

**FEMALE AUTHORSHIP AND IMPLICIT POWER  
IN WOMEN'S EROTICA:  
JAPANESE "LADIES' COMICS" AND *FIFTY SHADES OF GREY***

by

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## Abstract

Can female readers perceive empowerment through sexually explicit, fictional stories that feature depictions of misogynistic relationships or encounters? In this thesis, I will attempt to answer this question by examining English- and Japanese-language examples of sexual writing for women, specifically the genre of women's erotica (erotic fiction for a female audience).

I will describe how women's erotica in both languages is predominantly populated by female authors, and will argue that this allows readers to perceive sexual empowerment even when encountering storylines that feature female protagonists disempowered by male characters. The knowledge that the author is a woman perpetuates a belief on the side of the reader that the female protagonist is safe, and that she will enjoy the sexual acts that take place within the story.

To illustrate this point, I will compare the recently-published *Fifty Shades of Grey* with *Toraware no yoru* (Captive night), a 1990s example of "ladies' comics" (sexually explicit Japanese manga created for a female readership), which was re-published in e-format in 2009. I will demonstrate how the female sex of the authors enables readers to feel in control and empowered despite the often submissive role of the stories' protagonists. I will also argue that both works have been marketed and framed in a manner that alludes to Japanese- and English-language autobiographical sexual writing that developed from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I will establish how the confessional nature of these works helped construct a shared reality between reader and author in regards to sex and womanhood.

The solicitation of stories from ladies' comics readers and the emergence of *Fifty Shades of Grey* from the fan fiction community re-enforces the perception of a women-only space where text is influenced solely by a dialogue between female author and female reader. Although this female-centred space may in itself be a source of empowerment, the sustainability of such a space is precarious in the virtual environment, where the gender of author and reader cannot be guaranteed.

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## Notes

All translations of quoted text are my own unless otherwise indicated.

The genre known as “ladies’ comics” will be referred to throughout without italics and without quotation marks. The term will be used for the sexually explicit manga genre *redīsu komikku* レディースコミック, which is sometimes abbreviated to *redikomi* レディコミ, and which also has the Romanized variant “Lady’s Comic.”

In order to address possible discrepancies regarding e-book page numbering for E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades* trilogy, I have included chapter numbers as well as page numbers within footnote citations.

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## Dedication

For Professor Sharalyn Orbaugh.

*The Doctor: You're a woman, Seven!*  
*Seven of Nine: Is that an observation or a diagnosis?*

*Star Trek: Voyager*  
*Someone to Watch Over Me*

## Introduction

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial.<sup>1</sup>

Audre Lorde

In her essay *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, Audre Lorde asserts that the erotic is a power that is generated through the expression of feeling and the sharing of experience. She maintains that the power of the erotic has a positive effect on women, as it can prompt them to expect and demand deeper enjoyment from other aspects of their lives, such as their careers. However, she warns that “to share the power of each other’s feelings is different from using another’s feelings as we would use a kleenex. And when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.”<sup>2</sup> She finishes her essay by praising women who have attempted to share in transmitting this erotic power, stating “...I find more and more woman-identified women brave enough [sic] to risk sharing the erotic’s electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange.”<sup>3</sup>

Does the distribution of women’s erotic writing within the context of today’s publishing industry fulfill the vision of empowerment for women that Lorde

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (New York: Out & Out Books, 1978), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 8.



constructed in the late 1970s? Does this erotica entail women writing on their own sexual experiences as a means of sharing the erotic power inherent to women, or does it exploit women's sexuality? In this thesis, I will attempt to address these questions by demonstrating how female authorship may impact readers' reception of women's erotica as a type of sexual empowerment.

In May 2011, the first instalment of E.L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy was released in e-book format. The work includes explicit depictions of sexual acts between the female protagonist and the main male character. According to Bowker Market Research, 80 percent of its readers are female, and while the idea of women reading and writing sexually explicit literary works is not new, the extraordinary success of *Fifty Shades*, monopolizing the top spot on best sellers' lists and resulting in a movie deal, is unprecedented.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of e-publishing is considered to have played a part in the trilogy's success, since this has allowed for easy access to the work.<sup>5</sup> Readers can simply download the volumes from their homes, and there is no need to look for the material in the erotica section of a bookstore or go to a sex store in order to purchase it.

Japanese readers have long had easy access to erotic literature created for a female audience. Specifically, sexually explicit ladies' comics appeared in the marketplace in the 1980s, and these were made available via bookstores and convenience stores, and through subscription. The comics were incorporated into

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<sup>4</sup> "Who's Really Reading *50 Shades*?" Bowker, November 29, 2012, [http://www.bowker.com/en-US/aboutus/press\\_room/2012/pr\\_11292012.shtml](http://www.bowker.com/en-US/aboutus/press_room/2012/pr_11292012.shtml); Philip Stone, "E L James: £42,954,000 and Counting..." *Bookseller* no. 5542 (September 7, 2012): 15, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accession no. 80037735).

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Deahl, "Will There Be A '*Fifty Shades*' Afterglow?" *Publishers Weekly* 259, no. 18: 8, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accession no. 74689776).

periodical publications, and at the genre's peak there were over fifty separate titles with monthly publication numbers exceeding 100 million copies.<sup>6</sup> Ladies' comics can now be purchased in e-book format for download onto computers and mobile devices.

*Fifty Shades of Grey*, as well as many ladies' comics stories, include sex scenes in which the male characters sexually dominate the female characters. *Fifty Shades* focuses on sadomasochistic practices, while ladies' comics often incorporate scenes of resistance, as well as rape. While the emergence of ladies' comics has created some commentary within and outside of Japan, the debate surrounding *Fifty Shades* has exploded within the international media. Readers, researchers and journalists question whether the work represents sexual empowerment for women, or whether it is an example of the devaluation of women's needs within romantic heterosexual relationships.

In the *Redbook* magazine article "What's the Deal with *Fifty Shades of Grey*?" Dr. Laura Berman, a "sex and relationship therapist," states "...anything that gets women talking about sex and letting go of shame is good."<sup>7</sup> *The Globe and Mail* article, "Mom's Latest Guilty Pleasure: Bondage Erotica," includes an interview with *Fifty Shades* reader Clara Rose, who praises the camaraderie amongst the work's fans. She maintains "it's about women talking to each other like they did when they

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<sup>6</sup> Gretchen Jones, "Bad Girls Like to Watch: Writing and Reading Ladies' Comics," in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. by Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 98.

<sup>7</sup> "Love Notes: What's the Deal with *Fifty Shades of Grey*?" *Redbook* (June 1, 2012): 94, available from <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hotttopics/lnacademic>

were in college.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, *International Business Times* quotes *How to Get Your Wife to Have Sex With You* author Logan Levkoff as saying:

"What I love most about the hoopla surrounding '*Fifty Shades of Grey*' is that the story here isn't really about women getting turned on. It's not even about women desiring more sex with their partners. It's about women sharing information with each other. It's about storytelling and friendships. Women have found something that enhances their emotional and sexual lives and want to pass that knowledge onto their friends, family members, and even the world at large."<sup>9</sup>

Conversely, in the *Herald's* "Mummy Porn and a Male Model of Sexual Fulfillment," Julie Davidson asserts that *Fifty Shades of Grey* follows a male-created framework of sexual fulfillment, and suggests that the book has a similar detrimental effect to male-produced pornography.<sup>10</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown adds that *Fifty Shades* "gives the message that even educated women can only be fulfilled if entrapped and tortured by rich and powerful men – that abused victims ask for it and love their abusers."<sup>11</sup>

While Davidson and Alibhai-Brown's negative commentary focuses on the plot and content of the work, the positive discourse emphasizes sexual empowerment through the sharing of sexual experience via the consumption of erotic literature. I believe that the female gender of the author is a contributing factor to this perception of empowerment, and that female authorship negates the potentially

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<sup>8</sup> Zosia Bielski, "Mom's Latest Guilty Pleasure: Bondage Erotica," *The Globe and Mail*, March 2, 2012, Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly, Gale (document no. A281747148).

<sup>9</sup> Justine Ashley Costanza, "Why Some Find '*Fifty Shades of Grey*' Disturbing, New Film Adaptation Announced, Erotic Novel Generates Controversy," *International Business Times*, March 27, 2012, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/articles/320222/20120327/fifty-shades-grey-twilight-fan-fiction-edward.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Julie Davidson, "Mummy Porn and a Male Model of Sexual Fulfillment," *The Herald*, July 14, 2012, <http://www.heraldsotland.com/mobile/comment/columnists/mummy-porn-and-a-male-model-of-sexual-fulfilment.18148693>

<sup>11</sup> Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, "Do Women Really Want to be So Submissive?" *Independent*, July 2, 2012, available from <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic>

antagonizing elements of the plot. In this thesis, I assert that this association of empowerment with female authorship is due in part to the relationship between this material and foundational erotic texts written by women, and that English- and Japanese-language publishers have exploited this expectation of empowerment in order to successfully market sexually explicit works with blatantly misogynistic content to a female audience.

In the first chapter, I will examine the development of Japanese- and English-language women's erotic writings, and how these works contributed to the differentiation of women's erotica from pornography by building a reputation for aesthetic value and authenticity. Referring to Japanese women's magazines in the 1920s and English-language works for women published between the 1920s and the 1970s, I will illustrate how the autobiographical nature of these works generated confidence in readers that the authors were sharing personal experiences in which women were in control of the sexual acts, and that their sexuality was not commodified as one might expect within male-centred pornography.

In the second chapter, I will examine the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy and the ladies' comics work *Toraware no yoru* 囚われの夜 (Captive night) in order to demonstrate how these contemporary examples of women's erotica are in clear conflict with earlier erotic texts created for women, and are in fact similar to male-produced pornography as they remove female agency within sexual acts, and also depict female sexuality as a commodity. I will argue that, despite these aspects of the stories, the emphasis on female authorship, which is prevalent in both texts, has resulted in readers' reception of the material as following the tradition of previous

examples of women's erotica, where women writing about sexual experience was associated with women's sexual empowerment. I will also discuss the role of the readers in providing content, and how this also contributes to the notion of a female-exclusive genre devoid of male authorship and readership, thereby removing it from possible connotations with pornography targeted towards men.

I will conclude the thesis by speculating on how the growing popularity and availability of digital formats will complicate the ability of publishers to frame women's erotica as a "by women for women" genre. I will describe how, despite potentially increasing accessibility for female readers and opportunities for writers of women's erotic fiction, e-publishing will also make it less feasible to exclude male readers and writers from the virtual space. The incursion of men into this female sphere of women's erotica will ultimately impact the reception of the genre by female readers, and whether the material will be viewed as empowering by this female readership.

