conflict with Yuriko, her mother describes her own awkwardness with Yuriko's beauty. Unfortunately, it is too little too late, and the narrator's mother ends up killing herself out of loneliness and desperation. "I never dreamed Mother had such a hidden store of pain," the narrator says (36). The narrator never knew because there was never any communication between her and her mother, and this lack of communication was not just the downfall for the mother, who was increasingly isolated even within her own family, but the daughter as well, who has no close friends to speak of throughout her life.

Kazue, who looks down on her mother, and Mitsuru, who lives in a different part of town so as to hide her relationship with her inconveniently located mother, also suffer from this lack of communication, which is connected to the underlying theme of competition between women in *Grotesque*. Since young women competing with their mothers, sisters, and classmates, they have no support or allies against the phallogocentric economy of desire that pits them against each other while denying them success on the same level as their male peers. Far from preparing them for adult, this competition and lack of friendship and communication cripples them; and, instead of giving them a defense against a value system that favors men, it reinforces their inferior position.

These women are fully aware of their inferior positions in a male-dominated hierarchy. The narrator understands how patriarchal social values affect her life as a high school student, and she continues to experience the disadvantages of her gender as she grows older and enters the workplace. At her job in the P Ward Office, the narrator deals with casual sexual harassment as a matter of course, even though she describes herself as a "pudgy middle-aged woman" who should fall outside the target range of such attention

(10). Even though this harassment luckily consists of nothing more than a few inappropriate comments from a senior colleague named Nonaka, it makes the narrator extremely uncomfortable: "He has a greasy glint in his eye, and whenever he stares at me, I can feel his black eyes scorching holes in me, just as if someone had pressed a hot brand against my skin" (11). The unwanted attention of this man is almost physically painful to the narrator; yet, when she finally complains to her section chief about Nonaka's lascivious behavior, he assures her that "Mr. Nonaka didn't mean anything by it. He was just trying to be friendly" (12). After dismissing her instance of her own discomfort, the narrator's boss then asks her personal questions about her sister, whose murder has recently been reported in the newspapers. The narrator is disgusted by the superficial show of sympathy he makes in order to satisfy his own curiosity. "I've met his type any number of times – the kind of man who thinks he can get away with pretending to know how I feel" (13). After denying the feelings she explains to him, the narrator's boss then proceeds to ascribe feelings to her. Her female colleagues, who tease her about both her boss and Nonaka, are no help to her either, and the narrator ends up avoiding places like the office cafeteria where she would have to be around other people.

Even as she avoids human contact, the narrator fantasizes about children, imagining what her offspring with various men would look like. She even admits to imagining a child with Nonaka. She cannot stand actual men, however. She boasts that "I'm really proud to be a middle-aged, part-time, unattached freelancer," but part of her pride in her unattached status no doubt stems from her resentment of men (14). The only man she can tolerate is her grandfather, "a senile old man who sleeps most of the day"

and must wear diapers because of his inability to take care of himself (35). Because she can continue to live in her grandfather's government-funded apartment as long as he is alive, she is willing to take care of him as she would a child. When it comes to raising children, the narrator also resents the women whom she encounters through her work with state-sponsored day care centers. "There are any number of unbelievable mothers in this world of ours," she says, citing women who are too lazy to raise their children, or too irresponsible to raise their children, or who simply feel entitled to have someone else raise their children. the narrator's grandfather is neither a father nor a mother, and he poses no threat to her as a man. This empty remnant of the nuclear family is the only familial relationship that the narrator can tolerate. For her, the family is broken, as she feels that there can be no equal partnership between women and men or between women and other women, who must compete with each other for male attention.

The family is broken for Kazue as well. Like the narrator, she still lives in the same place she did in high school. Her father has passed away, so she shares the house with her mother and younger sister, whom she supports with her job at G Architecture and Engineering Corporation. She resents her family, since supporting them drains the income that she imagines she could otherwise use to buy attractive clothing. She still looks down on her sister and hates her mother. She wants to be free of her family, but people at her office say that she only got her job because of her father's connections to the company. Furthermore, she is not as respected at work as a woman five years her junior who graduated from Tokyo University, perhaps the only school more prestigious than her own. Like the narrator, she suffers from sexual harassment, and she understands that the



popularity and respect accorded to female employees is determined by their attractiveness. Kazue doesn't like her family, and she doesn't have any romantic partners. She has no social skills, and she has no friends. Since her mother and sister both depend on her income, she also has no financial safety net or accumulation of economic resources that she can use to escape her situation.

The only way that she feels she can compete with the younger and more attractive women in her office is through prostitution, and she is even competitive with the other prostitutes, gloating that they are not as highly educated as she is. Even as she accumulates money, which is the ultimate quantitative sign of success for men, she also obsessively loses weight, which she sees as the ultimate quantitative sign of success for women. Her money brings her no happiness, however, and her eating disorder causes her to lose her regular clients from her escort service as she grows more sickly. The combination of overwork and starvation is an outgrowth of Kazue's obsession with effort and success. Unfortunately, the standards she has set for success in both a man's world and a woman's world are impossible to for her meet as an older woman, she would have killed herself had she not been murdered.

Kazue's murder parallels the "Tokyo Power OL Murder Incident" (*Tōden OL satsujin jiken*) of 1997, in which the body of a 39-year-old woman employed at Tokyo Power was found in an apartment in Shibuya's Maruyamachō love hotel district. Upon further investigation, the office worker, who had graduated from Keio Senior Girls High School (Keiō Gijuku Joshi Kōtō Gakkō), was revealed to have been a freelance street prostitute, and a thirty-year-old Nepalese man, supposedly one of her clients, was

charged with her murder.<sup>62</sup> Adrienne Hurley cites Naitō Chizuko's *Teikoku to ansatsu* (Empires and Assassinations) as demonstrating how the media was able to create a story from the sparse facts concerning the case in order to entertain readers and viewers.<sup>63</sup> For example, convenience store workers in Maruyamachō were familiar with the woman, telling police investigators that she would often buy low calorie foods and that she was nothing but skin and bones. From these second-hand observations sprang lengthy speculations of the victim's entire life history, and opinion magazines such as *Bungei shunjū* and *Gendai* devoted entire issues to the explication of the incident. Many fictionalized versions, such as Sakabe Shūichi's three-volume manga *Ura Noruma*, quickly appeared on the shelves of bookstores and video rental stores. Naitō argues that many of these publications, both highbrow and lowbrow, express excessive prurient interest in the love life of the victim, who is subjected to male fantasies of both the sexual and the sociopolitical varieties.

Kirino challenges this system of male-centered discourse in *Grotesque* by allowing the women involved to tell their own stories. The narrative viewpoint is fractured and more than likely edited by the main female narrator, thus disallowing for any one definitive interpretation. In fact, Kikuchi Yumi argues that the entirety of Kirino's novel functions as a conversation between the unnamed narrator and the writers of the documents she presents to the reader, which often flatly contradict the information the narrator has presented as fact.<sup>64</sup> Although the narrator "asserts her subjectivity by claiming the authority to interpret the pasts of other people," she is clearly unreliable, as

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<sup>62</sup> After multiple hearings, Govinda Mainali was found innocent and released from prison in 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Hurley 200.

<sup>64</sup> Kikuchi 50.

is any narrator who would attempt to appropriate the life of another for narrative purposes. The first-hand accounts the narrator offers the reader, such as journals supposedly written by Kazue and Yuriko, are not any more trustworthy, however, as even the women engaging in prostitution rely on misogynistic stereotypes to explain their behavior.

Kirino therefore de-glamorizes prostitution by showing that, even as it functions as a problematic means of self-determination for Kazue, it ultimately fails the narrator's sister Yuriko, for whom it was a means of income. By the end of the novel, the beautiful Yuriko, who dropped out of high school to become a model and hostess, trolls the same street corner of Shibuya that Kazue, the graduate of one of the nation's top universities, does. The two are equally unsuccessful as prostitutes, and they both compare themselves to an old woman called "the Marlboro Hag," whose territory they have taken. The Marlboro Hag doesn't have a back story, and she doesn't need one; it is implied that, without a stable man to support them, all women end up in the same situation: old, ugly, and ignored. Just as they are doomed to fail in a competition with men, women are also doomed to fail in the competition with other women as well. According to the phallogocentric economies of desire that constrain Kazue and Yuriko, women who cannot remain girls are doomed to a disappointing and sordid fate. The narrator, who cares for her elderly grandfather and assumes custody of Yuriko's illegitimate son, still has some use as a caregiver. Still, she continues to compare herself to Kazue and Yuriko, blind to the misery caused by patriarchal hierarchies and competition between women.

Instead of living glamorous lives as economically successful *makeinu* unconstrained by conservative gender roles as described by Sakai Junko, the narrator of

*Grotesque*, as well as Kazue and Yuriko, demonstrate that societal norms of femininity and family can never be escaped. Therefore, not just single women but all adult women are *maneinu* in a society that privileges female youth and beauty. The fate of the narrator's high school classmate Mitsuru is an especially cogent illustration of the traps set by gender roles for even the brightest and most promising women. After college, Mitsuru completely dropped out of normal society and joined a religious cult with her husband, thinking that she could somehow change an unfair and unjust world. In an incident modeled on Aum Shinrikyō's 1995 Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway, the group with which Mitsuru became involved through her husband ultimately ended up betraying her high ideals. When she is released from prison, Mitsuru confides to the narrator that, while she was involved with the organization, she knew what she was doing was wrong, but she lacked the willpower to question the male authority that controlled the religious group. Shortly after speaking with the narrator, Mitsuru leaves Tokyo to live with her old high school biology teacher, on whom she had a crush on him in high school, thereby once again submitting herself to patriarchal ownership. Since being in a romantic relationship with her teacher was Mitsuru's cherished fantasy in high school, it is as if she is only able to find happiness by remaining a girl forever.

The narrator's own path to happiness resembles Mitsuru's return to her girlhood in that she chooses to decry adulthood by remaining a virgin, forever unattached to any man.

Reflecting on her meeting with Mitsuru at the end of the novel, the narrator muses:

Once I graduated from college I took a completely different path from my model-turned prostitute younger sister. I chose to be inconspicuous. In my situation, inconspicuousness meant living forever as a virgin, a woman who would have no contact with men. [...] A permanent virgin. Do you know what this signifies? It

may sound wholesome and pure to you, but that was not actually the case. Kazue articulated it brilliantly in her journals, didn't she: to miss the only chance one has to have power over a man. Sex is the only way a woman has to control the world. (460)

By renouncing her sexual identity as a woman, the narrator relinquishes her agency in a male-dominated world. Thus caught in a permanent state of stasis, she stays in her grandfather's apartment and continues to wear her class ring from Q High School, thus maintaining some remnant of her privileged status of "schoolgirl" even as she abjures adult sexuality. The narrator, Kazue, Yuriko, and Mitsuru have all internalized misogynistic phallogocentric economies of desire that reward youthful beauty and heterosexual attraction. Since all of these women understand that they will never be able to compete on a level playing field with men, they compete with other women for the attention of men, even within their own families. Since the female characters in *Grotesque* cannot communicate or form alliances with each other the way that men do, their ultimate fate is to either be dead or severely emotionally disconnected from the world. In the face of a male-dominated, misogynistic society, even the small pleasures of the *makeinu* are eclipsed by personal disappointment in the failure to live up to the unrealistic standards by which women are measured.

Kirino Natsuo thus looks at politicized media depictions of women with a female gaze that transforms female objects into subjects. In *Real World* and *Grotesque*, the author critiques the contradictions inherent in phallogocentric discourses on women in Japan by demonstrating their effect on the women themselves, who find themselves trapped in a cycle of outwardly imposed misogyny and internalized self-hatred that they in turn direct toward other women. Kirino's novels have been received well by critics and

have reached a large and diverse audience,<sup>65</sup> despite the dark tone of her writing and the explosive volatility of the social and political topics she addresses from a feminist perspective. Phyllis Betz claims that crime fiction is an essentially conservative genre, as mystery novels upset the status quo only to reconstruct it. "In crime novels the social order suffers temporary breakdown and is reclaimed at the end through the hero's actions," Betz argues. "Crime challenges the societal norms that define the particular community values described in such works. Order, conformity, and ordinariness characterize the world restored."<sup>66</sup> The conclusions to *Real World* and *Grotesque* do nothing to restore social order, however, thereby leading the reader to feel an even deeper sense of malaise concerning the misogynistic elements of society that have resulted in such unhappy endings. In a postmodern world dominated by powerful news media, stories have incredible power to shape not just the lives of individuals but also the trajectories of societies, and the brilliant and compelling crime fiction of Kirino Natsuo demonstrates the ability of feminist stories to provide a necessary alternative and counter-narrative to mainstream discourses on women and gendered political issues.

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<sup>65</sup> Davis 10.

<sup>66</sup> Betz 86.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Falling from *Onna Tengoku*: The Precarity of the Housewife in *Sabiru kokoro***

In *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders*, Peter Conrad describes how certain physical and behavioral patterns ranging from alcoholism to erectile dysfunction have been increasingly understood as into medical conditions with defining symptoms and methods of chemical treatment. Biological and psychological processes that were once considered "natural" have thus become targets for the pharmaceutical and biotechnical industries. When Conrad's book was first published in 2007, the author was responding to a conversation that had followed in the wake of the popularization of medications such as Methylphenidate (known more commonly by its brand name, Ritalin) to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children. The outcry that arose over such treatment sprang from concerns over prescribing methamphetamine-based psychotropic drugs to children still in elementary school, who are believed to possess natural spontaneous energy and short attention spans. Other critics saw ADHD as nothing more than a "luxury disease" that would ostensibly not be a concern in a society in which people did not have the leisure and resources to develop the disorder. The debate over "luxury diseases" spread to include obesity and eating disorders such as anorexia, a wide range of mental illnesses, and even diabetes. The preconception behind the idea of luxury diseases is that those who suffer from them simply have too much free time and not enough willpower; in other words, only those who live lives of luxury suffer from such conditions.

The idea of luxury diseases, or *zeitakubyō*, exists in Japan as well. Along with gout (*tsūfū*), which is often attributed to an excess of alcohol and fatty foods, menopause (*kōnenki*) is also considered to be a luxury disease resulting from the indolence of housewives. As Margaret Lock explains, "the experience of *kōnenki* is conceptualized as both a social and a biological process in which mind and body are inextricably linked. It also has a moralistic component: certain women are assumed to be more 'at risk' for distress because of their leisured lifestyle in *onna tengoku*."<sup>67</sup> In *onna tengoku*, or "housewife heaven," women are free from the stresses and pressures that assail men in the workforce, such as *karōshi*, or death from overwork. Safely ensconced in an *onna tengoku*, housewives collectively occupy the most stable and comfortable position in Japanese society. While their husbands leave the home before the sun comes up and slave away at their jobs to support their families, women go grocery shopping before meeting their friends for lunch, after which they might enjoy tennis lessons or cultural pursuits such as classes on flower arranging. Housewives enjoy lives of leisure, pursuing their hobbies and spending time with their children while their husbands are at work. Women control not only their household budgets but also the *otsukai* allowances their husbands receive,<sup>68</sup> so they are free to invest in their own lifestyles. According to Lock,

Housewives have had their day sardonically described as *san shoku hiru ne tsuki* (three meals provided, with a nap thrown in). The rhetoric associated with them implies that, in contrast to all other Japanese, many are selfish, idle, unsurpassed

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<sup>67</sup> Lock (1996) 75.

<sup>68</sup> Brasor and Tsubuku. It should be noted that Japanese law states that only one name can be on a bank account, which means that Japanese banks cannot offer joint or family accounts. An account is accessed with a family's official seal or the account passbook, so whoever holds these items controls the account. Some banks have recently offered separate bank cards (*dairinin kādo*) for family members that allow them to access ATM machines, but there can still only be one account holder.



consumers who fill their endless empty hours with a life of luxury and ease unknown in Japanese society before this time.<sup>69</sup>

If women experience any physical or psychological symptoms associated with menopause, they are thus encouraged to be more active and give back to society by engaging in volunteer activities.<sup>70</sup> The assumption behind the classification of menopause as a luxury disease is that the work performed by housewives, from managing the household budget to childcare, is not actually work.<sup>71</sup> As housewives do indeed work but receive no money for their labor, their situation is in fact more precarious than the idea of the *onna tengoku* would suggest.

Precarity is a term used in socialist discourse to describe a state of uncertainty regarding job and income security, but it may also be used to describe a lack of other resources, such physical safety and emotional stability. Both economic and emotional precarity are capable of negatively affecting the lives of people alienated from society. Because of the social stress the young women in Kirino Natsuo's *Real World* experience, their emotional precarity leads them to assist in a crime that ends in the death of two of their small group of friends. The two murdered prostitutes in *Grotesque*, who have rejected all female companionship as competition, have no social safety net to shield them from extremely dangerous situations on a regular basis as a result of their financial precarity. Precarity is a common theme in Kirino's work, and Kristina Iwata-

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<sup>69</sup> Lock (1996) 82.

<sup>70</sup> Lock (1996) 94.

<sup>71</sup> In his 1981 monograph *Shadow Work*, Ivan Illich discussed the housework done by women, but recent studies have demonstrated that, even in the public labor market, women must bear an unfair burden of shadow work. For information on shadow work and gendered labor practices in an American context, see Alice Kessler-Harris's *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*, Vicki L. Ruiz's *From Out of the Shadow: Mexican American Women in Twentieth-Century America*, and Cameron Lynne Macdonald's *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering*.

Weickgenannt demonstrates how the writer's 2007 novel *Metabola*, which is based partially on Kobayashi Takiji's 1929 socialist novel *Kanikōsen* (The Cannery Ship), tackles issues relating to youth employment and unemployment in contemporary Japan. As Iwata-Weickgenannt states, "What Kirino thus captures is the complete 'lack of reserves' [...] a deficiency that is symptomatic of contemporary forms of poverty," which include a relative lack of "basic financial resources, close relationships and mental stability."<sup>72</sup>

While *Metabola* deals with economic precarity from the perspective of young men, Kirino's 1995 novel *Mizu no nemuri hai no yume* (Sleep in Water, Dream in Ashes) addresses the precarity of young women who turn to prostitution in order to make ends meet. In *Mizu no nemuri*, Kirino responds directly to the scenario envisioned by Kawabata Yasunari in *Nemureru bijo* (House of the Sleeping Beauties, 1969), in which older men pay to share a bed with drugged young women. Kawabata focuses not on the women but rather on the aesthetic impressions of the male narrator, and *Mizu no nemuri* examines the story from the perspective of a detective attempting to find out more about the young woman who possess no interiority for Kawabata's narrator. Miho Matsugu argues that Kirino's novel is thus "a critical response to Kawabata's celebrated modernist novel using the genre of detective fiction to restore female subjectivity to its story line."<sup>73</sup> As Matsugu demonstrates, "while Kawabata erects textual barriers to keep out any traces of female interiority and subjectivity that could mar his metaphysical fantasy, Kirino dismantles them by linking the plot to a specific historical context and laying bare the

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<sup>72</sup> Iwata-Weickgenannt 150.

<sup>73</sup> Matsugu 486.

female experiences that form the plot's back story."<sup>74</sup> Where Kawabata has transformed women into abstract art, Kirino returns them to a socioeconomic context. In her 2000 short story *Sabiru kokoro* (Rusted Heart, translated in Appendix A), Kirino similarly exercises a female gaze in order to demonstrate how housewives, supposedly the inhabitants of an idyllic *onna tengoku* when seen from a male perspective, are revealed to be in a precarious position when observed from the broader perspective of a larger socioeconomic context.

### **Rusted Hearts and Rusting Families**

Although *Sabiru kokoro* is not expressly feminist, and although it offers its readers no feminist solutions for the problems it raises, the story's housewife-centered perspective pushes back against misogynistic discourses pertaining to housewives in two ways. First, *Sabiru kokoro* demonstrates that, even though housewives seem to live quite comfortably, they are actually in a very precarious situation, as they have no resources of their own to rely on should they leave their families. Second, Kirino illustrates how, even though housewives might seem to lead relaxed lives, they actually do real work that has clearly discernible value outside of the borders of home and family. Both of the messages of *Sabiru kokoro* fly directly in the face of the idea of *onna tengoku* and restore subjectivity to the women targeted by discourses downplaying the social and economic contributions of private and domestic labor markets. The formal aspects of the story highlight a contrast between an appearance of stability and the reality of the precarity that

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<sup>74</sup> Matsugu 487.

governs the existence of housewives. Over the course of *Sabiru kokoro*, Kirino also shows the reader that, although the line between the public sphere of the workplace and the private sphere of the home may be blurry, it is difficult for women to truly escape the economic and emotional appeal of the family.

*Sabiru kokoro* introduces Fujieda Kinuko with the bold statement that she's decided to leave her husband Yoshiyuki. The reader's first impression of Kinuko is therefore that she is willful and spiteful, especially since she intends to surprise Yoshiyuki by leaving him on his birthday. This particular date also happens to be the one-year anniversary of Kinuko's brief departure from home after her extramarital affair with a former co-worker came to light. Kinuko's name, which is reminiscent of soft fabric and lavender flowers hanging from garden trellises, implies that she lives a luxurious life as an ungrateful housewife at the expense of her husband. Despite the malicious spite she harbors towards her husband, she seems not mentally unhinged but rather completely in control of herself and her situation, having planned her flight from the home she shares with her husband with such care and attention to detail.

The impression of Kinuko crafted by the story's introduction does not accurately reflect the reality of Kinuko's life, however. Although her status as the wife of a university professor seems fairly stable and middle-class, Kinuko's situation is in fact precarious. Her social position, for example, is not derived from anything she herself has accomplished but rather from her husband's status. Apart from her claim on her husband, Kinuko has very little to call her own. For example, when Kinuko is confronted by the wife of the man with whom she had an affair, she is overpowered by the woman's

superior status as the legitimate wife of her sexual partner, and Kinuko flees from the confrontation because, without the support of her husband's position, she has no social assets of her own on which she can rely. When Aojima's wife manages to chase her out of her own apartment, Kinuko's precarious status becomes readily apparent:

Kinuko looked into her purse for the first time after arriving at the train station. There was nothing there except for her beat-up wallet, a promotional packet of tissues that she had picked up somewhere, and a single tube of lipstick. She only had five thousand yen in her wallet. Her hair was messy, and she wasn't wearing any makeup. Even worse, she had on jeans and a sweatshirt and socks covered with fuzz, an outfit she wouldn't have worn even to the neighborhood grocery store. (193)

Not only is her wallet battered and almost empty, suggesting that she has no financial resources, but her clothing is also disheveled, a reference to the fact that she has no social or sexual power outside of her marriage. If she is not situated within her role as a housewife, Kinuko is incapable of successfully presenting herself in society. When Kinuko flees from the apartment where she lives with her husband, it is as if she has lost her means of moving through the world freely.

Kinuko's escape from her husband does not remove her from his influence, however. In fact, her temporary flight from the apartment she shares with Yoshiyuki makes her dependence on him even more apparent. Kinuko seeks refuge at her friend Chikako's house only to be made painfully aware of the difference between their lifestyles and social positions. Even though Chikako went through a divorce herself and is sympathetic to Kinuko's troubled situation, Chikako's current marriage is stable, and she enjoys the social and material benefits provided by her successful husband. In contrast, Kinuko's husband Yoshiyuki cannot afford to take time off from work to travel

to Tokyo immediately; and, when he does arrive, he presents Chikako with several camera film cases filled with 500-yen coins, which represent not only his unenviable financial status (he may be giving Chikako the only money he has saved) but also his gauche approach to conflict resolution. In other words, not only is Yoshiyuki poor, but he's also boorish and insensitive. Both of these qualities reflect poorly on Kinuko, especially when she compares herself to Chikako. This difference in status is all the more frustrating to Kinuko because it is not she and Chikako who are different, but rather her husband and Chikako's husband. When Kinuko becomes aware of the irrationality of such a social arrangement, she decides to leave a marriage that both is not only emotionally unfulfilling but also socially and financially limiting.

After Yoshiyuki returns home with Kinuko, he comes into her bed at night and wraps his hands around her neck, threatening to strangle her. Although he desists in harming her physically, he succeeds in strangling her financially, telling her that he will limit her monthly budget to 100,000 yen and forcing her to swear never to leave their home in the suburbs of S City.<sup>75</sup> As collateral, Yoshiyuki holds their daughter Aoi hostage, knowing that Aoi will face severe discrimination at school should her parents divorce. Kinuko is constrained not just by worry about her daughter but also by the knowledge that, as a 37-year-old housewife, she has no marketable skills and would be at a severe disadvantage in an open job market. Thus, Kinuko's supposedly stable identity as a housewife has become a liability and a prison. She is acutely aware of this contradiction

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<sup>75</sup> "S City" more than likely refers to Saitama City, the capital of Saitama Prefecture, which is part of the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan Area (*shutoken*). Saitama City is about a half hour away from Tokyo by train, and it is known as being a bed town for commuting workers filled with relatively inexpensive *danchi* apartment complexes.

and bitterly resents her position: "Kinuko hated the idea of spending her entire life as a happy housewife. She couldn't stand the thought of ending up as a mindless slave who was neither loved nor respected" (199). Although she has effectively been employed by Yoshiyuki as a housewife for years, Kinuko feels neither respected for her contributions to the household nor loved for the companionship she has provided. To Kinuko, a "happy housewife" is nothing more than a "mindless slave" who labors endlessly and without recompense, doomed to achieve no higher purpose than carrying out orders of her husband. As Kinuko saves money in tiny increments and prepares to leave Yoshiyuki, she slowly removes all traces of herself, such as her books and clothing, from the apartment. Although "the interior of the apartment gradually lost its charm and individuality," her husband does not notice (201). This is partially because of his churlish self-centeredness, but his lack of sensitivity is also connected to the suggestion that Kinuko's individual identity makes no difference to her role as a housewife.

When Kinuko leaves Yoshiyuki's house on the day she has appointed for herself, she is once again thrust into an extremely precarious position. Once again she goes to Chikako's house; and, once again, she feels her own status contrasted against Chikako's. Because of the difference in the men that the two women married, Chikako lives in a trendy area of Tokyo, while Kinuko has lived far away in the suburbs. Chikako still looks youthful, while Kinuko has aged visibly. In contrast to Kinuko's generic and charmless apartment, Chikako's apartment is spacious and filled with beautiful furniture. Chikako's daughter still lives with her mother after having graduated from college, while Aoi worked through high school for the sole purpose of being able to afford moving out of

Kinuko's apartment as soon as she graduated. In other words, because of nothing more than the luck of the draw concerning marriage partners, the lives of Kinuko and Chikako are completely different. Nevertheless, although she was once jealous of Chikako, Kinuko's attitude towards marriage has changed over the course of the ten years she was unable to visit her friend. "Kinuko remembered that she had been jealous of this lifestyle when she was younger. Now she felt that Chikako was a queen confined within her own house, and her jealousy had completely evaporated" (204). Chikako is an embodiment of the ideal of the *onna tengoku*, and Kinuko's impression of her friend is similar to the impression that the reader was given of Kinuko at the beginning of story – spoiled and unaware of her privilege. Although the life Chikako leads, in which she gets to live in a large and stylish apartment in Tokyo without having to lift a finger, was once the envy of Kinuko, both Kinuko and the reader now understand how swiftly a woman can fall from *onna tengoku*. Furthermore, without any resources of her own to rely on, even a wealthy housewife is like "a queen confined in her own house."

Once Kinuko is no longer sheltered by her status as a housewife and the income of her husband, it does not take long for the negative effects of her economic precarity to manifest. The amount of money Kinuko has saved after budgeting "her life in units of ten yen divided between grocery stores and greengrocers" is far from large, and the purchase of a single suit in a department store is enough to deplete her savings significantly (211). Furthermore, even though she wants to make a difference outside of her family, where she was "nothing more than a live-in maid," she doesn't see herself as having any



marketable skills, as nothing she had done as a housewife could be considered to be job training (208).

For the past ten years, Kinuko's only hobby and means of asserting her will had been to apply herself diligently to housework. She had been a perfect housewife, cleaning the house and devoting herself to cooking. There had been only one thing missing ever since her daughter had left for school in Tokyo. Even though she wanted to work as hard as she could for someone else's sake, there was no one who would benefit from her hard work. Yoshiyuki didn't count, of course. (205)

For Kinuko, housework is a calling, and she defines herself through her work. From Kinuko's description of the jobs she does as a housewife, the reader gets the impression that, were housework valued on the labor market, someone with Kinuko's dedication and experience would be considered extremely valuable by employers. In fact, the employment ads Kinuko browses in the newspaper do list such skills, which include cooking and childcare, as desirable. The main criteria of whether or not a housewife's labor is considered work thus seems to be whether or not it takes place within the family. Since Kinuko wants her labor to be acknowledged as valuable and productive, she is therefore happy to abandon the confines of her own family even as she interviews for live-in caregiver and housekeeper positions that will situate her within other people's families.

As Kinuko begins to visit other people's houses in order to interview for live-in housekeeper and caregiver positions, the contrast between the appearance and the reality of families becomes even more apparent. At the houses Kinuko visits, the families must cope with all manner of difficulties, from rowdy children who need constant feeding to old people who need constant care. Even though these houses may look nice on the outside, they're falling apart on the inside. In the same vein, even though the families who

live in large and luxurious houses may seem wealthy and stable, they are all on the verge of collapse due to a shortage of domestic labor. Although the housewives who live in these houses may seem to occupy a comfortable position from the outside, even the large amount of labor they contribute to the management of their households does not suffice.

The Uchida residence, where Kinuko eventually ends up finding a job after more than two weeks of searching, is a perfect model of the disparity between a superficial appearance of comfort and the dire need for labor in the management of a large household. The Uchida family is related to a high ranking politician and lives in the upscale Mejiro residential neighborhood in West Tokyo. Their house is a spacious Japanese mansion with a large lawn and a garden that reminds Kinuko of her childhood home in Hokkaido. The centerpiece of the garden is a cherry tree that blooms beautifully and extends over the wooden fence that surrounds the property. Since the job opening that the Uchida family has posted appears to be a cushy position, many applicants are drawn to the interview, only to be frightened off by the state of the house as it appears from the inside.

Just as Chikako had suspected, the Uchida family that owned the house was related to the famous member of parliament. It made sense that there were a lot of applicants for the position, but the economic circumstances of the family were unmistakably strained. Kinuko glanced about the musty old room. The sooty ceiling. The children's graffiti on the post in the *tokonoma*. The yellowing *shōji* screens. The outdated television. It looked as if no one had laid a hand to this house for several decades. (215)

The inside of the house is unkempt and dirty, and the state of the television and *shōji* screens betrays the family's impoverished economic circumstances. Although the property itself is luxurious, Kinuko's impression that "no one had touched the house for

several decades" illustrates that luxury does not maintain itself but requires a significant amount of upkeep. The other women who come to the house to interview for the position are further put off by the fact that the house is inhabited by two old women and a sick man, and a professional caregiver with decades of experience confides to Kinuko that not only are houses like this difficult to clean, but even one old or sick person requires an extraordinary amount of attention. Instead of being driven away, however, the circumstances of the house motivate Kinuko, as she sees them as an opportunity for her to demonstrate her abilities as a housekeeper and to use her skills for the benefits of others. During her interview, Umeko and Shigeko, the two elderly sisters who live in the house, suggest that working for Uchida family will require no less effort and planning than the sort of effort and planning necessary to leave one's husband. In a homosocial sphere of women who understand the value of labor performed within the home, Kinuko's abilities are properly appreciated, and she is given the job on the spot.

Kinuko, who has been engaging in the shadow work of household management for years, is happy to have finally entered a more public sphere of labor, and she reflects on the economic and ideological distance between her former home and the house of another family through a fantasy of traveling between countries.

Several days later, as she sat in a taxi with her futon and scant personal effects on her way to the Uchida household, Kinuko entertained the fantasy that she was entering a different country with a passport labeled "Housekeeper." She had left the country of Fujieda, to which she would never again return, and she was headed to the country of Uchida by way of the country of Chikako. She felt less like a traveler and more like an exile who had put her home country behind her forever. (217-218)

Her job is not just a job, but a visa recognized by political entities and a passport into a wider world beyond the confining kingdom of her own household. Kinuko envisions herself not as a carefree tourist or traveler, but rather as a vagabond cast adrift in a hostile world with few resources and no one on whom she can rely. She understands the precarity of her situation but is so happy to be away from the confines of the family that she is energized instead of enervated. She handles her job at the Uchida household well despite the family's poverty, and the author takes pains to demonstrate how Kinuko's job, which involves careful planning and resource allocation, is strikingly similar to a "real" job in corporate management. Kinuko is in fact so good at her job that "one almost couldn't imagine how things were like without her," and she thus achieves her goal to be useful to people who appreciate her (223). It is significant that, although Kinuko is engaged in the same housework that filled her days when she lived with her husband, she needed to "travel" beyond the boundaries of her own family to be able to find happiness and existential meaning in her work.

Unfortunately, it is not so easy for Kinuko to removing herself from the social structure of the family. Although Kinuko has escaped from her own family, she is not able to escape the family model, and her workplace ends up becoming more of a family than her own family.

There was not a bad or mean-spirited person there. Everyone lived together and helped each other, and Kinuko supported everyone. She gazed at the apron that she had ironed with pride. The Uchida household was not what she thought it would be, but it was an ideal world in its own way. It made Kinuko happy to see the old house managed according to her plans. She was a perfect housewife who was useful to everyone, and she felt that this was indeed her reason for living. (224)

The communality and friendliness are less professional than they are familial, and Kinuko's management of the Uchida household transforms it into a showplace model of a happy family. Everyone helps everyone else, and everyone gets along with one another. Umeko supports her sister Shigeko, who has a weak heart, and a young woman named Midori has assumed the care of Yasuo, who is bedridden with stomach cancer. On one hand, it is possible to see this arrangement as "work," as Kinuko reflects that she is "happy to see the old managed according to her plans." On the other hand, it is easy to view this arrangement as simply a "family" taking care of one another, as "everyone lived together and helped each other." Regardless of whether Kinuko's current situation is "work" or "family," she feels that the atmosphere is completely different from her life with Yoshiyuki. It is almost as if Kirino is suggesting that a household runs better if there are no able-bodied men present to create distinctions between "work" and "care" and "public" and "private."

Kirino's blurring of the boundary between the private realm of the family and the public realm of the commercial labor market is reinforced by the juxtaposition of Aoi and Midori. Aoi and Midori, whose names suggest different shades of the same color, are the same age but in all other ways polar opposites. Because of the strained atmosphere in her home as she was growing up, Aoi is mature for her age, while Midori, who suffers from a developmental disorder, remains childlike and emotionally open. Midori is friendly to everyone, while Aoi is chilly to even her mother. When Aoi meets Kinuko on an outdoor café patio in the ritzy Tokyo neighborhood of Aoyama, she obliquely criticizes her mother for her rash behavior concerning her father, gently mocks her mother's pride

concerning her first paycheck, and expresses open disdain concerning the work her mother does. Aoi is presented to the reader as "calm and mature" instead of mean or spoiled, but she has a certain coldness to her that makes her seem like a stranger to her mother (230).

Kinuko looked into Aoi's cool eyes. She had thought that her daughter was on her side, but she felt suffocated by the frank criticism of a fellow woman. Her daughter had passed out of her hands a long time ago, and at some point she had come to see her parents with the level gaze of an outsider. Kinuko almost couldn't believe that just a year ago she and Aoi and Yoshiyuki had all lived together as a family under the same roof. (232)

The sort of friendly familiarity Kinuko feels towards the members of the Uchida household is absent in her interactions with her daughter. The fluidity of family roles and emotional attachments blurs the lines of the family; yet, in another sense, Aoi's chilliness towards her mother suggests a clear differentiation between inside and outside the family. Once Kinuko has declared herself to be outside the Fujieda family, her daughter treats her in the same way that she would treat any other woman, namely, as competition for male attention.

Midori, on the other hand, is associated with childish emotional warmth and bright colors. When Kinuko first meets her, "Midori was wearing a startlingly bright red turtleneck and yellow pants. Kinuko got the sense that she was the only spot of color in this dim, dark house. Her round nose and slightly separated eyes made her look a bit like a lap dog" (218). Midori's youth stands in stark contrast to the decrepitude of the Uchida household, and her puppy-like energy invigorates the older people who live there. She is playful like a child, and her body is "fleshy like a young girl's" (226). Because of Midori's disability, Kinuko assumes that she is somehow related to the members of the

household. Yasuo later reveals to Kinuko that Midori came to the family as an applicant for the same position Kinuko now holds, however, and that he himself insisted that she be hired. While Kinuko's own daughter is "like a stranger," the truly rootless Midori is like family, a situation that underscores the deeper confusion that the story develops over the division between work and family. Although Kinuko begins *Sabiru kokoro* with a very clear idea of the divide between "family" and "work," the elements of her life that fall to either side of the division have been reversed by the end of the story.

