BECOMING-SIMULACRA: TEXTUALIZING MURDEROUS WOMEN IN HEISEI JAPAN (1989–2019)

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During the Heisei era in Japan (1989–2019), depictions of murderous women became widespread in literature and media. Despite being a minor percentage of reported crimes, murders committed by women, exemplified by Kijima Kanae's case, gained significant media attention and inspired numerous fictional and non-fictional works. Influenced by Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation and simulacra, this study views media-constructed images of murderous women in the Heisei era as simulacra detached from accessible reality. Analyzing selected writings based on Kijima's crimes, the chapter argues that instead of revealing the truth of the crimes or the "essence" of female criminality, these texts generate a hyperreality devoid of "truth." The "truth" is utilized by Heisei authors as perspectival interpretations to engage with discourses surrounding gender and sexuality, the monstrous potential of human beings, and social issues, such as consumer culture, the expanding cyberspace, and the shift in the gender division of labor, which concerned the general public in Japan during the Heisei era.

Keywords: simulacra, murderous women, gender ideology, femininity, Japanese literature, Heisei Japan

1. Introduction

In Heisei Japan (1989–2019), images of murderous women proliferated and were widely circulated on both the page and screen. The popularity of the Murderous Evil Woman (悪女 *akujo*) archetype in Japanese novels, films, and TV dramas coincided with the media's obsession with real-life female murderers, such as Hayashi

Masumi, Kijima Kanae, and Ueda Miyuki,[1] who were dubbed "the three most infamous evil women in the Heisei era" (平成の三大悪女 *Heisei no saidai akujo*) in the Japanese magazine *Shūkan gendai* (週刊現代, *Modern Weekly*) (Ōwaki 2017, 148–150). These three women gained a huge amount of attention from the media. Their names and photos frequently appeared in the news, in tabloid magazines, and on variety shows. Their crimes were also adapted into novels, TV dramas, films, and even adult comics. While the images of murderous women proliferated in the media, real-life murders committed by women made up only an extremely small percentage of reported offenses. According to the annual *Hanzai hakusho* (犯罪白書, *White Paper on Crime*) published by the Japanese Ministry of Justice (1989–2018), the percentage of homicides committed by women among reported offenses during the Heisei era consistently ranged from 0.3% to 0.4%. Within the category of homicide cases, only approximately 20% were attributed to female perpetrators each year. These statistics highlight the relatively small proportion of women involved in homicides throughout this period. The increase in images of murderous women in Heisei Japan does not indicate that Japanese women were becoming particularly evil or murderous during the Heisei era.

The gap between the "representation" and "reality" is thus made evident by the images of murderous women, yet, this area remains relatively unexplored by scholars. This chapter therefore aims to fill the gap by answering the following question: If these images are not a simple reflection of reality, how can we understand their intertwinement with the social and cultural context of Heisei Japan? To address this question, this study examines the images of murderous women in both fiction and non-fiction writings based on the case of Kijima Kanae, one of "the three most infamous evil women in the Heisei era." Among the three, Kijima stands out as the most frequently portrayed in various forms of literature. She was found guilty of murdering three of her would-be husbands and was suspected of being involved in four additional deaths between 2007 and 2009. She met her victims through matchmaking (婚活 *konkatsu*) websites. Before their deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning, each victim had transferred millions of yen to Kijima's bank account. Despite her conviction and final death sentence in 2017, Kijima has consistently maintained her pleas of innocence, making her death sentence controversial. The sensational nature of her crimes gained significant media attention, inspiring numerous fictional and non-fictional works that offered diverse interpretations of her actions. These works serve as valuable materials for delving into the public's imagination of murderous women in Heisei Japan, as well as for interrogating the complicated relationship between reality and representation.

[1] In this chapter, Japanese names will be presented in Japanese naming order, family name first and given name second.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

2. Poison woman: writing female criminality from the Meiji to the Heisei era

This study is greatly informed by Christine Marran's (2007) study on the representation of criminal "poison woman" across the Meiji (1868–1912), Taishō (1912–1926), and the Shōwa era (1926–1989), which offers valuable insights into the relationship between the murderous, transgressive female images and the Japanese social and historical context.

According to Marran (2007, xxiii), the Meiji Restoration's encouragement of pursuing truth and the rise of small newspapers (小新聞 *koshinbun*) targeting less educated readers in Meiji Japan triggered the boom of writing stories featuring real-life female criminals, who were dubbed "poison women" (毒婦 *dokufu*). While the term suggests a connection to poisoning, it was generally used to refer to women who committed murder or robbery, regardless of their criminal methods (Marran 2007, xxiii). In Meiji Japan, poison-woman literature became a popular subgenre of crime fiction and was circulated widely in newspapers.

Marran (2007, xvii) points out that the emergence of a new female image often coincides with social and political upheaval, which can potentially bring significant changes to women's lives. Marran (2007, 56) notes, for example, that the appearance of the on-the-run poison-woman coincided with the removal of class boundaries and changes in travel laws after the Meiji restoration, allowing women to travel without a passport. The public's fear of the lone female traveler can be seen through this literary representation. Notably, these narratives not only responded to the transformation of women's lives in the Meiji period, but also exposed both authors' and readers' drive "to categorize, to contrast the criminal individual's experience with that of the collective as part of a quest for meaning and understanding of why the crime occurred" (Allen 2013, 16). By writing about deviant, real-life female murderers, who stood as antitheses to the idealized "good wife, wise mother"[2] (良妻賢母 *ryōsai kenbo*), and by condemning them as guilty, sexually abnormal, and unenlightened Others, male authors asserted their own identities as civilized citizens while propagating Meiji enlightenment discourses[3] (Marran 2007, 63–64).

The concept of "good-wife-wise-mother" characterizes the modern ideal of womanhood constructed during Meiji Japan, deeply intertwined with the development of the modern gender division of labor. This division of labor emerged from

2 The term "good wife, wise mother" represents the idealized role for women in Meiji Japan, emphasizing domesticity, motherhood, and commitment to the family.

3 As advocated by the Meiji Restoration, the pursuit of enlightenment was a crucial aspect of Japanese modernization. This discourse promoted Western-style education, civilization, family institution, and a break from feudal values.

DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

the establishment of the "family-state" system (家族国家 *kazoku kokka*), which universalized the samurai code for all Japanese men, demanding their loyalty towards the nation and the emperor, while requiring women to embody samurai ideals of loyalty and commitment within the domestic sphere (Liddle and Nakajima 2000, 41–42). It imposed upon women the tasks of domestic work and proper education of children to support their families (Butel 2012, 67–68). This gender ideology largely confines "good" women to the domestic sphere. Notably, this ideology has predominantly reflected middle or upper-class ideals of femininity since its formation in the Meiji era. In the Heisei era, this expectation of female domesticity continues to influence public perceptions of womanhood. Throughout the Meiji to the Heisei eras, criminal women in literature have typically faced criticism according to middle-class standards of ideal womanhood and have been excluded from the category of "good-wife-wise-mother."

