“When I first saw you on the street, I had this nostaligic feeling like I’d seen you somewhere before, or rather I had the impression that there was no one in my life more familiar than you. The person I feel closest to, the person I know better than anyone, for some reason that was how I felt about you. Who are you?”

—Takahashi Takako, “Majiwari”

In previous chapters, we have explored the ways Kōno, Takahashi, and Kurahashi used literature as a means of exposing, critiquing, and then subverting binary models of gender that sought to confine women within restrictive stereotypes of femininity. In chapter 4, we saw that this binary structure is problematic in part because it is predicated on a logic of “sexual indifference.” In other words, this model of gender difference is able to conceptualize femininity only as masculinity’s logical opposite so that women are assumed to embody only those qualities that men lack (or disavow as “unmasculine”). Aside from the psychological violence such a model inflicts on women, who must strive to excise those proclivities deemed unnatural for their sex, it also presumes a consistent and uniform set of characteristics that “naturally” define “woman.” That is, it is predicated on the assumption that women everywhere are similar to one another while being radically different from men.

As we will see in this chapter, the authors addressed in this study took issue with this presumption, and many of their narratives work to highlight the differences among women as a counterweight to hegemonic discourses of gender that emphasized the differences between women and men. In light of their personal histories, this should not be surprising. We saw in chapter 1 that each of these authors’ educational experiences and life trajectories set them well apart from the mainstream model of postwar
wife and mother and that these experiences may be seen as motivating not only their attacks on normative discourses of femininity, but also their refusal to adopt an appropriately “feminine” style of writing. In short, they were exceptional women for their time who found it difficult to identify with women who complied with gender norms, yet they also found themselves to be outsiders vis-à-vis the male homosocial networks to which they sought entry.

In this chapter, we will discuss three works of fiction that explore the loneliness of such a position through narratives of female homoerotic desire that is fraught with conflict due to incommensurable differences among women. These authors seem highly ambivalent about the potential for true intimacy between women, even as their narratives express a clear desire for such closeness. The stories discussed in this chapter all employ the trope of the body of the Other Woman as a means of working through the problems and possibilities of relationships between women, embedded as they are in networks of power and disciplinary regimes that operate according to a patriarchal logic that divides women against one another and against themselves. The notion of a member of one’s own sex as a kind of constitutive Other that is radically different from oneself serves as a direct challenge to discourses of gender that treat Woman as a singular and coherent ontological category. These stories highlight the fact that the differences among women may be just as insurmountable as the differences between women and men, and in doing so, they fundamentally question the integrity of the category of “woman” itself as a coherent and unitary signifier.

It is important to keep in mind that due to the specific sociohistorical context for expressions of homoerotic desire in modern Japan, these narratives would not necessarily have been understood as “lesbian” in the sense of implying the expression of a specific type of sexual identity. In fact, these authors are commonly understood to have been “heterosexual,” meaning that they are known only to have been erotically interested in men in their personal lives, and indeed the vast majority of their literary works are concerned primarily with heterosexual relationships.

In fact, in Japan during the time these women were growing up, passionate friendships between young girls were tolerated as more or less normal and did not indicate the expression of any sort of identity (sexual or otherwise) that would preclude future heterosexual attachments. Both fictional and autobiographical writings by these women indicate that such homoerotic friendships were a familiar part of the landscape of their personal experience. Subsequently, the first decade following World War II
witnessed an explosion of narratives that explored various sexual desires and activities, including female homoeroticism. As documented by Mark McLelland in his study of the “perverse press” at this time, readers were able to enjoy a wide variety of erotic pleasures in fictional form without identifying themselves as possessors of a specific “type” of sexuality. It seems that it was not until the “women’s lib” movement of the 1970s that awareness of “lesbianism” as a politicized sexual identity permeated mainstream Japanese consciousness. The 1960s may therefore be seen as a time of flux, when in spite of increasingly conservative social mores, a variety of possible sexual behaviors and desires might still be imagined without necessarily identifying the subject of those fantasies as possessing a specific “type” of sexual identity.

In each of these texts, the protagonist and the Other Woman are bound together by a complex of emotions that blurs the distinction between desire and identification. Whether this is expressed through the protagonist’s envisioning of the Other Woman as a surrogate or replacement, as a complement to oneself, or as a more perfect vision of the self that one might have been, the protagonist simultaneously sees herself in the Other Woman even as she desires her as an Other that is external to the self, and in no case is she successful in either possessing or internalizing her. The Other Woman therefore serves as a figure of desire that can never be fully satisfied, a fantasy of wholeness and fusion that is perpetually frustrated, highlighting the boundaries that separate women even as they struggle to bridge the gaps between them.

In the literature of Kōno Taeko, homoerotic desire frequently takes the form of erotic substitution of one woman for another through partner-swapping arrangements that allow for women to experience physical intimacy indirectly by sharing the same man. We will see this dynamic operative in the short story “On the Road” (Rojō, 1964), where the protagonist’s fantasy that her sister might take her place as her husband’s sexual partner is just one example of the kind of substitutional logic that governs relationships among women. Kurahashi and Takahashi also have produced texts that employ themes of erotic substitution of one woman for another in relationships with men in ways that involve an identification of one woman with another through a merging of their sexual subjectivities. However, in other texts they take the homoerotic trope one step further by portraying the sexual desire of one woman for another more explicitly through scenes of erotic gratification between women that do not involve the mediation of a man. In these texts, too, the Other Woman frequently appears in the guise of a doppelganger or alternate self for the
protagonist, once again highlighting the mutual imbrication of identification and desire in these narratives. The two examples we will see of this type of story are “Intercourse” (Majiwari, 1966), by Takahashi, and “Bad Summer” (Warui natsu, 1966), by Kurahashi.

“On the Road”

This story begins on an ostensibly auspicious note with the marriage of protagonist Tatsuko’s younger sister Kimiko, yet fissures soon develop in this picture of perfect happiness as we learn that the bride would have preferred another groom. Kimiko’s confession, just before her wedding, that she wanted to marry “a man like [Tatsuko’s husband] Kanō” sets the tone for the rest of the story, told mostly in flashback; it chronicles the complex web of relationships between the protagonist and various other women who present themselves as potential replacements. From her mother to her sister to a stranger on the train, these other women serve variously as figures of desire, fear, and identification, threatening to destabilize Tatsuko’s existential integrity in ways that are alternately pleasurable and frightening.

