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Amanda C. Seaman/Bodies of Evidence

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1992, Miyabe Miyuki's *Kasha* (Cart of fire, translated into English as *All She Was Worth*) was the most anticipated novel of the season. This prizewinning detective novel solidified Miyabe's reputation as one of Japan's top mystery writers, made it to the top of almost every "best mystery" list, and was even lauded as one of the "best novels of postwar Japan" by an eminent social critic.¹ *Kasha* was more than just a good story about a missing woman and her mysterious identity; it was an examination of pressing social issues gripping Japan: personal bankruptcy, the deleterious effects of rampant consumerism, and the crises arising from the largely unregulated and highly speculative consumer credit industry, which had helped to finance the go-go economy known popularly as "the bubble." In addition to its role as a social barometer, *Kasha* also represented a watershed moment in the history of Japanese women's detective (or *misuterii*) fiction, providing the impetus for a new wave of women mystery writers in the 1990s that dwarfed the earlier, limited female presence in the field. Inspired by both Miyabe's success and the increasing number of Western mysteries in translation, women began writing mysteries of all types, leading to the appearance (in 1997) of a two-volume anthology of short stories by women writers, *Aka no misuterii* (Red mystery) and *Shiro no misuterii* (White mystery), which made it very clear that women's detective fiction was more than a simple fad.²

The "boom" in women mystery writers has echoed far longer than many anticipated, owing not simply to the entertainment provided by female authors or to the savvy of their publishers, but also to the way in which these authors have used the narrative and conceptual resources of the detective genre to depict and critique contemporary Japanese society, especially the situation of women within it—a combination of storytelling and social awareness found not only in *Kasha*, but in many other works as well. In the following chapters, therefore, I focus upon the way in which five contemporary writers—Miyabe Miyuki, Nonami Asa, Shibata Yoshiki, Kirino Natsuo, and Matsuo Yumi—critically engage with a variety of social issues and con-

cerns: consumerism and the crisis of identity, discrimination and workplace harassment, sexual harassment and sexual violence, and the role of motherhood in contemporary Japan. In turn, I interrogate the structures and conventions of detective fiction that allow these writers to produce a different kind of social critique from that found in other forms of literature. Detective fiction is well suited to this type of critique since the genre has long provided a forum for reflection on and critique of modern urban life. Such a socio-cultural analysis of women's detective fiction, I argue, provides us with a wealth of information about the "real world" of contemporary Japan, not in some essential or objective sense, but rather by revealing how a Japanese author imagines her own society to be—particular the kinds of problems besetting that society. This study thus explores the worlds that these authors construct in their novels and examines how these worlds intersect with other political, cultural, and economic discourses and with the lived experiences of contemporary Japanese women.

Japanese Detective Fiction: A Brief History

Detective fiction has a long and somewhat complicated history in Japan. Like many other Western imports, it has been both celebrated and dismissed on account of its foreign pedigree. Yet as with other "modern" literary genres in Japan (most notably the *shōsetsu*, or novel), the success of detective fiction was part of the broader social and cultural changes brought about by the Meiji Restoration. Detective fiction and its protagonist presented a new type of literature, stories (as Edgar Allen Poe called them) of "ratiocination," in which the detective works alone in the familiar world of city streets and alleyways, investigating disorder (crime) and restoring affairs to their "proper" disposition. Detective fiction thus was intimately bound up with the new social phenomena of urbanization and modernization, with their uncomfortable juxtapositions of old and new, urban and rural, wealth and poverty, and community and isolation. As critics have long noted, detective fiction in Europe and America was intimately linked to the urban environment and reflected both the terrors and the pleasures offered by newly industrialized cities like New York or Paris.³ As an urban genre, therefore, detective fiction had a special appeal in the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taisho (1912–1926) eras in Tokyo, which was witnessing unprecedented changes not only in its economy, but in the details of everyday life as well.

At another level, detective fiction's success in Japan can be seen as part of the more general influx of Western ideas and texts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ The individual most commonly accepted as the first Japanese detective writer, journalist Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862–1913), was part of the burgeoning literary market of the late Meiji era (ca. 1905–1912),

one marked by growing numbers of newspapers, newspaper readers, and authors eager to provide a largely urban audience with a wide range of literature, including translations and adaptations of Western works (some of them bordering on plagiarism), as well as original stories and essays.⁵ While in the beginning Ruikō simply translated foreign detective fiction, he often found that he had to adapt stories such as Émile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge* for his Japanese audience, reworking the plot and changing the names and places to ones with which his readers would be familiar.⁶ In the course of adapting and changing mysteries written by others, Ruikō began to create his own, producing a substantial oeuvre in addition to his better-known translations. His "Muzan" (In cold blood) is the earliest example of a Japanese mystery story, written in the form of a classic whodunit.⁷

Ruikō and the others who followed him at the end of the Meiji and the beginning of the Taisho eras concentrated on following the tenets of detective fiction established by Western authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Anna Katharine Green, and Austin Freeman.⁸ These writers of classical Anglo-American detective fiction emphasized puzzles that could only be solved rationally and logically (e.g., the "locked room") and rules of fair play. The more clever and diabolically twisted these *torikku* (tricks) were, the more highly regarded the work. Indeed, the cultural critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke argued that detective fiction could exist only in a culture capable of logical thought:

In order for detective fiction to develop, it is necessary to have a settled society. Without a settled social environment, there can be no detective fiction. In a broader sense, these social circumstances point to the development of scientific enlightenment, of the intellect, and of the analytic and logical mind. Specifically, when the criminal and the investigative method become scientific, the investigation of the crime and the subsequent trial are founded on valid physical evidence, and conviction is based upon written laws, this demonstrates the maintenance of national order.⁹

Hirabayashi's insistence upon modern scientific rationality as a prerequisite for detective fiction echoes the views of Western critics and writers and points to the deep way in which Japanese detective fiction was (from its earliest days) implicated in wider processes of cultural assimilation and modernization. As Karatani Kōjin and others have shown, however, these processes were far more complex than simple narratives of "modernization" or "Westernization" would suggest.¹⁰ Part of detective fiction's success was also due to its resonance with earlier texts and traditions, such as Kuei Wan-Jung's *Tang yin bi shi* (known in Japanese as the *Toinhiji*), a Chinese collection of criminal cases originally meant as a training manual for legal officials.¹¹

Likewise, while Ruikō began his career translating Western mystery stories, other authors drew upon the elements of mystery, horror, and suspense found in Ueda Akinari's (1734–1809) famous collection of ghost stories, *Ugetsu monogatari*, and combined them with insights gleaned from more modern psychological research on obsession, fetishism, and sadomasochism.¹² Tanizaki Junichiro, who became famous later in life for his more “literary” treatments of these topics, began his career writing short stories like “Himitsu” (The secret, 1911) and “Yanagi-yu no jiken” (The incident at the Willow Bathhouse, 1918), which combine mystery, exoticism, and a heavy dose of eroticism.¹³ These qualities of Tanizaki's work, as well as his creative use of writers like Baudelaire, Conan Doyle, and Poe, would have a profound impact not only on the noted mystery writer Yokomizo Seishi, but also on the most famous Japanese author of detective fiction—Edogawa Rampo.

