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GROTESQUE: A GENDER AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

GROTESQUE: A GENDER AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL ANALYSIS

BY FAYE NGUYEN

This thesis analyzes the translated version of a fictional psychological thriller, *Grotesque* by Natsuo Kirino, that takes place in contemporary Japan, revolving around the lives of three girls attending the same elite high school. With the use of close reading interpretations of passages written in first person narration from the characters, the paper argues how the author intentionally uses differing narratives to curate a cohesive story of how three women independently navigate a society that sanctions gender norms and punishes those who deviate from traditional roles. Based on the real life murder case of Yasuko Watanabe, known for her dualistic identity as a career woman by day and prostitute by night, the reader's experience of *Grotesque* emulates the real life controversy that sparked in reaction to Watanabe's murder as civilians struggled to figure out the circumstances that led her to her decisions. However, by curating three vastly different psychological narratives that tell a different story about the same events, Kirino renders it virtually impossible for the reader to obtain a factual reality and thus an objective understanding of who the characters truly are. As a result, she provides her protagonists with individual autonomy through their ability to write their own narratives. Analysis of the characters also include the use of attachment theory in order to infer and explain defense mechanisms that construct their internal working models, ultimately altering how they behave and perceive reality, demonstrated by the narrative structure and plot. By the end of the novel, each protagonist is able to obtain an emotional resolution within themselves by either defying and/or appealing gender norms using the psychological tools they are equipped with.

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Introduction

Grotesque is a novel by Natsuo Kirino that intertwines the lives of an unnamed narrator, her younger sister, Yuriko, and their high school classmate, Kazue Sato, producing a saga of three women who come of age during Japan's "economic miracle" in the latter half of the 20th century while taking on marginalized gender roles in the rigid social environment that emerged during that boom. By taking place during this period, it provides the reader with a crucial vignette of the changing economic and social environment that contextualizes the character's lives as they navigate a society where women are expected to adhere to specific gender roles while being presented the option to pursue a career in a modernizing industrial society. As a result, the narrator, Kazue, and Yuriko are all faced with the complicated decision of whether to appease or defy such expectations. With the novel being a psychological crime thriller, the reader obtains a unique position in their lives and thus an opportunity to understand the world through their lens.

Although Kirino is well known in Japan for her distinctive works that discuss social issues in Japan within the crime genre, only a handful of novels, including *Grotesque*, have been translated into English. Unlike other Japanese crime writers, Kirino sets herself apart from her peers through her female-driven narratives that delve into a grisly world of murder and prostitution that evoke a larger message regarding personal agency and feminism. Her work has received national recognition for the unique statements she makes about contemporary society, "Kirino has received much recognition from literary circles, including the Edogawa Ranpo Prize in 1993 and the Naoki Prize in 1999; the Medal of Honor awarded to her by the Japanese government, however, serves as official acknowledgment of her contribution to society as a

novelist" (Qiao 4). Known for building worlds that force the reader to look more analytically at contemporary Japanese society, her unconventionality lies in her decision to portray crimes not in grimy back alleys and dodgy corners but in places of everyday life that the "ordinary citizen" occupies. Instead, Qiao describes how she "focuses on crimes that happen within our comfort zones—homes and communities—which are committed by common people. Kirino proposes that what is most alarming and disturbing is the element of transgression within everyday life" (Qiao 7). This encourages the reader to probe into the hidden, insidious aspects embedded within Japanese society, which seep into our everyday lives. In *Grotesque*, Yuriko's first sexual experiences as a child all take place within the homes of trusted male figures, and much of the social classes and gender inequalities conveyed take place within their school, home, and workplace.

The high school the characters attend is constructed by a rigid social hierarchy determined by one's pedigree and family wealth to create a social microcosm distinctly reminiscent of the social hierarchy that defines contemporary Japanese society. Q High School is a prestigious preparatory high school that admits students from the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Students who begin attending at the elementary level are born and raised in the lap of luxury, often the children of wealthy diplomats and CEOs, while those who are admitted from the middle school and high school level usually get in through academic merit. The narrator describes those admitted from the elementary level as often flouting luxury accessories, shorter skirts, expensive gold earrings, etc., and other symbols of conventional femininity. Q High School thus represents a class-based hierarchy that places the "born elite" at the top who can flex their wealth and shows of femininity, while the poorer, newer students are relegated to the bottom ranks and must struggle to assimilate socially.

At the time of publication in 2003, Kirino's novel made a strong political statement that juxtaposed the very social environment in which it questioned. According to the Tokyo Weekender, a Japanese Lifestyle magazine, the topic of prostitution at the time of publishing became a distinctive device for its time period. "Kirino sets out her notion that acts of prostitution can also be considered acts of feminism, a device which was, in 2003, relatively provocative" - Tokyo Weekender. The sex work industry has always held a ubiquitous position within Japan's economy. According to Koch, "The history of commercial sex as an organized institution in Japan dates back at least to the late sixteenth century when the first instantiation of what would develop into a system of licensed prostitution was established in Kyoto... Today, cisheteronormative commercial sexual services are available throughout urban japan via brick and mortar business that are highly integrated within the dense urban landscape..." (Koch 6). Not only has sex work held a significant and lasting role within the Japanese economy, but it is considered a simultaneously important yet stigmatized aspect of society. *Iyashi*, meaning "healing" and "soothing," is a term that describes the benefits that sex work brings to its male customers. Koch describes it as a "carefully constructed performance of intimacy that commingles maternal care with sexual gratification" (Koch 4). The sex industry has historically existed to fulfill the pleasures of male sexuality. Although it has long been considered an important facet of the economy, the topic of prostitution has always been regarded as a taboo that defies acceptable forms of female behavior. What is significant is how Kirino weaves a tale of three women and their relationship with prostitution to cast a different light on the industry as a provocative form of personal agency.

However, only a few of her novels have been translated into English, with *Grotesque* having been translated by Rebecca Copeland. With specific edits and cuts approved by Kirino,

Copeland points out how the Wikipedia author for *Grotesque* frames these cuts as censorship, which she consequently disagrees with. Such cuts include scenes of male prostitution, yet the translation still covers topics such as child rape, necrophilia, and incest. Rather, Copeland contests this as a simple notion of making the novel less repetitive and trimmer to appeal to the press's readership. Unlike European-language translators, she notes that this practice of trimming a book is a procedure that "is standard with the large trade presses in the US" (Copeland). Furthermore, she acknowledges the difficulties in translating a novel for a different audience based in the US. Elaborating on this, she states, "But on the other hand, I recognize that the publisher is producing a book for an entirely different audience. It is not the same book. Even when the translation is 'faithful' or 'literal' or whatever term you want to use, it really isn't. It is not a mirror, a perfect copy, or an equivalent. It's a separate work for a separate audience with a completely different reading experience" (Copeland). By understanding this necessary facet of translation, Copeland is able to imbue her own vision into the translation while acknowledging the narrative game of the original novel that she must participate in when rewriting it in English. "It includes a variety of narrative voices and narrative forms. The main narrator is untrustworthy, and the entire novel challenges concepts of truth and lies. Perhaps it is not unreasonable, then, that the translation also participates in this narrative game by also appearing "truthful" but also somehow deceitful" (Copeland). In the original novel, the distinction between truth and lies is already difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish. Copeland merely acknowledges the inherent nature of the novel and honors the fact that she, as a translator, is given the ability to manipulate the very fabric of the narratives herself, similar to how Kirino does.

After a long-term economic recession that followed World War II, Japan rose into an economic superpower from 1955 to 1973, acquiring a GNP rivaling the USA's. In an effort to

industrialize and rebuild the nation, men shifted gears from small family businesses and the agricultural sector to white-collared employment (Charlebois 18-19). Key to Japan's economic success in the period was a type of work that became known as the "corporate salaryman"—a role that eventually became an image of normative Japanese masculinity. The corporate salaryman¹ is typically characterized as a white-collared male employee who devotes long and grueling hours to his company as the breadwinner of his family. The sustainability of the salaryman's busy schedule relied on the complementary labor of a full-time housewife who was expected to support her husband and manage the household. Together, the corporate salaryman and the full-time housewife became ideals of masculine and feminine identity that continue to inform Japanese society. These roles cemented themselves within Japanese society to become the primary constituents of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Charlebois 2). This ubiquitous dynamic within Japanese contemporary society remains entrenched as a symbol of status and normative gender roles that play an overarching role in the lives of the protagonists.

The fates of Kazue, the narrator, and Yuriko are not necessarily obscure or exceptional cases that are unique to them. Rather, the novel is inspired by a real-life case that mirrors Kazue Sato's life, famously known as the Toden OL murder case (Yoda 197). The sensational case centers around a woman named Yasuko Watanabe, who, while working as a prostitute by night and an elite career woman by day, was eventually murdered by one of her sex work clients. Like the fictional characters inspired by her, her story indicates a larger and prevailing social phenomenon that encapsulates many women living within patriarchal societies that pressure women into the role of a housewife. Women often are pressured to choose between two paths: to pursue a career or to become a homemaker. Those who take on more deviant paths like sex work,

¹ Charlebois, *Japanese Femininities*, 17

such as in the case of Watanabe, are subjected to unsafe conditions as a result of the societal stigmatization of the industry. As the case became one of the most well-known murder cases in contemporary Japan, Yoda describes the reaction to the publicized case, "At first, male-oriented tabloids and weekly magazines were abuzz over the victim's double life, evoking a well-worn pornographic trope: the specter of a good woman with the hidden face of a whore" (Yoda 186). The public responded with many interpretations that distorted the image of the victim's identity. Even after death, the victim's life and decisions were subject to scrutiny, and her image was misogynistically rewritten by the public to repaint her existence as a symbol of erotic titillation. At the time of her death, she was 39 years old, the same age that Kazue Sato's character was also murdered.

I am arguing that because the author allows the fictional protagonists to have full reign in writing their narratives, and despite their lives being afflicted by uncontrollable external factors such as societal expectations, gender roles, and traumatic childhood experiences, they are still able to derive a sense of agency and autonomy through their ability to curate their own stories and ultimately choose to define themselves and how they will be remembered. By providing multiple psychological narratives that distort the truth, the reader's opinions of each character are constantly being renegotiated. For example, the narrator consistently imposes her own value judgments, often misogynistic, onto the other characters, initially coloring the reader's impression of Kazue and Yuriko. But as the novel progresses, we come to understand that her thoughts are entirely subjective as both Kazue and Yuriko assert their own agency within their stories and reveal their own truths. This is demonstrated by the unreliable narrations and factual discrepancies between stories of the same event to show how each protagonist manages to carve out their own identity and subjective perspective in a world that grants little room for

deviance. Therefore, the author wants the reader to be able to bypass not only the narrator's biases, but their own as well by taking away the ability of the reader to come to conclusions about what the objective truth may be and instead allowing the protagonists to define their own truths and identities.

The exceptionally beautiful Yuriko eventually settles into a career as a full-time prostitute after she is expelled from high school after it is revealed that she has been maintaining a secret network as a prostitute amongst students and teachers. Yuriko's older and notably less attractive sister, the main narrator, however, pursues a different pathway by instead choosing to remain as an indefinitely single virgin who works a low-wage clerical job. Meanwhile, their school acquaintance, Kazue Sato, ambitiously climbs the corporate ladder as an elite career woman while undertaking sex work at night. Although all three characters take different paths in life, the common factor that unites them is that they eschew the identity of a traditional, married housewife.

