

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NATSUO KIRINO'S *GROTESQUE*

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Abstract

This study is based on the Japanese novel *Grotesque* (*Gurotesuku*) by Natsuo Kirino. I use Judith Butler's theories of *gender performativity* and *interpellation* as a framework to analyze the four main female characters, the unnamed narrator 'Watashi', her sister Yuriko, and her classmates Kazue and Mitsuru, and how they are formed and re-formed by the power structures surrounding them. How does the environment we grow up in form whom we become, or to ask in a different way; how much do our surroundings have to say in the constitution of us as discursive subjects? Using Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus and field*, and *different forms of capital*, I put Butler's theories in a social context, and explain how the main characters in *Grotesque* can be said to be influenced by the social rules and unwritten norms surrounding them. I also look into some aspects of translation theory, and how the way *Grotesque* has been translated into English can be said to affect the way it can be read and interpreted.

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Oslo, May 2012

Structure

In Chapter 1, I will first give a brief introduction to this thesis, and explain the reasons for choosing this particular topic, before presenting my main goals and method, as well as limitations and style choices for this thesis.

In Chapter 2 I will first give a brief introduction to *Grotesque*, focusing on its style and composition. Then I will give a brief account of the time period when *Grotesque* was written, and the incidents and topics that can be said to have influenced it. Then I will turn to the theory I intend to use as frameworks to analyze *Grotesque*. I will present the main points of the theories of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu that I will focus on, while giving some examples of how these theories can be used to offer new insight when analyzing *Grotesque*.

Chapter 3 contains the main analysis, where I explore further how the novel can be read in light of the theories of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu. I will examine how these analytical frameworks can shed light to problematic situations that occur in the different social fields, and how this can be said to affect and influence the four main characters.

In Chapter 4, I explore the novel's link to reality, taking a closer look at the incidents that inspired *Grotesque*, and how they are linked to the events and characters in *Grotesque*. I will try and link the content of *Grotesque* to real life social problems in Japan. My main focus will be on the incident that inspired Kirino to write *Grotesque* (*Tōden satsujin jiken*), and Aum Shinrikyo, a religious sect that bears close resemblance to the sect Mitsuru ended up joining in the novel. I will try to explore how these cases can be linked to the competitive environment in the education and occupational fields, which I have looked into in chapter 3.

In Chapter 5, I will address certain translation issues that I discovered while working on this thesis, and how this changes the way the novel can be read, and also the way it was received in the West.

Chapter 6 contains a short summary and conclusion.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

'You and I and Kazue are all the same. We were all duped by a meaningless illusion; obsession with how we looked to others,' Mitsuru (My translation).

'Anata mo atashi mo onaji. Kazue-san mo onaji. Minna de munashii koto ni kokoro o torawareteita no yo. Tannin kara dō mirareru ka-tte koto,' Mitsuru (Kirino 2006, 426, vol. 2).

In a conversation with a Japanese friend I made a comment about being more interested in securing my own career, rather than settling down. The response was resolute. Instead of an answer or a comment on my statement, I was faced with a surprising label. 'So, you are a feminist.' What surprised me more than the comment however was my own reaction to it. I felt an instant resentment to being 'hailed' in such a term. Not because I disapprove of (most) of the ideas behind the term, but because of the term itself. For all the good intentions behind the words 'feminism' and 'feminist', they feel obsolete, something belonging to a distant past when women had to fight for their right to vote, and to be allowed to work. This started me thinking; has feminism outplayed its role? Have we reached the limits of equality? If so, it would not be the first time feminism would be pronounced extinct and obsolete. As early as 1889, Mary Augusta Ward, a journalist and novelist who wrote under the name Mrs. Humphry Ward, claimed that 'the emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women' (Walters 2005, 71) Let's return to my reasons for reacting negative to being labeled as feminist. I realized that it had less to do with my feelings around the idea of feminism, and more with how I would be perceived as a 'feminist.' Being called a feminist does not only define my point of view on certain cases concerning the position of women, but also seem to label me as a certain kind of person; a man-hater who believes women should rule the world (a slight exaggeration to prove my point). Whether I (or other feminists) believe this to be true is beside the point, because the way one is being perceived, is also in a certain way one come to define oneself. This at last brings me to Judith Butler and to *Grotesque*.

Butler is deeply concerned with the excluded, illegible and the unlivable, and that the way we define ourselves and others, where some things are seen as ‘right and natural’, effectively excluding others as ‘unnatural and wrong.’ In the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes that she tried to oppose ‘those regimes of truth that stipulated that certain kinds of gendered expressions were found to be false and derivative, and others, true and original’ (Butler 1999, x, preface). The four main female characters in *Grotesque*, the nameless narrator, her sister Yuriko and her former classmates Kazue and Mitsuru, all struggle with how they are seen and defined by their surroundings. They all have problems fitting in to the strictly hierarchical and in many ways conformist Japanese society. I became interested in exploring how these girls were affected by their surroundings, and how Butler’s theories could help shed light to and explains some of the often conflicting emotions and actions of these girls.

The first time I read *Grotesque* was for a Japanese literature class at the University of Oslo (UIO). I was instantly fascinated by the psychological descriptions of the main characters and the way the novel portrayed problematic situations in Japanese society. However, when discussing the book in class, I realized that my professor (who was Japanese and naturally had read the Japanese version of the book) kept returning to important aspects of the book that I could not agree on or scenes I had no recollection of reading. I became interested in finding out more about the differences between the Japanese original and the English translation. Looking into the background of the novel, I realized that *Grotesque* is perceived quite differently in the West compared to Japan. The novel *Grotesque* has received mixed reviews in the West, from very positive reviews to more nuanced praise, but overall the receptions have been fairly positive. It is interesting to note that several critics comments about the length of the novel, using words as ‘overlong’ and ‘too-expansive’. One critic even claimed that there is a ‘need for a pitiless editor wielding a large machete’ (Karbo, Entertainment Weekly, March 13, 2007). This is despite the novel already being cut about a hundred pages from the original Japanese version. This presents the interesting and problematic practice of editing and adapting translated novels in order to accommodate Western readers. This inspired me to do a close reading and comparison of the original and the English translation, to see if I could trace these differences, and how they affected the reading of *Grotesque*.

One other important aspect I discovered was that *Grotesque* is in part based on a famous murder case, usually referred to as *Tōden OL satsujin jiken* (the murder case of the TEPCO¹ office lady), that happened in Japan in 1997. Fifteen years after it happened, it still receives a lot of media attention in Japan. The references to this case, as well as references to Aum Shinrikyo, which bear strong resemblance to the sect that one of the girls, Mitsuru end up joining, is something most Japanese would recognize. However, because these cases are less known in the West, most Western readers would not connect *Grotesque* to these events. Therefore one can argue that the link to reality that is presented in *Grotesque*, and in many ways make up the foundation and driving force behind the novel, is for the most parts lost to the Western reader. This greatly affects the way that the novel is read and interpreted. For most Japanese readers *Grotesque* is seen as an attempt to answer this compellingly difficult question; why would a woman who was seemingly a winner in modern society end up degrading herself by selling her body on the street?

¹ Short for Tokyo Electric Power Company.

The Purpose of the Study

Method

I have chosen to analyze *Grotesque* through two different theoretical frameworks, using the theories of Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu. My main method is close reading of the novel *Grotesque*, focusing on the four girls (the unnamed narrator, Kazue, Mitsuru and Yuriko) and using the theories of Butler and Bourdieu to analyze how they are affected and interpellated by their surroundings.

I will also compare the Japanese and English version of *Grotesque*, with special focus on how they can to a certain degree be read as two different versions (and even genres), and how this affects the way *Grotesque* can be interpreted.

Theoretical Framework

The four main characters in *Grotesque*, the unnamed narrator, her two former classmates Kazue and Mitsuru and her sister Yuriko, are all battling with feelings of being excluded, and can be said to live in what Butler would describe as ‘unlivable lives’. I will use Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity and interpellation as a framework to analyze the four main female characters, and how they are formed and re-formed by the power structures surrounding them. How does the environment they grow up in form whom they become, or to ask in a different way; how much do our surroundings have to say in the constitution of us as discursive subjects? Using Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field, I will put Butler’s theories in a social context, and explain how the society surrounding the main characters in *Grotesque* reinforce and even create this kind of exclusion.

Translation Issues

Working with this thesis I came across an interesting problem; some of the sentences and paragraphs I believed to be important were missing in the original translation, or were translated in a completely different manner from the way I had interpreted them. Especially the

ending was problematic, as it had been dramatically shortened in the English translation, something which can be said to influence the way *Grotesque* can be interpreted quite radically. I became interested in finding out why these changes had been made, and how it affects the reception it has received. I will analyze and compare closely selected places in the translation that I found problematic, and try to show how the translation change and influence the way it can be interpreted.

Sources

My primary source is the Japanese original version of *Grotesque*, *Gurotesuku* by Natsuo Kirino (2006). I will use the English translated version, *Grotesque* (2008), to refer to specific quotes and passages in the text, and I will refer to both the original and the translated version as far as possible. I will also use the English translation as comparison to explore how the two versions differs from each other, and how this affect the way the novel can be interpreted. However, in my analysis, I base myself on the Japanese original. Other main sources are Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999), *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *Excitable speech : a politics of the performative* (1997a); Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984); Reiko Abe Auestad's article *Gurotesuku de Kirino Natsuo: Lettres, carnets et journaux intimes comme dispositifs textuels* (2011); Toril Moi's *What is a woman? : and other essays* (1999), as well as other selected works. I also use a number of secondary sources to explore the social context in which *Grotesque* was written.

Limitations

Although I have tried to give an overview of the theory in a separate chapter (Chapter 2), some of the theory will be presented together with my analysis, because of the limited space, but also because some of the theory could be best presented accompanying examples taken from *Grotesque*. Because of limited space and time I will not analyze the fifth section of *Grotesque*, consisting of a written report made by Zhang, the Chinese immigrant who is accused of killing Kazue and Yuriko. It contains a short introduction to the court proceedings, before a longer section where Zhang describes his life story, as well as his side of the events leading to the murders. It mostly deals with Zang's life in China and his thoughts of being a foreigner in Japan. Although this section offers a different perspective, and some interesting angles of being an

'outsider' and marginalized in Japanese society, I chose to leave it out because it brings limited insight into the four women who are the focus of my study.

Abbreviations

Q School – Q School for Young Women

TT – Target Text

TL – Target Language

ST – Source Text

SL – Source Language

MT – My Translation

Style Choices

In this thesis, Japanese names are given in the normal Western order with surname last. In the case where the source text differs greatly or is omitted in the target text, I have added my own translation as a reference, as well as a transcription of the original text as reference. I have used the modern Hepburn Romanization system, unless other transcription systems have been used in the original source. Another exception is words that are commonly known and adapted into the English language, like for example Tokyo. Japanese words are marked by italics. I use single quotation marks to mark quotations, unless double quotation marks are used within a reference. The pocket edition of the original Japanese edition of *Grotesque* is divided into two volumes. When I refer to this edition, I have marked the reference with *vol.1* or *vol.2*, in order to show which volume I am referring to. Instead of using the Japanese transcription *Gurotesuku* when referring to the Japanese original, and *Grotesque* when referring to the English translation, I have chosen to use *Grotesque* when referring to the novel in general throughout this thesis. I have instead tried to make it clear in the text how and where the two editions differ from each other, and when I'm referring to only one of the editions.

When analyzing and translating the source text (the original Japanese version of *Grotesque*), I have another focus point compared to that of Rebecca Copeland (the original translator), thus making my point of departure and translation strategy quite different from the original. Since I base my thesis on the content of the original Japanese version, it is important that the translation I refer to and the original text are as close as possible. As I will look at the translation in view of the theories of Butler and Bourdieu, my center of attention will naturally be on different aspects of the novel that can be read in light of these theories.

Neither English nor Japanese are my mother tongue, and my translations will naturally be affected by this. There will always be the risk that I might have misunderstood the intended meaning either in the translation or in the original Japanese text. I am by no means a trained translator, so some might also find my translations to 'literal' or clumsy. For analytical purposes I have tried to stay as close to the original as possible, without losing the natural flow of the English language.

The Nameless Narrator with many 'Names'

As mentioned above, the name of the main narrator is not mentioned at all throughout the entire novel. This presented me with a puzzling problem that reminded me of the important role names play in everyday life. How should I refer to her? Some of the most common way of referring to her seems to be 'Yuriko's sister', 'the narrator', 'the nameless narrator' and 'the older sister' (one critic even dubbed her simply 'the ugly sister'), but this kind of rephrasing has a tendency to become tedious and confusing when used repeatedly. Her last name (Hirata) is known, because her sister Yuriko is frequently mentioned by full name. However, this name is never used to refer to the narrator. As Kirino herself explains in an interview, there is a deeper meaning behind Yuriko's sister's lack of name:

'I wanted to leave her an anonymous, representative person, so I left the name out. I wanted to lend her an anonymity that would make her more of a general person, a kind of anonymous subjectivity. A kind of hidden side to her personality. If she had a name, that feeling would be lost,' Natsuo Kirino (Rochlin, L.A. Weekly, Tuesday, Juli 3, 2007).

Because Kirino is obviously deliberate in keeping the main narrator nameless, I felt it was important to keep this aspect when referring to her. In order to keep with the authors wish to keep her an 'anonymous unknown' while at the same time makes referring to the nameless narrator a less tedious task, I chose the Japanese personal pronoun *watashi* ('I'), which she uses to refer to herself throughout the book, as a name. Therefore I will refer to her as 'Watashi'. However, it is important to remember that this is not a real name, but a substitute for a name, and to keep her anonymous status in mind when reading this thesis.

Chapter 2 - Theory

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is divided into two sub chapters; *Introduction to Grottesque*, and *Background*. *Introduction to Grottesque* is just that; an introduction to the work and the author. I will look into the style and composition of *Grottesque*, and give a brief introduction to Natsuo Kirino and her career. In *Background* I will examine the time and social environment in which *Grottesque* was written. *Grottesque* touches upon many different social problems, like that of the competitive Japanese school system, discrimination of women, prostitution, as well as the ambivalent position of Westerners in Japan. In this way, the four main characters in *Grottesque* not only represent themselves, but trends and situations for women in general, and can be seen as symbols of problematic trends and attitudes persevering in Japan. I will explore how this social context can be linked to *Grottesque*.

In the second part I present the main theories and key concepts in the analytical framework by Butler and Bourdieu that I use in my analysis of *Grottesque*, while giving some brief examples of how I will use this theory in my analysis.

Introduction to *Grottesque*

Composition and Style

The original Japanese version of *Grottesque* was first released as a serial in the weekly magazine *Shūkan Bunshun* from February 2001 till September 2002. It was released in a hardcover edition in 2003 (Kirino 2003), and a pocket edition divided into two volumes in 2006.² The story revolves around two prostitutes whom are murdered in Tokyo one year apart. We soon discover that the main narrator, Watashi, is close to them both; one is her younger sister Yuriko Hirata, and the other is her former classmate Kazue Satō. Together with Mitsuru, another classmate of Kazue and Watashi, they all went to Q School for Young Women (hereafter Q School); a school which exerted great influence on the lives of the four girls. Yuriko and Watashi are siblings, born to a Japanese mother and a Swiss father. However, while Yuriko is described as almost

² My references are to the 2006 pocket edition.

grotesquely beautiful, Watashi is ordinary at best. She has a difficult relationship with her sister, and seems to be both intrigued and disgusted by Yuriko to the point of obsession.

The Genre of Grotesque

When reading the different reviews of *Grotesque* in different Western media, I was surprised to discover that most of the reviewers seemed to take it for granted that *Grotesque* should be defined as a mystery novel, using terms like ‘feminist noir’, ‘crime noir’ and ‘crime fiction’ to describe the novel. However, as one reviewer put it: ‘*Grotesque* is not so much a crime novel as a brilliant, subversive character study’ (Sercher, The Telegraph, March 27, 2007). If one look to the way *Grotesque* is written, it is hard to define it as a typical mystery novel (in fact, *Grotesque* is not marketed as crime fiction in Japan). One reason why it is problematic that *Grotesque* is defined as crime fiction is the way the plot line is arranged. As the novel begins, the alleged murderer Zhang is already caught, and the trial against him is just about to start. He has already confessed to killing Yuriko, but denies any involvement in the death of Kazue. In this sense the story is far from any typical mystery novel, where the revelation of the killer can be seen as the main goal and driving force behind the plot. In *Grotesque* the killer is known from the start, and the main narrator, Watashi (as well as most of the other characters described), are not preoccupied in proving his guilt or assuring that he receives the appropriate punishment.³ *Grotesque* focuses most on the psychological aspects of the characters, and the way they evolve and are changed by their surroundings, rather than revolving around a mystery that have to be solved. I will look further into this in chapter 5, where I explore the way *Grotesque* have been translated and adapted into English, and how this adaptation might have led to *Grotesque* being interpreted as crime fiction in the West.

Style

The style in which the book is written is also quite special. Reiko Abe Auestad proposes that *Grotesque* can be read as an *epistolary novel*, using Altman’s model for analyzing the *epistolarity* of the text (Auestad 2011). Altman defines *epistolarity* as ‘the use of letter’s formal properties to

³ Although there is some discussion around the question of Zhang’s guilt, this is not so prominent that it can be said to be a driving force behind the novel.

create meaning'⁴ (Altman 1982, 4). Because of her relationship to the two deceased, Watashi is overwhelmed by attention from the public:⁵

People I'd never seen before would catch wind of the gossip and poke their noses into my business, bombarding me with all kinds of intrusive questions about those two (Kirino 2008, 9; cf. 2006, 18, vol.1).

After refusing to answer any questions, and trying to avoid attention, Watashi suddenly becomes desperate to tell her side of the story. However, with all her family either dead or unavailable,⁶ and having alienated all her friends because of her malicious attitude, Watashi is lacking close confidantes to which she can relate her story (and her justification concerning her involvement with Yuriko and Kazue). She therefore addresses herself to *the public* or *society (seken)* (Auestad 2011). One way this can be seen is that Watashi consequently narrates in polite humble form (something which is usually reserved for formal speech or letters), and frequently turns to the reader (or *the public*) and offers comments and answers to unspoken questions:⁷

TT.

I'll probably keep on talking even if you try to interrupt me...I have Kazue's old letters and things that I can refer to, and even though it'll probably take some time to tell the whole story, I plan to keep going until I've unloaded it all – every detail (Kirino 2008, 9).

ST.