## Chapter 1: Creating a Yardstick of Sexual Power

Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic* points to two characteristics that are regularly applied to differentiate pornography from erotica. First, Lorde states that "pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling."<sup>12</sup> This bears similarities to the argument that erotica has more aesthetic value than pornography. Further, while pornography focuses almost exclusively on depictions of sexual acts, erotica requires character and plot development. Second, Lorde muses that "to share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feelings as we would use a kleenex."<sup>13</sup> Lorde appears to be referring to pornography here, as well, suggesting that the erotic's power lies in the sharing of the authentic and personal, unlike the exploitative nature of pornography. These ideals are reflected in Gayle Rubin's comparison of erotica and pornography. She states:

Although the term 'pornography' was originally used to refer to all kinds of explicitly sexual writing and art, it has increasingly been associated with the phenomenon of inexpensive commercial erotica. Particularly since World War Two, the term has acquired connotations of the 'cheap stuff': mass-market, commercial materials distinct from more expensive, artistic or sophisticated 'erotica'.

She later adds:

Erotica has had the connotations of being softer, classier, better produced, less blatant, and often less bluntly explicit than pornography.<sup>14</sup>

In this chapter, I will discuss this differentiation between the terms erotica and

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<sup>12</sup> Lorde, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>14</sup> Gayle Rubin, "Misguided, Dangerous and Wrong: An Analysis of Anti-pornography Politics," in *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures: The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*, ed. Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 25.

pornography, and will demonstrate how early examples of modern Japanese- and English-language erotic texts directed towards women strengthened notions of the aesthetic value and authenticity of erotic writing through female authorship.

In her book *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sexuality, and Everyday Life*, Jane Juffer discusses the aesthetic value prescribed to erotica. Rather than attributing plot and character development to a feminine need for romantic storylines, Juffer argues that the inclusion of details such as the female protagonist's career within literary erotica serves to reflect the reality of women's lives. Juffer states:

The act of writing erotica in the 1980s became another venue for distributing the information about women's bodily pleasures and sexual fantasies that was produced in the masturbation discourse.... In fact, literary erotica has provided a way for women to explore, under the legitimating auspices of aesthetic discourse, the many different ways to reconcile reality and fantasy, the everyday and the erotic."<sup>15</sup>

Juffer asserts that it is the inclusion of details on the everyday reality of women that differentiates erotica from pornography, where sexual acts happen without any context that could be considered to mirror real life.

Juffer also maintains that English-language women's erotica that emerged in the 1980s directly benefited from the work of writers and educators such as Betty Dodson, Lonnie Barbach, and Nancy Friday, who focused their attention on women's masturbation. They urged women through workshops (in the case of Dodson) and literary texts to seek sexual satisfaction without the presence of a partner. Juffer explains:

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<sup>15</sup> Jane Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 105.

Masturbation discourse laid the foundation for much of the women's erotica and couples' porn that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s; teaching women that masturbation was an accepted activity was a necessary first component to their consumption of erotic materials. Furthermore, masturbation discourse, especially as it valorized the clitoris, helped distinguish erotica from pornography, a genre connected to men's orgasms and masturbation.<sup>16</sup>

The masturbatory texts that Juffer refers to, which include Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden*, were published in the same timeframe as Lorde's 1978 essay, and were focused on the exchange of the personal through autobiographical and biographical stories and fantasies. This personal element in the creation of the texts strengthened the idea that the material was based in reality, even when the content touched on sexual fantasies. Women readers, in turn, used the texts to embark on their tangible goals of discovering their bodies and sexuality.

Additionally, the exchange of sexual fantasies and experiences via texts and publications resulted in a shared understanding of women's sexuality that could only be created by women themselves. Nancy Friday concludes:

What women needed and were waiting for was some kind of yardstick against which to measure ourselves, a sexual rule of thumb equivalent to that with which men have always provided one another. But women were the silent sex. In our desire to please our men, we had placed the sexual constraints and secrecy upon one another which men had thought necessary for their own happiness and freedom. We had imprisoned each other, betrayed our own sex and ourselves. Men had always banded together to give each other fraternal support and encouragement, opening up for themselves the greatest possible avenues for sexual adventure, variety and possibility. Not women.<sup>17</sup>

The sexual "yardstick" that Friday refers to involves the sharing of personal experience in order to create a knowledge database for women from which to draw in order to achieve sexual empowerment. Friday worked towards establishing this

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Friday, *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), 7-8.



yardstick through the contributions of women who agreed to participate in her study of female fantasy.

Since the yardstick functions as a shared reality, it is imperative that it be based on the true and the personal. Friday also maintains that autobiography is necessary to achieve empowerment. She states:

Today we have a flowering of women who write explicitly and honestly about sex and about what goes on in a woman's mind and body during the act. Marvelous writers like Edna O'Brien and Doris Lessing. But even with women as outspoken as these, they feel the need for a last seventh veil to hide acknowledgement of their sexuality; what they write calls itself fiction. It is a veil I feel it would be interesting and even useful to remove as a step in the liberation of us all, women and men alike. For no man can be really free in bed with a woman who is not.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, according to Friday, even literary authors such as O'Brien and Lessing must acknowledge their own sexual experience within their work so that their writings can strengthen the yardstick of women's experience.

Previous to the emergence of these texts, American readers had already been exposed to confession romance magazines featuring purportedly autobiographical stories that incorporated sexual experiences. This magazine genre grew from the publication *True Story*, which solicited women readers to submit their stories for \$1000.<sup>19</sup> *True Story* began publication in 1919, and the genre flourished over the following decades. According to George Gerbner, "by the turn of mid-century, some forty titles in the romance confession field tried to lure advertising sponsorship with

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>19</sup> Roseann Mandziuk, "Confessional Discourse and Modern Desires: Power and Please in *True Story* Magazine," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 2 (2001): 174, doi:10.1080/07393180128076

a guaranteed circulation of 16 million copies.”<sup>20</sup>

The titles of the magazines encouraged the notion that the stories within their pages were based on confessions submitted by their readers. Five of the eight romance periodicals included in Leo Bogart’s 1956 study “Magazines Since the Rise of Television” included the word “true” within their titles. In addition to *True Story* Bogart lists *True Romance*, *True Experience*, *True Love Story* and *True Confessions*.<sup>21</sup>

Like the masturbatory texts of the 1970s, confession magazines solicited first-person accounts from women. However, while the masturbatory texts encouraged sexual fantasy and experimentation as a method of empowerment, the confession magazines highlighted empowerment through adherence to traditional notions of womanhood.

Maureen Honey provides the following description of the typical plot of the confession magazine story:

While a wide variety of crises assail the confessions heroine, her shame is most often due to sexual transgression: premarital sex, affairs with married men, giving birth out of wedlock. Driven to the arms of a man by her desperate need for warmth, acceptance, and meaning, the narrator violates her own moral standards or blinds herself to her lover’s lack of character in order to avoid re-entering the cold world from which she is trying to escape. The price for her illusory safety is, however, guilt and self-debasement as she clings desperately to a man who does not respect her. Isolated even further from other people than she had been by her need to dissemble, the narrator is pushed to the limits of her endurance as she tries to hide her “sin” from the world. The tension of this drama is resolved when the narrator finally faces reality and makes a decision to act in accordance with her values (usually by ending the relationship) or heroically pulls herself together to lead a decent life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> George Gerbner, “The Social Role of the Confession Magazine,” *Social Problems* 6, no. 1 (Summer, 1958): 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/798993>

<sup>21</sup> Leo Bogart, “Magazines Since the Rise of Television,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1956): 166, doi: 10.1177/107769905603300201

<sup>22</sup> Maureen Honey, “The Confession Formula and Fantasies of Empowerment,” *Women’s Studies* 10, no.3 (January 1984): 307, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accession no. 5809142).

Sex in the confession magazine was equated with moral failure, and it was by resisting sexual desire that female protagonists were shown to embody strength. Honey also discusses the prominence of womenly self-sacrifice within the stories, stating: "Because their compulsion for adventure, romance, and unconditional love has caused them to act in destructive ways, narrators equate acting on demands of self with pain."<sup>23</sup> By focusing on the notion of self-sacrifice, the confession magazines are in clear contrast with works such as *My Secret Garden*, where addressing one's own needs through self-gratification is a primary objective.

Additionally, the act of confession itself reinforced a common understanding of the ideal woman. Roseann Mandziuk discusses how confession within *True Story* facilitated the construction of a shared female identity amongst writers and readers:

Because the writers and readers for *True Story* are articulated as the same gender and class, the evaluation of the interlocutor in this commodity confessional draws its authority not from a hierarchical distance or superior position but from the invocation of a commonly shared reservoir of values. The power in the form is dispersed horizontally, across the moral code, rather than invoked vertically, between different points on a social hierarchy.

In accordance with the revelation/mediation process characteristic of women's reading, moreover, the confession functions as a mediating act between collaborators, such that the act itself, and the mutual participation in it, potentially offers exoneration to both writer and reader.<sup>24</sup>

Despite their differences, both *My Secret Garden* and confession magazines such as *True Story* employed confession as a way for female readers to identify with the information being transmitted. The works also allowed readers and writers to exchange information in a climate of collaboration that further facilitated the sense of "exoneration" that Honey describes. Female authorship was essential to making

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>24</sup> Mandziuk, 185.

the confession formula effective for both types of works. The author's gender facilitated the female reader's ability to identify with the author and narrator, creating an environment where authors and readers could potentially become collaborators.

The concept of confession also played a prominent part in stories with sexual content that appeared in Japanese women's magazines of the 1920s. Maeda Ai maintains that the emergence of these women's periodicals coincided with a surge in the number of women who had attained a secondary education. He also links the popularity of the magazines to an increase in women working outside the home, with a disposable income.<sup>25</sup> Thus, women were experiencing personal empowerment on many levels; sexual empowerment via disseminating sexual experience complemented this trend.

In her book *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan*, Sarah Frederick offers a detailed discussion on the women's magazine *Nyonin geijutsu*, which was published between 1928 and 1932. Of particular interest to Frederick is the special issue entitled "Jidenteki ren'ai shōsetsugō" 自伝的恋愛小説号 (which Fredrick translates as the "autobiographical love fiction" issue). The issue involved women writers confessing love stories that often included reference to sexual experiences. Frederick points out that, while explicit terms were often masked by *fuseji* ("x" characters taking place of the actual words within the stories so as to avoid confiscation by censors), the scenes within

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<sup>25</sup> Maeda Ai, "The Development of Modern Fiction in the late Taishō Era: Increasing Readership of Women's Magazines," trans. Rebecca Copeland, in *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*, ed. James A. Fujii (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 169-172.

the stories were clearly understood by readers through context.<sup>26</sup>

Stories from the autobiographical love issue provided a sense of authenticity since they were said to reflect the authors' own experiences. "Kiri no naka no koi" 霧の中の戀 (Love within the mist) by Ōi Sachiko 大井さち子 features a protagonist named "Madmoiselle." Near the middle of the story, the narrator states the following:

筆者大井さち子とこのマドモワゼールとを同じに考へられる方があるならそれで好い。それが、一番好い。なぜなら私は他人の戀愛なんか伺うなつたつてかまひはしないと思つてゐるのだから。<sup>27</sup>

If one leans towards thinking that the author Ōi Sachiko and Madmoiselle are one and the same, then that's good. That's the best. Why? Because I wouldn't care to speak of the love of another.

Ōi highlights the authenticity of her work by claiming that she would not appropriate the love story of someone else, so the reader can assume that the content of the story has its basis in Ōi's personal reality.