As a fictional work, the author gains control over the lives and narrative decisions that the protagonists make when telling their stories. With each protagonist given the opportunity to share their life, it is significant that each character chooses to begin the narrative at differing periods of life. The novel's plot is composed of three interweaving narratives of characters that reveal how their psychological states are woven into the fabric of their narrative through the way they organize the structure of their stories. Despite their shared experience at Q High School, each character offers a starkly different perspective and recounts those experiences, providing insight into the complexity of their differing mental states. Yuriko and Kazue, from the beginning of the novel's chronological timeline, are dead, and their voices and thoughts are only heard through the eyes of the main narrator in the form of epistolary diary entries. The main narrator,

who speaks to the reader in the present, organizes the order of her story by prioritizing significant memories of perceived interpersonal betrayals and abandonment. Yuriko's narrative is primarily organized through significant sexual encounters with men throughout her adolescence into her adulthood. In contrast, Kazue's narrative is a chronological documentation of her work life as a career woman and as a prostitute. As each character chooses to recount specific events of their lives, these written moments indicate how each character has come to define their personal identity as it reflects their own consciousness. By organizing the novel in this way, the author encourages the readers to view the central protagonists as beings defined by their internal working models, a concept in attachment theory that describes how an individual's paradigm of self and way of thinking becomes established in response to crucial interactions with their primary caretaker as an infant. In the same way that such moments construct an individual's internal working model for life, the retellings that constitute the beginning of each protagonist's narration define and contextualize how they perceive the following events of their lives.

Although establishing and imbuing her tone throughout the novel, the narrator is later revealed to be unreliable, distorting physical and emotional details of the events in ways that provide her affirmation and serve as a form of psychic defense against a painful reality. Her unreliability, indicated within Kazue and Yuriko's differing stories, and when her friend, Mitsuru, makes jarring claims that directly contradict her narration towards the resolution of the novel, forces the reader to renegotiate what they perceive to be the truth. By removing the reader's ability to develop an objective and factual understanding of the novel's events, the author gives each protagonist their own agency in curating their narrative that is authentic to themselves. Despite the narrator's frequent comments on her younger sister's alleged dim-wittedness, Yuriko's own narrative provides a candid and direct account of her life that conveys a strong sense of

pragmatic awareness of her surroundings. Even then, there is a noticeable lack of focus on her own internal state that opposes that of her older sister. The narrator often not only fixates on the wrongdoings of others and inflates her own positive attributes, but she also has a distinct awareness of how other's actions have impacted her. Although aware of others' roles in her life, Yuriko has little to say or claim about her inner world besides acknowledging her seemingly vacant identity. Despite growing up together, the sisters' style of narration differs from one another, demonstrating how their approaches serve their respective emotional needs. Kazue Sato, on the other hand, also provides a unique voice that intertwines with the existing narrative. Even compared to the narrators, her narrative is delusional and self-boastful, offering very little awareness of reality that is only further emphasized by the perspectives that precede hers. Although there are momentary lapses within the novel where she can almost grasp a sense of self-awareness, she quickly rationalizes such painful realities away through the mental gymnastics embedded within her narration.

To understand why they stray from marriage and domestic roles, a social expectation placed on them as women, we must understand how their upbringing and parental relationships result in insecure attachment styles that drive them to take on social identities that deviate from the norm. Kirino presents her characters' decisions as influenced and informed by their internal working models, which take on distorted forms due to insecure attachment styles that are ultimately caused by their inadequate parental relationships. Attachment theory is a psychological theory that explains how the dynamics of human relationships are defined by one's internal working model, which is believed to begin from an infant's relationship with its primary caregiver. During infancy, the child lacks a sense of coherent self and, through mutual and reciprocal interactions with the primary caregiver, is then able to develop an internal working

model and identity in response to those interactions. The internal working model establishes the paradigm in which a human operates, thinks, and reacts to situations, consequently influencing their perspective and development of mental representations towards their self and surrounding relationships (Fonagy 31). Attachment theory provides an avenue to see the impact of how one's relationship with their primary caregiver can disrupt their ability to form healthy relationships and high self-esteem, ultimately resulting in warped manifestations of sexuality that will cause long-term turmoil and suffering. Furthermore, through analyzing this within the socio-cultural context of Japan, understanding the internal working models of each character is further complicated by oppressive and rigid gender roles that the characters must learn to navigate and adhere to.

Through the first-person narration, the novel's main characters reveal to the reader their struggles with troubled parental relationships that deal with various forms of emotional neglect and favoritism, causing them to search for ways to satiate their emotional needs for the rest of their lives, a demonstration of the detrimental effects that their parental relationships have had on their internal working models. Therefore, to understand the factors that contribute to the inevitable paths of these characters, it is necessary to understand how both societal context and their respective attachment styles coalesce within *Grotesque* to demonstrate the ways in which each character simultaneously defies and appeals to the normative roles of femininity expected of them. In this paper, I identify that the narrator exhibits symptoms of a disorganized attachment style, Yuriko exhibits symptoms of an avoidant attachment style, and Kazue exhibits symptoms of an anxious attachment style. Through acknowledging the psychological states of the characters through the lens of attachment theory, the reader is able to see the bigger picture where major facets of Japanese culture, such as family hierarchy, traditional gender roles, and

economic context, interact with attachment theory to make a distinctive feminist statement on how such factors inevitably drive the characters to go down the paths that they choose.

In response to external international pressures, Japan passed the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, also known as "EEOL," in 1985 in an attempt to give women more opportunities within a hostile, male-dominated workforce (Parkinson 604). Although strides were made, the social attitudes remained deeply embedded within the culture. Companies responded by creating a two-tiered employment system consisting of managerial and clerical tracks. The former is characterized by long hours and the benefits of a secure, lasting career, while the latter is characterized by part-time or low-wage clerical work that is not intended to sustain a long-term career. As a consequence, the former track is occupied by men aspiring to become career-salary men, while the latter is occupied by women who work for a limited period of time before quitting to become housewives (Charlebois 26-27). As a result, women in Japan are faced with limited opportunities not only in the workplace, but consequently limited options in achieving economic autonomy. That said, this context is essential to understanding how the characters navigate through the strict social matrix that they find themselves in.

Although this paper focuses on a story that takes place in Japan, the lives of Japanese women should not be considered an obscure bubble that exists independently from the rest of the world. Rather, as the book takes place during a period of burgeoning wealth and the cementation of the middle class, the social hierarchy conveyed in the novel mirrors certain time periods of the US, particularly in the mid-twentieth century. Characterized by middle-class housewives and their breadwinner husbands, the USA and Japan take on similar economic and social trajectories. The truths uncovered by this novel can also be pivotal in understanding social truths ubiquitous in many other societies.

The thesis will be divided into three major components. The first section will discuss each character's relationship with their parents within the context of their cultural and racial identity. For the narrator and her younger sister, Yuriko, who holds the unique position of being half-European and half-Japanese, I will discuss how their racial identity influences their relationships with their Swiss father and Japanese mother. On the other hand, Kazue Sato has a traditional Japanese nuclear family that follows a traditional division of gender roles. Her father, being a corporate salaryman, and her mother, being a full-time domestic housewife, represent a common familial structure that is apparent in contemporary Japanese society. In the second section, I will discuss how the characters are given the opportunity to present the reader with their own personal narratives, which inevitably reflect their own psychological states. Each character chooses to begin their narrative at different points in their lives and introduces formative experiences that represent the conception of the beginning of their narrative consciousness. The second section will focus on how the very structure of each narrative informs the reader of their perceived identity, the formation of their consciousness, and how it consequently influences their actions.

Throughout the paper, I will be using Margot Waddell's *Inside Lives* to contextualize the lives of the characters as chronological narratives that demonstrate their psychological development, or lack thereof, to understand how the characters use forms of psychic defenses in order to protect themselves from the world, while depending on what Esther Bick calls the "second skin" phenomenon, the result of insufficient internal structures that stunts their internal growth and maturity. To first understand how an individual's internal working model develops throughout life, one must examine how the baby's interactions with its mother inform the individual mental structures. Unable to distinguish either physical or psychic pain, the baby may

project to their mother a multitude of symptoms of distress, such as crying, shrieking, or defecating and urinating. The mother's ability to contain such reactions, understand and attune herself to the baby's needs may result in a harmonious interaction between the two where the baby is able to be understood and contained by its mother, which Bion refers to as "reverie" (Waddell 33). If the mother misunderstands by projecting her own anxieties onto the child or neglecting to contain her baby's projections, the child often resorts to Bick's notion of "second skin" to find solace. The "second skin" is defined as a primary survival function, a sort of psychic replacement for a physical skin that an individual may adhere to in order to feel a sense of primitive omnipotence to protect themselves from perceived dangers (Waddell 49-50). This can manifest in the form of an attachment to sensory objects and sensations, such as visual, tactile, and audible experiences. The survival mechanism occurs when a baby is lacking in reciprocation from its mother, who is meant to act as a container for the baby's interactions and expressions, also known as projections, with the world. If a mother fails to absorb, acknowledge, and affirm her infant's needs, one may often resort to adhering to some form of the "second skin."

There are consequences to the overuse of this mechanism, however. Waddell states, "Yet if babies have to draw on their own devices for too much of the time, living within a second-skin can be felt to be a necessity and become a habit. This kind of shell can protect the baby from feelings of psychic disintegration and panic, but it also cuts him off from the external world" (Waddell 50). In other words, creating a habit of mentally relying on alternative forms of solace alienates the individual from living authentically and being in tune with their internal world. Each character clearly relies on something throughout the novel that inevitably stunts their growth. For the narrator, she relies on her alleged apathy and maliciousness towards others; for

Yuriko, it is sex with older men that enables her to live, and for Kazue, relying on intellectualizing herself as well as delusions of beauty that only she can see to achieve the vague goal of success. Depending on this inevitably stunts one's emotional growth by preventing one from genuinely interacting with oneself and the world, also known as the introjective process.

Throughout the fragmented individual's life, as the characters in *Grotesque* also demonstrate, the development of one's life often manifests in various oscillations between different states, defined by psychic defenses to protect oneself from internal and external anxieties. In attachment theory, one's emotional development is not defined through a chronological timeline, but through periodic fluctuations that ideally develop towards a greater goal of attaining the emotional capacity for intimacy. As a result, the novel's own narrative structure reflects this through the lack of a chronological structure. Instead, the narrative structure represents the protagonists' internal dialogues, negotiations, and dilemmas as they struggle to make sense of their suffering and desires. By the end, all three protagonists are able to find some resolution, even in dysfunctional ways, that provides them a sense of completion. Freud defines this as "central to the achievement of adolescence is the satisfactory fulfillment of the task of crystallizing sexual identity, of finding a sexual partner, and of bringing together the two main stems of sexuality, the sensual and the tender" (Waddell 176). Our characters will demonstrate how, throughout their narratives, their troubled pasts and insecure attachment styles either result in dysfunctional sexual identities that lack depth or an entire repression of sexual identity. It is also worth noting that the narrator, Yuriko, and Kazue all remain unmarried. Marriage is not only something that Waddell deems as a signifier of one's capacity for emotional intimacy, but also an institution that conveys acceptable gender norms and performativity in Japan. When Waddell references marriage, she strays from the traditional contractual notion of

marriage and focuses more on the emotional "internal capacity for marriage," which she deems as the goal that the adolescent works towards all its life throughout the development (Waddell 176). This capacity for emotional maturity and devotion to a partnership is considered to be intrinsic to the goal of the separation process from the child and its mother, and the traumas of the hopes, goals, and losses experienced in childhood (Waddell 177). Therefore, this paper will delve beyond describing how parental influence simply affects the characters' attachment styles and discuss how the characters lack fundamental tools from within to cope with trauma and pain. Instead, they 'adhere' to corporeal things, such as sex, pseudo-intellect, and feminine performativity, ultimately stunting their emotional growth.