This principle of substitution seems to operate with alarming regularity in Tatsuko’s family, beginning with her mother’s early death and replacement by the stepmother who raised her. Tatsuko was six when her birth mother died and has few clear memories of her. Although she claims to have grown up in this household without feeling overly sentimental about the early loss of this parent, she clearly felt a bit of an outsider in her new family, in spite of the efforts of her parents and half-sisters to include her.

She only vaguely remembered her [mother’s] face. When she looked at a photograph, all she felt was a sense of “Right, that’s what she looked like.” She never felt like going out of her way to look at such pictures either. As a girl, when she would finish her homework and go downstairs, upon hearing the loud laughter of her parents and sisters coming from the living room, she did feel a stepchild’s hesitation to open the door, but it wasn’t so bad that she wanted to cry before her mother’s photograph.6

While Tatsuko claims not to have suffered much from her family situation, it is obvious that she has never felt herself to be an equal member of the household and that this feeling of alienation from her family has stayed with her until the present. Early in the story, when her husband encour-
ages her to stay overnight with her parents the night of Kimiko’s wedding, thinking that they might want one child nearby to console them in light of this new empty-nest situation, Tatsuko at first demurs because she does not think her presence would be as welcome as that of her other half-sister (8). From the beginning of the story, then, it is clear that Tatsuko views herself to be easily replaceable, just as her own mother was replaced by the stepmother who raised her.

Tatsuko’s sense of being superfluous to her family only increases as she grows up and at last begins to feel an increasing sense of connection to her own mother. She recalls that a year after her marriage, on a visit home to see her stepmother, she had been given a photograph of her birth mother in her early twenties, before she fell ill. Seeing the photo, Tatsuko is shocked not only to recognize herself in her mother’s image, but also to realize that she would soon be the age her mother was when she died. Examining the woman in the picture carefully, Tatsuko reflects:

She must have been about twenty. Maybe it was because Tatsuko herself had already lived well past that point, but in the image of her mother in the photograph, Tatsuko unexpectedly felt the youth of that age. When she thought that her mother had that photo taken at an age that she herself had experienced and remembered clearly, Tatsuko had the sensation of being able to touch the fabric of the old-fashioned parasol [that her mother held in the picture]. She realized that until now, even when she had occasion to think about the fact that her mother had died long ago, she had never really felt that she had once had a real mother. When she realized this, for the first time she longed for her dead mother. (19)

From this point on, Tatsuko begins to fear the possibility that she too might die young, as though the emotional connection that has been established between them creates a channel for inheriting the woman’s fate. Tatsuko grows to identify with her mother, but this is initially experienced as a fearful and inauspicious sense of foreboding.

The situation changes, however, with Kimiko’s sudden confession of feelings for Kanō. In the first pages of the story we learn that Kimiko, the youngest of the three sisters, has been unlucky in love. After two of her suitors die within a year of one another, she gives up on dating and then eventually consents to an arranged marriage after coming dangerously close to becoming “Christmas cake.”7 While she had not particularly
cared for the first man who proposed to her, the second was a boyfriend whom she very much hoped to marry, but her family’s disapproval prevented their engagement, and eventually she broke off the relationship. Although by the time she learns of his death she seems unaffected by it, when she realizes that both men died in such quick succession, she begins to believe she is cursed and will never marry happily. While she consents to the match arranged for her out of a sense of responsibility to her parents—they require one daughter to bring a son-in-law home as successor to the head of the family home—her outburst just before her wedding makes it clear to Tatsuko that Kimiko is not entirely happy with her choice.

As Tatsuko lies in bed the night after the wedding, thinking about her younger sister’s unfortunate situation, she begins to wonder if perhaps Kimiko’s words might not have been prophetic. If it is true that Kimiko has been cursed to find marriage partners with early expiration dates, then what might happen to the man she just married? And what if Tatsuko herself has been cursed with the misfortune of carrying on her mother’s legacy of early death? In that case, might not her younger sister and Kanō have the opportunity to marry after all? Curiously, Tatsuko seems neither jealous nor disturbed by this prospect. The more she thinks about it, the more she even seems to relish the idea, and she lies awake that night fantasizing about Kanō killing her during a violent bout of lovemaking before taking her younger sister as a second wife:

Tatsuko often dreamed of death. Bound ever tighter by the rope, when her body would fall over with a thud, or when she felt her fingertips—the only part of her body that she could still move—grow cold behind her back, she felt as though she experienced the pleasure of death....She lost herself in dreaming of the pleasure of a death bestowed upon her by Kanō. She would definitely die young. Then perhaps Kimiko really would marry Kanō. But the only way Tatsuko would set him free would be if she met that kind of end. Thinking about that, Tatsuko felt warmly towards Kimiko. But if Kimiko knew how she had died, she might hesitate to marry Kanō...Pursuing such thoughts endlessly, Tatsuko’s eyes glinted ever more fiercely in the dark. (20–21)

Tatsuko and Kanō, it seems, have long enjoyed sadomasochistic sex play, and this fantasy is depicted as not atypical of their usual bedroom antics, with one important exception—the addition of younger sister Kimiko.
This seems only to add to Tatsuko’s pleasure in the anticipation of death at the hands of her husband. It is implied that they have enacted this scenario together many times, coming close to the ultimate climax of death but stopping just short of satisfaction. The fantasy of a substitute allows Tatsuko to imagine having it both ways, attaining the objective of death yet not really dying. The possibility that Kimiko would take her place therefore gives her the sense of endlessly renewable pleasure.

In the final pages of the story Tatsuko meets with yet another doppleganger, who gives her a prescient glimpse into her own possible future. On the train as she is returning home from her parents’ house, Tatsuko encounters a pair of older ladies chatting together and pays little attention to them until she overhears one remark, perhaps in the context of a conversation about health care remedies: “I wouldn’t worry about it if I were you. Look at me. I didn’t even think I would make it to forty. My mother died young, you know” (22). From this moment on, Tatsuko becomes fascinated with the woman and cannot stop observing her, carefully noting her clothing and hairstyle, trying to imagine her daily activities and her destination, and repeating her words over and over in her head. When the woman gets off at Tatsuko’s station, she follows her, trying to determine if she lives there or is simply visiting someone she knows and feeling an eerie sense of connection with her as strangers who might possibly share the same fate. Just then, in the final lines of the story, the woman is run over by a speeding truck right before Tatsuko’s eyes.