Saegirarete mo shaberi suzureru kamoshiremasen...Nagaku naru kamoshiremasen ga, mukashi no Kazue no tegami nado mo nokotte imasu kara, tsutsumi kakazu ohanashi itashimasu (Kirino 2006, 18, vol.1).

⁴ She states that this is a 'working definition.'

⁵ Example is borrowed from Auestad (2011, 248).

⁶ By the time her narration begins her sister and her mother are both dead, her father is living in a different country with a new family and her grandfather is senile, living in an institution.

⁷ Example is borrowed from Auestad (2011, 248).

In this way, she is using society or the public as a form of what Altman would describe as a ‘shadow confidant’ (Altman 1982). Using *epistolarity* as a model, *Grotesque* can be read as a letter that Watashi, the main narrator, writes to society (*seken*), in response to the overwhelming attention she receives after the deaths of Yuriko and Kazue (Auestad 2011). Her story is mixed with journals, memoirs, letters and public documents, all presented in first-person narrative, bringing different views and opinions about present and past events. Amongst these are Yuriko’s memoir and Kazue’s journal, a love letter written by Kazue, and a long recount of past events by Mitsuru,⁸ as well as a letter from their former teacher Kijima. These different accounts often contradict each other, and make it difficult to ascertain what the truth really is, something which underlines the ambiguity of the novel, and opens for many possible readings and ways of interpreting the text. In this way Watashi’s story is met with resistance from the others through the different perspectives that is revealed to Watashi at the same time as the reader (Auestad 2011). Watashi’s view of these past events, as well as her way of perceiving the world around her change and evolve as the story progresses.

Composition

Grotesque consists of eight sections. The first two sections in the first volume are narrated by Watashi. They take place roughly two years after Yuriko’s death, and one year after the death of Kazue. These two sections deal mostly with Watashi’s side of events happening in her early childhood, and at Q School. The third section consists of Yuriko’s memoirs. It is probably written close to her death 2 years before the main story begins, as it contains descriptions of how she meet Kazue, and end up sharing the same ‘turf’, working as street prostitutes. It contains flashbacks from Yuriko’s traumatic childhood, her time as a middle school student, and her life after she is kicked out of school for prostitution, describing her journey from working as a luxury prostitute to working in a back alley in Shibuya as a streetwalker. She gives a different perspective of some of the events that her sister touches upon in the first two sections. For instance while Watashi stresses the fact that she wants nothing to do with her sister, Yuriko starts her journal by stating that recently Watashi calls her all the time, even proposing that they should live together. In the fourth section we again return to Watashi, who claim that Yuriko is telling

⁸ Auestad proposes that Mitsuru’s long confession can also be read as a form of letter (Auestad 2011).

nothing but lies, and demand that her side of the story should be heard as well. In this way, the story is influenced by Watashi reading Yuriko's memoirs. Watashi continues, relaying flashbacks brought forward by reading Yuriko's memoirs, expressing how she experienced Yuriko's arrival at the school. Also Kazue, who appear in Yuriko's memoirs, receives new attention: 'Well, then, shall I tell you more about Kazue in High School? I mean, since Yuriko wrote about her in her journal, I think I should' (Kirino 2008, 158; cf. 2006, 298, vol.1).

The second volume starts with the fifth section, containing Zhang's written report. The sixth section is again narrated by Watashi, and deals with the trial, and her meeting several people from her past. One of these are Mitsuru who has recently been released from prison, spending 6 years behind bars for her involvement in a sect responsible for terrorist acts.⁹ In a long conversation with Watashi, Mitsuru gives her version of events, which also contest and modify Watashi's previous statements. She gives Watashi a letter from their former Professor Kijima, and urges Watashi to read it.¹⁰ The letter contains Professor Kijima's self-examination after hearing about Yuriko and Kazue's deaths, as well as Mitsuru's imprisonment. She also meet Professor Kijima's son Takashi, a former classmate of Yuriko. With him is Yurio, Yuriko's blind teenage son, whom he is taking care of. Watashi shows an instant fascination towards Yurio, and manages to persuade him to come live with her. The seventh section consists of Kazue's memoir. It ends shortly before she is killed, and as the other sections it also contains flashbacks from her childhood and her time at Q School, telling her side of events. However, Kazue mostly focuses on her time after she commences working, and the ostracized position she holds within the firm, and her double life as a prostitute by night and elite office worker by day. The eight and last section is again narrated by Watashi, and describes her reaction to everything that has been discovered in the novel so far, and especially her reaction to Kazue's journal. Encouraged by Yurio and Mitsuru, Watashi begin to feel a desire to change, something which end up with her and Yurio's entering the Japanese sex trade.

⁹ This sect bears close resemblance to Aum Shinrikyo, the sect responsible for several terrorist acts in Japan, the most famous of which was the attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995.

¹⁰ In the English translation, this letter is for some reason divided into several letters.

About the Author

'My main motivation to write is to "observe the fabric of human relationships." Sometimes the threads that connect people are strong, or warped, or weak, or twisted by the encounters. Isn't that what a story telling is really all about?' Natsuo Kirino (Honjo 2003).

Natsuo Kirino¹¹ (1951-) started out writing romance fiction, before turning to mystery fiction. *Kao ni furikakaru ame* (Her face, veiled in rain, 1993), the first installment in her Miro series, featuring a hard-boiled female detective, won the Edogawa Rampo Prize for best mystery in 1993 (Seaman 2004). Since then Kirino has written over 20 novels, and won numerous prizes. Her first book translated into English was *Out*, a story about a group of ordinary housewives who end up dismembering and disposing a friend's husband after she killed him in a fit of rage. However, like *Grotesque*, *Out* is far from a simple mystery novel, and she touches upon many troubling topics, like women and foreigners' position in the Japanese society and the difficult position they often hold as part time workers in Japan. Especially women's position in society seem to be a topic that Kirino is deeply concerned about, and she often describes women who live on the edge of society. As Amanda C. Seaman, who has written several articles as well as a book on Japanese women's detective fiction, explains:

...she [Kirino] implies in not-so-subtle terms that, despite the increasing number of Japanese women who work and live in the center of the metropolises, the majority live on its edges in an existence that trap them between the home and the part time job (Seaman 2006, 201).

However, while many of Kirino's novels can be read as sharp critique of the male domination in Japanese society, they often contain controversial topics, like the exploration of individual liberation through violent sex, which can be said to undermine a traditional feminist interpretation.

¹¹ Natsuo Kirino (桐野 夏生) is a pen name; her real name is Mariko Hashioka.

Background

The Lost Decade

The present time of *Grotesque* is set to the end of the 1990's, and the book is heavily influenced by this decade. This was a period of turbulent changes and major incidents in Japan. The beginning of the 90's was haunted by the collapse of the bubble economy, when a collapsed stock market and crisis in the bank sector and real estate market led the economic expansion to a screeching halt, making several commentators dub it 'the lost decade' (Kingston 2010; Callen and Ostry 2003). 1995 is a year forever burned into the Japanese consciousness, when the Great Hanshin Earthquake, also known as the Kobe earthquake, led to 6,434 people losing their lives. It was soon followed by another horrific incident. Only 2 months later the religious sect Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas on the Tokyo subway in an act of domestic terrorism, killing twelve, and causing long-time after effects for thousands. Discussions about problems in the school system concerning the dangers of too much pressure in school and the long time repercussions of a competitive school system became heated during the 90's, and led to the reinforcement of *yutori-kyōiku*¹² in 1998, a set of teaching guidelines which set out to reduce the hours as well as the content of the curriculum in primary education.

Tōden OL Satsujin Jiken

Known in Japan as *Tōden OL satsujin jiken* (the murder case of the TEPCO office lady), this incident can be said to be what inspired Natsuo Kirino to write *Grotesque*. It is a famous murder case that happened in Japan in 1997, where an elite career woman was found murdered in an old apartment building in downtown Shibuya.¹³ It was soon discovered that she was living a double life, working in an elite firm by day and as a street prostitute by night. As I mentioned in the introduction, this particular case received a lot of media attention in Japan. Much of the focus from the media and society in general was on the victim, and the question of why this seemingly successful woman ended up working as a prostitute. In many ways the victim received more

¹² *Yutori-kyōiku* can be roughly translated as 'relaxed education.'

¹³ Shibuya is one of Tokyo's 23 special wards (*tokubetsu-ku*).

negative attention than the alleged killer (as I will look into in Chapter 4). *Grotesque* is just one of several books written in the aftermath of this case. The most famous non-fiction account of the incident is probably *Tōden OL satsujin jiken* (2000) by Shinichi Sano, a highly subjective account of Sano's investigation into the case, and the possible innocence of the Nepali immigrant who was convicted for the crime. I will look closer into his book in Chapter 4.

The Competitive School System

School plays a big part in *Grotesque*, as all the four main characters went to the same school, Q High School for Young Women (*Q joshikō*),¹⁴ and large parts of the novel take place at this school in form of flashbacks and retellings of past events. Competition at Japanese schools is fierce. In 2005 public universities funded by national, prefectural, or municipal governments constituted only 26, 3% of the total of Japanese universities, while the remaining 73, 7% consisted of private universities (Ministry of Education 2007). There are tuition fees for entering both private and public universities. However, private universities tuition fees are considerably higher than in the public universities, and on top of this they also demand large entrance fees (Sugimoto 2003). With over 77, 7 % of Japanese students continuing to higher education, the competition for entering the best universities are fierce. University entry exams are exceedingly difficult, and in order to be best prepared students fight to get into the high schools that offer the best possibilities of passing these exams. The way the students are valued and measured by their *hensachi* (deviation score) also contribute to the pressure the students' experience. *Hensachi* can be defined as 'a statistical formula to measure the test result of each student in a large sample with a view to predicting the probability of his or her passing the entrance examination of a particular school or university' (Sugimoto 2003, 121). There is enormous importance laid on these numerically calculated *hensachi* marks, as they are treated 'as though they were the sole indicator of the total value of the student' (Sugimoto 2003, 123).

The fierce competition has also led to a huge industry of commercial actors who make profit out of extra-school education by offering after-school tutoring, referred to as *juku schools*. As with the regular schools, *juku* schools are also expensive. In 2007, an average middle school student spent 26, 064 yen a month on tuition fees to *juku* schools (Ministry of Education 2008). 73, 7% of

¹⁴ Yuriko is first enrolled in the middle school section, but later advances to the high school section of Q School.

third year middle school students had at some point attended *juku* school. Thus, commercialization of the Japanese school system has led to a situation where the parents' willingness and possibility to invest in their children's education heavily affect their possibility to enter the university of their choice. This constant competitive situation has led to a downward spiral: to get into a good university, you must get into a good high school, to be assured a place in a good high school, you need to get into a good middle school, and in order to do that, the best option is to get into a good elementary school (Hendry 2003). This extreme situation has made it all the way down to kindergarten and pre-schools, with children as young as one year old competing for a place within the best institutions.¹⁵

Q School, which plays an important part in *Grotesque*, is in fact said to be based on a high school affiliated with Keio University,¹⁶ and being a part of the Keio school system. The pedagogical doctrine of Q school, *independence, self-reliance and self-respect (dokuritsu doppō to jison-shin)* bear close resemblance to an all-girls high school affiliated with Keio. Like the Q school system, the Keio school system is based on an *elevator system*, where one is as good as assured to be able to ascend to the next level in the system. This means that if you enter at elementary level you are almost guaranteed to be able to stay within the Keio system until graduating at the Keio University. Because of this guarantee, the students who are able to enter into a school with an elevator system are released from the stress of the competitive entrance exams, and therefore enjoy more freedom to explore and cultivate other abilities. Ironically, this promise of release from the competitive entrance exams can be said to increase competition to get into these kinds of elevator schools.

Ijime

The descriptions of the bullying and difficult situations that occur at the school where Watashi, Yuriko, Kazue and Mitsuru attend are brutal and extensive, and all the four girls experience bullying or exclusion in one way or another. Bullying, or *ijime*, is a big problem in Japanese

¹⁵ Interestingly, because it is difficult to test children at such a young age, some of these kindergartens chose to instead test the mothers (Hendry 2003).

¹⁶ Keio University is one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, considered one of the two top private universities alongside Waseda University.

schools, as it is generally accepted as a ‘necessary evil’ that children have to go through, and teachers often side with the bullies rather than the victim (Sugimoto 2003). Sugimoto describes *ijime* as ‘a collective act by a group of pupils to humiliate, disgrace, or torment a targeted pupil psychologically, verbally, or physically’ (Sugimoto 2003, 137).

Women’s Position in Japan

Japanese companies usually split female workers in a two-tier system, separating career from non-career workers (Sugimoto 2003). A small group of elite female employees, usually referred to as *sōgo shoku* (all-round employees), are treated much as their male colleagues, and are able to advance upwards in the system and get promoted. Both Mitsuru and Kazue can be said to belong to this group of elite workers.

The majority of the female workers, however, are placed in the category of *ippan shoku* (ordinary employees). They are exempted from working overtime, participating in after work drinking, and from having to transfer to a different location if requested, something which is common in Japanese companies. However, they will always stay at a low wage level, doing menial work, and are expected to quit work as soon as they get married. Japanese women usually retire from work when they get married, to become full time housewives (*sengyō-shufu*). In recent years it has become common for women to start working again after their children reach school age, but lacking experience compared to the male in their same age-group because of their extended break from the work force, they often end up in low-paid part time jobs.¹⁷ In the early 2000s, nearly eight out of ten part-time and casual workers were women (Sugimoto 2003). Watashi, although she never marries, can be said to belong to this group of women, working in an office doing menial work, with few challenges and possibilities of advancement.

Kazue, Yuriko and Watashi are all involved with the Japanese sex industry. The sex industry holds a strong position in Japan, and prostitution can be traced back as far as the eighth century, and the geisha is for many foreigners one of the symbols of Japan. Even though the Prostitution

¹⁷ It is important to note that in Japan the label ‘part-time’ covers not only limited working hours, but any kind of work on fixed-time basis paid by hourly rates. It is therefore possible to be referred to as a part-time worker even though one works the same amount of hours as a regular full-time worker.

Prevention Law was implemented in 1965, the prostitution industry is still thriving (Sugimoto 2003). So called ‘Love hotels’, where one is able to rent rooms by the hour without having to register one’s name or address, and where the employees are hidden behind a screen while one chooses a room, makes it easy for prostitutes to work under the radar. Kazue, Yuriko and Watashi all describe how they use love hotels when working as prostitutes. There are also a number of semi-legal establishments like hostess-clubs (usually referred to as *kabakura*) and Turkish baths (*hotetoru*), which offers sexual services under the table. Before she starts working as a street prostitute, Kazue works at a Turkish bath. Yuriko works in a number of different hostess-clubs, before she also end up as a street prostitute. Her descriptions show the wide range of clubs available, from the super exclusive ones, that are usually located in the Ginza area, that cater to wealthy business men and rich foreigners, to clubs specializing in ‘mature women’.

Hāfu

Watashi and her sister Yuriko are both *hāfu*, and this has a strong effect on how they are conceived and treated in Japanese society. *Hāfu* (Half) is a term used by Japanese to denote people being half Japanese and half Caucasian. In postwar Japan there has been serious discrimination against this group,¹⁸ but in recent years this discrimination has largely been replaced by admiration and fascination (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001). However, many *hāfu* complain of being objectified, and not being included into the Japanese society. As Murphy-Shigematsu explains:

The objectified nature of their experience...remains for many, as they are treated as “Others” – outside the boundaries of ordinary Japanese (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001, 215).

This complex attitude toward the *hāfu* can be said to stem from the ambiguous attitude Japan has towards the West. Several sociologist and Japan experts point to Japan having an inferiority complex toward the West (Itoh 2000; Sugimoto 2003). Mayumi Itoh points to the extensive use of *gairaigo* (foreign words adopted into the Japanese language) and the extensive import of

¹⁸ Especially because of the many orphan children that were born by Japanese women and American men serving at the many military bases throughout Japan (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001).

Western (and especially) American culture, as examples of how this inferiority and admiration manifest itself. He states that Japanese often chose to replace typical Japanese expressions, like *kissaten* (coffee shop) with the *gairaigo kōhii shoppu*, because it sounds more fashionable (Itoh 2000). Countering this is the notion of Japan as a racially and ethnically homogeneous society, and the belief that the spiritual, moral, and cultural spheres should not be contaminated by foreign influence (Sugimoto 2003). These two conflicting ways of thinking can be said to influence the way in which *hāfu* are treated in Japan. On one side, they are admired, and seen as exotic, because of their link to Western culture, but at the same time they are perceived as foreign, and outside the Japanese homogeneous society. Murphy-Shigematsu links this sense of ‘foreignness’ to appearance, suggesting the way Japanese perceive foreign is by looks, and by their idea of the ‘typically Japanese’. Thus, an American with a typically Japanese appearance, who only speaks English, would seem more Japanese than a Japanese citizen speaking fluent Japanese with a ‘foreign’ appearance (Murphy-Shigematsu 2001). This can explain why Yuriko and Watashi are treated so differently, even though they are both *hāfu*, as I will look closer into in Chapter 3.

Analytical Framework

Judith Butler

Judith Butler (1956-) is an American philosopher, who has greatly contributed in the field of feminism, queer theory and political philosophy, amongst many. Judith Butler's way of writing is interesting, but also in many ways unusual; she often seems more interested in asking questions than she is in answering them, and she writes using long and dense sentences that can often be difficult to understand. In a way, this forces you to not only read her texts, but also in a way interpret them. This makes you think, often in a new and radical way, and rethink everyday concepts in surprising and engaging directions. Butler is most known for her key concepts of *interpellation* and *gender performativity*. To understand why Butler's contributions to gender studies are so important, it is vital to understand how the debate of *nature versus nurture* has influenced feministic thoughts. It has been perhaps the most important and controversial topics in gender studies in over a century.

Nature versus Nurture

Is it our biological traits that define us, or is it the way we are brought up that define who we are and what we become? Or is it a combination of both genes and environment that makes us what we are? As I mentioned above, *nature versus nurture* is one of the most debated topics of feminism. One of the reasons for this is the theories surrounding *biological determinism*. This theory was widely accepted and popular in the late 19th and early 20th century, and describes how nature and science are seen as 'facts' dictating the natural differences between woman and men, often describing the male as a superior being compared to women (Moi 1999). To contest this theory feminist introduced the bipolar distinction between sex and gender, making it difficult to use bodily differences as a 'natural fact' to justify discrimination. 'Sex' became the term linked to science, biology and medicine, defining it as 'biological sexual difference', while gender was defined as 'the oppressive social norms brought to bear on these differences', and linked to the mind (Moi 1999). However, new feminist thinkers, like Judith Butler, are unhappy with this separation of sex and gender, and search of new ways for categorizing and defining the notions of gender and sex.