Frederick also mentions another *Nyonin geijutsu* special issue that focused on true stories or *jitsuwa*. According to Frederick, *Nyonin geijutsu*, as well as more mainstream women's magazines such as *Shufu no tomo* (Housewife's friend) solicited *jitsuwa* stories from readers, although the stories were then stylized by the magazines' authors and editors. Frederick writes:

*Jitsuwa* is a journalistic classification rather than any particular writing style, so it is hard to characterize generally. Most of the *jitsuwa* here were not written in the first person, but there was usually (but not always) a female protagonist and a female author's name (a real name or something along the

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<sup>26</sup> Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 144-145.

<sup>27</sup> Ōi Sachiko 大井さち子, "Kiri no naka no koi" 「霧の中の戀」, *Nyonin geijutsu* 女人芸術 (March 1929): 81.

lines of X-ko). At the same time, the protagonists' names are often different from the authors', and many episodes are told through surprisingly indirect narration. For example, many of the *jitsuwa* use a diary format or epistolary form in which a letter to a relative or husband tells most of the story. These forms call attention to how mediated the stories are.<sup>28</sup>

While *jitsuwa* were an important facet of women's magazines of that period, the fact that the stories were not published as is but adapted and transformed into fictional narratives points to the importance of the female gender of the writer in order to maintain the authentic tone of the works. In addition to the female authors who wrote for *Nyonin geijutsu*, the magazine itself was entirely women-run.<sup>29</sup>

The periodical also espoused predominantly proletarian values, setting itself away from some of the consumeristic tendencies of other women's magazines at the time, such as *Shufu no tomo*.<sup>30</sup> Frederick states:

The people involved in this project took seriously the significance of providing an alternative to highly profitable magazines while being savvy about the difficulty in doing so in a way that was not so naïve after all. They aimed to have greater political and artistic effect by constructing a politically active popular audience, seeking in a sense both to criticize commercial mass culture's products for and about women and to produce popular culture by and for women, in the sense of culture of and for the good of "the people."<sup>31</sup>

The objective of creating commercial culture while refuting commodification that encompassed women also came through in the *Nyonin geijutsu* stories that touched on sex. These works included obvious references to sexuality either through direct language or through its intimation via *fuseji*; however, its dual objective of espousing proletarian values to readers placed it at odds with mass market capitalism, thereby positioning itself away from male-dominated, mainstream

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick, 161.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 139.

pornography. This is reflected in Joel Kovel's essay, the "Antidialectic of Pornography," in which he argues:

Pornography is the captivity of the erotic within mass culture. It is the erotic less its negativity, less its ambivalence, its association of sexuality with death, and, finally, its truthfulness. For truthfulness is the one property of erotic representation which redeems the whole and gives to it the possibility of aesthetic realization. The representation of the erotic moment of dissolution requires fidelity to the tragic character of existence, requires the capacity to look into the abyss beyond desire and give it signification. Truthfulness stands forth as the ultimate value of the erotic, and truthfulness inheres in the internal relation of the elements of the work and not in its manifest subject. For this reason great erotic art need not be all explicit in its depiction of sexuality. A poem by Emily Dickinson is no less erotic than a work by Bataille, even if the latter confronts the problem of the erotic directly. Similarly, no more erotic novel has ever been written than *Anna Karenina*, even if it lacks any direct representation of sexuality. By contrast, the attempt to make pornography more "erotic" by improving production values, introducing more or less credible kinds of characters, and cutting out the ranker forms of exploitation, succeeds only in softening the pornography and expanding its market further into the normal zone of mass culture, where it now abuts upon the domain of the soap opera. Softer pornography is more acceptable, especially to women (who now comprise, I have heard, forty percent of the pornographic videotape market), but it remains fully pornographic, indeed, signifies the assimilation of sex-hygiene into pornography.<sup>32</sup>

Here, Kovel associates erotica with truthful representations of sex, and links pornography with mass market exploitation of the sexual experience.

Truth and autobiography figured prominently within the English-language masturbatory texts and confession romance magazines, as well as in *Nyonin geijutsu*; however, the works differed in their stated goals for including sexual content and associating the accounts with real women. The masturbatory texts were aimed at providing readers with increased sexual understanding and fulfillment. Confession magazines acknowledged sexual experience as a part of women's reality,

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<sup>32</sup> Joel Kovel, "The Antidialectic of Pornography," in *Men Confront Pornography* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1990), 165.

but also related the primarily negative consequences of pursuing sexual pleasure. Meanwhile, the *Nyonin geijutsu* autobiographical love issue included themes of autobiography and sexual experience in order to validate the integrity of its authors, and to more effectively transmit other messages within the text, such as proletarian ideals.

Even when depicting fantasy, these works acknowledged women's realities, achieving the "ultimate value of the erotic" that Kovel describes. Additionally, the stories highlighted the notion of confession and autobiography as a means to underscore the truthful representation of the female experience, creating the perception of common understanding between the author and reader.

In the next chapter I will examine how the reception of contemporary forms of English- and Japanese-language erotic fiction has been influenced by the first-person nature of these early works. I will illustrate how contemporary women's erotica has been packaged similarly to these autobiographical stories and shared personal fantasies in order to gain credibility with a female readership. I will also explain how this is done partly through the emphasis of female authorship, and how this results in "softening the pornography" and the expansion of "its market further into the normal zone of mass culture" of which Kovel warns.



## Chapter 2: Contracting Out Pleasure Online

For her thesis entitled “Pour une remise en question de la victimisation des femmes comme public des medias: Le cas de la consommation de la pornographie par les femmes,” Judith Plante interviewed thirty-six women as part of her study on women’s consumption of pornographic films. When the participants were asked whether they had watched any pornographic films that were created by women, those that responded in the affirmative considered these works to have better-constructed, more romantic storylines as compared to movies created by men. When asked how such a film with scenes of domination differed from similar male-created works, one respondent indicated that:

« ...mais c’était moins *hard*. Quand la femme disait non l’homme arrêta. Il retentait “sa chance” plus tard dans le film. Il y a aussi plus de fantasmes, si on peut dire, féminins.» (Lorette)<sup>33</sup>

“...but it was less *hard*. When the woman said no the man stopped. He tries “his luck” again later on in the film. There were also, one could say, more feminine fantasies.” (Lorette)

In addition, the women who had never watched female-produced pornography were asked how they would expect a female director to approach a film as compared to a male counterpart. Participants responded as follows:

«Elle va peut-être vouloir plus refléter ce qu’elle aimerait, elle, ses propres fantasmes. Je suis sûre qu’il y aurait beaucoup plus d’érotisme, plus de caresses, plus de préliminaires. Et l’ambiance ne serait pas du tout la même, ça serait moins juste un prétexte.» (Andrée) Une autre s’étonne que la littérature érotique féminine ne soit pas mise en films, car «il y a beaucoup de femmes qui en écrivent. Et il y a d’excellents livres.» (Élizabeth)

“She would perhaps want to reflect what she enjoys, herself, her own fantasies.

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Plante, “Pour une remise en question de la victimisation des femmes comme public des medias: Le cas de la consommation de la pornographie par les femmes,” (M.A. thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 2002), 80, Proquest Dissertations & Theses (document id: 305497792).

I am certain that there would be much more eroticism, more cuddling, more foreplay. And the setting wouldn't be the same at all, there would be less of it just being a pretext." (Andrée) Another was surprised that women's erotic literature was not made into films because "there are a lot of women who write. And there are some excellent books." (Élizabeth)<sup>34</sup>

The responses of the participants reflect not only a perception that female characters within the pornographic films had more control, such as the female protagonist's "no" having an effect, but also emphasize an expectation that a female creator would incorporate her own sexual preferences into the stories, and that this would correspond to "feminine" tastes. While the women cited are referring to pornographic films specifically, Élizabeth's comment that it is surprising that pornographic films are not based on women's erotic fiction demonstrates that the two genres could be regarded similarly by consumers. I believe that, as a result of the well-developed history of women's literary erotica and its tradition of incorporating autobiography, there is a much higher expectation that literary works will express an understanding of women's needs and the empowerment of female protagonists.

In this chapter, I will compare the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy to the ladies' comics work *Toraware no yoru* (Captive night). I will demonstrate how both these works incorporate examples of extreme disempowerment of the female protagonists and yet provide a similar expectation of empowerment and pleasure to readers as the female-created pornographic films had to the participants in Plante's study. I will illustrate how this can be attributed in part to the association of these literary works with autobiographical erotic writings created decades earlier, such as

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 81.

those discussed in Chapter 1.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru* differ greatly in format. As the genre title suggests, ladies' comics are pictorial works that are a sub-genre of manga (Japanese comics), and are often serialized within periodicals. Gretchen Jones describes ladies' comics as being focused on "highly explicit representations of sexual acts." She also states that "a large proportion of the images reflect violence, often toward the female characters themselves. Illustrations of gang rape, various forms of sexual degradation and humiliation, and even torture abound in the pages of Ladies' Comics..."<sup>35</sup>

*Toraware no yoru* is a short standalone story that was originally distributed within a ladies' comics periodical and was re-published seventeen years later as part of an e-book anthology of the author's works. In contrast, *Fifty Shades of Grey* has no illustrations, and is a full-length monographic trilogy. Unlike *Toraware no yoru*, which was created and distributed within the framework of mainstream publishing, *Fifty Shades* stemmed from a piece of fan fiction, freely available on the Internet. Despite these differences, the emergence, dissemination, and reception of ladies' comics bears similarities with *Fifty Shades of Grey*, providing an important basis for comparison.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* originated from the fan fiction work *Master of the Universe*, that was based on the *Twilight* series, which was published between 2005 and 2008 and which resulted in a successful movie franchise.<sup>36</sup> *Fifty Shades* was adapted into

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<sup>35</sup> Gretchen Jones, "Ladies' Comics: Japan's Not-So-Underground Market in Pornography for Women," *U.S. - Japan Women's Journal* English Supplement, 22 (2002): 3.

<sup>36</sup> "Bio," The Official Website of Stephanie Meyer, <http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/bio.html>

an e-book in 2011, making its way to traditional print publication approximately one year after the original e-book was released.<sup>37</sup> In her essay, “One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance,” Catherine Driscoll examines the production of sexually explicit fan fiction, and argues that these works blur the genre lines of pornography and romance. She states, “Fan fiction, like romance, is commonly represented outside its reading communities as immature because of its indiscriminating and excessive investment in popular culture. But fan fiction is also represented as a (usually secret) substitute for real romantic and sexual relationships — as a type of amateur porn.”<sup>38</sup>

In her book *Onna wa poruno o yomu* (Women reading porn), Mori Naoko suggests that the success of ladies’ comics versus other genres of pornography for women is related to the fact that the material was introduced within a space that was already carved out exclusively for women within the manga genre. Mori determines that pornographic films in the 1980s and 1990s were not easily accessible by women because of their availability through stores that catered to men. In particular, women with children were excluded from these “adult-only” spaces. In contrast, ladies’ comics were shelved within areas already designated for women’s reading by bookstores and convenience stores, where girls’ and women’s

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<sup>37</sup> David Marr, “From Hornsby to New York: How an Erotic E-book Became a \$1m Blockbuster,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 12, 2012, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/from-hornsby-to-new-york-how-an-erotic-ebook-became-a-1m-blockbuster-20120311-1uso5.html>

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Driscoll, “One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance,” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2006), 85.

comics and magazines were shelved separately from men's material.<sup>39</sup> I believe that, as a consequence, ladies' comics were inaccessible to men in the same way as women were excluded from acquiring mainstream, male-oriented pornography. While women could feel safe entering the physical space set aside for women's material and ladies' comics, men would likely find these same spaces unwelcoming, possibly emasculating.