By returning to the theme of appearance and reality, especially when it pertains to perceived stability as opposed to actual precarity, Kirino demonstrates that it is difficult to draw bold lines demarcating the public workspace and the home. Because these categories carry different economic weights and are treated differently by society, however, they are perceived as real even by individuals whom they do not benefit, such as Kinuko. The title of the Kirino's story, *Sabiru kokoro*, refers indirectly to the scratch that the wife of Kinuko's lover left on the door of her apartment. The scratch gradually rusted over the course of ten years; but, every time Kinuko saw it, she was reminded of how she was trapped in her marriage. Before Kinuko leaves her home with Yoshiyuki, it is the last thing she sees.

There was a tiny rusted scratch on the gray steel door. It was the scratch that Aojima's wife had made with her umbrella ten years ago. No one aside from Kinuko had noticed it; it held meaning only for her. It was an emblem of shame and defiance. Whenever she saw it, her timeworn resolution to leave home flared within her. Even though it had rusted over, the scratch still remained. (200-01)

The rusted scratch, emblematic of the fault line between the appearance and the reality of being a housewife, is permanently bored into Kinuko's heart as well. The scar is a symbol

of Kinuko's false consciousness regarding her subaltern economic position, the burden of which she must bear even after her attempt to shrug it off by breaking away from the ossified family structure represented by her failed relationship with Yoshiyuki.

The title of *Sabiru kokoro* has another meaning, which becomes clear when Kinuko is finally able to talk to the only other male character at the end of the story. After Umeko rushes her sister Shigeiko to the hospital in the middle of the night, Kinuko is left alone with Yasuo. She ends up helping Yasuo, who is too weak to move by himself, downstairs and outside into the garden. Deep into the night and separated physically from the house, both Kinuko and Yasuo find themselves facing uncomfortable realities that go unmentioned during safe household routines of daytime. Kinuko tells Yasuo about how she left her marriage, and Yasuo reveals that he insisted on hiring Midori partly so that his death would leave a permanent scar on the heart of an innocent creature. When Kinuko calls him cruel, he accuses of her doing something similar to her husband, namely, wanting her departure from her marriage to come as such a shock that it would leave a scar on Yoshiyuki's heart. Kinuko realizes that he is right. "She had wanted to gouge an impression exactly like the rusted scratch on the foyer door into Yoshiyuki's heart" (240). Yasuo muses that he and Kinuko are able to injure Midori and Yoshiyuki because they are not family (*tanin*), and that the appeal of leaving an impression on them is strengthened precisely because they are able to exist outside of the family. Since the housewife Kinuko and the invalid Yasuo have no other means of communicating their anger and leaving a mark on the larger world, each may at least affect the life of someone outside of his or her family. The differentiation between family and outsider remains



crucial to Kinuko and Yasuo, despite the lengths Kirino has gone to establish the demarcation as arbitrary, especially concerning Yoshiyuki, who is Kinuko's legal husband, and Midori, who is like a surrogate daughter to Yasuo.

*Sabiru kokoro* ends with Kinuko's acknowledgement that the distinction between family and work is complicated, but it is unclear how this knowledge shapes Kinuko's life. Yasuo does not have long to live; and, when he dies, Midori's fate is uncertain. Kinuko might be retained as a housekeeper in order to help care for Shigeiko; but, once Shigeiko dies, Kinuko will more than likely be asked to seek employment elsewhere, as the tattered bills she receives for her first month's salary indicate the Uchida household's relative lack of financial stability. It is also not clear what will happen to Umeko when she is left by herself in a huge house with no money. Who will take care of her when she is no longer able to take care of herself? The appeal of the familial relationships Kinuko develops with the members of the Uchida household resonates on an emotional level, but this relationship is dependent on Kinuko receiving a salary. If Kinuko loses her job, both the perfectly functioning Uchida household and Kinuko's goal of self-determination fall apart. Kirino thus ends *Sabiru kokoro* in a manner that challenges the economic division between work and family but also reinforces this division by calling the reader's attention to just how close all of the characters are to an inevitable unhappy end that results directly from the distinction that must be made between unpaid labor performed within the family and paid labor performed outside the family. The family is therefore just as much of an economic unit as it is a legal and cultural unit, and *Sabiru kokoro*

demonstrates that the economic components of the family are perhaps the most difficult for a housewife to escape.

In *Sabiru kokoro*, Kirino illustrates the problems inherent in the division between family and work when it comes to women's labor. The author also complicates this problem by showing that, even if such a division is arbitrary, it is still very real in terms of wages and employment. There are therefore no easy solutions to issues concerning the labor of housewives, housekeepers, and caregivers, as neither temporary paid employment nor the emotional bonds of female homosociality are a defense against economic precarity. Kirino's feminist project is not to suggest solutions, however, but rather to demonstrate that the legal construction and the economic functions of the family are difficult for women to escape altogether. As Iwata-Weickgenannt remarks concerning the similarly ambiguous ending of Kirino's novel *Metabola*, "Kirino makes clear that crude binaries such as 'center' and 'periphery' and 'exploiter' and 'exploited' are of little use when faced with the complexly interwoven and entangled power relationships of the world we live in today."<sup>76</sup> Although phallogentric misconceptions concerning *onna tengoku* are counterproductive to discussions of women's labor, the home in some sense does provide a refuge for people who must deal with economic and emotional precarity; and, as such, it is not easy for feminists to discard the concept of the family, especially since the construction of any given family is so fluid.

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<sup>76</sup> Iwata-Weickgenannt 154.

### **What's Love Got to Do with It: Marriage, Employment, and Japanese Law**

There is still a societal disconnect between the economic potential of the family and its legal reality in Japan. In *Lovesick Japan*, Mark West draws from a body of 2,700 court cases in order to examine a distinct perspective on marriage in Japan. Along with the caveat that the judges writing the court opinions associated with the cases are overwhelmingly male and predominantly conservative, West remarks that the discourses underlying these cases point to a clear divide in gender roles and gendered expectations regarding marriage.<sup>77</sup> For example, a court precedent established in 1952 holds that there is always an at-fault party responsible for the failure of the marriage (*yūseki haigūsha*), and that the responsible party cannot be granted a divorce without the consent of the "innocent" party. West identifies culpability as being almost synonymous with adultery. What this means is that, if the spouse having an affair wants to get a divorce, the court will not grant it without the consent of the other spouse, no matter what the conditions of the marriage or how abusive the non-culpable spouse may be. "The no-at-fault divorce rule might have been intended to protect women from financial abandonment. But it did nothing to protect women if the no-at-fault husband does not seek a divorce, as the ability to remain in a paper marriage helps wives very little."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, women are only protected by the law if the husband is declared by the court to be the party at fault; which, as West demonstrates, is far from always the case.

Because a couple must cohabit in order to remain legally married, the court's refusal to grant a divorce can be particularly severe when one of the spouses is clearly

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<sup>77</sup> West 9.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 197.

unfit to remain in a marriage. The mistreatment of women in particular is overlooked by the court, as Japanese women are regularly deemed to have too much time on their hands and therefore too much space to construct phantoms out of thin air. West quotes a judge in Nagoya as stating as part of a ruling passed down in 1991:

The housework done by housewives used to be quite difficult. But from the end of the 1950s to the 1960s, washing machines, vacuum cleaner, and electric rice cookers, the three so-called "sacred instruments," proliferated, and it is said that the housewife's job became easier. This free time gives women time to contemplate. A woman looks back on her history with her husband and their children, has regrets, and dreams of a world in which she is free.<sup>79</sup>

Late-life affairs and divorce proceedings instigated by women are apparently a result of housewives so spoiled by their tenure in an *onna tengoku* that they rail against the intrusion of their husbands, who have supported their existence financially. In contrast to the supposition of the lazy and avaricious wife, the majority of the financial burdens associated with divorce falls on the female spouses seeking to separate from their husbands. According to Tsunoda Yukiko, an attorney and activist, many women feel compelled to stay in loveless and abusive marriages because all of their financial assets, from their bank accounts to their houses, are registered under their husbands' names.<sup>80</sup> Divorce law and financial law thus render it difficult for women to leave marriages, especially if they are full-time housewives. The type of "freelance housewife" job that Kinuko pursues in order to imbue her life with a sense of meaning and fulfillment in *Sabiru kokoro* would make perfect sense in a free market that valued the labor contributions of domestic assistants, but the legally monolithic nature of the family in Japan makes such an arrangement difficult, thus relegating women's domestic labor to

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<sup>79</sup> West 195.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 179-80.

unpaid shadow work. Because housewives are so legally and economically dependent on their husbands, the *onna tengoku* they occupy is therefore extremely precarious, a situation that Kirino describes in heart-wrenching detail in *Sabiru kokoro*.

Article 14 of the postwar Japanese constitution promises that "all people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin."<sup>81</sup> The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare contains an Equal Employment, Children, and Families Bureau (*Koyō Kintō Jidō Katei Kyoku*), and the Japanese Prime Minister's Cabinet also contains a Gender Equality Bureau (*Naikakufu Danjo Kyōdō Sankaku Kyoku*), which was established in 2001. Furthermore, an Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*Danjo Koyō Kikai Kintō Hō*) was passed in 1985 and amended and strengthened in 1997. Nevertheless, the law has proved difficult to enforce,<sup>82</sup> and Japanese corporations have responded by reinforcing a two-track employment system that, although gender-neutral in theory, tended to push male hires into the managerial track while shunting female hires into the lower-paying and less secure clerical track.<sup>83</sup> As a demographic group, women were hired less frequently than men, and they also earned significantly lower salaries.<sup>84</sup> At the turn of the millennium, ninety percent of part-time workers were female,<sup>85</sup> which is troubling in that the Japanese Labor Standards Act (*Rōdō Kijun Hō*) allows a wage difference of eighty percent between full-time and part-time workers.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> An English translation of the Japanese Constitution can be found at the Prime Minister's Office website at: [http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html)

<sup>82</sup> Gelb 51.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 52.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 53.

<sup>85</sup> Kezuka, quoted Gelb 61.

<sup>86</sup> Gelb 62.

Despite legal support for working women, female workers in Japan still suffer from gendered employment practices and salary scales.<sup>87</sup>

In *The New Paradox for Japanese Women*, Tachibanaki Toshiaki presents and summarizes statistical data concerning women and employment in contemporary Japan. Tachibanaki notes that each successive decade since the end of the Pacific War has seen more women employed outside of the sphere of home and family, and attitudes towards working women have gradually become more accepting. For example, Tachibanaki states that, although "in 1979, roughly 70 percent of women supported the traditional view that the husband should be the breadwinner and that women's place is in the home," by 2004, "that figure had dropped to slightly over 40 percent," meaning that more than half of women support the idea of women working outside the home.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, even though there is greater societal tolerance for working women, the employment conditions of these women are unequal to those of their male counterparts. Specifically, since women as a demographic group still have less training and education than men, "there are few women in high-level jobs and many in work that involves simple routine tasks," such as clerical positions with lower salaries.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the majority of female workers (55.6 percent) are what Tachibanaki refers to as "nonregular" workers, a category that includes freelance workers, short-term contract workers, part-time workers, and temp workers; in short, the majority of working women occupy positions that are neither

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<sup>87</sup> As suggested by the plight of Kazue in Kirino's novel *Grotesque*, women hired in managerial positions after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law went into effect in 1986 also suffered from discrimination by their male colleagues who held the attitude that they were only able to attain their positions through affirmative action.

<sup>88</sup> Tachibanaki 256.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 257.

skilled nor stable.<sup>90</sup> Not only do these women lack job security and the guarantee of long-term employment, but they are also ineligible for many of the benefits enjoyed by regular workers, such as bonuses, promotions, employee benefits, and participation in social insurance programs. Tachibanaki cites "the desire of companies to save on labor costs" as a key factor in gendered employment practices, as nonregular workers are much cheaper to maintain and dispose of than regular workers.

As the above data makes clear, it is difficult for women not only to leave their families by suing for divorce but also to function economically without the support of a male relative. Kirino illustrates the stresses and anxiety engendered at the level of the individual in stories like *Sabiru kokoro* and longer novels such as *OUT*, which concerns the economic precarity of married women who work in part-time jobs in the margins of the service sector in order to make ends meet. Although the female characters of *OUT* band together and support one another in order to achieve immediate goals in a manner similar to the female characters in *Sabiru kokoro*, the battle they wage against the entrenched misogyny and sexist double standards of contemporary Japanese society is impossible to win; and, in the end, physical escape from Japan is the only viable option available to them. Kirino's work is thus not feminist in the sense that she is able to suggest solutions to the problems she describes or somehow change the society she lays bare before her reader, but her righteous feminist anger is powerful and palpable, and she never allows the reader to walk away from her stories with a sense of comfort and ease regarding the status quo.

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<sup>90</sup> Tachibanaki 231. In contrast, roughly 20 percent of male workers are nonregular workers.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Short Skirts and Superpowers: The Evolution of the Beautiful Fighting Girl

On February 9, 2011, the *New York Times* published an article titled "In Tokyo, a Crackdown on Sexual Images of Minors."<sup>91</sup> Although the "sexual images" in question come from a variety of media, such as adult films and role-playing video games, the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Minors (*Tōkyō-to seishōnen no kenzen naikusei ni kan suru jōrei*), or the "Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act," passed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly on December 15 of 2010 specifically targets manga featuring young female characters in what are deemed to be sexually compromising poses or situations. The journalist who penned the article, Hiroko Tabuchi, quotes Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō as saying of the manga in question that "these are for abnormal people, for perverts." The article sensationalizes the media that Ishihara hopes to censor as child pornography by emphasizing the young ages and sexual exploitation of its models without differentiating between young women who exist in the real world and those who exist solely on paper. It is only in the very last line of the article that a seventeen-year-old male manga reader is quoted as saying, "I don't even think about how old these girls are. It's a completely imaginary world, separate from real life."

The style of illustration targeted by the Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act is known as *bishōjo-kei*, or "*bishōjo* style." A *bishōjo* is a female character in a manga, anime, video game, or light novel that belongs to a genre generally regarded as targeted towards a male

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<sup>91</sup> Tabuchi. Hiroko Tabuchi, a graduate of London School of Economics and Political Science, has worked as a foreign correspondent covering social issues in Japan for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. She a member of the NYT team awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2013 for reporting on Apple's manufacturing practices in China, and her work focuses on social and economic issues in Asia.



audience, such as science fiction or adventure fantasy. Examples of such characters are Nausicaä (from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), Nadia (from *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*), or Ayanami Rei (from *Neon Genesis Evangelion*). *Bishōjo* are rooted firmly in fantasy, whether that fantasy is a post-apocalyptic wasteland or a halcyon year of high school. These characters need not be connected to an actual narrative, however, and can be depicted in original stand-alone artistic compositions, such as those printed on the postcards and pin-up posters enclosed in monthly manga magazines. These illustrated girls are often characterized as young and innocent; they are magical beings enmeshed in their respective fantasy worlds, and there is an *Alice in Wonderland* quality about them capable of evoking fantasies regarding childhood and, more specifically, girlhood.<sup>92</sup>

Problems in the interpretation and judgment of these images arise when young female characters demonstrate hints of sexuality. When combined with signifiers of youth and purity (such as a school uniform or angel wings), the sexuality betrayed by a coy grin or a short skirt clashes with cultural ideas of a feminine innocence that should be protected. Such sexualized images of young women are not just drawn by men, however. Exposed breasts and panties are also depicted in the work of female artists<sup>93</sup> who combine large eyes, ornate clothing, and angelic expressions with lush skin tones and compromising poses. Regardless of the extent or intensity of the sexualization, however, the fantasy element of these pieces

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<sup>92</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* is not without sexual connotations and has been read as an exploration of adolescent sexuality replete with Freudian symbolism. As an exemplar of the literary nonsense genre, however, the work is emblematic of an equation of between young women and fantasy worlds that has been capitalized on by storytellers, such as the directors of Disney Animation Productions.

<sup>93</sup> Two examples are Sakizo (<http://sakizo.jp/>) and Foo Midori (<http://www.geocities.jp/foomidori/>). Any art book collecting illustrations of *bishōjo*, such as the *Pixiv Girls Collection* anthology published annually by Pixiv (a Japanese social media site focusing on artwork), or the *Toranoana Chronicle* published biannually by Toranoana (an anime and manga goods retailer), will feature the work of female artists specializing in *bishōjo-kei* artwork that is virtually indistinguishable from that of their male peers.

remains strong, and the girls are generally more playful than pornographic as they smile happily to themselves or each other while going about their daily lives seemingly unaware of their subjection to an outwardly imposed sexualizing gaze.

Explicit illustrated pornography does exist in Japan, and it quite clearly packaged as pornography. This pornography is sold in venues such as specialty bookstores or separate sections of mainstream retail book sellers, and it is classified according to the imagined ages of its imaginary protagonists. Media featuring underage *bishōjo* in non-pornographic situations are not grouped with or sold alongside pornography, and one might argue that they belong to a different artistic space altogether. *Bishōjo* simply are not real. They are not real because they are illustrated, but they are also not real because they are the embodied representatives of pure fantasy. Their world is not the real world, and they serve as a gateway into the fantasy world they represent. People who draw and appreciate *bishōjo* do so partially because of the beautiful otherworld they channel and not merely because they might serve as fodder for onanistic inclinations. One might draw a parallel between the *bishōjo* style of illustration and the hyper-sexualized men and women on the covers of American fantasy novels, in which tight leather pants and clinging silk dresses are not so much signifiers of pornographic intent as they are emblems of a certain fantasy aesthetic reminiscent of the pulp covers painted by Frank Frazetta.<sup>94</sup>

The fundamental idea behind the aforementioned manga censorship law is that men are looking at women in a way that is degrading and psychologically unhealthy. A

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<sup>94</sup> Frazetta, who began his career as a comic artist and continued to illustrate covers for comic magazines throughout his life, is perhaps best known for his work with Edgar Rice Burroughs novels, such as the books in the *Tarzan* and *Barsoom* series, as well as his paintings depicting the world of Conan the Barbarian. A collection of the artist's work can be found at the website *Frank Frazetta Art*.

pornographic gaze is encouraged and exploited in many aspects of popular and commercial art, but one could also posit the existence of a "fantasy gaze," which is less concerned with the image itself than the story behind the image. Moreover, the sizable percentage of women creating and consuming *bishōjo* images and narratives complicates the idea of an all-powerful male gaze. One might argue that the women who enjoy media supposedly targeted at men have adopted an hermaphroditic gaze internalizing the male gaze and therefore identify with male characters and viewers when they look at sexualized images of women. As a counterargument against this interpretation, I would like to raise the possibility of a female gaze implicit in women portraying and looking at other women. By creating and appreciating sexualized images of teenage girls, for example, women can embrace and celebrate a sexuality that lies outside of virgin/mother/whore stereotypes. For women, then, the appeal of *bishōjo* is not merely the asexual appeal of the fantasy world they represent but also the self-reflexive appeal of being young, beautiful, magical, and sexually aware. The fictional *bishōjo* can also serve as an empowering role model for readers, especially when the character type is used by female artists as a site of contention concerning discourse on female agency and sexuality. In this chapter I will apply this concept of the female gaze to Takeuchi Naoko's *Sailor Moon* and CLAMP's *Magic Knight Rayearth*. I will argue that both manga recontextualize and reinterpret *bishōjo* character tropes common to illustrated and animated narratives of the 1990s and thus disrupt the cycle of narrative consumption and reproduction that drives mainstream media. Before I begin, however, I'd like to briefly outline the positions of three cultural theorists writing about *bishōjo* characters and patterns of narrative consumption among their fans.

### **Consuming *Bishōjo*, Consuming Narrative**

In 1989, Japanese pop culture ethnographer Ōtsuka Eiji wrote an essay called "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative." Ōtsuka's essay takes as an illustrative example Bikkuriman Chocolates, or, more specifically, the trading cards packaged with the chocolates. It was because of the trading cards that the chocolates were such a phenomenal hit with children around the time that Ōtsuka was writing, even though the superhero character "Bikkuriman" had no television or manga tie-in products. According to Ōtsuka, the secret to Bikkuriman's success was that, on the back of each trading card, there was a short paragraph of information about the character depicted on the front. If a child collected enough cards, he or she would gradually be able to piece together a larger story and gain a broader perspective on the Bikkuriman universe. Out of many small narratives, children were able to create a grand narrative. The point of Ōtsuka's discussion of Bikkuriman Chocolates is that "child consumers were attracted by this grand narrative, and tried to gain further access to it through the continued purchase of chocolates."<sup>95</sup> In other words, "what is consumed first and foremost, and that which first gives these individual commodities their very value, is the grand narrative or order that they hold in partial form and as their background."<sup>96</sup> Although the children who bought the Bikkuriman Chocolates were invested in the collection of cards, they were apparently not as concerned with individual cards as they were about the larger story, the mythology, and the worldview of the Bikkuriman universe – what Ōtsuka calls the "grand narrative." Ōtsuka argues that the consumption of anime functions in much the same way. Each episode of the anime franchise

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<sup>95</sup> Ōtsuka 106.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 107.

Mobile Suit Gundam, for example, is a small narrative. The story of each individual protagonist that plays out across the episodes is a small narrative as well. The diagrams and mechanical data included with the toy models of the robots may also be considered small narratives. As these small narratives are accumulated, however, they begin to form the contours of an entire world. Ōtsuka argues that it is this grand narrative that makes long-running franchises such as Gundam (and multimedia franchises such as Pokémon and Harry Potter) so popular and marketable.

According to Ōtsuka's model of narrative consumption, small narratives, while pleasing in and of themselves, also function as puzzle pieces that can be put together to form a larger narrative. Ōtsuka argues that, while the general viewing audience will only follow one or two strands of small narratives, what distinguishes otaku is their interest in the grand narrative. Otaku are characterized by their interest in gathering bits of information hidden in the background, putting these bits of information together, and creating their own small narratives based on their understanding of the grand narrative. Such a model of narrative consumption goes a long way towards explaining fan-made narrative products such as fan fiction and *dōjinshi* fan manga, since "if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative [...] they will then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands."<sup>97</sup> Therefore, otaku are otaku because they are invested in narrative consumption and reproduction at the level of the grand narrative.

In *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Azuma Hiroki proposes a different model of narrative consumption. The Japanese title of Azuma's cultural study, *Dōbutsuka suru*

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<sup>97</sup> Ōtsuka 109.

*posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai*, is revealing. The first word of this title refers to the concept of "animalization" proposed by Alexandre Kojève in *The Roots of Postmodern Politics*. This animalization involves the degradation of humans, or independent subjects capable of reasoning, directed action, and compassion, into animals, or mindless consumers who act on instinctual impulses such as hunger and the drive for greater comfort. It is Azuma's thesis that otaku and, by extension, the society that has spawned them are becoming increasingly animalized. Azuma describes the narrative and cultural consciousness characteristic of otaku through what he calls the database model of narrative consumption.

This database model stands in direct contrast to the model proposed by Ōtsuka, which he refers to as the "tree model" in his monograph *Monogatari shōhiron*, which in turn deals with concepts relating to grand narratives and their postmodern decline as expressed in Jean Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. According to Ōtsuka, each small narrative in a particular work functions as a gateway granting access to the grand narrative of that work, with a grand narrative being synonymous with the work's setting and worldview. To give a concrete example of how Ōtsuka's model interprets otaku narrative consumption, the character Ayanami Rei of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is adored by otaku because, for them, she represents the tragedy, epic scale, and political allusiveness of the entire television series. Ayanami Rei is not just a girl in a battle uniform; she is *Neon Genesis Evangelion* itself. To "consume" her is to emotionally insert oneself into the apocalyptic, man-versus-god atmosphere of the larger narrative.

Azuma directly contradicts this model of understanding symbols and narrative with his database theory. While Ōtsuka argues that the grand narratives of shows like *Evangelion*

are given weight by their relevance to nonfictional grand narratives (such the Pacific War and the postwar history of Japan), Azuma believes otaku narratives are almost completely removed from those of the real world. In the opening chapter of *Otaku*, he states, "In otaku culture ruled by narrative consumption, products have no independent value; they are judged by the quality of the database in the background."<sup>98</sup> Thus, although an otaku might be familiar with Ayanami Rei's age and bust size, be able to quote her dialog, and expound on the quality of various plastic models made in her likeness, he is not invested any larger worldview or grand narratives that may be encompassed by *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Instead, the otaku mines each episode of the television series for information to plug into a mental database that also contains information on similar shows. Because of the absence of the emotional pull of grand narratives, the otaku can substitute one element of his database for another. The light blue hair of a young female character such as Hoshino Ruri from *Martian Successor Nadesico* or Tsukishima Ruriko from *Droplet* instantly calls up references to the light blue hair of Ayanami Rei. Furthermore, any sexual attraction and personal attachment the viewer might have felt for Ayanami Rei is seamlessly transferred to the new character, thus allowing shortcuts in characterization. For otaku, the appeal of any given character lies in the database of associations connected to the character, not in the story that contains the character, and grand narratives are nothing compared to the "animalistic" appeal of a character's defining physical characteristics. Tropes can therefore be transferred from one story and character to another, along with an otaku's emotional investment.

Azuma claims that, "Compared with the 1980s otaku [on whom Ōtsuka bases his model], those of the 1990s generally adhered to the data and facts of the fictional worlds and

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<sup>98</sup> Azuma 33.

were altogether unconcerned with a meaning and message that might have been communicated."<sup>99</sup> The otaku of the 1990s thus consumed only fragments, or small narratives. These fragments, which could comfortably fit within the small square boxes of a database, could then be easily cross-referenced with other fragments. Because of the ease of referencing these fragments, distinctions between an original and its copies (either through officially licensed spin-off works or fan works) disintegrated. According to Azuma, there was no longer any need to connect these fragments back to the grand narratives of either the original work or the real world. An otaku could float unanchored through the database he created through his consumption of undifferentiated narratives. For otaku, stories don't matter – it's all about the cute female characters.

Azuma therefore views the otaku fascination with animated girls as deeply pathological. Otaku have cut the cord tethering them to reality, thus severing the portion of the narrative feedback loop that connects fictional stories back to the real world. If, for example, the themes of war and masculine infantilization in a series like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are not associated with the historical and emotional weight of conflicts such as the Pacific War, then they become nothing more than a backdrop for the sexual titillation provided by provocatively clad female characters. For Azuma, desire for fictional characters cannot exist on the same psychological plane as an historically grounded awareness of the real world, and the otaku's preference for historically and politically disembodied *bishōjo* has caused him to withdraw into his own world of erotic fantasy and the pointless acquisition of useless trivia.

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<sup>99</sup> Azuma 36.



Both Ōtsuka and Azuma stress the appeal of the acquisition of narrative trivia and the intense emotional investment in fictional narratives on the part of otaku. Ōtsuka argues that otaku collect the various paraphernalia related to their favorite media properties while reading and rereading the original texts in order to gain a better understanding of the fictional world in which the story takes place. Once in possession of an adequate level of possession of this worldview, otaku will then create their own spinoff stories, whether privately in their heads or semi-publicly through online message boards and *dōjinshi* limited run print publications. Fictional grand narratives thus render a media franchise more marketable, collectible, and ultimately more profitable. Azuma, on the other hand, denies the existence of grand narratives, fictional or otherwise, in the minds of otaku. For otaku, data collection is not about delving deeper into grand narratives; instead, it revolves around the base animalistic pleasure of acquisition, which is rendered all the more pleasurable when combined with the polymorphously perverse element of fictional women. According to both theories of narrative consumption, the otaku is not capable of independent action; he may only reproduce the narratives he consumes. Even if he is capable of selecting specific elements from his own personal database to combine into new stories, the sum narrative total is still the same.

In this way, narrative tropes that have long since become stereotypes are not only accepted by an otaku audience but welcomed and celebrated. As a result, an otaku fetish has developed for the *bishōjo*, a recurring character in anime and manga since at least the mid-seventies.<sup>100</sup> In his groundbreaking study *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, psychologist and cultural

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<sup>100</sup> The character Mori Yuki, the only female member of the cast of the 1974 animated series *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*), is often cited by Japanese media historians and theorists such as

theorist Saitō Tamaki analyses the figure of the animated and illustrated beautiful fighting girl in order to shed light on otaku sexuality. In his preface to the book, Saitō brings up arguments concerning "the Japanese and their so-called Lolita complex" and then quickly dismisses such arguments as intellectual laziness along the lines of "the miserable business of repetitive theorizing about the uniqueness of the Japanese."<sup>101</sup> Saitō later lists several common assumptions regarding otaku, such as the misconception that "otaku are immature human beings who have grown up without being able to let go of infantile transitional objects such as anime and monsters."<sup>102</sup> Rejecting such notions of immaturity and arrested psychological development, Saitō argues that otaku do not privilege fiction over reality but rather possess a unique capacity to accept fictional worlds as a separate but equal form of reality. Otaku, states Saitō, "are uninterested in setting fiction and reality up against each other. If anything they are able to find reality (*riariti*) equally in both fiction and reality (*genjutsu*)."<sup>103</sup> Saitō thus differentiates between the reality of the phenomenal world and the perceived reality of the fictional narrative by referring to the former by the Japanese world for "reality," *genjitsu*, and to the latter by the English world, *riariti*. For the otaku who lives in both *genjitsu* and *riariti*, "real (*riaru*) fictions do not necessarily require the security of reality (*genjitsu*). There is absolutely no need in this space for fiction to imitate reality. Fiction is able to clear a space around itself for its own reality (*riariti kūkan*)."<sup>104</sup>

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Azuma and Saitō as one of the most popular *bishōjo* characters, although American manga scholars such as Frederick Schodt and Jason Thompson generally consider the prototype of the *bishōjo* to be the heroine of Tezuka Osamu's *Princess Knight* (*Ribon no kishi*) manga, which completed its original run in 1956.

<sup>101</sup> Saitō 6, 7.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 24.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 156.

Saitō believes that this environment of *riariti* is structurally created by three main factors: atemporality, multiple personality space, and high context. By "atemporality," Saitō means that anime and manga downplay the progression of chronological time – characters do not age or do not act in an age-appropriate manner. By "multiple personality space," Saitō means that various aspects of one personality (presumably that of the artist or director) are often distributed across multiple characters in the same anime or manga. By "high context," Saitō seems to mean that a narrative can be transferred from one medium to another (i.e., from manga to anime) and that the level of visual representation in these narratives is highly stylized and symbolic. Such abbreviations in time, characterization, and visual exposition place anime and manga narratives deeper into the realm of the symbolic. This in turn allows viewers and readers to enter the narratives more fully.

The key to making this fictional world "real" is desire. "For the world to be real (*riaru*)," Saitō explains, "it must be sufficiently electrified by desire. A world not given depth by desire, no matter how exactly it is drawn, will always be flat and impersonal, like a backdrop in the theater. But once that world takes on a sexual charge, it will attain a level of reality (*riariti*) no matter how shoddily it is drawn."<sup>105</sup> Because the stylization of anime and manga is so adept at creating shared codes of imagery, elements of polymorphous perversity began to be introduced into the two mediums. According to Saitō, such sexual objects began to explode across illustrated and animated narratives beginning in the early eighties. The goal of the otaku creators and consumers was "an autonomous object of desire" that did not belong to any reality outside of anime and manga.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, anime characters were never

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<sup>105</sup> Saitō 162.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 151.

supposed to stand in for real women – for otaku, their appeal is their very fictionality. Saitō's ultimate argument, however, is that the attachment of an adult male to the figure of the beautiful fighting girl is in no way psychologically unhealthy, and that an immersion in the fictional *riatriti* of *bishōjo* narratives is not an escape from the real world, but rather an supplement and alternative to conventional sexual expression that can easily exist alongside *genjitsu*.

The primary weakness of Saitō's argument, however, is that it fails to take real women into account. Although many *bishōjo* are drawn and animated by men and situated in stories marketed to appeal to a primarily male audience, they undoubtedly have female fans as well. Moreover, men are not the only people who draw *bishōjo* characters, and manga for boys and men are not the only narratives in which such characters appear. In fact, the most famous and high-profile *bishōjo* of the past two decades was created by a woman for an audience of teenage girls. This *bishōjo* is Sailor Moon, and she is the star of her own manga, *Sentō bishōjo* ("fighting *bishōjo*") *Sailor Moon*. Despite Saitō's insistence that *bishōjo* exist in their own reality and have nothing to do with real flesh-and-blood women, female fans of the *bishōjo* heroines of *Sailor Moon* have claimed that these characters have exerted an overwhelmingly positive influence on their perceptions of other female characters and of themselves as young women.

### **Fighting for Love and Justice: The Female Fans of *Sailor Moon***

To celebrate the rerelease of the original *Sailor Moon* manga in English translation by Kodansha International, a Tumblr-hosted blog by the name of "Fighting Evil By Moonlight,"<sup>107</sup> which specializes in commentary on magical girl (*mahō shōjo*) anime, began its tribute to the work with these comments on its international reception:

*Sailor Moon* is not only the magical girl genre's most seminal work; its influence reaches to the remotest genres and trends in anime fandom. Anyone involved with anime – hentai-hoarding otaku, overseas translators/marketers, shoujo artists, seinen artists, everyone – has *Sailor Moon* to thank for the medium being what it is today. It is hard to overstate the way that this one series revolutionized anime and manga.<sup>108</sup>

Although artist Takeuchi Naoko did not create the "magical girl" genre, the *Sailor Moon* series, collected in eighteen volumes over the course of the five year span between 1992 and 1997, was extremely influential in the development of the proliferation of magical girl stories, from *Cardcaptor Sakura* to *Pretty Cure* to *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, since it first appeared in print. This is in part due to the efforts of its editors at *Nakayoshi* magazine, who had already planned a multimedia marketing campaign incorporating an animated series and accompanying merchandise. The true secret to the success of *Sailor Moon*, however, lay in the strength of its appealing and engaging character designs.

As has been noted elsewhere,<sup>109</sup> the five "Sailor Scouts" (*sērā senshi*) were designed according to the conventions of the "super fighting squad" (*sūpā sentai*) genre of live-action children's television, which generally feature a five-person team of color-coded warriors, each with his or her own special power and guardian spirit. Each of the five core Sailor

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<sup>107</sup> This title is taken from the opening line of the English-language theme song of the North American release of the first season of the *Sailor Moon* animated series.

<sup>108</sup> <http://henshins.tumblr.com/post/10180196614/i-dont-write-much-about-sailor-moon-1991-for>

<sup>109</sup> Allison (2006) 128, for example.

Scouts is similarly associated with her own color and celestial body. Sailor Mars, for example, is clothed in a uniform with red and purple accents and is able to attack using her fire-based magical powers. The personalities of the five girls are similarly encoded. Sailor Mars has a fiery temper to match her pyroclastic fighting style; and, given the association of fire with ritual purification, she also works as a *miko* at her family's Shinto shrine when she's not attending classes or fighting evil.

Because the personalities of the Sailor Scouts were designed to be as easily identifiable as their color-coded uniforms, they tend to fall into predictable patterns. Sailor Mercury, for example, is "the girl with glasses" (*meganekko*), whose defining characteristics are her gentle speech, intelligence, and propensity to respond to situations with slightly off-kilter remarks. Sailor Venus is a "well brought-up young lady" (*ojōsan*), who is slender, beautiful, elegant, articulate, and used to getting her way. Tall, athletic, and earnest Sailor Jupiter could be the heroine of any number of sports manga for girls, while Sailor Moon herself is the archetypal heroine of the genre of *shōjo* romance that fills the pages of *Nakayoshi* and its spinoff magazines.<sup>110</sup> Although her heart is in the right place, she is scatterbrained and ditzy, often running late to school and forgetting her homework (*Figure 1*). She would rather play video games than study, and her two primary concerns seem to be desserts and romance. Once she transforms into her Sailor Scout alter ego, however, Sailor Moon ceases to be the stereotypical boy-crazy heroine of a *shōjo* romance and instead becomes the iconic embodiment of the *bishōjo*. She is strong, competent, and a good leader.

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<sup>110</sup> Such as *Bessatsu Friend*, *Nakayoshi Lovely*, and *Run-Run*, in which Takeuchi Naoko serialized the manga that would become the prequel to *Sailor Moon*, *Codename Sailor V*. The spinoff magazines are used by their parent company, Kōdansha, to develop new talent and simultaneously diversify and saturate the market for *shōjo* comics.