After the spread of sexology and psychoanalysis from Europe to Japan in the 1910s, poison-woman literature in the Taishō and early Shōwa eras began to focus on exploring the connections between female criminality, physiology, and psychology. In Yokose Yau's *Kinsei dokufu ten* (近世毒婦伝, *Stories of Early Modern Poison Women*, 1928), for example, female criminals were depicted as "gender transgressive," being portrayed as "masculine, sexually driven, and unrepentant" (Marran 2007, 114). Psychoanalysts Takahashi Tetsu and Ōtsuki Kenji conducted a psychoanalytic diagnosis of poison woman Abe Sada, who killed her lover and cut off his penis in 1936. They concluded that Abe was "primitive" and had not formed a fully developed sexuality, attributing her brutal act to her wholly unsuppressed sexual desire (Marran 2007, 114).

During the Taishō era, poison women were often regarded as sexual criminals and female sexuality became the "primary touchstone for explaining crime by women" (Marran 2007, 112). During the post-war period, however, the portrayal of historical poison woman figures, such as Abe Sada, underwent significant changes. Although Abe had been pathologized in the 1930s, she was later praised by leftist intellectuals for "being unencumbered by ideological pressures" in the post-World War II era (Marran 2007, 136). Women's transgression became a privileged means of signifying resistance towards oppression and authoritarianism. In the film *Ai no korīda* (愛のコリーダ, *In the Realm of the Senses*, 1976), director Ōshima Nagisa treated Abe as an eroticized icon of emancipation, interpreting her act of cutting off a penis as a form of resistance against masculine totalitarian politics and cultural values in pre-World War II Japan (Marran 2007, 136).

The trend of depicting murderous women as symbols of emancipation or victims of patriarchal society continued into the Heisei era. During this period, feminist theories gained increasing popularity. This prompted authors to explore the complex relationship between gender inequalities, the hardships faced by

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

women, and their involvement in criminal activities. One such author is Kirino Natsuo, a female novelist, who delves into this theme in her renowned crime fiction novel *OUT* (1997). Scholars, such as Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (2015), Mina Qiao (2018), and Wendy Jones Nakanishi (2018), view women's acts of killing depicted in Kirino's work as responses to oppressive patriarchy. They examine how Kirino's writings illuminate the precarious existence of women in post-bubble Japan, and view her novels as exposés of Japanese society.

From the Meiji to the early Shōwa era, the criminality of the "poison woman" was largely interpreted in relation to her "deviant" biological sexuality. In the post-war era, however, a feminist perspective was introduced, leading to a different interpretation of murders committed by women. Women's crimes were no longer perceived as completely evil but were seen as expressions of political resistance against authoritarian or patriarchal oppressions. In the following sections, I will investigate whether the representational modes found in the previous poison-woman literature persist in the texts featuring Kijima Kanae in the Heisei era, and whether any significant changes have occurred.

Raechel Dumas (2018, 145) argues that stories of the monstrous-feminine in Heisei Japan, particularly in horror films and science fiction, are "gendered narratives of cultural crisis." According to Dumas, the Heisei era was marked by a prevailing sense of crisis, primarily revolving around the economic recession, shifting gender norms, and the breakdown of the family. The fearful female monsters serve to "agitate the open wounds" in society (Dumas 2018, 18). She identifies the frequent use of monstrous-feminine bodies as expressing society's anxiety over women's becoming-uncontrollable femininity (Dumas 2018, 10). This anxiety is exemplified by the portrayals of "out-of-control" sexuality in popular culture, such as the manga series *Tomie* (富江, 1987–2000), where a teenage girl is depicted as a seductive immortal monster who manipulates men into killing her and then seeks revenge on them (Dumas 2018, 10). As Marran (2007, 174) observes, the narrative surrounding criminal, murderous women continuously evolved, and the murderous-woman figure proved to be "flexible enough to be an agent of new gender discourse." Building upon Marran and Dumas' insights, this study will investigate how the portrayals of female murderers, may also serve as a medium that bridges the discourses related to the gender and social issues of the Heisei era.

While Marran, Dumas, and other aforementioned scholars all emphasize the importance of understanding the social context and societal upheavals when examining images of criminal women and monstrous feminine, this study draws on Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation to further point out that the social context should be understood as textual and discursive rather than objective reality. By looking at various interpretations of one real-life murderer, Kijima

Kanae, this study problematizes the idea of truth and reality, and will argue that the images of murderous women in the Heisei era are simulacra, with no reality being the referent. The four works that will be discussed in the chapter are listed below.

1. Sano Shin'ichi's non-fictional work *Betsukai kara kita onna: Kijima Kanae akumabarai no hyakunichi saiban* (別海から来た女――木嶋佳苗悪魔祓いの百日裁判, *The Woman from Betsukai: 100-Day Trials of the Devil Kijima Kanae*, 2012)
2. Kitahara Minori's non-fictional work *Dokufu: Kijima Kanae hyakunichi saiban bōchō ki* (毒婦。木嶋佳苗100日裁判傍聴記, *The Poison Woman: 100 Days of Watching the Trials of Kijima Kanae*, 2013)
3. Yuzuki Asako's novel *Butter* (2017)
4. Mari Yukiko's novel *Gonin no Junko* (五人のジュンコ, *Five Junkos*, 2016)

3. Heisei murderous women as simulacra

As previously discussed, the image of the "poison woman" is a literary construct with a history that can be traced back to the Meiji era. It is coded by historical and stereotypical interpretations of female criminality and sexuality, carrying fictional elements within its understanding. The media representations of female murderers in Heisei Japan were, to some extent, built upon this Meiji-era construction of the "poison woman" image, which was sensational, imaginary, and textual. In weekly tabloid magazines, female murderers were depicted sensationally and dubbed as evil and poisonously dangerous. The articles about Kijima Kanae came with headlines such as "Kijima Kanae, the poison woman of the Heisei era, indulges in excessive eating in jail just before her first trial" (平成の毒婦と呼ばれた「木嶋佳苗」初公判直前の拘置所「爆食生活」) (*Shūkan shinchō* 2011) and "The buxom marriage hunting swindler who brings death" (死を招く豊満「婚カツ」詐欺師) (*Shūkan bunshun* 2009).