Interpellation and Gender Performativity

The environment and the power structures that surround us shape, and make us into subjects. What we believe to be natural and given is in fact norms and habits repeated and internalized until they seem like natural facts. In her preface from 1999, celebrating the 10 year anniversary of *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains of how gender performativity operates:

The anticipation conjures its object...an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates (Butler 1999, preface (1999), xv).

Transferred to the question of how gender is produced, Butler proposes that ‘what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures’ (Butler 1999, preface (1999), xv-xvi) In other words, we anticipate that we are in a certain way, and inadvertently act out this anticipation, believing this act to be ‘internal’ and ‘natural.’ In this way, we are in fact unconsciously producing our gender. Because we believe females (or males) to behave in a certain way, we unconsciously adjust ourselves to these presumptions. Then we take this behavior that is created by this anticipation as proof of this difference, and believe it to be natural and unavoidable. As I mentioned before, this is not a conscious process, and Butler claims that ‘There is no doer behind the deed’ e.g. there is no active agent involved (Butler 1999, 1993). The question here is how these anticipations are achieved; why do we produce ourselves in the way that we do? To explain how this performativity of gender is produced, Butler uses the concept of *interpellation*. According to Salih, ‘Butler uses ‘interpellation’ in a specifically theoretical sense to describe how subjects positions are conferred and assumed through the action of ‘hailing’’ (Butler and Salih 2004, 78). Butler draws her idea of interpellation from Louis Althusser’s essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1999)*. In this essay he uses an example of a policeman calling out ‘Hey, you there!’ to a man on the street. By this simple act, which Althusser describes as ‘hailing’, the policeman interpellates the man as a subject, and in the act of turning around the man takes up his position as a subject. Butler takes this notion a step further, claiming that we are not only hailed into being as subjects through interpellation, but also our gender is created by this process. Sex (in this case sexed identity) is not ‘natural’ or ‘given’, but something that is interpellated from birth (or even earlier with the use of ultrasound scan)

(Butler 1993). As soon as ‘It’s a boy!’ or ‘It’s a girl!’ is exclaimed the infant shifts from an ‘it’ to a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, and the unknown ‘it’ is hailed into its sex. In other words; we are not born as ‘male’ or ‘female’, but our bodies are interpreted as either a ‘he’ or a ‘she’, and so we become what we are named (In this sense, it could just as well have been the shape of the head, or the size of the feet that was the defining factor) (1993). But why would we comply with such a ‘hailing’? If gender is nothing but a sort of label, would we not see through it? As we will discover in the next section, the key to answering these questions lie, according to Butlers, in the power of repetition:

But the “girling” of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect (Butler 1993, introduction, xvii).

In this way the interpellation, or hailing, is repeated throughout life in a never-ending process. For example, boys and girls are born with a different body, but they are not born discerning blue as a boyish color and pink as a girlish color. But most people (at least in Western culture) would still hesitate at the thought of wrapping a present for a newborn baby boy in pink. In the same way, the fact that more boys play with toy-guns, while girls tend to play with dolls to a larger extent than boys, can be seen not as a consequence of a natural inborn disposition, but because their parents and society around them consciously or unconsciously guide and encourage this behavior. Thus, gender itself can be seen, not as a natural fact, but as something that is socially constructed, created by an endless line of recitations (Butler 1993, 1999). Some of the problems Kazue face can be seen as problems created because she has received confusing interpellation. One reason for this is that her father imposes on her expectations that would suit a boy child rather than a girl. Kazue can be said to lack the proper understanding of how society expects her to act (and react), something which complicates her situation. I will look closer into this interesting possibility in Chapter 3.

I mentioned above how our association to different colors as an example of how this interpellation functions in everyday life, and how pink is associated with girls. In her new book, *Rosa – den farliga färgen* (Pink – The Dangerous Color) (Ambjörnsson 2011), social anthropologist and gender researcher Fanny Ambjörnsson discusses the social stigma associated

with pink. According to her, the low status of pink, show us how the feminine and the female still is looked down on in modern society. Ambjörnson states that pink is associated with the feminine, and at the same time it is also associated with the childish, unserious, cute and the embarrassing, the soft and the frilly, thus making the link between the feminine and all these traits (2011). Ironically, under a hundred years ago pink was in fact the preferred color for dressing baby boys (2011). Pink was seen as a strong color, because of its closeness to red, which was associated with warriors and blood. In this way, a lot of the attitudes and associations we take for granted, and believe to be natural and unchangeable facts, are in reality socially constructed opinions, taught from childhood through norms and conventions, and repeated until they seem like unavoidable natural facts.

Injurious Speech Acts

What words wound? Is there a rule for what can be said to be an injurious speech act? We all have a certain notion of what we believe to be injurious words, and which words are seemingly harmless. However, these expectations do not always reflect reality. One example of this is how Yuriko is interpellated as ‘beautiful’ and ‘exotic’, but for her these usually positive speech act have a negative effect. In *On Linguistic vulnerability* (Butler 1997a) Butler show how speech acts can be a form of interpellation, and how injurious speech work through a series of repetitions and recitations. What wounds are not just the words themselves, or that singular speech act, but the continuous recitation, repetition and rearticulation that forms the victim of such interpellation in subjugation (Butler 1997a). Simply put; if you are called ‘ugly’ enough times, eventually you would start defining yourself as ugly.

Recognition and Subversion

As I stated above, one comes to ‘exist’ through interpellation. This interpellation, or hailing, can be seen as a form of recognition, because to be addressed is also at the same time to be recognized (Butler 1997a). Thus, recognition plays an important part in how we perceive ourselves and others. Not being recognized is a painful experience, and as Butler suggests, any recognition is better than none:

There is no way to protect against that primary vulnerability and susceptibility to the call of recognition that solicits existence...thus we sometimes cling to the terms that pain us because, at a minimum, they offer us some form of social and discursive existence (Butler 1997a, 26).

Subjects that are being recognized, as inferior, or being recognized in terms that are considered 'unlivable' or 'illegible', will necessarily try to escape from this hurtful interpellation, through subversion. All the four girls struggle with the way they are perceived and recognized within Japanese society and this greatly affect the way they are formed as subjects, as I will explain in Chapter 3.

Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 - 2002) is a French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher. During his very productive life, he published more than 30 books and 340 articles in a wide variety of fields (Swartz 1997), but he is perhaps most famous for his concepts of *different forms of capital* and *habitus and field*.

The Different Forms of Capital

In his introduction to the book *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984), Bourdieu states that there is ‘an economy of cultural goods.’ Bourdieu claims that all action is interested and reward-oriented (but tacit and prereflective rather than conscious and calculated).¹⁹ He introduces the concept of symbolic power, based on different forms of capital, which are not purely seen as symbolic, but actually function much in the same way as *economic capital*,²⁰ though they are not reducible to one another. The main forms of capital besides economic capital are *symbolic capital*, *social capital* and *cultural capital*. These different forms of capital can to a certain degree be transformed and changed into each other, but there are complex rules for how this can be done, as I will explain further in Chapter 3. The correlation between the different types of capital one possesses at any time is what define one’s social status within a culture (or a field). Cultural capital can be divided into three different states: *embodied*, *objectified* and *institutionalized*. Bourdieu defines these three different forms of cultural capital as:

.... the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because....it confers entirely

¹⁹ Though he is ambiguous about whether this kind of action also can be conscious to a certain degree (Bourdieu 1984).

²⁰ Economic capital can be defined as the accumulated wealth one possesses (money and property).

original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu 2011, 47).

In this way, *embodied cultural capital* can be seen as an internalized code or a form of cultural awareness that one usually receives through socialization in the family, but also in other fields like for example school. In his essay *A Sociological Theory of Art Perception*, Bourdieu uses art as an example to explain how this ‘internalized code’ or ‘cultural awareness’ is necessary in order to interpret any kind of cultural goods (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993). This code and the way it is socialized resembles Butler’s interpellation in that it is naturalized and internalized in such a way that it becomes considered as something natural:

Educated people are at home with scholarly culture. They are consequently...considering as natural (in other words, both as a matter of course and based on nature) a way of perceiving which is but one among other possible ways and which is acquired through education that may be diffuse or specific, conscious or unconscious, institutionalized or non-institutionalized (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993, 217).

Academic capital can be seen as a form of institutionalized cultural capital. *Social capital* consists of social networks and acquaintances while *symbolic capital* takes the form of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honor (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993). We shall see later how the distribution of these different kinds of capital can be said to influence how the Hirata-sisters, Kazue and Mitsuru act, and how the status they hold at school changes in correlation to the capital they ‘invest’ and transform.

Habitus and Field

Before turning to the analysis, there is a need to look into the framework which Bourdieu place’s his theory of capitals, namely that of *habitus and field*. In his attempt to unite two opposing points of view in the field of social science; namely that of the objective and the subjective, Bourdieu introduces the concepts of habitus and field. Bourdieu defines habitus as:

A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles

which generate and organize practices and representations than can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990, 53).

The Field can be defined as ‘a competitive system of social relations functioning according to its own specific logic or rules’ (Moi 1991), or as Bourdieu put it: ‘an area, a playing field, a field of objective relations among individuals or institutions competing for the same stakes’ (Bourdieu 1993). In simpler words, habitus can be explained as a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993), while the field is the concrete social situation, or social arena, like for instance ‘the educational field’, where this game takes place. The school that the four girls attend can be seen as one example of such a field. Toril Moi explains in her essay *Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture* that ‘[t]he aim is to rule the field, to become the instance which has the power to confer or withdraw *legitimacy* from other participants in the game’ (Moi 1991, 270). Even though they play within the same field, the strategies the different player use, are not always the same. I will explore this further in Chapter 3, where I analyze the vastly different strategies Watashi, Yuriko, Kazue and Mitsuru employ within various fields.

Chapter 3 - Harmful Interpellations

In this chapter, I will be using Bourdieu and Butler's theories to explore the intricate interpellation that takes place in the family fields, educational field and in the occupational fields described in *Grotesque*. Firstly, I will look into the family situation and the complex relationship between the two sisters Watashi and Yuriko, and how the way they are interpellated affects their relationship, as well as their relationship with others. I will also explore the interpellating power of words, and how and why some words are felt hurtful to certain people, while others are seemingly fine being hailed by the same speech act. I will also look into how these often unconscious labeling processes shapes the way we see and define both ourselves and others. Then I will take a closer look at 'the family' as a field. I will show how Kazue is affected by the way she is interpellated in the family, as well as how it complicates her position in the education field and later in the occupation field. In the next section I look into the educational field, and how all the four girls are affected by the interpellation they receives there, as well as the four girls position within this field. In *Survival*, I will examine the way the Yuriko, Watashi, Kazue and Mitsuru all can be said to employ different survival strategies, and explore what kind of strategies they use, and their reasons for needing such strategies to 'survive'. Lastly, I will briefly examine the way sex and prostitution is presented in *Grotesque*, and how sex can be seen as a weapon that can be used by women as well as against women.

The Complex Relationship of Yuriko and Watashi

*Those who do not 'do' their gender correctly are punished by society
(Butler 1999, 139-40).*

As I explained in Chapter 2, Butler uses interpellation and gender performativity to show how gender is socially constructed, and how people are affected by the society that surrounds them. Interpellation is rarely straightforward or simple. One is often being told when growing up what way to behave or how to do things correctly, and then shown through action a completely different approach that goes against what one has been told in the next instance. One example of this is how the four girls are being told at school that everything is possible as long as you work

hard, although at the same time the treatment Yuriko and Watashi receive at the school is vastly different. While Watashi works hard, and gets admitted to Q School, Yuriko is admitted into the middle school section of the same school even though she performs badly on her admittance test, because one professor takes a liking to her during the admittance interview. In this way, the double standards that permeate Japanese society affect how the girls are formed as subjects. This interpellation has a great impact on both Watashi and her sister Yuriko.

At first glance, Watashi seems narcissistic, self-absorbed and jealous, hating everything and everyone around her. She shows no apparent sorrow over the deaths of her sister Yuriko and her classmate Kazue. There also appears to be no resentment towards their alleged killer Zhang (at least not when it comes to his involvement in her sister and classmate's deaths), but instead that resentment and hatred is directed towards the victims themselves. However, this interpretation of Watashi is a simplified one that does not take into account her complicated and ambiguous feelings she has towards both Yuriko and Kazue. One can also question whether her feelings towards Zhang are as impartial and unbiased as she claims them to be. Behind all her malice and resentment Watashi can be interpreted as lonely, and desperate for attention and recognition. To understand Watashi and the complex and often self-contradicting way that she acts, one must look to the interpellation which she was subjected to during her childhood and the reasons behind her complicated relationship with her sister Yuriko.

Watashi grew up in something that can be described as a dysfunctional family. Watashi describes her mother as a submissive and weak woman, who is controlled their father (Kirino 2008, 6; 2006, 14, vol.1). The father is described as a strong authority within the family, and is both physically and verbally abusive:²¹

MT.

'My father used to hit me occasionally. Even if it started out as physical punishment, it would lead to an emotional explosion, so I had to be very careful,' Watashi (My translation).

²¹ The original TT makes reference to medical attention, which is not mentioned in the ST:

'He'd been hitting me since I was little. First he would beat me and then he'd unleash a torrent of verbal abuse. It was often severe enough to require medical attention,' Watashi (Kirino 2008, 23).

ST.

'Chichi wa watashi ga osonai goro kara, tokidoki naguru koto ga atta no desu. Saisho wa taibatsu demo, sore ga kanjō no bakuhatsu ni tsunagaru koto mo aru node yō-chūi deshita,' Watashi (Kirino 2006, 44, vol.1).

It is unclear whether he hits his wife and Yuriko as well. If Watashi is in fact singled out, this can be said to enforce her feeling of estrangement within the family. One reason for why she could be singled out is that Watashi is the only one in the family that confronts her father.²² As I mentioned above, the father is the strongest authority within the family. Watashi describes him as frugal and selfish, especially when it comes to money (Kirino 2008, 5; 2006, 12, vol.1). However, unlike Kazue's father, (who has distinctive authority both within the family, and as a respectable white collar worker in an elite firm, also can be said to hold an authoritative position within Japanese society), Watashi's father, because of his position as a foreigner (*gaijin*), is unable to establish himself as an authoritative force outside of the family. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the West is both a source of admiration in Japan, and at the same time seen as 'outside' of Japanese culture and society. Especially Yuriko is an object of this kind of attention, because of her distinctive Western look. She has a hard time fitting in, being treated with admiration, but also with curiosity and envy:²³

'At that point my fate was as good as sealed. I would live as a Japanese in that country thick with humidity. I would be pointed at by children shouting 'Gaijin! Gaijin!' And behind my back the girls would whisper 'Halves might be pretty now, but they show their age faster than we do.' And the high school boys would torment me,' Yuriko (Kirino 2008, 121; cf. 2006, 227, vol.1).

As I argued in Chapter 2, this treatment which Yuriko receives is closely linked with her appearance. This can be observed in the different treatment that the two sisters receive. Because

²² Yuriko explains their strained relationship with the fact that Watashi and her father share a similar personality (Kirino 2006, 226, vol.1).

²³ One can argue that she is in some ways treated more like an 'object' than a human being.

Watashi, who takes after her mother, has an appearance that is distinctly Japanese, she is not seen as exotic even though she is just as much *hāfu* as Yuriko is. She therefore has an easier time blending in, and assimilating into Japanese society. However, being Yuriko's sister, and a part of a family that is not fully Japanese complicates matters for Watashi. The Hirata-family receives attention because they represent something which is perceived as 'foreign' and 'exotic', but at the same time this position also makes them stand 'outside' of Japanese society. However, this attention is not evenly distributed. It is Yuriko and the father that receive the attention as 'foreign' and 'exotic', while Watashi and her mother can be said to function the link that ties the family to Japanese society and are compared with Yuriko and the father. Whenever she is near her sister, Watashi feels this comparison:²⁴

MT.

Adults passing by would always stroke Yuriko's cheek, exclaiming 'What a cute child!' And then they would turn their attention towards me, dressed in matching clothes, and their expression would suddenly become troubled, like they were thinking 'Who is this ugly child?' In our neighborhood and in primary school I became an object of attention, as the older sister who looked nothing like Yuriko (My translation).

ST.

Surechigau otonatachi wa, kanarazu Yuriko no hō o nadete ikimashita. 'nante kawaii ko deshō.' Soshite, osoroi no fuku o kita watashi ni chūi o utsushita totan, tomadotte shisen o oyogaseru no desu. 'Oya, kono minikui ko wa dare' to. Kinjo demo shōgakko demo, watashi wa chūmoku no mato deshita. Yuriko to zenzen niteinai onēsan toshite (Kirino 2006, 201, vol. 2).

Instead of being invisible beside her beautiful and Western-looking sister, the attention and curiosity that her sister invokes makes her distinctly visible; as someone lacking, and incomplete. To borrow Butlers words; in being denied recognition or recognized as inferior she is 'undone',

²⁴ This section is missing in the original translation.

and is in that sense forced to live an unlivable life:²⁵ ‘[I]f the schemes of recognition that are available to us are those that ”undo” the person by conferring recognition, or ”undo” the person by withholding recognition, then recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced’ (Butler 2004, 2).

The Incidents at the Rotenburo and the New Year Party

Auestad proposes that there are specially two incidents where this ambivalent tension in the relationship between the two sisters becomes clear (Auestad 2011). The first scene takes place at a *rotenburo* (a Japanese style outdoor bath), which Watashi visits with her family during a vacation. Watashi, who is a middle school student at the time, describes how her sister becomes the site of attention and curiosity:²⁶

“Look at that girl.”

“Why, she looks just like a doll.”

In the changing room, in the passage to the bath, and even from within the stream of the bath waters, the women whispered among themselves. Old women stared openly at Yuriko without the least bit of reservation, and young women made no attempt to hide the shock on their faces as they nudged one another with their elbows. Children, too, went out of their way to draw closer and stare with their mouths agape at the naked Yuriko. That’s always the way it was (Kirino 2008, 16; cf. 2006, 31, vol.1).