She will sacrifice herself for her team and always achieves strategic insight into the motivations of her enemies. Her magical power and her ability to win every battle stem from her innocent spirit and her purity of heart, which makes her heir to the long line *bishōjo* characters appearing in narratives targeted at a male audience, such as the titular heroine of Miyazaki Hayao's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.<sup>111</sup>

Many North American readers of the *Sailor Moon* manga have found the work to contain themes of female empowerment expressed through its cast of mainly female characters, its sympathetic male hero who acknowledges the strength of the female warriors, and its narrative focus on the bonds between women. An eighteen-year-old blogger on Livejournal who writes feminist commentary on popular culture under the name "Comic Book Girl" has expressed her admiration of *Sailor Moon* by stating that, not only did it serve as her induction into the world of manga and comic book fandom, but it also convinced her that, even though she was playing in a cultural realm dominated by men, it was okay to be a girl:

[*Sailor Moon*] is a world where femininity is not something to be ashamed of, it's the source of POWER. The girls don't use their pretty clothes and jewels and compacts as playthings to impress men – these things are all weapons against evil, and powerful ones. They declare themselves pretty, needing approval from no one. Our hero possesses all the typical "chick" attributes – emotional, tearful, forgiving, loving, nurturing – and she uses these attributes to triumph and kick ass. She burns monsters alive with the purity of her love, sends out supersonic waves that shake the villains down when she bursts into tears, and her friendship and forgiveness is the most effective superpower one could ask for. The "girly" emotions and affectations are not something to be ashamed of or suppressed, but the source of the power these girls wield. They don't have to imitate guy heroes at all or act "masculine" to be taken seriously – girliness is just as powerful.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Saitō lists a number of examples of such *bishōjo* in his fifth chapter, "A Genealogy of the Beautiful Fighting Girl."

<sup>112</sup> Comic Book Girl.

For a young female reader in the mid-to-late nineties, *Sailor Moon* and her fellow Sailor Scouts were positive feminist role models. In a wasteland of Disney princesses concerned only for their fathers and boyfriends, the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime series were a rare oasis of female characters not defined by their attachment to men or involvement in romance. Even after the television series was taken off the air and the out-of-print manga volumes became almost impossible to find, knowledge of the series passed from fan to fan. As the internet became from freely accessible to high school and college students, unofficial "fansubs" and "scanlations"<sup>113</sup> proliferated, and *Sailor Moon* achieved almost mythical quality in the annals of North American and European anime fandom.

Although the fandom reception of *Sailor Moon* was generally positive,<sup>114</sup> North American academic critics found the franchise troubling. Susan Napier, for instance, observed that the Sailor Scouts were somewhat "lacking in psychological depth," and claimed that, "to an adult reader/viewer the girls' lack of appreciation for their marvelous powers can be frustrating," which suggests "a loss of interior complexity" on the part of female characters who are otherwise more active and dynamic.<sup>115</sup> Napier points out that young female characters representing "wish fulfilling fantasies of empowerment," such as the female protagonists of *Vampire Princess Miyu* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, either "lack any dark side which might make [their] personalities more interesting to older readers"

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<sup>113</sup> A "fansub" is a pirated Japanese-language video subtitled by a non-professional volunteer team of translators. Fansubs are distributed through unsearchable online torrenting sites whose addresses are passed from fan to fan at events like college anime club meetings. A "scanlation" is a scan of a Japanese manga which is translated, edited, and lettered by a group of fans. Before lost-cost digital manga became widely available on e-readers like the iPad and the Kindle, scanlations were hosted by publically searchable sites such as One Manga and Manga Fox.

<sup>114</sup> Although Saitō, in his chapter detailing responses to his email surveys of Western anime fandom, cites male anime fans as ridiculing *Sailor Moon* for being childish, formulaic, and boring.

<sup>115</sup> Napier (1998) 103, 104.



or are caught in a double bind in which their powers are dangerous to both themselves and others.<sup>116</sup> In fact, female characters who are too powerful or who do possess psychological complexity are often cast as the evil villains whom the *shōjo* heroines must battle and defeat. Since the magical powers of the *bishōjo* stem from her innocence, purity, and unwillingness to use her abilities for personal gain, she is thus prevented from entering the realm of adult maturity if she wishes to remain one of the good guys. Even if a girl is omnipotent, she must still know her place and behave accordingly.

Kotani Mari thus understands the concept of *bishōjo* as belonging to "'the female culture' imagined by patriarchal society."<sup>117</sup> In her essay "Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies in Japanese Women's Science Fiction," Kotani argues that it is difficult to find feminist agendas in contemporary Japanese science fiction. Male writers often characterize the feminine sphere as an abject other by rendering it as either subhuman or uncannily superhuman. Female writers of science fiction, on the other hand, "tend to focus on vivid mother-daughter conflicts," with the mother being as monstrous as anything taken from male-authored narratives of combat and violence.<sup>118</sup> Although the work of writers such as Hikawa Reiko and Matsuo Yumi reflect an expanded range of social roles for women, Kotani still sees an emphasis on the role of woman as mother in the science fiction of female writers in the seventies and eighties. For these writers, motherhood provides possibilities for the exploration of shared homosocial experience, but Kotani contends that, as empowering as female homosociality can be, the focus on motherhood still confines an understanding of femininity within the limits of patriarchal expectations. By the nineties, *shōjo*-hood had

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<sup>116</sup> Napier (1998) 99.

<sup>117</sup> Kotani (2007) 54.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 48.

joined motherhood as a discursive space for exploring female identity, but Kotani finds the *shōjo* culture represented by writers and artists such as Arai Mokoto and Hagio Moto as confining as the literary culture of motherhood. The very concept of *shōjo* is defined through patriarchal constructs such as female virginity and the inevitability of heterosexual marriage; and, as a result of its patriarchal origins, the concept of *shōjo* is often connected to the trope of the monstrous feminine common in male-authored science fiction, even in the work of female writers. In manga especially, Kotani argues, the recurring conflict between older and younger often renders the older woman, who is sexually experienced but not sexually available, as monstrous. Meanwhile, the younger woman, who is sexually inexperienced, matures from an innocent *shōjo* who needs to be protected by a father figure into a more mature *shōjo* on the cusp of sexual availability. If a *shōjo* grows too powerful, however, and if her magical or psychic powers are too obviously "a conduit for anger and oppressed female sexuality [...] the more she is hunted" as a monstrous abnormality.<sup>119</sup> Even in the most radical of science fiction narratives in literature and manga, then, the two most dominant roles, the mother and the *shōjo*, are still governed by their relation to male sexuality.

Anne Allison views the *bishōjo* of *Sailor Moon* as conforming to patriarchal expressions on a visual level as well. Unlike the *sūpā sentai* teams on which they are based, "who don similar unisex uniforms when morphed [into superheroes], girl heroes tend to strip down in the course of empowerment, becoming more, rather than less, identified by their flesh."<sup>120</sup> Allison also references the long legs and miniskirts of the transformed warriors when she mentions that, among certain circles of fandom, *Sailor Moon* "is also read as a sex

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<sup>119</sup> Kotani (2007) 58.

<sup>120</sup> Allison (2006) 129.

symbol – one that feeds and is fed by a general trend in Japan toward the infantilization of sex objects."<sup>121</sup> Indeed, the sailor costumes of the original manga (*Figure 2*) have been transmogrified into fetish fuel (*Figure 3*) for male fans, who have portrayed the Sailor Scouts in every sexual situation imaginable in *dōjinshi* and on online image boards such as Futaba Channel.<sup>122</sup>

Shallow characterization and short skirts alone do not make a work inherently sexist, however. As demonstrated above, female fans<sup>123</sup> of the series found the costumes of its heroines an appealing and empowering symbol of youthful femininity. Furthermore, as both the manga and the anime series progress past the first plot arc, Sailor Moon and her four friends are allowed to develop their individual talents, personalities, and bonds between each other. An openly lesbian couple joins the team in the form of Sailor Neptune and Sailor Uranus, and a transgendered trio of celestial warriors known as the Sailor Starlights aid Sailor Moon during her final battles. Non-normative sexual identities abound in *Sailor Moon*, as demonstrated by the loving and affectionate gay couple who serve as generals in an evil army, as well as supporting characters who fall in love across species boundaries. Although such relationships were non-normative in the Japan of the nineties, both the anime and the manga versions of *Sailor Moon* treat these relationships and the characters involved in them in a naturalized manner. In this way, Takeuchi Naoko, managed to subvert the conventions of the *shōjo* manga that runs in *Nakayoshi*, which features heteronormative high school

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<sup>121</sup> Allison (2006) 133.

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.2chan.net/>

<sup>123</sup> And more than a few male fans as well - veteran *shōjo* manga translator Matt Thorn calls the series a "miraculous asset" to the development of a manga readership in North America (Thorn 2011).

romance, as well as the conventions of *bishōjo* fantasy stories, which tends to focus a single female character with no strong relationships to other women.

*Sailor Moon* thus challenges Azuma's "database model" of narrative consumption while severely problematizing Saitō's understanding of the appeal of *bishōjo* characters. Although fans of the series continue to create fan works and collect all manner of merchandise, *Sailor Moon* conforms to the conventions of genre only to later turn them upside down and does not allow its fans to become comfortable in a cocoon of recycled narrative and character tropes. Also, although various fanworks have demonstrated that male fans (and more than a few female fans) have been sexually titillated by the long legs and short skirts of the Sailor Scouts, fans of both sexes have engaged with the work and transformed its characters from simple objects of polymorphous perversion on Saitō's plane of *riariti* to role models for fans and creators on both sides of the Pacific. As Brigid Alverson, a professional editor of Japanese and American graphic novels writes on the cultural and artistic influence of the series, "Today, there are more female comics creators, working in more different styles, than ever before, and many of those creators got their start reading manga - and drawing their own. *Sailor Moon* not only saved the world, it seems, she created a new one."<sup>124</sup>

For many of these new creators, however, the anxiety of influence generated by *Sailor Moon* was a heavy burden to bear. Although *Sailor Moon* overturned the tropes of *shōjo* romance and *bishōjo* fantasy, it popularized the tropes of the *mahō shōjo* genre. In the wake of a truly transformative work like *Sailor Moon*, the effects of Azuma's database model went into overdrive as merchandise-hoarding otaku, inspired female artists, and anime studio

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<sup>124</sup> Alverson.

executives started mixing and matching the elements of *Sailor Moon* and the various magical girl titles that had preceded it. Derivative manga, such as Yazawa Nao's *Wedding Peach* and Tanemura Arina's *Kamikaze Kaitō Jeanne*, sprang up immediately, while popular anime franchises like *Tenchi Muyō* quickly developed magical girl spin-off series. Most of these new magical girl series merely regurgitated different aspects of *Sailor Moon* in an endlessly looping cycle of character tropes and plot devices. Thankfully, *Magic Knight Rayearth*, one of the very few magical girl series from this period to survive without ever going out of print in Japan or North America, effectively broke the cycle of narrative consumption and reproduction, both for its creators and for its audience.

### **It Can't End Like This: Breaking the *Bishōjo* Mold in *Magic Knight Rayearth***

The serialized fantasy manga *Magic Knight Rayearth* (Figure 4) ran in *Nakakyoshi* from November 1993 to February 1995. In order to capitalize on the success of the magical girl series *Sailor Moon*, the magazine's editors hired the fledgling creative team CLAMP, whose debut series *RG Veda* was enjoying a successful run in a monthly Shinshokan publication called *Wings*, which also targeted an audience of teenage girls.<sup>125</sup> Like *Sailor Moon*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* is a *shōjo* manga featuring many conventions of the magical girl genre. Its three heroines are garbed in fantastic school uniforms that undergo a series of transformations as the girls become more powerful. Also, like *Sailor Moon* and her friends, the heroines of *Magic Knight Rayearth* are able to attack their enemies and heal their injuries

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<sup>125</sup> For information on CLAMP's debut, see *All About CLAMP* 205, 219. Darkhorse Comics editor Carl Horn's essay "Swords and Sorcery - Shojo Style" has more information on how CLAMP was scouted by Kōdansha editor Irie Yoshio, who also recruited Takeuchi Naoko into the pages of *Nakayoshi*.

with flashy elemental magic spells. The work draws clear influences from other genres as well, such as *mecha* (giant robot) action and fantasy adventure. Over the course of their adventures in the fantasy world of Cephiro, the three girls must revive three giant robots called *mashin*, which will aid them in their final battle against the *mashin* of their enemies. The sword-and-sorcery elements of the title seem to be borrowed directly from *shōnen* adventure series such as *Saint Seiya* and *The Slayers*, and the manner in which the weapons, armor, and magic of the three heroines "level up" (in power) through the accumulation of battle experience is drawn from role-playing video games such as *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*. Although *Magic Knight Rayearth* seems to have been shaped from a combination of elements drawn from genres targeted at boys,<sup>126</sup> its ornate artistic style and narrative focus on the friendship of three adolescent girls places the work firmly in the realm of *shōjo* manga.

The character tropes represented by the three heroines of the series also resonate with the traditions of *shōjo* manga. Hikaru, the leader of the team of fourteen-year-old warriors, is characterized as pure-hearted and innocent. She never hesitates to help her friends despite the danger to herself, and she trusts others implicitly. No matter what the perilous circumstances the girls find themselves in, Hikaru's hope, trust, and naivety are unflinchingly portrayed in a positive light, just as similar qualities are in *Sailor Moon*. Umi, a long-haired beauty, is an *ojōsan* from a rich family. As such, she is used to getting her way and more willing to question her circumstances and the motivations of others. Instead of being portrayed as

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<sup>126</sup> At least, such genres tended to be targeted at boys before the mid-nineties. Due to the widespread popularity of *bishōjo* properties like *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth* among a young female audience, however, such genres came to be marketed towards girls as well. This demographic marketing trend can be seen in the pervasiveness of the androgynous and large-eyed *shōjo* art style, the proliferation of attractive male characters, and an increase in prominent female characters in the anime, manga, video games, and light novels of the late nineties.

experienced and savvy, however, Umi's skepticism comes off as foolish and bratty; she endangers her two friends and must be gently put back into line by Hikaru's emotional generosity. Fū is the *meganekko* of the group. As such, she is demure in her interactions with other characters and speaks in an unusually formal and polite manner. Fū is enrolled in a prestigious middle school in Tokyo, and the other characters comment on how intelligent she is. Although Fū does indeed manage to solve many of the riddles the three girls encounter in Cephiro, her common sense and deductive skills are no match for the pure heart and magical intuition of Hikaru. Like *Sailor Moon*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* valorizes girlish innocence, trust, and emotional openness. All obstacles may be overcome by the power of the friendship between a small team of teenage warriors, whose battle prowess derives not from training or innate skill but rather from the purity of their hearts.

Hikari, Umi, and Fū are summoned from Tokyo to the fantasy world of Cephiro by a fellow *shōjo*, Princess Emeraude. The opening page of the manga presents the reader with a single glowing flower suspended in space. At the heart of this flower is a young girl with long, flowing robes and hair. The following page reveals that she is crying. "Save us" (*tasukete*) are her first words; and, as she summons the Magic Knights, a beam of light emerges from an enormous glowing jewel that ornaments the circlet she wears. In a dramatic two-page spread (*Figure 5*), the girl looks directly at the reader, still entreating someone to "save us." This girl is Princess Emeraude, the "Pillar" (*hashira*) of Cephiro who supports the world with the strength of her will. In Cephiro, one is able to magically transform the world according to the power of one's will. Emeraude, who possesses the strongest will in Cephiro, maintains peace and stability through her prayers. Unfortunately, since she has become the

captive of her high priest, an imposing man in black armor named Zagato, Emeraude is no longer able to act as the pillar of Cephiro, and the world is crumbling. She thus summons the three Magic Knights to save her and, by extension, Cephiro.

Princess Emeraude is a quintessential *shōjo*. She is delicate, fragile, and beautiful, just like the flower in which she is imprisoned. She is gentle and kind, yet possesses a great strength of will. Her undulating robes and hair associate her with water, and it is suggested that she is imprisoned beneath the sea. Like water (which is often associated with femininity in anime and manga), Emeraude is outwardly weak and attempts to exert her will through nonviolent methods. Her wide eyes, which are often brimming with tears, reflect the open and unguarded state of her interior world, and she innocently trusts the Magic Knights while still attempting to see the goodness within the man who has supposedly imprisoned her. Princess Emeraude is similar in both appearance and disposition to *Sailor Moon's* Princess Serenity (*Figure 6*), who also embodies the *shōjo* ideal of gentle compassion.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the childlike Princess Serenity is her arch-nemesis, Queen Beryl. While Princess Serenity rules passively, inspiring her subjects with her compassion and virtue, Queen Beryl is hungry for power and has wrested control over Princess Serenity's Moon Kingdom through political machinations, deceit, and powerful magic. By the opening of *Sailor Moon*, Beryl has focused her attentions on the neighboring planet of Earth, where she sends her generals to subdue the populace and gather energy that she will use to awake an even greater source of magical power. The first time the reader sees Queen Beryl in the second chapter of the *Sailor Moon* manga (*Figure 7*), she is in her audience chamber disciplining the general who had previously been defeated by Sailor Moon.



Unlike Sailor Moon, who is later revealed to be a reincarnation of Princess Serenity, Queen Beryl is in no way girlish. She is a mature woman, and her full-bodied figure is wrapped in a seductively alluring dress. In either hand she wields a phallic symbol of power, and her male general bows before her. In direct contrast to the enormous eyes of Sailor Moon and her teammates, Queen Beryl's eyes are narrow and shaded. It is Queen Beryl's lack of innocence that marks her as evil just as much as her adult sexuality and aggressive wielding of political and military power. The value systems represented by Queen Beryl and Sailor Moon cannot exist in the same universe; and, in the *shōjo* fantasy of *Sailor Moon*, the universe belongs to the woman with unguarded eyes and a pure heart.

In the last chapter of *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, Saitō Tamaki explains that "subcultural forms [...] seduce and bewitch us with their uncompromising superficiality. They may not be able to portray 'complex personalities,' but they certainly do produce 'fascinating types.' The beautiful fighting girl, of course, is none other than one of those types."<sup>127</sup> Another primary type is the demonic older woman, the shadow cast by the unrelenting purity of the *bishōjo*. As a psychoanalyst, Saitō identifies this character type as the phallic mother, an expression "used to describe a woman who behaves authoritatively. The phallic mother symbolizes a kind of omnipotence and perfection."<sup>128</sup> Words like "omnipotence" and "perfection" just as easily describe *bishōjo* characters such as Sailor Moon; but, in the realm of *shōjo* manga, these qualities become signifiers of danger and villainy when applied to adult women. The concept of "phallic" is of course threatening, but so too is the concept of "mother." In her discussion of *shōjo* horror manga, Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase notes a clear trend concerning

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<sup>127</sup> Saitō 146.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 159.

the abjection of the mother, especially through the narrative eyes of daughters, who "have seen the struggle of their mothers and the tragedy that they endured in patriarchal domesticity."<sup>129</sup> For a teenage female audience, an adult woman is both a frightening and pathetic creature. Her adult body is useless in the heterosexual economy of desire, her anger and frustration can change nothing, and any power she wields is unreliable and often misdirected. For such a woman, who has lost both her innocence and emotional clarity, "phallic" power is a dangerous thing that dooms her to the almost certain status of villainhood.

The three heroines of *Magic Knight Rayearth* must fight two such women in order to save Cephiro. The first of these women, Alcyone (*Figure 8*), is a twisted perversion of Princess Emeraude. Like Emeraude, Alcyone is associated with water, and the reader first sees her emerging from under a waterfall. Her long hair and cape cascade around her body as Emeraude's do. Alcyone has a large circular jewel ornamenting her forehead as Emeraude does; and, like Emeraude, she possesses a strong will and is skilled in the use of magic. Unlike Emeraude, however, Alcyone is evil and must be defeated by the Magic Knights. The primary difference between Alcyone and Emeraude is that, while Emeraude is portrayed as an innocent child, Alcyone radiates adult sexuality, which is apparent in her revealing costume and condescending flirtation. Alcyone attacks the Magic Knights on the orders of Zagato; and, after the Magic Knights vanquish her, they learn that she has done everything from developing her power to aiding the downfall of Cephiro because she is in love with him. Alcyone, a sexually and emotionally mature woman, is thus characterized as evil simply because she is in love with a man despite the fact that she is no longer an innocent and

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<sup>129</sup> Dollase (2010) 65.

virginal *shōjo*. The long, jewel-tipped staff that Alcyone carries and the ornamentation on her armor mark the character as a phallic mother, or a powerful woman who is ultimately rendered pathetic because of her inability to successfully wield her power and attract the attention of the man she desires.

In the final pages of *Magic Knight Rayearth*, Hikau, Umi, and Fū must fight Emeraude herself, for Emeraude is also in love with Zagato. Because she has fallen in love, Emeraude's purity of heart and strength of will are compromised, and she can no longer act as the Pillar of Cephiro. Since no one in Cephiro can kill her, and since she cannot kill herself, she has imprisoned herself and summoned the Magic Knights so that they may save Cephiro by destroying her and thereby releasing her from her responsibilities, for it is only with her death that a new Pillar can support Cephiro. By falling in love with a man, Emeraude has renounced her sexually untainted *shōjo* status. When the Magic Knights finally find her, the princess no longer appears as a child but instead displays the body of an adult woman (*Figure 9*). Emeraude's adult body represents both her personal selfishness as expressed by her wish to devote herself just as much to her personal desires as to the welfare of the wider world and her willingness to use her immense power in order to achieve her "selfish" goals. The two-page spread in which the reader first encounters Emeraude as an adult mirrors the scene in which Emeraude first appears as a child. Emeraude still floats in a watery space, and she completes her first phrase, "Please save us" with the target of her plea, "Magic Knights." Instead of appearing metaphorically as a flower, however, Emeraude's full body is displayed, and her white robes are encased in black armor. Emeraude has thus been transformed into a phallic mother like Queen Beryl and Alcyone, and the tears in her eyes represent her anger,

an impure emotion that is ineffectual against the combined powers of the Magic Knights, who are doomed to succeed in carrying out their mission.

The demonic phallic mother is thus defeated by the pure-hearted *bishōjo*, an outcome that would never be in doubt to a genre-savvy reader. In *Magic Knight Rayearth*, however, a happy ending is not forthcoming. Hikaru, Umi, and Fū are shocked by what they have done, and the manga ends abruptly with their realization. In the closing pages of the story, Princess Emeraude dissolves into light, and the three Magic Knight are suddenly back in Tokyo, crying in each other's arms. The manga closes with Hikaru screaming, "It can't end like this!" (*Figure 10*), and yet it does end like this. Youth and innocence have defeated maturity and adult sexuality, as per the conventions of *shōjo* romance and *bishōjo* fantasy, but no one is happy. In fact, this outcome is quite traumatic for both the victors and the reader who has witnessed their victory. By upsetting the reader, CLAMP also upsets the narrative cycle in which character tropes and story patterns are endlessly recycled. In its antagonistic and confrontational dynamic between virginal *shōjo* and sexually mature women, *Magic Knight Rayearth* mimics the *shōjo* romance and *bishōjo* fantasy that has come before it in series such as *Sailor Moon*. However, by representing this character dynamic as tragic, CLAMP critiques the misogynistic tendency in anime and manga to villainize older women who possess both sexual maturity and political power.

Just as female fans of *Sailor Moon* are able to find messages of feminist empowerment in the series instead of polymorphously perverse possibilities for sexual titillation, female creators like CLAMP are able to stage feminist critiques of real-world sexual economies of desire within their application of gendered narrative tropes. Therefore,

when cultural theorists such as Ōtsuka, Azuma, and Saitō discuss otaku immersing themselves in fantasies that have nothing to do with the real world, they acknowledge *bishōjo* series like *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth* but fail to take into account the female viewers, readers, and creators for whom fictional female characters are not removed from social and political realities. Such theorists take the male gaze for granted, and their readings of anime, manga, video games, and light novels, as well as their opinions concerning the communities of fans that consume them, are therefore phallogocentric. The ideology supporting the passage of the Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act discussed at the beginning of this chapter also suffers from the same paradigm of "men as consumers, women as consumed" that severely limits the narrative theories of phallogocentric observers. Within the communities of women who consume and produce popular narratives, however, the female gaze is alive and well. This female gaze not only allows female readers to see celebrations of empowered female homosociality in works that would otherwise be dismissed as misogynistic, but it also serves as a critical tool for female creators such as Takeuchi Naoko and CLAMP, who seek to overturn clichéd tropes and narrative patterns both as a means of telling stories that will appeal to an audience of women and as a means of feminist critique.



Figure 1

The introduction of the fourteen-year-old Tsukino Usagi, who will soon become Sailor Moon. Usagi is running late to school, and she admits that she's "a bit of a cry baby."



Figure 2

The costumes of the teenage Sailor Scouts are decorated with bows and jewelry, and the school uniform themed outfit comes equipped with a short skirt.





Figure 3

A *dōjinshi* featuring three of the Sailor Scouts (Moon, Jupiter, and Venus) in explicitly pornographic situations. In such fanworks, the Sailor Scout uniforms become a means of fetishizing the bodies of the female characters.

Figure 4

The cover of Kōdansha's release of *Magic Knight Rayearth* in separate volumes (*tankōbon*). The covers of these three volumes don't display the Magic Knights with their weapons and armor but rather depict them as schoolgirls surrounded by fantastic creatures such as pixies and mermaids.







Figure 5 (top) and Figure 9 (bottom)

Princess Emeraude in the opening and closing pages of *Magic Knight Rayearth*.



*Figure 6*

The angelic and pure-hearted *shōjo* queen Serenity from *Sailor Moon*.

Figure 7

Queen Beryl prepares to punish one of her generals for his failure to defeat the Sailor Scouts. Telling him that he has failed twice, she informs him that he must "face the consequences."

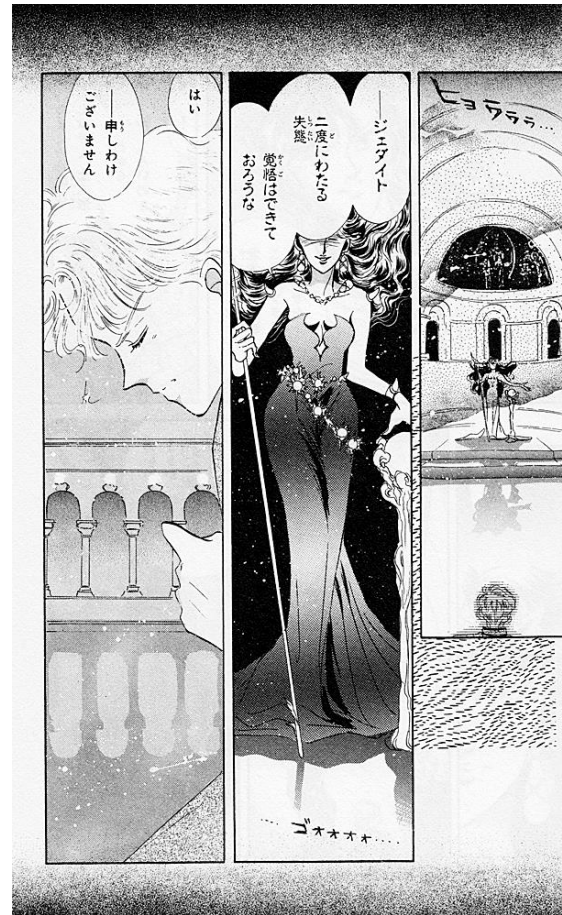


Figure 8

The sorceress Alcyone responds to Zagato's command to hunt down the Magic Knights with a self-assured "As you wish."



● END ●

Figure 10

The final page of *Magic Knight Rayearth*. After finding herself and her friends back in Tokyo after defeating Princess Emeraude, Hikaru screams, "It can't end like this!"



## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Maiden and the Witch: CLAMP's Subversion of Female Character Tropes

The four main publishing genres of manga are defined by the demographics of their readership. The two most popular genres, *shōnen* and *shōjo*, are targeted at boys and girls respectively. *Josei* manga is written for older teenage girls and adult women, while *seinen* manga is designed to appeal to men. Each broad demographic genre has subcategories further tailored to more specific ages and interests of its readership, and a certain amount of manga published by both large and small presses falls outside of conventional demographic genres.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, demographic genre influences everything from advertising to bookstore layout to editorial policy, not to mention narrative pattern, character development, and reliance on gendered genre tropes.

Although many manga artists specialize in one particular genre, CLAMP is remarkable in that the group has serialized manga in magazines targeted at all four of the major demographic genres. Regardless of genre, however, their work is characterized by its prominent female characters. Two of their series, *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*, a *shōnen* manga, and *xxxHolic*, a *seinen* manga, feature an innocent teenage girl and a jaded adult witch as their respective main characters. These two series, which were serialized simultaneously during the first decade of the twenty-first century, incorporate intersecting plots and numerous crossover elements. The two manga are closely related

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<sup>130</sup> Examples of such manga would be the titles serialized in Kōdansha's *Shūkan Morning* magazine and Shōgakukan's *Gekkan IKKI* magazine, although such series can be considered to be categorized as *seinen* manga (as demonstrated by their Japanese Wikipedia pages). Another large body of manga that does not fall into the four main demographic genres is children's (*kodomo*) manga, which includes titles such as the perennially popular *Doraemon*. Frederick Schodt's *Dreamland Japan* has more information on manga magazines, demographic genres, and publishing categories.

on a thematic level as well, as the younger woman and the older woman serve as foils to each other not simply through manga's stories but also through their narrative modes of storytelling. This chapter will examine the character tropes associated with the young girl and the older woman within the two manga through a reading of the stories and images used to portray them. By subverting these tropes, CLAMP transcends misogynistic genre stereotypes in these two series while offering an alternative avenue for female empowerment. In a broader context, the group queers the very notion of demographic genre by casting the representatives of *shōnen* manga and *seinen* manga as female characters. In order to provide context for a reading of these manga, it is important to discuss the *shōjo* traditions regarding female characters that CLAMP incorporates into their *shōnen* and *seinen* series, along with the larger narrative patterns from which these gendered tropes originate.

### **Pure Hearts and Sparkling Eyes: The Rise of the *Shōjo***

The first wave of *shōjo* manga was heralded by the emergence of the weekly magazine *Margaret* in 1963. Although manga featuring prominent female protagonists had appeared before,<sup>131</sup> they were largely the province of male artists. The editorial staff of *Margaret*, however, cultivated the talent of female artists, which resulted in the rise of a generation of talented women such as Ikeda Riyoko, Hagio Moto, and Takemiya Keiko in the early seventies. The manga created by these artists, such as *Versailles no bara* (The Rose of Versailles), *Tōma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas), and *Kaze to ki no uta* (The

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<sup>131</sup> One of the most famous of these proto-*shōjo* manga is Tezuka Osamu's *Ribon no kishi* (Princess Knight), which was originally serialized in Kōdansha's *Shōjo Club* magazine between 1953 and 1956.

Song of Wind and Trees), featured willowy and ornately costumed young women (and effeminate young men<sup>132</sup>) searching for love and purpose. These characters were visually characterized by their round faces and their enormous, sparkling eyes, so much so that Kanako Shiokawa writes, "if one was uncertain as to who the main character was, the ground rule dictated that she was the possessor of the largest and the starriest eyes."<sup>133</sup> In *shōjo* manga, large eyes are connected to notions of innocence and vulnerability, traits reflected in the dress of these characters, which strategically covered and de-emphasized their breasts and hips.<sup>134</sup> The love pursued by these *shōjo* (and their male counterparts) was "pure" in the sense of not being tainted by overt sexuality or selfish motives such as political or economic gain.<sup>135</sup> Since the seventies, the demographic genre of *shōjo* manga has emerged as a major publishing category, with numerous magazines like *Nakayoshi*, *Ciao*, and *Ribon* continuing to market love stories to an eager audience of teenage (and "tween" age) girls.

During the late seventies and eighties, male manga artists and animation directors began to incorporate the trope of the pure-hearted and innocent young woman into their own work, and the magical *shōjo* became a staple of Japanese popular culture in the nineties. Susan Napier cites the perceived liminality of these young female characters as adding to their appeal, part of which is "the fact that many Japanese are able to project

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<sup>132</sup> Such young men are stylized as *shōjo*-like through artistic conventions common to the visual characterization of *shōjo* characters, such as large eyes, ornately styled hair, and a more "girlish" face-to-body ratio. Watanuki, the male protagonist of *xxxHolic*, is a contemporary incarnation of such a character.

<sup>133</sup> Shiokawa 101.

<sup>134</sup> Frenchy Lunning unpacks the gendered implication of this clothing style in her essay "Under the Ruffles: Shōjo and the Morphology of Power," in which she suggests that the emphasis on purity and vulnerability characterizes such outfits as feminine.

<sup>135</sup> This literary construct, known as *jun ai* (pure love), saw a recent revival with the publication of Katayama Kyōichi's 2001 novel *Sekai no chūshin de, ai o sakebu* (translated as *Socrates in Love*).

issues of identity construction onto the attractive and unthreatening figure of the *shōjo*.<sup>136</sup> In the unstable social and economic climate of post-bubble Japan, "the iconic figure of a vulnerable young girl, either fighting back or internalizing various dark psychological problems, may have had particular cultural resonance."<sup>137</sup> Napier thus identifies the trope of the innocent *shōjo* as a central figure in manga and anime, representing freedom, growth, and change in the face of rigid adult masculinity.<sup>138</sup> She states that, "in contemporary Japanese society, girls, with their seemingly still-amorphous identities, seem to embody the potential for unfettered change and excitement that is far less available to Japanese males, who are caught in a network of demanding workforce responsibilities."<sup>139</sup> It is therefore not surprising, continues Napier, that writers and animators use this character to represent issues surrounding the construction of personal identity. Although many *shōjo* heroines find themselves facing seemingly insurmountable conflicts in confusing and unstable worlds, they are always able to find a way to grow, progress, and achieve some sort of victory. Furthermore, many heroines, most notably those of director Miyazaki Hayao, possess characteristics commonly associated with masculinity, such as physical strength, a mastery of technology, and astute political acumen, which allow them to negotiate the boundaries between male and female identities. According to Napier, the fluidity of the adolescent *shōjo* body is more open to the projection of identity than the perceived rigidity of the male body, and this lability

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<sup>136</sup> Napier (2005) 150.

<sup>137</sup> Napier (2006) 297.

<sup>138</sup> The *shōjo* is a different character type than the *bishōjo* discussed in the previous chapter, although there is significant overlap. In terms of visual characterization, a *shōjo* is more childlike, while a *bishōjo* is more overtly sexualized.

<sup>139</sup> Napier (2005) 149.



renders it a more appropriate vehicle for the formation of male subjectivity within contemporary narratives.

Sharalyn Orbaugh draws on video game theory to make a similar argument in "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the *Shōjo* in 1990s Visual Culture." Orbaugh states that, although the audience that enjoys the gun-slinging, sword-wielding adult women of many action narratives can be understood to be primarily male, this male audience is encouraged through a subjective narrative viewpoint to enter the bodies and identify with the gendered physical experiences of female protagonists. Orbaugh cites several Japanese social critics as figuring the postmodern experience as essentially feminine, and she calls this trend "cognitive transvestism," or "a cross-gender identification or disguise for the purpose of exemplifying or thinking through a social conundrum."<sup>140</sup> Orbaugh connects this process with Carol Clover's central thesis in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, which is that horror films "reveal in unmistakable terms that men are quite capable of feeling not only *at* but also *through* female figures, the implication being that they have always done so, although the traditional disposition of sex roles on screen has allowed the male spectator simultaneously to steal and deny the theft."<sup>141</sup> Like Clover, Orbaugh concludes that an audience figured as male can only identify with a female character so long as she remains a phallic virgin, or a girl still untainted by the physical aspects of heterosexual love and thus still open as an object of male identity projection. According to this line of thinking, the *shōjo*-ness of *shōjo* thus presumably serves the interests of male creators and audiences, not actual women.

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<sup>140</sup> Orbaugh (2003) 206.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* 235.