Journalists, writers, and the public have obsessively scrutinized the physical appearance and relationships with men of female murderers. Their narratives constructed murderous women into seductive, uncanny spectacles, luring people to get close to them. Some female murderers, including Kijima Kanae, became celebrities to a large extent, even attracting fans and supporters. Do these media representations truly capture, however, the reality of these criminal women? I suggest that the images of murderous women in the Heisei era can be seen as simulacra, a term coined by Jean Baudrillard. These images only present the appearance rather than actuality or truth and blur the boundary between the realm of the fictive and that of the real.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

According to Baudrillard (1994, 1–3), the rapid development of media technologies, television in particular, since the post-World War II period, has devastated the boundary between the original and the representation. We have fallen into a hyperreal space where the representation or the simulacrum precedes and replaces the real. The real is obscured by a barrier of images and becomes unattainable. For example, when a murder case is reported by journalists or adapted into fiction and films, it undergoes a process of simulation. The actual act of murder is replaced by the constructed discourse and signs created by the media, which themselves are simulations of the original murder. People's understanding and the narratives surrounding a murder case do not represent the actual crime itself, but rather the simulated versions of the crime (news, fiction, films, discourse, etc.). As a result, the original crime itself becomes obscured and disappears.

Baudrillard therefore considers the 9/11 attacks and Gulf Wars "non-events." He is not denying the occurrence of the attacks but criticizing how media technologies have manipulated people's experience and knowledge of war and terrorism and reduced the real into a bonus of the mediated events, "like an additional *frisson*" (Baudrillard 2003, 29). According to Baudrillard, the mass media acts as a simulation machine, constantly generating images and leading to the volatilization of reality or the original. Instead, a hyperreality composed of signs emerges, where simulations of reality are perceived as the real. In this hyperreal realm, signs of objects have replaced the actual objects themselves. Baudrillard argues that we have entered an era of signs reproducing themselves autonomously even without referents in the real world in the second half of the 20th century.

Baudrillard's theory ultimately leads to the recognition that the hierarchy between truth and appearance has disappeared, as everything has been transformed into signs. In "Transformation of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures since 1992," Japanese sociologist Miyadai Shinji (2011) similarly acknowledges the "loss of divinity" of reality. Namely, the collapse of the hierarchy within the reality/fiction binary in Heisei Japan. By illustrating how adult videos have shifted from expressions of popular actresses or narratives to fetishist images easily accessible on the Internet, and how anime/manga characters and schoolgirls in uniforms are consumed on an equal level, Miyadai (2011, 254–255) points out that "reality is grasped as an aggregate of signs." Furthermore, Miyadai (2011, 236) points to the diminishing discrimination against *otaku*, those who were previously viewed as inferior for escaping from "reality" into "fiction," since 1996, as evidence of the equivalence between reality and fiction taking effect.

Both Baudrillard and Miyadai's theories articulate the dissolution of the reality/representation binary. Drawing from their perspectives, I interpret the media-constructed images of Heisei murderous women as simulacra with no accessible reality to be their referent. These images have become the primary source of the

public's knowledge of female murderers. Simultaneously, the "essence" of these female murderers and the "truths" of their crimes have been obscured and replaced by these images, rendering them inaccessible and indecipherable to the public.

As introduced earlier, this study focuses on the writings based on Kijima's crimes. These writings provide different interpretations of Kijima's motives for killing and serve as great examples demonstrating that the images of murderous women are simulacra. I will demonstrate that instead of uncovering the truths which could justify the controversial trials or overturn the judgment, these texts generate a hyperreality emptied of "truth." The "truth" behind the crimes and the "actuality" of murderous women were utilized by Heisei authors as perspectival interpretations to engage with discourses about gender and sexuality, as well as social issues, such as the economic recession, the consumer culture, and the shift in the gender division of labor due to more women entering the workforce, which concerned the general public in Heisei Japan.

4. Textualization of murders committed by women in Heisei Japan

As previously argued, the Heisei narratives surrounding murders committed by women are hyperreal. Whether in news or in novels, a murder is presented to people in the mediated form of crime narratives as a simulacrum rather than a social reality (Black 1991, 21). In his studies of the 18th-century penal reform which brought Europe from the time of public execution into the time of surveillance, Hutchings (2001, 31–34) points out that, since the removal of spectacular execution from everyday life, people's access to punishment has been mostly mediated by texts, such as novels, crime fiction, and Gothic stories. Hutchings (2001, 31) views "the displacement of law from the body into text" as a textualizing process of punishment. I argue that people's relation to murder is similarly symbolic and textualized in Heisei Japan. People's access to murder also involves a process of displacing actual violence from the body into text/signs. To articulate this process more precisely, the concept of textualization, which extends beyond the act of writing and encompasses the practices of comprehension, reading, and interpretation, is employed in this research.

I suggest that the textualization of murder involves two intertwined avenues: rationalizing and aestheticizing. The French philosopher Georges Bataille identifies two conflicting impulses inherent in every subject: the need for clarity, control, and comprehension on the one hand, and the desire for emotional intensity and intoxication on the other (Kennedy 2014, 234). The rationalizing and aestheticizing avenues are connected respectively to these two impulses. These two avenues may appear to be opposing, however, they generate non-dialectical effects. Rather, they dynamically interact and complement each other, blurring the boundaries

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

between subjectivity and objectivity, and between the realm of reason and the representable, and that of the unrepresentable and the sublime.

The rationalization of murder involves delving into the motives of the murderers. One example of this is the utilization of psycho-medical or juridical terminology to explain criminal behavior, such as labeling murderers as psychopaths. Another example is establishing a connection between violent actions and individuals' traumatic childhood experiences. In the texts portraying Kijima in the Heisei era, authors' approaches that link murders to social issues and provide reasonable explanations for the criminals' motives also exemplify this rationalization process. The rationalization of murder aims to make sense of the crimes by offering comprehensible justifications.

The aestheticization of murder involves associating the notions of violence, danger, and death inherent in the concept of murder with the unrepresentable, the sublime, and what Bataille refers to as sovereignty, which he defines as an experience of freedom, devoid of all the limitations of interests (Noys 2000, 60). The term suggests a state that transcends the modern aspiration of productivity. According to Bataille (2012, 61–75), in literature, a realm unconcerned with profits or practical benefits, both authors and readers can momentarily transcend their instinctual drive to preserve life and confront the unsettling aspects, the disruptions, and the decline that human activity usually seeks to avoid. By aestheticizing murders, authors embrace the sovereign evil, which is "something passionate, generous, and sacred in them which exceeds the representations of the mind" (Bataille 2012, 145). Authors such as Yuzuki Asako and Mari Yukiko emphasize either the emancipatory or the horrifying and devilish power of Kijima's acts of killing, exemplifying the aestheticization of murder. Interestingly, even non-fiction works engage in this process. Sano Shin'ichi and Kitahara Minori portray, for example, the "evil aura" of Kijima as a means to compensate for their inability to fully comprehend the complexities of the murderous woman. This approach can also be seen as an aestheticization of murder, as it serves as a way to mediate the unrepresentable.