Edogawa Rampo was the pen name of Hirai Taro (1894–1965), who was to change both the artistic conception of detective fiction in Japan and the manner in which it was produced.¹⁴ Rampo is the defining figure of Japanese detective fiction because of his unique ability to combine the suspense story tradition of the Edo period with the scientific methods and logical devices of the Western detective story. This stylistic and technical blending of old and new, Japan and the West, was mirrored in the way that Rampo depicted the changing face of Tokyo in his stories, encouraging his readers to recognize the familiar traces of premodern Edo as well as the innovations and novelties introduced by modern technology and social reform. Many of Rampo's works feature themes that revolve around voyeurism, false or multiple identities, dismemberment, sadomasochism, doll-like people, and human-seeming dolls.¹⁵ Yet in other works he is a sharp critic of the inevitable changes brought on by the modernizing city.

After graduating from Waseda University, Rampo bounced from job to job (including working for a trading company and selling soba noodles from a pushcart) before launching his literary career in 1923 with the publication of “Ni-sen dōka” (The two-sen copper coin).¹⁶ This short story, which incorporates tricks about cryptography in its plot, won a prize offered by the youth-oriented journal *Shinseinen* (New youth), which went on to publish many of Rampo's stories in the ensuing years. Before 1920, most mysteries were published either serially in mainstream magazines or newspapers or as stand-alone novels. With the introduction of a magazine devoted to literature aimed at a young, primarily male audience, however, the mystery field enjoyed rapid growth—a surge in popularity that made Rampo's career possible. *Shinseinen* capitalized on the growing middle-class reading public, who had both leisure time to read and the money to buy books and magazines.

While there had been other magazines devoted to detective fiction, they were short-lived, and it was only with the appearance of *Shinseinen* that a forum was created for both Western translations and original detective stories.¹⁷ Most of Japan's early detective fiction authors got their start by publishing in *Shinseinen* because of the increasing demand for new material. *Shinseinen* thus was responsible for popularizing and exploiting the mass market appeal for detective and adventure fiction by creating an audience who would continue to consume it.¹⁸

As a popular genre, moreover, detective fiction provided an outlet for aspiring women writers. Hiratsuka Raichō (1896–1971), who was best known for her editorship of the early feminist journal *Seitō* (Bluestocking), was one of the first to translate Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man in the Crowd."¹⁹ Likewise, Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–1972), a left-wing author, wrote detective fiction not only for pleasure, but also for money. Her stories, "Supai jiken" (The spy incident) and "Irezumi jiken no shinsō" (The truth about the tattoo affair), were standard, puzzle-oriented detective fiction,²⁰ but the money that she earned allowed her to continue with her other writing.²¹ Moreover, while some authors, such as Ogura Teruko and Ichijō Eiko, published their detective fiction in the pages of *Shinseinen*,²² many others contributed to a series of spinoff magazines dedicated to female readers and featuring true-life accounts of women detectives, as well as mystery stories targeted at girls. In particular, the women's magazine *Shufu no tomo* (The housewife's friend) published serialized mysteries and mystery reviews.²³ These mysteries were different from those appearing in *Shinseinen* in that they often featured romantic themes or domestic entanglements.

Likewise, women's magazines such as *Fujin* (Lady), as well as *Shufu no tomo*, published true-life accounts of women who had taken jobs as detectives, and these contained an element of social criticism as well.²⁴ In the April 1924 issue of *Shufu no tomo*, under the heading "Shukugyō fujin no yorokobi wa nani ka?" (What makes career women happy?), was a story by Sugiyama Tamae. Supposedly the tale of a young woman's rise from founding origins to a career as a detective, Sugiyama's account is quite critical of the social mores of her heroine's employers as the young woman is sent undercover in a wealthy household and comments upon the social classes and their foibles in Osaka at the end of the Taisho period.²⁵

The growth of detective fiction, whether written by women or men, was abruptly halted during the Pacific War. In 1941, detective fiction of Anglo-American origin was banned in Japan, and writers of detective fiction turned their attention to either adventure fiction or spy fiction.²⁶ Even this outlet was curtailed, however, as a chronic shortage of paper effectively put an end to much of the publication of mass entertainment magazines. By the end of

the war, *Shinseimen* was on its last legs and ceased publishing in 1950. In its place arose a new magazine—*Hōseki* (The jewel)—that took over as the main forum for detective fiction in Japan. More important for the renewed success of Japanese detective fiction were the efforts of Edogawa Rampo, who now turned much of his attention from the production of detective fiction to its promotion in Japan and overseas, as well as to numerous critical essays on the history and development of detective fiction in Japan and the West. In 1955, the Edogawa Prize was created through the joint efforts of Rampo and the Kodansha publishing company, which in subsequent decades became one of Japan's biggest publishers of mysteries, both foreign and domestic. Finally, the publication in 1956 of a collection of Edogawa Rampo's stories in English, as well as an issue of the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* dedicated to his work, firmly established his reputation worldwide as the progenitor of detective fiction in Japan.²⁷

Postwar Detective Fiction and the Place of Social Critique

Despite Rampo's stature, it is the work of another writer that has had the greatest influence upon the women writers of the late twentieth century: Matsumoto Seichō (1909–1992). Matsumoto, while perhaps most famous for his detective fiction, was also a cultural critic and activist. Born to a poor family in Fukuoka, he never completed high school and had to support himself with a variety of different jobs, beginning his writing career by producing advertising copy for the *Asahi shinbun*. Matsumoto's early literary works were not popular fiction but rather more serious "pure" literature, and in 1953 he received the Akutagawa Prize for best work of serious fiction for his novel *Aru Kokura nikki den* (One account of the Kokura diary), which told the story of author Mori Ogai's missing diary.²⁸ Not long after, Matsumoto switched to detective fiction, winning the Association of Mystery Writers Prize for "Kao" (The face), the story of a man who murders his mistress and whose guilt drives him to reveal his crime.²⁹ After his successful debut, Matsumoto continued to publish a series of detective novels, almost every one of them a best-seller. In fact, Matsumoto's popularity started a previously unheard-of boom in sales of detective fiction in Japan, to the point that critics of the genre refer to the "pre-" and "post-Matsumoto" eras.³⁰ When he was not writing detective fiction, Matsumoto was a social critic, writing extensively about true-life crime and other political and historical events, such as the impact of the American occupation on Japan.³¹