The interlocking set of substitutions—Tatsuko for her birth mother, Kimiko for Tatsuko, and even Tatsuko for an anonymous stranger—implies a complex web of emotional investment by the protagonist in the body of the Other Woman. Her encounter with her mother, mediated by the photograph that she receives from her mother’s surrogate, is bittersweet. As Tatsuko searches the picture eagerly for clues to her own forgotten past, her mother’s image evokes recollections of her own experiences at that age, as Tatsuko begins to identify with her even to the extent of imagining herself in her place, holding the parasol in the photo. While this sense of identification with an intergenerational body double is pleasurable in that for the first time she is able to feel a sense of connection with this long-lost member of her family, it also provokes feelings of dread at identifying so closely that she might literally repeat her mother’s unfortunate history. Even a stranger on the train can apparently serve this dual function—proffering a kind of privileged self-knowledge, only to threaten the transmission of a horrifying fate. The desire for intimacy with the Other Woman here is therefore tempered by a fear of the same.
Ironically, though the protagonist is able to resolve these fears on one level by shifting the object of identification to younger sister Kimiko, this strategy is likewise fraught with pain and danger to self. While Tatsuko thinks of this shift as an opportunity to satisfy her rather unconventional sexual desires, implicating Kimiko in an erotic triangular relationship with herself and her husband, such a scenario can obtain only so long as it is preceded by the protagonist’s own physical experience of pain, and death, at the hands of her husband. But why would Tatsuko consent, or rather insist, on such an outcome? Why would she wish to be replaced by her younger sister?

Just as with her birth mother, intimacy between women here too seems permeated by a logic of substitution that punishes as much as it rewards. In addition to an obvious wish to see her younger sister happy after so many disappointments in love, it is also implied that Tatsuko feels superfluous and inferior to the members of her father’s family. She even begins to feel that after learning of her sister’s desire for her husband, she no longer has the “right” to feel frightened of her mother’s legacy of death, and it is this thought that prompts her violent fantasy of dying at Kanō’s hands in order to be replaced by Kimiko (20). The baby of the family, Kimiko has always been indulged by her parents and sisters, and it seems that Tatsuko here feels obligated to continue this tradition not only out of feelings of love for her sister, but out of a distinct sense of inferiority as well.

Rather than warm havens of emotional support, families in Kōno’s literature seem more like unsympathetic machines composed of a set of interlocking yet easily replaceable parts, and “On the Road” is clearly no exception. Women are particularly susceptible to the logic of substitution, as they seem continually to replace or be replaced by other women through adoption, remarriage, and even death. Kōno’s female protagonists are thus haunted by a sense of existential instability, and they struggle to establish a basis for autonomous subjectivity. Other women thus serve to both facilitate and impede this process of subject formation, acting as sites of privileged self-knowledge even as they also present themselves as potential rivals or threats.

“Intercourse”

The first-person protagonist of this story, known to the reader only as Watashi (“I”), is fond of wandering aimlessly through the streets of unfamiliar places. She is evidently experiencing some sort of existential crisis.
because she says this type of activity is “her only consolation.” She finds the visual stimulation of these unknown environments to be pleasurable because it overwhelms her sense of self in a kind of flânerie-induced oblivion that “numbs her soul.” One day, as she is walking through the dingy back streets of the old part of town, she encounters a mysterious woman, roughly the same age as herself, and is convinced that she somehow knows this person but cannot remember how. Watashi is attracted to the woman because in spite of her shabby appearance, she seems to harbor a light within that is invulnerable to the ravages of time: “Her dark kimono was made of silk but seemed to be more than ten years old, terribly threadbare, and the sleeves were ragged. Her whole appearance gave off the shadow of decay, the mark of erosion of forty years of life. But somewhere inside her there appeared to be a core that glowed dimly, emitting a faint light from the depths of her existence” (149). Watashi decides to follow the woman but then loses sight of her as a strange dark fog suddenly descends upon her.

The next time she encounters the woman, it is in the thoroughly different environment of brand-new high-rise apartments in a more modern section of town. The woman’s dark and dingy appearance contrasts shockingly with the clean white concrete walls of the maze-like apartment district, and yet Watashi feels the same eerie nostalgia as before. The woman seems to remember her from their previous encounter and speaks to her. This startles Watashi because the woman had not seemed to notice her that day or even look in her direction. On the other hand, her intuition tells her that she has known this stranger from somewhere else, even though the woman seems to refute this by suggesting that they had only met that one time. Just as confusion begins to set in, Watashi’s doubts are abruptly erased by the woman’s touch: “Her thin dry hand extended out from her threadbare sleeves and rested on my shoulder. Something like a pleasant electric sensation flowed from her hand, and my body tingled slightly. The atmosphere enveloping us instantly sparkled and gave off a clear light” (151–152). They begin to reminisce about their earlier meeting, and the woman again surprises Watashi by appearing to know things about her that she should have no way of knowing. However, the woman remains a mysterious figure to Watashi, one who thwarts her attempts to know more about her. When Watashi asks questions about her life, the woman merely smiles and gives her a coral hairpin as a token of remembrance. The two begin to walk together through the “hypnotically white” landscape, which seems to have something of a trance-like effect on Watashi, and she eventually loses sight of the woman again. Returning home, Watashi tries
on the hairpin and discovers that it suits her perfectly, as if it had been hers all along (154).

In subsequent encounters the woman continues to deflect Watashi’s desire to know more about her and their strange connection. When Watashi presses her on the question of whether they had known each other from before, she merely responds that the question is unimportant because “lovers” always feel that way, and she adds, “As long as we are able to share this happiness together, isn’t that enough?” (155). When Watashi persists, the woman again distracts her with physical intimacy:

My voice that had questioned her single-mindedly faded and was overcome by the force of the sensation that communicated from her to me. Even though we were linked by nothing more than her thin hand placed on my shoulder, we experienced a deep intercourse during which our whole bodies were abuzz in a confusion of sensation. In that moment, the signs of decay that had covered her disappeared, the shadow of decline that had clung to her fell away, and the dim flame that had until now burned faintly deep inside her flared up suddenly. That faint glow within that had been her hallmark ascended vibrantly to the exterior of her being, became pure light and shone brilliantly. (156)

From this point until the end of the story, the woman becomes Watashi’s frequent companion on her walks through the cityscape, a journey that takes them alternately through the “land of shadows”—their name for the dark back streets—and the “land of light,” or the sparkling new high-rise district. While Watashi had been accustomed to wandering about in isolation, she seems gratified by the intimacy and companionship the woman offers her, though she is still disturbed by her frequent disappearances and eerie familiarity and is curious to know more about her—a curiosity that is never satisfied.