The rationalization and aestheticization avenues suggest that the process of textualizing murder in the Heisei era involves interweaving various discourses, including gender, social issues, psychoanalysis, and the juridical, with the aestheticization of transgression. I will later demonstrate that murders by women were textualized as a site for exploring social problems, gender ideology, and the monstrous potential of humans in Heisei Japan.

These two avenues allow authors to articulate the transgressive acts that stand upon the boundary between life and death through language. By working simultaneously, they generate a self-in-between, which mediates between what is comprehensible for one's "self" (authors) and what appears to be unrepresentable in relation to the Other (murderous women). This sense of in-betweenness, signified

by textualization, aligns with Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of writing as becoming, holding the emancipatory potential to defy clear divisions between the intelligible and the unrepresentable, the self and the other, and truth and appearance.

According to Deleuze (1998), writing is a way through which we undergo an emancipatory process of becoming. He argues that, in writing, the author does not "impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience," but "becomes woman, becomes animal or vegetable, becomes molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible" (Deleuze 1998, 1). He adds that "becoming does not move in the other direction," namely, becoming Man, because man "presents himself as a dominant form of expression," imposing itself on all matter (Deleuze 1998, 1). Deleuze recognizes the transformative nature of writing as a process of becoming undone, wherein writers navigate beyond their own selves and venture into the realm of the Other. This movement allows writers to embrace different perspectives, liberating themselves from the domination of their own identities and embracing alternative forms of existence. In other words, writing as becoming is to become the Other, dismantling the dichotomy between self and other by continuously producing a self that exists in a constant state of in-betweenness. In this context, the term "the Other" does not refer to concrete or fixed entities, but rather to simulacra, the multiplicity resulting from the continuous sliding of signs.

In this study, the concept of textualization of murder in the Heisei era, which allows for the interrogation of the complexity of identity by traversing the realms of reason and the unrepresentable, and of self and other, resembles what Deleuze describes as a writer's potential in liberating themself from the dominations of their own identities and embracing different perspectives and forms of existence. The textualization of murder can be conceptualized as a process of becoming simulacra, an attempt to embody the unrepresentable Other, wherein murder is understood and engaged with as a complex interplay of signs and meanings, offering the possibility of challenging and modifying dominant discourses.

5. The three textualizing patterns

The selected writings about Kijima Kanae exhibit three textualizing patterns. The first pattern textualizes Kijima's crimes as symptoms of social ills. The second pattern textualizes her murders as attacks on the patriarchal fantasies about femininity. The third pattern textualizes her killings as manifestations of inherent, transgressive otherness within human nature. These patterns show how Heisei authors mediate differently between their need for clarifying the murderer's motives and their encounters with the unrepresentable through rationalizing and aestheticizing avenues.

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5.1 Pattern one: Sano Shin'ichi's *Betsukai kara kita onna*

Sano's non-fiction work *Betsukai kara kita onna* falls under the first pattern, which textualizes the crimes of murderous woman Kijima as symptoms of social ills that need to be eliminated. This non-fiction work consists of two parts, with Part One revolving around Sano's visit to Kijima's hometown Betsukai, a small town in Hokkaido, famous for dairy farming and Part Two focusing on the trials of Kijima.

In his work, Sano intertwines his critiques of consumer culture, the expanding cyberspace, and the loss of masculinity in the Heisei era with his interpretation of the "truth" of Kijima's murders. He rationalizes Kijima's murders as partially caused by problematic society. Sano's analysis of Kijima's crimes focuses on her insatiable desire for material comforts. He establishes a binary opposition between Tokyo and Kijima's rural hometown of Betsukai, underscoring his assertion that Kijima's transformation from a small-town girl into a murderer in Tokyo, who maintained a lavish lifestyle through manipulation and murder, was driven by the disparities between rural and urban areas during the late Shōwa and Heisei eras.

Sano criticizes Japan's emphasis on Tokyo's commercialized culture, blaming the government for neglecting urbanization disparities. He comments on Kijima's fantasies of Tokyo written in her high school yearbook and criticizes the government for shaping "naïve, distorted images of the city's glamorous life" (幼く歪んだ都市像) (Sano 2012, 19). For Sano, Kijima, who was brought up in an elite family and was never satisfied with staying in a small town, had a distorted fantasy about life in Tokyo, which resulted in her deviant ways of maintaining a luxurious life, namely, by defrauding and murdering her male victims. Sano criticizes the Japanese government's complicity with consumerism and their lack of concern about important urbanization issues.

Sano also emphasizes the role of the Internet in Kijima's crimes. He describes her online activities as an attempt to bridge the gap between rural and urban lives using the Internet (Sano 2012, 19). He highlights how the Internet facilitated connections between individuals from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, allowing Kijima to entice lonely urban men into her digital realm. This underscores the risks technology posed to Heisei Japan, as victims drawn to Kijima's online persona often lacked strong communal or familial ties. Sano expresses his concern about how Internet communication may have ruined people's offline interactions.

Sano further links the lack of authenticity in cyberspace to Kijima's descent into evil. He contends that the anonymous realm of the Internet awakened the latent "cells of her karmic sin" (宿罪の細胞), "drowning her in the allure of a false world and the power to soar in the world of evil" (虚偽の世界に遊ぶ魅力と、悪の世界に羽ばたく魔力に溺れさせた), and transforming her into "a monstrous criminal who was beyond her own control" (木嶋佳苗自身にも手に負えない怪物的犯罪者) (Sano 2012, 67). Sano contrasts Kijima's online talkative persona with her quiet offline

demeanor, and her attractive online image with her actual appearance, highlighting her evil's derivation from the ambiguity that characterizes the digital realm. Sano's portrayal of Kijima's evil revolves around her lack of authenticity. This lack of authenticity goes beyond her deceptive online identities and images; it extends to her fundamental lack of genuine humanity. Sano observed that Kijima remained expressionless and unaffected, even when confronted with pictures of her deceased victims and the anguish of their families. These moments reinforced his perception of her "hollowness of humanity" (空疎な人間性), suggesting that her evil nature arose from a profound lack of humanity, morality, and empathy (Sano 2012, 23). While rationalizing Kijima's murders as partially caused by social ills, Sano also aestheticizes Kijima as possessing an evil power that transcends intelligibility. In Sano's narrative, Kijima and her crimes exist in the space between the comprehensible and the unrepresentable, becoming simulacra that do not convey the truth of herself or her crimes, but rather signify a lack of truth and a lack of humane essence.