Matsumoto's socially conscious writing was notable for the way in which it deliberately exploited the historical and political possibilities of detective fiction. With its emphasis on the minutiae of daily life (clues from which the detective derives his solution) and its attention to "real-life" social

problems (corruption, sexual scandals, financial misdeeds, etc.), detective fiction has reflected more immediately than other literary genres the fears and fantasies of the modern, urban bourgeoisie. Furthermore, as John Cawelti has argued, while detective fiction is often dismissed from critical study because of its formulaic nature, it is that very feature that makes it such a good vehicle for the expression of cultural complexities in an accessible format. In contrast to mimetic literature, which shows the reader the world as she knows it, formulaic literature allows for a balance between reality and the characteristics of an escapist imaginative experience. Thus, the reader can consider new and existing social issues in a safe and carefully controlled forum and resolve any tensions and ambiguities arising from them in a non-threatening manner.³² For Cawelti, genre novels provide a “controlled space” that allows for the exploration of alternative perceptions and constructions, a space in which cultural fears and public concerns can be investigated by a wide readership. This suggests, according to Priscilla Walton, that “formula narratives have the ability to assist in the process of shifting ideological norms on a broad scale.”³³ Ultimately, then, “formulaic evolution and change are one process by which new interests and values can be assimilated into conventional patterns of imaginative expression.”³⁴

Thus, detective fiction serves a dual role: first, it allows for interpretations in the text of certain issues, and second, it presents those issues to a larger audience, providing a forum to consider possibly alternative viewpoints. As Margaret Crawford has noted, this can be seen most distinctly in the way in which detective fiction represents urban life and urban problems, providing a discourse about the city that parallels but exists apart from that generated by academic urban studies. Due to its “historical link[s] with both urban reality and urban imagination,” therefore, detective fiction’s “continuing evolution . . . offers rich possibilities for rethinking the connections between subjectivity, interpretation, and urban space.”³⁵

This social, interpretive aspect of detective fiction is evident in the work of Edogawa Rampo. As Matsuyama Iwao has shown, Rampo’s sensory evocation of the city in his stories revealed the depth to which everyday life was changing as a result of the rapid social and technological transformation of Tokyo in the 1920s. Rampo’s 1926 story, “Yaneura no sanposha,” commonly translated as “The Stroller in the Attic,” relates the murder of an apartment dweller by his neighbor, who is driven to the crime by the former’s loud snoring seeping through the paper-thin walls.³⁶ Such seemingly small details do not simply illustrate changes in living circumstances resulting from rapid urbanization; they also anticipate the sympathy (or at least comprehension) of readers who themselves had experienced a loss of privacy or felt trapped by the close proximity of strangers around them.

Rampo's willingness at times to directly address socially controversial issues likewise revealed his ability to move beyond the tricks of the trade current at the time, and it drew the attention of increasingly active government censors in the early Showa era (1926–1989). Thus his 1929 story, "Imomushi" (The caterpillar), which described a grievously wounded soldier's homecoming, was refused by the journal *Kaizō* because of its antiwar message. Although the story was later published in *Shinseinen* in heavily censored form, it was not allowed to be reprinted until after the war.³⁷ More generally, Rampo's fascination with deviance and the margins of society took on political overtones as the military government of the 1930s and 1940s took an increasingly dim view not simply of "foreign" literature, but also of what it perceived to be threats to Japanese stability and values.

Despite these early efforts, however, Rampo's detective fiction tended in the main to adhere to the conventions of what Japanese critics call "*honkakuha*," or standard, detective fiction, albeit with a greater emphasis upon the exotic and the erotic.³⁸ Indeed, after the war Rampo disavowed any political goals in "Imomushi," arguing that he had been interested in the more universal aspects of the soldier's situation rather than in criticizing war or the government.³⁹ While this may reflect Rampo's own political retrenchment during the war years, it also points to the intrinsically ambivalent nature of detective fiction as a forum for social observation.⁴⁰ Despite changes in the genre—such as the development of the hard-boiled detective novel, which brought with it a shift from the deductive reasoning favored by earlier writers to the inductive-style logic characteristic of the post-World War II period—many of the basic components of detective fiction have remained largely unchanged.⁴¹

These components, in turn, are at their root conservative. Part of this conservatism is due to the very structure of the detective novel's plot, which moves inexorably from stasis to disruption to settlement in an attempt to impose order on the chaos of the city and its inhabitants. More important, within the context of the narrative, no matter what problems come to light (such as bankruptcy, incest, or fraud), they can be resolved only within the parameters of the preexisting social structure. Indeed, according to Franco Moretti, the detective novel is antinovelistic because "the aim of the narration is no longer the character's development into autonomy, or a change from the initial situation, or the presentation of plot as a conflict and an evolutionary spiral, [an] image of a developing world that is difficult to draw to a close." Instead, "the individual initiates the narration not because he lives—but because he dies."⁴² Social inequities, the plights of individuals, or personal rationales for wrongdoing thus are eclipsed by the restoration of law and order. This characteristic is enhanced by the figure of the detective himself, a voyeuristic figure for whom seeing is often the same as doing. In

the hard-boiled tradition in particular, it is the detective's ability to stay *uncommitted* and *uninvolved*, his ironic detachment, that allows him to do his (and by extension society's) job correctly.⁴³ Thus, while the detective novel may reflect the anxieties of society, it is also a site where the appeasement of those fears is structurally inscribed.⁴⁴ The problems that the detective novel features are resolved by the end of the text, with the guilty punished and justice prevailing.

While part of this tradition in a number of ways, Matsumoto Seichō nevertheless strove to take a more active position on the problems facing post-war Japanese society. His reinterpretation of the meaning and function of detective fiction led to the development of an entirely new subgenre, called “*shakai-ha*” (the social school) by publishers and critics. Unlike the dominant subgenre of *honkaku-ha*, which is characterized by entertaining puzzles and plot twists, *shakai-ha* is intensely realistic in its approach, with extensive attention to the characters' psychological motives and to social problems. Matsumoto's best-known detective fiction was set in the high-growth era of the late 1950s and 1960s, as Japan transformed itself after the devastation and privations of war. As was the case with Rampo, Matsumoto's works reveal the changes taking place in everyday life and how these changes—increased corporate corruption, urban sprawl, and alienation, to name a few—affect the characters in the novels. In contrast to traditional detective fiction, however, in which social problems are presented as either insoluble “facts of life” or details necessary for the creation of a “reality effect,” Matsumoto brought social change and injustice into focus as intrinsic elements of the plot, causes for crime rather than simply its context.