Similarly, many English-language examples of women's erotic fiction, including *Fifty Shades of Grey*, are categorized within contemporary romance, a genre which is almost exclusively female in both authorship and readership. Random House has categorized *Fifty Shades of Grey* as "Fiction - Romance - Contemporary" and "Fiction - Erotica."<sup>40</sup> In addition, Amazon.com lists the trilogy under "Books > Romance > Contemporary" and "Books > Literature & Fiction > Women's Fiction > Contemporary Women."<sup>41</sup> The category of romance not only occupies an exclusive space within bookstores, but it also makes for its own space within the virtual environment. While the readers may not notice the explicit categorization of *Fifty Shades* under the term "romance" in the online marketplace, the work is nonetheless presented along with similar books from that genre. As a result, despite the ambiguity of E. L. James's name (a pseudonym with only first and middle initials, and a last name which is also used as a masculine first name), the reader is assured that the writer is female, and that the work's primary audience and main consumers

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<sup>39</sup> Mori Naoko 守如子, *Onna wa poruno o yomu: josei no seiyoku to feminizumu* 女はポルノを読む: 女性の性欲とフェミニズム (Tokyo: Seikyūsha 青弓社, 2010), 197-198.

<sup>40</sup> "Fifty Shades of Grey: Book One of the Fifty Shades Trilogy," Random House, Inc., <http://www.randomhouse.com/book/222129/fifty-shades-of-grey-by-e-l-james>

<sup>41</sup> "Fifty Shades Trilogy: *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker*, *Fifty Shades Freed* 3-volume Boxed Set," Amazon.com, [http://www.amazon.com/Fifty-Shades-Trilogy-Darker-3/dp/034580404X/ref=zg\\_bs\\_books\\_8](http://www.amazon.com/Fifty-Shades-Trilogy-Darker-3/dp/034580404X/ref=zg_bs_books_8)

are also women.

*Toraware no yoru* was originally published in print but is now sold exclusively as an e-publication. Similar to *Fifty Shades*, the work's virtual space resides under a female-exclusive category. The e-book provider eBookJapan lists the anthology in which the story appears under the category TL/Redikomi (Teens' Love Comics / Ladies' Comics) where the sexually explicit ladies' comics material is grouped together with the less graphic "teens' love" genre depicting romantic stories for a younger female audience.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, the format and publication method of *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades* prompt their exclusion from community spaces such as libraries. In the case of *Fifty Shades*, some libraries have argued that it is because the work originated as a self-published title that it is deemed out of scope for their collections.<sup>43</sup> Manga collection and preservation has also been hindered within Japanese libraries. The inclusion of manga stories within hard-to-maintain periodical titles and the valuation of the material as being lowbrow has complicated manga collection within these institutions.<sup>44</sup> A library catalogue search for *Aya*, the original publication in which *Toraware no yoru* was published, retrieved no results within Japanese academic and public libraries, and it appears that only Japan's National Diet Library

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<sup>42</sup> "Tinsurabu, redisukomikku: denshishoseki, komikku wa eBookJapan 『ティーンズラブ・レディースコミック-電子書籍・コミックはeBookJapan』, <http://www.ebookjapan.jp/ebj/lady/index.asp>

<sup>43</sup> Barbara M. Jones, "Controversy in *Fifty Shades of Grey*," *American Libraries* 43, no. 5/6 (May 2012): 21, Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly, Gale (document no. A294299891)

<sup>44</sup> Naiki Toshio 内記 稔夫, "Nihon ni okeru manga no hoson to riyō" 『日本における漫画の保存と利用』, *Karento awarenesu* (Current Awareness) カレントアウェアネス 293 (September 20, 2007): 8-9, <http://current.ndl.go.jp/files/ca/ca1637.pdf>

houses the magazine run.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, even without the sexual content, both works can be seen as going against the norms of both commercial publishing and public libraries, and may therefore attract readers who are otherwise ostracized from these spaces. Further, formatting issues provide some libraries with alternative excuses for why this sexually explicit material is not being purchased.

Finally, ladies' comics and manga are similar to fan fiction in that both types of material are tied to pop culture trends and reader communities. While I will not be able to fully investigate the role of reader communities in this thesis, I feel that it is important to highlight the possible similarities between the audiences of both genres, in that they include fans who have an expectation of an adherence to narrative formula, and also have experience exerting power through their own submissions and writings. Driscoll writes:

Frances Ferguson argues that pornography's development of "a variety of genres with a variety of target audiences ... performs a major service by educating a self-selecting audience into the possibility of sexual self-realization. The meaning of the pornographic object, in other words, is its audience's self-image." Although available sexual identities may be coded into porn as a dominant reading or packaged into its categorization, self-realization is a fantasy of pornography that does not necessarily either project or rely on "the audience's self-image." The element of fan fiction that most obviously contradicts this is not the diversity of sexual motifs and scenes but rather the communities that moderate all fan fiction, the shared reality demanded by canon, and the amalgamation of these in romance narratives.<sup>46</sup>

As Driscoll suggests, fan fiction involves community participation in the creation of text, and this is influenced by the expectations of a "canon" that involves a particular community-built understanding of genre and categorization. Despite

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<sup>45</sup> "Aya," NDL Search, National Diet Library 国立国会図書館,  
<http://iss.ndl.go.jp/books/R100000002-I000000082154-00>

<sup>46</sup> Driscoll, 91-92.

this increased level of involvement and expectation of adherence to and understanding of canon, fan fiction Internet communities allow for the anonymity of contributors and readers. Those who are involved do not have to identify themselves by name. For instance, E.L. James wrote under the pseudonym Snowqueens IceDragon.<sup>47</sup> This, too, is similar to ladies' comics, where authors generally write under female pseudonyms, even though they are not necessarily female.<sup>48</sup> Hence, for both fan fiction and ladies' comics, credibility is desired from reader communities even though the true identities of authors and contributors are hidden from these communities. As a result, I believe any demographic information gleaned about the background of an author is crucial to maintaining the credibility of the author as someone who is capable of telling the story. In the fan fiction context, this would entail proving that one is familiar with the source text, which serves as a basis for reality or "canon" to which the fan fiction community conforms. I assert that, within women's erotica, establishment of credibility involves the author demonstrating that she can reflect on the true sexual experiences of women. This is done by assuring the reader that the author herself has a female body and can therefore empathize with the female reader's sexual needs.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* has evolved from the original fan fiction story *Master of the Universe* that James wrote as Snowqueens Icedragon. Direct references to the *Twilight* story have been removed, and some members of the fan fiction community have since criticized James for not crediting her fans with assisting in the success of

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<sup>47</sup> Natalie Zutter, "Fifty Shades of Grey Author E.L. James Hates the *Twilight* Fans that Made her Famous," May 11, 2012, <http://crushable.com/entertainment/el-james-snowqueens-icedragon-fifty-shades-of-grey-twilight-fandom-wank-860/#ixzz2B3E0NMXm>

<sup>48</sup> Jones, "Bad Girls Like to Watch," 99.



her publications through support of and feedback on the original work.<sup>49</sup> Yet, James does readily credit the author of *Twilight*, Stephanie Meyer, not only for providing a framework for *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but also for inspiring her to follow her aspiration of becoming a writer. In an interview with BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, James not only mentions Meyer, but also attributes the success of the work and the coinage "mommy porn" to mothers discussing the work when accompanying their children to school outings.<sup>50</sup> She does not, however, speak specifically to the fandom that initially gave rise to its popularity, which ultimately gained mainstream publisher interest. By de-emphasizing the importance of fan fiction in the success of her work, James repositions *Fifty Shades of Grey* from a piece of fan fiction that is focused on the *Twilight* canon, to a literary work that has emerged from the shared interest and understanding amongst women. By doing so, James encourages the association of the work with women's erotic fiction that is rooted in the exchange of sexual experience as a means of empowerment. As a result, *Fifty Shades of Grey* is presented as providing the same possibilities of empowerment even when, as I will outline below, the work's content sits contrary to the ideas espoused in the masturbatory texts.

The *Fifty Shades* trilogy is comprised of the works *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed*. The story follows Anastasia (Ana) Steele, a young, awkward, unremarkable woman about to be graduated from university, and

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<sup>49</sup> Jane Litte, "Master of the Universe versus Fifty Shades by E.L James Comparison," *Dear Author* (blog), March 13, 2012, <http://dearauthor.com/features/industry-news/master-of-the-universe-versus-fifty-shades-by-e-l-james-comparison/>

<sup>50</sup> "Woman's Hour, Erica James," interview by Jane Garvey, (BBC Radio 4, Tuesday April 10, 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ddxbm>

Christian Grey, a sexy, mysterious, excessively rich, self-made C.E.O. of a massive conglomerate, who happens to have a troubled past. The two characters meet when Ana's beautiful and accomplished roommate falls ill, and asks Ana to take her place as reporter for an interview with Christian to be published in the student newspaper.

Despite being badly dressed, unprepared, and falling on her face as she enters Christian's office for the interview, Ana manages to intrigue Christian to the point that he begins to pursue her. His proposition, however, is not for a romantic relationship, but a dominant/submissive arrangement, seeing Ana enter into a written contract that would provide Christian authorization to use specified techniques and instruments during sexual activity. The contract would also allow him to enforce rules on dress, eating and exercise throughout the duration of the contract. The majority of the first volume of the trilogy centres around this contract.

Although the contract is presented as an object of discussion between the characters, I believe it also acts as an agreement between the author (E.L. James) and the reader, in which there is an understanding that the protagonist will always be safe, even if she gives up complete control over her body and sexuality to the male character.

In *Le pacte autobiographique*, Philippe Lejeune highlights the importance of labeling a narrator with the author's own name in order for a work to be received as autobiography. He asserts that the simple use of "je" (I) does not imply that it refers to the author. Instead, by indicating that the narrator has the author's name, the text's framework as autobiography is communicated to the readers. However,

Lejeune also points out that while identifying the narrator with a different name to that of the author serves to disassociate the author from the narrator, the complete omission of a narrator's name can result in a lack of clarity as to who the narrator represents. In this ambiguous state, the narrator could be equated with the author.<sup>51</sup>

While the *Fifty Shades* trilogy's narrator is clearly identified and named as Ana Steele, the writer of the contract itself is unknown. The contract is not expressed through dialogue between characters, but is represented as print text that is read by the characters in the story. Before being presented with the dominant/submissive contract, Ana is asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement that Christian clearly states has been created by his lawyer; however, the dominant/submissive contract is presented without mention of the writer. The reader may conclude that it is also Christian's lawyer who created the contract, but since the lawyer remains unnamed and never appears in the text, the identity of the contract creator remains ambiguous. This ambiguity facilitates the reader's acceptance of the contract passages as being narrated by E.L. James directly.