Yuriko, who is used to the attention, strip down without any hesitation, while Watashi, who is conscious of the comparing eyes of the spectators, looks down, and is reluctant to undress. Later, in the bath, the comparing eyes of the other women become more and more intrusive:

Mother called out, “Yuriko dear?”

“Mother?”

²⁵ Quote is borrowed from Auestad (2011, 250).

²⁶ Example is borrowed from Auestad (2011, 250).

Yuriko's clear voice rang out over the water, and the eyes that had been trained on her suddenly shifted to me and my mother. They returned to Yuriko once again and then pivoted back to me: eyes that were busy comparing, their curiosity overflowing. I knew it would not take long for them to determine which of us was the superior and which the inferior (Kirino 2008, 17; cf. 2006, 33-4, vol.1).

One can argue that Watashi is uncomfortable by the attention, because in the comparison with Yuriko she will always be seen as the inferior. In other words, as long as she is being compared to Yuriko, Watashi feels that she has no value. This can be seen in the way she reflects on the fact that she would have escaped this attention if she was alone.

Watashi's feelings escalate at the New Year party the same night. It takes place at the cabin belonging to Johnson, a handsome American businessman, and his beautiful and stylish Japanese wife Masami. While the Japanese women all squeeze into the tiny kitchen, the men gather in the living room by the fireplace. The only exception is Masami, who having worked as a flight attendant has adopted Western mannerism, and stands by her husband's side by the fireplace. While Watashi follows her mother to the kitchen, Yuriko boldly takes up a position by the fireplace. Watashi observes from the corner how her sister is adored and given attention by the Johnsons:

Yuriko latched on to Johnson, leaning against his knees as he perched in front of the fireplace. She was doing her best to play up to him. Masami's diamond ring sparkled as it caught the glow of the fire and shot flecks of light across Yuriko's cheeks (Kirino 2008, 20; cf. 2006, 38, vol.1).

This scene becomes the instigator in a change in Watashi's relationship toward her sister, as Watashi realizes that she would have been able to accept Yuriko if she was Johnson's and Masami's daughter. This can point to that it is precisely because Yuriko is in a relational position opposed to Watashi that she nurtures such strong hate for her. These two incidents release Watashi from her sense of obligation she felt to love her sister:

For so long I had been in a viselike grip of this sense of duty – a sense telling me that I was indeed morally obliged to love her. And then the spectacle I beheld in the bath that night and again at the party liberated me from the pressure I had been feeling (Kirino 2008, 22; cf. 2006, 43, vol.1)

What Words Wound? – The Interpellating Power of Words

When the two girls are sent home alone early from the party Watashi's feelings explode, and she confronts her sister in an desperate act of retribution and self-assurance:²⁷

“Who are you?” I blurted out. “Who the hell are you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You're a monster!”

That made Yuriko angry. “Well, you're a dog²⁸!”

“I hope you die!” (Kirino 2008, 21-2; cf. 2006, 41, vol.1).

As I mentioned above, Butler believes that words have an interpellative power, both to create and to destroy (Butler 1997a). In other words, it is precisely because we are 'hailed' into being through the interpellative power of language that words also have the power to harm us. However, it is not always easy to discern what can be seen as a hurtful speech act. For example, one would most likely agree to the claim that being called ugly would be considered hurtful, while being called beautiful would be seen as praise. But this is not always the case. As Butler explain, what is experienced as harmful and what is interpreted as positive, depend on the context in which the interpellation takes place:

To be hailed as a “woman” or “Jew” or “queer” or “black or “Chicana” may be heard or interpreted as an affirmation or an insult, depending on the context in which the hailing occurs (Butler 1997b).

²⁷ Example is borrowed from Auestad (2011, 250-1).

²⁸ The word *busu* (ugly) is used in the original.

Let's for example consider that for Yuriko, the label of 'beauty' is just as destructive as her sister's label of 'ugliness' is. In other words; for Yuriko 'Beauty' is experienced as a harmful speech act. Just like being called *busu* (the word 'dog' is used in the translation above) hurts her sister, being called beautiful feels like a verbal assault to Yuriko, precisely because it labels Yuriko as an object that can be admired and possessed, rather than a subject that can be loved. It's what sets her apart from other people. One of the problems with this kind of hurtful interpellation is that one believes it to be a part of oneself, which makes it difficult, if not impossible to escape (Butler 1997a).

Watashi, on the other hand, feel that Yuriko is the reason by which she becomes 'undone'. She is jealous of Yuriko because of the positive attention she receives, and this envy turns into hatred because her own position is undermined by Yuriko's apparent superiority. This results in Watashi having very ambiguous feelings for her sister; on one hand she is influenced by the interpellation she receives to admire her little sister, and on the other hand, she experiences that she is 'undone' by this interpellation as Yuriko's inferior. This results in her both feeling intense hatred, at the same time as she almost worships Yuriko as her superior.

Monsters

"Have you ever seen a monster?"

Kazue raised one eyebrow and looked at me with suspicion. "A monster?"

"Yeah, a person who's not human" (Kirino 2008, 164; cf. 2006, 309, vol.1).

Another injurious term that is frequently used in *Grotesque* is the word 'monster' (The terms *Kaibustu*, *bakemono* and *gurotesuku* can be said to be used almost interchangeably in the original Japanese version). Yuriko uses the word to describe herself and Kazue after they both end up as street prostitutes. Watashi also frequently uses the word, describing her sister as a 'monstrous beauty' (*kaibutsuteki na bibō*), and on several occasions describes both Mitsuru and Kazue as monsters. Kazue spend much time worrying if she has turned into a monster, like Yuriko said, and in the end she admits that she also is a 'monster' (Kirino 2008, 441; 2006, 396, vol.2). But what does 'monster' in this case mean? Watashi defines a monster as 'a person who's not human'

(Kirino 2008, 164). If we look to Butler's definition of what constitutes an 'unlivable' life we can see a clear connection. As mentioned before, Butler proposes that being recognized as less than human or not recognized as human at all lead to 'unviable' or even 'unlivable' lives (Butler 2004). In this sense 'monster' can be seen as a way of describing humans that don't fit into the social order of Japanese society. They become monsters because their position within society is an 'unlivable' one. In some way or the other all the main characters in *Grotesque* are described as 'monsters' that refuse to subordinate themselves to Japanese society's rules, conventions and norms.

Abandonment

Watashi's relationship with her mother is also strained because of Watashi's feelings of inferiority towards her sister. She feels that her mother takes Yuriko's side, and describes her as a slave who is worshipping Yuriko because of her beauty (Kirino 2008, 18; 2006, 35, vol.1). She explains; 'Yuriko's existence had forced my mother and me to take up enemy positions' (Kirino 2008, 20; cf. 2006, 39, vol.1). Because of this, Watashi feels that her mother abandoned her. This can be seen in her reaction when she hears of her mother's suicide. Watashi states that she felt nothing; to her, her mother died a long time ago (Kirino 2008, 64; 2006, 127, vol.1). When her father's business goes under, he decides to move back to Switzerland, taking Yuriko and her mother with him, while Watashi stays behind, and starts living with her grandfather.

Yuriko, on the other side, is jealous of her sister, because Watashi looks like their mother, while she herself looks nothing like anybody in her family. This shows how looks play an important part for the two sisters in their struggle to define themselves and create a place for themselves within the family. Watashi is obsessed with looks, and describes and examines the appearance of everybody she meets. Thus, one can claim that their feeling of being recognized is closely linked with appearance. One can see this in the way Yuriko explains that she is the one abandoned by their mother, and not her sister. She uses her lack of resemblance with her mother as a reason for this abandonment:

MT.

My sister was not abandoned.²⁹ I was the child that was abandoned by mother. I was the child that didn't resemble anybody and whose existence itself was resented. The only ones who wanted me were men. I discovered what it meant to exist only through this experience of being wanted by men. Because of this I will desire men for all eternity (My translation).

ST.

Ane wa suterareteinai. Watashi koso ga haha ni suterareta kodomo datta. Dare ni mo niteinakute, sonzai jitai o utomareta kodomo. Watashi o motomeru no wa otokotachi dake da. Otoko ni hossareru koto ni yotte, hajimete sonzai suru imi o moteta watashi. Dakara, watashi wa eien otoko o hossuru (Kirino 2006, 220, vol. 1).

Another example of the importance of outward appearance is the way in which the two sisters argue and torment each other. They both claimed to have been bullied by the other, and appearance seems to be the main arguing point, using appearance to claim that the other does not belong in the family:

'Ever since we were children, Yuriko would pick on me because we looked so little alike....Yuriko was ten times more spiteful and vicious than I ever was. She had absolutely no qualms about boring straight through my heart. "I wonder where your daddy is, huh?" she would chide me....This was always her ultimate weapon,' Watashi (Kirino 2008, 184; cf. 2006, 347, vol.1).

Watashi makes up elaborate stories about Yuriko being an abandoned child, who was taken in by Watashi's family, thus enforcing her own position within the family. Watashi also fantasizes about her being the one not belonging in the family, that her father is a different one. She makes

²⁹ The original translation 'My sister did not think anything of the sort.' (Kirino 2008, 117) gives a slightly different connotation from the original, as it proposes that Watashi does not believe herself to be abandoned, instead of stating that it is Yuriko who is certain that her sister was not abandoned.

up stories about her ‘real’ father (Whom she insists must be a different foreigner, as she is unable to give up her position as *hāfu*, which she is secretly proud of), who loves and misses her, but had to leave her with the Hirata family because of unavoidable circumstances (Kirino 2006, 260-2, vol.1).³⁰ In this way, both sisters struggle with the feeling of not belonging, and not being recognized within their own family.

Watashi’s Ambiguous Sexuality

Her ambiguous sexuality is another thing that can be said to be Watashi trying to escape the harmful interpellations she is subjected to. She frequently stresses that she is uninterested in men, and even when she thinks of how her children with a certain person would look, she is carefully avoiding even thinking about the sexual act it would involve. She also confesses that she loves Mitsuru in high school, and Yuriko suggests that Watashi might be lesbian (Kirino 2008, 125; 2006, 234, vol.1). This careful avoidance of heterosexual love might be a (conscious or unconscious) choice in order to avoid being compared with her sister, as well as to fortify her position as the absolute opposite of Yuriko. She can be said to create an idealization of ‘the virgin and the lesbian’ because it lies completely outside the habitus that her sister occupies, thus identifying herself as the opposite of her sister and in this way escaping comparison. As Watashi puts it herself:

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 2008, 460; cf. 2006, 425, vol.2).

Withdrawing from the game, Watashi, in an act of subversion, tries to change the way in which she is interpellated by refusing to enter into the game, and resignifying herself outside the ‘heterosexual matrix’. In this sense, Watashi being a lesbian and her hating men, although it can be said to have a common cause, are not related. Her lesbianism, if she indeed is lesbian, is not a cause of her hatred of men. As Butler proposes, it is a common misconception that ‘lesbianism is nothing but the displacement and appropriation of men, and so fundamentally a matter of hating men – misandry’ (Butler 1993, 87).

³⁰ This story is missing in the English translation.

Watashi herself later denies the fact that she is lesbian, and describes her love for Mitsuru as a feeling of admiration:

MT.

That said, I'm not a lesbian. Such indecency is impossible for me. It is true that I had a crush on Mitsuru in high school, but it was more a feeling of respect, a faint feeling that soon disappeared. It was only because I felt close to her and admired her when I noticed her ability to use her brain as a weapon. However, towards the end of the first year in high school, Mitsuru fell in love with the science teacher Kijima. In truth, even before that, because of a certain event, Mitsuru and I had a falling out (My translation).

ST.

Demo, watashi wa dōsei-aisha de wa arimasen. Sonna kegarawashii koto wa zettai ni arimasen. Tashika ni, kōkō-jidai no watashi wa Mitsuru o sukoshi suki ni narimashita ga, sonkei ni chikai mono deshita shi, sugu ni kiete nakunaru yō na awai kanjō deshita. Mitsuru ga zunō toiu buki o migaite iru koto ni kitsuita watashi ga, katte ni rentai-kan o tsunorase, tashō akogare o motte ita dake na no desu. Nazenara, kō-ichi no kōhan, Mitsuru wa seibutsu-kyōshi no Kijima o suki ni natte shimai mashita shi, jitsu wa sono mae ni mo aru dekogoto ga atte, watashi to Mitsuru to wa nakatagai o shite shimatta kara na no desu (Kirino 2006, 363, vol. 1).

However, this refusal can also be seen as an act of denial, because she is feeling betrayed and abandoned by Mitsuru. The use of ‘*nazenara*’, which can be translated roughly as ‘the reason why...’, before Watashi explains that Mitsuru fell in love with Kijima, and that she and Mitsuru had a falling out, suggests that she believes this to be the cause of her love being short-lived. Watashi denying being lesbian can also reflect the typical Japanese view of lesbianism as a passing phase that ‘must be seen as temporary, so that when a woman marries, her lesbian tendencies are resolved’ (Seaman 2004, 102).

The Objectified Yuriko

After her mother commits suicide, Yuriko decides to move back to Japan. Her sister refuses her to come live with her and their grandfather. With nowhere else to go, Yuriko ends up living with Johnson and his wife Masami, who's only connection to Yuriko is that the two families owned cabins near each other before they moved to Switzerland. Yuriko herself describes this relationship as being based on Johnson desiring her. She describes how Johnson treats her as an object and a 'toy' (*gangu*), and is only interested in Yuriko as a sexual partner (Kirino 2008, 130; 2006, 253, vol.1). Yuriko compares this relationship to prostitution, and compares the school tuition to 'compensation money' (2008, 128; 2006, 238, vol.1). Her relationship with Masami is also difficult. Rather than caring for Yuriko, she treats her almost like a doll, and dresses her up in outlandish outfits in order to show her off (2008, 130; 2006, 254, vol.1). An example of this is that Masami neglects to buy Yuriko underwear, because it is not visible. The only thing that matters to Masami is that the outer appearance is perfect, so she spends money and effort in pretty clothes and making extravagant lunches for Yuriko, but without really caring what Yuriko wants or thinks. Being used to being treated as an object, Yuriko is unable to stand up for herself. There seems to be an implicit assumption that Yuriko is not smart throughout the novel, not only by Watashi, but also by Kazue, Yuriko's classmates, Professor Kijima and Johnson, to mention some. They seem to draw the conclusion that because she is beautiful, she must have a fault. It would be unforgivable if she was smart as well:

"Maybe Yuriko's retarded or something"

Nakanishi gave Mokku a shove. "Mokku, you're going too far!"

"But she's so pretty – it wouldn't be fair if she was smart to!" (Kirino 2008, 135; cf. 2006, 262, vol.1).

However, from her memoir, one does not get the feeling of a stupid, thoughtless young girl, but rather a reflected and deep thinking person. Watashi also admits this at the very end of *Grotesque*, even though she has been stressing the opposite throughout the novel: 'Even I knew

that Yuriko actually was a strong and intelligent³¹ woman' ('Yuriko ga hontō wa tsuyokute kashikoi onna de atta no wa, watashi date wakatte imashita' (*Kirino 2006, 425, vol.2*)). One can argue that Yuriko resigns herself to 'her place', and plays the 'stupid and innocent beauty' in order to satisfy the expectations of her surroundings. In this way her beauty is connected through harmful interpellation not only with her being treated as an object, but also contributes to her being interpellated as 'stupid'.

³¹ *Kashikoi* has both negative and positive connotations, so 'cunning' might also be an appropriate translation. The original translation states: 'Beneath it all, Yuriko was really a strong and cunning woman. This much became obvious to me' (*Kirino 2008, 461*).

The Family Field – Kazue and the Importance of Hierarchical Ranking

The family always tends to function as a field, with its physical, economic and, above all, symbolic power relations (Bourdieu 1996, 22).

If one look at the definition of *field* that I presented in Chapter 2, it is perhaps difficult to view the family as ‘an area, a playing field, a field of objective relations among individuals or institutions competing for the same stakes’ (Bourdieu 1993). Can one really claim that family is a field where individuals compete? However, if we look at Kazue’s family situation, where she describes a family strictly controlled by hierarchical rules, this definition seems less far-fetched. In Japanese society, hierarchical order plays a big part of everyday life (Hendry 2003). The way one act and behavior is strictly ruled by the idea that one party will always be inferior and the other superior, often decided by age and/or seniority. This hierarchical system is worked into the language in such way that it is impossible to communicate without making an assumption on how that person is ranked according to oneself in the hierarchical ranking (Hendry 2003). This hierarchical thinking is also present within the family system, as can be seen by the way one usually address each other within a family: ‘inferior members address superior ones with a term of relationship, while superior ones may use personal names’ (Hendry 2003, 103). Kazue’s description of her family and the hierarchical system ruling it is telling of the problematic condition of her family situation:

Because in our house there is an order to things. There’s that test you do with a pet dog, right? You line up all the members of the family and release the dog to see who he goes to first. And the first one is the boss. It’s like that. Everyone automatically knows the order of things---who has the most prestige and authority, I mean. And you accede to that order accordingly. No one needs to explain it, but everyone obeys it. 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 2008, 85; cf. 2006, 167, vol.1).

Kazue has a close relationship with her father. She both admires and respects him greatly, and Watashi describes how Kazue is almost 'brainwashed' by her father. On the other hand, Kazue has a difficult relationship with her mother, and frequently describes how she is unable to respect her. She also expresses contempt and deep resentment towards her mother. Ironically, the hierarchical ranking system in her family can be said to be one of the reasons why Kazue is unable to respect her mother. When Kazue passed her mother in rank, it became impossible for her mother to function as a role model for Kazue, because she no longer held a superior position. This makes her father, who is the only one above her in the hierarchy, the only available role model for Kazue in her family.

Kazue observes that her mother actually feels superior to her husband because she is from a good family, and born in Tokyo, while he originates from a poor family from the countryside. In order to circumvent this Kazue's father bases the family hierarchy solely on academic achievement. As a Tokyo University Graduate³² he is then assured to be seen as a superior compared to the mother. In this way, he succeeds in placing himself at the top, and establishes himself as the superior authority of the family. To use Bourdieu's terms; Kazue's father establishes academic capital as the only valid currency in which the hierarchical rank is decided, and uses this in order to effectively undermine the mother's authority:

"Kazue is 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 2008, 359; cf. 2006, 255, vol.2).

³² Tokyo University is generally perceived as the most prestigious university in Japan.