Rather than relying on plot twists to propel the story forward, Matsumoto focuses on describing the motives of the characters and how the ordinary person can be driven to commit crimes normally outside his or her ken. In his best-known work, *Ten to sen* (Points and lines, 1958), he constructs a plot that centers on murders committed in order to cover up collusion between a high-level government official and a businessman.⁴⁵ Matsumoto's novel thus draws the reader's attention to the darker side of Japan's much lauded high economic growth, pointing out its personal, social, and environmental costs in a way that anticipated investigative journalism on similar themes in the 1960s.⁴⁶ The crimes Matsumoto describes, moreover, are not only the result of individual perpetrators, but also of the flawed or inequitable social structures to which those individuals belong.

Despite Matsumoto's success and popularity, the *shakai-ha* fiction that he pioneered has had relatively few adherents. Most contemporary detective fiction writers, while paying homage to Matsumoto, consider themselves to fall within the *honkaku* tradition. Much of this is due to the overtly political

nature of Matsumoto's writings, and its left-leaning politics. While Rampo wished to remain outwardly apolitical, Matsumoto's political views colored both his fiction and its critical reception.⁴⁷ Coming of age at a time of great labor unrest, Matsumoto belonged to a proletarian reading group at the Yawata Steel Mill and was a reader of both *Bungei sensen* and *Senki*, the two prewar proletarian journals. Although Matsumoto did not identify himself as a proletarian writer and insisted that his works simply revealed his concern for the everyday citizen, his political background, as well as the explicitly critical stance of his detective fiction, has led critics to consider his works as more than merely entertainment literature, a judgment that carries both positive and negative connotations.

The ambivalent status of Matsumoto's work, in fact, called into question the place of detective fiction within the Japanese literary hierarchy, which has continued to be dominated by the distinction between "*junbungaku*" and "*taishūbungaku*" (pure and mass or popular literature).⁴⁸ While literary critics tend to agree upon the superiority of *junbungaku*, they are far less clear about what it actually constitutes.⁴⁹ Until Matsumoto, however, detective fiction's place within the dominant binary was clear. As a formulaic genre—particularly one that had been imported from the West—and as a form of literature that appealed to large numbers of readers, it was quite clearly *taishūbungaku*.

In 1961, this categorization was challenged in essays by two leading literary critics, Hirano Ken and Itō Sei. Hirano's essay, which came in the middle of a long serial discussion of the status of *junbungaku*, dealt with the origins of *junbungaku* and its relationship to proletarian literature. While Hirano dismissed attempts to recategorize detective fiction, he did concede that *junbungaku* and proletarian literature shared the same origins.⁵⁰ Itō replied that the realism identified by so many critics as a benchmark of *junbungaku* was equally present in Matsumoto's work.⁵¹ In a subsequent essay, moreover, Itō argued that particular works of detective fiction shared some of the qualities of "pure" literature, notably those by Minakami Tsutomu, whose first-person narrative struck him as similar to that employed by the *watakushi shosetsu* ("I" novel). In turn, he noted that Matsumoto's fiction, like that of the proletarian writers, "successfully describes the incomplete capitalist society of the Showa era."⁵² Itō went on to suggest that detective fiction, particularly that narrated in the first person or treating social issues, should be considered as "in-between literature" (*chūsetsu bungaku*)⁵³—not quite pure literature but sharing some of the same ideals. Itō called detective fiction "social novels" and suggested that other examples of genre fiction should not be lumped together because they treated problems in different ways.⁵⁴ Because of Matsumoto's focus upon politics, moreover, Itō concluded that his works could be considered as *junbungaku*.⁵⁵

To be sure, Hirano and Itō's inclusion of detective fiction within their discussions of *junbungaku* and *taishūbungaku* had little lasting effect upon detective fiction's status within the *bundan*, the Japanese literary community.⁵⁶ Their explicit focus upon Matsumoto's link to the proletarian movement and the political content of his writing meant that the decline of *shakai-ha* fiction of political activism in the mid-1960s removed the only "authorized" form of detective fiction from view. At the same time, their debate underscored the particular strengths of detective fiction as a potentially critical yet entertaining genre. Unlike proletarian literature, which "spreads a political ideology running counter to the hegemony of the capitalistic, monarchic ideology already in place," detective fiction amuses at the same time as it edifies (albeit in a far less didactic manner).⁵⁷ In turn, Hirano's reflections on the nature of "pure" literature—and in particular its "anxiety to portray the world realistically . . . yet maintain a detached attitude toward common society"⁵⁸—revealed the degree to which *taishūbungaku*, and particularly detective fiction of a more "standard" cast, could fulfill many of the same functions.

Women's Detective Fiction: The "Boom"

It is no accident that Hirano's investigations into the nature of *junbungaku* came in the early 1960s, amid an onslaught of American television and other products. As Matthew Strecher has pointed out, attempts to redefine *junbungaku* have coincided with periods in which Japan was most open to outside influences—notably in the 1920s and 1930s and again in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but also in the late 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁹ In each instance, the Japanese literary guild feels threatened by the encroachments of popular literature and thus attempts to protect itself by reasserting the boundaries between the "pure" and the "popular." This sense of crisis has been exacerbated in recent years not only by the proliferation of mass artistic media, but also by a general feeling that *junbungaku* is out of touch with the reading public. Indeed, despite the recent burst of writers from the periphery of Japanese society receiving the Akutagawa Prize (such as Zainichi [Koreans resident in Japan] or Okinawans), there generally has not been much interest in these authors or their stories. This attitude can be seen both in the mainstream press and among figures in the literary establishment. Novelist and Nobel laureate Oe Kenzaburo has complained that *junbungaku* is now either so ephemeral or so universal in its concerns that it no longer tries to reflect what is happening in Japan itself,⁶⁰ while an article in the mass market magazine *Aera* declares that Japanese literary traditions have become stagnant, preventing "serious" authors from responding creatively to a rapidly changing society.⁶¹

This situation of literary ferment and crisis, however, has also opened the door to new authors and new approaches. In particular, Sato Shinichiro, an editor at the major publishing house Shinchosha, has suggested that genre literature, particularly that written by women, is filling the void left by the lack of interesting examples of *junbungaku*.⁶² Leading this trend has been a new breed of young female detective writers, whose works combine not only the *honkaku-ha* and *shakai-ha* traditions of detective fiction, but also other literary genres as part of a new sensibility about, and new sensitivity to, women's roles within contemporary Japanese society.⁶³