As a result, although the contract is presented by Christian to Ana, the control over the document remains with E.L. James as author and woman. Ana's safety within her role as submissive is therefore guaranteed by the female creator to the female audience. James underlines the conditions of safety by detailing Christian's responsibilities as a dominant to Ana:

15.1 The Dominant shall make the Submissive's health and safety a priority at all times. The Dominant shall not at any time require, request, allow, or demand the Submissive to participate at the hands of the Dominant in activities detailed in Appendix 2 or in any act that either party deems to be

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<sup>51</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 28-30.

unsafe. The Dominant will not undertake or permit to be undertaken any action which could cause serious injury or any risk to the Submissive's life...

The contract continues:

15.2 The Dominant accepts the Submissive as his, to own, control, dominate, and discipline during the Term. The Dominant may use the Submissive's body at any time during the Allotted Times or any agreed additional times in any manner he deems fit, sexually or otherwise.<sup>52</sup>

The contract also provides the author with a venue to outline the types of sexual activities that will take place within the trilogy, and what acts will be excluded.

Appendices 2 and 3 of the contract include lists of "limits." Here, the reader is presented with a detailed account of "hard limits" (activities that will definitely not take place) and "soft limits" (activities that are negotiable).

#### APPENDIX 2

##### Hard Limits

No acts involving fire play.

No acts involving urination or defecation and the products thereof.

No acts involving needles, knives, cutting, piercing, or blood.

No acts involving gynecological medical instruments.

No acts involving children or animals.

No acts that will leave any permanent marks on the skin.

No acts involving breath control.

No activity that involves the direct contact of electric current (whether alternating or direct), fire, or flames to the body.

#### APPENDIX 3

##### Soft Limits

To be discussed and agreed between both parties:

Does the Submissive consent to:

Masturbation

Cunnilingus

Fellatio

Swallowing semen

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<sup>52</sup> E.L. James, *Fifty Shades of Grey: Book One of the Fifty Shades Trilogy* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2011), chap. 11, 165-166.

Vaginal intercourse  
Vaginal fisting  
Anal intercourse  
Anal fisting

Does the Submissive consent to the use of:

Vibrators  
Butt plugs  
Dildos  
Other vaginal/anal toys

Does the Submissive consent to:

Bondage with rope  
Bondage with leather cuffs...<sup>53</sup>

Appendix 3 continues with a list of other possible types of bondage, as well as forms of “discipline,” such as spanking and caning. While the contract is drafted by Christian, the terms of the contract are negotiable, and Ana spends considerable time considering revisions to the document. The reader can therefore believe that the protagonist is in control of the events that will take place, even when these events involve her losing physical control (via bondage or restraints), or losing her free will (another part of the contract states that “the Submissive will wear clothing only approved by the Dominant”).<sup>54</sup> Although we find out in subsequent volumes that the contract is never signed, many of the sexual acts included in the series follow the conditions proposed within it. For example, many of the gadgets listed are ultimately used, and the techniques that Ana was willing to try are acted out within the work.

The content of the contract has sparked much criticism because it is essentially entrapment into slavery; however, fans of the work assert that it is empowering as it

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 169.

instigates dialogue amongst women. Some point to the fact that Ana ultimately does not sign the contract as indicative of Ana's independence and power.<sup>55</sup> Yet, Ana strives to fulfill many of the sexual demands that are included within the contract, and constantly refers back to it when contemplating how she can best please Christian in the relationship. Thus, the contract is effectuated regardless of Ana's refusal to sign it.

The one aspect of the contract on which Ana clearly reneges involves controlling her fertility. Although the contract states that "the Submissive will ensure that she procures oral contraception and ensure that she takes it as and when prescribed as to prevent any pregnancy," Ana fails to remember to take her birth control shot and thus becomes pregnant soon after the couple marries.<sup>56</sup> Although Christian is at first furious at this development, he eventually accepts the situation after Ana risks her life in order to save Christian's sister from being hurt by the trilogy's villain. By the story's conclusion, Ana is depicted as being pregnant with a second baby while continuing to take part in sexual bondage with her husband.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, it is only the adherence to a traditional womanly role within the context of motherhood and self-sacrifice that Ana is shown to reverse the clauses of the contract, while the other aspects of the document continue to be enforced.

Although the items within the contract itself demonstrate a complete disregard for the rights of the woman, the fact that Ana is able to contribute to the

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<sup>55</sup> Lynn Crosbie, "Shades Trilogy Secret? She's Got the Power," *The Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2012, Canadian Periodicals Index Quarterly, Gale (document no. A288210387).

<sup>56</sup> James, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, chap. 11, 167.

<sup>57</sup> E.L. James, *Fifty Shades Freed: Book Three of the Fifty Shades Trilogy* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2012), epilogue, 540-541.

contract by making revisions, after which she follows through by enacting some of the contract's clauses, effectively makes Ana into a creator of the pornographic story that unfolds in the novel. At one point, Ana walks out on Christian after she asks to experience a harsh punishment, and realizes that it is too much for her to handle. Christian is quick to point out, however, that she could have mitigated the pain had she used a "safe word," insinuating that she had the power to change the outcome through words, but was just too stupid to use them.<sup>58</sup>

While this dynamic of Ana as porn-writer is incorporated in the story's plot, how the material was created and distributed also adds to the notion of shared stories. E.L. James's original *Master of the Universe* story was released within a fan fiction website, where story sharing is done exclusive of publishing houses and marketing campaigns. Although fan fiction stories are generally based on highly popular works with mass market distribution, the re-purposing of popular works by individual fans via fan fiction communities subverts the consumerism inherent to mass market culture.

As mentioned previously, James has downplayed the fan fiction origins of the work; however, she continues to highlight the amateur storytelling common in the genre, re-conceptualizing *Fifty Shades* as a work to be shared amongst women, rather than *Twilight* fans. This idea of women sharing stories outside of mass-market publishing norms, coupled with the marketing of the book as a piece of erotica (in addition to simply "romance"), allows for the association of *Fifty Shades*

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<sup>58</sup> E.L. James, *Fifty Shades Darker: Book Two of the Fifty Shades Trilogy* (Random House Digital, Inc., 2011), chap. 2, 35.

with previous erotic texts, such as those of which Juffer speaks.<sup>59</sup>

Just as women's erotica in the English-language book market entails sexually explicit material targeted towards a female audience, Japanese ladies' comics are published specifically for the female reader. The ladies' comics story *Toraware no yoru* by Kishida Reiko 岸田 蓁子 was originally published in the August 1992 issue of *Aya*. The work was later re-published in e-book format within a four-story anthology of Kishida's works. *Toraware no yoru* begins with the protagonist Nanako shopping for gifts to celebrate her 5th wedding anniversary with her husband Hiroyuki. Nanako purchases a watch and a bottle of rosé to share with her husband that evening. She muses that every year they dine together with flowers, a kiss, and the rosé. As she returns home and fishes for her key with presents in hand, she wonders to herself whether she should wear her Dior dress or a Nina Ricci outfit (neither of which she can wear with underwear, as she can't risk a panty line) when she is suddenly attacked from behind by a man and sedated. She later wakes up in an opulent bedroom and notices that she is being watched by a long-haired, goateed man clad in a leather jacket and sunglasses. Although Nanako at first attempts to escape, she realizes that she is chained to the bed, and is at the man's mercy. The man proceeds to blindfold her and perform cunnilingus on her. As part of the sex act, the man opens the bottle of rosé, and pours this over her genitals. He subsequently unshackles her and takes off her blindfold. She questions her captor, asking:

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<sup>59</sup> Juffer, 73.



あ あなたの目的は一体なんなの!? 私を嬲ること!?  
Wh... what exactly is your purpose!? To mock me!?

To which he responds:

.....いいえ あなたを愉しませてあげることです  
No, it's to gratify you.<sup>60</sup>

He subsequently presents her with a vibrator, stating that it is an anniversary present, and gives her directions on relaxing her body before he inserts the object. Although she verbally protests by saying “Hiroyuki... tasukete tasukete...!” (Hiroyuki... save me save me...!) readers are shown a conflicting visual image of an orgasmic Nanako.

Pausing here, one may ask how a tale of confinement and rape can be delivered to readers as an enjoyable sexual fantasy. While the analysis of rape fantasies themselves is the subject of a separate discussion, I believe that this story manages to assure the reader that, to use the kidnapper’s words, it is the woman’s gratification which is at issue in the story, and that the protagonist is not in danger of being hurt. This assurance that the protagonist is safe results from a perception that the story stems from an entirely female-created framework, which on the surface appears to be free from harmful male pornographic consumerism.

The title of the anthology in which the e-version of *Towareru no yoru* appears is *Zēnbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan* ぜ〜んぶ実話!! 読者のH体験談 (*All true stories!! Stories from readers’ sexual experiences*). Here we see the appearance of the term *jitsuwa*, the real-life stories that Frederick examined in *Turning Pages*,

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<sup>60</sup> Kishida Reiko 岸田 蓁子, *Toraware no yoru* 『囚われの夜』 in *Zēnbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan* ぜ〜んぶ実話!! 読者の H 体験談 (Ohzora Publishing Co. 宙出版, 2009), 105-106, <http://www.ebookjapan.jp/ebj/book/60034346.html>

referenced in the previous chapter. In addition to the work's author having a female name, it is made clear to the purchaser that the stories in the anthology are all "true" and will involve first-person accounts from women. This biographical dimension of the anthology is further highlighted within the title page of each story, which includes a brief blurb on the background of the reader who submitted her confession to be made into comic form. The title page of *Toraware no yoru* (Figure 1) includes an image of a bare-chested woman, suspended from above, entangled by roses and being caressed by a man. In addition to the title, Kishida's name, and an introductory headline, the following three call-outs appear on the top left and bottom right corner of the page:

体験告白手記 特集 愛のためらい  
Confessional notes special edition: Love's hesitation

体験告白  
True confession

この作品は東京都の主婦（25歳）から寄せられた作品を元に構成しました。  
This story is based on a work submitted by a Tokyo housewife (25 years old)<sup>61</sup>

I believe that these statements reinforce the message on the anthology's cover – that everything included within the pages is produced exclusively by women. Not only is the author/illustrator a woman, but the content of the story stems from the real-life experience of the Tokyo housewife who, we can assume, made it safely back home with fond memories of the experience, otherwise she would not have been in a position to send the confession in to the periodical where it was originally published.

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<sup>61</sup> Kishida, 97.



Figure 1: *Toraware no yoru* (*Zēbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan*, 97). Illustration by Kishida Reiko. Image courtesy Ohzora Publishing Co. and Kishida Reiko.