Whether they are wandering through the land of shadows or light, the space the women traverse during the course of their walks together is portrayed as occupying a different plane of existence from the mundane world. These worlds of shadow and light in fact seem more like states of emotion or sensation rather than physical spaces per se—modes of experience whose undulating rhythm gives structure to the narrative and mirrors the tension between youthful purity and physical decay that the women embody. Watashi and her companion seem strangely insulated from contact with other people so long as they inhabit this psychic space,
and indeed at one point Watashi wonders aloud why no one has appeared to intervene in their relationship. In fact, they have become so absorbed in one another that other people have literally become invisible to them.

There is only one point in the story where the two women, while wandering together in their isolated haven, are forced to “turn their eyes to reality” (157). They encounter a ferocious bulldog that threatens to attack, and though they pass some scary moments as they walk by him, they are able to escape without incident. This experience reminds the woman of something that happened to her when she was a girl, and she tells Watashi the story about a “big, ugly man” who once attempted to take her pet dog. She successfully beats the dogcatcher off with a stick, but in the process he swells to “three or four times his size” and takes on a monstrous appearance. This story sounds familiar to Watashi, and this collective memory functions as another clue to the unusual bond between the women.

In spite of the fact that the women seem to present a picture of perfect harmony, Watashi cannot help but be suspicious about the woman’s origins and identity, and her desire to solve this mystery intensifies even as their intercourse reaches ever greater heights of intimacy and sensation, ultimately propelling the story to its disastrous conclusion. During one erotic encounter the scent the woman gives off smells just like the new perfume that Watashi is wearing for the first time, and Watashi again cannot resist asking her why she seems so familiar. As the woman appears to achieve some sort of climax, Watashi presses her for an answer:

“When I first saw you on the street, I had this nostalgic feeling like I’d seen you somewhere before, or rather I had the impression that there was no one in my life more familiar than you. The person I feel closest to, the person I know better than anyone, for some reason that was how I felt about you. Who are you?”

I pulled out a knife I had slipped into the sleeve of my kimono. “At least let me tell you my name. Let me carve my initial into your brilliant white shoulder with this knife.” She was still trembling with pleasure. I cut the letter F deeply into her white left shoulder. The pleasure of giving and receiving pain converged beneath the tip of the knife as if inscribed there. Instantly blood spurted out, coloring the letter and the woman’s skin red. Before my very eyes a mist the color of blood rose and quickly grew dense. As my vision grew foggy, our friendship dissolved like a receding tide. (163)
Chapter 5

The last lines of the story leave Watashi wandering aimlessly through the streets, isolated and alone, with a wound in her left shoulder to match the one inflicted upon her companion and a knife “weighing heavily” in her sleeve. Her desire to define her relationship to the Other Woman—either through knowledge of her identity or by ascribing her own identity to the woman—has not only destroyed their relationship, but has also resulted in a self-inflicted wound that mirrors the psychic damage done to the protagonist through the loss of her “lover.”

The conclusion of the story, in addition to the various similarities between the women that are underscored throughout the text, strongly indicates that the Other Woman may simultaneously be read as a doppelganger for the protagonist. Watashi’s persistent sense of nostalgia upon seeing the woman, as well as the woman’s eerie knowledge of aspects of Watashi’s life history to which she should logically have no access, suggests a series of encounters that verge on self-knowledge or recognition of suppressed aspects of her own personality. But in spite of the many textual clues that indicate the identity of protagonist and Other Woman, the woman nevertheless remains Other until the very end. Watashi’s attempts to force a convergence of self and Other, first through the relentless pursuit of knowledge about her double and then through the inscription of her own identity upon the body of the Other Woman, irrevocably destroys the harmony between them. Maintenance of this tension between self and Other would thus seem crucial to the preservation of the intimacy between them. So long as Watashi is able to accept the otherness of her companion, she can continue to enjoy the feeling of nostalgia for the second self that the woman represents for her, but the moment she attempts to resolve this dichotomy by enforcing a kind of totalistic identification with her double, the bond between them is broken.

From the first lines of the story, Watashi seems to identify strongly with the Other Woman. They are roughly the same age, around forty, and Watashi appears profoundly moved by the woman’s aura of having suffered through accumulated years of struggle and decline. The light that she senses within the woman, which is likened to a core of youthful purity that has resisted the ravages of time, is echoed in Watashi’s own bodily experience: “My face and hands had grown dark with decay, but for some reason only my shoulders preserved a youthful whiteness, and as if she had known this already, she [slipped my kimono off and] stroked my bare left shoulder, saying ‘Just this part is pure white’” (161). The women seem instinctively to sense and seek out this inner beauty in one another, and their “intercourse” serves to release this light within, as the
erotic climax of the Other Woman is always accompanied by a moment when this hidden light emerges to the surface and permeates her being. In bringing forth the light deep within her companion, Watashi is also able to access her own inner beauty through the body of the Other Woman. In recognizing and drawing forth the beauty of the Other Woman, Watashi is rewarded with recognition of her own beauty, such that knowledge of and communion with the Other provides a channel for expression of one’s own inner self.

This sense of communion with the Other Woman is facilitated by their isolation from “reality,” as their bond is described as creating a world of two that is immune to outside interference. The Other Woman declares that there is “no greater love” than the one they share, and until the very end of the story, their intimacy seems to offer the purest and most complete type of love imaginable between two people: “In any relationship between lovers, one person loves and the other is loved, one loves more and the other less, but between us there was absolutely none of that sort of discrimination. It was all intoxication and no anguish whatsoever. It was just like she said: ‘There is no greater love than this’” (161). Their relationship is therefore characterized by a remarkable degree of harmony and equality that is predicated on a delicate balance between the two women, and they marvel that no one has attempted to come between them to disturb this balance. The Other Woman surmises that this is because their love is of a “special quality” and that the rest of the world seems to have disappeared because their love “shines so brilliantly” that other people are no longer visible to them. Furthermore, because their intimacy can be achieved through such unobtrusive means as the touch of a hand on a shoulder, they can have “intercourse” wherever they like without arousing the suspicions of passers-by (160).