In *Betsukai*, Sano constructs the criminal otherness of Kijima through portraying her deviance from the "good-wife-wise-mother" ideal. Throughout his detailed account of Kijima's trials, Sano presents numerous dialogues between Kijima and the prosecutor, delving extensively into her sexual relationships with men, particularly her involvement in the sex industry (風俗 *fūzoku*). Despite the lack of direct relevance to Kijima's crimes, Sano presents these details as evidence of her evil.

Sano also expresses his aversion towards Kijima's bold opinions on sex, condemning her statements for unleashing a "demonic, prurient storm" (魔風、淫風) in the courtroom (Sano 2012, 117). He records her claim that her extraordinary sexual performance at the mistress (愛人契約 *aijin keiyaku*) club[4] made her male clients adore her (Sano 2012, 235). By contrasting Kijima with a well-educated, attractive female judge, Sano underscores the vast gap between her and desirable women, hinting at his discomfort with both her assertion and her involvement in the sex industry. This discomfort can be seen as his fear of the uncontrollable femininity that challenges ideal womanhood in the Heisei era. Dumas (2018, 9) argues that consumerism led to women actively commodifying their bodies and seeking self-gratification, defying the "good-wife-wise-mother" type of obedient femininity. Sano's fear of this rebellious, consumer-driven womanhood, and his concern about men being exploited by uncontrolled female desires are expressed through his portrayal of Kijima's deviant sexuality. Sano's stance in *Betsukai* is reminiscent of authors of poison-woman literature from the Meiji era. As previously discussed, the early poison-woman narratives largely revolved around

[4] A club targeting married male clients and providing them with dating and even sexual services.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

the condemnation of the breach of this "good-wife-wise-mother" framework by murderous women. In the Heisei era, this association of murderous women's evil with her "deviant sexuality" was also influenced by this gender ideology.

While criticizing Kijima's uncontrollable, deviant femininity, Sano expressed his worries about the loss of masculinity of Japanese men in the Heisei era. He struggles to comprehend why men were attracted to Kijima despite her physical unattractiveness and lies. This astonishment is clear in his statement that falling for her trap is "a disgrace to the reputation of the Japanese men" (日本男児の名がすたる) (Sano 2012, 166). Sano interprets the male victims' susceptibility to deception by women as a sign of immaturity and a lack of masculinity. He voices his serious concern that "in a rapidly aging society, men are moving in the completely opposite direction towards infantilization" (急速に進む高齢化社会の中で、男たちはそれとはまったく逆ベクトルの幼児化に向かって進んでいる) (Sano 2012, 273). Anxiety about masculinity loss emerged after the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s. Economic downturn led to layoffs among Japanese white-collar workers (サラリーマン *sararīman*), disrupting their role as family providers. Concerns about men's emasculation and authority loss spread among Japanese male intellectuals (Dasgupta 2015, 13). The increased participation of women in the workforce, leading to a shift in the gender division of labor, further intensified this anxiety about diminishing masculinity. Sano's concern responds to the destabilization of Heisei-era hegemonic masculinity tied to economic success and societal roles.

In *Betsukai*, Kijima is portrayed as a devil whose evil and crimes were nurtured and enabled by the consumer culture, the expanding cyberspace, and the weakness of her male victims in Heisei Japan. Sano's narrative departs from uncovering the "truth" behind the crimes and extends to broader social criticism. For him, Kijima's trials were of the utmost importance in revealing her true motives, securing her admission of guilt, exorcising the evil, and restoring the order of morality and justice. He hoped that, through the trials, the mystery of Kijima's evil would be brought into the realm of reason and the representable, ultimately preventing similar tragedies in the future. The frustrating result of the trials, however, was that the Supreme Court finalized Kijima's death sentence without unravelling her true motives, marking the end of Sano's quest for the truth.

5.2 Pattern two: Kitahara Minori's *Dokufu* and Yuzuki Asako's *Butter*

Kitahara's non-fiction *Dokufu* and Yuzuki's novel *Butter* fall under the second pattern, which textualizes Kijima's murders as attacks on patriarchal fantasies about femininity. In her work, Kitahara records the trials of Kijima, challenging the mainstream narrative, which condemns Kijima as malicious while sympathizing with her victims. She delves into Kijima's perception of sexuality, femininity, and relationships, offering a feminist perspective on her crimes. Kitahara's portrayal

of Kijima's appearance counters the tabloid depictions. Contrary to the unsavory images propagated by the media, Kitahara highlights Kijima's beautiful skin, voluptuous figure, and confident demeanor in court (Kitahara 2013, 19). She further notes how Kijima's refusal to lose weight to conform to the patriarchal definition of feminine beauty and feminine power (女子力 *joshiryoku*) empowers her female supporters, who are often referred to as "Kanae girls" (佳苗ガールズ *Kanae gāruzu*). Kitahara observed that as Kijima's trials received extensive media coverage and became a public spectacle, many women in their thirties, who were contemporaries of Kijima, became fascinated by her, attended the trials, and identified themselves as "Kanae girls" to show their support.

Joshiryoku literally means "feminine power" in Japanese. However, unlike the concept of "girl power" in Western pop culture, which signifies women's ability to take control of their lives, the notion of *joshiryoku* in the Japanese context is limited to women's ability to embody idealized womanhood. This includes excelling in domestic tasks, maintaining an attractive and slim appearance, and always behaving in a polite and gentle manner. According to the sociologist Kikuchi Natsuno's analysis of a survey conducted among Japanese university students (Kikuchi 2019), the term *joshiryoku* is closely associated with women's physical appearance and their perceived attractiveness in the context of seeking heterosexual romance and marriage. Kikuchi (2019, 98) points out the lack of awareness of feminism within the concept of *joshiryoku* in Japan and argues that the term encompasses both a new, neoliberal aspect of ability-based and individualistic gender norms, as well as conventional, stereotypical aspects rooted in heteronormativity. Therefore, *joshiryoku* can be seen as a reversal of "girl power," as it perpetuates rather than subverts heteronormative gender norms.