In this way, Kazue is put in a position where she is forced to either accept her father's system, and look down on her mother, or reject it, and thus lose her place in the hierarchical ranking as well as her father's approval. Having a dominant father as the sole role model, and being raised believing in academic capital as the ultimate decider in worth, affects Kazue's way of viewing the world deeply. Kazue relates that her father expresses to her his disappointment because she is not born male:

He doted on me. He, more than anyone else, was able to discern my real strengths – and as a consequence was distraught that I had been born female (Kirino 2008, 359; cf. 2006, 254-5, vol.2).

One can perhaps argue that Kazue's father is compensating for his lack of a male successor in the way that he is raising his daughters, and Kazue in particular. It can be said that Kazue is in some ways interpellated with male values. At the same time as she is interpellated believe in typically male values as superior, she is also taught to look down on typical female values:

“Kazue, I think you should get a job with a first-class company. You'll be able to meet an intelligent man, someone who will stimulate you intellectually. There's no need for you to marry, though. You could just stay on in this house. You're bright enough to outdo any man out there,”
Kazue's father (Kirino 2008, 360; cf. 2006, 255, vol.2).

This can be seen in the way Kazue takes responsibility when her father suddenly dies of a heart attack when she is still a university student. Instead of depending on her mother, whom she views as inferior, Kazue takes responsibility, and soon becomes the breadwinner in the family (Kirino 2008, 362; 2006, 259, vol.2). Later, Kazue compares her life with that of a normal middle-aged man supporting his family (Kirino 2008, 370; 2006, 275, vol.2). However, even though she takes over her father's role in the family, she does not receive the same respect as he did within the family and society. She is unable to replace her father as the authority figure in the family, and is overlooked and underrated at the company she works for. One can claim that the reason for this is that she is female. Even though Kazue is stuck in her beliefs of typically female values as subordinate to male, she cannot escape the fact that she is female, and consequently will be judged according to female values. However, Kazue is unable to see this double standard. One

consequence of this is that Kazue is shocked when she is not treated and valued in the same way as her male colleagues. Instead she experiences being overlooked, and being reproached for her lack of femininity. One example of this is the way Kazue is ostracized at her workplace because she fails to act feminine and humble, refusing to pour tea and neglecting her appearance. I will look closer into the way this interpellation affects Kazue, and the way it complicates her position within the educational and occupational fields in the following chapters.

The Power Structures in the School

Confused, they began to suspect that the rules they had followed up to the present was no longer valid. They would have to learn a whole new set (Kirino 2008, 46; cf. 2006, 91-2, vol.1).

Just like the family field, the Q School system, where the four main narrators attend, can be seen as a separate cultural field, with its own rules, norms and social relations. What makes the educational field different is that it is a field where different ‘cultures’ or habitus interact (and clash), which leads to confusing interpellation, something that complicates the situation for the four girls further. As I mentioned before, within any social field there are rules and regulations that are composed of a set of complicated codes for what is acceptable within a field. It is important to note that official rules and regulations are only a part of these rules and norms. Official policy, and what is actually done and approved of, also from those who make the official rules, can often be two different things. One example of this is Watashi’s account of the matriculation ceremony at Q School, where she explains how the length of the skirts was enough to separate the students entering at high school level and the students continuing from a lower level:

Those of us who were entering for the first time – each and every one of us- having successfully passed the entrance exams, had skirts that fell just to the center of our knees, in exact accordance with official school regulations. However, the half who had been in the system since elementary or middle school had skirts that rode high up their tights (Kirino 2008, 44; cf. 2006, 89-90, vol.1).

In this case the official school regulations are being overruled by unwritten norms, and are obviously approved of by the people in charge of upholding the school regulations, since it’s not regulated or discouraged by the teachers. In this way one is silently shown how one should act in order to fit in and be a proper member in the field in question. Breaking with the ‘code’ can have serious repercussions, and if one oversteps a boundary, one is quickly put in one’s proper place

through ridicule, exclusion and bullying. However, sometimes it is impossible to comply with the code, because one lacks the necessary resources, or capital, as Bourdieu would put it, or lack the necessary knowledge of these unspoken rules and norms (Bourdieu 1984). One reason for this is that it is not always obvious which rules apply to which group, and who is a member and who is not. As Moi notes: ‘To the extent that different agents have different social backgrounds (they may come from different geographical regions, be of a different class, gender, or race and so on), their habitus cannot be identical’ (Moi 1999, 272).

In Q School, there are several different kinds of habitus (or group of habitus) that compete with each other. The composition of these groups largely coincide with time of entry, where the students that have newly entered the school are labeled as ‘outsiders’ (*gaibusei*), while those who were continuing from within the school system are labeled ‘insiders’ (*naibusei*).³³ This labeling is used not only to set the two groups apart, but also mark a clear hierarchical line, where the insiders are perceived as far superior compared to the outsiders. This notion of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ largely coincides with Bourdieu’s belief that in every social structure there exists a fundamental opposition between the dominant and the dominated (Bourdieu 1984, 469). Here, the dominant consciously or unconsciously, dictates what is defined as normal. In her sharp perceptions about this ‘clash of cultures’ (or habitus), Watashi describes how this difference was felt for the new girls entering the school:

The difference was not something that would softly fade away with the passage of time. There is no other way to explain it but to say that we new girls lacked what the other girls possessed seemingly by birth: beauty and affluence...In a word, the incoming students were uncool (Kirino 2008, 46; cf. 2006, 90-1, vol.1).

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, this difference between the new girls and the insiders that are ‘seemingly by birth’, can be said to be a result of the elevator school system. The outsiders, spending all their time and effort in order to pass the difficult entrance examinations, have little or no possibility to cultivate themselves. The insiders, however, are already secured a place

³³ One interesting aspect to note is Mitsuru’s statement about the middle school students being labeled as ‘outsiders’ before the student entering at high school level arrived and took over the label and social position as ‘outsiders.’

within the system. They are free from the stress of harsh entrance tests, and can therefore afford to concentrate on cultivating other abilities, like for example fashion, and broadening their social network, thus accumulating social capital. The insiders are further divided into ‘the inner circle’ (which mostly consists of students entering from elementary school) and ‘the orbiters’ (mostly students entering from middle school). ‘The inner circle’ is described as ‘the real elite’, a position unreachable for anyone not born into it. It is this inner circle that dictates and dominates the value system of the school. They are set apart by their value system, or habitus, which places importance on social and economic capital, rather than academical achievements:

‘Those who began attending this school from the elementary level are the true-blue princesses, the daughters of fathers that own giant cartels. They’ll never have to work a day in their lives. In fact, to have a job would be a source of great embarrassment,’ Mitsuru (Kirino 2008, 54; cf. 2006, 106, vol.1).

If getting a job is not a goal for the insiders, then what can be said to be their motivation within the educational field? What is it that they hope to achieve? One possible motivation is the search for a marriage partner. Sugimoto states that marriage in Japan are often class-dependent, and that people often find their partners with same occupational or educational background (Sugimoto 2003). She points to the fact that about 80 percent of female graduates from the University of Tokyo are married to graduates of the University of Tokyo (Sugimoto 2003, 171). This habitus is distinctly female in that it recognizes female values, as marrying well and appearance over academical achievements. Thus, the main goal of an education is to become a ‘good wife’ and find a suitable marriage partner, rather than procuring a good job. In this way, the situation can be said to be complicated further by them being female. This ambiguous struggle between old traditional values, where having to work is an embarrassment and education is seen as way of cultivating oneself, and new values, where education is important in order to succeed in the labor market, is distinctively female, as expectations towards males will always be the latter.

The Four Girls Position within the Educational Field

If one comes into discursive life through being called or hailed in injurious terms, how might one occupy the interpellation by which one is already occupied to direct the possibilities of resignification against the act of violence? (Butler 1993, 123).

In other words, *subversion* is the way in which one tries to escape a harmful or ‘violent’ interpellation in order to resignify the way in which one is recognized. In this section I will deal with Watashi, her sister Yuriko, Kazue and Mitsuru’s position within the educational field, and how they try to subvert the harmful interpellation they are subjected to by shifting the capital they possess to their advantage. Thus, the position they hold within the field is not fixed, but can rather be described as an ever changing process, as the different players use different strategies in order to change and subvert their position.

Mitsuru

‘For a full year not a single soul said one word to me. The only ones who talked to me were the teachers and the women who worked in the school store. That’s all. Even the other kids who had entered that year bullied me. [That’s because if they bullied another outsider, they could become insiders],³⁴ Mitsuru (Kirino 2008, 73; cf. 2006, 145, vol.1).

While in middle school Mitsuru was a victim of severe bullying (*ijime*), something that had a deep impact on her, and influenced her to use any means necessary in order to fit in. In an (successful) effort to change her social position, she endeavored to shift her capital to her advantage. Her mother is wealthy, but as her wealth accumulated from a chain of hostess clubs, she lacks respectability. In fact it is the mother who is the source of Mitsuru being bullied,

³⁴ The original translation ‘They thought bullying an outsider might make them an insider’, suggests that this is something the outsiders thought, while the original Japanese version, ‘dōshite ka-tte ieba, gaibusei o ijimeru ni yotte, naibusei ni dōka dekiru kara da’ (Kirino 2006, 145, vol.1) states that this is not only something they believe, but a fact.

Mitsuru being punished for her mother's (alleged) lack of taste and taste.³⁵ To change her position as a target of this *ijime*, she uses academic capital³⁶ in order to ingratiate herself with the insiders that instigated the bullying. She starts lending out her class notes, and this works to strengthen her social position, and soon the bullying stops. However, even as she is ingraining herself, she uses the notes as form of silent revenge or protest, giving them faulty copies instead of her own notes. As well as functioning as retribution, keeping her real notes to herself also assures her continued position as number one in the academic ranking. Mitsuru also uses her (or rather her mother's) economic capital to rent an apartment in the 'right part' of town, pretending to own it (Kirino 2008, 56; 2006, 109, vol.1), thus changing economic capital into cultural capital. By the time Watashi first meet Mitsuru (during first year of high school), Mitsuru has successfully changed her position, being first in her year in the academic ranking, and have accumulated substantial social capital. She has gone from being the bullied loner, to being an insider.³⁷ In this way Mitsuru's understanding of 'the internalized set of tactic rules' (Moi 1999), makes it possible for her to transform her position within the educational field (the Q school system).

Kazue

Kazue's effort can be seen as a faulty version of what Mitsuru is doing. As Mitsuru, she is trying to use her economic and academic capital in order to fit in, but she ultimately fails. Kazue seems to lack Mitsuru's understanding of the unwritten rules and how they operate, and therefore she is unable to achieve results in the same way as Mitsuru. As most of the other girls who enter Q School system from high school, she tries to fit in by appropriating the fashion of the insiders by shortening her skirt and wearing knee socks. Kazue also sew logos on her socks to make them look like brand socks. She explains to Watashi that it is not because she is unable to buy real brand socks, but because she finds the way the girls in school value brands is silly (Kirino 2006, 99, vol. 1). In this way, this can be seen as a protest, in the same way as Mitsuru takes revenge on

³⁵ For a closer look at the reasons behind Mitsuru's bullying, see Chapter 5.

³⁶ I use the expression 'academic capital' here in a broader sense than perhaps Bourdieu would approve, denoting not only academic credentials, but also academic knowledge.

³⁷ Though she is not a member of the inner circle, because this is, as I mentioned above, a position that requires certain social and cultural capital that is unachievable through just effort.

the system by giving flawed notes to the insiders. However, while Mitsuru is careful not to let her real feelings concerning her dissatisfaction with the system be known, Kazue let her defiance show, and often openly protest to the values that does not reconcile with her own. Unable to agree with the value system that dominates the school, Kazue tries to use her own logic in order to change her position. Because of the way she was raised, Kazue believes that academic capital is the most important capital, the one that defines the hierarchical ranking. Because of this, she sees the use of any other capital, like social capital, as unfair and unjust, and tries to protest to the treatment she receives by the insiders. Another incident that shows how Kazue is unable to understand how the double standard at Q School works, is when she tries to join a club.³⁸

Kazue first tries to join the cheerleading club, not realizing that it is impossible because she lack the necessary social capital, as this club is exclusively for insiders. The club members reject Kazue by saying she failed the interview, and when Kazue protest and tell them that she has not been to any interview, they continue to make up new excuses (Kirino 2006, 121, vol.1).³⁹ This is one example of how the insiders dominate the outsiders, and make sure that everybody follows the unwritten rules for what is perceived as appropriate behavior. Unable to stand what she sees as unfair treatment, she tries to protest during home room, but also this attempt is thwarted by the insiders, and instead leads to an escalation of the bullying towards her. In the end she is able to join the ice skating club using economic capital, because they let anybody enter in order to cover their extravagant expenses. However, she is not treated as a proper member, but is instead being hazed and ridiculed by the other club members, and in the end she is only allowed to stay on because she is willing to lend her notes to the other club members. Mitsuru proposes that it is exactly the fact that Kazue is so desperate and tries so hard, that leads to her ultimate failure:

Kazue put all her energy into trying to fit in with the others. She came from a family that had some money. She was smart...But it was this very determination that marked her as a target for bullying. The harder she tried the worse it was (Kirino 2008, 341; cf. 2006, 226, vol.2).

³⁸ Extracurricular activities, or ‘clubs’ are an important part of Japanese schools, and students are often expected to join at least one club during their time at school.

³⁹ Missing in the original translation.

Watashi

Watashi also tries to fit in the best she can, but lacking symbolic, economic and academic capital, she is unable to fit into the value system of the insiders. Watashi soon sees the double standards that dominate Q School, and how the unwritten rules and norms prevent her from ever being accepted as an insider. She understands that she is unable to fit in no matter how hard she works, because she fundamentally lacks everything that the insiders perceive as important; her family situation, the place she lives, her limited funds and her being nothing more than an average student makes it impossible for Watashi to even compete. In short; she has no capital at all, therefore she is unable to change her position. Realizing this, Watashi soon gives up, and instead tries to create a new space for herself within the existing social field. She describes herself as a spectator on the sidelines. Convincing herself that she is just an observer, and has no interest in participating and getting involved, is one way of protecting herself from the hurtful experience of being so completely rejected. Watashi uses this ‘disinterest’ as an excuse for why she is unable to succeed. For example she states that the reason she is bad at rhythm gymnastics because she does not practice at home, the reason she does not get good grades is because she does not study and the reason she is not dating boys, is because she has no interest. As Mitsuru confronts Watashi at the end of the book, this being just a pretense because of her inability to compete with the other girls at school, becomes clear:

*You pretended not to have any interest in fashion or boys or studying.
And you decided you'd manage to endure your time at Q High School for
Young Women by arming yourself with malice (Kirino 2008, 341; cf.
2006, 225-6, vol.2).*

One can perhaps argue that, in the same way as she tries to avoid harmful interpellation by avoiding to compete with her sister Yuriko, Watashi tries to step away from the ‘playing field’ in order to avoid the hurtful interpellation at school. However, it is not a simple matter to withdraw from the game, because by entering the field, one automatically assumes a position as a player. As Mitsuru makes clear her confrontation with Watashi, she was not always as successful in her attempt to stay ‘on the sidelines’ as she claims:

Both you and Kazue were amazed, when you entered high school, by the disparity between yourselves and the other girls there. How you wished to narrow the gap a bit. Fit in more. So first you started wearing knee socks like the other girls. Did you forget? ...but you finally just gave up because you did not have the money to compete (Kirino 2008, 341; cf. 2006, 225, vol.2).

Yuriko

At first glance Yuriko may seem to be the luckiest of the four, as her beauty assures her a position as an ‘insider’ despite her being a newcomer, and even make it possible for her to enter the inner circle. As Mitsuru states to Watashi about the strict rules of hierarchy that dominates Q school, the only possibility to enter the inner circle from outside is if ‘you’re beautiful beyond compare’ (Kirino 2008, 55). This reflects the importance of looks in the female field, and how beauty can be seen as the most important asset for women, something that is even able to interpose on the strictly hierarchical system of Q school. However, Yuriko’s position in the inner circle is tedious. Her social capital is gained through her beauty, and position as a *hāfu* returning from abroad, but lacking in family connections, she is not truly accepted. Even though she is brought into the inner circle, she is not treated as a real member, but rather that of a mascot and a symbol, there to symbolize and represent the ‘beauty’ of the insiders:

“It won’t take long to learn. Besides, you’ll be the main attraction. The students in the high school and university will be thrilled.”

[They will be thrilled. The process of turning me into a plaything has already started]⁴⁰

“I don’t have any confidence.”

Nakanishi ignored me and lifted my uniform skirt to get a look at my legs.

“Your legs are long and pretty. You really are a perfect beauty. We have to show you off!” (Kirino 2008, 135; cf. 2006, 262, vol.1).

⁴⁰ Missing from the original translation: ‘yorokobu. Sude ni gangu-ka ga hajimatte ita’ (Kirino 2006, 262, vol. 1).

She has a certain degree of economic capital through the Johnson family, whom she is living with the entire time she goes to Q school, but access to this money is controlled by Masami (the family wife), and so her real access to economic capital is fairly limited. As I mentioned above, Masami spends this money lavishly, but only on what she sees as important, therefore Yuriko has no real say in how this money is used. To rectify this, Yuriko starts engaging in *enjō kōsai*,⁴¹ and later begins working as a prostitute within the school with her classmate Kijima, who functions as her pimp, introducing her to possible customers. In this way Yuriko uses her beauty as a form of capital, and employ it in order to survive within the field. Her extraordinary beauty sets her apart, and makes it impossible for the insiders to ignore her presence. However, her family situation makes her position difficult, as this example shows:

When people first met me, they'd come up with all kinds of fantasies on my behalf. They'd imagine that I lived some kind of Barbie-doll life in a dream house with a gorgeous daddy, a pretty mama, and a good-looking older brother and gorgeous older sister protecting me. But then, when they actually saw my older sister...their little fantasy about me disintegrated. They'd start to despise me – so I became everyone's little plaything (Kirino 2008, 134; cf. 2006, 260-1, vol.1).

Because of her special situation, the other students are confused and unable to place Yuriko within the framework of the social field; Yuriko is not one of the 'outsiders', but she is still an outsider who does not fit into any of the usual categories. As I showed above, the existence of her sister at the school (which assures that her family situation is known) makes it impossible for her to become a real part of the insiders, and her beauty assures that she can never become one of the outsiders.