Though Watashi says that their “intercourse” consists only of this kind of slight physical contact, it is obviously and explicitly erotic. The woman even refers to their relationship as koi, a word denoting erotic feeling as opposed to spiritual love, and she refers to the two of them as “lovers.”10 This aspect of their intercourse is evident through its electric effect on the protagonist and the feelings of intimacy that arise as a result of their mutual response: “Our intercourse was complete with just the touch of her thin dry hand on my shoulder. Her total existence was directed toward me, and my total existence was directed toward her, and since her existence and mine were each like a delicate chord waiting fervently for the hand of that one person to play us, just a slight touch was enough to make our total existences tremble in response to one another”
Yet it is interesting that the eroticism of these encounters between the women is not expressed in genital terms but rather through a diffuse sort of sexual expression that can be achieved through any kind of physical touch.\textsuperscript{11} In fact, bodily contact seems secondary to the mutual response of each woman’s “total existence” toward that of the other. By the end of the story, it is implied that they are able to feel the electric current that presages such encounters without even being in the same place, indicating that the two women’s intimacy has intensified to the point of near fusion between self and Other.

In fact, given that we may read the Other Woman in this story as a doppelganger for the protagonist, these encounters may be understood as simultaneously homoerotic and autoerotic. The references to the notion that there is “no greater love” than the type they share can of course be read as indicating self-love rather than feeling that is other-directed. This tension between self- and other-directed love mirrors the tension between identification with the Other and desire for the Other that structures the relationship of these two women. One may of course read the Other Woman as a double for Watashi, but this does not mean that they are the same person, and to the very end of the story aspects of the Other Woman (most prominently her identity) remain inaccessible to Watashi. She is similar, but she is not the same, and she cannot be made to be the same, as Watashi unfortunately discovers in the final lines of the narrative.

One might say the same is true of all relationships between women, erotic or otherwise. There may be as many differences among women as there are between women and men—and this seems to be precisely Takahashi’s point. Though women may long for the kind of total intimacy that bars all outside intervention, in reality there are many barriers that serve to keep women apart—among them class, race, age, experience, and education, not to mention rivalries over men and the access to power or privilege that they represent.\textsuperscript{12} Takahashi’s protagonist, isolated and lonely at the beginning of the story, encounters another woman with whom she feels a profound connection. Through this relationship each woman is able to bring out the beauty in the other, in the guise of the light within, and Watashi cannot help wanting to push that feeling of connection to its logical extreme through possession of her “lover,” expressed through a radical desire for total identification between self and Other. Yet she finds at the end of the story that this only exacerbates, rather than cures, her sense of loneliness as the Other Woman literally evaporates before her eyes.
“Bad Summer”

The protagonist of this story, known only as L, is an established novelist at the pinnacle of her success who is suffering from an unnamed illness. As the story opens, she is on her way to a party in honor of the publication of her collected works, where she meets M, a young girl of seventeen or eighteen who has just made her debut on the literary scene. Even at such a young age she is considered by the literary world to be a genius, and L soon becomes attracted to her. After the party she sends M signed copies of her collected works but is disappointed to find that M is out of town and unable to receive them. Overdue for a change of scene, suffering from writer’s block, and wanting to evade the doctor’s diagnosis of her medical condition that is expected the following week, L decides to journey to a remote island resort that is, not coincidentally, near M’s birthplace.

Although L hopes that this island sojourn will pull her out of her artistic impasse, she instead finds that each time she attempts to produce “fruit of her creativity,” it fails to “implant itself in her womb.” Even the “orthodox novel” she has grudgingly agreed to write, after years of avoiding what she sees as a hackneyed genre, fails to come to her. Though she has built her career on writing avant-garde fiction that some critics consider brilliant and others eccentric or downright disturbing, writing only during the wee hours of the night “like an insect excreting poison,” here she finds herself sleeping and waking early like a normal person (155). Ironically, while her physical health seems to have returned, she now suffers from an indefinable spiritual illness. Since she cannot work, she instead begins writing love letters to M at her home address, confessing her desire to “consume” her and, failing that, to read her work. After many weeks pass and she still has received no response from M, L decides to travel to her hometown on the chance that she might be visiting her family there. Though she thoroughly exhausts herself in looking for M, no one seems to have seen her or know her whereabouts. Then one day, about a month after their first meeting, M unexpectedly turns up at the hotel where L is staying. L immediately has M move to the room next to hers and takes upon herself the dual role of M’s “guardian” and “lover.”

The majority of the story, then, is devoted to L’s unsuccessful pursuit of M, and even when she finally finds her and manages to keep her close, L is frustrated by her inability to completely possess the girl. Rather, L is described as the one who is “captive” to M’s charms, as in a scene where L watches her brush her hair: “M faced the mirror in her pajamas, brushing
her long hair as if to deliberately tease L, and turning around, once more gave L a meaningful smile. But it was a cruel smile, the kind a person gives when she is certain that she is loved, a smile as if to lightly claw at prey that has already been captured” (170). The text is quite clear on the homo-erotic bond between the women, as they are explicitly described at various points kissing and caressing each other. L’s description of her feelings for M includes references to love both in a spiritual, idealistic sense and as physical, carnal desire. However, it is equally clear that L’s feelings are more intense than those of M, and it is even implied that M deliberately manipulates L and toys with her affections. Furthermore, in a conversation between the two women where they compare their love to the love of men, M is emphatic that what L has to offer her is vastly inferior to the heterosexual alternative (172).

Complicating this tale of unrequited love is the fact that with the exception of M and apparently herself, L obviously has a very low opinion of other women. In a familiar conflation of women with the body and men with the mind, L eschews anything that relates to bodily necessity in favor of intellectual pursuit. This is explicitly stated in the text as follows: “In her opinion, womanly things were lacking in absolute beauty; they were nothing but elements plucked down from the altar of spirituality to the marketplace of the terrestrial world” (167–168). In comparison to the transcendent standard of “absolute beauty,” femininity thus occupies a substandard position as denizen of the mundane world. If spirituality is visualized as an “altar” that is literally elevated above this mundane world, then its opposite, the corporeal realm to which women are relegated, is implicitly inferior, having been “plucked down” to a position that is beneath this exalted world of the spiritual. Such a conclusion suggests that the body, coded as feminine, is little more than a commodity to be traded in the terrestrial “marketplace” and that in order to transcend this realm of crass materialism, a woman must deny her corporeality in favor of purely intellectual or spiritual concerns.