Dokufu explores the connection between Kijima Kanae and Kanae girls, through their shared aversion to *joshiryoku* and patriarchal expectations. According to Kitahara (2013, 92–94), many Kanae girls struggled to conform to patriarchal expectations and pleased men by enhancing their *joshiryoku*, only to later find these performances to be painful and distasteful in hindsight. They also empathize with the challenges and discriminations faced by women who are considered "not good-looking" like Kijima. By showing how Kanae girls were prompted by the events surrounding Kijima to start reflecting on the problematic gender norms and their own struggling performances of desirable femininity, Kitahara portrays Kijima as an icon of emancipation and empowerment for these women.

In *Dokufu*, Kitahara depicts Kijima through a contrasting lens, shedding light on both the "flashy/transgressive" (派手な) and "plain/conservative" (地味な) facets of her character. These two aspects can be understood, respectively, as Kijima's transgression against the normative perceptions of femininity, and her masquerade of ideal femininity as a means of survival specifically for securing financial

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

support from men. What attracts Kanae girls is exactly the flashy, transgressive image of Kijima. Kitahara captures the different reactions of men towards these two versions of Kijima. While the "flashy" Kijima becomes a source of anxiety and hostility among men, such as the judges, the prosecutors, and some male authors, such as Sano, the "plain" Kijima exhibits qualities of ideal femininity, successfully ensnaring her male victims.

Kitahara examines how Kijima approached her male victims. She noticed that Kijima faked her identity as a nutrition student and played the role of a caring woman who loved cooking and children, and only dated with the goal of getting married (Kitahara 2013, 25). In a conversation between Kitahara and clinical psychologist Nobuta Sayoko, included in the appendix of *Dokufu*, they argue that the caring role that Kijima performed while dating with her male victims transformed the care labor from expressions of affection to exerting power and control over others' lives (Kitahara 2013, 247). Through providing care, Kijima was able to drug her male victims' meals, tamper with fire alarms in their homes, and ultimately cause their deaths through suffocation with burning coals (Kitahara 2013, 247). While the "plain" Kijima appeared to cook tasty beef stew for her male victims, fulfilling their fantasies of being served by a nurturing woman, the transgressive Kijima simultaneously poisoned these meals, killing both the men and their fantasies. Through highlighting the stark contrast between these two versions of Kijima, Kitahara explains how Kijima's murders instill fear in Japanese men, who are accustomed to being cared for. This fear arises from Kijima's ability to transform what men perceived as "something akin to sweetness" (甘美さのようなもの) into a deadly poison (Kitahara 2013, 217).

In *Dokufu*, the "plain" Kijima, who presents herself as a caring and nurturing woman, is depicted as a deceptive mask, enabling her manipulation and exploitation of men who indulge in fantasies of ideal womanhood. Kijima's true self is portrayed, in contrast, as cruel, transgressive, and terrifying, further aestheticized by Kitahara as an indecipherable darkness. Kitahara (2017, 141) describes Kijima's eyes as "a pitch-dark cave" (真っ暗な洞), suggesting that others "cannot discern her thoughts or intentions from her gaze" (何を見て、何を考えているのが、瞳からはまったく分からないから). Kitahara suggests that only Kijima knows her true motives, leaving the cruelty and evil of her "true self" fundamentally unknown and unknowable to others.

Throughout the book, Kijima and her murders are textualized through a gender lens. Kitahara constructs Kijima's simulacral criminality from a feminist perspective, connecting her transgressive acts with discourses on ideal femininity and patriarchal expectations. Increased emphasis is placed on how Kijima preyed on men, masquerading as a nurturing woman, rather than focusing on why she killed them. Kitahara rationalizes Kijima's murders as intentional exploitation of

the "good-wife-wise-mother" framework for personal gain while simultaneously aestheticizing them as attacks on patriarchal fantasies that possess subversive power yet are driven by Kijima's indecipherable evil. In Kitahara's work, the simulacral image of Kijima does not signify the truth of her murders. Instead, it suggests an emancipatory possibility of transcending the confines of ideal womanhood.

Published in 2017, Yuzuki's novel *Butter* gained prominence as a Naoki Prize[5] nominee. It fictionalizes the Kijima Kanae case, with a female journalist investigating an accused female murderer, Kajii Manako. Yuzuki acknowledges inspiration from Kitahara's *Dokufu*, adopting a feminist perspective to illustrate the murderer's transgressive and ambivalent views towards femininity and heterosexual relationships. Interestingly, Kijima, displeased with Yuzuki's portrayal in the novel, noted in her personal blog that the character Kajii is not a reflection of her (Kijima 2017). Kijima's observation holds weight. Yuzuki blends news, nonfiction, and imagination to create Kajii, a character distinct from Kijima. Notably, the protagonist of *Butter* is the journalist Machida Rika rather than Kajii. The narrative follows Rika's evolving views on womanhood, feminine beauty, and relationships influenced by Kajii, whose unapologetic embracement of her own desires empowers Rika.

In the novel, there is a resemblance between the connection of Kajii and Rika and that of Kijima and the Kanae girls. Empowered by Kajii's acceptance of her true self and desires, Rika begins to adopt Kajii's lifestyle, including her eating habits, leading to a consistent weight gain. Yuzuki portrays people's negative reactions toward Rika's physical changes. Rika's boyfriend attempts to convince her to manage her weight, arguing that it is not only for her well-being but also for societal acceptance, given that overweight women might leave a negative impression on others (Yuzuki 2017, 98). Yuzuki reflects on others' unfavorable attitudes towards Rika's weight gain, shedding light on the discomfort surrounding Rika's deviations from societal norms. This illustrates the disturbing power of unconstrained desire and implies that Kajii's perceived evil arises from her audacious pursuit of desires that defy norms. Rika's negative experiences in her journey of self-discovery foster empathy for Kajii, leading her to see Kajii not just as a friend but as a savior. This transformation is sparked by Kajii's positive comments on Rika's appearance. Kajii's support empowers Rika, leading her to construct a feminist image of Kajii, which she believes might also inspire other Japanese women to challenge gender stereotypes and inequalities.

It is crucial to recognize that Yuzuki's portrayal of Kajii is not intended as an in-depth investigation into the truth behind Kijima's infamous crimes. It instead

[5] The Naoki Prize, formally known as the Naoki Sanjūgo Prize (直木三十五賞), is a prestigious Japanese literary accolade that is awarded every two years. Established in 1935, the award is named in honour of the novelist Naoki Sanjūgo.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

serves as a feminist projection of women's desires to transgress societal gender norms. As the protagonist, Rika, says in the novel,

> 梶井真奈子に取材することがもし叶ったら、事件の真相に迫るだけではなく、自分自身の生きづらさのようなものにもしっかり向き合ってみたいという思いがある。(Yuzuki 2017, 31)
>
> If I were able to interview Kajii Manako, I would not only seek to uncover the truth behind the case but also confront the difficulties of my own existence.