The genre in which these women work has been described by Kasai Kiyoshi as *shinhonkaku-ha*, a hybrid form that blends the entertaining plot twists and narrative devices of traditional Japanese detective fiction with the social critique characteristic of Matsumoto and the *shakai-ha* tradition.⁶⁴ This cross-fertilization represents a response to the women's detective fiction that developed in the postwar period. Initially, the creation of the magazine *Hōseki* and its increasing demand for detective fiction of all types led to the appearance of a number of female authors, but they received little recognition until 1957, when Niki Etsuko received the prestigious Edogawa Prize for her novel *Neko ga shitte ita* (The cat knew it).⁶⁵ Niki, who was followed as an Edogawa winner by Shijō Ayako in 1959 and Tōgawa Masako in 1962, was notable not only for her commercial success, but also for the social criticism in her works, which led to her recognition alongside Matsumoto as an instrumental figure in the rise of "social" detective fiction.⁶⁶ In the mid-1960s, however, the number of women writers declined, as many married or moved on to other genres.⁶⁷ The 1970s and 1980s were dominated by two female mystery writers, Natsuki Shizuko and Yamamura Misa, whose popular novels, often featuring young, unmarried heroines who found love at the end of each story, spawned a number of imitators and became representative of women's mystery writing. Rather than the social criticism of *shakai-ha* detective fiction, these women relied on clever plot twists and colorful locales to distinguish their books, a style that quickly became threadbare through overuse and overexposure in the form of film and television adaptations.

The dominance of this brand of detective fiction began to give way in 1987, when the previously unknown Miyabe Miyuki won the Japan Mystery Writers Association Prize for her short story "Warera no rinjin wa hannin (Our neighbor is a criminal)."⁶⁸ Miyabe's career signaled the beginning of a "new wave" of women mystery writers that owed its impetus to a variety of factors. The most immediate of these was the phenomenon of writing schools, which arose as a response to the explosion of literary prizes (and cash awards) offered by publishers, individuals, and corporations in the 1980s. Since many of these awards were established in order to recruit new

writers and since they recognized short fiction, the prerequisites were far less daunting than for more established awards such as the Akutagawa or Naoki Prizes.⁶⁹ The schools that serviced this industry attracted large numbers of women, many of them housewives hoping to begin freelance careers. This was true as well for the writing schools associated with major publishers, which operated as a type of “farm system”; indeed, the school operated by Kodansha counts Miyabe Miyuki as one of its alumnae.⁷⁰

Furthermore, critic Yamamae Yuzuru has suggested that the “bubble” economy of the 1980s, which in many ways benefited male workers far more than their female counterparts, had the opposite effect for women writers of detective fiction. This was so for two reasons. For one thing, female authors had more opportunities to publish their work due to the simple fact that men were fully occupied with the demands of a red-hot economy.⁷¹ For another, the economic boom meant that more women were joining the workforce, leading not only to an increased readership for women’s fiction, but also an increasing interest in a genre that (as will be seen in chapter 3) has much to say about the effects of work upon women and their relationships.

Finally, the boom in women’s detective fiction was linked to a corresponding boom in the United States and the United Kingdom. From the early 1980s onward, with the work of Marcia Mueller, Sara Paretsky, Liza Cody, and Sue Grafton, who all created independent female private eyes in the hard-boiled tradition, women’s detective fiction of all types became extremely popular in the United States. Japanese publishers capitalized on this phenomenon and marketed translations of these authors under the title “4-F” (the protagonist, the author, the translator, and the reader all being females). These translations proved to be exceedingly popular and had at least some influence upon all of the authors discussed in this study. For example, Sengai Akiyuki has suggested that Anglo-American women’s detective fiction has compelled Japanese authors to create characters with a strong sense of individuality and a greater interest in taking on personal problems. Of particular interest for Japanese female detectives, says Sengai, are the problems of love and sex and how to resolve them.⁷²

Yet while the influence of writers like Paretsky and Patricia Cornwell on Japanese women writers is undeniable, critics also have noted differences between the American and Japanese writers. While some issues (love and work) are discussed in a similar fashion, the emphasis on others, such as identity and community, reflects the particular nature of women’s lives in Japan. This adaptability, in fact, indicates one of the strengths of detective (and other genre) fiction, which allows for similarities due to its formulaic plot structure, as well as for heterogeneities because of the need to tell a variety of different stories within the same framework.

Each of these elements—professional, economic, and literary—can be seen in the careers of the women who make up the contemporary “boom” generation. In the pages that follow, I discuss these writers within three distinct “waves.” The first is epitomized by Miyabe and Takamura Kaoru, who received extensive attention both because they were women writing in what had been commonly considered a man’s genre and because they were amateurs with surprising talent. By the time the second wave of women writers began to be published, the fact that they were women no longer was sufficient to attract interest, allowing them to build their reputation solely on the quality of their work. The third wave of women writers is marked not only by its size, but also by the increasing diversity of literary forms that its members bring to their work.

It is important to note that while detective fiction has always been considered entertainment fiction for the masses, there is elitism even within the genre. The numerous awards for detective fiction in Japan lead to the understanding that evaluative judgments have been institutionalized to determine what is “good.” Thus some writers of detective fiction have won prizes and critical acclaim and some have not. The writers I consider here have been consistently rated the best in their field, regardless of their sex, and there are many female detective fiction writers who have not managed to attain a similar level of achievement.

Takamura and Miyabe: The Royalty of Mystery Writing

The first two authors of the Heisei era (1989–) “boom” were Takamura Kaoru and Miyabe Miyuki. Because they were the first two women to achieve financial and critical success with their work, they received the lion’s share of media attention. Despite their differences (or perhaps because of them), they were often interviewed together, particularly in the early years of the boom (1992–1994), and their status as unmarried women and former office workers who became writers made them good interview subjects. After 1994, because of the influx of other women writers, Takamura and Miyabe did not receive as much individual attention. By this point, however, both were established writers, and their nonmystery writing was often seen in journals and newspapers.