L therefore suppresses her physical needs and nurtures her intellect. She eats sparingly and sleeps less, staying up late into the night to devote herself to her writing, which she describes tellingly as a kind of creative process of impregnation and birth. However, she is careful to distinguish this from the kind of biological pregnancy that other women experience—indeed, anything associated with the female reproductive system is described as “vulgar,” distasteful, and “empty” (143–144). She even despises other women writers, scorning them for being no different from ordinary middle-aged women in their concern for clothing and
makeup and implying that they are worse than prostitutes (135–136). Clearly, L perceives herself to be different from other women, and M even asks at one point if she might not in fact be a man (173). Yet L seems profoundly drawn to M, who is described throughout the narrative as thoroughly feminine and seductive in all the ways that L appears to despise.

In fact, there are clues throughout the story to suggest that M can easily be read as a doppelganger for the protagonist. Having reached a plateau, or perhaps even a stumbling block, in her career at the age of forty and further suffering from physical deterioration in the form of an unnamed and possibly fatal illness, L seems to see in M a younger, healthier, more vibrant version of herself. There are physical similarities, such as the fact that M’s hands are identical to those of L, in addition to a revealing conversation between the two women where L asks M to “become her” when she dies. M demurs, reminding L that if she dies, they both will (169–170). This “second self” motif is further underscored by Kurahashi’s playful mention of titles published by both women that are identical to titles of works published by herself. This opens up the possibility of reading M and L as younger and older versions of the author, even as an autobiographical reading of this story is deliberately refuted within the text itself.15

Taking into account this doppelganger motif opens up the possibility of reading L’s obsessive desire for M as an attempt to recuperate the femininity that she has discarded in order to pursue the path of pure intellectual creativity. While L is clearly ambivalent about her gender identity, if not downright misogynistic, M seems to have been able to establish herself as a writer of great reputation without casting off her feminine traits or conducting herself in a “vulgar” manner like the other women writers that L so despises. While L seems to be something of a shut-in, isolating herself in order to concentrate on her craft and avoiding contact with others, M is able to come and go freely between L’s claustrophobic world of introversion and the outside world of everyday life. M represents what L has lost in the process of becoming an androgynous intellect, and her elusiveness frustrates L, who attempts unsuccessfully to possess her.

In a pivotal scene of conflict between L and M, we learn that L has rejected heterosexual love in the course of denying her own femininity, as part of the process of becoming the androgynous intellectual that she is now. In her youth L had fallen in love with a male artist who insisted on turning their relationship into a “game of imagination,” apparently in spite of her own desire for physical intimacy. While she had experienced this
initially as a kind of loss, she eventually internalized this way of thinking and in doing so, she completed her own “transformation” into an artist. The text then contrasts her situation to that of other women as follows:

L was aware that women tried to become artists not through love of art but through love of artists, which in the end came close to the common opinion that women could not become real artists. Certainly L had become a poet through her discovery of love for a poet. But this love was not directed at those parts of man that were made from clay. If L had not succeeded at stripping her spirit from her flesh through love—and this was something that was essentially difficult for the female sex to accomplish—her “transformation” [into an artist] would probably have failed. By renouncing her sex, she had liberated her spirit and her imagination. From that time on L had not loved another man. . . .

However, now circumstances had changed. At a time when L had nearly the end of her life, she had begun to love M. Of course, given that M was not a man, this didn’t really constitute a sudden and inexplicable change in the fact that L could not love men. And what about M, who was bundled up in L’s love? One afternoon, M lay her head on L’s back, who was lying face down on the beach, and suddenly declared, “Hey, are you really a woman? I wish you were a man.” Chewing on her own hair, M turned her head to peer at L’s face. Clearly she realized that she had wounded L’s love, and her posture indicated that she was prepared to flee quickly if L lashed out in anger at her.

L asked gently, “What do you mean?”

“If you were a man, I would let you inside of me. It’s a shame you aren’t a man.”

L resolved never to speak to M again. (171–172)

This passage begins with a meditation on L’s own personal history, as a woman who learns to idealize her love of men into a purely intellectual form and of her eventual transformation into a “woman writer.” The two parts of this term are seen to be inherently in contradiction to one another, requiring the female subject who aspires to a life of the mind to make a choice between the two. Most women, in L’s opinion, are inadequate to the task of “stripping spirit from the flesh”—that is, renouncing one’s corporeal femininity in favor of pure intellectualism—that is required to resolve the contradiction. In successfully navigating this difficult challenge,
L clearly sees herself to be exceptional vis-à-vis ordinary women, who are unable to embrace art in its pure form and therefore settle for the sexual embrace of artists—a love that is “directed at those parts of man that [are] made from clay.” In contrast to ordinary women, who settle for a relationship to art that is mediated by heterosexual desire, L has bypassed this form of embrace for a “love” of male artists that is expressed as purely intellectual. She has therefore successfully cast off her feminine gender identity, which is intimately imbricated here with heterosexual desire, for an androgynous subjectivity that allows for the love of men only insofar as these feelings are abstracted into an idealized and disembodied form of intellectual admiration. Consequently, she learns to despise other women precisely because they represent the subject position of corporeal immanence that she has worked so hard to transcend.

The text then quickly turns to a meditation on L’s relationship to M and how this fits in with L’s refusal of heterosexuality, strongly implying that both phenomena are linked to her existentially unstable status of “woman writer.” Her love for M is clearly differentiated within the text from heterosexual desire, but from L’s perspective this is a positive thing. Heterosexuality, which in this text is intimately bound up with “femininity” as an inherently inferior subject position, clearly endangers the persona of disembodied intellectual that L has crafted for herself. In L’s mind, for a woman to take up a place in the heterosexual matrix means to accept a position whereby one cannot produce art and must settle for loving it indirectly via the body of a man. By refusing the love of men, L has cast off her feminine gender identity and resolved the contradiction between “woman” and “writer,” terms that come laden with an enormous amount of cultural baggage that implies the gendered and mutually exclusive nature of these subject positions.

Yet L’s renouncing of her femininity is clearly accompanied by feelings of loss, judging by the way she arrived at this decision in the aftermath of a troubled and unsatisfying heterosexual relationship and by the way she is clearly drawn to M because she embodies those qualities that L was forced to reject. By loving M, she is able to recapture something of her lost femininity while remaining safely distant from those elements of it that threaten her status as androgynous intellect. Therefore, while many clues within the text suggest that M serves on one level as an extension of self, it is simultaneously crucial for L that M remain Other, preserving the tension between auto- and homoeroticism within the text. This tension cannot and must not be resolved in order for M to fulfill her role as surrogate feminine self, embodying those qualities that L has had to reject.
in herself in order to complete her “transformation” into a disembodied intellect. The homoerotic relationship with M therefore offers itself as a solution to L’s dilemma between complying with normative constructions of heterosexual womanhood, which would force her to abandon her status as artist, and renouncing femininity entirely by accepting a subject position that is implicitly masculine.