The Relationship between Watashi and Kazue

Watashi and Kazue have a relationship that occupies the close borderline between friends and enemies. Watashi play the role of both confidant and bully, while Kazue identify with Watashi as

⁴¹ Enjō-kōsai (援助交際) can be translated as 'compensated dating,' a Japanese phenomenon where young girls, usually high school students, date and/or exchange sexual favors with older men for money.

a fellow outsider, but at the same time she looks down on her. She feels that Watashi is inferior, because of her lack of economic and most importantly academic capital. They both use each other in order to strengthen their own positions within different fields. While Watashi bullying Kazue can be seen as an attempt to fit in at school, Kazue uses Watashi in her own way. One example of this is an incident when Kazue try to use Watashi in order to befriend Mitsuru, in an attempt to increase her own position within her family and impress her father. Kazue invites Watashi to her house under the pretense that it's her birthday, and asks Watashi if she can invite Mitsuru as well. However, when Watashi replies that Mitsuru has already left, Kazue's attitude changes, and she even tries to retract her invitation. Watashi tags along anyway, and receives a less than warm welcome at Kazue's house. When Watashi realizes that she is only being used as a replacement for Mitsuru, and that Kazue is insincere in her attempt to be Watashi's friend she reacts with confusion and hurt:

Was that story about her birthday just a ruse? Had Kazue just wanted to show Mitsuru to her father? Had she tried to use me as the bait to lure Mitsuru over? I was of absolutely no value to this family... (Kirino 2008, 81; cf. 2006, 160-1, vol.1).

On top of this Kazue's father takes Watashi aside and commands her to stay away from his daughter. He shows apparent contempt towards Watashi, because she is neither a top student nor from a respectable family:

"...you're not an appropriate friend for one of my daughters. It's a pity about your mother. But from what I can tell, the circumstances of her death are not what one would call normal...Kazue's a wholesome girl from a normal family"

What he meant was that my family was not normal. Yuriko and I were not wholesome.

(...) "Of course a friendship with a girl like you might prove to be a good lesson for Kazue. She could learn more about society that way. But it's still too early for her, and you have nothing to do with our family. Besides, I have a younger daughter to think of, so I'm sorry to have to say

this but I don't ever want to see you her again." (Kirino 2008, 93; cf. 2006, 180-1, vol.1).

This becomes an extension of the treatment Watashi receives at school, as Kazue's father repeats all the issues Watashi struggles with, and all reasons for why she is unable to fit in. To be told this by the father of one of her fellow outsiders, and on top of this, the one outsider that Watashi feels is more hopeless than she is, comes as a shock to Watashi. Hurt, Watashi decides to get revenge on Kazue and her father.

Later, Kazue sends a letter to Watashi, and proposes that they can be secret friends (Kirino, 170; 2006, 321, vol.1). This suggests that Kazue is unwilling to recognize Watashi as a friend in public, but approaches her because she is in need of a confidant, and recognizes her as a fellow outsider at school. Encouraged by Watashi, Kazue admits to being in love with Kijima, a popular and handsome boy, and a classmate of Yuriko. Watashi marvels at Kazue's lack of understanding of her position at school, but sees this as an opportunity to get revenge. She encourages Kazue to write Kijima love letters, and also encourages Kazue's attempts to work on her looks, while she secretly makes fun of her for her efforts. Kazue uses all means available to become more beautiful in order to compete with Yuriko, whom she perceives as her rival because she is always together with Kijima.⁴² Kazue, who already has a problematic relationship to food, develops an eating disorder, also this encouraged by Watashi. Watashi intercepts Kijima's answer to Kazue, and makes him send the letters back to Kazue without an answer, making sure that Kazue's father would find them. Kazue experiences a deep shock from this 'rejection' and gives up the pretense of trying to be pretty, and instead devotes herself fully to studying. The two girls continue to be drawn to each other because of their similar position as outsiders, but at the same time they both see themselves as superior to the other. Watashi looks down on Kazue because she is unable to see and understand the unwritten norms, and Kazue feels superior to Watashi because she does not work to change position, and because she is lacking in academic and economic capital. As Kazue later states: 'Here was someone even more pathetic than I was! Yuriko's older sister was

⁴² While he is in fact, as I stated in Chapter 2, working as Yuriko's 'manager', introducing Yuriko to potential 'clients.'

not as intellectually gifted as I. She reeked of poverty, and she would never be able to get a job at a first-rate firm' (Kirino 2008, 372; cf. 2006, 279, vol.2).

Survival

In the last chapter I looked at how the four girls try to change their position within the educational field. However, they were not always successful, either because they lacked the knowledge of the unwritten codes, or because they lacked the necessary capital. If one is unable to fit in, and to become recognized within a field, one has no choice but to try and change the rules by which one finds oneself dominated:

If my opinions are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred (Butler 2004, 3).

However, one cannot exist as a subject, without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed the subject (Butler 2004). Therefore, the way in which one is able to resignify oneself is highly dependent on the social world that one becomes constituted within. To refuse the rules and norms completely is to give up one's position within that field. Ironically, this means that for the outsiders this would simply change their position from being one type of outsider to being a different type of outsider. In this kind of situation the last resort becomes survival; if one is unable to fit in and to be an accepted member of the field, one must fight to survive within the field (in the case of the educational field, this would mean until graduation). In order to assure their survival, the four girls seek to protect themselves from the harmful interpellation that they are subjected to. According to Watashi, both she and Mitsuru employ 'armor' in order to survive. She also states that Yuriko's monstrous beauty functions in the same way as a form of survival mechanism, and explains Kazue's failure with her lack of such an armor, or survival instinct:

Not yet adults ourselves, we sought to protect ourselves from potential wounds by turning the tables on our perceived aggressors and being the ones to launch the attack. But it grew tiresome being a constant target, and those who clung to their injuries were surely not destined to live long. So I worked on refining my maliciousness and Mitsuru worked on her

intelligence. Yuriko, for better or worse, was imbued from the start with a monstrous beauty. But Kazue...Kazue had nothing to cultivate (Kirino 2008, 60; cf. 2006, 118, vol.1).

In fact all the four girls can be said to employ such an 'armor' against the world. This armor can be seen as a way of fighting, or rejecting society, and its norms (rather than obediently responding to the terms by which one is interpellated), and can be described as a form for subversion, a way of trying to escape and change the way in which they are hailed.

As Watashi comments, Yuriko's beauty can be seen as form of natural armor. It sets her apart, and gives her entry to places and fields she would normally not be able to enter. As I mentioned above, she is able to enter the Q school system even though she failed the entry exam, because professor Kijima becomes interested in her (Kirino 2006, 240, vol.1).⁴³ She is also welcomed into the cheerleading club that Kazue is unable to enter. Watashi also suggests that Mitsuru's armor is her brain; being the best at everything, seemingly able to do everything, from acing tests to placing first in rhythmic exercises, without breaking a sweat. However, behind this seemingly perfect mask, Mitsuru was in fact a hard worker, hiding her efforts meticulously:⁴⁴

MT.

In short, what I wanted to say was that like Ochiai,⁴⁵ I liked that my hard work went unnoticed. He was known as a genius who didn't need to practice at all, but in reality it seems he was practicing secretly late at night, swinging bats and training like a fanatic. I thought that was cool. So whenever I spent all night studying, I would use eye drops to fix my bloodshot eyes, and drink Lipovitan D,⁴⁶ all while pretending that I didn't study at all (My translation).

⁴³ The section where Yuriko explicitly states this is removed in the English translation.

⁴⁴ This section is removed in the original translation.

⁴⁵ Ochiai Hiromitsu (落合博満), a famous Japanese baseball player.

⁴⁶ Lipovitan D is a Japanese energy drink.

ST.

Tsumari, atashi wa Ochiai senshū mitaku, doryoku shiteiru no o satorarenai yō ni suru no ga suki datta-tte koto o itakatta no. ano hito wa renshū o shinai tensai to iwareta rashii kedo, jitsu wa, shinya hisoka ni suburi o shitari shite renshū no oni datta rashii no yo. Sōiu no kakkoi janai. Dakara, atashi wa tesuya de benkyō shite mo megusuri o sashite jūketsu o keshitari, ripo D o nondari shite, benkyō nanka shitenai kao o shiteita no ne (Kirino 2006, 155, vol. 2).

In this sense, playing the calm and composed genius, and hiding her efforts, can be said to be her real armor. If one consider that one of the reasons for Kazue being bullied at school was that she was seen as ‘uncool’ (*dasai*) because she put so much effort into fitting in and into studying and being the best, it can be said that Mitsuru’s defense is a well-developed one for fitting into the complete educational field of Q School.

As ‘outsiders’ the situation for Kazue and Watashi is more complex. Watashi does not resort to only one type of defense, but hides her weaknesses behind a layer of ‘armor’. Her first line of defense is her maliciousness, which can be seen as a way of hurting and alienating people around her before they can hurt her. She is throwing her contempt and hate at the world that treats her in much the same way. As I mentioned above, Watashi is playing the role of the spectator, pretending to be an objective observer, who is not influenced by the things that happen around her. This can be said to be her second layer of protection. By pretending that the bullying and ridiculing of the outsiders have nothing to do with her, she is able to protect herself from these hurtful experiences. Lastly, the inner, and most important, protection is an intricate fantasy-world, where Watashi imagines herself as a heroine, with Yuriko’s looks, but who is also smart. In other words a ‘perfect woman’ who have everything, but at the same time does not care about things like fashion, studying or boys. This ‘perfect fantasy’ is created to be able to deal with the harsh reality and its disappointments. As Butler explains ‘Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality...’ (Butler 2004, 28). At the same time ‘fantasy is what allow us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise’ (29), therefore creating a possibility of subversion. This fantasy-world works together with Watashi’s second line of defense, making her able to pretend to be completely unaffected by her often cruel

surroundings. However, for Watashi this fantasy can never become a part of reality, because it bases itself of the impossibility of perfection. She not only fantasizes about ‘being’ Yuriko, but also about inhabiting Yuriko’s position without any of the problems that Yuriko’s position in society includes.

Even though Watashi claims that Kazue has ‘nothing to cultivate’ (Kirino 2008, 60), one can perhaps argue that her naïve beliefs in that she is able to do anything if she just tries hard enough, and her stubborn belief in that the world is fair, can be seen as a form for protective armor (albeit a faulty one). Kazue is convinced that everything is possible as long as one works hard enough (something which ironically resonates with Q School’s official school motto):

“Are you saying that---no matter what---all you have to do is try your best and you’ll succeed?”

“Well, of course. If you try hard enough you’ll be rewarded” (Kirino 2008, 85; cf. 2006, 168, vol.1).

However, as I have mentioned previously, the official policy and the real rules and norms that govern the school are far apart. Her naïve beliefs crash with the harsh regime at Q School, and are instead used against her by Watashi and the other girls at the school. As the story progresses, this naivety turns in to bitterness and disillusion:

I was going to get revenge. I was going to humiliate my firm, scorn my mother’s pretentiousness, and soil my sister’s honor (Kirino 2008, 380; cf. 2006, 293, vol.2).

If we compare this harsh statement with Kazue’s attitude some 20 years earlier, we see an almost shocking change. While the first statement is almost comically hopeful and optimistic, the second statement is void of any feeling of happiness and hope. Her lack in understanding of the unwritten code, however, does not change, and the difficult time at Q School is soon replaced by a similar situation in the occupational field. As a female in a Japanese firm, she is overlooked, and in the end put on the sideline. She is also accused of getting her job through connections instead of getting in by her own merit, as her father worked in the same company before he died. For Kazue this comes as a shock, as she was convinced that she got the job through her own

effort. She slowly realizes that her hard work does not always result in the recognition that she feels she deserves. Feeling like a failure, Kazue desperately searches for a way to redeem herself, and be seen:

I want to win. I want to win. I want to win.

I want to be number one. I want to be respected.

I want to be someone whom everyone notices

I want people to say, What an awesome employee Kazue Satō is. So glad we hired her! (Kirino 2008, 365; cf. 2006, 263, vol.2).

In her search for recognition, she tries to distinguish herself by copying her co-worker Yamamoto, a female with high education who entered the firm at the same time as Kazue.⁴⁷ Yamamoto represents everything Kazue wants; graduated from an even more elite university than Kazue (Tokyo University), and at the same time beautiful and stylish. Kazue start wearing similar clothes as Yamamoto, and when she hears that Yamamoto passed the top level of the Government English Language Exam, she studies for a full year in order to pass on top level as well. She even copies Yamamoto down to her facial expressions, and way of speaking. However, in a conversation with Yamamoto, she realizes that no matter how hard she struggle, Yamamoto is still one step ahead;

MT.

'...so I would almost think about getting married, becoming a full time housewife and living a plain but comfortable life.'

'You have a partner?' I said while feeling slightly defeated. She is still one step ahead. She has a boyfriend (My translation).

ST.

'...kekkon shichaō kana, to omou koto aru wa. Sengyō-shufu ni natte, jimi dakedo kiraku ni ikite ikireba-tte'

⁴⁷ This section about Kazue and her obsession with Yamamoto is largely cut in the English translation.

'aite ga iru no?' atashi wa kasuka na haiboku-kan o kanjinagara itta. Mata hitotsu sakinjirareta, toiu kankaku. Kareshi ga iru koto (Kirino 2006, 268, vol. 2).

Kazue realizes that she has nobody; she has no lover or friends, and her relationship with her mother and sister is so bad that they hardly speak to each other. Later, Kazue follows in Yuriko's footsteps and turns to prostitution as a new kind of armor against this constant feeling of not being recognized and approved of. Her secret life makes her feel superior, and makes her feel in control. For Kazue prostitution is a protection in the form of a separate world, a place of her own, that neither her colleagues nor her family can enter:

It was the moment of the day I loved the most...It gives me such an immense feeling of relief, liberation...From here I head into the night streets, right smack into a 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 2008, 349-50; cf. 2006, 240, vol.2).

As I mentioned above, Kazue leads a double life, working in an elite firm by day and as a prostitute by night. These two different 'worlds' can be seen as two different fields. She maintains a feeling of control and superiority by playing the two fields against each other. When she experiences failure in either of her two worlds, she comforts herself with the thought of her other life, and is therefore able to maintain a feeling of superiority and control even when she is bullied or belittled in either field. For Kazue, what makes her special is the fact that she straddles these two completely different fields. In order to receive attention, she exposes her 'work field' when she works as a prostitute, and feels exalted when thinking about her 'night life' when she is at work. This can for example be seen in the way Kazue is obsessed with showing her business card to all her customers when working as a prostitute. It is the role as 'a prostitute who works in an elite firm' and the opposite role of 'an elite office worker who is also a prostitute' that makes her 'special' and allow her to feel superior to the people around her.

Like Watashi, Kazue employs fantasy as a way of escaping. In this way her naivety can be said to reappear, and turns into delusion, as she creates a fantastic image of herself as a 'perfect woman':

After I graduated from Q University, I entered a top-notch firm. I was fashionably thin, and men paid attention to me. I had it all, witch in and of itself was extremely cool...By day I was respected for my brains; by night I was desired for my body. I felt like superwoman! (Kirino 2008, 360; cf. 2006, 256, vol.2).

Unlike Watashi, Kazue is unable to grasp this gap between reality and her fantastic image of herself. While Watashi is aware of her fantasy and is to a certain degree able to separate reality and fantasy,⁴⁸ Kazue convinces herself that the perfect image she has created is real, and acts accordingly. This lead to confusion and problems in dealing with her surroundings, as there continues to be a gap between Kazue's expectations and the expectations of the people around her.

⁴⁸ At least as a grown up. It is unclear whether she was able to distinct this during her childhood and her years at Q School, and Mitsuru's descriptions of Watashi who was struggling hard in order to fit in at school, might suggest that she was not as aware of this distinction at that point.

Sex as a Weapon

“Do you want the money? If you don’t you’ll become a normal woman, not a prostitute...so what will you be, a whore who’s worth no more than three thousand yen or a normal woman I don’t want to touch?” Zhang (Kirino 2008, 455; cf. 2006, 415, vol.2).

The radical ending of this book, which is largely removed in the English translation, turn this book into something more than ‘women as victims’, or ‘men as the enemy’. It is an important key to understanding this novel’s ‘answer’ to the question concerning prostitution; what is the reality of prostitution? Is prostitution just about selling your body? Is it about revenge, like Kazue and Yuriko’s sister claim? Is it liberating? Or is it oppressing? What is the difference of charging money, and doing it for free? One can perhaps argue that it’s the difference of treating the partner as a ‘subject’ and treating him/her as an ‘object.’ Kathleen Barry proposes that ‘the separation of them - the whores - and us - the women - is utterly false’ (Barry 1995, 10), and that there is a need to understand ‘prostitute women not as a group set apart...but as women whose experience of sexual exploitation is consonant with that of all women’s experience of sexual exploitation’ (Barry 1995, 9). In this sense, the word ‘prostitute’ is seen as yet another label, branding and at the same time reducing the person labeled to nothing but the label. In other words, the prostitute is dehumanized, and is seen as an ‘object.’ This can explain why Zhang is not interested in a ‘normal woman.’ If he does not pay for Kazue, he would have to perceive her as a woman and a human being instead of an object, and he would be unable to control her to the same extent. An object cannot hurt or belittle. In other words; an object is harmless. Barry sees sex as power and sex as a tool for dominating and oppressing women (Barry 1995). However, is it not possible for the ‘power of sex’ to operate both ways? Cannot sex be used against men as a type of subversion, as a way of dominating and suppressing the suppressers? Is not this the real ‘monster’? Not being able to suppress and dominate these outsiders, their ‘subjectivity’, and thus placing them outside the boundaries of society. But in the same act of ‘labeling’, they take away the social constraints, making it possible for the ‘monsters’ to be free of the rules and norms that surround them. In this way sex becomes a double edged sword. As Watashi (and Kazue) states; being a permanent

virgin is to miss the only chance a women has to subjugate men (Kirino 2008, 460; 2006, 424, vol.2).

Short Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked into how the four main characters are affected by the social context they find themselves in and the interpellation they receive from their surroundings. They all struggle with fitting in, and meeting the expectations of the society surrounding them. Kazue encounter problems because she is unable to understand the unwritten norms and rules, and because of the interpellation she receives in her family. Watashi, on the other hand, understand how these unwritten rules function, but lack the capital to change her position. Both Yuriko and Watashi struggle with the harmful interpellation they receive, and this influence their behavior and choices heavily. Mitsuru succeed in changing her position within the educational field, but struggle with the high expectations she sets for herself, as I will explore further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 - Reality and fiction

A literary author's intention is not usually to describe the 'real world' (as it is seen and acknowledged in the cultural community) but to motivate personal about reality by describing an alternative or fictional world⁴⁹ (Nord 1997, 80).