The notion of true stories and *jitsuwa* is also emphasized in a pair of interviews with ladies' comics' authors that were published in the women's

magazine *Fujin kōron* in 2001. The articles focus on the trend of including storylines about mother-in-law relations within the comics. In her February 2001 interview, Hazuki Sei claims that the plot of one of her stories, which depicts a mother-in-law enduring a compression fracture that ultimately ruins a couple's trip to Saipan, is actually a *jitsuwa*. Hazuki states that this stems from her own experience, and even the dialogue between the characters is taken from reality.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, in a July 2001 interview, Ide Chikae maintains that all of her horror-themed ladies' comics are also based on *jitsuwa*. In Ide's case, the stories come via reader submissions, which Ide adapted for use in her manga.<sup>63</sup>

Mori discusses the solicitation of reader stories in *Onna wa poruno o yomu*. She states that the more sexually explicit stream of ladies' comics originated from women's magazines that solicited first-person accounts of sexual experiences from their readers. The magazines originally began by incorporating reader comments in their articles on sex and sexuality, but later transformed reader submissions into serialized manga stories. The magazine publishers subsequently decided to create dedicated ladies' comics periodicals.<sup>64</sup> Mori indicates that, although both magazine and mainstream book publishers began producing ladies' comics in the 1980s and 1990s, the sexually explicit manga were derived from women's magazine publishers, while mainstream publishers concentrated on producing ladies' comics

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<sup>62</sup> Yamada Mihoko, Hazuki Sei and Tsuruma Satoko なり 山田 美保子, 葉月 せい, つるま 里子, "Shūtome, rōkaigo, itaden mangaka no nichijō wa 'redikomi' yori yonari" 『嫁姑・老人介護・イタ電 漫画家の日常は「レディコミ」より奇なり』, *Fujin kōron* 婦人公論 86 (February 7, 2001):83.

<sup>63</sup> Ide Chikae 井出 智香恵, "Rasetsu no ie no sakka ga akasu jujitsu wa redkomi yori horāna monogatari" 『「羅刹の家」の作者が明かす 現実レディコミよりホラーな物語』, *Fujin kōron* 婦人公論, 86 (July 22, 2001): 36.

<sup>64</sup> Mori, 75.

that simply included more adult-themed content such as plots involving office work and families.<sup>65</sup>

Mori also points to women's magazines of the 1920s that incorporated confessional texts as setting the foundation for the use of reader submissions within ladies' comics. Mori argues that, while these early examples of *kokuhaku* (confessions) were normally limited to issues relating to love and marriage, the same magazines continued to create and solicit *kokuhaku* in the 1960s and 70s, although changing their focus to deal with sex and sexuality specifically.<sup>66</sup>

The women's magazines from which the ladies' comics were derived were already publishing non-fictional accounts of reader concerns regarding sex. By using the term *kokuhaku* for both reader questions and for the manga stories, the magazine publishers created an expectation from readers that the ladies' comics erotic fantasies were based on reality. I assert that discussions on sex within the magazine articles constructed a "we're all in this together" type of group consciousness about women's sexuality. Women could read about other women's sexual issues to gain understanding of their own concerns, even when the specific accounts did not entirely mirror their own experiences.

Through *kokuhaku* terminology, ladies' comics producers continue to associate their works with non-fiction articles and autobiographical stories found in women's magazines, creating a parallel expectation of common understanding that hinges on female-created input. The major difference here is that, while the articles may examine a broad range of problems and issues regarding sex, the ladies' comics

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 79-81.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

stories specifically emphasize a commonality in sexual pleasure. If the author of a ladies' comics story is basing the plot on a true experience of pleasure, then pleasure can be expected for the reader, as well.

Gretchen Jones also highlights the importance of reader submissions in ladies' comics. In her essay "Bad Girls Like to Watch: Writing and Reading Ladies' Comics," Jones states:

The authors/creators of these comics and their readers seem to acknowledge one another, and work together to create content that "works." The reader-supplied comments in particular seem to suggest to other readers that there are other women who consume these comics, and have similar problems or concerns. This form of "sisterhood" is similar to an observation Linda Williams makes in her reconsideration of Hitchcock's *Psycho* and its female viewership. She asserts that women enjoy being in the company of other women and being scared together, forming a connection between women. The reader comments in ladies' comics may function in much the same way: creating connections between female readers. At the same time, male aggression can be transformed into a game that women can safely manipulate, secure in their position as the sole arbiters of their fantasy world.<sup>67</sup>

Jones indicates that female readers are able to "safely manipulate" the male aggression that takes place within ladies' comics not only because these readers provide their own input to the storyline, but also because both readers and writers create a women-only sphere where these stories are created.

The effectiveness of the stories as sexual fantasies, therefore, hinges on the sense that the works stem from true sexual experiences, and also that the stories are not mediated by or created for men. Although some ladies' comics stories are in fact written by men, these creators write under female pseudonyms, further illustrating the need for the genre to appear as a female-only medium in order for the stories to

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, "Bad Girls Like to Watch," 104.

be effectively marketed to the female readership.<sup>68</sup>

*Toraware no yoru* ends happily for the female protagonist. Upon sensing that the kidnapper is about to initiate intercourse, Nanako breaks the wine bottle and threatens him, only to see him reveal himself as her loving husband, Hiroyuki. A confused Nanako learns that Hiroyuki set up the kidnapping in the hopes that it would be *shigekiteki* (stimulating), and that it would be an enjoyable present to her. While she is momentarily unconvinced and prepares to leave, she stops abruptly when she sees the lavish table setting meant to celebrate the anniversary. (Figure 2) It becomes clear that Hiroyuki has borrowed this villa from a friend for the occasion, and although he had planned to stop the charade much earlier, he found her to be so very *kawaii* (cute) that he let the charade and the sexual acts continue.<sup>69</sup>

Hiroyuki also presents Nanako with a luxurious robe, and she responds by forgiving Hiroyuki. (Figure 3) The story finishes with her giving him a watch and stating that next year she may turn the tables and stage a kidnapping as part of his present.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>69</sup> Kishida, 127.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 131.

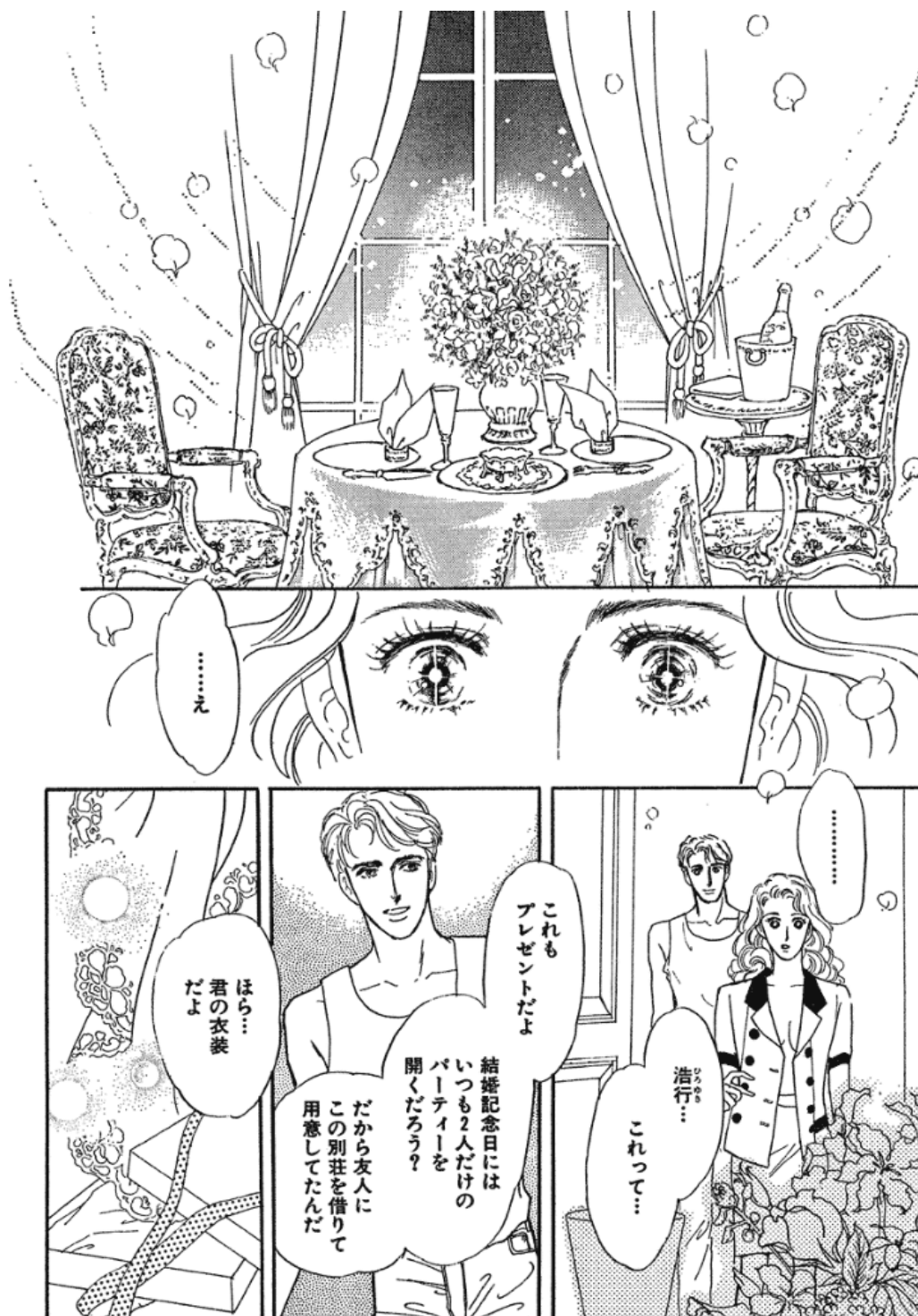


Figure 2: *Toraware no yoru (Zēnbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan, 126)*. Illustration by Kishida Reiko. Image courtesy Ohzora Publishing Co. and Kishida Reiko.