I will be using Peter Fonagy's *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis* as a main source to analyze their childhood experiences as it provide an in-depth study of the behaviors and relationship dynamics that may result in insecure attachment. To understand their society, I will be using Justin Charleboise's *Japanese Femininities* to contextualize how notions of femininity and masculinity are inexplicable from the structure of the Japanese economy. Then, I will delve into how each character's insecure attachment style manifests and demonstrates itself through their adult relationships. In the last part of each section, I will then discuss how the characters choose to either yield or defy gender expectations imposed by their environment and how their insecure attachment style affects their navigation of these expectations.

Part 1: Family Life

The beginning of the novel introduces the main narrator's thoughts, in which she elaborates on her feelings towards men and procreation before discussing her family dynamics, perhaps an intentional device from the author to foreshadow the source of her fractured identity. Her relationship towards physical appearance and sexuality becomes apparent in the first line, "Whenever I meet a man, I catch myself wondering what our child would look like if we were to make a baby" (Kirino 1). The narrator continues to discuss her fantasies of procreation that imbue every male interaction. Significantly, she chooses to fixate on the appearance of her hypothetical child. Although it becomes immediately apparent how sex and procreation occupy her mind, she acknowledges a certain gap in her thinking. She continues, "For some reason I never think about the act that men and women perform to produce these children" (Kirino 2). Despite her fixation on procreation, she reveals a gap in her fantasies, where she tends to skip over the physical act of sex and the sexual intimacy that occurs between both participants. This introduction provides a vignette of her consciousness that foreshadows the rest of her narrative. Only after this elaboration does she choose to introduce herself as a mixed-race individual. "If you look closely you'll notice that I'm 'half'" (Kirino 3). Once again, her fixation on physical appearance becomes apparent, and choosing to introduce her biracial identity first and foremost emphasizes it as an essential facet of how she perceives herself. She first describes her father as a parsimonious man of Swiss nationality and Polish descent before going on to describe her mother as a weak-willed and "loser" woman of Japanese nationality and descent. The narrator's position as having a Japanese mother and a foreign-born Swiss father places her in a precarious position as a mixed-race individual in a racially homogenous country such as Japan. Her biracial

appearance affects not only her experience as a Japanese civilian but also how she and Yuriko compartmentalize their racial identity concerning their parental relationships.

The narrator often identifies as leaning more Asian in appearance, and she demonstrates a racialized identification of her mother that reveals itself in her troubled relationship with her father. She states, "... I'm half European and half Asian, but even so, my face is far more Asian than European..." (Kirino 9). Unlike Yuriko, whom she describes as clearly having "both Asian and Western features," the narrator's self-perception demonstrates an appearance-based identification with her mother, evidenced by her lack of relationship with her father. This disparity is acknowledged, "I had always lived with this strange sense of distance from my father, a distance I could not bridge. All you could say about our relationship was that we never got along. When my father spoke to Yuriko, his voice was always natural. But whenever he had to deal with me he was full of tension" (Kirino 188). Her alienated relationship with her father suggests a connection to her fixation on men and the physical appearance of her child. The narrator subconsciously attributes her disparate appearance to their emotional distance. Her fixation on procreation and the physical appearance of her child that pervades her daily interactions with men is a psychic attempt to resolve or find closure within her lacking relationship with her father. She describes childhood memories in which Yuriko would make fun of her relationship with their father. "'I wonder where your daddy is, huh?' she would chide me. 'Because you don't look a bit like my daddy.' ... I realized that my Swiss father was not my real father when I first became aware of Yuriko's existence" (Kirino 183). This passage demonstrates the narrator's perceived alienation from her father as a dilemma inseparable from Yuriko and Yuriko's racial identification with him. Such instances show how their racial appearances inform how they identify with their parents.

After introducing her family, the narrator provides the reader with formative vignettes from her past that explain her family dynamics, revolving primarily around the trauma that stemmed from being Yuriko's unattractive sister. The first memory she chooses to disclose is a family trip to their mountain cabin during New Year's, when she and Yuriko were twelve and ten, respectively. Her decision to begin her narrative with this memory suggests its importance within the narrator's consciousness, signifying a formative moment in the construction of her fractured identity. While at the cabin of their father's friend, Johnson, they are instructed to walk home together. In a moment of spontaneity, the narrator flees to the cabin and locks the door behind her, abandoning Yuriko outside in the snow. She later awakens to hear her parents arguing outside her door. When her father asks their mother why the narrator would act in such a way, she candidly states, "'She feels inferior to her sister, that's all,'" (Kirino 21). This passage shows how her mother, their primary caregiver, verbally projects an inferior position onto the narrator in relation to Yuriko, inevitably defining her self-image. In her own words, she states, "She had already become Yuriko's slave. By that I mean she worshiped her beautiful daughter. She was utterly intimidated by the fact that fate had given her such a lovely child. If Mother had admitted Yuriko's creepiness to me, I wonder if I would have been able to trust her" (Kirino 17). Although her narration is unreliable, her perception of Yuriko and their mother's relationship informs how the narrator views herself as the less loved child, particularly due to their disparity in attractiveness. The significance of this memory suggests that she has come to mirror and define herself by her mother's words, developing into an unshakeable inferiority complex.

Despite her dislike and inability to trust their mother, the narrator targets Yuriko as the sole recipient of her hatred, revealing a conflicting yet persistent desire for her mother's approval and attention. Because she views Yuriko's beauty as the main impediment to receiving her

mother's love and attention, the narrator perceives her mother to be unavailable as a result of her physical deficiencies compared to her sister. What this conveys is the concept of "felt security," which Cawthorpe explains "stems from experiences with the caregiver and reflects the conscious investment of affect held in regard to an attachment figure" (Cawthorpe 4). As she derives feelings of inferiority, the narrator perceives negative affects from her primary caregiver. Not only does this negatively affect the degree of felt security that she perceives from her mother, but it also affects her perception of herself, an example of how one's internal working model comes to complement that of their primary caregiver. Fonagy describes how the mother's emotional availability affects one's internal working model, "The key feature of this is how acceptable or unacceptable the child feels in the eye of the attachment figure. A child whose internal working model of the caregiver is focused on rejection is expected to evolve a complementary working model of the self as unlovable, unworthy, and flawed" (Fonagy 12-13). In the following sentence, the narrator states, "You wonder why I didn't refute my mother's claim, don't you? But maybe I couldn't deny feeling inferior" (Kirino 21). Her mother not only verbally affirms her inferiority, but the narrator's acceptance of her inferiority indicates that she has adopted an internal working model that mirrors her mother's.

As the narrator continues the story, she describes her father's physical punishment and her mother's failure to protect her in order to fully convey to the reader what she perceives as their complete betrayal of her. Her parents' actions after the incident affirm the narrator's sense of rejection, further establishing her inferiority complex. The child is regulated by three behavioral systems - attachment, exploration, and fear. Such systems allow the child to learn and develop in proximity to the caregiver (Fonagy 9). The narrator's fear system is aroused when her father physically beats her as a consequence of her treatment of Yuriko. "I suppose my

indignation showed on my face, because my father slapped me again with all his might. From the corner of my eye, I glimpsed my mother's pinched profile as I toppled to the floor. She didn't try to come to my defense" (Kirino 22). In this instance, her father's physical punishment indicates his priority for Yuriko's physical comfort over the narrator's. Notably, she immediately turns to her mother in moments of danger and anticipates protection. Bowlby describes this as a natural response, "When the fear system is aroused by what Bowlby called "natural" cues to danger, the child immediately seeks a source of protection and safety, the attachment figure" (Fonagy 9). However, not only does her mother fail to affirm her emotionally, but she also fails to protect her from physical danger, further cementing the narrator's perceived favoritism. Fonagy further states, "Thus separation involves two stressors: unprotected exposure and the sense of being cut off from the critical source of protection" (Fonagy 9). In this case, the mother does not protect her daughter because she is physically unable to; the mother does not protect her daughter because she chooses not to; at least, this is how the narrator chooses to understand her actions. It is thus communicated to her that, as a result of her inferiority to Yuriko, she has been rejected and abandoned by her caregivers, emotionally and physically. Throughout this childhood memory, one can see how the narrator continuously seeks her mother's comfort despite repeated instances of rejection and favoritism.

The narrator's troubled relationship with her mother persists into her teenage years, and she reveals symptoms of disorganized behavior when she oscillates between apathy and grief in response to her mother's suicide. Perceiving herself to have been symbolically abandoned by their parents in favor of her sister, her emotional detachment is conveyed by her desire to stay in Japan with her grandfather after her family moves to Switzerland for their father's new job. The full breadth of the narrator's detachment from her mother becomes apparent after their mother

soon commits suicide. Bowlby identifies how insecure attachment manifests as a symptom of responses to this separation: “an initial protest proceeding to despair and depression and finally a phase of emotional detachment if the separation extends over a period of time...” (Sable 173). Similar to how Bowlby divides the child’s reaction to separation into stages, the perceived emotional and physical abandonment of the narrator also occurs in several stages throughout her adolescence. After her death, the narrator expresses detachment, “I was not sad. It’s strange, but I felt I’d lost my mother long ago. I’d done all my mourning while I was little, so I hadn’t even felt particularly lonely or sad when my mother left me for Switzerland back in March” (Kirino 63). The narrator, unable to express sadness, claims that she has already previously mourned their separation, which parallels the phase of despair and depression discussed by Sable. In the final stage of their separation, her mother’s death, she demonstrates how she utilizes emotional detachment to avoid her feelings, which Sable describes as a “defensive numbing” (Sable 173) that characterizes detachment. Despite this, the narrator shows conflicting emotions and cannot fully detach. As she reflects further on the situation, she states, “I resented my mother for killing herself and I hated my father for his infidelity; then, just as suddenly, I began to feel sorry for my mother, and I knew I had a kind of affinity with her. Tears began to well up in my eyes. Out there in the rain, I was able to cry over my mother’s death for the first time” (Kirino 68). Upon realizing her bitter resentment towards her parents, she is suddenly flooded with sympathy and desire for her mother, indicating her disorganized state. The narrator exposes a deeper, unrequited yearning for her mother’s love. Sable describes how the mother becomes the object of distress, emphasizing, “the mother has served as a source of both fear and reassurance, thus arousal of the attachment behavioral system produces strong conflicting motivations: attraction

and avoidance” (Zimberoff and Hartman 6). These conflicting motivations and the oscillation between attraction and avoidance continue to characterize the narrator’s eventual relationships.