A literary work will always reflect the author's interpretation of reality (Nord 1997). So how much of *Grotesque* can be said to reflect Japanese society and realistic social problems? This chapter is an attempt to answer this question. I will look into the cases of Mitsuru and Kazue, and how their struggle can be said to reflect real problematic situations in Japanese society.

Consequences of a Competitive Society

As I mentioned before, the Japanese school system and the society in general encourage competition on a large scale. Good students are often expected to set their personal life aside and devote their life to studying, being told by teachers and parents that as long as they study hard they will get into a good university, which in hand secures a good job. This is presented as the ultimate goal and many students experience disappointment when they finally reach it and realize that this goal does not hold all the glory that they expected. Both Kazue and Mitsuru experience problems with fitting into ordinary Japanese work environment. They are both disappointed and disillusioned. Having postponed their personal life, and spent almost all their teenage years studying from morning till night,⁵⁰ they become disillusioned when they assume working life, and suddenly find themselves without a clear goal to strive towards. Both Kazue and Mitsuru search for something to compensate for this loss of goal. While Mitsuru joins a cult (with striking similarities to Aum Shinrikyo), Kazue turns to prostitution. Mitsuru explain how she started struggling when she began to work, and it became more and more difficult to see her position as number one because 'a doctor is not evaluated by test scores' (Kirino 2008, 300; cf. 2006, 156,

⁴⁹ Nord bases this definition on De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 192).

⁵⁰ Something which is also the reality for many Japanese students (cf. Hendry 2003).

vol.2). She explains her joining the cult, because it could compare with the academic setting, with levels that one must climb.⁵¹ Kazue compares saving money with studying, and develops an abnormal interest in saving and earning money:

I enjoyed thinking about my savings, seeing the money multiply before my eyes. I just wanted to reach my goal; then I could enjoy looking at all I'd saved. In a way, saving money meant the same to me now as studying had earlier (Kirino 2008, 359; cf. 2006, 253, vol.2).

In this way, Kazue and Mitsuru can be seen as representatives (albeit extreme ones) for this kind of competitive students, and the repercussions of a system that focuses too much on academic capital. They both draw lines between their behavior, and a longing for the grading system found in school, with ascending levels and easily measured success. They continue to strive to be the best, but struggle and become disillusioned when success (in the academic field) is no longer measurable, and praise can no longer be expected for hard work.

Mitsuru and Aum Shinrikyo

While the Japanese who joined new religious movements (*shinshukyō*) in the 50's and 60's did it out of largely materialistic reasons, the Japanese who joined the *shinshinshukyō* (literally translates as 'new- new religion') in the 70's, 80's and 90's joined mainly because of boredom with the routine and restrictions of the educational system and the business world (Metraux 1999). One of the biggest mysteries surrounding Aum, is the fact that many of those that choose to join, were elites that had graduated from Japan's top universities. Why would well-educated people who were seen as the 'winners' of Japan's competitive educational system, chose to join a radical cult like Aum? In his book, *Aum Shinrikyo and Japanese Youth* (1999), Daniel A. Metraux points to the competition in the occupational field, and the limited possibilities to distinguish oneself in the 'real' world: 'One big attraction was the fact that while working in the

⁵¹ This is interpreted differently in the English translation: 'That's when I thought that if I underwent religious training I could bring my life to the next level' (Kirino 2008, 300). The ST, 'demo, shūkyō wa shugyō sureba suru hodo suteeji ga agate iku' (Kirino 2006, 156, vol.2), can be interpreted as 'However, in religion the more you train yourself the higher you ascend to new levels'(My translation).

“real” world, they were no more than small cogs in big wheels, but in the secluded world of Aum, one could become, for example, chief of the cult’s science and technology agency and do whatever one wanted at an impressive facility with a great deal of money’ (Metraux 1999, 59). Although they were a part of the elite, they fell just short of reaching the top of their fields, and in their frustration they turned to Aum, which promised them a high position, freedom to do research and almost unlimited research funds. In Metraux’s account about Aum’s scientific elite, he explains:

It is also important to note that while these intellectuals graduated from some of the better schools in Japan, they were rarely top of their classes. They were good students, but not quite good enough to be at the cutting edge, to be among the tiny few who would make the fast-track to the tops of their fields. This can be very frustrating for a bright person who has come so close to making it to the very top, yet just missed it. Aum seemed to offer these people a second-chance at a shining career (Metraux 1999, 59).

If we compare this to Mitsuru’s own account about her university experience, we can see a strong resemblance between her experiences and those of Aum’s scientific elite:

I wasn’t first in the class, not by a long shot. I probably came in around the middle. No matter how hard I tried, how carefully I listened in class, or how many all-nighters I pulled studying, there was always others I could not beat. But what do you expect? I mean, the school admitted the brightest students from throughout the nation. To make it to the top you had to be naturally gifted, an absolute genius- otherwise you could study forever and it was still hopeless. After a few years I realized that far from being first, I’d be lucky if I ended up twentieth. It really gave me a shock. That’s not like me, I thought, and I began to suffer from an identity crisis (Kirino 2008, 301; cf. 2006, 157, vol.2).

There are also striking similarities between Mitsuru’s story and that of Dr. Ikuo Hayashi, a famous Aum member (cf. Metraux 1999, 59-60, 104). Hayashi, who was a member of Aum’s

scientific elite, joined Aum together with his wife, and their two children. He was a graduate of Keio University Medical School, and both he and his wife worked as medical doctors before joining Aum. His career within Aum bear strong resemblance to Mitsuru's career within the sect she joins; he worked with human experimentation and was in charge of drugging members of the cult who wanted to leave (Kirino 2008, 301; 2006, 158, vol.2). He is currently serving a life sentence in prison (same as Mitsuru's husband). These similarities might indicate that Kirino has drawn inspiration from his story in the forming of both Mitsuru and her husband.

Kazue and 'Tōden OL satsujin jiken'

Women have only one reason for turning to prostitution. It's hatred for others, for the rest of the world. (Kirino 2008, 467; cf. 2006, 443, vol.2)

There are many similarities between Kazue Satō and Watanabe Yasuko (渡邊泰子), the real victim in the *Tōden OL satsujin jiken* (Sano 2000).⁵² The family situation is almost identical. They both seem to have an almost obsessive admiration for their fathers, who both die early, leaving them the bread-winner in the family. Like Kazue, Watanabe had a younger sister, and is described to have had a strained relationship with her mother. She graduated from Keio University, from the economics department, which is, as I argued in the introduction, presumably the same university as Kirino based her Q University on. She had good grades in school, and was described to be almost unnaturally proud of TEPCO, the company she worked for, often talking about the company with her customers. Also the fact that Kazue's father worked in the same company as her, is taken from the real case. The same is many of the details surrounding Kazue's personality; her obsession with money, struggling with anorexia, bringing beer to the love-hotel, collecting newspaper clippings- for her customer are all details taken from the life of the real victim, Yasuko Watanabe. Even the detail about the indecent picture taken on the bed, is taken from the real case.

In his book 'Tōden OL satsujin jiken', Shinichi Sano explore the case in detail, in an effort to find out what really happened (Sano 2000). However, like most of the others who have

⁵² Kirino also lists this book as one of her sources when writing *Grotesque* (cf. Kirino 2006, 446, vol.2).

researched this case, his focus seem to be more about why Watanabe, who was working at one of Japans most renowned companies (TEPCO), would choose to work as a prostitute. Rather than presenting her as an innocent victim, her life and actions are explored in detail, and one often get the feeling that she is being blamed and judged for her conduct instead of being treated as a victim of a heinous crime. Instead, it seems like Sano's main goal is to acquit Govinda Prasad Mainali (ゴビンダ・プラサド・マイナリ), the Nepali who is currently serving life imprisonment for the murder. Sano is convinced of his innocence and spend much time on trying to prove this, like retracting his route the night of the murder and going to Nepal and meeting his family in search of proof. He even goes as far as blaming Watanabe for dragging Govinda into her murder case:

MT.

It would not be strange if Govinda, who found a meaning of life in working hard for his family in a foreign country, would want to feel the warmth of a human body. And like the work of the devil, the one that appeared before him was the office lady Watanabe Yasuko, a woman who traversed the sex industry, and had fallen so far as to be standing in Maruyama-cho, picking up customers....I cannot help but feeling that Yasuko, who could only confirm her sex by endless degradation, with a dreadful energy heading for certain destruction, dragged an innocent young boy from the Nepali countryside with her down the abyss (My translation).

ST.

Ie o tsukuru koto dake o ikigai ni shite ikyō no chi de hataraitte kita Gobinda ga, futo hitohada ga koishiku naru koto ga atta toshite-mo fushigi de wa nai. Sono toki ma ga sashita yō ni kare no mae ni arawareta no ga, kurabu nado fūzoku-seikatsu o henreki shita hate ni, maruyama-chō ni tachi, kyaku o jikabiki suru hodo tenraku shita tōden OL no Watanabe Yasuko datta....tomedo mo naku daraku suru koto de shika jibun no sei o kakunin dekinakatta Yasuko wa, daraku ni omomuku sono susamajii made no enerugii de, nepaaruru no nōson kara yatttekita

*junboku-na seinen made naraku no soko ni hikizuri-konde shimatta yō-na
ki ga shite naranai (Sano 2000, 208-9).*

In this excerpt it is clearly the murder suspect that is presented as the innocent victim, while the real victim, Yasuko Watanabe, is being blamed and judged for her ‘devious lifestyle.’ She is seemingly to blame for her own murder taking place. This example can be said to illustrate the marginalized position that many females in Japan hold, and how prejudice still has great influence in Japanese society.

Short Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored *Grotesque*’s link to reality. There are many aspects of this novel that can be said to reflect real life situations in modern Japan. Although the characters that are portrayed are somewhat exaggerated and dramatized, many of the problematic situations they encounter are situations that reflect social problems that exist in Japan.

Chapter 5 - Translation

In this chapter I will compare the Japanese original source text (ST) with the English translation (the target text, TT), and see how these differences can affect the way *Grotesque* can be interpreted. I will also examine the possibility of a ‘genre-change’ where the TT is marketed as crime fiction while the ST is marketed as a novel.⁵³

Translation Issues

My reaction was that it couldn't be published successfully at such length, which indeed would do harm to Haruki's cause in this country. – Gary Fiskejon, Haruki Murakami's US editor (Rubin 2005, 306).

In ‘Translating Murakami’⁵⁴ (Rubin 2005), Jay Rubin, known for his translations of Haruki Murakami into English, presents a well-known problem concerning many of the Japanese novels being translated into English, namely the tendency to shorten and change the content of the novel in order to make it more appealing for Western readers. Japanese novels are often published in two or even three volumes in their original language, and long novels reaching up to 800 pages are quite common. These novels are often shortened, sometimes by several hundred pages, when they are translated into English, where traditionally the average novel is considerably shorter. This naturally makes a huge impact on the content. A translator thus faces a tough decision of what material to cut, and what to keep.⁵⁵ Which parts are unnecessary? Does this part make the storyline progress, or can it be cut? Suddenly the role of the translator is broadened to encompass

⁵³ The use of the term ‘novel’ can be seen as problematic, because crime fiction can also be defined as a part of the novel genre. I use the term ‘novel’ loosely to refer to prose narrative in general, opposed to a novel confined within the crime fiction genre.

⁵⁴ This essay is based on a talk Rubin gave at the Deutches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo, on 30 January 2001: ‘How to Carve a Wind-up Bird: Murakami Haruki in English’ (Rubin 2005).

⁵⁵ It is of course not always the translator that does this editing. Equally challenging problems can be said to occur when the translator and the editor, are two different people.

the role of an editor as well. Thus, the interpretation of the translator plays an important role in how the book is in turn interpreted and read in its translated version (Nord 1997).

Using the word-for-word method, where the translator keeps the grammatical structure and word in a rendering that is completely faithful to the source text (ST), is not a convenient method to use when translating a novel.⁵⁶ There will always be a certain need for interpretation and change in grammatical structures, or rendering of colloquial expressions and metaphors into expressions understandable to the target text (TT) audience (Nord 1997). Thus most translations involve a need for the sense-for-sense method, where one translates the intended meaning of a text rather than the literal words and grammatical structure. This gives the translator freedom to create a text that can be read as a natural text in the target language (TL) (Nord 1997). However, the sense-for-sense method can invite a tempting double role for the translator, becoming a commentator and a critic, as well as a translator.

One way of avoiding and mending this translation problem is the Skopostheorie. According to the Skopostheorie the *purpose* of a target text (the translated text) is what determines how a specific text should be translated (Nord 1997). Nord offers the following definition of *Skopos*:

Greek for 'purpose'. According to Skopostheorie, the theory that applies the notion of Skopos to translation, the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (Skopos) of the overall translational action (Nord 1997, 140).

This theory is an attempt to solve the problematic dilemma concerning free translation opposed to faithful translation, and that a particular translation may require a faithful rendering, a more free interpretation or a middle ground between these two extremes (Nord 1997). However, even though this kind of strategy is good for solving many kind of translation problems, because it places all the importance on the target text and the purpose of the translation (which for most book publishers would be to sell as many copies of the translation as possible), there is a danger of the content being altered in order to accommodate other reasoning's, like for instance making the novel appeal to the mass-marked.

⁵⁶ This kind of method is usually only found in grammatical textbooks and other comparative texts.

The Role of the Publishers

Publishers are thinking about sales, about deadlines, about “shaping” and “pacing” an author’s career, about the timing and rhythm of releasing an author’s work, about keeping the author in the public eye without flooding the market – about selling books (Rubin 2005, 312).

All translation will include some form of strategy (Nord 1997). If we look at the purpose of the English version of *Grotesque*, we can deduce some of the main intentions the translator had to keep in mind. One of the reasons why I refer to Jay Rubin’s comments is not only because it is a convenient source, but also because the publisher of Murakami in English (US publisher Knopf), is the same publisher responsible for *Grotesque*, and in this sense the statements concerning the severe cuts and adaptation Jay Rubin describes can be seen in direct connection to the adaptations made in *Grotesque*. The most important strategy can be said to be making *Grotesque* a book that appeals to Western readers. As I mentioned above, this includes shortening the text substantially. In *Grotesque*, the ending is the part most substantially changed in the translation. As I mentioned in the introduction, the case that *Grotesque* bases its story on (*Tōden satsujin jiken*), is not well known in the West, and because of this, the way the novel is read will also be different. This has probably affected the way *Grotesque* has been translated, as scenes that have direct relevance to the case might have seemed less interesting or relevant for Western readers. Another important aspect is the genre of the novel, which I will look into below.

From Novel to Crime Fiction

As I mentioned in the introduction, the ending is the part most substantially changed in the English translation. The eighth and last section, where Watashi describes her reaction to reading the different letters, memoirs and diaries as well as her conversations with Mitsuru and her and Yurio’s decision to work as street prostitutes, have been radically shortened and edited. One can question whether there is a certain degree of censorship involved in the editing of the English translation, as important scenes involving male prostitution have been completely removed, resulting in the ending being substantially changed. It is not certain whether this was a conscious choice, or if it’s coincidental that the ending has received such heavy editing. One other possible

explanation is that the English translation is marketed as crime fiction, and that the ending did not fit into this genre. Almost all the reviews written by Western media, makes a mention of *Grotesque* as a book belonging in the crime fiction genre. The cover also indicates this, as the summary indicates that the book should be read as a thriller, and stresses the violent aspects of *Grotesque*:

Two prostitutes are murdered in Tokyo.

Twenty years previously both women were educated at the same elite school for young ladies, and had seemingly promising futures ahead of them.

But in a world dark of vicious ambition, for both women prostitution meant power. Grotesque is a masterful and haunting thriller, a chilling exploration of women's secret lives in modern day Japan (Kirino 2008, back cover).

If we compare this to the summary on the back cover of the Japanese pocket edition, we can see a different focus:

MT.

[Grotesque portraits] the malice and deceit that surround the female students of an elite all girls high school. 'Here we have class based society in all its repugnant glory.'⁵⁷ [It tells the story of] the diabolically beautiful and nymphomaniac Yuriko and the isolated and aggressively competitive 'outsider',⁵⁸ Kazue. Yuriko's sister 'Watashi' feels deep resentment for the two, and tries her best to ruin them both. A monumental work of Kirino, which with overpowering literary style portraits the life of modern women (My translation).

⁵⁷ I have used the quote from the original English translation (Kirino 2008, 54).

⁵⁸ 'Tochū nyūgaku gumi' can be literally translated as 'a member of the group that entered the school halfway,' referring to the students that entered the school at high school level.

ST.

Meimon Q joshi-kō ni uzumaku joshikōsei-tachi no akui to giman. 'koko wa iyarashii hodo no kaikyū-shakai na no yo.' Akuma teki na bibō o motsu ninfomania no Yuriko, kyōsōshin o mukidashi ni shi, koritsu suru tochū nyūgaku gumi no Kazue. Yuriko no ane de aru 'watashi' wa sono futari o hageshiku nikumi, otoshiire yō to suru. Attoteki na hicchi de gendai-jōsei no sei o egaki kitta, Kirino bungaku no kinjitō (Kirino 2006, back cover, vol. 1).

This 'genre-change' can be perceived as problematic because by placing a book within a certain genre heavily influences the way readers interpret the book. By defining *Grotesque* as a crime fiction novel, the readers automatically expect that the novel more or less follows the norms of the crime fiction genre, and will read it with certain expectations that they would not have if it was presented as a novel.



Also the cover of the English edition, with a close up of a young woman with smeared make-up on a dark back ground, can be said to reinforce the impression that *Grotesque* should be read as a crime fiction. To the left; English pocket edition of *Grotesque* (Vintage), to the right; Japanese pocket edition of *Gurotesuku*, volume 1 and 2 (Bunshun)

Examples of Changes in Grotesque

In the eight section of *Grotesque*, Yurio proposes to Watashi that she should work as a prostitute like his mother, in order to earn money for a computer for him. The continuation of this conversation is cut in the TT, excluding the part where Yurio explains that he proposed that Watashi should go earn money on the street like his mother, because he got angry at Watashi's negative attitude towards Yuriko and Kazue because they worked as prostitutes. He continues by proposing that he instead should sell himself, stating that it should be him because he is able to protect himself and because he is younger and therefore would most likely be able to charge more (Kirino 2006, 435, vol.2). Omitting this makes Yurio seem like he's manipulating and using Watashi for his own gains because he wants money to buy a new computer. Watashi insists that she should be the one earning money on the street, but when they find themselves standing on the same corner Yuriko and Kazue worked at, it is Yurio that attracts customers. As a middle aged female, Watashi has a hard time finding interested customers. In the end, Watashi ends up as Yurio's manager. However, his attitude towards Watashi slowly changes. He becomes disdainful. Watashi is struggling with her conscience for making her nephew work as a prostitute, and continues to roam the streets for customers. In the end, she finds a man curious of a woman being a 40 year old virgin, and she goes to a love- hotel with him (Kirino 2008, 467; 2006, 443, vol.2).