In *Butter*, the female protagonist's investigation of the murderous woman Kajii becomes a means of exploring her own "self." Consequently, the presence of Kajii carries a dual simulacral quality. On one level, it is a simulacrum generated from the textualization of Kijima's crimes. Within the context of the fictional narrative, however, it also becomes a simulacrum generated from Rika's self-exploration, where she projects a feminist understanding of women's transgression onto this simulacral image.

In the novel, Kajii embodies empowerment but also vulnerability and misogyny. Yuzuki suggests Kajii's crimes stem from her inner conflicts and lack of support and friendship outside heterosexual relationships. Similar to Kitahara's work, the true motives behind Kajii's killings remain undisclosed. Within the narrative, Kajii's mentality and her relationships with her male victims are rationalized through the perspective of Rika, offering a feminist critique of patriarchal expectations of femininity. As the criminality and the nature of the murderous woman are framed through the lens of the feminist, who can be seen as the Other to the murderous woman, an aestheticizing process takes place, rendering Kajii's true nature unknowable. The aestheticizing process in the novel operates on two layers. On the one hand, it associates the murders with the unknowable and indecipherable to some extent. On the other hand, it links the presence of the murderous woman with a sense of emancipation. This manifests in Yuzuki's portrayal of Kajii's empowering transgression, which is dissociated from her crimes but strongly connected to her defiance against patriarchal regulations of women's desires.

5.3 Pattern three: Mari Yukiko's *Gonin no Junko*

Mari's novel *Gonin no Junko* (first published in 2014) falls under the third pattern, which textualizes murderous women as the monstrous Other. Renowned for her prolific production of mystery novels filled with grisly and grotesque episodes, Mari has earned the moniker of the "Queen of Iyamisu" (イヤミスの女王) or what is referred to as "eww mysteries" (イヤミス) (Kōbunsha 2022). Most of her stories evoke feelings of horror and disgust, leaving readers with an unsettling sense of dread. In her notable iyamisu novel, Gonin no Junko, Mari delves into the theme

of evil exhibited by female murderers. She portrays this malevolence as omnipresent and hidden within the depths of every individual's psyche. By focusing on female murderers specifically, Mari explores the connection between this dark essence and femininity.

In an interview conducted by Hosoda Naoko (2015), the chief editor of the pop culture website MANTANWEB, Mari revealed that the inspiration for the story of *Gonin no Junko* stemmed from the crimes committed by Kijima. One of the characters in the novel, Satake Junko, is directly modeled after Kijima. The narrative revolves around five female characters, all named Junko but written differently in kanji, whose lives become entwined due to the arrest of a serial killer named Satake Junko, who coincidentally shares the same first name as them. Although the novel begins with Satake's arrest, Mari's focus lies more on the subsequent murders involving the other four Junkos.[6] Mari expressed in the interview her deliberate decision not to place Satake Junko at the center of the novel, emphasizing that Kijima, being a born psychopath, should not be a figure for the public to seek inspiration from or attempt to comprehend (Hosoda 2015). By placing Kijima into the category of the indecipherable, evil Other, Mari's novel is not an exposé of the truth behind Kijima's murders. Without explaining Satake's motives or providing the details of her crimes, Mari transforms this notorious real-life murderer into a sign/simulacrum of evil within her novel. She constructs Satake Junko as the embodiment of evil itself. The interconnection of the four other Junkos through Satake's crimes serves as a metaphor, symbolizing their connection through the all-pervading evil inherent in human nature. This narrative arrangement highlights the omnipresence of evil as the central theme of the novel.

Although Mari does not provide explicit details of Satake's murders, she implies a connection between Satake's actions and the mindset of another murderer, Shinoda Junko. This is evident through her depiction of Satake's claimed deep connection with Shinoda, describing their "oneness of mind and body" (私とは一心同体だった子よ), suggesting that they kill for similar reasons (Mari 2016, 353).

Rather than explicitly depicting the brutal scenes of murder, Mari chooses to portray Shinoda's killing impulse, which is driven by an instinct to eliminate the intrusive Other, to protect the transgressive aspects of themselves, and to uphold a sense of normality. In the novel, both Satake and Shinoda engage in the killing of men after deceiving them for financial gain. While Satake's crimes remain unexplored in the narrative, Mari provides a clear explanation for Shinoda's motives. Shinoda resorts to murder when her fabricated identity is exposed and she faces a menacing threat from a man. Ironically, when Shinoda offers to return

6 Interestingly and noteworthy, not all Junkos are murderers, although they are all somehow involved in murder cases.

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the money she had taken, the man instead demands sexual compensation, "reducing" her to the status of a prostitute and reinforcing her position as an Other, inferior to socially acceptable women. This experience triggers deep anguish and a sense of otherness and inferiority within Shinoda, which fuels her murderous impulse to eliminate the threat permanently. This portrayal of Shinoda's murder of the man can be potentially interpreted as Mari's exploration of Kijima's motive. As portrayed in the novel, the woman's killing impulse may be driven by a desire to eliminate the threatening presence of her male victims, who serve as a catalyst for triggering her feelings of otherness and inferiority.

In the story, Mari further portrays two more female murderers. One kills her own baby, not only because childcare impedes her work, but also due to the baby's presence accentuating her sense of otherness and unnaturalness stemming from her deficiency in maternal affection. The second woman kills a child who witnesses her abusive behavior towards her ailing mother-in-law. By illustrating these murders as endeavors to eliminate the intrusive Other who lays bare the female characters' transgressive otherness, Mari also underscores the connection between the pursuit of normalcy by these women and the patriarchal construct of ideal femininity characterized by caregiving, nurturing, and sexually preserved.

In *Gonin no Junko*, murders are not violently or brutally portrayed. With few depictions of the killing scene, the murders are rationalized as the most effective strategy to make the intrusive, threatening Other disappear. Simultaneously, they are aestheticized as driven by the women's intense and forceful murderous impulses that exceed the realm of reason. When depicting the women's murdering impulses, Mari frequently employs exclamation marks to convey the characters' extreme emotions of disgust, annoyance, and hatred prior to their killings. The murderous impulses surge within them suddenly, prompting them to make an immediate decision to kill. The acts of killing in the novel are not meticulously planned. Instead, they are the characters' spontaneous responses, driven by an instinct to protect their own existence from harm inflicted by the Other. By illustrating the blurry line between reason and madness in these murderous impulses, the novel textualizes killing as the characters' instinctual survival strategy, deeply intertwined with their inherent transgressive otherness that defies patriarchal expectations of femininity.