However, it is clear that while L seems satisfied with their arrangement, M is not, apparently because she has not experienced her own status as woman writer to be riddled with contradiction. M seems thoroughly comfortable with her own femininity even as she has established her credentials as an up-and-coming artistic phenomenon. Though she acquiesces to L’s desire for her, perhaps for the strategic advantage of having an established writer’s support—and in fact L does offer her professional backing—M still seems to be sexually interested in men and obviously believes L’s love to be inferior to that of men. The generation gap in self-perception between these two women, such that L sees a contradiction between femininity and professional goals whereas M does not, is evocative of the actual differences in experiences of Japanese women born before or after the war. The former group, having had to navigate a sea change in expectations of their purpose in Japanese society due to post-Occupation changes in educational, legal, and social structures, seems to have struggled with questions of gender identity in ways that the postwar generation of women, who grew up taking these new opportunities for granted, did not.

Because L’s longing for M is motivated by both personal and professional desires and because these desires are experienced by L as inseparable impulses, she experiences M’s rejection of her love as a rejection of her as both lover and mentor. After the fight discussed above, L goes to some trouble to order a copy of M’s collected works and finds that the young woman’s vibrant and powerful literary style only heightens her erotic desire for the girl. Inspired by admiration for M’s intellectual gifts, L presents M with a volume of her own literature but is wounded to discover that the girl is unacquainted with her work and finds her expression of enthusiasm for the gift to be perfunctory and shallow (174–175). This merely adds insult to the injury inflicted in the scene described above. M’s suggestion that L is not a proper woman yet simultaneously lacks the qualifications to perform satisfactorily as a man can thus be interpreted as both an attack on her suitability as a lover and a suggestion that her “transformation” into a genderless intellect is incomplete. Depressed at the personal and professional impasse at which she has arrived, L begins to feel as though
what she intended to be a short island vacation has in fact committed her
to a path that can end only with her death and that perhaps the only way
to avoid this fate is to kill M first (181–182).

The ending of the story highlights the contradictions between femi-
nine and masculine that L embodies in a surreal and shockingly violent
denouement. One morning, while M is still asleep, L gets a ride on the
hotel motorboat out to a deserted island nearby where she and M had
previously shared many intimate encounters. She takes with her a volume
of M’s collected works, reading it with a bittersweet combination of admira-
tion for the girl and painful feelings of unrequited love. She begins to
feel drowsy and experiences a sensation as if her “existence” were melting
away into the ocean, and she likens it to the feeling of “blood like black-
ness itself flowing ceaselessly out of her womb.” She feels “pinned down”
by an intense feeling of lethargy. The story ends as follows:

Just then, the world became tinged with an inauspicious shadow
and filled with a roar like a large flock of birds flapping their
wings. These strange birds, flocked together in the sky, had long,
bald, pink heads, and just like so many phalluses, they descended
upon L in unison. Their lewd cries resounded terrifyingly in her
ears….L screamed just as the naked boys leapt at her. Countless
sharp nails ripped off her clothes, and L’s body, thin but retain-
ing the form of untarnished sex that belied her age, was exposed
to the sun. Her face was covered with a straw hat as her body was
rent apart by their evil blades…. 

It was just before noon when M arrived by motorboat. Strangely, L’s consciousness was floating above the ground
at a height that allowed her to look down on everything. For
example, she could clearly see her own body lying on the sand
like a weird hieroglyphic. L understood it as her own dying body
gushing blood from where it had been rent apart. M removed
the straw hat covering the face of the corpse. The small ivory face
was contorted as if in pleasure, its upper lip curled. She could
hear M’s sweet voice calling, “Sensei, sensei. The results of your
medical exam came just a little while ago from a Tokyo hospital.”
Above her own face, L saw a face like a sunflower with a row of
cruel teeth. (182–183)

It is unclear whether L’s experience is real or a dream or some kind of hal-
lucination. She seems to be dozing off just prior to this event, and despite
the fact that after the attack her perspective hovers above the scene like that of a spirit leaving the body in its death throes, in the final line of the story L is once again gazing up at M while lying on the sand, suggesting that she does not actually die.

The nature of the “attack” she experiences on the island is as unclear as whether or not it actually occurred. Prior to this scene, a gang of malevolent-looking teenaged boys had arrived at the hotel, and L sensed trouble the moment she saw them. Several times their potential for dangerous or malicious mischief is hinted, including one scene in which they show up to a musical concert and appear to L to be wielding knives. These scenes foreshadow the final attack on L, and it bolsters an interpretation of the ending that indicates that actual violence was done to the protagonist. On the other hand, L’s altered state of drowsiness just beforehand and the fantastic nature of her perception of the incident, whereby a flock of birds turns into a gang of attacking phalluses, creates the possibility that this was simply a dream or hallucination. Nor is it clear whether they raped her or stabbed her or perhaps both—the blood flowing from L’s body, assuming it is in fact real, may emanate from one or more unspecified wounds, depending on how one reads the original text. The “blades” in this passage may refer to the knives that L thinks she sees them carry earlier in the story; alternately, they may be a metaphorical expression for the male sexual organ that is more explicitly referenced as a “phallus” elsewhere in the passage.

Regardless of how one interprets this final scene, the imagery employed further elucidates the conflicted relationship between L’s professional and gender identities. Having renounced heterosexual femininity in favor of an androgynously intellectual subject position, L has created a tenuous position for herself between genders that is perhaps impossible to maintain. Though her love of M hints at the possibility of resolving this tension between her desire for femininity and her desire for art, M’s failure to return her affections suggests the fragile nature of such a compromise. M represents for L all the feminine qualities that she desires but cannot allow herself to express, and while attributing these traits to the body of another woman allows her to protect herself from the cultural baggage they carry, by externalizing them onto the Other Woman, she has placed them outside her own control. M may represent what L desires for herself, but though L sees something of herself in this Other Woman, in the end she remains Other and therefore outside the realm of L’s control.

L’s strategy of abjecting her own feminine qualities onto the body of the Other Woman apparently solves one problem only to create others.
The final scene, in which L is raped either literally or metaphorically by a gang of young men who wield knives like phalluses—or perhaps phalluses like knives—therefore suggests a forcible reintegration of L into the heterosexual economy. Her untenable compromise between femininity and masculinity is clearly aberrant and societally unacceptable, and from the perspective of normative structures of authority, it must not be allowed to continue.