### **Moved by a Male Hand: *Bishōjo* in Japanese Animation**

*Shōjo* characters tend to operate within a patriarchal frame of reference that locates them squarely within a feminine realm of "dreams" or "the past" associated with a liminal and virginal identity on the cusp of sexual availability. Thomas Lamarre takes this association one step farther by demonstrating how anime directors such as Miyazaki Hayao associate feminine bodies with the non-Cartesian and pre-technological. In his preface to *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, Lamarre argues that, although the vast majority of anime scholarship in the West has found its purpose in explicating the cultural aspects of Japanese animation, a broader philosophical dimension may be added to the Japanese animation by drawing on the work of cinema theorist Paul Virilio. Virilio sees the ballistic perspective of cinema as representing a view of modern technology that encompasses concepts of dominance, mastery, and destruction. For Virilio, the cinematic camera puts the viewer's eyes into the speeding train, bullet, or bomb, thus forcing an audience to adapt a perspective of hyperspeed and hyperinstrumentalization far removed from the human level. Because the cel layers of traditional animation make this sort of viewpoint difficult to express, however, Lamarre posits anime not as cinematic but rather as animatic. In other words, animation directors can use the animetic interval, or the movement of characters between different the surfaces of cel layers (as opposed to movement through depth), to oppose the sort of modernistic cinematism described by Virilio.

Even as Western animation studios have developed techniques such as closed compositing (moving all of the layers of an image at the same time), which help to create

the illusion of speeding into the depth of an image, Lamarre argues that many Japanese anime directors have resisted them in favor of open compositing, which preserves the animetic interval by not hiding the gap between the different layers<sup>142</sup> and encourages a degree of creative play with the camera in the perspective expressed through the drawings. Lamarre's description of animation technology circles his central argument:

Because anime operates (and thinks) at the level of the moving image, we need to understand how its themes and stories operate from the level of the moving image. It is here that we can begin to understand how anime might enable an *animetic critique* of the modern technological condition through its negotiations with and struggle against the ballistic logistics of perception (cinematism or hyper-Cartesianism).<sup>143</sup>

Therefore, by understanding the physical technology of animation and the formal artistic and cinematic devices engendered by this technology, we can understand how animation directors use (or do not use) this technology to stage a philosophical and ideological critique of technology at both a diegetic and an extra-diegetic level. In the work of the directors Lamarre discusses in *The Anime Machine*, such a critique is often expressed through the treatment of female characters and female bodies.

Lamarre tests this argument with a visual reading of the films of Miyazaki Hayao, whom Lamarre quotes as stridently resisting cinematism, which the director associates with war and violence. Although two of Miyazaki's early films, *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984) and *Tenkū no shiro Laputa* (Castle in the Sky, 1986), feature many scenes of characters flying or falling through the air, Lamarre argues that the viewer never shares their point of view as they zoom in towards a destination; the viewer either glides along beside them or watches them fall or run from a

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<sup>142</sup> See Lamarre p. 36-42 for illustrations of what open compositing is and what it looks like on screen.

<sup>143</sup> Lamarre 11.

set perspective. Instead of identifying with flying machines, the audience is encouraged to identify with the human beings operating the machines, a perspective that Lamarre views as demonstrating a distinctively humanistic relationship to technology. Miyazaki is not so naïve as to reject technology completely, argues Lamarre, but the director does encourage his audience to view it in a different way through his manipulation of the animatic camera.

One of the more interesting aspects of this line of inquiry is Lamarre's examination of Miyazaki's use of bodies, especially in their relation to technology. Lamarre discusses the use of the technique of rotoscoping (the frame-by-frame tracing of images of live-action actors) in Western animation, as well as the decision of many Japanese directors of animation to instead employ limited animation, which is primarily characterized by a lower frame-per-second rate of movement. Lamarre quotes senior Tōei animator Ōtsuka Yasuo as expressing how limited animation gives artists more expression over how the body moves, allowing them to exaggerate its lightness or solidness. Although limited animation may risk appearing cartoonish, Lamarre associates full animation with the modernistic evils of cinematism, stating that "full animation promises to fold the animetic interval back on itself, making for a substantial body with a substantial relation to the world."<sup>144</sup> The heavier bodies of characters represented by full animation appear to transcend their world and are able to move easily through it while freely manipulating everything within it. On the other hand, Lamarre believes that the bodies of characters represented by limited animation seem to float weightlessly between

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<sup>144</sup> Lamarre 73.

the layers of the frame and are therefore more responsive to their environment in a more humanistic relation to their world.<sup>145</sup>

The relationship between animated body and animated environment is not equal for male and female characters, however. Lamarre references Miyazaki in arguing that, because the desires of male characters are concrete and goal-oriented, they interact with their environment by exerting their bodily strength on physical objects. Male characters therefore act directly, whereas female characters tend to affect their world indirectly, through telepathy or magic. Regardless of whether girls are non-technological (through their use of magic) or hyper-technological (through their use of technology that appears to be magical), Lamarre believes that, for female characters, technology is more of a physical condition than it is an ability, as it is for boys. In other words, this animetic discourse of technology echoes the phallogocentric idea the males are physical and rational while females are emotional and mystical. Lamarre concludes that Miyazaki's emphasis on female characters positions technology outside of the "modern" paradigm of problems and solutions represented by male characters and orients it instead towards an innate condition, which must then be cured by the female:

She embodies the technological condition, affords salvation or release, and appears as the new god or new paradigm to give constancy to a new understanding, a new way of living with technology, a new rootedness. This places quite a burden on the young girl, who must become akin to a god or savior of animation technologies.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Lamarre uses the character Sheeta from *Laputa* to demonstrate how the girl, who has the ability to float weightlessly through the air, provides a juxtaposition against the awkward and bulky airships and war planes piloted by the film's male characters. Lamarre discusses Sheeta's movement through her animated environment in depth in Chapters 7 and 8.

<sup>146</sup> Lamarre 84.

Lamarre states that this gendered arrangement of animated physicality repeats the common duality of female as passive and physical and male as active and intellectual; but, as the female characters form the center of the delight an audience derives from the movement portrayed in animation, they also represent the humanistic hope and possibility expressed by animetism and limited animation, which transcend the Cartesian perspectivism inherent in more cinematic visual narratives.

In the third and final section of *The Anime Machine*, "Girl Computerized," Lamarre analyzes the 2002 television series *Chobits*, an animation based on a manga by CLAMP that was serialized in the *seinen* manga periodical *Young Magazine* between 2001 and 2002. Lamarre sees the gynoid protagonist of the series, Chii, as reminiscent of the main female characters in *Fushigi no umi no Nadia* (*Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*, 1992) and *Laputa*, as her innocence contains a mysterious power of potentially world-destroying proportions. While both Nadia and Sheeta have hyper-technological pendants, however, Chii's entire body is hyper-technological, so she cannot remove herself from the possibility of a mechanized world by simply taking off her necklace as the two human girls can. Lamarre argues that, in gynoid narratives like *Chobits*, the *shōjo* has thus gone from controlling great power to becoming a weapon of mass destruction herself. The responsibility for this power therefore rests in the hands of Hideki, the male protagonist of *Chobits*, who effectively owns Chii. Lamarre connects this story to a broader pattern of "boy lives with gynoid" narratives,<sup>147</sup> which he sees as normalizing solipsistic male

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<sup>147</sup> Such narratives include *Den'ei shōjo* (1992), *Bannō bunka nekomusume* (1998), *Hando meido Mei* (2000), and *Mahoromachikku* (2001-2003). Many of these animated series are based on manga, although a significant number are based on *bishōjo* games in which the player's objective is to court one or more of the attractive young women who surround the male player-character.

mechaphilia through sentimentalism. Referring to Lacanian theories of sexuality, Lamarre reads this scenario as an onanistic perversion of endless substitution for an actual woman. The result of this perversion for Chii, the non-woman, is that her reality is entirely male-centered, as various visual devices figure the male as subjective while Chii is figured as an eternal object throughout the anime. Therefore, if subjectivity in the films of Miyazaki is post-Cartesian, then that of *Chobits* is post-Lacanian, a "perversion of male perversion."<sup>148</sup> Lamarre's reading highlights the limitations and inconsistencies of female characters without unquestioningly valorizing them as paragons of female strength and empowerment, but it fails to take into account a female view or feminist interpretation of these characters. Scholars such Donna Haraway and Livia Monnet have suggested numerous non-phallogocentric readings of non-human women,<sup>149</sup> but Lamarre marginalizes feminist posthumanism, as well as the possibility that a female character might possess her own subjectivity separate from that of any of the male characters. Although Lamarre reads the female protagonist of the anime version of *Chobits* as being configured as being an inhuman object of male desire, CLAMP's original *seinen* manga turns the male protagonist into an object of desire for Chii and, by subjectivizing its gynoid characters, severely problematizes notions the dualistic ontology of human and inhuman. Since the *shōjo* has acted as both an object of desire and an object of discourse in many *shōnen* and *seinen* narratives, it is tempting to read female characters and female

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<sup>148</sup> Lamarre 298.

<sup>149</sup> See Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" and Monnet's "Invasion of the Woman Snatchers," which explore the possibilities of a postgender world in both fiction and reality. In "Sex and the Single Cyborg," Sharalyn Orbaugh demonstrates how female cyborg bodies in Japanese animation are positioned to serve the interests of male characters and male viewers, this adding a critical feministic perspective on the tendency of male anime directors to objectify female characters in order to make philosophical statements concerning technology.

bodies as eternal objects, but the work of female creators like CLAMP demonstrates that *shōjo* are perfectly capable of achieving their own subjectivity.

### **Taking Back the *Shōjo*: Innocence and Experience in *Tsubasa* and *xxxHolic***

Female creators employ the *shōjo* for themselves and their own pleasure. CLAMP in particular has penned a number of magical young girls who were not content to merely chase after love and allow themselves to be enchanted and protected by men, thus acting as the active protagonists of their own stories. In *Magic Knight Rayearth*, three high school girls embark on a *shōnen*-style quest of fighting powerful enemies and finding friendship in a parallel world filled with danger. As discussed in the previous chapter, their objective is to save a crumbling nation by rescuing a childlike princess held captive by her dark and handsome chief priest. At the end of the manga, the three *shōjo* warriors fight the *shōjo* princess in an epic conflagration of fire and swordplay and giant robots. This female coming-of-age story can be seen as a development of the *shōjo* character itself, in that it problematizes old *shōjo* stereotypes while allowing its three young heroines the type of agency that had thus far only been available to *shōnen* heroes. Lamarre argues that, in many works of Japanese animation, "the girl is associated with a power of great magnitude with potentially world-destructive capacities" and that she, "in all her innocence, is the site for activation of a mystery that can lead to world salvation or annihilation," especially in the works of male authors, artists, and directors.<sup>150</sup> In the hands of female manga artists, however, the *shōjo* learns to wield her power not merely

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<sup>150</sup> Lamarre 231.



as a "site for activation" but as an agent capable of gaining skill and competence on her own terms.

Nevertheless, many of CLAMP's characters retain qualities generally associated with *shōjo* tropes, such as wide-eyed innocence and purity of heart. The character Sakura from CLAMP's *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle*, a 2003-2009) is a perfect example of this type of *shōjo*. *Tsubasa's* Sakura is based on the title character of CLAMP's earlier work *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1996-2000), which has become a classic of the magical *shōjo* genre.<sup>151</sup> *Tsubasa* takes the iconic young heroine, whose cheerful motto is "everything is going to be okay" (*zettai ni daijōbu desu yo*), and places her within an alternate universe and storyline. In *Tsubasa*, Sakura is the princess of Clow Country, a magical kingdom whose vast deserts hide mysterious ruins. She befriends Syaoran, the adopted son of an archeologist, and the two grow up together as friends, gradually falling in love. On the day of Sakura's coming-of-age ceremony, she accompanies Syaoran to a newly unearthed excavation site in the desert, where she demonstrates a strange power in a flash of wings and light. The awakening of this power causes her to lose her memories, which are scattered throughout multiple dimensions in the form of feathers. Syaoran therefore sets off on a journey with the all-but-lifeless Sakura in order to recover the princess's memories. As Syaoran restores her memories, Sakura regains her bright and cheerful disposition and is universally adored by everyone she encounters.

Because of her innocent and trusting personality, Sakura can do no wrong. Firmly believing that everything will be okay if only she tries hard enough, she manages to solve

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<sup>151</sup> *Cardcaptor Sakura* was adapted into an anime series (1998-2000) and two feature-length films (1999 and 2000). Along with Sailor Moon, Sakura was one of the most visible magical *shōjo* characters of the 1990s.

problems facing the group of adventurers by virtue of her pure heart and the encouragement she provides to the men who protect her. As a *shōjo*, Sakura is characterized by enormous eyes that occupy almost a third of her face. (*Figure 11*) Her pupils and irises are represented as one enormous black circle, which suggests friendliness and affability, and the borders of her eyes are not sharply delineated, which suggests openness and vulnerability. Her hair and clothing are flecked with white dots, as if she were sparkling with cleanness and goodness, and her weightless hair always seems to fly around her head, tousled by a magical wind that does not affect the other characters. Despite her girlishness, Sakura possesses great power, although she has no control over it – it merely flows through her, as if she were an empty vessel. (*Figure 12*) When it emerges, her eyes become vacant, her facial expression slack. The wings that sprout from her back further emphasize her pure and angelic character. After she has lost her memories, she remains emotionally empty for the majority of the opening volumes of the series, doing nothing more than sleeping and apologizing to the male characters when she wakes up for a few moments. In the opening volumes of the manga, the *shōjo* Sakura is thus identified by her purity and emptiness. Because of the associations that the other characters project onto her, she must be defended and kept safe. (*Figure 13*). During the first half of the manga, Sakura almost never appears alone in a panel, constantly accompanied by or held by another character, whose arms and hands seem to shield her from the reader. The *shōjo* is less of her own being and more of a conduit for magical power and the feelings of the men who surround her at all times, holding and transporting her beautiful yet fragile body.

The innocence and openness of the *shōjo* archetype is not limited to girls within the universe of CLAMP, however.<sup>152</sup> The teenage male character Watanuki from *xxxHolic* also has many traits commonly associated with the female *shōjo*. His eyes can see spirits, a magical power which is associated with his physical body in the same way that Sakura's power is tied to her corporal form. Spirits can sense Watanuki's uniqueness and are attracted to him, which has caused him no small amount of trouble. Like Sakura, Watanuki both embodies and is threatened by powers beyond his understanding or ability to control; and, like Sakura, Watanuki has a round, childish face with large eyes and pupils. (*Figure 14*) Unlike Sakura, Watanuki is anything but bright and cheerful, but he is still a decent person who will do anything to help someone who seems to be in distress. Watanuki's innocence and defenselessness make him an easy target for the spirits that plague him, so he is protected by a classmate named Dōmeki, who has been trained by his family, which runs a Buddhist temple, to ward off spirits, even though he cannot see them. Dōmeki is taller and more masculine than Watanuki, with smaller eyes, shorter hair, and more elongated body proportions. (*Figure 15*) The juxtaposition between the two emphasizes Watanuki's relative *shōjo*-ness. The relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki echoes many characteristics of a *shōjo* romantic relationship, from Dōmeki's constant teasing to Watanuki's insistence that he does not enjoy his friend's company.<sup>153</sup>

Even though Watanuki is male, he possesses the small, frail body, wide eyes, and

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<sup>152</sup> Nor is this innocence and "girliness" restricted to female characters in the broader genre of *shōjo* manga. One of the defining works of the genre, Hagio Moto's *Tōma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas, 1974-1975), is centered around two young male characters, Thomas and Eric, who are almost stereotypically *shōjo* in their characterization.

<sup>153</sup> The pseudo-romance between Watanuki and Dōmeki, a relationship which is far from unusual in the works of CLAMP, is widely discussed and accepted by Japanese fans of the series, who have drawn countless *dōjinshi* fan manga that imagine this relationship as open and explicit. This aspect of CLAMP's manga will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

innocence of a *shōjo*, as well as a mysterious magical power and the protection of a strong and highly skilled male friend.

In a moment of intense desire to ride himself of his unwelcome ability, Watanuki stumbles across a strange house overshadowed by three enormous skyscrapers in the middle of Tokyo. He is drawn inside, where he is confronted with an eerie woman named Yūko, who longues in a state of dishabille, surrounded by clouds of mysterious smoke. (*Figure 16*) Her narrow eyes, with small irises and even smaller pupils, are in direct contrast to Watanuki's large eyes, making her appear ineffable and somewhat sinister, and her thick black hair is haphazardly spread across her clothing like a spider's web. The crescent moons that adorn her throne-like chair and the choker around her neck associate her with darkness and with magic, and in fact she is the powerful "Dimensional Witch" (*Jigen no Majo*), capable of granting any wish. Her services must be paid with a price equivalent to the value of the wish (*taika*), which is often terrible and mercilessly extracted. The price she charges Watanuki is his servitude to her for an indefinite period of time, after which she will grant his wish for eyes that no longer possess the ability to see the supernatural. When she agrees to grant Watanuki's wish, Yūko is supremely sinister. (*Figure 17*) Her smiling face is full of shadows, and the black of her hair blends into the shadows on her body. Her pupils are tiny, suggesting impenetrability. The smoke from her pipe twists across the panel like a snake or a ghost. This water-like smoke is one of Yūko's primary visual motifs,<sup>154</sup> making her seem dangerous and literally shrouded in mystery. The reader is thus led to believe that both Yūko is a rather dark creature, and that her wish-granting is not entirely altruistic.

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<sup>154</sup> The other is the butterfly, which, with its connection to dreams, places Yūko outside of standard reality.

Yūko is not solely sinister, however, but often displays a more mischievous side, although this aspect of her personality is not innocently playful, often tending towards selfishness and manipulation. Her visual portrayal is far from displeasing, however, and sexiness is a major factor in Yūko's character design, with her shapely figure, long, slender limbs, heavy eyelashes, and frequently exposed skin and undergarments. This sexiness is not necessarily a positive aspect of the character, however. Shiokawa writes that, according to the conventions of *shōjo* manga in particular, readers "know that upon seeing very tall and beautiful women dripping in *adult* sexuality, one should run like hell because these characters are invariably deadly and evil."<sup>155</sup> The overt sexuality of an adult woman is thus contrasted against the nascent and subtly implied sexuality of a *shōjo*. Yūko's adulthood is referenced not only by her sexuality but also by her smoking and drinking habits, as well as her connection to the world of exchange and commerce. She constantly references the concept of "inevitability" (*hitsuzen*), primarily as an explanation for what other characters see as bad luck. Although this concept often walks hand-in-hand with callousness and even cruelty in its application by Yūko, it also entails adult notions of responsibility. In Yūko's adult world, nothing is given for free, and every accident and misfortune is tied to a sin committed in the past. Yūko is therefore the representative of a harsh adult world directly in contrast to the weightless and carefree fantasy of the *shōjo*, in which "everything is going to be okay."

The character Yūko has numerous precedents in the history of popular culture in Japan. The visual style of *xxxHolic* is reminiscent of the art deco movement popular in Japan in the early Shōwa period, and Yūko parades through its pages like a "modern

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<sup>155</sup> Shiokawa 119.

girl," the "glittering, decadent, middle-class consumer who, through her clothing, smoking, and drinking, flaunts tradition in the urban playgrounds of the late 1920s."<sup>156</sup> Even earlier were the "poison women" (*dokufu*), criminal media figures who were "emblematic of the dangers of female freedom, transgression, and sexuality" in the late nineteenth century, whose vices and disrespect for convention are clearly echoed in Yūko's brazen behavior.<sup>157</sup> Yūko is not merely a deviant, however; she is also a spell-casting witch, a trope familiar to readers not only from manga such as *Sailor Moon* but also from the wide range of fairy tales that have been popularized by Disney movies and children's books. Psychoanalyst Sheldon Cashdan labels the witch as "a major player in these dramas [...] whether she's a black-hearted queen, and evil sorceress, or a vindictive stepmother, she is easily identified by the lethal threat she poses to the hero or heroine."<sup>158</sup> Although the witch is "black-hearted," "evil," "vindictive," and "a lethal threat," she is also "the diva of the piece," and "few figures in a fairy tale are as powerful or commanding as the witch."<sup>159</sup> Cashden interprets the witch as the figurative embodiment of negative personality traits, such as vanity, jealousy, and greed, which must be overcome by the pure-hearted protagonist of the story. Thus, the telling and retelling of fairy tales is both a symbolic purging of these negative traits and a reassurance that they can, in fact, be overcome. The bad mother is repeatedly defeated by her children, who will ostensibly grow up outside of the shadow of her pernicious psychic influence.

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<sup>156</sup> Silverberg 51.

<sup>157</sup> Marran xxiv.

<sup>158</sup> Cashdan 17.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

Jane Caputi sees the witch in a more positive light, however. The witch is not an abject interloper who should be killed and overcome, but instead an emblem of feminist empowerment who should be celebrated and embraced. Caputi states that "the femme fatale, witch, or vamp represents an outlawed form of female divinity, potency, genius, sexual agency, independence, vengeance, and death power," whereas the pure-hearted "niceness" of the young men and women who restore the patriarchal order by killing the witch are "toothless" and "impotent."<sup>160</sup> The witch character is typically represented as insane or evil, and quite often as visually hideous or inhuman, so that the actions of the young men and women who kill her can be easily interpreted as objectively good and desirable. The abjection of the witch also ensures that the feminine power that needs to be vanquished can be easily understood as dangerous and disgusting. The death of the witch therefore seems only natural, and the innocence of the young men and women who kill her becomes their weakness. Because they are innocent, they do not or cannot question their actions. The reader is also complicit in the crime of failing to understand what has been repressed when the mother is killed in order to restore the rule of the father, who continues to justify this murder.

Even though CLAMP portrays Yūko as a witch in terms of her appearance and personality, Yūko is also a nurturer, or at least a proponent of tough love. In addition to the *shōjo*-like Watanuki, Yūko comes into contact with several *shōjo*-like young women who bring their problems to her. Yūko is not a fairy godmother, however, and will not grant their wishes without a price. Her encounters with her clients are often presented as horror stories in which the young women who come to Yūko for help end up more

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<sup>160</sup> Caputi 328.

miserable than they were before they met her, but a close reading of these incidents reveals that the price Yūko asks the women to pay is often nothing more than self-reflection. Yūko refuses to distinguish between common conceptions of good and evil and right and wrong, and she rarely sees the perceived misfortune of the women who come to her as such. Instead, she forces them to question their own beliefs and behavior in an attempt to force them to understand what they are really wishing for. The price these women must pay is painful introspection and the loss of innocence that this entails. In other words, Yūko urges the women to abandon their *shōjo*-ness and enter the adult world of responsibility by paying the price for the power and agency that accompanies maturity and adulthood.

Although her methods are indirect and occasionally callous, Yūko is not uncompassionate. When she asks a client of hers to choose between the life she is living and the life that she feels she should be living, Yūko hovers over the woman seductively. (*Figure 18*) The background of the panel depicting the distraught woman's downcast face is white, whereas the background of the panel containing Yūko and her questions is black. The figure of the innocent young woman is white, and Yūko is primarily black, a sharp contrast of colors that suggests the temptation of a good angel by an evil demon. Yūko is far from malicious, however, as she gently guides instead of manipulatively forces the young woman to make a difficult decision. When the woman continues to insist on following the path society has set out for her by prioritizing her husband and child over her own individual identity and desires, Yūko appears briefly saddened but then fulfils the woman's wish, the unhappy consequences of which she understands only after its



realization. In *xxxHolic*, innocence and pure-heartedness are not virtues but rather detriments to a clearer awareness of one's self and one's surroundings. One particular *shōjo*-like woman who fails understand that she lies to herself when she lies to others is depicted as being surrounded by a filthy cloud of oily black smoke. (*Figure 19*) Despite Yūko's best efforts, this woman is so deluded by the imaginary world she has created for herself that she cannot understand how she has been trapped by her own lies, a situation that is blatantly clear to the reader. The seemingly demonic Yūko is merely trying to protect the young women from their own innocence, or from their lack of insight into the way that the adult world works.

The storylines of *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* and *xxxHolic* intersect at several points in both manga, with Yūko acting as a distant yet concerned protector of Sakura and her companions. Over the course of her journey to recover her memories, Sakura realizes that the people she trusts are not the people she has been led to believe they are, and that there are frightening things in her background she never imagined. The pain resulting from these realizations deeply injures Sakura, and she is forced to abandon the role of the innocent *shōjo* roughly halfway through the series. Sakura is crippled by her fear, but Yūko helps her to understand that, in order to move forward in her life, she must accept the unpleasant truths about herself, as well as the fact that she can never change what has already happened. The title page of the second volume of *xxxHolic* displays Sakura and Yūko together, with the older woman hovering protectively over the young girl. (*Figure 20*) The complimenting patterns on their kimono suggest that they are closely related, perhaps as two halves of the same whole; and, in the background, Yūko's

watery smoke motif is overlaid with Sakura's cherry blossom motif. Although the two characters may seem diametrically opposed, CLAMP implies that they are in a beneficial relationship, with the older woman guiding the younger through the trails of her coming of age. The *shōjo*-like Watanuki is also able to grow as a person through his interactions with Yūko, and at the end of the series he ends up taking on her job as a stylish, wish-granting witch, thus overcoming the gendered limitations of the role as well. Therefore, in the fictional world created by CLAMP, the *shōjo* is not purely good, and the witch is not purely evil. The *shōjo* is not required to fight or defeat the witch, and the witch is not required to pander to unrealistic and debilitating expectations of female purity and innocence.

As *Tsubasa* and *xxxHolic* break down the boundaries of gender and age stereotypes, and they also challenge the conventions of demographic publishing genres as well. *Tsubasa*, serialized in the *Shūkan Shōnen Magazine*, is targeted at an audience of older elementary school boys.<sup>161</sup> *xxxHolic*, serialized in *Young Magazine*, is aimed at an older audience of male readers in high school or college. Both series have a wide range of readers, however, and the lavish publication of *xxxHolic* in *tankōbon* book form, as well as the numerous fan works depicting the romantic relationship between various male characters in *Tsubasa*, suggest a considerable female audience. The modes of storytelling of the two manga are noticeably different, with an emphasis on action in *Tsubasa* and an emphasis on atmosphere in *xxxHolic*. At first glance, *Tsubasa* seems to be easily

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<sup>161</sup> The magazine's audience of boys is indicated by its emphasis on action and its *furigana* reading guide for all Chinese characters in the text.

identifiable as *shōnen* manga, while *xxxHolic* is not out of place in a *seinen* magazine for older teenage and college-age male readers.

In the final chapters of *The Anime Machine*, Lamarre compares differences in manga paneling to differences in the uses of animation technologies, and he references the layout of manga panels as one of the key factors in determining the genre and overall mood of a particular work. He references the stereotype that, "at moments of great affective importance, some shojo manga tend to dispense with panels altogether, in favor of sparkling collages and temporal whirlpools, while some shonen manga draw lines of force and splatter ink across the pages as their combat scenes sprawl over and finally destroy the frames of action."<sup>162</sup> The visual style of *Tsubasa* tends more toward that of *shōnen* manga, with its heavy "lines of force" and its "sprawling" combat scenes, but its narrative emphasis seems to be more on romance and character development than the typical series of battles. Likewise, *xxxHolic* outwardly seems to fall more into the *shōjo* category, with its creative use of panels and "temporal whirlpools," but it features little romance and no conventionally attractive male characters. The genre categories of both manga are thus indeterminate, which is appropriate to the erasure of common gendered stereotypes that occurs in both titles.

Both *Tsubasa* and *xxxHolic* conform to many of the genre conventions of *shōnen* and *seinen* manga aimed at male audiences. Both titles also have male protagonists who serve as the point of view characters for the readers of their respective stories. Nevertheless, the characters adorning the covers of the manga are Sakura and Yūko. These two female characters also drive their respective stories forward while possessing a

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<sup>162</sup> Lamarre 289.

degree of subjectivity, interiority, and agency only rarely seen in female characters in *shōnen* and *seinen* manga. Even if Sakura and Yūko are not point-of-view characters, they are the heroines of their respective stories. Furthermore, by casting these two women into an apprentice/mentor relationship of the kind common in stories targeted at a male audience, CLAMP is also positing Sakura as the *shōnen* and Yūko as the *seinen* with whom readers are expected to identify. CLAMP therefore subverts not only the gender roles of its fictional characters but also the gendered nature of an audience presumably determined by gendered publishing categories.

Although seemingly monolithic demographic genres exert an enormous degree of influence over the way manga is edited, published, and marketed in Japan, CLAMP's subversion of standard genre-based character dynamics challenges the validity and necessity of these demographic genres. The success of *Tsubasa* and *xxxHolic* in Japan and in overseas markets challenges the presumed profitability of these publishing categories as well. CLAMP therefore demonstrates that female creators are able to use gendered tropes in gendered media in a manner that overturns artificial and sexist notions of gender while still appealing to a broad and diverse audience. The claim that media targeted at males has a more general appeal and sells better than media targeted at females is almost a truism in entertainment industries, but the bestselling manga of CLAMP prove that gender tropes can serve as much more than narrative architecture, and that readers of all genders can find a great deal of appeal both in stories that transcend demographic genre categories and in a pointed critique of the limitations placed

on stories by the narrative refusal to see female characters as nothing more than the objects of male discourse and desire.



*Figure 11*

Sakura says, "My older brother will definitely get mad if I go with you, Syaoran.  
Even though you're my very, very important childhood friend. Right?"



*Figure 12*

Sakura's mysterious power is unsealed when she visits a mysterious ruin in the desert with Syaoran.

*Figure 13*

Syaoran, holding Sakura, is transported to Yūko, who gives him the means to recover Sakura's memories on the condition that that she will never remember her previous relationship with him. Syaoran responds with, "...I will go. I will never let Sakura die!"





*Figure 14*

Watanuki tells Yūko his name, "Watanuki Kimihiro."

*Figure 15*

Dōmeki (left) and Watanuki (center) meet with Yūko and their friend Himawari at Dōmeki's family's temple in order to tell ghost stories. Yūko says, "Since the players are all gathered..."







*Figure 16*

Watanuki enters Yūko's shop and meets her for the first time.

Figure 17

Yūko agrees to grant Watanuki's wish to no longer see spirits on the condition that he become her manservant. Yūko says, "I will grant your wish."



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Figure 18

Yūko reasons with a client, asking if she really wants her wish to be granted. Yūko asks, "What's it going to be? What is important to you? What will you allow yourself?"



Figure 19

One of Yūko's clients cannot understand that the lies she tells herself, symbolized by a thick black cloud, are paralyzing her. She says, "What? My body..."



*Figure 20*

Yūko and Sakura as presented in the opening spread of the second volume of *xxxHolic*.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Between Women: Erotic Fantasy and the Female Gaze in *Yaoi* Fan Comics

In the manga *Axis Powers Hetalia* (Akushisu Pawāzu Hetaria, 2006–), World War II was a game played between two teams of handsome men. The Hetalia franchise, which began as an amateur webcomic written by Himaruya Hidekaz, anthropomorphizes the major world powers of the early twentieth century as attractive young men. (*Figure 21*) America sports a bomber jacket and guzzles hamburgers, Germany enjoys making cuckoo clocks and is serious to a fault, and Italy, the namesake of the series,<sup>163</sup> is a pasta-loving coward who depends on Germany to protect him. Although the original webcomic plays with national stereotypes and caricatured reenactments of historical events, later incarnations of the franchise (such as an animated series and drama CDs featuring the voice actors of the animation) focus less on historical jokes and references and more on the homoerotic tensions that arise between the masculine representations of countries in heated competition with each other.

In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick demonstrates that the intense relationships of the men involved in the creation and administration of the British Empire were characterized by homosocial desire, a "pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, [and] rivalry" which is linked with both hetero- and homosexuality.<sup>164</sup> The female audience<sup>165</sup> of *Hetalia* has interpreted the international homosocial rivalries and conflicts between the

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<sup>163</sup> The title is a portmanteau of *heta*, a Japanese word meaning "incompetent," and "Italia." "Hetalia" also plays on the word *hetare*, meaning "loser." This is appropriate, as the manga portrays Italy and his buddies Germany and Japan as being highly idiosyncratic.

<sup>164</sup> Sedgwick 1.

<sup>165</sup> There are a number of male fans in Japan and other countries who participate in the slash fan culture associated with *Hetalia*. Further work needs to be done on straight and queer male fans of *yaoi* narratives, and the present discussion excludes them.

men of the twentieth century as overt homoeroticism between anthropomorphic avatars of national identity. Germany defends Italy like an senior student with a crush on a incoming student in a boarding school novel. Britain, having introduced America to the allure of international politics, is now frustrated to find himself in position of subordination to his younger charge, a situation that parallels a triangular relationships in Victorian romances. In the eyes of fans, these character dynamics directly allude to forbidden longings and stolen kisses behind closed doors.

Although *Hetalia* has come under criticism for reinforcing national and racial stereotypes and turning a blind eye to wartime atrocities such as the Holocaust and the Japanese occupation of Nanking,<sup>166</sup> the levity with which the major events of modern history are portrayed betrays a surprisingly liberal understanding of history. Not only does it render the supposedly great deeds of men as trifling, but it also critiques the ambitions of a homosocial modernity. By representing, for example, the Sino-Japanese Wars as quarrels between two lovers who can't communicate properly, the female fans of *Hetalia* are not engaging in a process of forgetting or downplaying the importance of history, but rather of gently mocking the grave seriousness of masculine-gendered modernist pursuits such as colonization, war, and the formation of national identity. In effect, by highlighting the homoeroticism that arises between the anthropomorphized

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<sup>166</sup> For a concise summary of English-language debates with links to discussion forums, see the *Fanlore Wiki* entry for *Hetalia* at <[http://fanlore.org/wiki/Hetalia:\\_Axis\\_Powers](http://fanlore.org/wiki/Hetalia:_Axis_Powers)>. According to the comments contained on these forums, there has also been a significant outcry against the franchise on Korean-language internet discussion boards, on which posters decry the treatment of Japan's colonial history as a laughing matter. Critics were also offended by Korea's characterization as nursing a one-sided crush on China and Japan.



nations of *Hetalia*, these fans are using the franchise as a vehicle for queering the notion of history itself.

The fan response to *Hetalia* calls to mind Henry Jenkins's assessment of the "slash" subcultures of female fans in America who create homoerotic parodies of popular television shows. According to Jenkins, "Slash confronts the most repressive forms of sexual identity and provides utopian alternatives to current configurations of gender; slash does not, however, provide a politically stable or even consistently coherent response to these concerns."<sup>167</sup> The artists drawing romances involving the countries represented in *Hetalia*, like the women publishing slash fiction in America, are not attempting to make an overt political statement. However, by blithely disregarding both heterosexuality and conventional masculinity (especially as it is represented by military ideals) as the basis of normative identity, female fans of *Hetalia* challenge the heteronormative phallogocentrism underlying the construction of history as it is presented in state-sponsored narratives such as secondary school textbooks and period dramas presented as televised serials on public television.

The *Hetalia* franchise is far from the only set of texts subjected to such treatment at the hands of female fans in Japan. In fact, many high-profile titles, from *Mobile Suit Gundam* to *Harry Potter*, have been thoroughly queered in unofficial spinoff media such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan comics. This fan work, which is often physically published and sold at chain stores, subverts not only mainstream ideologies of gender but also phallogocentric notions of text and subtext common in conventional literary studies, in which the creator controls a singular and immutable set of textual meanings. The

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<sup>167</sup> Jenkins (1992) 190.

relationship between manga and amateur parody comics is especially intriguing, as the fans who create them play not only with established plotlines and characters but also with such extratextual features such as art style, font, and cover composition.

This chapter will examine amateur comics created by women who have read and been inspired by the work of CLAMP, specifically the manga series *xxxHolic*. I will first introduce these amateur comics, which are called *dōjinshi*. I will then discuss the genre of the male-male romance fantasy often referred to as *yaoi*, and I will explain how this genre, like English language slash fiction, is an expression of the erotic female gaze. I will then read two *yaoi dōjinshi* based on *xxxHolic* in order to demonstrate how this erotic female gaze is used to interrogate and reinterpret the original source text in a way that creatively subverts the phallogentrism implicit in many manga narratives written for a male audience. Finally, I will suggest that CLAMP, which itself began as a group dedicated to the publication of *dōjinshi*, creates its work in such a way as to encourage the female gaze. The interactions between manga readers and source texts illustrates how cycles of narrative production and consumption have changed in the face of active fan cultures. As the contemporary manga industry in Japan is fueled by fan production, an understanding of what *dōjinshi* are and how and why they are produced is necessary in order to fully appreciate the underlying driving forces of Japanese popular and digital cultures.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Henry Jenkins makes a similar argument in an American context. As both laws and legal practices concerning fair use and copyright violations related to popular media are different in Japan and America, however, an examination of how fan production increasingly drives the creation of popular culture is necessary in a Japanese context as well.