The English translation jumps directly from the cut of scene with Yurio, where he proposes that Watashi should work as a prostitute, to the scene where Watashi finally finds a man willing to buy her. This makes the scene seem out of place and sudden. On top of this, the sudden use of historic present, and phrasings like 'I see myself walking through Maruyama-chō' (Kirino 2008, 467), 'I flow through the street and alleys' (467), 'I see a middle-aged man standing in front of a hotel...' (467) and 'Suddenly he turns serious, and I find myself crossing the threshold of a love hotel for the first time in my life' (467) makes the passage seem ambiguous, and makes the reader question whether or not Watashi actually becomes a prostitute. In this way, the distant and almost dreamlike description of the scene describing Watashi becoming a prostitute in the TT, makes us doubt whether it is really happening, or if it is something she imagines.

It is not only the ending that is affected by *Grotesque* being shortened in the English translation. In a scene where Mitsuru explains to Watashi how she became a target of bullying, Mitsuru

reveals that it was a greeting her mother made at a PTA-meeting that was the instigator. She comments: ‘It was just her typical kind of greeting’ (Kirino 2008, 74). If we look at the source text, we can see that this sentence can be interpreted in a different manner: ‘kore dake kiku to goku futsu no aisatsu desho’ (Kirino 2006, 146, vol.1) (Just hearing this, it sounds like a completely normal greeting, right? My translation). As we can see the original translation is actually stating the opposite from the source text, which stresses the fact that this is indeed a typical greeting, which normally would not lead to bullying or taunting. Stating that it was ‘her typical kind of greeting’, instead of ‘a typical kind of greeting’, leaves the reader with the impression that for her this is a typical greeting, but for most people it would be considered unconventional or strange. In the continuation, Mitsuru explain that after this incident she became a target of bullying, and that the very next morning there was a drawing of her mother on the blackboard besides the words ‘A member of Q!’ (‘Finally a Q student!’ in the original TT⁵⁹). It continues:

“But what it⁶⁰ meant was whether I had entered at elementary school or junior high, I would never be one of them.”

“I understand perfectly”

“What do you understand?”

“About your mother.” I wanted to add that I knew she was ashamed of her own mother (Kirino 2008, 74).

In this case, the ‘I understand perfectly’ Would most likely be read as an answer to the statement before, namely that Mitsuru would never be a proper member of Q, and the clarification that Watashi offers about her understanding about Mitsuru’s mother seems to be drawn almost from thin air. In fact, a whole paragraph has been removed between the first line and the second:

TT.

‘Their message was that whether I had entered at elementary school or junior high, I would never be one of them.’

⁵⁹ Note that the difference between being a student and being a member (and therefore belonging) is lost.

⁶⁰ The statement on the blackboard

The resigned face of Mitsuru's mother who had thrown away all pretenses of showiness and frippery floated into my head. The real victim of the bullying had not been Mitsuru, but her mother. She probably had not known the unchangeable fact that this small society was ruled by strict class distinctions. By the time she realized, it was already too late. Mercilessly turned into pray, she had no choice but to be 'devoured' whole. Mitsuru was able to survive and to get back up thanks to her brave resolve and her ingenuity, but her mother would never get the chance to recover. Mitsuru's mother probably never went to a PTA- meeting ever again. 'I understand perfectly' (My translation).

ST.

'Tsumari, shotōbu-nyūgaku darō to chūtōbu darō to, uchi nanka wa keshite ichiin nanka narekkonai-tte koto na yo.' Watashi wa Mitsuru no hahaoya no kyoshoku o sute-satta akiramegao o omoi-ukabemashita. Ijime de kitzutsuita no wa, Mitsuru de wa naku, hahaoya datta no desu. Mitsuru no hahaoya wa kitto shiranakatta no desu, kono chiisana shakai ni kibishii kaikyū ga sonzai-shite yuruginai koto o. Kitsuita toki wa mō osoi. Sanzan ejiki ni natte kui-tsukusareru shika nai no desu. Mitsuru wa kenage ni mo zunō de iki-nuita no ni, hahaoya no hō wa bankai suru chansu mo ataete moraenai. Mitsuru no hahaoya wa nido to hogosha-kai ni wa kao o misenakatta koto deshō. 'Yoku wakatta wa' (Kirino 2006, 146, vol.1).

In this case the 'I understand perfectly' refers to Watashi's understanding about Mitsuru's mother. We are also made to realize from the drawing of her mother on the blackboard that Mitsuru becoming a target of bullying comes more from the way Mitsuru's mother flaunted her wealth (being portrayed in a red dress with a big diamond ring on her finger) than from her words. This leaves us with new understanding about Mitsuru's mother, and explains some of her current bitterness towards the school.

Foreignization and Domestication

One other much debated aspect of translation theory is the question of domestication versus foreignization, which can be said to be two opposite translation strategies. Domestication refers to the strategy of adapting the cultural context, like for example names of people, food and places, to the TL, while foreignization refers to the strategy of preserving these cultural contexts (Gambier and Doorslaer 2010). In the English translation of *Grotesque*, names of places and exotic references to Japanese food and traditions are largely kept. In this sense, *Grotesque* can be said to be translated using the foreignization strategy, as the cultural context is preserved throughout the novel. However, if we look at the language used in the translation, there is a high frequency of a typically American way of speaking, as well as extensive use of American slang and swear words. Examples of this ‘Americanization’ are the use of ‘john’ (Kirino 2008, 355, 399, 403)⁶¹ to describe a person buying sexual favors, and the frequent use of words and expressions like ‘hick town’ (360), ‘call girl’ (375), ‘men who were rolling in dough’ (329), ‘southpaw’ (330), ‘fellow’ (207) ‘son-of-a-bitch’ (93) ‘knockout’ (162) ‘to a T’ (80), ‘powwow’ (81) and ‘hook, line and sinker’ (180), to mention a few.

As I mentioned above, there is also an abundant use of swear words in the TT, especially in the seventh section (which consists of Kazue’s diary) that is not present in the ST. This might be a translation strategy, using derogatory terms to convey the anger and bitterness in Kazue. It can also be interpreted as a form of domestication, as curse words are used more frequently in the US than in Japan, where curse words are rarely used. One example of this is the added ‘What an asshole’ (Kirino 2008, 325) that is not present in the ST (cf. Kirino 2006, 197, vol. 2). The swear word ‘fuck’ is also used frequently (Kirino 2008, 389, 426). One example of this is ‘Omē nanka, tada no inbai janē ka. Sore mo san-ryū no inbai da yo.’ (Kirino 2006, 249, vol.2) which is translated to ‘you’re nothing but a fucking whore’ (Kirino 2008, 356). Another example is an instance where the more neutral ‘yappari sekusu-tte ii ne’ (Kirino 2006, 248, vol. 2) is translated to ‘God, it’s good to fuck’ (Kirino 2008, 356). ‘Slut’ (399), ‘hell’ (369, 403, 427) and ‘bitch’ (384, 445, 450) are other examples of the extended use of swear words in the TT.

⁶¹ In the cases where the words occur frequently, I refer to some examples of where the words are used.

In this sense, one can claim that this text keeps with the demands of foreignization, keeping the exotic and foreign. However, there is an extended use of American slang throughout the TT. In this way, the TT can be said to be domesticated on the discursive level.

Some Examples of Linguistic Problems in the Translation

There are also some problems regarding the linguistic aspect of the TT translation. Let's compare two translations of the same segment, where the first is the original translation and the second is my suggestion of a possible different way of translating this passage:

TT.

You're the one who's crazy. Look at you---you look absolutely evil. Why do you think you're any more sincere than I am? You go through life telling nothing but lies. And even now you're sitting here thinking how wonderful you are because you're half. I sure wish I could trade you for Yuriko (Kirino 2008, 303).

MT.

You're changed for the worse, haven't you? Look at you---you look absolutely evil. Where is your sincerity? You've probably gone through life telling nothing but lies. Surely you're not still bragging about being half? You're nobody but a woman just wishing to become Yuriko (My translation).

ST.

Anata mo kawatta wa yo. Anata wa hontō ni akui no katamari mitai-na kao ni natta wa. Anata no shinjitsu-tte doko ni aru no. Anata wa uso bakkari tsuite ikiteiru-n deshō. Masaka, ima demo hāfu-tte jiman shiteiru-n janai deshō ne. anata wa Yuriko san ni narikawaritai dake no onna (Kirino 2006, 161, vol.2).

If we compare the TT with my translation, most of these sentences have some changes in style and meaning, but on a sense-for-sense basis they are not that far apart. Some small differences,

like the different interpretation of ‘Ima demo’, do not change the content substantially.⁶² The last sentence, however, is interpreted in two quite different ways. It’s possible that it is a misreading of the word ‘*Narikawaru*’ (成り代わる) that is used in the original translation, translating it as ‘trade’ or ‘change’, instead of ‘in the place of.’⁶³ This sentence becomes confusing because it seems to suppose that Mitsuru and Yuriko have a close relationship (while in fact they barely knew each other), and that Mitsuru wishes that Yuriko was the one alive rather than Watashi. At the same time, the stressing of the fact that Watashi is envious of her sister and secretly wants to be (like) Yuriko, is lost. Another example of this kind of mistranslation is the mix-up of the two words *Kazue* (和恵) and *chie* (知恵):

TT.

Images of Kazue as a dark demon began to loom up in my imagination at that moment, one after another (Kirino 2008, 207).

ST.

Konna toki, watashi no atama ni wa akuma no yō na chie ga tsugitsugi ni waite deru no deshita. [Ee, watashi wa Kazue no jiritsu o samatagete yarō to kesshin shita no desu]⁶⁴ (Kirino 2006, 389, vol.1).

MT.

At that moment, a diabolic insight welled up inside me. [I decided that I was going to hinder Kazue from becoming independent] (My translation).

Chie can roughly be translated to ‘wisdom’, or ‘insight.’⁶⁵ The *kanji* (Chinese characters used in Japanese writing) looks confusingly similar to those in the proper noun *Kazue*, and this might be the reason for why this mistranslation occurred.

⁶² ‘Ima demo’ can be translated as ‘even now’ or ‘still’, but the addition of ‘sitting here’ in the original translation makes it sound like the focus is on ‘right here and now’ instead of ‘at present time.’

⁶³ Definitions are taken from *Kenkyusha's new Japanese-English dictionary (Skrzypczak and Snowden 2003)*.

⁶⁴ This sentence is cut in the original translation.

⁶⁵ Again the definition is from *Kenkyusha's new Japanese-English dictionary (Skrzypczak and Snowden 2003)*.

The Problematic Subject in Japanese Sentences

Japanese subjects are often dropped, and this can lead to confusion, because it is not always obvious who is saying or doing what. It can sometimes be a challenging task to translate such sentences, because in English (and most other languages) the subject has to be clearly stated for a sentence to be coherent. One example of how this can lead to confusion if the translator (and in this case also the proof-reader) is not paying attention:

TT.

“Well, yes. I did make some mistakes in my youth. But after all, I was thrown out of school very suddenly – thanks to your betrayal”

“It wasn’t a betrayal. Professor Kijima wrote in his letters that she came seeking advice,” I said.

Kijima shrugged it off.

“It was a betrayal. Your friend here had long nurtured a violent jealousy of Yuriko. It was her nature.”

“You’re wrong. She was worried about Yuriko,” Mitsuru said (Kirino 2008, 329-30).

MT.

‘I guess I can be said to have strayed from the right path for a while. After all, I was suddenly expelled from school thanks to Yuriko’s sister secretly reporting us.’

‘Surely she didn’t report you. It says in Professor Kijima’s letter that she came to him seeking advice, doesn’t it?’

Misturu tried to protest, but Kijima just shrugged it off.

‘She reported us. Her life is completely ruled by her jealousy for Yuriko’.

‘That’s wrong. I did it for Yuriko’s sake’ (My translation)

ST.

'mā ne. Watashi mo ichiji wa wakai misora de rotō ni mayoimashita kara ne. nani shiro, oneesan kara no mikkoku de totsuzen no taigaku-shobun desu kara ne.'

'Mikkoku janai deshō. Kijima-sensei no tegami ni wa, sōdansareta-tte aru janai.'

Mitsuru ga kōgi shimashita ga, Kijima Takashi wa kobaka ni shita yō ni kata o sukumemashita.

'Are wa mikkoku desu yo. Oneesan no jinsei wa, Yuriko e no shitto ni yotte naritatteiru-n desu.'

'chigau wa. Yuriko no tame o omotta no yo' (Kirino 2006, 205, vol. 2).

In this case it is possible that it is the translation of 'oneesan' that is causing problems: Kijima is using the word 'sister' (*oneesan*) as a pronoun, pointing at Watashi. This is possible in Japanese, because it is understood that Kijima as a friend of Yuriko, would address Yuriko's sister as 'oneesan', but would lead to confusion if translated this way into English. Usually one could change this with the name or with 'her', but since Watashi's name is unknown, and using 'her' in this case would lead to confusion about who 'her' in this situation is, this is not possible in this case. In the translation, *oneesan* is translated with 'your' and 'your friend here', and it is possible that this is the reason why the translator has chosen to switch the speaker role of the following sentences. However, this leads to confusion about who is saying what, and in the sentence "It wasn't a betrayal. Professor Kijima wrote in his letters that she came seeking advice," I said, Watashi end up referring to herself in the third person. In the last sentence, the only one who can explain 'intent' or 'reason' without adding a word indicating guess or surmise (by for example adding 'deshō' or 'kana') in this case, is Watashi, and so it would be strange if Mitsuru is the one who offers this explanation. Another example of this is the sentence 'I was strong enough not to need my mother' (Kirino 2008, 464). In the ST ('Haha wa boku no sonzai o hitsuyō to shinai kurai, tsuyoi hito datta no desu' (Kirino 2006, 430, vol. 2)), the subject of the sentence is the mother (*haha*), and not Yurio (*boku*). This can be seen because *haha* (mother) is marked with the topic marker *wa*, and because '*boku*' and '*sonzai*' is connected with the nominal marker *no*, which suggests that this is a nominal phrase. A more accurate translation would therefore be 'My mother was so strong that she did not need me' (My translation).

Short Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how some of the changes that have been made in the translated version of *Grotesque* influence the way it can be interpreted. Some consequences of these changes is that the ending in the TT seem abrupt and rushed, and that some of the psychological aspects are lost, as shorter and longer scenes are cut throughout the novel (I have tried to give examples of this throughout this thesis). One possible explanation for some of these changes is that it is a deliberate attempt by the publishers and translator to make the TT version of *Grotesque* read more like a crime fiction (possibly because Kirino's first translated novel *Out* also is marketed as crime fiction). However, this is only one of many possible explanations. One other explanation is that these changes have been made simply to reduce the length of *Grotesque*, as this seems to be a common practice when it comes to long Japanese novels being translated into English. There is a need for further exploration of how and why these changes are made, and how they affect the novels that are subjected to such shortening and editing.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Further Research

“If you look at it that way, the one who was freest of all was Yuriko. She was so liberated. I wondered if she didn’t come from an entirely different planet. Such a free spirit. She couldn’t help but stick out in Japanese society. The reason she was such a prize among men goes beyond her beauty. I suspect they instinctively saw her true spirit. ...The reason why you haven’t been able to overcome your sense of being Yuriko’s inferior is not just because she was beautiful but because you could never share her sense of freedom,” Mitsuru (Kirino 2008, 343).

If we see this statement in relation to the two incidents (at the outdoor bath, and at the New Year party) that made such an impact on Watashi, we can perhaps read a new meaning into them. Yuriko, who is able to ignore the curious stares, while her sister looks down, wanting to escape attention. Yuriko, who fearlessly enters the living room, while Watashi follows her mother into the kitchen. Because of her beauty, Yuriko automatically gains access to almost any group, but also because she is not desperate to belong, and therefore doesn’t feel the pressure to change herself in order to fit in. Or perhaps she realizes that even if she tries to fit in she would never be able to. Her beauty and her position as a Western-looking *hāfu* are just to ‘foreign’ to be able to blend in to Japanese society. In this way, her freedom comes with a great cost. Yuriko is free, but to gain that freedom she has to stand outside the constraints of the rules and norms that govern the Japanese society. One can say that Kazue, towards the end frees herself from these constraints as well. However, just as for Yuriko, this freedom comes with great cost. She stops caring about how she is perceived, shouting at strangers and yelling at her boss. But to act this way is also to lose one’s place within the society. One becomes an outcast, a *monster*. To borrow Butlers words, in a way they are both choosing to live ‘unlivable lives.’ This might be because the alternative they are given is just as unlivable as the one they chose. At least the life they have chosen comes with a certain sense of freedom and revenge. One can also question whether this is what happens to Watashi at the end of *Grotesque*. After reading the diaries of Kazue and Yuriko,

she realizes that the only way to gain real freedom is to live on the edge of society, discarding all her 'armor' and societies codes and rules.

The commercial forces necessarily involved in publishing a translation, can lead to changes in how a novel can be interpreted. Shortening and changing the text in order to make it more appealing to the intended audience is one of the consequences that can be seen from this. There also seems to have been a deliberate effort to market this novel as crime fiction in the West. This might have affected the way it was edited. Some of the changes in the translated version of *Grotesque* might be seen as an attempt to simplify the plot line, and to focus more on the aspects of *Grotesque* that fit under the crime fiction genre. In this way, there is a possibility that some of the changes I have looked into have been done deliberately in order to make *Grotesque* seem more like a crime fiction novel. This is an interesting possibility that requires further research.

Grotesque is a complicated novel that even though it is set in a Japanese context, encompasses both the universal and the Japanese, because it deals with people on the edge, people who are unable to find their place within a society (or a field), but nonetheless keep on struggling to find a place they can belong. It deals with problematic topics like prostitution, different forms of discrimination and consequences of being brought up in a highly competitive society. In this sense, *Grotesque* can be seen as an important part of Japanese literature that exposes and discusses important aspects of modern life Japan.

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