In the early stages of the boom, it was clearly the gender of the authors, the strength of their personalities, and the quality of their work that piqued the media’s curiosity and kept these authors in the spotlight.⁷³ Takamura, the older writer, became known as the “Queen of Mysteries,” with the slightly younger Miyabe her princess.⁷⁴ This relationship continued to hold true until Takamura left the field of mystery writing in 1997. A graduate of International Christian University, Takamura (b. 1953) is the most respected

among the women writers in the recent boom, but that respect also has served to isolate her from her peers. Certainly she is one of the better educated of the writers in this study (only Shibata, Kirino, and Matsuo completed their university studies) and the most socially active in her critical writings; nevertheless, she is not included in the *White Mystery* anthology and is only briefly mentioned by mystery critics. This isolation is due in part to the subject matter of her novels; despite the genre in which she writes, she aims at making her readers “struggle for their pleasure.”⁷⁵ Her novels are dense ruminations on financial crime and international espionage that feature flawed and psychologically damaged characters. She also says she does not intend to write a mystery when she writes; rather, she feels that her work is “*futsū no shōsetsu*” (a regular novel).⁷⁶

Takamura’s attitude toward her writing also differs from that of other writers because she feels that she has a moral obligation (*gimu*) to her readers to explore deeper philosophical issues within the context of her fiction. Like Matsumoto Seichō, Takamura has taken on contemporary social issues such as nuclear power and terrorism in her novels, themes that reappear in her newspaper and magazine editorials.⁷⁷ This serious outlook is reflected in her personal lifestyle; by all accounts, she leads a workaholic, quasi-monastic existence, eschewing movies and nonnews television programs. More strik-

ingly, Takamura strives, either consciously or unconsciously, not to be a *joryū* or *josei sakka* (lady novelist). Disavowing any ability to understand women, particularly when it comes to murder, she thinks that men's motives for killing are easier to comprehend and populates her novels with male characters.⁷⁸ Recently, Takamura has professed her disaffection with the genre and what she considers to be its limitations, and after the publication of her two-volume fictionalization of the Morinaga-Glico incident of 1984 (*Reidi jokaa* [The lady joker], 1997) she publicly gave up detective fiction in order to concentrate more fully on "serious" literature.⁷⁹

In contrast to Takamura's brooding intellectualism, Miyabe Miyuki (b. 1960) insists on emphasizing the entertaining aspects of her work, despite the often weighty issues she takes on. Her output is prodigious: since the appearance of her first novel, she has published (as of this writing) over thirty full-length novels and collections of short stories and has had several long-running serials in such newspapers as the *Asahi shinbun*. She also has won numerous awards for her work, including the Yamamoto Prize, the Japan Mystery Writers Association Prize, and the Yoshikawa Prize, and in 1998 Miyabe was finally awarded the Naoki Prize, Japan's most prestigious award for popular literature, for her novel *Riyū* (The reason). In addition, while heralded as one of Japan's best mystery writers, Miyabe also has published a number of historical novels (*jidai shōsetsu*) to similar acclaim.

As one of the first women writers of the Japanese mystery boom, Miyabe has received substantial attention from the press—in particular after the publication of *Kasha* in 1992. Initially she was interviewed with and compared to Takamura Kaoru, but Takamura soon separated herself from Miyabe after quitting the mystery writing business. Miyabe has remained in the public eye because she is such a compelling and accessible figure. Her image is always that of a demure young woman, well-dressed and artfully accessorized, and many of her interviews are given in *kenjōgo*, the humble language of polite young women (*ojosama*). Unlike other literary figures in Japan, Miyabe has not espoused any causes (such as speaking out on terrorism or the plight of the aged), but she occasionally writes essays on her and her family's memories of old Tokyo or the joys of traditional hot springs. These themes of memory and of the *shitamachi*, or working-class area of Tokyo, which has long been home to the city's craftspeople and petty merchants, recur in her fictional works.

In many of Miyabe's earlier interviews (1992–1994), she identifies herself as an "Edokko," a child of the old city of Tokyo, Edo. Her family has lived in Kōtō-ku, in the traditional *shitamachi*, for four generations. After graduating from Sumidagawa High School, she trained as a shorthand typist before working in a law office for several years. She began studying at Kodansha's

“Famous School” for writers, where she wrote her first novel. Unmarried, Miyabe continues to live at home with her parents, although she has an office near her house where she does much of her writing. Intensely involved in her career, Miyabe has never traveled outside of Japan and prefers to do much of her research in the local libraries near her house. Even within the city of Tokyo, Miyabe rarely strays across the Sumida River, limiting her trips to the Ginza.⁸⁰ She sees Tokyo as both a “mirage” and a frightening place that has changed significantly since she was young.⁸¹ Yet despite this identification with Tokyo’s more traditional side, Miyabe does not harbor an antitechnological bias. The characters in her books take technology for granted, and Miyabe herself does all of her writing on word processors. Her interest in technology extends to the foreign media, such as international cable news. While her books are riddled with references to Western popular culture (movies and songs), her fictional Japan is devoid of foreigners and foreign companies and products.

Miyabe’s skill as a storyteller, her demure and ladylike demeanor, and her facility with both detective and historical fiction make her a popular writer among all members of the Japanese reading public. Yet despite the seemingly socially conscious aspects of her work, there is a darker, more conservative message underlying her novels, which advocate a return to the simpler past as a way to stem the tide of consumerism, as well as to recover Japan’s “traditional” essence.

The Second Wave: Nonami Asa

While Takamura Kaoru and Miyabe Miyuki were the first women to write mysteries in the hard-boiled tradition, their novels rarely discussed women and never had a woman as the detective. In contrast, the women who make up the second wave of detective writers have begun to create detectives who reflect the desires and concerns of modern Japanese women. Foremost among these second-wave authors is Nonami Asa, who has been hailed by critics as the successor to Miyabe Miyuki and Takamura Kaoru. While Nonami has written in a variety of genres, she is most celebrated for her mystery and suspense novels.⁸² Born in the same year as Miyabe (1960), she followed a similarly circuitous route to mystery writing. After dropping out of Waseda University, she worked a number of part-time and short-term jobs before enrolling in a school specializing in writing for television and movies. This phase of her career did not last long, and she turned her sights to mystery writing. Her first novel, *Kōfuku na chōshoku* (*A happy breakfast*), won the First Japanese Mystery and Suspense Award in 1988. Temporarily paralyzed by her sudden success, she was unable to produce anything for a number of years, until she eased herself back by writing short stories.⁸³ Despite debuting at the same time as Miyabe, due to this hiatus in her writing career,

Nonami Asa (Shinchosha
Publishing Company)

Nonami did not become well known to the mystery world until the release of *Kogoeru kiba* (Frozen fangs) in 1996.

After the initial boom in women's mystery writing, the Japanese press has not been as dotting toward women authors, with much less coverage of their works in the mainstream popular press. Nonami, however, has received substantial attention, in part because she was awarded the Naoki Prize, and in part because of her unique, motorcycle-riding police detective heroine. Unlike Miyabe, who presents an unrelentingly cheerful face to the media, Nonami has a darker edge and is much more willing to discuss the misfortunes and setbacks that she has suffered. This difference between the two authors manifests itself in the way that each chooses to critique society. While both draw on their personal experiences to form their plots, Miyabe's nostalgic social critique is lighter in tone and less personal than the almost brutal depiction of male/female relations that Nonami provides. Yet Nonami's work, although frank, is not uniformly negative, as there are hints of progress in gender relations in her treatment of the topics of women and work.