Similar to how the narrator’s biracial identity and appearance inform her parental relationships, Yuriko attributes their mother’s emotional neglect upon moving to Switzerland as a consequence of her racial appearance. Yuriko’s perspective is only revealed after her death, when Johnson’s ex-wife, Masami, delivers her old diary to be read by the narrator. Within the diary, Yuriko writes of her experiences in Switzerland, her high school experience in Japan, and her adult life. She describes the dynamic between her and her mother, “My mother hated me. Giving birth to a child who looked so unlike herself threw my mother into a tailspin from which she never recovered. She was still living in shock” (Kirino 115). This passage immediately contrasts the words of the narrator, who proclaims with utmost certainty their mother’s preference for Yuriko. Instead, Yuriko bluntly acknowledges what she perceives as her mother’s complete rejection of her. She attributes this to their relative disparity in appearance, the result of her Western features and beauty, whereas her mother is full Japanese and often described as “average.” Both sisters seem to believe that their appearance is the reason for their mother’s rejection of them. She continues, “After I reached maturity it became worse, and when it was decided we would move to Switzerland, my mother became the only Asian person in the family. As a consequence, my mother began to feel closer to my older sister, who was still in Japan and who was more Asian than I was, or so my mother thought” (Kirino 65). The disparity in ethnic appearance becomes a significant aspect that influences the dynamic between Yuriko and her mother. Although the narrator sees Yuriko’s beauty as her obstacle, Yuriko alternatively believes it is precisely her beauty and relative whiteness that form a barrier between her and her mother. Additionally, the narrator never establishes her appearance as an individual aspect of her, but

rather constantly relative to Yuriko. Their mother's developing identification with the narrator presents a potential rivalry for their caregiver's attention. After moving to Switzerland, Yuriko describes her mother's fixation on the narrator, "My sister's well-being weighed on my mother. She was constantly saying over and over, 'I worry about that child. Do you suppose she thinks I abandoned her?' My sister did not think anything of the sort. If my mother had abandoned anyone, it was me. I didn't look like anyone in the family. I'd been left to my own devices." (Kirino 116). Yuriko's firm assertion that her mother's abandonment was caused by a personal failure to mirror her mother suggests a strong sense of self-awareness of her deficiencies that the narrator lacks. In contrast, the narrator blames Yuriko for her perceived deficiencies. Furthermore, her mother's fixation on her sister suggests a neglect of Yuriko's adolescent emotional needs amid significant geographic and cultural displacement. Through Yuriko's narrative, the contradictory accounts of both sisters become highly apparent to the reader.

As a result of her mother's emotional neglect, she withdraws her own emotional needs, detaching from her mother while still maintaining a superficial relationship sustained through physical proximity. Yuriko mentions her Uncle Karl and her father's relief at her death and their consequential fear that followed her suicide, caused by her mother's possible knowledge of their immoral actions. For Karl, it was his sexual relationship with the fifteen-year-old Yuriko and, for her father, his affair with an employee.

"They had to live out the rest of their lives in a battle with their own feelings of guilt. That wasn't the case for me. What her death brought me was a clear understanding of adult selfishness. It wasn't my fault that my mother and father had produced such a beautiful child, such a miracle as myself. And yet, I was the one who was forced to

shoulder the burden. I'd had just about enough of it. I certainly did not want to get saddled with the responsibility for my mother's death" (Kirino 117).

Yuriko grieves her mother's death in a matter-of-fact tone, referring to her realization as a "clear understanding of adult selfishness." Her pragmatic attitude towards the situation contrasts her father and Uncle's fearful guilt, and she concludes that she "must shoulder the burden." Despite the traumatic death of her mother at a young age, Yuriko maintains an objective opinion of her mother, suggesting an emotionally detached stance. She states that her mother was her motivation to stay in Switzerland, "I had loved Mother. And now that she was gone, why stay in Switzerland?" (Kirino 120). It is clear that despite her perceived rejection from her mother, Yuriko continued to maintain and ensure a level of physical proximity and surface-level connection that lacks intimacy and emotional risk, a behavior that avoidant children often use with rejecting parents (Fonagy 8). This is called proximity maintenance, which Bowlby states is "the desire for people to be near and close to people to whom they are attached" (Francom 30). On the other hand, her older sister mirrors her perceived rejection by choosing to stay in Japan and subsequently choosing to "abandon" her family in response.

Despite her racial identification with her father, Yuriko's detachment from him is revealed after their mother's suicide when she calls the police on him, reporting him as a suspect in her mother's death. In an act of punitive rage, she relays her actions,

"I called the police solely out of anger. My mother was lying there dead in her casket, and my father had to drag his pregnant girlfriend into Mother's home. I questioned his callousness, but I never once doubted his innocence. My father wasn't strong enough to dirty his hands with such a crime. He didn't possess a desire great enough to commit

murder. So it came as no surprise that he stood on the sidelines and watched while my mother slowly collapsed” (Kirino 119).

Although she ridicules him for his weakness and doubts his ability to commit, her reporting him as an accomplice to murder suggests an overlap between her emotional and physical reality.

Fonagy explains how Bowlby was “impressed by the symbolic communication of abandonment, such as threats of suicide, of leaving, or of sending the child away. While such experiences are posited as ‘actual,’ in this domain, the reality of a threat and the child’s psychic reality clearly overlap” (Fonagy 15). Her punitive behavior towards her father could be considered a form of punishment for what she perceives as his failure to protect her mother, the primary caretaker. He may not have physically murdered her, but his abuse, neglect, and infidelity contributed to their mother’s severe depression and, consequently, her suicide. Thus, it may subconsciously convey to Yuriko that he symbolically murdered her. By contributing to her mother’s death and affirming her unavailability as a caretaker, her father presents himself as a direct threat to Yuriko’s symbolic survival (Fonagy 15).

By moving to Japan after her mother’s death, she symbolically abandons her father and makes a conscious decision to racially and culturally identify with her mother. Her detachment from him is apparent in a candid conversation between Yuriko and her father. “‘With Mother dead, there’s really no reason for me to be here.’ ‘I see. So, you’ve decided to live as a Japanese, then?’ my father mumbled, with no attempt to hide his hurt. ‘You may have a hard time of it with your Western looks.’ ‘Maybe. But I am Japanese’” (Kirino 120). Her biracial appearance demonstrates how Yuriko views her racial identity as compartmentalized by her mother and father. Her departure from Switzerland is not only a physical leave of her father, but her choice to live as a Japanese citizen rather than a Swiss conveys an emotional rejection of him. She can thus

identify with her mother and maintain a connection through their shared culture despite their physical differences.

Her cold and detached behavior towards her father is further emphasized through her attitude towards his impregnated affair partner and the prospect of a new sibling. Quickly after their mother died, their father immediately brought home his seventeen-year-old, pregnant affair partner, Ursula. Yuriko expresses her desire to leave while conversing with her father, “‘I don’t want to be here.’ ‘Because Ursula is here?’ my father lowered his voice. Ursula was sleeping in the guest bedroom. Any kind of tension could bring on a miscarriage, and we were ordered to keep her quiet” (Kirino 119). Her father’s infidelity affirms his physical betrayal of his late wife to Yuriko. Furthermore, being instructed to suppress tension in order to prevent a miscarriage represents yet another symbolic betrayal. Her father reinforces a repressive coping mechanism by asking Yuriko to suppress her mourning and grief regarding her mother’s death in order to ensure the survival of his other child, the physical evidence of his infidelity and betrayal. Unlike the sibling rivalry between Yuriko and the narrator to win their mother’s attention, Yuriko remains cool and unthreatened in the presence of a half-sibling. Instead of protesting or attempting to assert herself, she takes advantage of the situation to go back to Japan, demonstrating her complete emotional abandonment of her father.

Unlike the fractured dynamics of the sisters’ family, Kazue Sato reveals her family's hierarchical nature, ordered by division of gender and academic achievement. Contrary to the sisters, who must navigate life in Japan with the added complication of being biracial, Kazue is the daughter of a traditional Japanese nuclear family. In the following excerpt, the narrator visits her home, where Kazue proceeds to explain her family dynamics.

“Because in our house, there is an order to things... Everything is decided according to this order, like who has the right to take a bath first and who gets to eat the best food. My father’s always first; that’s only natural, right? And then I’m second. My mother used to come second, but once I made it into the top tier on the national scholastic rankings for my age group, I got to be second. So now my father goes first, I’m second, then my mother, and my sister’s last. If she’s not careful, though, my sister’s going to pass my mom” (Kirino 84).

In this passage, Kazue emphasizes her father’s inherent position at the top of the hierarchy within the home, indicating his role as akin to the head male patriarch. Her description of her family represents many typical social conventions of both gender roles and family dynamics that exist within contemporary Japanese society. Furthermore, her father is a hardworking salaryman, while her mother is a housewife. Charlebois describes how this marriage dynamic often leads to an inherent power imbalance. “A salaryman creates and sustains an unequal relationship with his wife through his domestic non-involvement and status as primary family breadwinner. As a consequence, his wife remains financially dependent on him and arguably subject to his authority” (Charlebois 47-48). As a result, Kazue’s mother is subject to being subordinated within the hierarchical structure of their family, something that is dictated by the father, who holds the most financial power. According to Charlebois, the complementary relationship between the salaryman and the full-time housewife symbolizes how hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity manifest within contemporary Japanese society (Charlebois 22). Furthermore, this hierarchy is determined through academic achievement, further cementing the emphasis on education and career within society that has penetrated Kazue’s family values. The emphasis on academic achievement in their family suggests how it disrupts the age-based

privilege that generally occurs and instead cultivates a sense of competition between women, particularly between Kazue, her sister, and her mother.

Although Kazue's father works hard to impress upon his daughters the value of academic achievement as a survival mechanism to ensure their protection and success in a society that negatively sanctions those who fail to conform, Kazue's identity as a female complicates the simplistic notion of achieving academic success as an avenue of "winning" the system. The narrator states, "...when I saw a person who used the rigidity and absurdity of social conventions as steadfastly as Kazue's father did, I was impressed. Why? Because Kazue's father did not really believe in the social values he represented, but he clearly knew that he had armed himself with them more or less as a weapon of survival" (Kirino 92). This passage emphasizes how the social values within the family are necessary to survive in a cutthroat society defined by rigid social hierarchies. However, the emphasis on women becoming homemakers places them in a precarious position where they must choose to achieve social affirmation through the domestic realm or obtain independence through building a career. Charlebois discusses the inherent implications for women within this dynamic, "While men benefit from institutionalized heterosexuality, women are disadvantaged by heterosexuality because they are defined as family caregivers and rendered financially dependent on a male breadwinner. We see then how men and women occupy not simply different but fundamentally unequal social positions in the current heterosexual gender order" (Charlebois 45). Although Kazue's family may represent a typical division of unequal gender roles, her father's relentless encouragement for her to succeed in her academics and career poses unique pressures for her regarding gender performativity. The narrator comments on this dilemma, "Kazue's father obviously paid no attention to the internal affairs at Q High School for Young Women. He was utterly unconcerned with the impact this

would have on Kazue or the way it would make her suffer” (Kirino 92). What the narrator refers to as suffering are the consequences of societal stigmatization that follows one’s inability to conform to gender roles. In this case, Kazue fails to conform to traditional femininity due to her focus on academics and building a career. Charlebois redefines the term of what it may mean to be “gender deviant.” “Nevertheless, individuals who subvert normative notions of masculinity and femininity are often regarded as gender deviant and victims of stigmatization (Charlebois 45). Therefore, individuals who behave outside the rigid boundaries of gender roles can be considered deviant for how they defy socially acceptable behaviors. Kazue, by obtaining a position as an elite career woman who rejects marriage, may, therefore, be considered deviant. Further, I will discuss how her liminal position is unsustainable and unsuccessful, contributing to her long-term unhappiness.