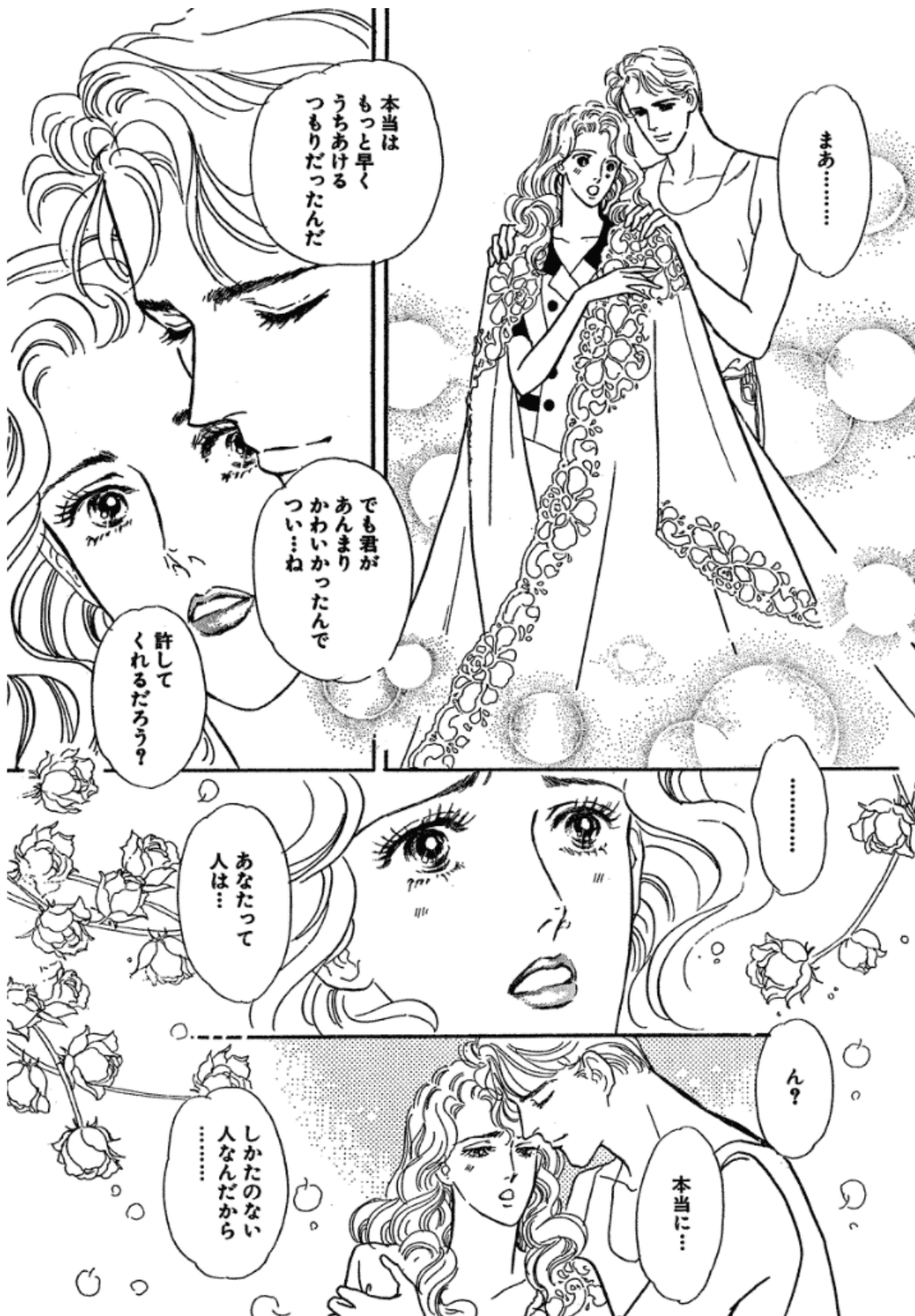


Figure 3: *Toraware no yoru (Zēnbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan, 127)*. Illustration by Kishida Reiko. Image courtesy Ohzora Publishing Co. and Kishida Reiko.

Although neither James nor Kishida purport that these stories are about themselves, both works incorporate characters who are empowered to write. Ana re-writes the contract, while Nanako represents the writer of the original confessional work on which the story is said to be based. Both Ana and Nanako, therefore, determine the direction of the storylines, reinforcing the perception that these are female-created and female-driven narratives.

By excluding male creators, these works situate themselves outside the realm of pornography, and its association with the blatant commodification of women's sexuality. A heterosexual female would not seem to pose the same threat as a male reader, as she would not enjoy the consumption of descriptions of female sexual acts as would a male. Yet, acquisition and consumerism runs rampant throughout both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru*. Although *Fifty Shades* begins with Ana receiving a number of gifts from Christian, many of which could be seen as enhancing her scholarship or career (such as a first edition set of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and a Macbook Pro), these gifts multiply to include clothing, jewelry, and finally an extra sports car to add to a previous car given to her by Christian. Ana is at first conflicted by these purchases, and states that they make her "feel cheap."<sup>71</sup> However, she eventually consents to Christian's gift-giving, and the reader is given examples throughout the novel of how the gifts signal his love for her, and are meant to protect or support her. Unlike *Fifty Shades*, *Toraware no yoru* offers no pretence of the gifts being useful for Nanako's educational or career enhancement -

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<sup>71</sup> James, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, chap. 15, 243.

in fact, there is no mention of Nanako having any profession or life outside of her relationship with her husband.

The gifts that appear in *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* represent a luxurious lifestyle that would be out of reach to most readers. In *Fifty Shades*, Christian's character resembles Ann Douglas's description of a Harlequin Romance hero who is "always the heroine's superior, older, handsome in a predatory way, dressed in stunning clothes, lord of at least a plantation and sometimes head of a corporation."<sup>72</sup> Christian's wealth seems limitless, and he tells Ana that he earns "roughly one hundred thousand dollars an hour."<sup>73</sup> His decadent lifestyle includes helicopters, charity galas, and trips abroad. Ana also bears similarities to Douglas's description of the typical Harlequin heroine, who is described as "usually an immigrant from another less modern culture to the energized, bewildering terrain of the male."<sup>74</sup> Christian transforms Ana from an awkward, badly dressed college student who regularly wears Converse shoes to a stylish executive wearing "Christian Louboutin shoes, a steal at \$3,295."<sup>75</sup> In *Toraware no yoru*, Hiroyuki and Nanako's residence is a huge, Western-style estate that, given the country's space constraints, would be difficult to imagine could even exist in Japan. Hideyuki's friend's villa, in which Nanako finds herself after the abduction, seems no less spacious and over-the-top.

These descriptions of high fashion and wealth that are far removed from the average reader's everyday life is a common trait within romance fiction. However,

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<sup>72</sup> Ann Douglas, "Soft-Porn Culture," *The New Republic* (August 30, 1980): 26.

<sup>73</sup> James, *Fifty Shades Darker*, chap. 5, 108.

<sup>74</sup> Douglas, 26.

<sup>75</sup> James, *Fifty Shades Darker*, chap. 6, 125.

despite the improbability of these objects ever being part of the reader's lifestyle, romance novel fans can still associate the commodification found in the works with real world understanding. Janice Radway discusses this point in *Reading the*

*Romance*:

Romantic authors draw unconsciously on cultural conventions and stereotypes that stipulate that women can always be characterized by their universal interest in clothes. However, at the same time that the fictional characterizations depend on these previously known codes, they also tacitly legitimate them through simple repetition, thereby justifying the readers' own likely preoccupation with these indispensable features of the feminine universe....

A similar sort of descriptive detail also characterizes the mention of domestic architecture and home furnishings in romantic fiction. If the novels are set in the historical past, the narrator's eye lingers lovingly over the objects and accoutrements of pre-electrical living. If the story's setting is contemporary, brand name appliances, popular furniture styles, and trendy accessories such as "lush" green plants, macramé wall hangings, and silk flowers typically populate the heroine's apartment. Both kinds of descriptions assert tacitly that the imaginary world of the novel is as real as the reader's world because it is filled with the same, solid, teeming profusion of commodities.<sup>76</sup>

Although material possessions depicted in *Fifty Shades* and *Toraware no yoru* include exorbitant clothes and furnishings that may not be realistically acquired by most readers, the stories still show themselves to be based in reality by also featuring items that fans can find and purchase. For instance, *Fifty Shades* makes mention of several Apple products that are attainable by middle-income readers. In *Toraware no yoru*, Kishida not only provides brand-name identification of Nanako's clothing and the watch she gives to Hiroyuki, but she also identifies the rosé as the pricey Perrier-Jouët Belle Époque, illustrating the bottle in detail.

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<sup>76</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 193-194.

In addition to these tangible gifts, we are shown examples of sexual acts as substituting presents in both stories. In the second volume of James's trilogy, Ana offers three birthday presents to Christian: an acceptance of his marriage proposal (stating, "What do you give the man who has everything? I thought I'd give you... me"), a solar-powered helicopter, and a gift box that includes "an eye mask, some nipple clamps, a butt plug, his iPod, his silver gray tie—and last but by no means least—the key to his playroom."<sup>77</sup>

The distinction between material gifts and the exchange of sexual acts is also blurred in *Toraware no yoru*. As mentioned previously, while the rosé is purchased as an anniversary gift for Hiroyuki from Nanako, it is transformed into a sex aid when Hiroyuki pours the champagne over and into Nanako. (Figure 4) Hiroyuki also makes it clear that the kidnapping and forced sex is the main part of his anniversary present to Nanako, and should be viewed similarly to the robe and dinner – just another lavish commodity. Nanako also refers to the experience as a gift when she suggests that she may do the same for him the subsequent year.

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<sup>77</sup> James, *Fifty Shades Darker*, chap. 20, 456; Ibid., 463.



Figure 4: *Toraware no yoru (Zēnbu jitsuwa!! Dokusha no H taikendan, 112)*. Illustration by Kishida Reiko. Image courtesy Ohzora Publishing Co. and Kishida Reiko.

Although the acquisition of goods such as clothing can be viewed as a common characteristic of romance novels, the notion of sex as commodity is more clearly associated with pornography. Thus, both *Fifty Shades* and *Toraware no yoru* parallel pornography by equating the protagonists' sexuality with overt commodification of sex. Furthermore, while, as Juffer points out, erotica's development was founded on the emergence of masturbatory texts, where women were encouraged to discover their sexuality through masturbation and the lack of male intervention to achieve sexual satisfaction, sex scenes within *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru* remove this type of sexual agency from the female characters. In *Fifty Shades*, Ana is virtually sexless until she meets Christian. She is a virgin and claims not to have had any real sexual interest in any other man. Moreover, the dominant/submissive contract tabled by Christian includes a clause that expressly forbids masturbation without Christian's consent. It states: "15.19 The Submissive shall not touch or pleasure herself sexually without permission from the Dominant."<sup>78</sup> The only masturbation scene in *Fifty Shades* occurs when Christian guides Ana's hands to sexually stimulate herself as a prelude to intercourse.<sup>79</sup>

The vibrator in *Toraware no yoru* is shown as a gift from Hiroyuki, and he uses it to penetrate Nanako. She does not use the vibrator on herself, and the masturbatory tool is used for his satisfaction and voyeuristic pleasure. Thus, for both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru*, masturbation is converted from a form of sexual empowerment, where women discover their sexuality exclusive of male intervention, into an act that is completely under the control of the male, and

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<sup>78</sup> James, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, chap. 11, 167.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., chap. 23, 407-408.

for male sexual fulfillment.

This passive nature of sexual fulfillment also places the works more in line with the romance genre than within the tradition of erotica. In her book entitled *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure*, Hilary Radner states:

In the world of the category romance, the only way a woman can have a man is to be had by him in the way that she desires. The woman must always take a position of passivity in relation to the man. This position must appear to be involuntary and unselfconscious. This is one of the fundamental contradictions of feminine sexuality: it is based on a passivity that is the result, not of nature, but of certain ideological choices that must appear natural and inevitable.<sup>80</sup>

Ana and Nanako express desire for their lovers, but their sexual fulfillment is contingent on the actions of the male characters in the stories. Ana is discouraged to climax on her own according to the terms of the contract. Although she ultimately does not sign the document, she follows this advice and is never shown to climax without Christian present, with the exception of when she is unconscious and dreaming of him.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, Nanako's sexuality is only brought out in response to the actions of her husband, through abduction and force.