6. Gender and textualization

In this study, the analysis of both fictional and non-fictional works does not rely on genre classifications or a division between reality and fiction. Instead, I categorize these works based on how authors position murderous women as the Other to themselves and mainstream society. These categorizations are crucial

in understanding the thematic and narrative choices made by the authors. I have identified three distinct patterns of textualizing murders in works featuring Kijima Kanae. The first pattern positions the murderous woman as the criminal Other while highlighting the author's alignment with justice. The second pattern takes a feminist approach, expressing the author's empathy with them. The third pattern emphasizes the monstrous potential inherent in human beings and suggests that every subject can be transformed into a monstrous Other.

Within this process of positioning murderous woman Kijima, her gender and sexuality become important references for authors to interpret her actuality in terms of her otherness. This paradigm of textualizing female criminality through discourses of gender, sexuality, and femininity can be seen as a continuation of the poison-woman narrative framework. Throughout the Meiji to the Shōwa era, physicians, sexologists, and psychologists endeavored to discover the physical and sexual reasons for female murderers' criminality (Marran 2007). As shown in Marran's research, they sought to explain the "abnormality" of murderous women by linking it to their reproductive functions and sexual perversions. Female murderers' deviances from the "good-wife-wise-mother" framework were rationalized and pathologized by scholars and writers who sought bodily evidence to support their claims. In the Heisei era, discussing female murderers' performance within the "good-wife-wise-mother" framework still constitutes a pivotal part of the textualization of murderous women. Interestingly, William Pawlett (2013, 77) also notes a similar emphasis on sexuality as "an explanatory principle" for male serial killers in Western culture and suggests that sexuality is regarded as the "ultimate measure of both normality and deviance." This study argues that the gender and sexuality of murderous women have functioned as crucial media through which authors comprehend these simulacra, namely, as a pathway towards the Other.

Judith Butler's theory on gender and sexuality helps to understand this argument. According to Butler (2010), gender and sexuality which constitute one's identity make the individual culturally intelligible and socially recognizable. Butler (2010, 44) emphasizes that "there is no recourse to a 'person,' a 'sex,' or a 'sexuality' that escapes the matrix of power and discursive relations that effectively produce and regulate the intelligibility of those concepts for us." Butler (2010, 208) further introduces the concept of the "heterosexual matrix," which refers to a hegemonic discursive framework characterized by the obligatory conformity to heterosexuality and the expectation of a specific form of sexuality and gender expression. This framework assumes the existence of a natural sex for every individual, with prescribed masculine and feminine roles, and it operates as a grid that determines cultural intelligibility. It can be argued that gender becomes the simulation of human beings. It is through the sign of gender, this intelligible identity (even though

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it does not lead to any "essence" or "actuality" of human beings), that people are able to approach the existence of the "self" and of the simulacral "Other."

In the textualization of murders committed by women, gender operates as one mediating factor between the rationalization and aestheticization processes. While the rationalization is partly performed through the intelligibility of gender, the deviance of murderous women from gender norms, which renders them unrepresentable, enables the aestheticization process to occur. Gender thus serves as a crucial element that navigates both avenues through which murders by women are textualized.

It is noteworthy that, while the poison-woman literature of the Meiji and Taishō eras usually involved discussions of the corporeal sex of the female murderers, Heisei-era texts featuring murderous woman Kijima concentrated on women's designated gender roles. Rather than anatomizing the murderers' bodies, authors in the Heisei era dissected murderous women through the discourses of gender norms and inequalities.

If, as Butler suggests, the discussions on gender and femininity in texts featuring murderous women are shaped by power relations while reproducing power, we can still explore the potentiality that arises from multiplicity and the proliferation of narratives. Butler highlights the performativity of gender. According to her, gender should not be understood as a noun but as "a doing without a doer," a process in which "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 2010, 34). Butler has noticed the potential to subvert the existing gender ideology in this process of repetition within the power relations which produced the very ideology. For Butler (1997, 40), performativity is "a renewable action without clear origin or end," which suggests that while gender is defined by social context, "it is also marked by its capacity to break with context." In other words, gender is not a fixed entity but rather an ongoing process in which a person's identity is constituted through repeated expressions. Butler suggests the possibility of reshaping discourses on gender through repetition, which generates difference and multiplicity.

In the context of Heisei textualizations of murders, the concept of womanhood used by authors to discuss Kijima's criminality has been modified and challenged by the differences and contradictions among various texts. Sano portrays Kijima's "deviant sexuality" as constituting her criminal otherness. Conversely, this deviation from the "good-wife-wise-mother" framework is not condemned but imbued with an emancipatory dimension in Kitahara and Yuzuki's writings. In this context, the otherness of murderous women signifies a subversive power that challenges patriarchy. In Mari's work, women's transgressions against patriarchal expectations and societal norms are portrayed as inevitable, even though the female characters often seek to hide their transgressive otherness through murder.

By analyzing texts falling under the three patterns, we observe that the vision of idealized womanhood is continuously challenged, modified, and even redefined by different authors. Drawing upon Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, this study suggests that the proliferation of narratives featuring murderous women not only circulates dominant discourses about gender but also serves as a platform for their modification or even subversion.

7. Conclusion

As demonstrated by the analysis of the selected writings, Heisei authors' interpretations of female criminality are deeply entangled with their discussions of consumer culture, the shifting gender division of labor, ideal femininity, and the perceived loss of masculinity associated with the economic downturn. Drawing upon Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, I suggest that these discussions do not lead to a single conclusion about the essence of female criminality. Instead, they generate simulacra that often contradict but also complement each other, providing diverse perspectives on gender, sexuality, and Japanese society in the Heisei era. The proliferation of murderous woman narratives in Heisei Japan suggests that these texts play a vital role in effectively negotiating gender and social discourses that concern the general public.

Gender and sexuality have been primary lenses for approaching female criminality in both earlier poison-woman literature and Heisei-era murderous woman narratives. Unlike the relatively homogenous and condemnatory tone of poison-woman narratives in the previous eras, however, the textualizations of murderous women in the Heisei era present a variety of perspectives and can be divided into at least three patterns. These varied narratives contribute to the ongoing modification and redefinition of concepts such as "good-wife-wise-mother" and ideal femininity and masculinity.

This chapter explores how Heisei-era texts address the otherness of the murderous woman Kijima and grapple with the unrepresentable aspects of her murders. Rather than constructing a complete image that reveals the "truth" of her crimes, the textualization process becomes a form of "becoming-simulacra," where efforts to represent the unrepresentable Other continuously challenge, problematize, and dismantle binary structures such as reality versus representation, self versus other, and femininity versus masculinity.

 DOI: 10.5507/ff.25.24465821.11

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