### *Dōjinshi*, *Shōjo* Manga, and Erotic Gazes

A *dōjinshi* is a publication by and for fans. The Japanese word *dōjin* designates a group of like-minded people, or "fans," and the suffix *shi* implies a printed publication. A possible translation might be "fanzine,"<sup>169</sup> but the connotations of the word in North American fan cultures<sup>170</sup> fail to capture the professional-grade production values of the vast majority of *dōjinshi*, which are printed in small batches by professional printing companies and collectively financed by the group of fans (known as a *sākuru*, or "circles") who contributed to the work. Although text-based fan fiction is not rare, the contents of *dōjinshi* can generally be classified as manga. Contemporary *dōjinshi* artists tend to use the same tools as professional manga artists, such as specialty pens and screen tones, as well as computer-generated effects like background fills and typed text. Furthermore, *dōjinshi* circles divide artistic tasks so that each aspect of production is handled by a specialist, and the technical aspects of the writing, drawing, inking, and

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<sup>169</sup> A common translation of the word *dōjinshi* is "coterie magazine." This translation is more apt vis-à-vis the broader history of the Japanese term, which is used to describe the literary magazines self-published by small schools of writers and poets in modern Japan. Self-published and privately distributed poetry collections and *surimono* prints were a major feature of Edo period print and literary culture as well. As the introductions of many *dōjinshi* "how to" guides, such as *Dōjinshi • Saito • Ibento kaisai dōjin katsudō nō hau no subete* and *Mezase Komike!* trace the origins of Japanese *dōjinshi* culture to American-style fan conventions, or *dōjin ibento*, however, it is difficult to assume continuity between prewar literary *dōjinshi* and postwar comic *dōjinshi*, although poetry circles and university literary clubs still refer to their in-house publications as *dōjinshi*. For more about the history of *dōjinshi* in Japan, see Eiko Ikegami's *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture*. In *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution*, Frederik Schodt traces the history of postwar manga through the lens of the career of Tezuka Osamu, who was extremely influential concerning the trajectory of manga publishing throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The means by which Tezuka and his protégés scouted and fostered talent for the most part circumvented amateur production, and comic *dōjinshi* events such as Comiket only began proliferating in the late 1970s as offshoots of science fiction conventions. Comiket co-founder Yonezawa Yoshihiro details the rise of *dōjinshi* (especially as a female-centric medium) and its relation to the industry-related work of Tezuka in *Sengo shōjo manga shi*.

<sup>170</sup> These connotations stem from the fanzines distributed at science fiction and fantasy conventions during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Such fanzines were usually composed of hastily photocopied pages stapled together and filled with margin-to-margin handwritten text and low resolution images.

layout are artistically polished.<sup>171</sup> This high quality of production serves to blur the line between the original text (known as the *gensaku*) and its reproduction through *dōjinshi*.

Any given *dōjinshi* generally has a wide range of distribution. Most are debuted at regional fan conventions (generally referred to as *ibento*, or "events") whose attendance can range from several dozen to several hundred thousand people.<sup>172</sup> Depending on the fandom, the event, and the whims of the creators, the print run of any given *dōjinshi* may range from a dozen copies to several tens of thousands of copies; and, when the initial print run is sold, creators may choose to issue second printings in smaller or larger numbers. After being debuted at a convention, the *dōjinshi* may be sold to specialty resale shops such as Mandarake and K-Books, which have branches in multiple locations across the Japanese archipelago. After a *dōjinshi* has made its debut, its creators may then choose to publicize it on their websites or Tumblr pages and sell it online via sites like Yahoo Auction or Alice Books.<sup>173</sup> From there, a small but significant percentage of *dōjinshi* make their way overseas, where they are sold by specialty dealers on eBay and at anime conventions.<sup>174</sup> This level of distribution suggests that *dōjinshi* are not merely a small and isolated phenomenon but rather the basis of large and well-organized subcultures based in Japan but accessible to international fan communities.

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<sup>171</sup> With the advent of digital publishing, *kojin sākuru*, or "one-person circles," have become much more common, and how-to guides such as *Dejitaru dōjinshi no tsukurikatta* detail how to handle all elements of *dōjinshi* creation and distribution entirely by personal computer.

<sup>172</sup> The largest and best known of these events is the biannual Comic Market, or Comiket. For more information on this event and its attendance, see Fan-Yi Lam's article "Comic Market: How the World's Biggest Amateur Comic Fair Shaped Japanese *Dōjinshi* Culture."

<sup>173</sup> The website for Alice Books can be found at <<http://alice-books.com/>>. Besides Yahoo Auction, there are many Japanese online auction sites on which *dōjinshi*, such as Moba-oku, or Mbok (<<http://www.mbok.jp/>>).

<sup>174</sup> A search for the term "doujinshi" on eBay on May 20, 2013 returned more than 25,000 hits.

At conventions and resale stores, *dōjinshi* are generally divided into two categories: *dansei-muke* ("for men") and *josei-muke* ("for women"). *Dōjinshi* "for men" tend to feature graphic heterosexual pornography, while *dōjinshi* "for women" have often been stereotyped as focusing on beautiful boys in love with each other. This constructed division<sup>175</sup> suggests a perceived difference between the male and the female erotic gazes. The male erotic gaze reflects a paradigm of male as subject, or that which looks, and female as object, or that which is looked at. Japanese popular media is no exception to this paradigm, and many works of Japanese animation and manga actively cater to the male gaze through the *bishōjo* character type and a related visual strategy known as "fan service," which costumes and positions female characters in such a way as to emphasize and display their sexualized bodies. (Figure 22) Female characters are there to be viewed, and the viewer is assumed to be male. In the discursive space of *dansei-muke dōjinshi*, the pornographic elements of the male gaze are made explicit.

The male gaze is not the only gaze at play in Japanese popular media, however. This chapter will demonstrate how the female gaze, and in particular the erotic female gaze, creates its own interpretations of stories, characters, and relationships in narratives targeted at a male demographic, as evinced by a reading of *josei-muke dōjinshi*.<sup>176</sup> Many of these *dōjinshi* fall into a genre category often referred to as *yaoi*, a portmanteau of a

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<sup>175</sup> *Dōjinshi* of both categories (although more often those classified as *josei-muke*) are not necessarily pornographic or even focused on romantic relationships, however. They may be illustration collections, four-panel gag manga, visual essays chronicling the circle's impressions of the *gensaku*, or retellings of the *gensaku*. Artists and writers hoping to become professionals also publish their original work as *dōjinshi*.

<sup>176</sup> *Josei-muke dōjinshi* are not necessarily modeled on manga for women (*shōjo* and *josei* manga) and are often based on *shōnen* and *seinen* manga. For example, the *shōnen* titles serialized in *Shūkan shōnen janpu*, such as *Naruto* and *Bleach*, are commonly appropriated as *gensaku* for *josei-muke dōjinshi*.

Japanese expression<sup>177</sup> used to label work that focuses on a romantic and/or physical relationship between two male characters. *Yaoi*, or, as it is more commonly known in Japan, BL (an abbreviation of "boys love," an Anglicization of the term *shōnen ai*), is not necessarily pornographic; but, like its Western counterpart "slash," the genre places a narrative emphasis on the relationship between two male characters. No matter what the source text - from Lord of the Rings to Harry Potter to popular animated TV shows for boys like *Naruto* and *Bleach* and *Pokémon* to webcomics like *Hetalia* - the female gaze has created its own homoerotic interpretations of the relationships between male characters.

Tomoko Aoyama sees one of the roots of the contemporary slash fandom in Japan in the *shōjo* manga of the 1970s written by 24-Nen-Gumi ("[Born in] Shōwa 24 [1949] Group") female artists such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko.<sup>178</sup> From the overt homosexuality in Hagio's *Tōma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas, 1974-1975) and *Pō no ichizoku* (The Poe Clan, 1972-1976) to the homoerotic tension in Takemiya's *Chikyū e* (To Terra, 1977-1980), beautiful boys locked in fatalistic embraces with each other are one of the more distinctive traits of the *shōjo* manga of the period. As in earlier *shōjo* manga, "beauty and fantasy were emphasized over reality," but the artists of the seventies "sought new modes of romanticism through science fiction, historical sagas, and

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<sup>177</sup> The expression is *yama nashi ochi nashi imi nashi*, which means something to the effect of "no development, no point, no meaning." In this sense, the word *yaoi* mirrors the English-speaking fandom designation of PWP, or "plot what plot." Fan lore holds that the word is also an abbreviation of *yamete, oshiri ga itai*, or "stop, my butt hurts."

<sup>178</sup> Another prominent member of this group of female manga artists born in 1949 is Ikeda Riyoko, internationally famous for her work *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles). For a perspective on Ikeda and the political and literary climate that influenced her and the other members of the 24-Nen-Gumi, see Anne McKnight's essay "Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972-2004."

homosexuality."<sup>179</sup> Artists and readers were "no longer satisfied with the persistent variations on the Cinderella theme," and homoerotic *shōjo* manga with male protagonists arose from a "desire to explore masculinity or androgyny as opposed to the worn-out image of femininity."<sup>180</sup> One of the primary motivating factors of the homoeroticism found in classic *shōjo* manga, then, was a desire to move beyond the restraints placed on women and female characters by a heteronormative society.

The act of slashing<sup>181</sup> two preexisting characters stems from a similar desire. Mark McLelland argues that "slash can be understood as a response to the cultural logic of the cultural industries which offer, on the whole, 'consensus narratives,' wherein studios and producers aim to maximize profits by appealing to as broad a section of the public as possible."<sup>182</sup> Since the prejudice seems to be that men will only watch and read stories dominated by male characters while women will watch and read stories not specifically targeted at them, "appealing to as broad of a section of the public as possible" often means "male dominated." McLelland's argument is that, since the most active and interesting characters are men, shipping two well-developed male characters together is more satisfying than shipping a central member of the cast with a less-developed, secondary female character. Female fans who slash male characters are simply taking popular media "intended for male consumption and rewriting them to embody their own

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<sup>179</sup> Aoyama (1988) 188.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 194.

<sup>181</sup> "To slash" refers to the act of envisioning two male characters together in a sexual or romantic relationship. The female equivalent is "femme slash." The gender-neutral Japanese equivalent is *kappuringu suru*, or "to couple." The gender-neutral English term is "to ship," with "ship" being derived from "relationship."

<sup>182</sup> McLelland (2007).

desires and interests" that fall outside of normative gender roles.<sup>183</sup> Matt Thorn, who interviewed several participants at a *dōjinshi* event in Tokyo, found that women who draw *yaoi* stories do so partially because they find heterosexual romance "boring," or because, in the words of one artist, "a heterosexual romance is always limited by the fact that the heroine and the hero, no matter what the circumstances, are ultimately following society's mainstream norm of mating."<sup>184</sup> Therefore, in the eyes of many fans, *yaoi* narratives are a means of resistance against societal and narrative heteronormativity.

Sharalyn Orbaugh also draws a connection between classic *shōjo* manga and amateur *dōjinshi* parodies, especially as the culture of *dōjinshi* recreates "some long-standing tendencies in *shōjo* literary activity in Japan, including the blurring of boundaries between production vs. consumption, and professional vs. amateur."<sup>185</sup> Instead of readers who passively submit to the phallogocentric authority of the *gensaku* text, which privileges original production and authorial intent over derivative reader interpretation and amateur reproduction, *dōjinshi* imply "multiple readers actively seizing the text and expanding its possibilities in incredibly diverse ways, each basing his/her expanded text on his/her preferred reading of the source."<sup>186</sup> *Dōjinshi* are therefore readings of the source material, which is to say that they are interpretations of textual elements with which the reader feels unsatisfied.<sup>187</sup> Although artists are free not only to interpret but also to create, it is worth remarking that *dōjinshi* usually serve to mock,

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<sup>183</sup> McLelland (2007)

<sup>184</sup> Thorn 177.

<sup>185</sup> Orbaugh (2010) 176.

<sup>186</sup> Orbaugh (2010) 178.

<sup>187</sup> Henry Jenkins also emphasizes the appeal of filling in the textual gaps to fan cultures; and, in his online essay "Transmedia Storytelling 101," he argues that media producers are increasingly structuring stories in such a way as to emphasize these gaps in order to create properties that are able to sustain a large and dedicated fanbase.

explore, or intensify what is already present in the original text. Just as the erotic male gaze makes explicit that which is already there – namely, the pornographic elements of cinematography that cater to heterosexual male viewers – so too does the erotic female gaze. In particular, *yaoi* artists who draw homoerotic love scenes are picking up on the subtext of the strong bonds between men that often form the core of popular narratives.<sup>188</sup> By actively reading this subtext, which tends to privilege the subjectivity, agency, and interiority of male characters over those of female characters, female fans are able to subvert the original text by challenging and queering its phallogentrism.

To demonstrate how this process works, this chapter will examine two *dōjinshi* based on *xxxHolic*. Despite the prominent role of the witch Yūko and the *shōjo* Sakura, the protagonist of *xxxHolic* is a high school student named Watanuki, who can see *yōkai*, or supernatural creatures that are invisible to normal humans. Because *yōkai* sense that Watanuki can see them, they harass him, and thus he is driven to make a bargain with Yūko, who will eventually grant Watanuki his wish of not being able to see *yōkai*. Until then, Watanuki must work in Yūko's shop as her servant. As Watanuki is dispatched on various errands, he is accompanied by his classmate Dōmeki. Dōmeki cannot see *yōkai*; but, as the heir to a Buddhist temple, he has a mystical ability to drive them away from Watanuki. Watanuki has a crush on a female classmate named Himawari; and, convinced that Dōmeki is competing for her affections, Watanuki maintains an almost constantly antagonistic attitude towards Dōmeki. The serious and stoic Dōmeki generally disregards Watanuki's griping, although he occasionally gently teases his irascible friend. Although

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<sup>188</sup> In *Writing the Love of Boys*, Jeffrey Angles discusses these homosocial bonds, which may be covertly homoerotic, in modern Japanese literature. In his Conclusion section, he demonstrates how contemporary comic *dōjinshi* artists have the covert homoeroticism of such works openly explicit.

Watanuki repeatedly attests that he does not desire Dōmeki's companionship, particularly when the two are in the company of Himawari, Dōmeki seems to always appear whenever Watanuki is in need of help or companionship. (*Figure 23*)

On the surface, *xxxHolic* conforms to many of the narrative conventions and character tropes common to manga aimed at a male audience. The protagonist of the story, Watanuki, and his foil, Dōmeki, are both male. The two main female characters of the story, Yūko and Himawari, have a more passive narrative role. Himawari's purpose is to provide an opportunity for the creation of a stronger bond between the two male characters, and Yūko, who lurks like a spider in her shop, serves as the somewhat villainous female other against which the heroism of the two male characters may be defined.<sup>189</sup> As neither Yūko nor Himawari is granted equal screen time or narrative interiority to Watanuki and Dōmeki, *xxxHolic* posits men and subjects and women as objects. The role of Himawari in particular calls to mind Eve Sedgwick's discussion of homosociality; and, as Sedgwick reminds us, homosociality is only a few steps removed from homosexuality. According to Sedgwick, homosociality is not synonymous with homosexuality in British literature; and, similarly, CLAMP never openly states that its male characters are in any way romantically interested in one another.<sup>190</sup> For readers looking for homoerotic undertones, the subtext of *xxxHolic* is clear.

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<sup>189</sup> The character Sakura in *xxxHolic*'s sister manga, *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicles*, serves a similar purpose in that she acts as an object through which the male characters can indirectly form bonds with one another and, later in the manga, a morally ambiguous character against which the male characters can define their own characters and character development.

<sup>190</sup> In fact, it is quite easy to read the male characters in both *xxxHolic* and *Tsubasa* as completely straight, as almost every male character is supplied with a female love interest. Many male and female characters in the CLAMP universe are canonically gay (in the sense of being in easily discernible romantic relationships with members of the same sex or being clearly romantically interested in members of the same sex), and these characters generally appear in CLAMP's *shōjo* and *josei* manga.



### Tentacle Porn for Women and the *Uke/Seme* Dynamic

*Yaoi dōjinshi* based on *xxxHolic* bring its homoerotic subtext to the surface and adventurously explore its implications. The *dōjinshi Kuchinashi kaoru sono ude ni* (In the arms of a fragrant gardenia, 2006) is loosely based on an episode in the tenth volume of the manga in which Watanuki is trapped by the spirit of a hydrangea plant and must be rescued by Dōmeki. (Figure 24) Such a scenario is not uncommon in *xxxHolic*. Watanuki's supernatural sight makes him vulnerable to *yōkai*, and Dōmeki often appears at the last moment to rescue him. Female readers have seen in this character dynamic not only the possibility for romance – why does Dōmeki care so much about Watanuki? – but also as fodder for the hurt/comfort scenario that Orbaugh has identified as one of the most common narrative patterns in male/male fan fiction and *dōjinshi*.<sup>191</sup> In the case of *xxxHolic*, after Watanuki is harassed or threatened by *yōkai*, he can then be comforted by Dōmeki in an emotional exchange that deepens the relationship between the two.

In *Kuchinashi kaoru*, the fan artist Kuroimisa imagines that Watanuki is sexually violated by a gardenia plant. When Watanuki finds refuge in the arms of Dōmeki, Dōmeki urges him to ejaculate, since that seems to be what the plant wants. Dōmeki then holds Watanuki as Watanuki suffers the attention of the plant's tendrils over the span of several pages. After the ordeal is over, Dōmeki explains that the gardenia plant had somehow merged with the recently deceased spirit of a woman who had had a miscarriage. The woman's husband was cheating on her, and she had hoped a baby would repair the relationship. After the woman was run down by a car after rushing out into the

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<sup>191</sup> Orbaugh (2010) 179-80.

road in pursuit of her husband, her last wish for a baby is received by one of the gardenia plants lining the road. Dōmeki's explanation of the event is delivered in a style that perfectly mirrors the explanations of similar phenomena in the original manga. Furthermore, the manner in which Watanuki and Dōmeki speak to each other in the *dōjinshi* is faithful to their characterization in the manga. The art style and panel layout are also fairly consistent with those of the original. The only element that is added is the explicit sexuality, although one could argue that, since Watanuki is continually harassed by *yōkai* throughout *xxxHolic*, this particular type of harassment is not that far-fetched of a possibility.

The device of “tentacle rape” (or “tendrils rape,” as the case may be) has a long and colorful history in Japanese illustrated and animated pornography, but these tentacles are usually applied to solitary girls who are openly exposed to the gaze of the reader, not to boys who are shielded by the arms of another man. On the cover of *Kuchinashi kaoru*, Dōmeki is shown as supporting the incapacitated Watanuki. (*Figure 25*) Watanuki is posed in such a way as to suggest vulnerability, but Dōmeki hovers protectively over him. Watanuki's line of sight is directed not towards the reader or obliquely away from the reader but rather at Dōmeki. The reader is certainly witness to Watanuki's violation, but many of the visual devices that allow the reader to project her or himself onto the page in more conventional illustrated pornography, such as a faceless or invisible sexual partner, are relatively absent from *Kuchinashi kaoru*. Dōmeki appears in all but two of the eight pages depicting Watanuki's tangles with the lustful gardenia, and his purpose is to alleviate Watanuki's humiliation, not to exacerbate it. The erotic female gaze

represented by *Kuchinashi kaoru* thus displays several deviations from the conventions designed to appeal to the erotic male gaze. For example, comfort is emphasized over humiliation, and partnership is preferable to anonymous rape. Although the graphic depiction of sex is major component of the *yaoi dōjinshi* that feature it, the focus of the female gaze is not necessarily on the sex between two men but rather on an exploration of a relationship between two characters that is only hinted at in the text. Watanuki's rescue at the hands of Dōmeki in *Kuchinashi kaoru* directly parallels many scenes in the original manga, the only difference being Watanuki's temporary lack of clothing.

An intriguing aspect of the sex in this *dōjinshi* is that the sexual aggressor, the gardenia, is female. The plant acts under the influence of the spirit of a recently deceased woman. Since this woman had been mistreated by her husband, Dōmeki explains, "it seems she had a touch of neurosis." In her mind, the production of a child would end her husband's extramarital affair, and her dying wish combined with "the vegetable instinct [*shokubutsu honnō*] of the gardenia" to create a strange hybrid of reproductive lust in a flowering plant that is not just female by association but also female by spiritual possession. On one hand, this creature is pathetic, as its actions are mindless and catalyzed by the tragic death of a woman obsessed with a man. On the other hand, in contrast to the passivity of both of its component parts, the hybrid woman/gardenia is able to accost a passing stranger and to take what it desires from him despite his protests. The vines prying apart the male principal's limbs and exposing his body to the reader are female, which suggests a connection between the female sexual aggressor in the *dōjinshi* and the presumably female reader of the *dōjinshi*.

A criticism of *yaoi* manga commonly found on online forums<sup>192</sup> is that the tropes of the genre reproduce heteronormative gender roles while simultaneously shutting out actual women from the story. One of the most well-known *yaoi* tropes is the dichotomy between *seme* and *uke*, or between the "active" sexual partner (who penetrates) and the "passive" sexual partner (who is penetrated). The *seme* is typically older and taller than the *uke*, with larger hands and a more angular face. (Figure 26) The *seme* will also generally be in a position of power relative to the *uke*. For example, if the *uke* is a student, the *seme* will be an upperclassman or a teacher. Besides being physically larger than the *uke*, the *seme* will perform masculinity by actively demonstrating his social dominance over the *uke* or by concealing his feelings behind a facade of taciturn reticence. There are variations on this dynamic, such as the *tsundere uke*<sup>193</sup> who disguises his affection for the *seme* by scolding him and bossing him around, but such variations are appealing precisely because they deviate from the usual character dynamic in easily recognizable ways. Therefore, in *yaoi* manga, the active *seme* partner is coded as masculine, while the passive *uke* character is coded as feminine. If the relationship between two men is essentially between a strong masculine partner and a weak feminine partner, then *yaoi* manga merely exploits a harmless fantasy of homosexuality in order to appeal to the heteronormative desire of presumably heterosexual female readers.

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<sup>192</sup> One such forum is the Livejournal community Fandom!Secrets (<<http://fandomsecrets.livejournal.com/>>), where members of multiple fandoms post anonymous observations and opinions. Each secret has its own chain of comments, wherein the issue at hand is discussed by both anonymous and named users. Sexuality, especially as it is expressed in fan art and fan fiction, is a common topic on the forum.

<sup>193</sup> The word *tsundere* is a portmanteau of *tsun-tsun*, which expresses disgust, and *dere-dere*, which expresses adoration. The *tsundere* character type is borrowed from the culture of *moe* fandom, whose constituents are primarily male. The relationship between male and female fandom cultures in Japan is complicated and requires further study, but *yaoi* and *moe* fan cultures are fully aware of each other and borrow character tropes and narrative patterns from each other even as they mock these tropes and patterns.

The fact remains, however, that such constructions of masculinity and femininity are still being performed by male characters. In *yaoi* narratives, a character is not passive because the character is biologically female. Rather, the character is passive because that is how the character's personality fits into a relationship. Although the masculine sex of the *uke* may merely be an attractive window dressing on a character gendered as female, the inscription of a stereotypically female character role onto a male character is still subversive in its denial of biological determinism. In fact, the more passive the *uke*, the more the association of femininity with romantic and sexual passivity is called into question. The presumption that *yaoi* is gendered heterosexually is founded on the supposition that there is by default a passive partner in a relationship, and that this passive partner is always depicted and read as female. In order to discredit this bias, it is necessary to understand how femininity is coded in *yaoi dōjinshi*. In many *yaoi dōjinshi* based on *shōnen* or *seinen* manga, the character traits that distinguish a certain character as masculine in the original work are often retained in fan work that depicts the character as an *uke*, thus queering common tropes used in manga to code characters as masculine or feminine.

### **Femininity, Masculinity, *Shōjo*, and *Uke***

As femininity is often defined by its deviations from masculinity, it is difficult to discuss the coding of femininity in male/male partnerships without relying on stereotypes. In *Yokubō no kōdo: Manga ni miru sekushuariti no danjosa* (Codes of Desire: The Difference between Male and Female Sexuality as Seen in Manga), Hori Akiko argues

that, when discussing gender coding in *yaoi* manga, it is useful to compare the genre to *shōjo* manga. Whereas the covers of manga magazines and *tankōbon* for both gay and straight men almost always feature a full body shot of a single person, *yaoi* manga covers, like the covers of *shōjo* manga, tend to feature a couple posed in manner that illustrates their relationship.<sup>194</sup> The connection between *shōjo* and *yaoi* extends beyond the bodies exposed to the reader's gaze, as there is also a similarity in the characters through whom the reader experiences the story. In *shōjo* manga, the story is told from the perspective of the female protagonist. In *yaoi* manga, the point-of-view character is often the *uke*, who supposedly occupies a feminized position in relation to the *seme*.<sup>195</sup> Therefore, when analyzing the femininity of the *uke* in *yaoi* manga, the construction of femininity in *shōjo* manga serves as a convenient comparison.<sup>196</sup>

There is an extraordinary range of *shōjo* manga in existence, and even stereotypical portraits of passive femininity may be subverted within a certain *shōjo* title, as the character development that is a defining quality of the *shōjo* genre ensures that a character's personality will not necessarily remain constant from one installment of a series to the next. Nevertheless, the female protagonists of a number of popular titles,

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<sup>194</sup> Hori 150-59. Hori displays tables of information on eighty contemporary mass market magazines. This information includes the number of characters on the covers, the sight lines of these characters (whether they are looking at the camera or at each other, for instance), and the clothing that the characters are modeling. Reproductions of twenty-four magazine covers are included as illustrations. This data demonstrates a correlation between the covers of pornographic magazines for men and manga magazines for men. There is also a clear correlation between the covers of magazines for women, *shōjo* manga magazines, and *yaoi* manga magazines. It should be noted, however, that not all *shōjo* and *yaoi* manga covers, and indeed not all *shōjo* and *yaoi* manga, feature a romantically intertwined couple.

<sup>195</sup> Hori 185.

<sup>196</sup> Although this comparison is useful, it is important to remember that correlation does not equal causality. *Shōjo* manga and *yaoi* manga are in fact marketed to two separate demographics, with *yaoi* being a subcategory of the larger demographic genre of *josei* manga, which is targeted towards women of college age or older. Like its male demographic equivalent, *seinen* manga, *josei* manga encompasses a broad range of subgenres, from mother-in-law horror stories to workplace dramas to science fiction to abstract artistic pieces. It is partially this breadth of genre that makes comparing *yaoi* manga to other *josei* manga difficult.

such as *Sunadoki* (Sand Chronicles, serialized in *Betsucomi* between 2003 and 2006) and *Bokura ga ita* (We Were There, serialized in *Betsucomi* between 2002 and 2012), all begin their respective stories with similar character traits.<sup>197</sup> Kuronuma Sawako, the protagonist of Shiina Karuho's hit series *Kimi ni todoke* (which began serialization in *Bessatsu Margaret* in 2005),<sup>198</sup> is a representative example of the *shōjo* heroine that stars in the high school romance story typical to *shōjo* manga. Because of her resemblance to a certain evil little girl from a popular horror film, Sawako is ostracized by her classmates despite her best efforts to be friendly. Sawako has therefore developed into a shy and self-deprecating young woman by the time she enters high school. As she still wants to reach out to the people who bully her, she admires Kazehaya Shōta, an outgoing boy in her class who is always surrounded by friends. Kazehaya is secretly in love with Sawako, as he is kindhearted enough to be able to see past the rumors that surround and appreciate her inner beauty. Over the course of the series, Kazehaya helps Sawako come out of her shell and gradually become friends with the other students in their class. Sawako appreciates Kazehaya's kindness but is unable to understand how he could be attracted to her.

According to the character type modeled so aptly by Sawako, the personality traits associated with the *shōjo* heroine of a romantic comedy are a lack of self-confidence, a cheerful willingness to help and forgive others, and a charming ignorance

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<sup>197</sup> This trend is partially a result of the effort of publishers to brand manga magazines and *tankōbon* publishing labels through house art styles and familiar narrative conventions. Although there will naturally be a diversity of styles and stories represented by the different artists managed by a publisher, the editors assigned to these artists contribute greatly to the finished product. Nevertheless, artists – and especially high-profile artists like CLAMP – still have a great deal of creative freedom. For more information on the role of editors and magazine guidelines in the creation of manga, see Frederik Schodt's *Dreamland Japan*.

<sup>198</sup> The manga series was adapted into a light novel series in 2007, a televised anime in 2009, and a live-action film in 2010.

regarding romantic matters. The heroine channels the reader's wish to be emotionally nourished and protected by an attractive and fiercely monogamous partner who loves her unconditionally despite her flaws (which are minor and in the end only serve to make her more desirable), as well as the wish for this relationship to be acknowledged and respected by her female peers. The romantic *shōjo* heroine will gradually develop into a more assertive and emotionally independent character over the course of the story, but the catalyst for this development are more often than not her interactions with the male love interest. The same pattern of character development through romance applies to *yaoi* narratives as well.

Not all *dōjinshi* featuring male/male relationships are explicitly pornographic,<sup>199</sup> and in fact many that do contain depictions of sex acts are far more concerned with character development than erotic titillation. The *dōjinshi* *Kemuri* (2010, translated as "Smoke" in Appendix B), of which six out of twenty-three pages depict a bed scene, attempts to explore how the relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki changes towards the end of *xxxHolic*. At the denouement of the *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* manga, it is revealed that Watanuki is not actually a human being but rather a copy of the *Tsubasa* protagonist Syaoran created to ensure Syaoran's continued existence across multiple realities. At the same time that Watanuki learns this in the *xxxHolic* manga series, it is also revealed that Yūko died long ago and is only able to exist in the small alternate

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<sup>199</sup> Although no statistics exist concerning the content of *dōjinshi*, it is my impression that the percentage of explicitly pornographic *dōjinshi* depends on the fandom, or "genre" (*janru*), to which the *dōjinshi* in question belong. Younger fandoms tend to produce more pornographic *dōjinshi*, while older fandoms tend to produce fewer. Therefore, among the *dōjinshi* produced in a given year for a television show that recently finished airing, perhaps eighty percent might be pornographic, whereas only twenty percent of a similar set of *dōjinshi* based on a television show that finished airing several years prior might be pornographic. There are many other factors at play, including, of course, how one wishes to define and categorize "pornography."



reality occupied by her extra-dimensional shop, which she maintains in order to provide a safe haven for Sakura, Syaoran, and Syaoran's clone. When Watanuki finally understands the nature of his existence and connection to Yūko, Yūko disappears into nothing, and Watanuki vows to take over her role as the master of her shop. Since the fragile dimension that houses the shop would disappear along with Yūko if Watanuki were to physically leave it, Watanuki vows to remain there, never leaving and thus never aging. Although, Dōmeki graduates from high school and enters college, he continues to visit Watanuki. Since the original manga does not delve into detail concerning how these plot developments affect the relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki, *Kemuri* picks up the pieces and fills in the gaps left open by the source text.

*Kemuri* chronicles one of Dōmeki's visits to Watanuki after Watanuki has inherited Yūko's shop. In this *dōjinshi*, Watanuki has also inherited the wispy strands of smoke that are one of the primary visual motifs associated with Yūko in the *xxxHolic* manga. (Figures 27 and 28) This *dōjinshi* illustrates the perspective of someone who, like Yūko, has become isolated from the ebb of time and the flow of human relationships. Similar to the manner in which the smoke motif suggests that Yūko is veiled in mystery in the original manga, the author of *Kemuri* uses it as a metaphor for Watanuki's veiled intentions regarding Dōmeki. In *Kemuri*, Watanuki surreptitiously gives Dōmeki an aphrodisiac and then initiates a sexual encounter when his friend spends the night. Watanuki's dialog with his companion Mokona after this encounter suggests that he has seduced Dōmeki in order to create a physical bond that will give Dōmeki a stronger incentive to continue visiting Watanuki's store. "We tease each other, but I'm pretty bad-

natured," Watanuki muses. "I wonder how long he'll be my partner." Watanuki later confesses and apologizes to Dōmeki, but Dōmeki brushes off Watanuki's apology and suggests that he knew Watanuki's intentions all along. The *dōjinshi* ends with the pair embracing. (Figure 29) Watanuki continues to antagonize Dōmeki verbally but is obviously happy, and the strand of smoke on the right panel divides what Watanuki says ("Let me go") from his true feelings ("Just a little longer").

In *xxxHolic*, Watanuki simply takes over Yūko's position in the shop by helping the people and spirits who enter hoping to have their wishes granted. Watanuki's main concern seems to be accepting his loss of Yūko while waiting for a sign that she will return or that she has passed on safely. Watanuki no longer seems concerned with the people with whom he had once had strong relationships, such as Himawari; he watches their lives from afar with benevolent disinterest. As Watanuki matures, the rancor drains from his relationship with Dōmeki. Like Yūko, who wore kimono and surrounded herself with objects of traditional Japanese craftsmanship, Watanuki has removed himself from the present and the real world, not only physically but emotionally as well. Since the flow of time accelerates in the closing chapters of the manga, the shift in Watanuki's personality seems abrupt and leaves the reader with several unanswered questions. Is Watanuki really okay with his decision? How does he feel about the sacrifices he made in order to inherit Yūko's shop? How could he just give up on ever spending time with the friends he made over the course of the manga? Neither *xxxHolic* nor the anime based on the manga answers these questions, so the reader who created *Kemuri* attempts to address

them through the medium of a sexual encounter between Watanuki and Dōmeki that forces Watanuki's hidden feelings to the surface for the benefit of Dōmeki and the reader.

Therefore, in *Kemuri*, as in *shōjo* manga, character development takes precedence over action, and the romance between two characters provides the stage on which this character development unfolds. As the inner monolog in *Kemuri* suggests, Watanuki is the point-of-view character, but it is not necessarily the case that Watanuki is feminized exactly like the heroine of a *shōjo* romance. Some of the traits associated with Sawako, the heroine of *Kimi ni Todoke*, also apply to Watanuki as characterized in *Kemuri*. For example, although he is no longer insecure about his role as the master of the small world created by Yūko, Watanuki is nervous about his relationship with Dōmeki and does not seem to understand why his friend continues to visit him. The overtly sexual elements of the *dōjinshi* do not resonate with tonal gestalt of *shōjo* romance, however, and Watanuki's calculated use of sex as a means to emotionally manipulate Dōmeki decisively separates him from the pure-heartedness of a *shōjo* heroine. Moreover, Watanuki maintains the ill temper and surliness that mark him as masculine (as opposed to a friendly *shōjo* character like Himawari) in the original manga. Thus, even though Watanuki is the point of view character and the *uke* of the *dōjinshi*, he is not characterized as "feminine" in the same way that a female character would be.

The fact that Watanuki attempts to rape Dōmeki in *Kemuri* is also an interesting twist in the *uke/semi* dynamic. As seen in *Kuchinashi kaoru*, the *uke* often finds himself in a position of sexual vulnerability vis-à-vis the *semi*. Even though the *uke* is not necessarily feminized, the dynamic of a more aggressive partner taking advantage of a

more passive partner has caused some members of *yaoi* fandom to decry the *uke/semi* method of pairing as not only heteronormative but also misogynistic in its recapitulation of rape tropes.<sup>200</sup> In *Kemuri*, however, Watanuki is not an innocent virgin who is forcefully indicted into sexual maturity by an uncontrollably virile partner, and it is not immediately clear who is taking advantage of whom in Watanuki's coupling with Dōmeki. If anyone is taking advantage of these two young men, it is the female reader. At its core, then, the debate over heteronormativity, misogyny, and rape tropes in *yaoi* narratives is not about fictional men but rather about the agency of the women who read and write them.

In his essay "A Japanese Electra and Her Queer Progeny," Keith Vincent describes how, in the 1970s, fledgling communities of female writers and artists creating stories about men in love with men "wrote and circulated their work in virtual isolation from Japan's gay male community," which was just beginning to organize itself into a cohesive entity.<sup>201</sup> Even after international awareness of male homosexual identities and communities spread, however, the genre of *yaoi* supposedly remained detached from the social and political concerns of gay men in the real world; and, in 1992, the gay activist Satō Masaki "lost his patience" with what he perceived as the appropriation and misrepresentation of gay male identity in *yaoi* manga and published a letter in a small feminist journal called *Choisir*.<sup>202</sup> Since the male characters in *yaoi* comics had no

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<sup>200</sup> Two blog posts critically discussing these tropes in relation to the anime series *Sekai-ichi hatsukoi* (World's Greatest First Love, 2011) can be found at <<http://www.thatanimeblog.com/index.php/2011/04/sekai-ichi-hatsukoi-post/>> and <<http://gargarstegosaurus.wordpress.com/2011/05/01/worlds-worst-first-love/>>.