Kazue’s relationship with her father embodies the phenomenon of the “oedipal winner,” causing dysfunction in the development of her superego and traits of narcissism and antisocial behavior. Richard Lasky explains the factors that lead to this dynamic of an ‘oedipal winner’ and their opposite-sex parent, “I am using the designation *oedipal winner* to mean an individual who, throughout childhood, was grossly overstimulated by the parent of the opposite sex in a setting where the same-sex parent competed inadequately or not at all” (Lasky 351). During adolescence, children subconsciously compete with their same-sex parent for the attention of their opposite-sex parent. In cases in which the same-sex parent is absent or is unable to “compete” adequately, it becomes symbolically communicated to the child that they have essentially won the oedipal battle for the opposite-sex parent. In Kazue’s case, her relationship with her father demonstrates the disproportionate attention and affection that he gave her, “I loved my father. Why? I wonder. Maybe because he treated me as if I were the most important

thing in his life. He doted on me” (Kirino 358). Her father’s special treatment indicates that she received an inappropriate amount of attention from him, consequently communicating to her that by being the most important thing in his life, she has surpassed her own mother in obtaining his affection. She continues, “‘Kazue’s the smartest girl in our family,’ he would say to me. ‘Well, what about Mother?’ ‘Once your mother married, she stopped studying, didn’t she? Why, she never even reads the newspaper.’ My father whispered that in my ear as if I were his co-conspirator” (Kirino 358). In a family where power and love are rewarded by academic achievement, her mother has effectively lost the battle for her father’s affections, having been out-competed by Kazue. Psychologically, she has effectively replaced her mother as her father’s partner, thus becoming the oedipal winner. Lasky describes the negative implications that such a dynamic may have on the female oedipal winner,

“This mode of influencing the contents of the ego ideal is designed to provide the female oedipal winner with a sense of narcissistic intactness as the child is subjected to narcissistic injuries which are the consequences of at least two major factors: (1) their mothers’ inadequacies; and (2) overwhelming labels of continuously mounting excitement caused by the incestuous attentions showered upon them by their fathers” (Lasky 365).

By eclipsing her mother in terms of scholastic achievement and taking her place as the object of her father’s affections, this necessary step in her adolescent development is interfered with, resulting in narcissistic and antisocial tendencies as the individual is unable to replace their previous object instincts with “neutralized and sublimated identifications” that are necessary for healthy psychic functioning. Kazue’s narcissistic tendencies are apparent throughout the novel,

and I will continue to explain how her relationship with her father affects her behavior well into adulthood.

Kazue's attachment to her father creates a dysfunctional dynamic that leads her to view her mother as a rival, causing her to be repelled by associated traits that may signal the role of the homemaker. After her father's death, she replaces him as the family breadwinner and is given the responsibility of financially supporting her unemployed mother and her sister's studies. She conveys bitter resentment to the dynamic, "And what did she do, my mother? She just sat at home fussing over the plants in her garden. What a big fat zero. A worthless woman. I looked at my mother in total disgust" (Kirino 361). Unlike many men, who may take pride in occupying the masculine role through financially supporting their family, Kazue cannot fully embrace that stance. Her utter disgust towards her mother not only conveys the liminal position she occupies as a woman with gender deviant behaviors but emulates how her father had negatively evaluated their mother due to her lack of education and role as a housewife. Beyond the surface-level dislike of her mother lies a deeper core repulsion towards the feminine roles she takes on within marriage as a full-time housewife. Her rejection of her mother's social identity indicates a void in her own identity and how she identifies with typical feminine behaviors, conveyed by her rejection of marriage. "I was convinced that women who married and became housewives ended up as laughingstocks. I wanted to at least avoid that" (Kirino 359). As a result of her rejection of the institution, she thus seeks to achieve her father's status as a salaryman by working on her career, even going as far as working in the same company as his. She continues, "...if I did marry, I'd have to marry a man who was more intelligent, so he could appreciate my abilities" (Kirino 359). This quote indicates Kazue's alternative desires. She makes a distinction, claiming that the man must be more intelligent than herself, potentially exposing her desire to marry someone she

can respect, like her father. Furthermore, her standard of having a man be more intelligent reveals a more profound desire to emulate what she perceives as the dynamic of her parents.

Although she completely rejects the subordinate position that her mother takes to her father, she expresses a desire to essentially not “wear the pants” in the relationship.

Part 2: Narrative Structure

As the narrator recounts tales from her childhood, it becomes evident how her fixation on Yuriko motivates her to form an independent identity that, ironically, revolves around Yuriko. The reader can see how the narrator's desire for identity and attachment is reinvigorated after she begins living with her maternal grandfather to attend a new high school. She chooses explicitly to cite this transition in her life as a moment of emotional significance that followed her traumatic childhood as Yuriko's shadow. She can seemingly establish a sense of self outside Yuriko's shadow for the first time by paving a new identity at an academically prestigious school. Academic prestige becomes evidence of her intelligence, a trait she takes pride in as she continuously disparages Yuriko for her stupidity throughout the novel. In Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology, he discusses the role of rivalry within sibling dynamics. "According to Adler, rivalry between siblings is grounded in each child's need to overcome potential feelings of inferiority. As a means of reducing competition, siblings often differentiate or "de-identify," developing different personal qualities and choosing different niches" (Whiteman 5). It is essential to point out that the narrator only perceives an intelligence disparity, and her words do not indicate objective truth or reality. Instead, it indicates a defensive attempt to narrow the gap between them. Sulloway states, "...sibling differentiation serves to minimize sibling competition, and that siblings will select unique niches in the family that maximize their access to resources" (Whiteman 6). This suggests that the narrator identifies and emphasizes her perceived intelligence to compensate for the inferiority complex that stems from being less attractive and, thus, an attempt to make herself a more competitive "rival." Similar to how Yuriko is blamed as an obstacle to their mother's attention, the narrator continues to attribute the failure of her other relationships to Yuriko. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how the narrator's

relationship with her grandfather and Mitsuru demonstrates her conflicting fears and desires through the way she oscillates between attraction and avoidance with them. Each “betrayal” reveals patterns of her attachment style that represent her psychological consciousness.

As the narrator seeks new relationships in an attempt to start fresh, a developing affinity for her grandfather emerges after a brief conversation where he neglects to acknowledge anything special about Yuriko. In the novel, her grandfather often uses the word “inspired” to recognize the beauty of his bonsai plants, which he defines as “to be infused with spirit.” She asks him, “Do you think Yuriko is inspired?” to which he responds, “Not whatsoever. Yuriko-chan is just too pretty a girl for that. She might be a garden plant. A pretty flower. But she’s no bonsai” (Kirino 28). Her question conveys a need for approval and affirmation that Yuriko is not superior despite her beauty, which she never received from her parents. Upon hearing that, she quickly develops an attachment for her grandfather, indicating a desperate desire for love and affirmation that hinges on emphasizing Yuriko’s shortcomings to affirm her worth. As previously mentioned, the narrator often disparages Yuriko’s intelligence to compensate for her feelings of inferiority, so much so that she proposes doubts about even being related to the family, “... the fact that she was dumb made her even more the splitting image of our parents. I also did not resemble anyone and yet, unlike Yuriko, my face was more clearly Asian looking. And I was smart. So where did I come from?” (Kirino 184). By dismissing her family, she essentially pulls herself out of the competition in which she feels she has been thrust in by emphasizing her intelligence. In her endeavor to carve out a new identity and new relationships, she selects and eliminates the ones that serve her worldview according to who she is in relation to Yuriko. However, as she has previously established behaviors of disorganized

attachment, she inevitably experiences conflicted feelings within her relationships that mirror the fluctuations of attachment that characterized her relationship with her mother.

As the narrator continues describing the new transition, her desires for intimacy continue manifesting within her social relationships at school as she seeks out others she feels she can identify with. Mitsuru, a studious girl who consistently scores at the top of the class, catches the narrator's eye as she repeatedly outperforms all the other students. She later reveals to the narrator her acute awareness of the "inner circle" and the "outsiders" that form their school's social hierarchy and how she escaped bullying as a middle school admit by lending fake notes to the insiders to eventually gain social acceptance. The narrator describes Mitsuru, "Even though her people had come from the sea, Mitsuru has learned to crawl on land like a lungfish, a fish that can breathe air... Suddenly I wanted to become good friends with this girl" (Kirino 56). The narrator establishes how Mitsuru, although similar to her in being born into ordinary circumstances, has used her smarts to ascend the class-based hierarchy at school. Fonagy describes a symptom common in disorganized behaviors: "Rejected children tend to forge alliances with other children who are similar to them with whom they share an interest in deviant activities" (Fonagy 40). The narrator, who not only feels rejected by her parents but has been socially rejected at school, identifies with Mitsuru in their shared experience of social marginalization and chooses to opt out entirely of the social matrix by not participating at all. Throughout her time at Q High School, the narrator unintentionally portrays a facade of cool apathy towards status or achievement to disguise her internal desires. She conveys her perceived commonality between the two when she states, "I had my maliciousness and Mitsuru her intelligence. Together our good points stretched and grew, and we nurtured them and struggled to stand on our own in this corrupt world" (Kirino 60). In this case, "deviant activities" refers to

their ability to detach themselves from the social and gender matrix by leaning into other mechanisms that stray from the traditional path of femininity and wealth to protect themselves.

Things take a turn for the narrator when Yuriko moves back to Japan after their mother's suicide, and she begins to witness what she perceives as the decay of her relationship with her grandfather and Mitsuru. After moving in with Johnson and Masami, they facilitate Yuriko's transfer to Q High School, the same school the narrator attends. Soon after, the people around her coincidentally begin to find love interests, "Ever since Yuriko showed up, Mitsuru, Kazue, and my grandfather changed abruptly. Love...love... everyone was tangled up with love... All I knew was that I had to do something to ensure that at least Mitsuru's and my grandfather's attention returned to me. Would I be able to battle Yuriko?" (Kirino 176). She cites an abrupt change within everyone as she realizes that Mitsuru, her grandfather, and Kazue all become entangled within their own love affairs. She immediately blames Yuriko's presence for the demise of her relationships, developing a defensive pattern that mirrors her relationship with her mother, in which she feels she must compete with others. In a conversation with Mitsuru, she says, "...I'm just really, really uncomfortable when everything gets ruined with lust. Maybe it's on account of my sister but you've changed recently too. And now my grandfather's acting weird. Ever since Yuriko's come back, everything seems to be falling apart..." (Kirino 192). This passage demonstrates the narrator's deep discomfort and fear associated with feelings of lust and love. It goes beyond discomfort, and she describes how she sees it as a betrayal, "It wasn't a question of my permission; that was even worse. It was just that I hated people in love because people in love betray me" (Kirino 209). Such a statement suggests that the narrator's fear is likely a defense mechanism to a traumatic experience from childhood, likely originating from her first model of love, her parents.