The Third Wave: Shibata Yoshiki and Kirino Natsuo

Shibata Yoshiki appeared on the mystery writing scene out of relative obscurity in 1995, when her first novel in the Riko series, *Riko-Vinasu no eien* (Riko-Forever Venus), received the Yokomizo Seishi Award for mysteries.⁸⁴

Unlike Nonami and Miyabe, Shibata (b. 1959) graduated from Aoyama Gakuin University and worked in clothing and medical companies before moving to Kyoto. After the birth of her children, she began writing novels.⁸⁵ As with Nonami, Shibata's series features a police detective, Murakami Riko, who is a member of the sex crimes division in the Shinjuku precinct. Riko's success at her job exacts a toll on her, however, as her messy personal life threatens her professional accomplishments.

Kirino Natsuo is the other major figure in the third wave of women mystery writers. Older than Miyabe and Nonami, Kirino (b. 1951) graduated from Seikei University in Tokyo and worked in marketing. Like Nonami Asa, she attended a "scenario writing school" in order to learn how to write fiction.⁸⁶ After she married and had children, she wanted to start working again, so she began writing fiction, spurred on by her desire to win one of the prizes offered by the Sanrio Publishing Company to new writers of romance novels.⁸⁷ In 1984, she won the Sanrio Romance Prize for her novel *Ai no yukikata* (The method of love), and she wrote two other romances before turning to young adult fiction and adventure novels under the pen name Noharano Emi.⁸⁸ In addition to young adult fiction, Kirino also has written scenarios for women's comic books.

Kirino's prize-winning mystery debut, *Kao ni furikakaru ame* (Her face, veiled in rain, 1993), began the Miro series. It was followed a year later by

Kirino Natsuo (Shinchosha
Publishing Company)

the second novel in the series, *Tenshi ni misuterareta yoru* (Night abandoned by angels). Both books reflect Kirino's interest in foreign detective fiction, in particular the new, hard-boiled brand.⁸⁹ In addition to her Miro series, which includes a story about Miro's detective father, Kirino has written a mystery set in the world of women's professional wrestling, which has become increasingly popular in Japan.⁹⁰ Her 1997 novel *Out*, the story of an ordinary group of housewives who dismember and dispose of a friend's murdered husband, drew substantial media attention and intrigued readers with the idea that a forty-year-old woman would have the passion to conceive and carry out such a crime.⁹¹ Kirino addressed this issue in a long article in a leading women's magazine, in which she discussed how friendship among women in their later years develops into a deeper intimacy.⁹² Kirino was awarded the 1999 Naoki Prize for her novel *Yawaraka na hoho* (Soft cheeks), another mystery involving the disappearance of a little girl. In 2003, after her success with *Out*, she revived the Miro series with the novel *Dark*.

The appearance of this third wave has gone unnoticed in the Japanese press, apart from accounts of individual prizes. While Miyabe and Takamura are still receiving media attention for their literary accomplishments and are sought for their opinions on current events, the latest wave of writers has entered onto the scene with little fanfare. These women, largely college educated, have benefited from the increased interest in detective fiction and the

overabundance of prizes that exist to recognize new mystery talent. Many of them have come to prominence only through the receipt of such awards, while others have turned to mystery writing from other genres, such as romance and science fiction. At the same time, however, this critical mass of women writers (including Imamura Aya and Wakatake Nanami) guarantees that all types of women's stories make it into print. While individual novels by women continue to capture the media's fancy, the bulk of women's mysteries have become part of the literary mainstream, where they are noticed for their plots and characterizations rather than simply for their female authorship. Often, the appearance of a new female writer passes unnoticed, except in an anthology of other women writers.

Matsuo Yumi

While Matsuo Yumi chronologically belongs to the second wave of writers, her unusual brand of satire and her roots in science fiction place her in a separate category. She was born in Ishikawa Prefecture in 1960 and graduated from Ochanomizu Women's University with a degree in English literature. Matsuo's first publication, *Ijigen kafe terasu* (Coffee house, "another dimension," 1989), was followed by *Burakku enjeru* (Black angel, 1994). She was known primarily as a science fiction writer until she went in a new direction in 1994 with *Baruun Taun no satsujin* (Murder in Balloon Town), which was

Matsuo Yumi (courtesy
of the author)

billed as a “science fiction mystery.”⁹³ After *Baruun Taun no satsujin*, she continued to write science fiction with *Pipinera* (Pippinella, 1996), *Makkusu Mausu to nakamatachi* (Max Mouse and his friends, 1997), and *Runako no kichin* (Runako’s kitchen, 1998). Her other work, *Jendaa-jo no toriko* (The prisoner of gender, 1996), is a meditation on gender and what would happen if gender differences were eliminated. Unlike the other authors treated in this study, Matsuo has not yet achieved the same level of visibility in Japan, due both to her being firmly rooted in the science fiction camp and to the tongue-in-cheek treatment of her subject matter.

Gender and Genre: A Point of Departure

As the preceding survey has made clear, just as Matsumoto changed the landscape of detective fiction writing in the 1960s and 1970s, the writers of the “boom” in women’s writing have continued to use detective fiction’s critical potential to discuss social changes and problems that concern them. More than merely changing the degree to which social and political issues are presented, however, women’s detective fiction results in changes to the genre itself. These changes have been the focus of increasing critical scrutiny over the last twenty years, most notably in the United States and England.⁹⁴ In particular, the appearance in the 1980s of the new female hard-boiled detective (epitomized by Sara Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton’s Kinsey Millhone) has spurred a reexamination of the relationship between gender and genre. Scholars have been divided over whether a purportedly masculine genre can be changed by the addition of women. Some argue that generic conventions override the shift in gender and insist that despite independent heroines and plots focused on women’s concerns, detective fiction’s inherent emphasis on violence does not accommodate women.⁹⁵ Sally Munt takes this argument one step further, suggesting that women’s detective fiction can only be a parody because of the immutability of the genre’s demands. The only way to avoid this, Munt suggests, is through the use of the lesbian detective, whose sexual freedom from the dominant mode of heterosexuality allows her truly to occupy the position of ironic loner demanded by detective fiction (hard-boiled in particular).⁹⁶

Other critics, however, have insisted that the addition of women to the genre, as writers and as protagonists, changes the form of detective fiction profoundly. In fact, Maureen Reddy argues that women’s detective fiction has become an entirely new genre that provides a means by which to criticize the masculine elements of detective fiction itself.⁹⁷ I think that the answer lies somewhere between these two positions. Munt is correct when she says that female detectives still have to operate under the same patriarchal state responsible for their oppression. Nonetheless, women authors have found ways to question the status quo through the genre without having to change

its structures. Thus, as Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones have observed, women writing mysteries “use an established popular formula in order to investigate not just a particular crime but the more general offenses in which the patriarchal power structure of contemporary society itself is potentially incriminated. They use the popular novel as a lens through which to filter cultural issues and problems which might be negotiated (if not solved) as part of the narrative of investigation.”⁹⁸