<sup>201</sup> Vincent 69.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 70.

trouble reconciling their sexuality with the demands of the real world, Satō argued, they were detrimental to gay men seeking to better understand their homosexual identity. "The more confused images of gay men circulate among the general public," Satō wrote, "the harder it is for gay men to reconcile these images with their own lives and the more extreme their oppression becomes."<sup>203</sup> Satō thus accused the female sexuality represented by *yaoi* as pathological and antagonistic to the goals of gay rights, and the statements of the women who responded to him via letters printed in *Chosir* also betray an internalized distrust of heterosexual female sexuality. Takamatsu Hisako, whom Vincent identifies as one of Satō's most vociferous interlocutors, voiced her "disgust at the female body," which "made it impossible for her to imagine romance or sex from the perspective of a biological woman."<sup>204</sup> The writer Kurihara Chiyo claims that, "as soon as I realized my interest in gays was a form of escapism my interest in gay novels burned itself out," and that she was able to give up gay novels as soon as she found "a way to live and love as the woman that I am."<sup>205</sup> While Satō argued that female *yaoi* fans are homophobic, the women themselves identified *yaoi* as a form of escape from heteronormativity. Furthermore, in order to apologize to the gay men whom they might have offended, both Takamatsu and Kurihara stated that they would do their best to abandon their queer sexualities and return to a more heteronormative existence. Instead of embracing the resistance to phallogentric heteronormativity expressed in *yaoi* narratives, politically aware female fans thus felt compelled to make the argument that they are not in fact antisocial loners removed from reality as their male otaku counterparts supposedly were.

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<sup>203</sup> Vincent 70.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 72.

In the latter half of the 2000s, however, female *yaoi* fans began to reclaim their identity as consumers of fantasy gay narratives.

### **Interrogating the Text from a Different Perspective: The Power of Female Fan Culture**

In her monograph *Otaku joshi kenkyū: Fujoshi shisō taikai* (A Study of Female Otaku: Essays on *Fujoshi*) Sugiura Yumiko repeatedly assures her readers that *fujoshi*, the "rotten girls" who create and consume *yaoi* manga,<sup>206</sup> are not poorly groomed anti-social misfits. "The majority of *fujoshi*," she writes, "are adult women. They live in the real world, where things like 'true love' don't exist. These women fall in love and get married in the real world, where society necessitates compromise. When they get tired, they take a break in a fantasy world, and then they go back to reality."<sup>207</sup> According to Sugiura, although *fujoshi* occasionally immerse themselves in fantasy, or "delusion" (*mōsō*), they are far from delusional (*mōsōteki*), and for them the world of *yaoi* is a break from reality (*genjitsu*), not the sort of separate reality (*riariti*) that *bishōjo* provide for otaku.

Sugiura does not compare *fujoshi* to otaku, except to note that, in the wake of the *Densha otoko* (Train Man) boom celebrating male otaku, female otaku were ignored.<sup>208</sup> Instead, she compares them with a tribe of adult women called *bunka-kei joshi*, or

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<sup>206</sup> The word *fujoshi* (腐女子) is a play on the synonymous *fujoshi* (婦女子), a word for wife. A male fan of *yaoi* is referred to as a *fudanshi* (腐男子). While the term *fujoshi* is playful and tongue-in-cheek, the term *mojo* (喪女), which is used to refer to a more antisocial and isolated female fan, is more clearly pejorative.

<sup>207</sup> Sugiura 42.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid 208. *Train Man* is a multi-media franchise that began with the publication of a novel in 2004. The novel's story involves an Akiba-kei ("Akihabara type," i.e., interested primarily in anime and manga) otaku who is rehabilitated into mainstream society over the course of his awkward attempts to date a non-otaku woman. For further details, see Alisa Freedman's "*Train Man* and the Politics of Japanese 'Otaku' Culture."

"culture girls." The distinguishing characteristic of *bunka-kei joshi*, according to Sugiura, is effort and, in particular, wasted effort (*muda na doryoku*). *Bunka-kei joshi* take ikebana lessons, spend their weekends at seminars on the tea ceremony, and attend kabuki performances while earnestly muddling their way through librettos that cannot be understood without a significant amount of study. Since these women occupy themselves with cultural pursuits during time that might otherwise be spent with family or with a boyfriend, Sugiura identifies them as a subset of *makeinu* ("loser dogs"), an expression used by Sakai Junko in her book *Makeinu no toboe* (Howl of the loser dogs) to describe successful career women who have exited their twenties without marrying. Sugiura scoffs at the effort *makeinu* expend in order to justify their position in society.

Although some *makeinu* possess a strong desire for wealth and cultural capital as a means to render themselves more attractive to potential marriage partners, the wasted effort they expend should not be confused with an acknowledgement of reality. People who truly understand their positions don't direct their energy into useless channels. After accomplishing what they need to do, they relax and enjoy themselves. The time I spend with *fujoshi* is very relaxed. Because they understand what they can accomplish in the real world, *fujoshi* are able to enjoy themselves in the fantasy world of *yaoi* and BL as a diversion.<sup>209</sup>

Sugiura's assessment of the mental and emotional health of *fujoshi* is therefore positive. It is precisely because these women have a firm grasp on reality that they are able to enjoy the fantasy of *yaoi*, which is not a separate but equal reality as proposed by Saitō Tamaki but rather a safe haven from the pressures of the real world.

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<sup>209</sup> Sugiura 164-65. The distinction that Sugiura makes between "*yaoi*" and "BL" is that the expression "BL" is used to describe original work while "*yaoi*" refers to parodies. According to my own experience, this distinction is somewhat artificial, and in fact Sugiura herself is not consistent in her use of the two terms. She also uses several other expressions for *yaoi*/BL, such as "801," a homophonous pun.

Although she mentions *fujoshi* who create manga and *dōjinshi* based on politics,<sup>210</sup> Sugiura does not devote any space to discussing *yaoi* as a means to effect social change. Instead, she treats the genre as a game played by women who are more or less socially well adjusted. *Fujoshi* wear nice clothes and date nice men, and they maintain close *fujoshi* peer groups while hiding their geekiness from their families and co-workers. The lifestyle guidebook *Fujoshi no hinkaku* (The Elegance of *Fujoshi*), displays the same attitude towards *fujoshi* identity. How do you keep business meetings and fan conventions straight? Buy a planner! You can also use it to keep track of manga release dates. How do you remember the items in your company's product catalog? Anthropomorphize the products and then imagine them in relationships with each other! You can also use this strategy to remember the names of the representatives of other companies. Like Bandō Mariko's 2006 bestseller *Josei no hinkaku* (The Elegance of Women),<sup>211</sup> *Fujoshi no hinkaku* argues that career women can have it all – a job, a boyfriend, and fantasies of beautiful men in love with each other – and even enjoy themselves in the process. Even if *yaoi* fandom is a means of successfully navigating and coping with the real world, however, both the portrait painted by Sugiura and the description of the *fujoshi* lifestyle offered by *Fujoshi no hinkaku* make female participation in *yaoi* fandom seem like more of a soporific than an agent of social change.

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 74-75. Apparently, former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō is commonly believed to be an *uke*.

<sup>211</sup> *Josei no hinkaku* (also translated as "the dignity of a woman"), published when Bandō was 61 years old, is a self-help guide for busy women who wish to balance their public and private lives successfully. Bandō's advice includes suggestions such as "dress nicely," "apologize often," and "hire a maid." Although *Josei no hinkaku* quickly became a bestseller, its author was criticized for conforming to, reinforcing, and creating excuses for outdated notions of femininity.



According to this interpretation, *fujoshi* are women who, while not completely passive, make no effort to engage or change the media they consume. Even when Sugiura discusses the women who read newspapers on their way to work in order to gather more fodder for their delusions about political figures,<sup>212</sup> she does not attempt to argue that they have any real interest in politics outside of *yaoi* fantasies. As she states in her conclusion, *fujoshi* have been largely ignored by the Japanese media because they are remarkably adept at hiding their otaku-ness. Sugiura argues that these women have been ignored because they don't seem particularly unhappy or maladjusted and aren't connected with any scandalous activities, such as illustrated pornography depicting minors.<sup>213</sup> In other words, they do not change or challenge the status quo. As the subcultures associated with *dōjinshi* demonstrate, however, many *fujoshi* are not merely consumers; these women are quite active as producers as well. If *fujoshi* are unsatisfied with the phallocentrism and heteronormativity they see in mainstream media, they create their own versions of official narratives in the form of *dōjinshi*, which may depict the homosexual escapades of male leads or go into more detail regarding the background and perspective of a female character who is short-changed in favor of male characters in the original work. When female fans find themselves excluded from male-centered stories and discourse, they simply create their own.

As the attendance for events like Comiket demonstrates, *dōjinshi* are not representative of an isolated corner of an insular fandom. Hundreds of thousands of people buy and sell these texts at enormous conventions sponsored and attended by

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<sup>212</sup> Sugiura 88-89.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 208.

manga publishers and anime and video game producers. Despite the obvious violation of intellectual property laws, the content industry allows *dōjinshi* to exist without persecution because the culture surrounding their production and distribution allows the content industry to flourish. *Dōjinshi* exist as part of an acknowledged feedback loop of production and consumption that fuels enthusiasm and ultimately results in the purchase of officially licensed products.<sup>214</sup> *Dōjinshi* events also provide tailor-made opportunities to scout talent in a manner that would prove difficult in online distribution channels.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, as *dōjinshi* artists are not fringe elements of fandom but primary shapers of market opinion, the content industry has kept an eye on fan conventions for decades in order to ascertain trends that may prove profitable.<sup>216</sup> Far from existing in a vacuum of high-gravity geekiness, then, Japanese fan activities relating to *dōjinshi* are capable of changing the manner in which stories are written, edited, and produced for even a broad, mainstream audience.

In particular, *yaoi dōjinshi* interpretations of mainstream works have alerted editors and producers to the profitability of appealing to female consumers. This industry awareness has led to sizable growth in the number of *josei* comics for women and myriad publishers, imprints, and magazines devoted to homoerotic relationships between men and between women. It has also led to a shift in narrative and character tropes in the

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<sup>214</sup> This feedback loop is described by Ōtsuka Eiji in his essay "World and Variation" as discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>215</sup> These channels include private webpages, Pixiv, and Tumblr. Fan artists operating online often do not provide contact information, although they will advertise their appearance at fan events. It is possible for the work of extraordinarily popular artists to be highlighted in publications such as *Quarterly Pixiv* (a magazine released by the manga publisher Enterbrain), but publication opportunities attention stemming from online activity are exceptions. *Axis Powers Hetalia*, which was hosted on its author's private webpage, is one such exception.

<sup>216</sup> For more information on the relationship between the content industry and *dōjinshi*, see Sharon Kinsella's *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*.

manga published for a more general audience. For instance, the popular *shōnen* title *One Piece* (serialized in *Shūkan shōnen janpu* since 1997) and *Soul Eater* (serialized in *Gekkan shōnen gangan* since 2003) feature large casts of female characters who are not sidekicks, love interests, or eye candy but fully realized protagonists with their own agency, interiority, and story arcs. In addition, more *shōjo* manga, such as *Ōran Kōkō Hosuto Kurabu* (Ouran High School Host Club, serialized in *LaLa* from 2003 until 2010) and *Otomen* (serialized in *Bessatsu hana to yume* since 2006), feature male protagonists who are not simply love interests or stand-in characters for a female reader. *Seinen* franchises aimed at an older audience, such as *Durarara!!!* (published as a series of light novels by Dengeki Bunko since 2004 and animated in 2010) and *Tiger & Bunny* (broadcast in 2011), not only avoid stereotypical portrayals of violent, stoic, and muscle-bound masculinity<sup>217</sup> but also include canonically gay characters who embrace realistic queer identities instead of merely pandering to stereotypes of homosexuality.<sup>218</sup> In other words, the fannish activity involved in the production of *dōjinshi* has resulted in a mainstream media that embraces a much wider range of gender identities, which in turn has the potential to influence widespread societal perceptions of gender norms and non-heteronormative sexuality.

In their original manga, CLAMP challenges the character and genre conventions that function as walls dividing gendered publishing categories and gendered audiences. CLAMP has also encouraged the application of a female erotic gaze to its stories and to

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<sup>217</sup> As seen in *seinen* manga such as *Saint Seiya*, *First of the North Star*, and *Golgo 13*.

<sup>218</sup> Such as the ever-popular "I'm really straight, but I'm gay for you" trope and the "fabulous gay queen" trope. More information and a plethora of examples can be found on the following two *TV Tropes* pages: <<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/IfItsYouItsOkay>> and <<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CampGay>>.

the male characters in many of its works, including *xxxHolic*. As early as the fourth volume of the manga, CLAMP strongly suggests a physical bond between Watanuki and Dōmeki. (*Figure 30*) As the pair holds hands while walking through a twilight carnival together, the female reader is free to imagine the two on a date, or in a relationship in which the pair is connected both emotionally and physically. There are many episodes in *xxxHolic* that serve to deepen the bond between the two young men through physical means, almost as if CLAMP were offering not-so-hidden clues for *fujoshi* and *fujoshi*-in-training. Many of CLAMP's other titles, from *Cardcaptor Sakura* to *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicle* also depict intense relationships between two ostensibly straight male characters. Many of the *dōjinshi* that CLAMP created as an amateur circle were *yaoi* parodies of a sports manga for middle-school boys called *Captain Tsubasa* (serialized in *Shūkan shōnen janpu* from 1981 to 1989). As former *yaoi dōjinshi* artists, it is entirely probable that the women of CLAMP know exactly what's going on in the heads of their female readers and thus draws its manga to encourage homoerotic readings. Despite its outward conformity to the conventions of genres targeted at a male audience, CLAMP queers its own texts through an awareness of a female readership interested in relationships that fall outside the boundaries of binary gender categories.

As the interpretations expressed by *Kuchinashi kaoru* and *Kemuri* demonstrate, CLAMP's female readers are perfectly capable of translating homosociality into homoeroticism, and they are able to refigure the elements on the printed page into a narrative that suits their own interests and responds to issues not addressed by the original text. As a team of creators, CLAMP actively encourages the interrogation of their work

from non-mainstream perspectives. However, *fujoshi* and other readers creating fanworks in a more global context are also able to apply different hermeneutic lenses to narratives that seem to discourage female involvement. Thus, the female erotic gaze actively exposes the contradictions and possibilities embedded in the phallogocentric homosociality of the original work. By exercising the female erotic gaze, readers who participate in *yaoi* and slash fan cultures subvert the concept of a masculinity that must continually assert its heterosexuality in order to maintain its prominence in gender-based power dynamics. By conducting these activities as members of a fandom community, whether that community is an online forum hosting fan fiction or a circle that publishes *dōjinshi* and distributes them at conventions, female readers are playing subversive games with original texts that establish an authority over those texts as female and queer. Even though a text still legally belongs to its author, and even though the highest grossing creators in the entertainment industries of Japan, Europe, and North America are still largely male, there are large subcultures of people to whom phallogocentric power structures of exclusive ownership and authorized interpretations do not apply.



*Figure 21*

The front cover of the first volume of the print edition of the *Hetalia* manga. Clockwise from the front, the three characters are Italy, Germany, and Japan.



*Figure 22*

An example of fan service from the first episode of *Seiken no burakkusumisusu* (The Sacred Blacksmith, 2009). In this screenshot, the protagonist is costumed in armor that accentuates her chest and caught in a pose that emphasizes her sexual vulnerability.



Figure 23

A chapter heading illustration from the second volume of *xxxHolic* featuring Watanuki (left) and Dōmeki (right). Although the two have their backs to one another, each looks at the other out of the corner of his eyes.



Figure 24

A scene from the tenth volume of *xxxHolic*. When the spirit of a hydrangea traps Watanuki in a dream world, Dōmeki uses his spiritual powers, which are augmented by his attachment to his friend, to enter the dream and save Watanuki. As Dōmeki looks down on Watanuki, he says, "I made it."



Figure 25

The front cover of *Kuchinashi kaoru*. Dōmeki holds an incapacitated Watanuki.

Figure 26

The front cover of a *yaoi* manga titled *Yako Zen*. The character on the right, Monji Taira, is shorter and younger than the character on the left, Hagiwara Kai. Compared to Hagiwara, Taira's hair is longer, his face is rounder, his eyes are larger, his skin tone is rosier, and his expression is less guarded. A reader familiar with the conventions of *yaoi* would easily be able to tell that Taira is an *uke* and Hagiwara is a *seme*.





Figure 27

The opening page of the *dōjinshi* *Kemuri*. The smoke indicated by the title divides Watanuki from Dōmeki in the top two panels and frames them as a couple in the third. The text reads:

Smoke hides.  
Smoke covers.  
Smoke obfuscates.  
Smoke...

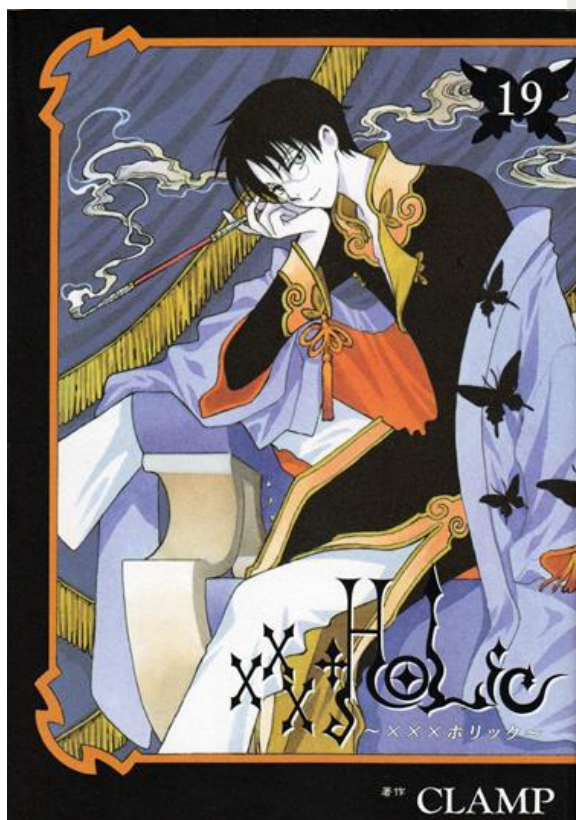


Figure 28

The cover of the nineteenth (and final) volume of *xxxHolic*. Watanuki now occupies the cover of the *tankōbon*, a space formerly devoted to portraits of Yūko. The smoke and butterfly motifs associated with Yūko have now become linked with Watanuki. Besides delving into the relationship between Watanuki and Dōmeki, *Kemuri* also expands on the meaning of this transfer of symbols.



*Figure 29*

The final page of the manga portion of *Kemuri*.

Watanuki says: Let me go... You're holding me too tight.

He thinks: But... Just a little longer.



*Figure 30*

A two-page spread from the fourth volume of *xxxHolic*. Watanuki and Dōmeki, who witness a *hyakki yagyō* (night parade of demons) while running an errand for Yūko, must both hold a special lantern that protects them from being revealed as humans.

## AFTERWORD

### The Potential of Female Homotextuality

Many feminist bloggers, journalists, and scholars have chronicled the negative impact of popular media on girls and young women. In *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, for instance, Peggy Orenstein connects the rising rates of depression and eating disorders in pre-adolescent girls with gendered marketing and the associated conflation of self-objectification with a perceived sense of empowerment. If emotional investment in media and the resulting internalization of its underlying ideologies can have a negative impact on the real lives of girls and the women they become, it also stands to reason that a positive impact is also possible, which is why feminists champion "strong female characters" in popular media and more gender-balanced literary and historical canons.

The real issue at stake in this dissertation is not whether bestselling fiction and graphic novels affect the psychology of their readers but whether they are capable of social commentary and effective as catalysts for social change. It can be difficult to compare a glam-and-glitter "monster of the week" story such as that which characterizes the opening volumes of the *Sailor Moon* manga with massive, era-defining novels such as those written by internationally renowned authors like Ōe Kenzaburō and Murakami Haruki. That being said, mystery fiction and manga allow readers to experience social and political issues from different perspectives on both a visceral and an intellectual level.

For example, Unita Yumi's ten-volume series *Usagi doroppu* (Bunny Drop) chronicles the daily life of Kawachi Daikichi, a thirty year old single man, and Rin, a six-year-old girl he adopts. (*Figure 31*) The first four volumes in the series portray Daikichi's



deepening bond with Rin as he deals with the challenges of raising her; and, in the last five volumes, the focus of the story shifts to Rin as a first-year student in high school as she learns to negotiate the challenges of the adult world.

The manga opens with the funeral of Daikichi's grandfather Sōichi and the introduction of a strange and sullen six-year-old girl lurking around Sōichi's house. The child, Rin, is purported to be Sōichi's illegitimate daughter, and no one in the family wants to take her in. While complaining about the expense and trouble of taking care of a child, Daikichi's relatives squabble over what is to be done with Rin until they can find an institution to take her off their hands. When Daikichi suggests that his mom adopt the child, she angrily retorts that he has no idea what sacrifices she had to make for the sake of him and his sister. Having observed that Rin's silence is a result of her sensitivity and increasingly frustrated by his family, Daikichi suddenly proclaims that he will take Rin home with him. The panel depicting Daikichi standing handsomely in a formal black suit as Rin runs to him makes it seem as if everything will work out for the pair; but, on the last page of the first chapter, a decidedly un-cool Daikichi is woken by a sleepy-faced little creature proclaiming, "Hey, hey, Mister [*ojisan*], I'm hungry!" Daikichi snaps that he's not an *ojisan* (a term used to address a middle-aged man), and that such an expression would better suit Rin, who is technically his aunt. Along with this light humor, however, comes Daikichi's sinking realization that he can no longer back out of the responsibilities with which his spur-of-the-moment decision to become Rin's guardian has saddled him.

Although *Bunny Drop* maintains a fairly light tone, it deals with serious themes. Daikichi's annoyance with having to glue name tags on every tiny piece of Rin's first grade math set is amusing, but it also illustrates the tireless effort Japanese parents must expend on their children's education, which has been cited as one of the reasons why mothers drop out of the work force and limit themselves to only one child.<sup>219</sup> Daikichi's panic over the lack of suitable daycare in the area surrounding his suburban neighborhood is presented as comic, but his exaggerated reactions mask a sense of unease concerning the lack of choices available to parents. Over the course of Rin's childhood, Daikichi makes friends with other parents, such as a working father, a working mother, a stay-at-home dad, and a single mother struggling to raise her son while keeping both feet on the corporate ladder. Daikichi, who requests a demotion in order to be able to pick up Rin from daycare on time, swaps war stories, survival strategies, and anecdotes of small victories with these other parents.

The issues *Bunny Drop* tackles are thus the issues the manga's readership, presumably women in their twenties,<sup>220</sup> must confront as they begin to make choices about the directions their lives will take concerning education, employment, marriage, childbirth, and elder care. The social observation and commentary of *Bunny Drop* does not immediately engage the reader at the same level as the manga's characters and story, but it stands out when the manga is compared to other titles with similar premises, such

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<sup>219</sup> See Allison (1996), especially the chapter "Japanese Mothers and *Obentōs*: The Lunch Box as Ideological State Apparatus." See also Amanda Seaman's essay "Making and Marketing Mothers: Guides to Pregnancy in Modern Japan." Hiroko Tabuchi's 2013 article "Desperate Hunt for Day Care in Japan" provides an update on the state of daycare in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area.

<sup>220</sup> *Bunny Drop* was serialized in Shōdensha's monthly *Feel Young* magazine, one of the most popular magazines catering to a *josei* readership.

as Unita's earlier *Yoningurashi* (Family of Four, 2003-2008). In the world of *Yoningurashi*, children are always adorable, and any problems their parents face are easily resolved within the span of a few pages. In contrast, *Bunny Drop* employs a degree of realism that never allows the reader to escape into a comforting fantasy of carefree adulthood that will disappear as soon as she closes the manga.

Likewise, Aihara Miki's manga *Goji kara kuji made* (From Five to Nine) allows its reader to explore different versions of adult femininity through its depiction of professional and romantic relationships of working women in their twenties. (Figure 32) Like Aihara's earlier titles, *From Five to Nine* is a dramatic exposé of the love lives of gorgeous young people in the trendy districts on the southwest side of Tokyo. The manga is serialized in *Gekkan chiizu*, a magazine that serves as a bridge between a *shōjo* readership of tweens captivated by stories of pure love and a *josei* readership of young women interested in the more physical aspects of romantic relationships. As a title targeted at a relatively mature female readership, *From Five to Nine* in particular uses common romance tropes to explore the conflicts between different gender roles and expectations of femininity through the love affairs of its main protagonist.

Sakuraba Junko, the leading lady, teaches during the evenings at an English language conversation school. Because of her friendly professionalism and almost native fluency, she's considered to be one of the top instructors at her workplace, and her dream is to save up enough money to study abroad in America. Since Junko has yet to settle down with a man, her grandmother has begun to set her up on dates with potential marriage partners. To appease her grandmother, Junko spends her twenty-seventh

birthday out on a *miai* date with a Buddhist monk named Hoshikawa Takane, who graduated from Tokyo University with a major in Indian philosophy. Junko is put off by what she sees as Hoshikawa's snobbishness; but, thinking that she'll never see him again, Junko ends up spending the night with him on a lark.

Immediately after Junko gets back from her one night stand with Hoshikawa, she realizes that the deadline to move out of her apartment, whose building is slated for renewal, is fast approaching. When she goes to her grandmother for help, her grandmother suggests that she take up temporary residence in a temple with connections to the family. Unfortunately, this temple is headed by Hoshikawa, who now wants to make Junko his wife. Becoming a temple wife is a full-time job that would require Junko to give up her position at the English conversation school as well as her dream of studying abroad. If she were to marry Hoshikawa, Junko would also have to relinquish the pleasures of her existence as an independent urbanite and spend her days cooking, cleaning, dressing herself in traditional clothing, setting out flower arrangements, and entertaining guests. As Junko makes plans to extricate herself from the machinations of her grandmother, who desires to see her married well in order to increase the social status of the family, she surprises herself by becoming conflicted over walking out on Hoshikawa and the stable life he can offer her.

Junko's love life represents the push and pull between competing ideologies. Junko is faced with a choice between giving into social pressure and relinquishing her independence and her dreams as she considers whether it is possible for her to somehow fend for herself without a social and economic safety net. Because of the romantic drama,



the reader is able to experience the emotional attraction and anxiety of these possibilities. For example, when Hoshikawa takes action to lock Junko into a traditional gender role, the denial of agency that Junko suffers is viscerally upsetting to the reader. As it gradually becomes clear that Hoshikawa genuinely cares for Junko, however, it also becomes clear that Junko's spirited resistance might be able change the way he sees the aspirations of the women of his generation. In this way, Hoshikawa serves as a representative of a society that is still primarily dominated by phallogocentric interests.

Hoshikawa is frightening, but Aihara suggests that he can be persuaded to see gender roles differently by someone like Junko, who is smart enough and tough enough to challenge him, even if she's coming from a position of relative disadvantage. The sort of "he can change" mentality Junko comes to embrace is presented as being just as dangerous in the fictional world of the manga as it is in real life, but the alternative of "he will never change" would be a bleak prognosis on the sort of patriarchal mentality Hoshikawa represents. The possibility that Hoshikawa is able to change his own behavior as he comes to see Junko as an individual instead of as a receptacle of his received notions of gender is an element of social optimism that serves as an emollient to the seemingly misogynistic sexual drama of the manga. In the world of *From Nine to Five*, gender equality and social change are not vague ideals but rather very personal goals whose achievement directly affects the lives of the young female protagonists despite the anxiety that arises in the face of societal resistance.

Manga artists do not have the ability to shape legal and political discourses as directly as lawyers, judges, politicians, bureaucrats, and the journalists and academics

who publish in influential opinion magazines. However, many of the social issues currently being debated in Japan, such as a shrinking workforce, a low birthrate, and an aging population, directly concern women and the choices they make in their lives. Despite this, young women in the demographic represented by the readership of manga such as *Bunny Drop* and *From Nine to Five* have relatively limited access to participation in public realms of political and legal discourse. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that they are active in realms of discourse to which they do have access.

An individual's consciousness of social issues is shaped by many types of discourse, and it young women are be more comfortable with discourses from which they do not feel excluded. Manga like *Bunny Drop* and *From Five to Nine*, which examine issues that pertain directly to their readers, are therefore instrumental in shifting public opinion and inspiring the critical attitudes necessary to inspire social change in women's lives. Even if the texts discussed in this dissertation, from crime fiction to graphic novels about magical schoolgirls, do not fit neatly within the category of *junbungaku*, they still perform many of the functions of serious literature. Manga and murder mystery novels may not be written or read by adult male politicians, journalists, and university professors, but they still serve as mirrors in which young women and men can scrutinize their lives, the limitations imposed on them, the choices available to them, and the means by which they can change the world to reflect their own personal identities and desires.



Figure 31

Daikichi watches over his adopted daughter Rin as she heads off to school.



*Figure 32*

Junko and Hoshikawa represent the clash between "modern" and "traditional."

**APPENDIX A*****Sabiru kokoro (Rusted Heart)***

Fujieda Kinuko had decided that if she were going to leave she'd leave on March 23, which was her husband Yoshiyuki's birthday. There couldn't be a nastier present.

March 23 had another meaning as well. Yoshiyuki had probably forgotten the date, but, on this exact day ten years ago, he had taken Kinuko from Tokyo and brought her back home and, in a certain sense, handed down her sentence. On that day Kinuko firmly made up her mind to leave her husband in ten years. In other words, March 23 was the secret anniversary of Kinuko's decision to leave her marriage.

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It was a Saturday in March ten years ago. Spring break was coming up, and the morning was warm and relaxed. Kinuko was living in an apartment in a university town called S City in the suburbs of Tokyo. After her daughter left for elementary school and Yoshiyuki set off for the university where he worked, Kinuko was doing laundry while thinking over her plans for the afternoon when the intercom began ringing persistently. Figuring that it must be a delivery, Kinuko rushed to the foyer.

"This is Mrs. Aojima!" a woman cried out in a shrill voice while knocking at the door.

"Is there a problem?" Kinuko felt her voice tremble.

Kinuko was thunderstruck. Could this really be the wife of Aojima Hitoshi?

"This is Aojima's wife! Hurry up and get out here!"

The woman's voice pealed forth from the intercom exactly as if she were summoning a criminal. There would be trouble with the neighbors if she continued to make a huge fuss like this, so Kinuko hurriedly opened the door to the foyer. She found two women standing outside. One of them, who was about Kinuko's age, seemed like she was about to go off at any second. She was wearing voluminous black clothing that made her look like a crow. This one was probably Aojima's wife. The other woman was slightly older, and her face resembled that of the first woman. She wore teal clothing with a yellow hat. The older of the two women broke the ice.

"I'm this woman's sister. Who do you think you are?"

"What do you mean, who do I think I am...?" Kinuko was at a loss for words.

"Don't try to play dumb with us," she lashed out viciously. Aojima's wife glared at Kinuko silently.

When she noticed that this woman was clutching an umbrella despite the fair weather, Kinuko backed away.

"What are you talking about, 'Don't play dumb,'" Kinuko mumbled in defense.

Suddenly the woman in black shouted, "You adulterous harlot!"

Without thinking, Kinuko darted her eyes toward the apartment door on the other side of the hallway. She and Yoshiyuki lived in a faculty dorm. It was a low-rise complex of three stories, and it didn't have an elevator. The apartment doors on each floor faced each other. Across from Kinuko lived a woman married to someone who seemed to have been an assistant professor since the dawn of time. In addition to having a big mouth, this woman was the building's community watch officer and resident snitch. Kinuko definitely didn't want her to hear what was going on.

When Kinuko spat back "How rude!" in a tight voice, she was cut off by the older woman, who countered with, "Which one of us is the rude one here?"

"You've come up with this accusation out of nowhere! You don't have the least shred of evidence."

"My husband stated very clearly that you were his lover!" Aojima's wife screamed hysterically.

Kinuko couldn't believe her ears. "That's a lie. There's not any sort of relationship between me and Mr. Aojima."

"It's a lie, is it? But he told me, he told me that he was having an affair with a certain Fujieda Kinuko who lives in S City. He said that you had just been an acquaintance at work, but then he got a phone call from you. He told me that you two always meet at a place in Roppongi called Hotel Ibis."

Aojima's wife delivered these words with an unnecessary amount of force. Her eyes were drawn together and slanted upwards in a caricature of outrage. If she kept shouting like this, this encounter would never end.

Kinuko rushed to shut the door, but, before she could lock it, the two women forced it back open.

"Please stop this."

To Kinuko's entreaty, the older woman responded flatly, "You can't get away."

"If you won't come out, we'll just stand out here and make trouble for you. We'll keep doing this until your husband isn't able to stay at the university any longer."

Aojima's wife emphatically thrust the tip of her umbrella against the reinforced steel door. The sound reverberated down the hallway. Kinuko resigned herself to the situation.

"Fine. I'm coming out now, so please hold on."

Thoroughly flustered, Kinuko went back into the apartment and picked up her bag and keys. In the meantime, the two women had flung the door open and were shamelessly looking around the inside of the apartment. When she saw Kinuko come back out with her purse, Aojima's wife screamed, "Where do you think you're going?!"

"What do you mean, where? We can't do this here. We can go to the park, or..."

"I'm not going anywhere. We can talk right here. You're not in a position to say what we can and can't do!"

Realizing that the two women had come just to harass her, Kinuko stood in the foyer in a daze. They didn't come to talk, but rather to get a look at the face of the woman named Kinuko and shame her by broadcasting the affair to her husband and the whole neighborhood. Kinuko was shocked that Aojima could be married to this woman. She was angry at Aojima for confessing his involvement with her, and she was disgusted with herself for entering into a relationship with Aojima even though she didn't like him that much. She was exhausted just by thinking about having to make an abject apology to Yoshiyuki. She didn't want to imagine what would happen afterward, and she found that she didn't care how this matter was settled. She could almost hear the sound of her last thread of patience snapping. Kinuko stepped into the first pair of shoes she saw in the vestibule, shoved past the two women, and fled from the apartment.

Kinuko had nowhere to go but Mita Chikako's apartment in Tokyo. Chikako was a classmate from her high school in Sendai, and for some time now Kinuko had been going to Tokyo once a month and accumulating trysts with Aojima under the pretext of visiting Chikako.

Kinuko looked into her purse for the first time after arriving at the train station. There was nothing there except for her beat-up wallet, a promotional packet of tissues that she had been given somewhere, and a single tube of lipstick. She only had five thousand yen in her wallet. Her hair was messy, and she wasn't wearing any makeup. Even worse, she had on jeans and a sweatshirt and socks covered with fuzz, an outfit she wouldn't have worn even to the neighborhood grocery store. She was dogged by the fear that the two

women were chasing after her, so, without looking back, she bought a train ticket and made her way to Tokyo.

When she called Chikako, Chikako told her to come to her apartment right away. She more than likely felt responsible for helping Kinuko fabricate an alibi. Chikako was the daughter of a wealthy family, and an apartment had been bought for her in the high-rent Zeimusho-ura area of Tokyo's swanky Azabu district, where she lived happily with her daughter and her second husband. Chikako had been through some rough times during her divorce, and she had handled it better than most. Still, even Chikako was flustered when Kinuko told her what had happened.

"This must have been terrible for you," Chikako said sympathetically when she saw Kinuko's face in her foyer. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

Kinuko saw herself reflected in a large mirror hanging in the foyer. Kinuko was 37, and her face looked terrible without makeup. She thought that the incident had to be her punishment for transgressing against her marriage, but she just couldn't handle any more humiliation. She buried her shame deep within herself and sighed without saying anything.

"Your husband called a while ago."

"What did he say?"

"He said he's coming to pick you up in three days, and he wants me to keep you here until then so he can come during spring break."

No, Kinuko thought, he's probably not coming now because he doesn't have the money. The salary her husband received as an assistant professor at a public university was only just enough to keep food on the table. Kinuko envisioned Yoshiyuki's bitter face. It seemed that Aojima's wife had somehow managed to contact Yoshiyuki at school and inform him of the circumstances. Kinuko was worried about what would happen to her daughter Aoi. She was certain that news of this business had already spread through the neighborhood.

While waiting for Yoshiyuki, Kinuko tried repeatedly to contact Aojima, but it seemed that he too was running away, and she couldn't catch him. Kinuko passed the point of anger and grew depressed.