At the novel's beginning, the narrator discusses her disillusionment as she comes to terms with the depressing reality of her parent's marriage, leaving a lasting negative imprint on how she views relationships. She states, "My father and mother fed my sister and me on a diet of romantic dreams just as though they were giving us candy. Gradually the dreams wore thin, until in the end they wasted away to nothing" (Kirino 5). Much of the narrator's trauma revolves around her existence as relative to Yuriko's, and she perpetually fixates on the topic of procreation, conveyed through her interactions with men. Yet, despite fixating on conception and procreation, she unintentionally glosses over the subject of sexuality, intimacy, and the human connection that accompanies the union required for procreation. Through the disappointing reality of her parent's relationship and ideals of love, she began to implicitly associate her and Yuriko's conception as a result of failed love. Perhaps she feels her parents have mutually betrayed and abandoned her in favor of Yuriko, and she is the inadequate outcome of a failed marriage. By fearing betrayal when faced with other people falling in love, she exposes her deeply ingrained fear of love and intimacy. As a result, when people around her fall in love, she falls into a similar disorganized cycle of behaviors as she did with her mother, in which she anticipates abandonment and betrayal, consequently sabotaging the relationship by manifesting it into reality.

Although the narrator revolves her narrative around her relationships and their perceived betrayals, Yuriko's thoughts are read by the narrator in the form of diary entries, revealing how her identity is constructed by significant sexual encounters with men. Although she doesn't begin writing until after her mother's suicide, she defies chronology by dedicating her first diary entry to writing about her first sexual encounter before the suicide, when she loses her virginity to her Uncle Karl at the age of fifteen. "I lost my virginity there on the hard oak bed that Karl shared

with his wife. It hurt a lot more than I had expected, but at the same time it brought such complete pleasure that I was convinced I liked it more than I could stand” (Kirino 113). A moment in her life marked by cultural isolation, her mother’s emotional preoccupation, and her father’s affair, her first experience of physical intimacy simultaneously fills the emptiness in her life through the validation of her appearance. She describes the experience as “wonderful” and the “awe and admiration” in Uncle Karl’s gaze. Yuriko discusses how men’s lust serves her, “The only people who paid me any attention were the men who desired me. As a child I first became aware that my existence had a purpose when I realized men lusted after me. Before I even began to worry about homework or any of those school things, I began having secret liaisons with men. And it is men who give me the proof I need now to feel I’m alive” (Kirino 116). Her ability to attract the attention of older men from a very young age molded her self-perception and presented her beauty as the singular determinant of her value and worth. At the same time, her appearance, which she perceived as an obstacle to her mother’s attention, becomes an avenue to obtain attention elsewhere. As a result, her decision to begin her entries with the conception of her sexual life marks the beginning of her consciousness based on the sexual validation of men. Although Yuriko maintains a largely avoidant approach to life, she displays ambivalent qualities that are conveyed by her conflicting desires.

As she continues to write, it becomes evident how Yuriko begins to use sexual relationships to respond to emotional distress as she discusses how her mother’s suicide catalyzed her into the arms of Johnson. In physically and emotionally abandoning her father, she embraces a relationship with Johnson. Throughout her entries, she demonstrates how her involvement in her sexual relationships serves as a direct response to her circumstances.

“So when my father brought his Turkish mistress into the apartment, I was relieved because it gave me an excuse to demand that I be allowed to return to Japan ... Besides, Johnson had finished his business in Hong Kong and he was waiting for me. Why couldn’t I stay with him? I was no longer a virgin, and I wanted to see what sex would be like with Johnson. I wanted it so badly I could hardly stand it” (Kirino 117).

This passage demonstrates how Yuriko maintains emotional dissociation from the situation. She neglects to acknowledge any negative feelings beyond minor slips of resentment. Instead, she redirects her focus to Johnson, who provides her with an escape from her troubled home life by allowing her to live in his and Masami’s home in Japan. Her first sexual encounter, having been with Uncle Karl while her mother was suffering from depression, followed by her relationship with Johnson after the suicide, introduces the emergence of a pattern in her life as a response to emotional distress. She and Johnson quickly begin a sexual relationship behind Masami’s back after she moves in.

Upon moving in with them, Yuriko’s role within Masami and Johnson’s lives continues to perpetuate and affirm her negative self-perception as they take on the role of her caretakers. Previously mentioned in regard to the Narrator, Quiroga acknowledges how the relationship between children and their temporary caregivers may either change or perpetuate the attachment behaviors of a child that were developed with previous caregivers (Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis 627). Masami, Johnson’s Japanese wife whom he met on a flight where she was a flight attendant, flouts Yuriko around like a little trophy. Yuriko quickly realizes Masami’s insincere facade, stating, “I had to wear the clothes Masami bought me as if I loved them with all my heart even though they were often pink and frilly and emblazoned so boldly with brand name logos it was embarrassing. ...Masami enjoyed dressing me up in outlandish costumes that turned

heads. But for some reason she never once bought me underwear or socks” (Kirino 129). This passage demonstrates several things that become reinforced to Yuriko. First, Masami reinforces to Yuriko that her needs are irrelevant as long as she can continue to maintain her external appearance. Second, their deceptive mother-daughter relationship emulates the superficial dynamic that Yuriko is used to maintaining with her own mother. On the other hand, Yuriko describes how Johnson completely rejects any role as a father figure in her life. “Johnson had absolutely no interest in my academic life. Not in my grades, my experience on the cheerleaders’ squad... Not Johnson’s daughter and hardly his wife. To put it bluntly, I was nothing more than the daughter of an acquaintance who was there for his sexual pleasure, so of course he didn’t feel the need to play a parental role” (Kirino 149). Yuriko occupies a liminal position in Johnson’s life. Her value lies not as a daughter or a wife, but rather as a toy for his sexual desires. Furthermore, his lack of interest in her social or academic life reinforces to Yuriko how unimportant these facets of her identity are. Yuriko’s relationship with her new caretakers affirms that her value hinges on her physical appearance, further perpetuating her promiscuous behaviors as a way to obtain attention.

Unlike the narrator and Yuriko, who recount past tales of formative events, Kazue’s diary entries begin in the present as an adult, and her narrative structure is dichotomized by day and night to create a representation of her split gender identity. This excerpt depicts her psychological state as she leaves the office and enters the other world of sex work,

“It was the moment of the day I loved best: rising from deep underground to the surface. It gives me such an immense feeling of relief, liberation. Aah. From here I head into the night streets, right smack into the world where Kamei would never tread, a world before

which the part timer and the assistant would flinch in fear. A world the office manager could not even imagine” (Kirino 348-349).

By splitting up her diary entries chronologically into day and night, she essentially narrates her life as “Kazue the prostitute” and “Kazue the career woman”. As mentioned earlier, her corporate endeavors serve to affirm the masculine aspect of her identity. Her identity as a sex worker affirms the unsatisfied feminine aspect of her identity that she failed to achieve through either being conventionally attractive or becoming a housewife. Her decision to only begin writing after becoming a prostitute is significant, as it marks an important shift in the conception of her consciousness. Furthermore, it is noticeable that as she transitions into night, she only mentions people related to her job, implying the subconscious primacy that her coworkers and their perceptions hold in her mind. On the other hand, not mentioning friends, family, or other social spheres also suggests a psychological absence in her consciousness.

Her split identity serves her as a defense mechanism or “second skin” and fuels her sense of superiority, apparent in her rivalry with other women. In regards to Kamei, her younger female coworker, she states, “She may have been pretty, and she may have graduated from Tokyo University, but she couldn’t do what I did, and that filled me with a sense of superiority” (Kirino 348). Here, she acknowledges Kamei’s success in education and her beauty as a feminine virtue. Although Kazue never entirely abandons her pursuit of corporate success, the addition of prostitution allows her to have a sense of completion and a false idea of success. This attitude is also apparent when she interacts with her fellow sex workers in the cafe they work in. “But it was clear the Braid was jealous of me. She had some inkling of the fact that I had a good education and a job in a top-notch firm. That’s right, you little bitch, by day I have an honest job. I graduated from Q University... In short, I’m nothing like you” (Kirino 350). Her competitive

attitude towards women exposes how Kazue evaluates her value as a human. Despite the starkly different worlds of Kamei and the Braid, Kazue can derive a sense of superiority from her ability to balance both worlds, affirming her incomplete gender identity. Her desire to constantly assert her superiority is a narcissistic and ultimately antisocial delusion that acts as a second skin that masks the emptiness of her life.

Part 3: Resolution

As Kazue grapples with the disillusioned reality of being a woman in a male-dominated workplace, her double life also provides her with a sense of autonomy that emulates the workplace privileges of her male peers that she is unable to access. “The Japanese practice of *tsukiai* or mandatory after-hours socializing is an example of a work-related endeavor in which companies expect their employees to participate...Nevertheless, men may not regard *tsukiai* as a duty or obligation but instead eagerly anticipate after-work socializing” (Charlebois 20). Such after-hours socializing can manifest in various forms, such as formal welcome or holiday parties, but most commonly in informal social gatherings where employees, often men, drink together and decompress. Upon reflecting on her life outside of her career, she realizes the emptiness of her own life. She references these after-hours socials that are often occupied by men, “But men have secret pleasures that they are able to enjoy. They slip off with their buddies for drinks, they play around with women, and they enjoy all kinds of intrigues on the side. I was nothing outside of work” (Kirino 369). After years of devoting her life to her studies and developing her career, she realizes that as a woman, she can never truly be accepted as an equal employee in the workplace. As a result, she learns to emulate a similar type of freedom on one of her escapades as a sex worker. While searching for customers one night, Kazue comments, “...I gazed up into the night sky. I was free. I was even thinner and more beautiful than before. I enjoyed my independence to the hilt” (Kirino 432). Her prostitution at night emulates the freedom outside of work that many men find themselves enjoying that she had always been excluded from. Never comfortable in a domestic role and unable to find social acceptance in the corporate world, her night-time escapades are where she finally discovers her autonomy and sense of empowerment as a human being.

In the last entries of Kazue's diary before her murder, she experiences her first orgasm, providing her with a sense of euphoric omnipotence and control. Within these final months, she enjoys sexual intimacy for the first time and finally develops a sense of personal power that allows her to let go of the constraints of the real world. She describes her first sexual encounter with Zhang, the man who was later suspected of Kazue's murder,

“Was this reality, a place like this? Then what were the orgasms I'd had? And that momentary taste of control? The feelings I had welled up again. But why? Welcome to reality. That's precisely why I wanted to live forever in the dream where I get to rule the world” (Kirino 419-420).

After numerous sexual encounters as a prostitute, Kazue experiences her first orgasm with Zhang. Previously, the primary source of enjoyment she had derived from sex work was from facilitating male ejaculations, a rather mechanical attitude towards sex. Despite her various sexual experiences upon entering the world of sex work, Kazue seemed to be disconnected from the intimacy of sex until this encounter. The pleasure she feels from her first orgasm, she considers a “momentary taste of control.” For the first time, she feels like she can “rule the world” in a society where she has never been able to win.