While the denouement of this story is shockingly violent, the strange smile of pleasure on L’s “corpse” indicates that it may on another level represent a welcome reprieve from the tension of attempting to maintain this impossibly androgynous subject position. In Kurahashi’s text, then, the body of the Other Woman may be understood not only as a physical embodiment of feminine qualities that intellectual women of her generation were forced to renounce, but also as a metaphor for the problem of oppressive structures of binary gender norms themselves. “Bad Summer” may be read as a critique of these structures, highlighting as it does the impossible position in which women who attempt to encroach upon traditionally masculine fields of endeavor are placed.

It is striking that all of the stories discussed in this chapter feature protagonists whose subjectivity is predicated on a profound sense of existential instability. Kōno’s protagonist feels only a tenuous connection to her own family, given her status as stepdaughter and half-sibling, and she consequently feels that her place in that fundamental institution is insecure. Furthermore, her preoccupation with her birth mother’s early death appears to threaten not only her position in the family but also her life itself, as she lives with the constant sense of foreboding that she will inherit her mother’s fate. Takahashi’s main character clearly suffers from some sort of psychological distress, and her engagement with reality is questionable, as she spends most of the story insulated in a world of two that allows no outside interference, obsessed with her relationship to a mysterious Other who seems to offer access to a privileged sort of self-knowledge. Kurahashi’s L is fractured from the beginning, having pared away elements of herself in an effort to deny her own femininity, yet determined to reclaim these qualities through physical possession of a younger woman who reminds her of what she has lost. Each of these characters, feeling her connection with the world around her to be shaky and unsatisfying, seeks in another woman what she perceives is lacking in herself.

Although there is a strong sense of identification between the protagonist and her double, the doppelganger must remain Other to the self.
The Other Woman in each case serves as a screen for the projection of the protagonist’s hopes and fears regarding her own identity and therefore must be held at a distance to be of any use in this quest for self-knowledge or exploration of her inner fantasies and desires. Maintenance of the tension between self/Other and desire/identification is therefore crucial both to the protagonist’s quest and to the structure of these narratives, even as this distance creates frustration in the main character, whose desire for the Other is continually deferred.

The tension between self and Other (or identification and desire) is one reason that these narratives of female homoeroticism are permeated by an undercurrent of hostility toward other women. Tatsuko of “On the Road” clearly feels warmly toward her sister when thinking of her as a medium for her own desire, and this identification between self and Other creates a pleasing sense of intimacy. Yet this fantasy of homoerotic fusion requires distance between self and Other to be preserved, through a triangular relationship that is mediated by Tatsuko’s husband. Furthermore, this fantasy is predicated on a structure wherein Kimiko takes her place in a masochistic and potentially fatal relationship to her husband—an experience that she senses would be unpleasant or shocking to the girl, given her worry that Kimiko would refuse if she knew the truth of the situation. At least some of Tatsuko’s pleasure in this scenario seems to come from envisioning the girl as object of the same potentially painful and humiliating treatment that is meted out to her by her husband.

Likewise, “Intercourse” ends with a violent climax wherein the protagonist literally destroys her doppelganger in a failed attempt to possess her completely. Fusion of self and Other, figured here as a “convergence” of the woman who inflicts pain with the woman who is the recipient of it, results not in a sensation of wholeness or healing of the division within herself but rather in a sense of loss of a beloved companion whose very otherness alone preserves the integrity of the relationship.

Finally, L of “Bad Summer” learns to despise not only other women but the woman within herself as well, and her efforts to reconcile the contradiction inherent in her status of “woman writer” place her in the impossible position of attempting to disavow her own femininity while projecting it onto another so that she can then embrace it as external to herself. The intensity of L’s love for M binds her to a relationship that can never satisfy her needs, threatening to destroy her if she does not free herself first—an escape that she believes can be achieved only through the death of one of the lovers. Thus, while these homoerotic relationships seem predicated on a preservation of tension between self and Other and
between desire and identification, the eroticism of these bonds is simultaneously permeated by feelings of antagonism and aggression that might be described as feminine misogyny.

The undercurrent of hostility toward the Other Woman seems to result from the fact that these relationships between women are nevertheless embedded in heteronormative structures of power, resulting in narratives that reinstate familiar gendered binaries even as they appear to trouble them on other levels of analysis. While the protagonists may long for harmonious communion with the Other Woman, fundamentally these relationships are still predicated on assumptions of a binary opposition between active and passive positions, roles that are implicitly gendered as masculine and feminine, even when both parties are biologically female. Thus, while male characters remain peripheral to each of these narratives, heteronormative structures of power clearly complicate the relationship dynamics between the protagonist and the other woman.

A heightened awareness of the differences and power structures that separate women from one another, preventing real communion or solidarity among them, seems accompanied by a haunting sense of sadness as well. Each of the protagonists of these stories seems profoundly lonely in some way—Tatsuko because she is an outsider in her own family, Watashi because she is isolated and alone in a forbidding and sterile environment, and L because in striving to transcend the paradox of her status as “woman writer,” she has taken up a subject position so anomalous that there now appears to be no one, male or female, with whom she can identify.

This sense of loneliness is perhaps not surprising, given that the authors of these texts, in their efforts to challenge hegemonic common sense regarding gender roles and discourses of “appropriate” femininity, seem to have been somewhat ahead of their time. Precisely because the gendered division of labor against which they struggled, in life and literature, had come to seem not only natural but necessary to Japanese society in the 1960s, founded as it was on a culture of high economic growth that produced national and individual prosperity, it was an exceptional woman indeed who dared to question the “logic” of dominant ideologies of gender. Unable to acquiesce gracefully to the models of femininity presented to them, these authors may be understood as having occupied a position in Japanese society that was as anomalous and gender indeterminate as their fictional protagonists.

Their life and works thus posed a profound challenge to the hegemonic discourses of gender that structured the high-growth period of Japan in the 1960s. It would be another decade—after the foundation
of growth began to crack due to international economic events that forced Japanese to question the wisdom of a single-minded pursuit of prosperity—before Japanese society began to take this challenge seriously. As we will see in the conclusion, the “women’s lib” movement of the 1970s openly debated many of the same problems of feminine subjectivity that preoccupied women writers of literature during the previous decade. These fiction writers may therefore be understood as working through the theoretical foundations of a feminist philosophy that would later emerge as an explicitly political movement.