Aojima had been her boss at the cosmetics company where she worked before she got married. Her flirtation with Aojima had been enjoyable but noncommittal. After she married Yoshiyuki, however, she grew bitter as she nurtured the fantasy that she had been forced to give up a chance at a romance with Aojima. She had the opportunity to go to Tokyo once a month for a cooking class, and during one of these trips she took a chance



and called Aojima. He had said he wanted to see her too, and they quickly rekindled their old relationship.

Lying to Yoshiyuki that she was staying over at Chikako's place, Kinuko would spend the night at a hotel with Aojima. The affair continued for half a year. Once she actually saw him in person, Aojima had turned out to be a cheap and wimpy little man, but Kinuko had more fun with him than she did spending time at home with her husband. By having an affair, she got to feel like a woman again while getting back at her husband at the same time.

Marrying Yoshiyuki had probably been a mistake from the very beginning. When she was first presented with the opportunity to meet with him as a prospective marriage partner, she learned that he was a lecturer at a prestigious national university and felt like marrying him on that alone. She had been young and foolish. Kinuko had enjoyed studying, and her grades had been good, but, when she was in high school, her mother had disclosed to her that she was adopted, and she had given up on advancing to college. She had a younger sister, and, ever since she was little, she had a habit of turning down snacks and toys, saying "I'm fine" even if it was something she really wanted. Although she wasn't consciously aware of it, at some point she had probably picked up on the fact that she wasn't her parents' real child. Kinuko had talent, but she felt pressured into not continuing her education. Her bitterness and feelings of deprivation engendered a sense of inferiority, which in turn led to her stubborn desire for an elite marriage partner.

When she met Yoshiyuki in person for the first time, she thought he was boring and wore frumpy clothes. When they went out to eat, he ordered only his own meal before handing the menus back to the waitress, and when they went on a walk he walked briskly in front of her by himself. Kinuko sensed somewhere in her heart that he was a self-centered, childish man who only talked about himself, but she pushed the marriage forward anyway. When she later overheard Yoshiyuki's relatives saying that Yoshiyuki had wanted to marry a prettier woman with a better educational pedigree, Kinuko realized how stupid she had been. Kinuko had turned a blind eye to Yoshiyuki's faults because of his elite status, and Yoshiyuki had overlooked Kinuko's shortcomings because she was meek and obedient. In a certain sense, they were a good match for each other. Unfortunately, no love or affection was born from any sort of happiness accompanying their wedding. The marriage was a failure, and Kinuko realized that married life was something she must simply endure. She thought that happiness was something not meant for her.

Nothing came out of the affair with Aojima either. Instead, Kinuko's affair turned her marriage into an even tighter cage.

Yoshiyuki came to get Kinuko three days after she left, on March 23. Wearing a worn-out gray suit and clutching his usual briefcase, Yoshiyuki bowed deeply to Chikako without even glancing in Kinuko's direction.

"I'm sorry that my wife put you through so much trouble."

His words were polite, but his eyes were unmistakably filled with reproach. He blamed Chikako for conspiring with Kinuko. Perhaps Chikako felt ashamed herself. She blushed and lowered her head without saying anything.

"How is Aoi doing?"

Ignoring Kinuko's question, Yoshiyuki took two film cases out of his suitcase and placed them on top of Chikako's luxurious living room table, which was made out of a single slab of wood.

"This is for your trouble."

Both film cases were densely packed with 500 yen coins. If putting 500 yen coins into film cases can be considered a hobby, then that was Yoshiyuki's only hobby. Kinuko had always thought that it was humorous how Yoshiyuki changed paper money into coins and fixated on finding ways to increase his supply of film cases. When Yoshiyuki handed the two cases to Chikako, Kinuko glanced at her, and Chikako silently signaled what a pain Yoshiyuki was being.

"Your husband sure is strange," her laughing eyes seemed to be saying.

Kinuko was embarrassed at how clueless her husband was. At the thought of returning to this strange man's apartment as his wife, Kinuko experienced the sudden anxiety of being trapped once again, and her knees trembled slightly.

"Since my wife will no longer be coming to Tokyo, I request your understanding that your association with her ends here," Yoshiyuki said without emotion as he gripped Kinuko's arm tightly. After that, Kinuko didn't see Chikako for another ten years.

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That night, Yoshiyuki slipped into Kinuko's bed. When Kinuko rolled away from him, he put his hands around her neck. Kinuko closed her eyes, thinking that there wasn't much she could do if he had decided to kill her. Feeling the strength drain from her body, Yoshiyuki quickly relaxed the pressure in his fingers and whispered into Kinuko's ear.

"I will forgive you this time. In return, I won't give you one yen more than necessary for your personal use. You'll get 100,000 yen a month for food. If that's not enough, that's still all you get. From now on, I won't let you work or take lessons. I won't let you take more than one step outside S City. I won't let you see Chikako. That woman was corrupted by her divorce, and she had a bad influence on you. If you don't like this, leave

your daughter and get out of the apartment immediately. Still, even if you leave, I will absolutely not divorce you. I cannot tolerate any stains on my record. Do you get it, do you understand? Nod if you understand."

In other words, Yoshiyuki had ordered her to do nothing less than stay at home and devote herself to being a full-time maid. There was no other choice, Kinuko thought. She would have to compromise. This is what she got for having married for selfish reasons. Her daughter was still young, and she was at the disadvantage of having brought this on herself by having an affair. To make matters worse, she had no money of her own.

Still, Kinuko hated the idea of spending her entire life as Yoshiyuki's maid. She couldn't stand the thought of ending up as a mindless slave of someone she neither loved nor respected.

*I can put up with this for ten years until Aoi grows up, and I can somehow manage to save money. Then I can leave.*

Having thought that far, Kinuko finally nodded.

"I understand. I apologize."

"Fine."

Seemingly put at ease, Yoshiyuki returned to his own bed.

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After that, the days passed peacefully, at least outwardly, but thorns of bitterness grew around the part of Kinuko's heart that suffered from being constrained. Ten years exactly. When ten years had passed, she would leave the apartment without warning. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kinuko was only able to continue living by imagining how surprised Yoshiyuki would be when she disappeared.

Aoi finally entered middle school and graduated. After she had taken her high school entrance exams, she spent her free time working at a part-time job to help pay for the expenses of high school life. When Aoi was eventually accepted into a university in Tokyo, Kinuko was relieved and opened her heart to her daughter.

"I'm going to leave home next March. You absolutely must not tell your father."

"What will you do after you leave?"

"I'll work as a domestic assistant. Your mother can't do anything besides housework."

Perhaps because she had noticed the tension between her parents while she was growing up, Aoi, who had always been taciturn and never caused any trouble, didn't ask any questions or make any objections. Gaining momentum from her daughter's consent, Kinuko steadily prepared to leave home.

Kinuko had completed every single one of her preparations a week before she carried out her plan. Starting a year before she planned to leave, she had liberally gifted her friends with her favorite tableware, which she had somehow collected with the small amount of money she was able to budget out of her living allowance. She dispensed with her clothing in the same way. She resolutely burned anything and everything that bore any traces of herself, such as her diaries and personal letters. She settled all of her debts so as not to incur any trouble in the future, and she even allowed her friends in the neighborhood to hold a going away party for her. She capped off her preparations by having a futon sent to Chikako's apartment, where she would stay for the time being.

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March 23 was sunny. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Kinuko saw Yoshiyuki off to the university in the foyer.

"Take care!"

Yoshiyuki turned and looked at Kinuko, who seemed more cheerful than usual, with a perplexed face. Kinuko looked away, avoiding his eyes. Since this would be the last time she saw his back walking away from her, Kinuko went out into the hallway to see him off. Only when he had disappeared completely did she turn around to gaze at the door leading to the foyer. There was a tiny rusted scratch on the gray steel door. It was the scratch that Aojima's wife had made with her umbrella ten years ago. No one besides Kinuko had noticed it; it held meaning only for her. It was an emblem of shame and defiance. Whenever she saw it, her timeworn resolution to leave home was revived. Even though it had rusted over, the scratch still remained.

Before she left home, Kinuko cleaned the house until it sparkled, took out a letter she had written several days ago, and placed it on top of the kitchen table.

*Thank you for your consideration for so many years.*

*Since I have no intention of coming back, please don't try to find me.*

*I'm fine with leaving the family registry as it is, but of course I will be happy to consent to a divorce if you decide to get remarried.*

*If that happens, please let Aoi know. I intend to communicate with her periodically.*

*Farewell,  
Kinuko*

The only things left in the kitchen cabinets were the generic plates and glasses that she got from the liquor store. As a result of Kinuko's efforts to erase herself from the apartment, her clothes and shoes had disappeared, and the interior of the house gradually lost its charm and individuality. Yoshiyuki, who was oblivious to his surroundings, had completely failed to notice. He was a boring man who looked down on movies and novels and thought that university professors were the most important people in the world. *He must have thought that I was under his control and stopped paying attention. This is goodbye.* Without looking back, Kinuko closed the door and shoved her house key through the newspaper slot. She automatically glanced at the scar on the foyer door when she heard the keys clink against the metal. *Finally*, she thought.

There were several women around the same age as Kinuko waiting for her downstairs in front of the shrubbery. They were all housewives from the neighborhood who had grown close to Kinuko over the past ten years.

"So you're really leaving. Please call us when things settle down."

"I will. But please don't tell my husband anything if he asks," Kinuko said empathetically.

"We won't say anything at all."

"I wonder what will become of your husband," one woman laughed, almost as if she were gloating.

"Yeah, he'll be shocked. He'll start crying for you to *pleeease* come home," another woman said, and everyone broke into laughter. The excitement of her friends gave Kinuko the impression that they were enjoying her rebellion as if it were they themselves that were leaving. What Kinuko was doing was something that none of these women would be able to carry out in reality, even if she secretly wanted to. It was exactly as if Kinuko were fighting a symbolic battle for the other housewives.

"All right, I'm off."

"Stay healthy."

"Take care of yourself."

"Will we ever see you again?"

Someone had started crying, but Kinuko smiled and waved and walked leisurely along the path to the station. Everything was completely different from when she had blindly

fled from Aojima's wife to the station ten years ago. Her makeup was perfect, and she carried a million yen in cash, which she had painstakingly accumulated from her monthly allowance of one hundred thousand yen. She had spent a certain amount of money on tableware and food she liked, but she had managed to build up her secret stash by not buying any clothing or makeup or books. She wondered how much her husband, who handed her a scant ten thousand yen for food, had been able to save. *Those were truly terrible days*, Kinuko thought as she bought a ticket. Still, she was able to fully experience this feeling of freedom because of the hardship she had endured.

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Ten years has passed since she last visited Chikako's house.

Although her husband had forbidden any contact with Chikako, Kinuko could still call her as often as she liked, and the two talked on the phone once a month. Kinuko had of course gone over her plan to leave home with Chikako.

"It's been a while."

Chikako saw Kinuko's face and smiled happily, but she seemed to be truly bewildered to see Kinuko actually standing in front of her. With a sidelong look she glanced at Kinuko's attire from top to bottom. Perhaps, in the ten years that they had only spoken over the phone, Chikako's friendship had cooled off a little. Kinuko, a bit perplexed, looked down at her own skirt and sweater.

"I look like a middle-aged woman."

"So what if you do?" Chikako laughed.

The years had done nothing to Chikako's pale and handsome face. Unlike Kinuko, Chikako's married life had been free from incident.

"You probably thought I wasn't serious," Kinuko said, looking at the table where Yoshiyuki had once laid his two film cases packed full of 500 yen coins.

"I suppose you're right. I was surprised when the futon was delivered. I didn't know you hated your husband that much."

"I don't really hate him," Kinuko said, not meeting Chikako's eyes. She didn't really know what had acted as the seed that grew into her desire to leave home. "If I had to put it into words, I get the feeling that maybe I wanted to become a traveler out on my own. When I stop to think about it, I guess I've felt this way for a long time, ever since I learned I was adopted. When I was trapped at home like that, I felt like I was going to die."

Chikako raised her eyebrows and exhaled a stream of cigarette smoke as if she suspected such an answer was only an affectation. Although Chikako's husband had been assigned to a temporary post in a regional capital, she lived an easy life here with her daughter, who had just graduated from college and started work at a company. Even though she lived right in Tokyo, she had a spacious and luxurious apartment that was so clean it hardly looked lived in at all. Kinuko remembered that she had been jealous of this lifestyle when she was younger. Now she felt that Chikako was a queen confined within her own house, and her jealousy had completely evaporated.

"I feel like I'm becoming a vagrant. I wonder if it has to do with not having a set day when I'll go home, or anywhere to go home to. I don't have anywhere else to go either. I haven't been able to stop myself from thinking about it."

"Hmm," Chikako said with an expression that made it clear she didn't really understand. "What are you going to do now?" she asked in a worried tone of voice.

"I'll look for a position as a line-in domestic assistant. I can't do anything else besides housework."

"It's not easy to be a live-in maid. Why don't you rent an apartment and then look for a job?"

"What sort of jobs are there for a 47-year-old woman who hasn't done anything besides being a housewife?"

"I'm sure you'll find something once you start looking."

"Even if I did find something, I wouldn't want it. It's because I don't have anywhere to call home that I want to dig my heels into someone else's house. I'm really good with housework."

For the past ten years, Kinuko's only hobby and means of asserting her will had been to diligently apply herself to housework. She had been a perfect housewife, cleaning the house and devoting herself to cooking. There had been just one thing missing ever since her daughter had left for school in Tokyo. Even though she wanted to work as hard as she could for someone else's sake, there was no one who would benefit from her hard work. Yoshiyuki didn't count, of course.

"I want to help out a family that's in trouble, like a family with a sick person or an old person."

"How gallant," Chikako said with a slightly sour expression. "I'm not sure how you thought up something like that, but still."

At that moment, Chikako's daughter, who was a 23-year-old office lady, returned home from work. She greeted Kinuko politely.

"Good afternoon, ma'am. It's been a long time."

"I apologize for staying over like this."

"No, not at all. Please stay as long as you like."

As she said this, a glint of annoyance flashed in her downcast eyes.

She couldn't be happy about having her mother's friend colonize the living room. Kinuko couldn't stay here long. For the first time since leaving home, Kinuko experienced loneliness, and she felt even more like a vagrant.

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The next morning, Kinuko began her first day of calling people who had posted "seeking live-in domestic assistant" ads in the work wanted section of the newspaper.

Kinuko found three positions, but one of the positions had already been filled. Kinuko decided to give up on another position because she got a bad feeling from dealing with the woman who answered the phone. When she called the last position, Kinuko was told that she should come as soon as possible for an interview, and she rushed out of Chikako's house enthusiastically. She was confident that they would like her immediately. With her hair in a clean short cut, she looked as professional as anyone else. Although her clothes were plain, her fashion sense wasn't bad, and she imagined that she gave the impression of a reliable married woman. She wanted to make herself useful by doing housework, and she was good at it. Kinuko was filled with hopeful expectations.

Kinuko arrived at a large and luxurious house in Suginami, but she was surprised when the door to the foyer opened. The traditional dirt floor in the vestibule was almost completely covered in shoes, and Kinuko wondered how many dozens of people lived in the house. All of the shoes were large men's work boots caked with dirt.

"You're here for the live-in domestic assistant position? Come in."

A fat woman in a tracksuit who didn't look like she was wearing makeup came out and made a brusque gesture with her hand. Since she could think of nothing else to do, Kinuko took off her shoes in front of the door and, trying not to tread on the work boots in her bare feet, stepped up into the house. The rooms were luxurious but slightly dirty, and the unpleasant smell of raw garbage wafted through the air. The cheap industrial carpet rolled out in the hallway was covered in black stains from spilled food.



Three middle school or high school boys were slouched on the couch in the living room, absorbed in a video game. Bags of chips were littered on top of the table, along with several plastic soda bottles that the boys were drinking from. None of the boys turned to look at Kinuko. While glancing over Kinuko's resume, the woman in the tracksuit said "Sit over there" without looking up at her.

Setting aside a dirty t-shirt, Kinuko sat on a corner of the sofa. She saw a mountain of dirty bowls and dishes piled in the sink when she glanced into the kitchen.

"As you can see, we have only boys here. They're always hungry. That's why I'm looking for someone who's good at cooking. We've had several people work for us already, but none of them has stayed on for long. You'll need to wake up at 5:00 in the morning and make three box lunches as well as breakfast."

"Is there anything else?"

"You'll need to make dinner too, and something light for a late afternoon snack. On weekends and holidays you'll need to make lunch. Are you good at cooking?"

"Yes, but I've never prepared meals for a large number of people."

"That's fine, it doesn't have to be anything special."

Kinuko made various excuses and left the house. She knew that saying she wanted to do her best for other people sounded silly, but she meant what she said. If she didn't, then this house probably would have been fine. Still, she was wanted to be careful about where she chose to work. She was worried that most households who employed domestic assistants were just using money to buy labor.

*I'm not a machine, and it's not worth it if I don't have the right motivation. I want to do a job where I feel appreciated as an individual.*

A chill ran down Kinuko's spine when she realized that this is how she would have described her relationship with Yoshiyuki. If Aoi hadn't been there, Kinuko would have been nothing more than a live-in maid in her apartment in S City.

When she returned to Chikako's house and confessed what had happened, Chikako nodded with a self-satisfied look on her face.

"That sounds about right. It's not so easy, trying to make your own way in the world."

Somewhat annoyed, Kinuko didn't respond. She didn't want to hear something like that from Chikako, who had everything given to her.

Kinuko went out for interviews the next day, and then the day after that. Unfortunately, no one told her that she was needed immediately to help save a family from miserable conditions. Kinuko couldn't help but think that the housewives were lazy and wanted to solve their problems with money, just like the first woman who interviewed her. This was how capitalism worked. Kinuko could understand it intellectually, but she didn't feel like she would be able to deal with living in a house for such a reason. No, more than not being able to tolerate a certain capitalistic mindset, she didn't want to be reminded of the sterile relationship between Yoshiyuki and herself. Kinuko kept going to interviews, but it didn't seem that she would be able to find a family that needed her as an individual.

She was moved for the first time by a family in Shōnan. The old mother had been confined to a wheelchair due to a stroke, and the unmarried second son, a company worker approaching his forties, still lived in the house. The young woman who came to pick Kinuko up at the station tearfully asked her for her help with the housework and the mother's care. Kinuko got a good feeling from the mother, who seemed to like her as well.

The house was an old Japanese-style mansion, and the rooms were connected by sliding *fusuma* screens, so there weren't individual rooms. Kinuko was on the verge of resolving to take responsibility for the poor old woman, who was inconvenienced by the house's lack of access for her wheelchair, when a tired-looking man in his fifties entered the room. Upon learning that this man was the oldest son who had come back home after getting divorced, Kinuko declined the offer of employment. Since there were no private rooms, she felt uncomfortable about living in a house a forty-year-old man and a fifty-year-old man, both of whom were unmarried.

In the end, a live-in domestic assistant isn't a member of the family. She would still be her own person even if she were living side-by-side with the family, and she didn't want to constantly share the same space with everyone. Realizing that this was yet another thing that she couldn't compromise, Kinuko became depressed. She must have been naïve to think that she could devote herself to an ailing family and assuage her loneliness by living with them. Kinuko was exhausted, and she was losing her self-confidence.

Five days had already passed since she left home. Kinuko tried calling her daughter.

"Mom, have you finally left the house?"

"I left just as I planned. Right now I'm staying at Chikako's house. Have you heard anything from your father?"

"No, that's the weird thing," Aoi said in a strange voice. "I don't think he's worried about you at all."

Kinuko was surprised. She decided to call a close friend from the neighborhood and ask about how things were going at her old apartment.

"Hey, how are you doing? Everyone has been worried about you. What have you been doing since you left?"

Kinuko told her that she was staying with a friend and looking for a job, and then she asked about Yoshiyuki.

"How is Fujieda doing? Have you heard anything?"

"Well, about him," Kinuko's friend lowered her voice, "Apparently nothing has changed, and he's carrying on as usual. Everyone has been watching him like a hawk. He leaves for work like he always does, and I hear there's nothing different about him while he's at the university. Everyone agrees that he's handling it better than expected."

After putting the receiver down, Kinuko thought that her husband probably found her just as depressing as she found him. Something might have snapped within her husband as well after that incident ten years ago. She had never thought about it like this. Maybe the person most pleased that Kinuko had left was Yoshiyuki himself. If that were the case, then she had given him the best possible birthday present. Kinuko was assailed by despair. Suddenly, finding a job – or doing anything at all – felt meaningless.

To console herself, Kinuko went to a department store. She hadn't visited a department store in Tokyo in years, and she was dazzled by all the things she wanted. Kinuko ended up buying a spring coat and a knit suit for interviews, and before she knew it 70,000 yen had flown away. Her paltry sum of one million yen would soon be gone. She had lived her life in units of ten yen divided between grocery stores and greengrocers, and a million yen was a large sum of money to her. If she didn't keep track of her money, however, it would disappear like smoke. Kinuko was struck by how precarious her situation was. It was as if the ground she was standing on could disappear at any second.

While thinking about other things, Kinuko had wandered into the department store's basement gourmet food market. Kinuko saw rare ingredients and foods she liked everywhere, and she couldn't stop herself from buying what she wanted. Finding some balsamic vinegar, she bought it without thinking. She also bought some Kyoto style pickles from a famous store to bring back to Chikako. It delighted her to buy these two things, since she hadn't been able to find either when she lived in S City.

"I'm back. I got these for you."

Chikako made a strange face when Kinuko gave her balsamic vinegar and the Kyoto-style pickles.

"What's this?"

"It's called balsamic vinegar. It's good for when you're making Italian food. I noticed that you don't have any, so I thought you should try it. And the Kyoto pickles from this place are famous."

Chikako said nothing. Her silence was unpleasant, as if she were suggesting that she didn't need such things. Kinuko's gifts had probably hurt Chikako's pride as a wealthy and knowledgeable Tokyo housewife.

"Kinu. Haven't you ever thought that your love of cooking is compensating for something?"

Kinuko was struck dumb by the harsh words that finally emerged from Chikako's mouth.

"What would I be compensating for?"

"You're unsatisfied with your life."

Chikako understood her better than she understood herself. Kinuko figured Chikako was probably right, and she fell silent.

Spotting Kinuko's new clothes out of the corner of her eye, Chikako continued her tirade. "Kinu. If you spend money like this it will be gone before you know it. You need to get a job instead of going shopping."

Kinuko wondered if Chikako was telling her to get out of her apartment. Things weren't supposed to be like this, she thought as she remembered Chikako's pained expression when her husband came to her house to retrieve her ten years ago.

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Kinuko finally found a place that met her criteria after she had been staying with Chikako for more than two weeks.

Chikako had begun to get irritated with Kinuko, who looked as if she were not going to leave at all, and Chikako herself had found this job posting.

"Kinu, you don't seem like you really want to do this, but what do you think of this place? Doesn't it look like this would be good for you? Do you want me to have my husband write you a letter of recommendation?"

Chikako's leading questions seemed tailored to force Kinuko to make a decision.

"It's not that I don't want to do this, but it just seems so meaningless."

"You shouldn't say things like that."

The money she had saved away had been whittled away to 850,000 yen. Kinuko took the job posting and looked it over.

*Caregiver*

*Live-in position, up to sixty years old*

*Private room, starting at 230,000 yen a month*

*Someone skilled at cooking preferred*

*More details at interview*

*Home located in Mejiro*

*Uchida*

"This Uchida family, maybe they're connected to the Uchida who's in the parliament. That part of Mejiro is filled with huge old houses, and this place has got to be a mansion."

Chikako was excited, as if she would be working there herself. Driven by Chikako's enthusiasm, Kinuko had no choice but to try to call the place. Although she wasn't expecting anything, the woman who answered the phone was the most courteous and pleasant person she had spoken to thus far. She said that she was very sorry, but since there had been a large number of applicants she would like to interview everyone in person and decide the matter as fairly as she could. Even though her chances probably weren't great, Kinuko felt like going just to see what the house was like.

Far from being a luxurious mansion, the Uchida residence was a run-down and dirty house. In a residential neighborhood of beautiful hedge fences, the Uchida house was the only lot where the garden shrubs were overgrown and neglected. The place had a lonely air about it, as if it were abandoned. However, a single cherry tree had been planted in the spacious garden, and it was perfectly in full bloom. An ornamental pond that looked like it had been carefully constructed by hand was surrounded by round stones in a corner of the garden. Kinuko was reminded of her old farm house in Sendai. She had once tried to build a pond with her younger sister, and they had even released a few goldfish there. Kinuko became nostalgic. Even though she had yet to meet the owner of the house, she thought to herself that she wouldn't mind being employed here.

Once she entered the living room, however, Kinuko was overwhelmed with surprise. At least thirty women were gathered there. They ranged from women about twenty years old to women so old that Kinuko had misgivings about whether they could do housework at all. There obviously weren't enough chairs, so everyone sat on the disheveled tatami mats and impatiently waited her turn.

"Hey, do you know anything about this Uchida family?" a woman around sixty years old whispered. Kinuko shook her head.

"This is the house of the brother-in-law of the Uchida in parliament. I hear that he passed away a long time ago, but I didn't know that the family had declined this badly. I came here thinking that I might be able to get something out of being employed here, but now I wonder."

Just as Chikako had suspected, the Uchida family that owned this house was related to the famous member of parliament. It made sense that there were a lot of applicants for the position, but the economic circumstances of the family were unmistakably strained. Kinuko looked around the musty old room. The sooty ceiling. The children's graffiti on the post in the *tokonoma*. The yellowing *shōji* screens. The outdated television. It looked as if no one had laid a hand to this house for several decades.

The woman who had whispered to Kinuko earlier grumbled that she had a twenty year history of working as a domestic assistant, but that she wanted to quit at her current house because caring for the elderly people there had gotten too difficult. She had applied to this house thinking that it might be a little more comfortable. If things were this bad here, though, then she would rather stay at the place she was working now.

"You know, it's really hard to clean an old house like this. It gets cold in the winter. Also, it seems that there are two old women here."

"Old women?"

"That's right." The woman furrowed her eyebrows as if to suggest that both of these women were already wearing adult diapers.

Kinuko heard a faint voice call her name from the neighboring tatami room. Her turn had come.

Two slightly chubby women who were well suited to the shabby room sat with their backs to the hanging scroll in the *tokonoma*. They were both past their late sixties, and they resembled each other. Both of them wore drab old people clothing that looked like it had been bought in the supermarket. The old woman wearing a brown cardigan and grey trousers spoke first.

"Hello, my name is Uchida Umeko. This is my older sister Shigeko."

Shigeko lowered her head deeply with her mouth clamped shut. Umeko's white hair was cut short and parted to the side. Shigeko wore her hair up in a bun fastened in the back. Even though their hairstyles were different, they resembled each other. Umeko looked at Kinuko's resume, and her face took on a doubtful expression.

"It says here that you're married. Why do you want to be a live-in housekeeper?"

Kinuko explained that she had left home, thinking that it wouldn't do any good to hide her circumstances. As she was speaking, Shigeko, who had been silent up until then, looked at Kinuko's face and said, "Well, you would have to have that sort of iron will in order to work here."

"That's true," Umeko said in response.

Kinuko, surprised, looked at Shigeko, but Shigeko had finished talking. At all the houses she had visited until now, Kinuko's potential employers had been shocked or frightened when they heard about her situation, as if her husband would inevitably leave a bloody trail behind him when he showed up to bring her back. Umeko, chewing on her pencil stub, asked, "Ms. Fujieda, why would someone as wonderful as you want to become a caregiver?"

"Yes, you're really wonderful," Shigeko interrupted, apropos of nothing.

"I want to do something for other people. I want to make myself useful to people who are in a difficult situation. Isn't that what being a housewife is about? It was painful for me to want to be helpful but to have no one to help."

The two women looked at each other.

"To tell you the truth, we have a very sick person here. He's my son, but he's not doing too well. Can you handle that? Do you still want to help us?"

Shigeko looked at Kinuko as if she were throwing herself at Kinuko's mercy.

Kinuko nodded.

"If you will have me, I will do my utmost to take care of you."

The two looked at each other again, relieved, and then nodded in return.

"Also, we have a girl here named Midori."

With a decisive expression, Umeko folded Kinuko's resume neatly.

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Several days later, as she sat in a taxi with her futon and scant personal effects on her way to the Uchida household, Kinuko entertained the fantasy that she was entering a different country with a passport labeled "Housekeeper." She had left the country of Fujieda, to which she would never again return, and she was headed to the country of

Uchida by way of the country of Chikako. She felt less like a traveler and more like an exile who had put her home country behind her forever.

When Kinuko got out of the taxi in front of the Uchida house, cherry petals fell lazily over the weathered fence made of wooden planks, and a pleasant fragrance filled the air. Kinuko's grim feelings of exile faded as they were replaced by a mellow sense of expectation.

"Excuse me. I'm the new housekeeper, Fujieda Kinuko."

There was a loud sound on the other side of the intercom, and a young woman appeared in the foyer. It seemed that this was Midori. Midori was wearing a startlingly bright red turtleneck and yellow-green pants. Kinuko got the sense that she was the only spot of color in this dim, dark house. Her round nose and slightly separated eyes made her look a bit like a lap dog.

"Umm... What do you want?"

"My name is Fujieda Kinuko. I'm the new housekeeper who's supposed to start work today."

"You want to see Umeko? I'll go get her," Midori yelled, running off. Kinuko could hear the sound her slippers feet pounding on the floor inside the house.

Eventually she came back to the foyer. "Umeko isn't here," she said, looking up into Kinuko's face for guidance about what she should do now. Although Midori was already in her twenties, her mannerisms were almost like a child's.

"Well then, would it be all right if I waited right here?"

Kinuko thought Midori would try to find Shigeko, but she just nodded back ran up the staircase. Kinuko was a little annoyed at Midori's lack of tact. It seemed that Umeko was running the house by herself.

Kinuko stood where she was for twenty minutes in the lower area of the foyer, which was covered in black stones. Since there was nothing else to do, she gazed at the cherry branches arranged in the large vase on top of the shoe rack.

"Oh, what are you doing here?" Shigeko eventually walked down the hallway in her bed clothes with her hand on the wall. She seemed to be on her way to the bathroom and had noticed Kinuko standing in the foyer. There was a worn-out expression on her face and dark circles under her eyes. "You must be Kinuko."

"That's right. I spoke to a young woman a moment ago, but..."



"I'm sorry, Midori can be so careless sometimes," Shigeko apologized, and, turning to the second floor, yelled, "Midori!"

Midori bounced loudly down the stairs. Her eyes were big and round.

"You should have shown her inside! This person is Fujieda Kinuko."

"Hello!"

It seemed that Midori had forgotten their meeting earlier, but Kinuko couldn't help returning Midori's cherubic smile. Midori might be a bit childish, but she was cute. Shigeko placed a hand on Midori's shoulder.

"How is Yasuo? Do you think he will be able to say hello?"

Midori jumped up and down in the hallway.

"Today should be okay. He's doing fine."

"Good. Well, let's go."

Shigeko climbed the staircase one step at a time. Her breathing was heavy, and the staircase creaked under her weight. At the top of the stairs was a hallway connecting three doors. Shigeko knocked on the door at the end.

Kinuko could hear someone saying "come in" from inside.

A man in pajamas was lying in a bed next to a window. An I.V. stand and a table with a wash basin on it were arranged next to the bed. The sick man's face was pallid, and his body was emaciated. Kinuko could tell that his illness was serious just by looking at him.

"This is Fujieda Kinuko. Starting today she is going to be our live-in housekeeper."

Yasuo raised his thin arm to Kinuko, who had lowered her head to him. His face bore a close resemblance to Shigeko's. Since Yasuo was so skinny, his hollow cheeks made him look like an old person. Perhaps he had already made peace with his own condition, as his eyes were calm and surprisingly clear. Midori stood at his bedside and stroked his hair.

When Umeko finally returned, she was holding several large shopping bags. Although she was no longer young, Umeko really seemed to be running this house by herself after all. Kinuko could feel Shigeko's relief as soon as Umeko came inside.

"I'll show you to your room. After all, it doesn't look like anyone has taken you there yet. I'm sorry about that. My older sister has heart problems. Midori isn't very sensible, and Yasuo is how he is." Umeko frowned.

"I don't mind at all," Kinuko said.

Umeko led Kinuko to a six-mat room in a corner of the first floor. The room was dark and damp; but, on the bright side, it was right by the cherry tree.

"It smells a little moldy, but I hope you can put up with it."

"It's not a problem."

After Kinuko laid out her futon and arranged her things in tiny space that had become her room, Umeko came back in.

"Kinuko, I know this is sudden, but could you make lunch? I have to clean my sister's room."

After taking the meat and vegetables Umeko had bought out of the bag and arranging them on the kitchen table, Kinuko asked, "What should I make?"

"Could you make udon?"

"Just udon?" Kinuko asked, thinking it was strange, but Umeko, with a serious expression, said, "We only have five hundred yen per person to spend on meals. I'll leave it up to you. Starting today, please make a budget and do the shopping yourself."

Umeko left the kitchen as if shrugging off a burden. Kinuko, facing Umeko's retreating back, asked, "Do you mean five hundred yen per meal?"

While running her hand through her white hair, Umeko turned and answered, "No, five hundred yen per day."

Suddenly realizing the difficulty of her situation, Kinuko reflected that this would be a chance for her to demonstrate her true ability. She quickly fried a *kakiage* noodle topping out of the vegetables on hand, put it in the udon, and brought it out.

"I'm so happy that someone like you came to work for us," Umeko said, smiling, when she saw the *kakiage*. Taking the bowl, Umeko ladled out a portion for herself and Shigeo. "We'll have ours in the living room."

"Okay. I'll take Yasuo's up to him, then."

"Take some for Midori too. Those two always eat together."

As the housekeeper, Kinuko ended up being the only one to eat in the kitchen. Kinuko was struck by another wave of loneliness. Umeko passed by with the laundry as she was washing the dishes after lunch. Since she was slightly chubby, her knees were bad, and she stopped to rub them.

"Um, Umeko," Kinuko spoke up. "I can bathe Yasuo and help take care of him. Please don't hesitate to ask me."

"Midori does that, so don't worry about it. She adores him like an older brother and won't let anyone else care for him."

"I see."

"By the way, Kinuko, is there any *kakiage* left?"

"No, it's all gone. Why do you ask?"

"When you make it, you should make extra so that you can put it on top of rice in the evening. You'll conserve more oil that way, and you can save time cooking. You'll wear yourself out if you're always so enthusiastic. Please take it easy." Using the same ingredients for lunch and dinner was a disgrace to a housewife, Kinuko thought, smiling bitterly, but then she wondered if she *was* trying too hard. Still, it was a pleasant feeling to finally be in control for the first time in years.

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Kinuko gradually got used to life at the Uchida house, and before long she had the place running according to her housework schedule. Three weeks had passed since she came, and leaves had begun to sprout on the cherry tree in the garden.

Kinuko's existence had become so necessary to the Uchida house that one almost couldn't imagine how things were like without her. She made a schedule for housework and took over the meal planning duties from Umeko, who seemed exhausted and took frequent breaks. She did her shopping at cheap stores that she found in the neighborhood, ran the kitchen, and gave detailed directions to Umeko and Midori when they helped her.

Kinuko decided to concentrate on cleaning separate areas of the house on different days. Monday was the first floor, Tuesday was the second floor, Wednesday was the entryway and garden, Thursday was the bath and kitchen, and Friday was what was everything else. Kinuko cleaned and polished everything carefully. Despite the age of the house and furniture, everything gradually became so clean it looked almost new. As the house took on a different air, its inhabitants became more energetic. Yasuo often came downstairs to

laze around while watching television. Kinuko created arrangements from the plants in the garden, and Midori, mimicking her, adorned the house with flowers. Kinuko, who was talented at cooking, came to oversee all of the meal preparations. She bought cheap, good ingredients and planned out meals for everyone in the house. For Yasuo, who had almost no appetite, Kinuko made nutritious, high-calorie meals. For Shigeko, who had a bad heart and moved sluggishly from day to day because of her depression concerning Yasuo and all the sleeping pills she used, Kinuko made meals that appealed to the palate of an elderly person. For Midori, who had boundless energy, she created a menu fit for a young person. Kinuko and Umeko diligently ate whatever was left over.

Umeko was responsible for caring for Shigeko. Shigeko depended on Umeko for everything, and she couldn't make it through the day if Umeko wasn't there. Midori spent almost all her time on the second floor. When she came downstairs she camped out in front of the television and laughed, but she applied herself earnestly to the difficult labor of caring for Yasuo, and the household couldn't manage without her.