After Kazue's first orgasm, an internal transformation begins to take place within her, and she learns to enjoy her female sexuality as she reclaims her agency in society. She states,

“Tonight, for the first time I experienced joy that I was not born a man. Why? Because I thought men's desires trivial. And because I had become the entity that acknowledged those desires. I felt I could finally understand Yuriko's freaky calm. Ever since Yuriko had been a little girl, she brought the world to her feet by using her sexuality. In her treatment of male desires of all kinds, she had built a world entirely out of men even if

only for the briefest of moments. It made me feel bitter. She didn't have to study; she didn't even have to work. She was able to bring the world to her feet by one method and one alone, because she was able to make men ejaculate. Now I would do the same. For a brief second I was drunk with the feeling of mastery" (Kirino 418).

This passage demonstrates Kazue's identification with Yuriko within the way they express their sexuality. Although she feels omnipotent in the moment, she is merely catching up with the realizations that Yuriko made at a far younger age. The power she believes she gains from her female sexuality is limited and ultimately meaningless, however, and consequently fails to fill the empty voids that characterize Kazue's life.

Following these internal realizations, Kazue continues to grapple with the chronic emptiness that engulfs her life, ultimately revealing her desire to be acknowledged and recognized as a woman. In this passage, the superficial components on which she prides herself wither away to expose a vacant identity, "I'm nothing! Empty. When did I disappear? All that was left of me was just a big suit of clothes, the clothes that belonged to a graduate of Q university, an employee of G architecture and Engineering. There was nothing inside. Then again, what is it that's inside, anyway?" (Kirino 438). Waddell notes how one's second skin is unsustainable, effectively describing the plight in which Kazue finds herself. "The brittle, protective facade may suddenly crack, exposing an absence of inner resources and a panic about being torn away from the supportive structures which had previously been felt to hold the personality together, albeit only externally" (Waddell 54). Kazue's experiences culminate to represent the withering away of her cultivated identity constructed by a double career, and she finds herself amid a psychological transcendence that conveys itself through the conclusion of

her diary entries. In the end, she releases her grip over her double career and reveals her most vulnerable desires in her last entry:

“I think it won’t be long before I have to bring my journal writing to an end. It’s supposed to be a record of my activities as a prostitute, but I’m having more and more days without customers. Therefore, Kijima-kun, these notebooks are for you. Please don’t send them back to me like you did with those love letters in high school. Because, you see, what you’ve read in these journals is another true side of me” (Kirino 457).

The narrator explains that in high school, Kazue had sent a series of love letters to her first crush, Kijima-kun. Never having received reciprocation or response, however, Kazue retains a lasting desire to be heard and affirmed by someone whose presence symbolizes the adolescent awakening of her sexuality. Her letter suggests an unsatisfied desire to be recognized as a woman.

Meanwhile, by curating a narrative that frames herself as an irrelevant character, the narrator unintentionally reveals that the entire construction of her identity exists solely as a side character in other people’s lives. Rather than being the protagonist in her own stories, she often portrays herself as a passive recipient of people’s actions. Acknowledging this, she states, “Perhaps Yuriko and Kazue and Mitsuru and even Takashi and Zhang are all part of me whoever ‘I’ am. Perhaps I exist in order to remain behind as their spirits floating, recounting their tales” (Kirino 459). The narrator seems to somewhat understand how her narrative revolves around the other people in her life and the vacancy within her identity. This is demonstrated through the structure in which she organizes her narrative. In the beginning, she discusses how her relationships with her parents and Yuriko have affected her. After they move to Switzerland, she shifts her focus onto her relationship with Grandpa and Mitsuru, not only emotionally

abandoning her family but through her writing as well. Unlike Kazue and Yuriko's narratives that are read after their deaths, the narrator only begins writing her journal entries as a reaction to Kazue and Yuriko's murder trials. Her entire narrative revolves around relationship betrayals rather than her own individual development and life. The author's decision to give every character a name except the main narrator suggests how her vacant identity reveals itself through her pen.

The narrator obtains a sense of personal resolution and completion when Yurio, Yuriko's blind son, becomes her dependent, a relationship in which she can possess and manipulate reality. She describes the boy, "Such cool beauty. Just like Yuriko. I could feel my breast swell with love... I wanted Yurio. I wanted a life together with Yurio. Because that is where I could find happiness" (Kirino 464). As previously mentioned, the narrator feels betrayed when someone she holds an attachment to falls in love, an action that triggers past feelings of abandonment. In other words, love is an exercise of individual autonomy, both things the narrator lacks. However, due to Yurio's dependency on her as a minor and disabled person, he is unable to abandon her. She finds comfort in his blindness and subsequent reliance on her, "I was being evaluated by someone else. No, not evaluated. I was being experienced by another" (Kirino 463). Her internal framework of existing as a shadow becomes apparent when she corrects herself in this statement. By feeling evaluated by someone else, she sees herself as an object not only to be judged for her appearance but indicates that she does not see herself as an equal participant within her relationships but as a treading shadow. For the first time, however, she states that she is being "experienced by another," demonstrating, for the first time, an intimacy that she never allowed herself to access. His blindness allows the narrator to eliminate the factor of her physical appearance from the equation.

Despite the narrator's sense of perceived resolution and happiness, her narrative continues to repeat the same pattern throughout the novel. Although it seems she has obtained closure, the narrator continues to revolve her identity around other characters. By gaining custody of Yurio, her attachment to him serves as a second skin, thus repeating the pattern of her unresolved issues. Yurio allows the narrator to reinforce her reliance on Yuriko to inform her identity even after her death. His blindness enables the narrator's delusional realities even further by allowing her to pretend to look just like Yuriko, "I took his hand and pressed it to my cheek. 'I'm the exact image of your mother. Your mother had a face like this. Just touch it and see'" (Kirino 334). Moments later, she adds, "I would replace Yuriko and be the mother he never had" (Kirino 334). This starkly contrasts the narrator's previous statement, when she claims, "All I ever wanted was not to be compared to Yuriko. And since I was going to lose whatever competition we had, I decided to withdraw from the game altogether" (Kirino 459). This indicates to the reader not only that the narrator is not truly self-aware of her desires and motivations, but the happiness she derives from this dysfunctional dynamic indicates an emotional transgression in her psychological consciousness that is more stunted than Kazue's.

In comparison to the narrator and Kazue, Yuriko seems to have discovered a sense of "fulfillment" in life at a far younger age through her sexual encounters. As Yuriko navigates life in a new country, her father's infidelity, and her mother's depression, her desire for sex serves as a form of autonomy in a life where she has little control. Throughout her relationship with Uncle Karl, she observes his fear of their affair being revealed to his brother, her father. She states, "Men live by rules they've made for themselves. And among those rules is the one specifying that women are merely commodities for men to possess. A daughter belongs to her father, a wife to her husband" (Kirino 114). Her observations of male authority mirror the Japanese concept of

teishukanpaku, or “father as head of the household,” and is described as a position of “ultimate authority” (Charlebois 128). Her role in the affair with Uncle Karl reflects her own participation in the patriarchal dynamic that characterizes Japanese households. Understanding and acknowledging this, she continues, “A woman’s own desires present obstacles for men and are best ignored. Besides, desire is always for the man. It’s his role to make advances on women and to protect his women from the advances of others. I was a woman who was seduced by a member of her own family” (Kirino 114). Here, she presents desire as a masculine trait. Parroting the powerless position that society has relegated her to, she refers to herself as having been “seduced” by her uncle, despite what she considers her voluntary participation in the relationship. Yuriko points out that desire being considered a “masculine trait,” fails to acknowledge the woman’s capacity for sexual autonomy. Her seduction of Uncle Karl, a retaliative reaction to her parent's emotional neglect, becomes not a gesture of control or autonomy but is instead reduced to a mere exercise of patriarchal control over women between her uncle and father.

By using her sexual desire as a mechanism to gain agency in her life, she subverts normative femininity through sexual promiscuous behavior that defies what is socially expected of women. Continuing from her previous commentary, she states, “I didn’t want to be anyone’s possession. In the first place, my desire was not some paltry affair that could easily be protected by some man” (Kirino 115). Juxtaposing her description of desire being masculine, she claims her desire for sex as something that cannot be controlled by men. From a young age, her beauty confines her to a hypersexualized role, further exacerbated by the dismissal of her intelligence. By choosing to take control and embrace a “masculine” trait, she uses sex as a way to subvert notions of female sexuality. For example, Yuriko describes her plan to seduce her uncle, “Bored

with Henri, I began to devise ways to be alone with Karl” (Kirino 112). Unlike the previous paragraph, where she portrays her as “a woman seduced,” she denies her passivity in their arrangement. After her mother’s death, she explains her home situation to Johnson over the phone, again reiterating her sexual autonomy, “I wasn’t trying to play on his sympathy. I was trying to seduce him. A mere girl of fifteen seducing a man of thirty!” (Kirino 121). In this instance, she uses seduction to lure Johnson into allowing her to move to Japan to live with him and gain independence from her father.

The sense of empowerment and control that Yuriko derives enables her to continue her sexually promiscuous behavior and prevents her from building meaningful connections throughout life. When Professor Kijima discovers Yuriko’s sex work, he expresses his disapproval. “‘It’s not the same. In your work, you hurt the people who care for you. They’ll stop loving you. They won’t be able to love you.’ That was a new thought for me. My body is my own, why should anyone else think they owned it? Why should a person who loved me think he should be entitled to control my body? If love was that restricting, I was happy to live without it” (Kirino 151-152). Following this incident, she decides to willingly sacrifice love if it means retaining her sense of autonomy and control over her own body. Although this serves her immediate emotional needs, it inhibits her ability to foster genuine and meaningful relationships. Waddell discusses one’s internal capacity for a meaningful and long-term connection, referring to the role of marriage in novels such as *Emma* by Jane Austen, in which marriage becomes a significant marker of development for the protagonist. “The external event of ‘marriage’ functions as a symbolic representation of the point of emergence of adulthood, of the culmination of late-adolescent struggles towards establishing a place of their own, by contrast with that which is conventionally assigned to them... This thrust is towards encountering, or recognizing, a true

partner and developing the capacities to be committed to a life-long relationship” (Waddell 178). Waddell discusses marriage not simply as a contractual agreement but as a literary mechanism to convey a character’s psychological development. In *Grotesque*, Yuriko is unable to foster any meaningful or long-term relationships besides her relationship with Johnson. Her inability to do so indicates her continued reliance on sexual encounters to serve her emotional needs, which ultimately stunts her psychological growth.