Undeniably, the most significant effect of gender shifts upon detective fiction occurs when women become the detectives. Women’s relationship to detective fiction has been changing, following the progress that women have made in society. Thus, while women have been both producers and heroines of detective fiction since its inception, early female detectives were closely circumscribed by their (and their authors’) social conditions. These early women detectives were forced by financial hardship to take up detection since “detecting” was not something that respectable women did seriously.⁹⁹ Even in the nineteenth century, an age when female social mobility had increased, women still were not supposed to leave the home and circulate unattended. Any woman who did so was likely to be seen as a prostitute since her appearance alone in public meant that she was like many of the goods available in the shop windows: she was for sale.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in a genre that made its home in the city streets, respectable women tended to be an occasional presence at best, often rendered invisible within the male-dominated urban landscape. As Rosalyn Deutsche has pointed out, this remained true in the hard-boiled detective fiction that had its start in 1920s and 1930s America.¹⁰¹ The by-now familiar world of the hard-boiled male detective leaves little room for women, either as characters or as readers. In the words of one critic, the female consumer of hard-boiled fiction must engage in “a kind of mental transvestitism to take pleasure in it.”¹⁰² Likewise, women are almost excluded from the public spaces of the city in early hard-boiled detective novels. This absence, however, “links the dangers of sexual liaison with the dangers of the city” since women are essentialized into the purest of stereotypes, “rendered erotically lethal, vilified, and defeated.”¹⁰³ Women, in other words, are seen as potentially dangerous, and the plots of these novels revolve around the subjugation of female agency and desire. Thus, the uncharacteristic freedom of movement and action enjoyed by the *femme fatale* is contained and constrained in some way, ultimately rendering the threat she poses to men as empty.

Given these conditions, one of the most notable developments in Anglo-American as well as Japanese detective fiction of the last twenty years has been the introduction of women into the hard-boiled detective novel as detectives rather than as sounding boards or stereotypical sex objects. This change, however, has brought contradictions with it. When Sara Paretsky,

who is famous for creating one of the first truly hard-boiled female detectives in V. I. Warshawski, started to conceive her series of novels, she attempted to change the gender of the detective without changing any of the genre's conventions. This resulted in an unintentional parody since "the hard-boiled convention of female sexuality as dangerous and even evil conflicts with the heroic status of the detective."¹⁰⁴ The author thus must walk a fine line if she wants her detective to conform to the conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction but also break its gender codes. Ultimately Paretsky created a detective whom she describes as "someone . . . like me and my friends"¹⁰⁵—that is, "self-reliant and independent, the prototype of a feminist ideal."¹⁰⁶ As can be seen from the wide range of women's detective fiction, "professional activities are no longer privileged: any woman can assume the role of detective; any social position, from welfare mother to First Lady, can constitute a vantage point from which to solve crimes and to interpret the city and the world. . . . Their lives demonstrate the fluid boundaries between public and private and a far more complex subjectivity than that of, say, Philip Marlowe."¹⁰⁷

Margaret Crawford's observation above suggests the degree to which changes in the gender of the detective have required adjustments to other conventions as well. Specifically, critics have suggested that a woman detective's system of relationships, her gaze, and her use of knowledge differ from those of the male detective. Unlike the archetypal male detective who wanders the streets alone, the female detective is no longer a solitary figure but one with a network of relationships. While these may not be kinship ties in the strict sense, they often are modeled on the extended family, creating a quasi-affinal cohort that frees the woman detective from the patriarchal relationship of the family structure and provides her with close, emotional relationships of mutual aid and respect.¹⁰⁸

In turn, when the female detective narrates her story, this regendering of the authorial voice alters the authorial gaze as well. This mitigates some of the voyeuristic quality of detective fiction, where women long have been the objects of the detective's gaze, turning what was woman-as-object into woman-as-subject. In particular, when the gaze of the female detective is turned toward violence against women and pornography, the reader is allowed—or even forced—to take a woman's point of view on topics that intimately concern women but that are often treated quite differently (or overlooked) by the mainstream media. This feminization of the gaze and the use of first-person narrative also make the character seem more "real" to her readers, an effect enhanced by depicting her everyday existence, the minutiae of life essential to the success of any form of realist literature. While the detective story is not an autobiography, it does use some of that genre's tech-

niques, with the result that the first-person detective novel is “predicated on the complex relationship of identification, analogy, and even contradiction among author, fictional character, and reader.”¹⁰⁹ This personal perspective, finally, aids in making the detective the authority who has the power and the knowledge to solve the mystery.

A third major change that occurs when the genre is regendered affects the structure and nature of knowledge. Traditionally, the core of the detective story has been the detective’s quest for clues to solve the mystery, which translates into a search for knowledge and information. The goal of the detective is to narrow down a multiplicity of suspects, clues, and motives into the one “true” solution. When it is a female detective who is engaged in this enterprise, however, the knowledge is often “subjective, involved, [and] empathic,” rather than the “objective, distanced knowledge which is the masculine epistemological ideal.”¹¹⁰ Often such knowledge leaves the detective torn between the need to seek justice from a paternalistic state and her desire to understand the circumstances in which the crime may have been committed—a dilemma rarely faced by the male (and particularly the male hard-boiled) detective.

To what degree do these seemingly programmatic claims about gender and genre reflect the writing—and realities—of Japanese women? As the following chapters attempt to show, contemporary women writers of detective fiction in Japan have used the sociocritical potential of detective fiction, its genre conventions, and its traditions in ways that both diverge from those of their Anglo-American counterparts and parallel them. While the writers of the “boom” are indebted in a number of ways to English and particularly American hard-boiled authors like Paretsky and Grafton, they have also created stories and characters that bear little resemblance to theirs. Miyabe Miyuki, for instance, completely eschews the female detective and creates women characters who are closer to the traditional model of the *femme fatale*. Likewise, Kirino and Shibata’s independent protagonists enjoy none of the close relationships celebrated by Sabine Vanacker and others, but instead are loners in a world of *male* communities. Furthermore, the writers I will examine cross the political spectrum, ranging from the conservative Miyabe to the avowedly feminist Matsuo. What this means, in the end, is that while the critical work of Western scholars can provide valuable tools for analyzing (women’s) detective fiction, it cannot replace close analysis of Japanese writers and their social milieu. And, as I will demonstrate, the differences that such an analysis reveals have much to tell us not only about popular fiction in Japan, but also about the experiences, perceptions, and ideals of Japanese women at the end of the twentieth century.