There was not a bad or mean-spirited person there. Everyone lived together and helped each other, and Kinuko supported everyone. She gazed at the apron that she had ironed with pride. The Uchida household was not what she thought it would be, but it was an ideal world in its own way. It made Kinuko happy to see this old house managed according to her plans. She was a perfect housewife who was useful to everyone, and she felt that this was indeed her reason for living. Kinuko brooded on the thought that the days she had spent with Yoshiyuki had been a waste of her time and talents. Every once in a while, she was overwhelmed by the urge to check in on how Yoshiyuki was living in the apartment that she, the perfect housewife, and poor Aoi had left, but she stifled that urge by engrossing herself in housework at the Uchida residence.

\*\*\*\*\*

Midori energetically pulled the weeds sprouting on the lawn as a refreshing May wind blew around her. Along with taking care of Yasuo, yard work was a job that Midori enjoyed. She could be in the garden all day, even forgetting Yasuo. On a day with good weather like today, Midori was absorbing in weeding. The white tips of her fingers were stained black with the soil of the garden, and she hugged her knees comfortably as she watched the confused bustling of the bugs that crawled out of the ground.

"Midori, it's time for lunch," Kinuko called out to her.

Midori turned happily. She was wearing the old straw hat that she used for garden work, a white shirt that looked like it belonged to Yasuo, red shorts, and socks with blue and yellow stripes. The hat looked like something that Shigeko's deceased husband might have once worn.

"What are we having today?"

"Pilaf."

"What is pilaf again?"

"It's when rice is soaked in broth and cooked."

"Okay," Midori smiled. "I like that. I like it even better when there is red-colored meat inside."

"Red-colored meat? I wonder what that could be."

Kinuko knelt down beside Midori. The weeds that Midori had pulled were lined up neatly one by one, all facing the same direction on top of a newspaper.

"It's red with white stripes."

"Ah, you're talking about shrimp. You like shrimp, don't you?"

The wind had blown Midori's hat off of her head. Kinuko stroked Midori's short hair. She had already noticed that this young woman was a bit slow. She couldn't do math, and she could hardly read any Chinese characters. Still, as long as Midori, who was kind and lovely, stayed in the house, she didn't inconvenience anyone. Umeko, Shigeko, and Yasuo all adored Midori from the bottom of their hearts. Kinuko once witnessed Yasuo frailly swat at Midori. Seeing Midori cower like a puppy, Yasuo had apologized immediately.

"We don't have any today, but I'll put cook some again soon."

"Will you do it tomorrow?" Midori was always saying "tomorrow."

"Will do. Let's go inside."

Kinuko took Midori's arm, which was fleshy like a young girl's. Midori looked up and waved her hand.

"Big brother! It's time for lunch!"

Kinuko looked up to the window of the second floor and saw Yasuo, who had been gazing down at the garden from a chair by the window, wave his thin arm in return. Looking up at him like this, Kinuko was finally able to perceive just how ill he looked.

Yasuo's condition was visibly getting worse with each passing day. It was like a dark cloud hanging over the Uchida household. Up until a month ago, he would come

downstairs and relax in the living room or walk around in the garden holding Midori's hand, but lately it was if he were strapped to his bed. Kinuko finally approached Umeko after seeing his meal dishes return untouched.

"I'm sorry to ask, but what exactly is wrong with Yasuo?"

Umeko, who was wearing an old fashioned pair of reading glasses and sitting with such good posture that she looked like an elderly teacher grading tests, was shelling fava beans. Although Kinuko hadn't heard anything specific, she guessed that Umeko had probably been single all her life and moved in with her older sister when she felt herself growing older. Umeko pushed up her glasses and looked Kinuko straight in the eye.

"He has stomach cancer. It's a really bad case."

Judging from his extreme emaciation, Kinuko had thought that was probably the case, but she was still shocked when she heard it put into words. She couldn't find anything to say.

"It was already too late when they discovered the cancer, and we were told that he only had half a year left. It's been almost a year since then, but it's still a shame. He was doing well at work, and he had finally started thinking about getting married. Shigeko took it hard when she saw how quickly he aged, but of course the most sorry of any of us is Yasuo himself.

"How old is Yasuo?"

"He just turned forty this year."

Kinuko emptied the colander full of shelled fava beans. The water for the stew had already started to boil. Kinuko added a pinch of salt.

"What was his job?"

"He was an elementary school teacher."

*That makes sense*, Kinuko thought, recalling the hand gestures he made from his bed and how he had waved to Midori from the second floor window. Yasuo fully understood how to convey a message without talking. He seemed like he would be perfectly able to stand at a blackboard and write in large characters that children could read easily. She had even seen him teaching division to Midori on one of his good days.

"What about Shigeko's husband?"

"He taught at a university. It's already been fifteen years since he passed away."

Remembering Yoshiyuki, Kinuko fell silent. Without noticing, Umeko, rolled up the empty fava bean shells into an advertising leaflet.

"This is just between us. Please don't tell anyone else."

"What is it?" Kinuko looked at Umeko nervously.

"The last time we took Yasuo to the doctor, he took me aside and told me that Yasuo only has about a month at most."

Umeko kept her voice low, but she sounded almost detached. She had started taking Yasuo to the doctor every week.

"Does Shigeko know this?"

"Don't tell her." Umeko shook her head. "She's already devastated by Yasuo's cancer, and we can't say anything to her now. That's why the two of us have to keep it together. I'm really grateful that you came to stay with us."

"Thank you. It's a good thing Midori is so nice to Yasuo."

"Yes," Umeko said, wiping the table down with a kitchen towel. "That child is like an angel. It's just that..."

Kinuko watched Umeko as she inserted her finger under a corner of her reading glasses and wiped some dirt out of her eye.

"It's just that it's sad that Midori doesn't know anything."

Kinuko sighed along with Umeko, sympathizing with the anxiety she must feel.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next Sunday, Kinuko found herself waiting for her daughter Aoi at a café in Aoyama. The café was open to the street, and its tables faced the sidewalk. Kinuko looked around at the scenery outside. The plants in the garden were budding, and the fresh green was beautiful. Kinuko patted the bag at her side fondly. Inside, the first month's wages that Umeko had given her lay untouched. Her pay was 23,000 in cash. The bills may have been covered in folds and wrinkles, and they may have been scavenged from savings stashed in various places inside the house, but that didn't matter to her. Kinuko was filled with the happiness of having earned this money herself.

"This is your first paycheck, isn't it?"

It was a little after the New Year. Aoi, whom she was seeing for the first time in six months, was calm and adult-like. Kinuko suspected that she herself had had a hand in shaping her daughter's attitude when she left home.

"How have you been?"

"I've been okay. What about you?"

"How do I look?"

"You look like you've gotten younger since the last time I saw you."

Aoi had dyed her short hair orange, and her lipstick was brown. She wore blue pants under a dark navy dress. As she took in her daughter's striking appearance, Kinuko was reminded of Midori's random sense of color. Midori would more than likely be at Yasuo's bedside right now, since he always came down with a high fever just after noon.

"I'm having so much fun working that I can't help it."

"Why? I just don't get it." Aoi shrugged her shoulders. "Don't you hate washing other people's clothes and cleaning up other people's messes?"

"There are times when I hate it, but usually it's okay. They're not related to me."

"Mom, you really had a tough time with Dad, didn't you?"

Aoi cast her eyes downward. She had done her best never to fight with Yoshiyuki in front of Aoi, but her daughter had still picked up on the coldness in their relationship. Aoi took a cigarette out of her bag. She turned to the side and lit it as if fleeing from Kinuko's difficulty in answering her.

"Dad came over to my place recently," she said, blowing out her words along with the cigarette smoke.

"He came to your apartment?" Kinuko asked, surprised.

"That's right," Aoi said curtly, turning her eyes to the couple at the next table. Their hands were clasped together tightly on the tabletop, and they were both gazing at the sky as if their future were written on it. "He showed up out of nowhere. I was really surprised. He ended up talking about you."

"What did he say?" Kinuko asked nervously.



"That he couldn't do anything about you leaving. That he wouldn't go looking for you, and that he would just keep living as he was now. If you didn't want to get divorced, then he would be happy if the two of you were still connected on paper."

"He said he would be happy?"

"That's what he said. He is who he is, but don't you think he loves you?"

Aoi looked off to the side, embarrassed. Kinuko, thinking of how Yoshiyuki had lived with her without noticing that her things were gradually disappearing from inside the apartment, was seized by an awareness of what she had done. Until this moment, she had simply resented Yoshiyuki's insensitivity without reading too much into it.

"We can't go back to the way things were before," Kinuko asserted.

"I know that. It's the same for Dad as well."

"It's the same for him?" Kinuko was taken aback by Aoi's bluntness.

"Of course. Since you went out of your way to do something like that to him, it's not like it could be the same as it was before. People can't just forgive things like that."

Kinuko looked into Aoi's cool eyes. She had thought that her daughter was on her side, but she felt suffocated by the frank criticism of a fellow woman. Her daughter had passed out of her hands a long time ago, and at some point she had come to see her parents with the level gaze of an outsider. Kinuko almost couldn't believe that just a year ago she and Aoi and Yoshiyuki had all lived together as a family under the same roof. Kinuko was overcome by loneliness. She felt as if a soft, amorphous feeling in her heart had hardened into a sharp point.

As she walked back to the Uchida residence after parting from Aoi, Kinuko could see the cherry tree leaning out over the wooden fence into the street. The evening wind tossed its abundant leaves back and forth. Kinuko stopped walking and relaxed for a moment, thinking of how Yoshiyuki said that he wanted to remain connected to her on paper. Perhaps what she had done had been a mistake. She was suddenly full of regret, but such thoughts faded away as darkness gradually settled into the evening air. Kinuko was much happier living at the Uchida residence than she had been during the years she had passed with Yoshiyuki.

\*\*\*\*\*

Several days later, Kinuko was shaken awake by Umeko in the middle of the night.

"Kinuko, we're in trouble, please wake up."

The light from the hallway shone from behind Umeko. Kinuko couldn't see the expression on her face, but she appeared to be flustered. Although Umeko was wearing the clothes she slept in, she had put on an apron over them. Kinuko leapt up and buttoned a cardigan over her pajamas.

"What happened?"

"Shigeko has fallen into some sort of coma. She startled me awake because she was snoring so loudly. No matter what I did, I couldn't get her to wake up. She must have overdosed on her sleeping medicine. Ah, what should I do..."

Kinuko soothed Umeko and then ran down the long hallway, her footsteps pounding on the floor. She dashed into Shigeko's room, which was all the way at the east end of the house. Two futon mattresses were laid out beside each other. Kinuko realized that Umeko, who was worried about Shigeko's medication, slept beside her older sister. Shigeko was snoring away on one of the futons. Her loud snores, which were clearly abnormal, continued at regular intervals.

"I think we should call an ambulance."

Umeko, who had calmed down a bit, nodded and picked up the telephone. Kinuko quietly packed a change of clothes for Shigeko into a bag as Umeko changed into gray slacks. Meanwhile, Shigeko, who was laid out vertically on her futon, kept snoring so loudly she didn't sound like an old person at all. Umeko took the bag Kinuko had packed and said, "I'm going with her, so I'll leave everything here up to you."

"I understand."

Yasuo, who was critically ill, couldn't leave the second floor, and Kinuko understood that Midori wouldn't be at all useful at a time like this.

The ambulance arrived within five minutes, and Shigeko was quickly borne out on a stretcher. After Umeko climbed into the ambulance after her, the house returned to silence so deep that it seemed as if the previous bustle had all been a hallucination. Kinuko had returned to Shigeko's bedroom and was tidying up the futons when a call came from Umeko.

"Hey. Everything is all right. It looks like she took too much sleeping medicine after all, and there's nothing out of the ordinary with her heart, thankfully. They're pumping her stomach right now, and they say we'll be able to come home in two or three days."

Kinuko sat down on the floor by the telephone and looked up at the clock. It was three in the morning. She knew she should go back to bed soon, but she was so excited that she

didn't feel like she could possibly go back sleep. Yasuo and Midori had probably woken up during all of the commotion, and they were probably worried. Like a nurse making her rounds, Kinuko took a flashlight in one hand and climbed the stairs to Yasuo's room. As soon as she opened the door, a quiet voice called out from the middle of the darkness.

"Kinuko?" Yasuo was awake.

"It's me. I'm sorry about all the noise. Did we wake you up?"

"No, I'm always awake at this time of night."

The voice that came out of the darkness sounded lonely. Kinuko was struck by the thought of how isolated and worried Yasuo must be.

"What happened to my mother?"

Yasuo spoke slowly, perhaps because it was difficult for him to breathe. Still, his voice was clearer now than it was in the daytime. Kinuko pointed the flashlight downwards. The wood grain of the old floorboards shone starkly in the light.

"She took too much sleeping medicine and had to go to the hospital."

"Will she be okay?" Yasuo asked anxiously.

"Yes. Umeko just called to say that they're pumping her stomach. She'll be able to come home in a few days."

"That's good."

"Would you like me to bring you something warm to drink?"

Yasuo laughed softly. "Could you do something else for me instead?" he asked.

"What is it?"

Kinuko lifted her flashlight and was surprised to find that Midori, who was wearing pink pajamas, was sleeping in Yasuo's bed. She felt as if she had seen something she wasn't supposed to see, and she averted her eyes. Yasuo, who was wrapped in a quilt, didn't appear particularly concerned, however. Unfortunately, Midori's fat thighs were on top of his slender torso, and it seemed that he was too weak to push her away.

"That looks like it hurts," Kinuko said, rushing to his side.

"I can't breathe. She's heavy."

Grasping Midori's fleshy thighs, Kinuko was eventually able to lift her away from Yasuo. Midori continued to sleep deeply, like a child. She mumbled in her sleep and turned away.

"Thank you," Yasuo said in relief. He smiled. "She's a healthy one, this girl."

Kinuko, flustered, silently stood up and was about to leave the room when Yasuo reluctantly added, "Kinuko, could you do something for me?"

"What is it?"

"There's something I've always wanted to do but haven't been able to. I'm asking because tonight is as good a chance as any."

"Certainly, go ahead."

"I want to go out into the garden at night and walk around. I want to sleep on top of the lawn in the night air, look up at the stars, and be surrounded by the smell of grass."

Kinuko started to say that she would call someone, but then she remembered that Umeko was at the hospital. Midori was fast asleep, and Kinuko worried that she wouldn't be able to carry Yasuo downstairs by herself. Noticing Kinuko's concern, Yasuo said, "I'll be able to walk downstairs if you help me. I'm a little stronger at night."

Kinuko felt uneasy, but she recalled what Umeko had told her a few days ago about Yasuo having less than a month to live. She wanted to grant his wish while he still had energy. Kinuko wrapped her arms around Yasuo and raised him out of bed. She placed both of his feet on the floor and supported him from the side as he stood up. Yasuo was as slender as a withered tree, and the edges of his bones dug into her so much that it almost hurt. Kinuko supported Yasuo with her shoulder, and together they slowly started walking.

"Will you be able to go down the stairs?"

"Yes."

Taking their time, they walked down the staircase one step at a time. It was difficult for Yasuo to breathe, so they rested several times on the way. Kinuko, who had gone ahead to open the sliding doors in the hallway facing the garden, returned to Yasuo and carried him out onto the lawn. He weighed less than forty kilograms. Kinuko hurried back inside to get a blanket and she wrapped him up tightly.

"Thank you, Kinuko, thank you."

"Won't the night dew be bad for you?"

"No, the night dew is like medicine, at least for people who are dying," Yasuo said while gazing at the sky. Kinuko sat on the lawn by his side. It was a warm night in June, and the plants were wet with dew. The night air was heavy with the fragrance of fresh greenery. Kinuko looked up at the cherry tree, which was covered in leaves.

"I wonder how long that tree has been here."

"That cherry tree? My father planted it as a memorial when I entered elementary school. It's strange that the tree is still alive even though... Well, everyone planted it together."

Kinuko had never really talked to Yasuo before. Midori was always stuck to him as if defending him from invaders, and besides, Kinuko didn't know what to say to someone who was so gravely ill. At some point Yasuo had become friendly towards her, and she attentively listened to his words as if she were meeting him for the first time.

"When Midori came to live with us, everyone thought she was useless, but I ended up taking a shine to her. I had just been informed that I have cancer the day before, and that's probably why I was able to see Midori's goodness. I was the only one who understood her."

"Midori isn't your sister?" Kinuko asked, expressing a doubt she had held for a long time.

"No, she isn't. Did my mother tell you that?"

"Yes." Kinuko nodded her head. "Well, no, I guess I just made that assumption on my own."

"She came here as a housekeeper, just like you." Yasuo closed his eyes and took a deep breath, taking in the smell of grass. "My mother realized that circumstances would be difficult after I came here to recover, so she put out an ad for a live-in caregiver. That was when Midori came. My aunt and mother said that she couldn't possibly do anything to help them, but I asked them to hire her for me."

"Is that what happened?"

"So why did I want Midori?" Yasuo's eyes sparkled in his gaunt face. "She's innocent and cute, but it would be depressing if it were just that," Yasuo said.

"It would also be cruel."

"That's true," Yasuo agreed flatly. "I think I probably wanted to teach her something."

"What did you want to teach her?"

"I wonder. Probably that I was dying. Like a parent teaches a child."

Kinuko turned her face downwards without thinking.

"What is it?" Yasuo asked.

"I feel like that's even more cruel. Midori will be devastated."

"It is cruel, it certainly is. When I die, I imagine she'll be quite upset, but I can do something like this because we're not related. I want to plant the sadness of losing me inside her."

He could do this because Midori was a caregiver with no ties or connections; he could do it because she was like a child who didn't know or notice anything. Sensing Kinuko's anger, Yasuo was silent for a short while.

"Is what my mother said about you leaving your husband true?"

"Yes."

"How is he doing?"

"I hear he's doing well."

"Did you leave him on a sudden whim?"

"No, I had it planned out."

"Your husband didn't notice what you were planning?"

"That's right."

"Then you wanted to plant something inside your husband. You're the same as me."

Kinuko gasped. For the first time she understood the meaning of what she had done by silently putting up with Yoshiyuki for ten years and then suddenly leaving him according to a long cherished plan. She had wanted to gouge an impression exactly like the rusted scratch on the foyer door into Yoshiyuki's heart. Ever since that day ten years ago when she decided to leave him, Kinuko had wanted to leave a distinct scar on Yoshiyuki's heart.

*I can do it because he's not family.*

Kinuko was about to say this to Yasuo, but, when she looked at his tired face, his eyes were firmly shut. It was as if he was refusing to listen to anything she had to say.

Kinuko lowered her gaze. The sound of a car horn echoed from somewhere far away.

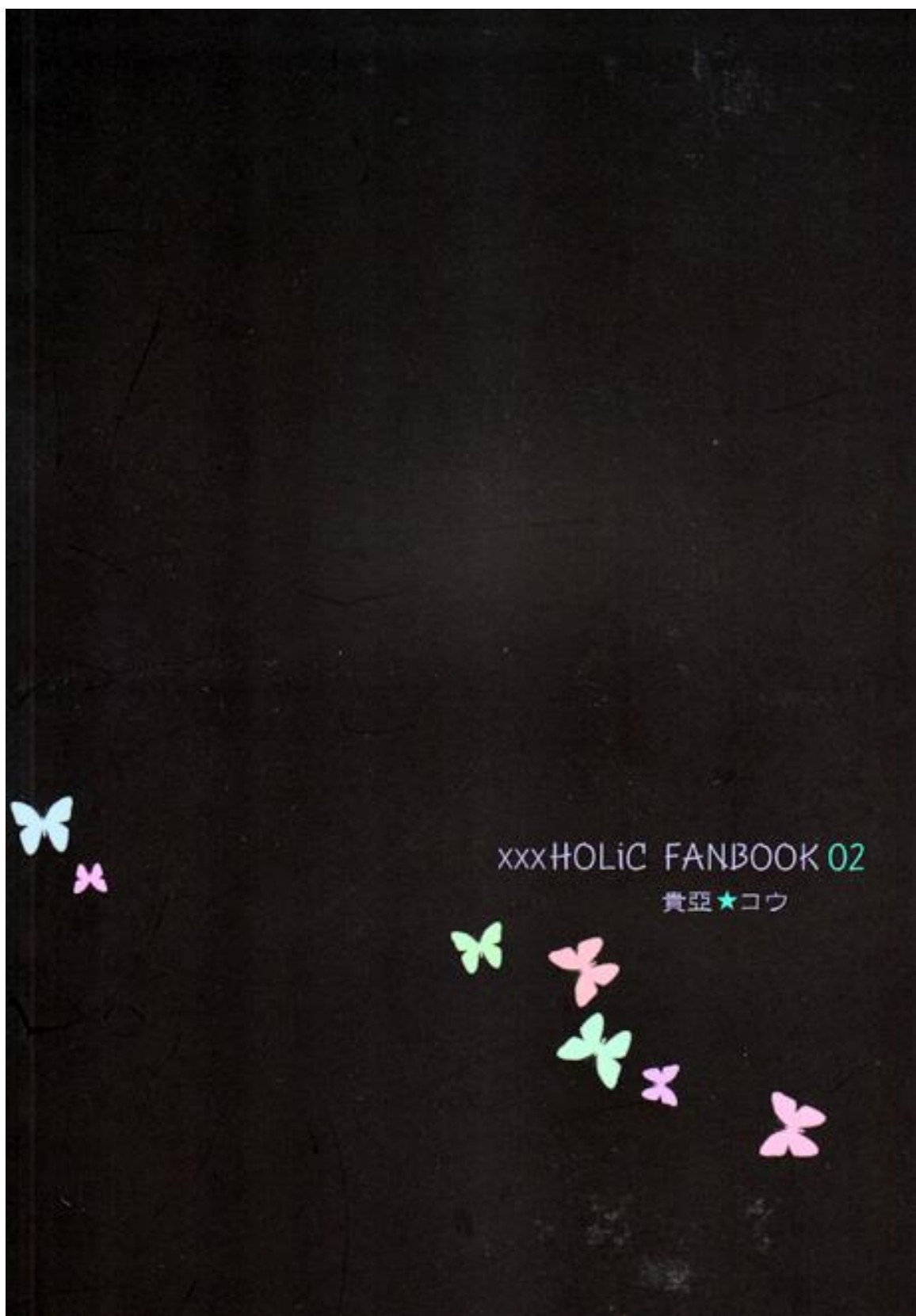
**APPENDIX B**

**Kemuri (Smoke)**

Published on August 15, 2010  
Written and Drawn by Kou (コウ)  
From the Circle Kia (貴亜)







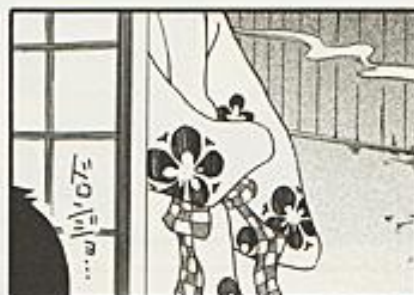




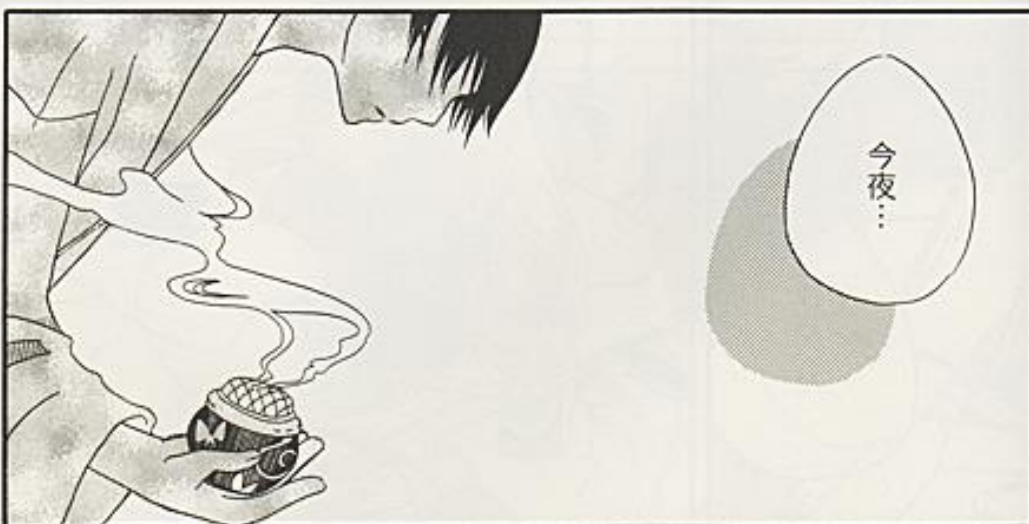






























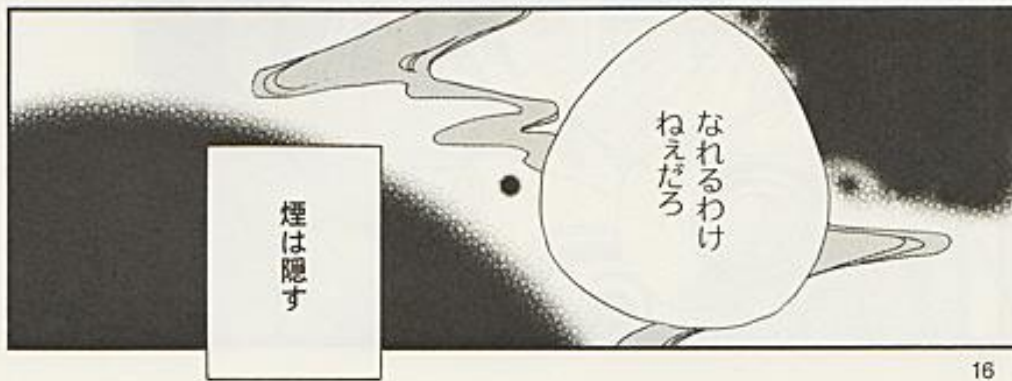


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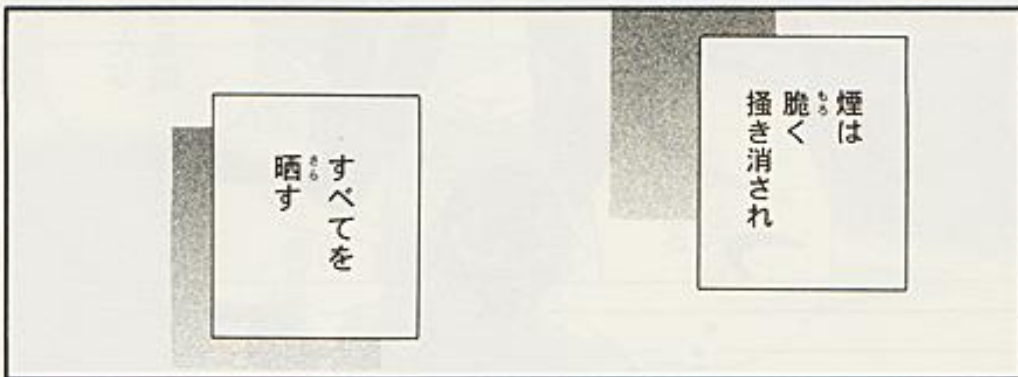








そして



すべてを  
晒す

煙は  
脆く  
掻き消され



















離せや…  
おっさん

けど  
あと少しだけ…



こんにちは、はじめまして。貴亜の絵描き、コウです☆

ホリック再加熱です。17巻のDVDを見て再沸騰です。  
 なんでしょ、あのワタヌキの色気は…  
 福山クンの声も良いし〜♪書く台詞が全て福山クンで聴こえて  
 きて楽しかった〜♪お久しぶりなパロ本、楽しんだ〜♪ホリック  
 の空気感を表現するのは難しかったですけど(>\_<)  
 皆さんにも楽しんでもらえている事を祈ります……☆

ではでは、また。(´o`)J



**Page 4**

Smoke hides.  
 Smoke covers.  
 Smoke obfuscates.  
 Smoke...

**Page 5**

*poof*

**Page 6**

Watanuki: Are you staying over tonight?  
 Dōmeki: Yeah.  
 Watanuki: I warmed the bath water for you.  
 Dōmeki: Let's get in toge...  
 Watanuki: We will not, you perv.  
*slink*  
 Mokona: Hello! Mokona got in the bath with Watanuki yesterday~ ♪  
 Dōmeki: Is that so. I'm jealous.  
 Maro/Moro: He said "take your time" and then pushed you away –

**Page 7**

*hop hop plop*  
 Mokona: You got played again.  
 Dōmeki: Yeah.  
 Mokona: Is your heart sore?  
 Dōmeki: A little. But tonight he'll probably...

***Page 8***

Watanuki: Hey.

Dōmeki: What are you doing on top of me?

Watanuki: Exactly what it looks like. Night crawling.

***Page 9***

Dōmeki: Is that so...

***Page 10***

Watanuki: Dō... meki...

***Page 11***

Watanuki: You put your finger in... Too far...

Dōmeki: Watanuki, I... you...

***Page 12***

*smack*

*drop*

Watanuki: Hurry up and do it.

***Page 13***

Hide me...

***Page 14***

*grip*

Hide me...

***Page 15****floop*

Mokona: Wa, tanu, ki-- ♥

Watanuki: What.

Mokona: You know~ There's this sake called Fuji Nishiki~ That's brewed with snowmelt water from Mount Fuji~ And, I, want, some!

Watanuki: No way. I just ordered a whole lot of sake a while ago.

Mokona: Please! Please!

Watanuki: ...I'm not going to spoil you.

Mokona: Well then who is going to spoil me? Doesn't Dōmeki spoil you?

***Page 16***

Watanuki: That's right. We tease each other, but I'm pretty bad-natured... I wonder how long he'll be my partner.

Mokona: Until you're his companion.

Watanuki: Like that will ever happen.

Smoke hides.

***Page 17***

Smoke is easily dispelled.

Watanuki: It's pathetic, that date rape drug.

***Page 18***

And also  
 smoke subtly erases  
 and exposes everything.

***Page 19***

Watanuki: What? Of course that's what it was.

Dōmeki: Oh, that's right.

**Page 20**

Dōmeki: I brought over some eggplants. I want you to make them Sichuan style.

Watanuki: You... aren't mad? Fine. I have the other ingredients, so I'll make them for you. And then I'll make miso soup out of the leftovers...

**Page 21**

Watanuki: And then I'll... Dōmeki...?

**Page 23**

Hide me.

Take me far away.

Cover up these feelings.

**Page 24**

Watanuki: Let me go... You're holding me too tight.

But... Just a little longer.

**Page 25**

Hello, nice to meet you. My name is Kou, and I'm an artist for [the circle] Kia.

I just got fired up again over *xxxHolic*. I watched the 17th [final] DVD, and things got all steamy. Why is Watanuki so sexy...?

Fukuyama [Jun]-kun's voice is so nice~ ♪ It was so much fun to hear by Fukuyama-kun say all of [Watanuki's] lines. I enjoyed making my first parody book in a while~ ♪ Even though it was difficult to convey the atmosphere of *xxxHolic*. (>\_<)

I hope everyone enjoyed reading.....☆

Well then, see you next time. (^\_^)/

## APPENDIX C

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*Gekkasuimokukindonichi* Vol. 3, front cover

Figure 4

*Magic Knight Rayearth* Vol. 1, front cover

Figure 5

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Figure 6

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Figure 7

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**Chapter 5**

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## Chapter 6

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*Axis Powers Hetalia* Vol. 1, front cover

Figure 22

*Sacred Blacksmith* Episode 1, screenshot

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*xxxHolic* Vol. 10, p. 126

Figure 25

*Kuchinashi kaoru*, front cover

Figure 26

*Yakozen*, front cover

Figure 27

*Kemuri*, p.4

Figure 28

*xxxHolic* Vol. 19, front cover

Figure 29

*Kemuri*, p. 24

Figure 30

*xxxHolic* Vol. 6, pp. 20-21



**Afterword**

Figure 31

*Bunny Drop* Vol. 10, front cover

Figure 32

*From Five to Nine* Vol. 1, front cover

## APPENDIX D

## Character List

Aihara Miki	相原実貴
Akihabara	秋葉原
anime	アニメ
Aum Shinrikyō	オウム真理教
Axis Powers Hetalia	Axis Powers ヘタリア
Ayanami Rei	綾波 レイ
Azuma Hiroki	東浩紀
Bandō Mariko	坂東 真理子
Betsucomi	ベツコミ
Bikkuriman	ビックリマン
bishōjo	美少女
bunka-kei joshi	文化系女子
Cardcaptor Sakura	カードキャプターさくら
Chobits	ちょびっツ
Comiket	コミケット
dansei-muke dōjinshi	男性向け同人誌
Densha otoko	電車男
dōjinshi	同人誌
dokufu	毒婦
Enchi Fumiko	円地文子
Equal Employment Bureau	雇用均等・児童家庭局
Equal Employment Opportunity Law	男女雇用機会均等法
fan service	サービス
fujoshi	腐女子

Futaba Channel	ふたば☆ちゃんねる
Hagio Moto	萩尾望都
The Heart of Thomas	トーマの心臓
Higuchi Ichiyō	樋口一葉
Himaruya Hidekaz	日丸屋秀和
Ikebukuro	池袋
Ikeda Riyoko	池田理代子
Ishihara Shintarō	石原慎太郎
Izumi Kyōka	泉鏡花
josei manga	女性漫画
josei-muke doujinshi	女性向け同人誌
joryū bungaku	女流文学
junbungaku	純文学
Kawabata Yasunari	川端康成
kawaii	かわいい
Keio Senior High School	慶應義塾高等学校
Keio Senior Girls High School	慶應義塾女子高等学校
Keio University	慶應義塾大学
Kemuri	煙
Kikuchi Yumi	菊地優美
Kimi ni todoke	君に届け
Kirino Natsuo	桐野夏生
Kobayashi Takiji	小林多喜二
Koizumi Junichirō	小泉純一郎
Kotani Mari	小谷 真理
Kuchinashi kaoru sono ude ni	くちなし香りその腕に

Kurahashi Yumiko	倉橋由美子
Kurihara Chiyo	栗原知代
Labor Standards Act	労働基準法
light novels	ライトノベル
mahō shōjo	魔法少女
makeinu	負け犬
manga	漫画
Margaret	マーガレット
meganekko	眼鏡っ娘
Mejiro	目白
Metabola	メタボラ
Miyabe Miyuki	宮部みゆき
Miyazaki Hayao	宮崎駿
Mizu no nemuri hai no yume	水の眠り灰の夢
Mobile Suit Gundam	機動戦士ガンダム
modern girls	モダンガール
moe	萌え
Murakami Ryū	村上龍
Nakayoshi	なかよし
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind	風の谷のナウシカ
Neon Genesis Evangelion	新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
onna tengoku	女天国
otaku	オタク
Ōtsuka Eiji	大塚英志
Ōtsuka Yasuo	大塚康生
riariti	リアリティ

The Rose of Versailles	ベルサイユのばら
Sailor Scout	セーラー戦士
Sailor Moon	セーラームーン
Saitama City	埼玉市
Saitō Tamaki	斎藤環
Sakai Junko	酒井順子
Sakakibara Seitō	酒鬼薔薇聖斗
Satō Masaki	佐藤 茉咲
seinen manga	青年漫画
seme	せめ
Shibuya	渋谷
Shiina Karuho	椎名軽穂
Shimazaki Tōson	島崎藤村
Shinjuku	新宿
Shitamachi	下町
shōjo	少女
shōjo manga	少女漫画
shōnen ai	少年愛
shōnen manga	少年漫画
Space Battleship Yamato	宇宙戦艦ヤマト
Sugiura Yumiko	杉浦 由美子
sūpā sentai	スーパー戦隊
Takamatsu Hisako	高松久子
Takemiya Keiko	竹宮恵子
Takeuchi Naoko	武内直子
Tenkū no shiro Laputa	天空の城ラピュタ

Tezuka Osamu	手塚治虫
Tokyo Power OL Murder Incident	東電 OL 殺人事件
Tokyo University	東京大学
Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act	東京都青少年の健全な育成に関する条例
tsundere	ツンデレ
Ueno Chizuko	上の千鶴子
uke	うけ
Unita Yumi	宇仁田ゆみ
Usagi doroppu	うさぎドロップ
yaoi	やおい
yōkai	妖怪
Yonezawa Yoshihiro	米澤嘉博
Yoningurashi	よにんぐらし

### **NOTES ON BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STYLE**

All of the Japanese titles listed are published in Tokyo.

All of the internet sources listed are recent as of July 1, 2013.

Manga appearing in English translation generally don't have one translator but rather a team of translators and editors, who may be working from the draft of an earlier translation. Since issues of ascribing translatorship to most North American editions of manga are so complicated, the names of the translators and translation editors have been omitted.

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