When Yuriko begins to lose her sexual autonomy, she stops writing in her diary, revealing within the structure itself an internal death within Yuriko’s consciousness. Her diary entries end with two separate memories, with the first memory that she narrates around the end of her career as a prostitute, and the last narration being the night that Masami discovers her and Johnson’s affair, which eventually leads to her expulsion from high school. Her last present-day narration recounts when she accidentally stumbles onto Kazue’s turf while attempting to find clients. “I didn’t have experience chasing down Johns. It looked like I would have a lot to learn from Kazue. On my way home I stopped at a twenty-four-hour supermarket in Kabuki-cho and bought a jet-black wig with hair that fell as far as my waist, just like Kazue’s” (Kirino 146). This memory, being the last present-day memory she chooses to write, marks the end of her sexual autonomy. She has officially stooped to the lowest, cheapest, and most dangerous level of sex work as she joins Kazue’s ranks. As Kazue finally feels like she is gaining power, this marks the decline of Yuriko’s power that she once retained in her youth. The memory, being one of the last entries in her diary, reveals a piece of Yuriko’s consciousness within the writing itself, as she happens to stop writing once her sexual autonomy has begun to diminish. The last instance that she recounts in her narrative does not follow chronological order but rather is the memory of the night when Masami discovers her affair with Johnson at seventeen. “Ever since I became an old

woman at the age of fifteen I haven't felt a thing, and ever since that night when I was seventeen I've been frigid" (Kirino 154). Her decision to conclude with this demonstrates a significant moment in altering her consciousness. Notably, fifteen was the age at which Yuriko lost her virginity to Uncle Karl. The night that her affair with Johnson was discovered, she claims to have gone "frigid." Although the first memory, in which she dresses up like Kazue years later, marks an external descent within her life, the second memory marks a psychological shift. It was from that point on that Yuriko truly embraced a lifestyle of prostitution, or perhaps, in other words, the beginning of the end.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Kazue, Yuriko, and the main narrator, give the reader a unique insight into their thoughts and feelings as they detail the tumultuous experiences within their lives that come to define them. The reader can see how all three characters utilize a “second-skin” in order to cope with their emotional deficiencies whilst navigating a socially rigid society. For the narrator, she becomes acquainted with living in Yuriko’s shadow as the less attractive sister, leading her to form an identity informed by insignificance and invisibility, thus provoking a pattern of self-imposed outcasting throughout all her relationships. In an attempt to combat this, the narrator denies her sexuality and embraces a cold exterior as an attempt to shield herself from intimacy and rejection. Yuriko’s second-skin is manifested through relying on her sexual desirability to elicit sexual encounters with men as a means of deriving a sense of autonomy and control without having to build deep, lasting connections. On the other hand, Kazue’s objectives alternate throughout her life, where she strives for academic and career success, while attempting to affirm her feminine worth through emphasizing her sexual appeal in an attempt to obtain a facade of “success” that is based on social approval. These roles that the characters occupy, however, are inherently constructed through compromised ideas of femininity and masculinity, in which they attempt to use their sexuality, or lack thereof, to obtain a sense of emotional resolution. By utilizing sexuality and gender performativity as a mechanism of defense to arm themselves, one can see how parental relationships create a blueprint that informs the way sexuality and gender identity is experienced by an individual. These characters’ actions, thoughts, and behaviors, can only truly be understood through deconstructing their internal working models, paradigms that are established early in life.

The uniqueness of the novel lies in its epistolary structure, in which the objectives and feelings of the characters are imbued throughout the book and within their own words. The narrator is able to obtain Yuriko and Kazue's diaries from Masami and Kijima respectively, after their deaths, which allows the reader to not only gain insight into their perspectives, but understand it in juxtaposition to the narrator's world. The way in which the narrator is able to obtain their diaries is significant in itself, and it is worth noting that the narrator, at first, has no interest in reading them. She receives Yuriko's diary through Masami, Johnson's ex-wife, after their divorce and Yuriko's death. Yuriko never intended for her diary to be read aloud by others, and the exchange of her diary reveals the consistent pattern of Yuriko's existence constantly being evaluated and objectified without her consent. This parallels the way her beauty was perceived throughout her life, as Yuriko's identity was prematurely defined through her beauty by others. Furthermore, her narrative indicates how she sees her own identity, as it is organized by order of significant sexual experiences. It begins with losing her virginity to Uncle Karl, and ends with Masami discovering her affair with Johnson when they are discovered in bed together. Although it does not always follow a consistent chronological structure, she ends her writing as she nears the end of her career in sex-work, evidencing a death within her own identity and consciousness. In other words, her story ends when she loses her sense of sexual autonomy.

Kazue, however, intentionally sends her diary entries to Kijima-kun, who is both Yuriko's friend and high-school pimp, and notably, Kazue's first crush, perhaps indicating that Kijima himself is a figure of significance in her adolescent sexual awakening. By doing so, she reveals her desire to be heard and understood by someone that differs from Yuriko. Her entries, however, begin well into adulthood, after she has already begun a double life as a prostitute by night and a career woman by day. As a result, her narrative is primarily organized by her conflicting

identities as a prostitute and career woman, which emulates the competing performances of masculinity and femininity that she finds herself attempting to balance as she struggles to find a sense of meaning in her endeavors.

As both entries are read by the main narrator, the novel largely follows the narrators opinions and thoughts, and begins and ends from her perspective. She tells her story from the present day, while constructing her identity to the reader through previous memories that entirely revolve around her relationships with others and their respective betrayals. It becomes evident that unlike Yuriko, whose identity is defined by her sexual worth, and Kazue, who attempts to base her identity off of conventional notions of “success”, the narrator's identity exists only in relation to other people. By introducing her first significant memory of being “rejected” by her parents due to her perceived inferiority to Yuriko, her internal working model becomes defined by living in the shadows of others. Her lack of identity is further indicated in her writing as the reader is never even given the opportunity to know her name. Throughout all her memories, she identifies as being “Yuriko’s older sister”, her grandfather’s “granddaughter”, “Kazue’s classmate”, or “Mitsuru’s friend”.

All three characters eventually come to a resolution, albeit dysfunctional. Despite numerous sexual encounters, Kazue experiences a sort of internal transformation when she experiences her first orgasm with Zhang. Throughout the novel, she attempts to gain social validation either through achieving corporate success or through emphasizing her femininity through beauty or other performative behaviors. Despite this, it becomes apparent that she has failed in both areas. Unable to be fully accepted in her male-dominated workplace, and unable to be affirmed for her femininity due to her rejection of marriage and domesticity, she derives a sense of control through sex and the ability to make men ejaculate. Aex serves her as a means to

an end, she becomes alienated from the act itself. Her first orgasm with Zhang thus marks a significant moment within her consciousness where for the first time, she experiences the euphoric intimacy of female sexuality. As her entries suggest, her writings soon decline after this experience, and as the initial pleasure subsides, she once more finds herself grappling with the emptiness of her life. Having accessed this new side of herself, she soon reveals a deeper desire hidden beneath her desire for success and social approval, which is to be heard, acknowledged, and understood. Upon reflecting on her achievements, such as her status as an employee at G Corporation, or pretending to be Zhang's girlfriend as they walk through the streets, she acknowledges the relative bleakness of her life and concludes with a significant thought: "Moreover, I wanted them to approve of me. That was me in a nutshell. In the final analysis, I was really just a sweet girl who needed approval" (Kirino 451). Perhaps it is indicative of her everlasting need to gain approval from her father, who died when she entered college. She was never fully able to prove herself to him, either through achieving a successful career or attaining social currency in the form of femininity, leaving a vacancy within her identity that she continues to try to fulfill.

Unlike Kazue, who seems to pursue all her desires head on, the narrator maintains a lifelong pattern of repression in which she tries to reject all aspects of her sexuality. "All I ever wanted was not to be compared to Yuriko. And since I was going to lose whatever competition we had, I decided to withdraw from the game altogether" (Kirino 459). She withdraws from "the game", by abstaining from all romantic and sexual relationships, instead staying a virgin indefinitely. However, like her relationships, her contradicting desires leak out of her repressed facade. Despite not wanting to be compared to Yuriko, she attempts to emulate and replace Yuriko's persona after adopting Yurio. Characterized by beauty resembling Yuriko's, his

blindness allows the narrator not only to manipulate his perception of her, but her sense of reality by claiming to look just like Yuriko. His dependency as a blinded adolescent allows her to comfortably foster an attachment with him, an individual whom she perceives cannot abandon and betray her. Through him, she finds a sense of “happiness” and comfort in which she can derive a newly constructed identity to replace the one that never existed in the shadow of Yuriko. Even though Kazue lives a life of boastful self-delusion, the narrator is never able to address or grasp her emotional vacancy in the way Kazue does. Instead, she continues to reinforce her protective facade through another person.

Although Kazue and the narrator’s emotional resolutions occur near the end of the novel, Yuriko’s sense of resolve occurs at the beginning, and slowly withers away as she grows older. She discovers her purpose in life and identity when she first loses her virginity to Uncle Karl. “As a child I first became aware that my existence had a purpose when I realized men lusted after me. And that’s why I will lust forever after men. Before I even began to worry about homework or any of those school things. I began having secret liaisons with men. And it is men who give me the proof I need now to feel I’m alive” (Kirino 116). This passage marks the significance of her sexual liaisons that altered her consciousness and internal working models from a young age, setting the tone for the rest of her life. As previously discussed, Yuriko’s sense of desire, portrayed as a masculine trait, is her form of autonomy that she was able to derive within a world that excessively objectified her. However, as discussed by Koch, many prostitutes must resort to more extreme and dangerous forms of sex work as they age, a consequence of their “sexual value” reducing within a market that commodifies their bodies. As a result, Yuriko must work harder to find clients, in turn reducing her ability to fulfill her desire for male sexual validation, a resource that was initially abundant. This is evident by her last chronological

memory that she documents being when she finds herself searching for the same type of work as Kazue, who has already degraded herself to the lowest forms of sex work.

Although each character, at some point throughout their lives, finds a sense of internal fulfillment and completion, none of them ever truly obtain healthy resolutions or a sense of self-actualization. For Yuriko, it is clear that prostitution has never been and never will be a sustainable avenue either economically or emotionally, due to the inevitable effects of aging. Despite her former beauty, she finds herself in the same position as Kazue, the girl who was the laughing stock of her high school class and now sells her body for pennies. Meanwhile Kazue, finally finds a sense of joy through sex, with her final conclusion as being one of identification with Yuriko and her supposed mastery over men. Not only conveys that she is severely emotionally stunted, but further emphasizes the emptiness that pervades her life. By fully investing herself in the world of prostitution, Kazue's last entries demonstrate her increasing alienation and detachment from real-life as it falls apart. In the end, she finds herself in the same position as Yuriko, in which their declining sexual value inhibits them from finding clients, and they both ultimately become stigmatized and marginalized individuals within society. Although the narrator finds a newfound happiness within her relationship with Yurio, the relationship emulates the pattern that consistently prevails throughout her life. Despite deriving happiness and a new identity in relation to Yurio, her claims to want to exist independently from Yuriko contradict this, as it becomes clear that much of her gratification is derived through emulating and replacing Yuriko herself. Thus, the narrator continues her pattern of constructing an empty persona in relation to her sister, seemingly never truly forming an independent identity and narrative.

In the end, the protagonists exist as fictional characters within the control of the author's pen. Despite all that is said regarding their attempts to assert agency and tell their own stories, Kirino crafts a narrative that is meant to renegotiate and put into question the truth of what each character presents to the reader. By having the opportunity to construct their own narratives, Kirino is not attempting for each word to be taken as truth, but instead she encourages the reader to realize that there is no objective truth when it comes to defining an individual due to external biases compromised by societal expectations, familial dynamics, and nuanced internal working models. Furthermore, by making sex and prostitution a fundamental aspect of the novel, Kirino is not only suggesting that such occurrences are far more ubiquitous in everyday life than one would expect, but she reframes a stigmatized industry that often marginalizes women into a domain that instead allows women to assert and derive a sense of agency.

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