Additionally, both James and Kishida are careful to situate the sexual acts featuring confinement and domination as temporary escapes. These present themselves as sexual fantasies within the stories, through which readers can indulge while secure in the knowledge that the gentle partner is right around the corner. Both Christian and Hiroyuki change their appearance when playing the dominant role. Christian usually changes into a designated pair of jeans, and Hiroyuki transforms himself with a leather jacket, sun glasses and facial hair in order to play

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<sup>80</sup>Hilary Radner, *Shopping Around: Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 75.

<sup>81</sup> James, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, chap. 14, 225.



the role of Nanako's captor.

As a result, the reader is offered a fantasy sex life within the cushion of normalcy that more closely resembles her everyday. However, unlike the fantasies told within *My Secret Garden*, the fantasies here are not owned by the female protagonists who tell them. Although Ana admits that she enjoys some of the rough sex opportunities that Christian proposes, his enjoyment remains the main instigation for her engagement in these activities. It is his fantasy that takes precedence, and her enjoyment is a happy side-effect of this. Unlike Christian, Hideyuki never climaxes within *Toraware no yoru*; however, all the sex acts are orchestrated by him, without any input from Nanako. Also, Hideyuki's decision to continue with the abduction scene longer than planned is based on his enjoyment of watching Nanako. In addition, Christian and Hideyuki control the places in which the sex takes place. The sadomasochistic sex instruments that Christian uses are kept within his "play room," and the rougher sex acts also take place here. Hideyuki, meanwhile, has borrowed the villa from his friend. Both areas are temporary and belong to the male protagonists. The role of the female character, therefore, is to play within the male fantasy, not to create and control her own.

In her analysis of ladies' comics, Jones often refers to Jennifer Wicke's article "Through a Gaze Darkly: Pornography's Academic Market." Wicke maintains that pornography reaches beyond the pornographic work itself, and that the consumer plays a role in the creation of the pornographic fantasy. She states: "Pornography is not 'just' consumed, but is used, worked on, elaborated, remembered, fantasized

about by its subjects.”<sup>82</sup> Following this premise, one can argue that readers of literary erotica look beyond the text to realize their erotic fantasies. The perceived authenticity of the story that stems from the gender of the author may have just as powerful an effect on the ability of women readers to accept and enjoy the work as the words within the novels. Although online reader reviews as well as media reviews of *Fifty Shades of Grey* indicate deficiencies in plot and style, readers are still able to make use of the work to enhance their sex lives.<sup>83</sup> They look to elements outside of the book’s content as a part of this endeavour, and it is thus that E.L. James’s background becomes part of the consumeristic experience.

*Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru* contradict Lorde’s ideal of the “power of the erotic” in two substantial ways. The stories commodify women’s sexuality, and female sexual agency is limited if not excluded from the works. At the same time, both titles mimic earlier erotic texts by emphasizing female authorship of and control over the storylines. In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, this is done through the promotion of E. L. James as an emerging writer who is contributing to a larger community of women sharing stories. The emphasis on female authorship also assures the reader that the story will resolve itself favourably for the protagonist, and will result in sexual fulfillment. This is reinforced by the depiction of Ana as co-author of the dominant/submissive contract, demonstrating that the story is controlled by women both from within the plot (Ana as the character) and through

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<sup>82</sup> Jennifer Wicke, “Through a Gaze Darkly: Pornography’s Academic Market,” *Transition* 54 (January 1991): 78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2934903>

<sup>83</sup> “Customer Reviews: *Fifty Shades of Grey*: Book One of the *Fifty Shades* Trilogy,” Amazon.com, [http://www.amazon.com/Fifty-Shades-Grey-Book-Trilogy/product-reviews/0345803485/ref=dp\\_top\\_cm\\_cr\\_acr\\_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1](http://www.amazon.com/Fifty-Shades-Grey-Book-Trilogy/product-reviews/0345803485/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1); Viv Groskop, “‘Fifty Shades’ Has Done Wonders for Book Selling, but Nothing for Literature,” *The Independent* (London) July 5, 2012, available from <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic>

the book's publication (via the author, E.L. James).

*Toraware no yoru* also highlights female authorship via its marketing as a *kokuhaku* confessional story, giving readers the impression that the work is based on real sexual fulfillment. Here again, through the belief that the story is female-created and controlled, readers are assured that the character is based on a pleasurable reality, and that she will be safe and sexually satisfied despite the character's seeming lack of control within the story.

In her study of Japanese *ani-paro* (animation parody) based on the Harry Potter series, Sharalyn Orbaugh demonstrates how this example of fan fiction draws from the collaborative practices already in place for the creation and dissemination of *shōjo* manga (comics targeted towards girls and women). She maintains:

From the time *shōjo* magazines were first launched, a system of feedback was put in place, allowing girls to write in to the magazines to express their reactions to stories in previous issues and later to submit stories and essays of their own. This practice continued through the 1990s, as readers of Ladies' Comics and commercial *yaoi manga*, for example, wrote in to express opinions about the erotic stories in previous issues and to request specific kinds of sex acts in future work."<sup>84</sup>

The *ani-paro* stories examined by Orbaugh also follow the fan fiction tradition of building a community of writers who, while writing individual stories, also rely on each other for input and support. This results in the collective subversion of the roles of reader and writer. Orbaugh states:

As opposed to the idea of a single author organizing a singular, autonomous text with a particular "implied reader" in mind and then readers consuming that text passively and acceding to the implied reader role set out for them (or else rejecting the text altogether), we see multiple readers actively seizing the text and expanding its possibilities in incredibly diverse ways... If the

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<sup>84</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Amateur Manga and *Shōjo* Reading Practices," in *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*, ed. Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley (London: Routledge, 2010), 176.

traditional idea of literature was based on a capitalistic notion of property (through copyright) and a phallogocentric idea of intellectual ownership and creative authority (through the idea of the genius male *auteur*), contemporary fan fiction is anarchic, hyper-democratic in that anyone at all can participate, and feminist in its resistance to phallogocentrism.<sup>85</sup>

Reader contributions in ladies' comics periodicals such as *Toraware no yoru* first appeared, stemmed from the *shōjo manga* culture of story exchange. *Fifty Shades of Grey* has its roots in fan fiction online writings where authors find encouragement and input from a test group of readers who collectively create new works based on mainstream texts. Both *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades*, therefore, bear similarities with the *ani-paro* Harry Potter works described by Orbaugh.

However, female authorship and control are also essential in order for *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades* to effectively construct the perception of reader/writer collaboration and exchange. Since both works aim to demonstrate that sexual satisfaction for the female author is possible, the authors must exhibit credibility regarding female sexuality and the sexual response of the female body.

While *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades* assume credibility through female authorship, as I have illustrated above, the content of the works entail female protagonists that are frequently disempowered sexually. Therefore, I believe that it is the concept of a female-centred collaborative space and not the material itself that results in the perception of empowerment amongst readers. The removal of female authorship would collapse this dynamic.

Gayle Rubin maintains that an increase in women's involvement in the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

production of pornography can have a positive impact on women's sexuality. She states:

There are legitimate feminist concerns with regard to sexually explicit materials. Although pornography should not be singled out, it should not be immune from feminist criticism. Porn is certainly not uniformly pleasing, well produced, artistically edifying or politically advanced. There is plenty of room for improvement and for porn that is well made, creative, more diverse, more attuned to women's fantasies, and more infused with feminist awareness. This will only happen as more women and more feminists become involved in the production of sexually explicit material. A feminist politics on pornography should be aimed at making it easier – not more difficult – for this to occur.<sup>86</sup>

Contrary to Rubin's assertion that female production could heighten feminist awareness within pornography, by diminishing female sexual agency and highlighting commodification, both *Toraware no yoru* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* reinforce a traditional, male-dominated framework of pornography. Female production of the works is stressed in order to assure readers of the authenticity of sexual fulfillment of the heroines, resulting in the readers' perception of personal sexual empowerment through the act of reading the material. However, female authorship has not altered the inclusion of sexual commodification and disempowerment within the stories themselves.

In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how examples of contemporary women's erotica have tried to emulate the appearance of truthful disclosure on sexual experience that was intrinsic to earlier erotic texts authored by women. This has been done through the emphasis on female authorship, but in the absence of storylines that are "more infused with feminist awareness." Instead of breaking the boundaries of women's sexual fulfillment through shared sexual experience, the

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<sup>86</sup> Rubin, 38.

works follow the constraints of romance fiction and its pre-determined roles for women's sexuality. Nonetheless, the material has made inroads in the publication and distribution methods of sexually explicit writing for women, and in the concluding chapter, I will discuss how newly-developed reader spaces could either undermine or facilitate the development of a more powerful form of women's erotica.

## Conclusion

In her *Newsweek* article entitled “She Works Crazy Hours. She Takes Care of the Kids. She Earns More Money. She Manages her Team. At the End of the Day, She Wants to be... Spanked?” Katie Roiphe asks:

Is there something exhausting about the relentless responsibility of a contemporary woman's life, about the pressure of economic participation, about all that strength and independence and desire and going out into the world? It may be that, for some, the more theatrical fantasies of sexual surrender offer a release, a vacation, an escape from the dreariness and hard work of equality.<sup>87</sup>

Roiphe argues that *Fifty Shades*' popularity is due to its portrayal of “sexual surrender” to a dominant male. Roiphe suggests that this is craved for by the modern woman who has tired of being in control outside of the bedroom.

In this thesis, I have attempted to challenge the notion that women's erotica such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* reflects a general desire by women to be dominated by men. I propose that, regardless of whether the content of these works conflicts or conforms with the female reader's own needs and desires, it is the reception of women's erotica as a shared female-centred reality that facilitates the genre's acceptance and that enables a sense of empowerment. Rather than yearning for a sexual relationship that stands opposed to her expectations of empowerment within her career, the reader is able to disregard what she may well consider unacceptable in her real romantic relationships, or in her work life. I believe this is due to the fact that women's erotica, through its female authorship and consumption, appears to be

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<sup>87</sup> Katie Roiphe, “She Works Crazy Hours. She Takes Care of the Kids. She Earns More Money. She Manages her Team. At the End of the Day, She Wants to be... Spanked ?” *Newsweek* 159, no. 18 (April 23, 2012): 24-28, Health Reference Centre Academic, Gale (document no. A286792852).

in a female-controlled environment, while the reader's own relationships and career more clearly reflect male influences.

While Roife maintains that the appeal of *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a result of its distancing from reality, I believe that it is the positioning of the work within reality, as an instrument to facilitate discussion on personal experience, that has made it a phenomenon. Through the emphasis on female authorship and readership, and through the labeling of the work as “erotica,” readers and fans are encouraged to consider *Fifty Shades* as contributing to Friday's “yardstick” of the reality of women's sexual experience. However, this sense of reality is contingent on the positioning of the work in a female-created and female-centred space. If the work were to be shown to have greater male influence or control (such as with male authorship), the entirety of the work, including the possibility of sexual satisfaction, would not prove to be effective with the target audience of women.

In an interview appearing in the literary magazine *Nami*, Japanese authors Yamamoto Fumio and Mitsuno Momo discuss “Onna ni yoru onna no tame no R-18 bungakushō” 女による女のためのR-18文学賞 (By women for women restricted 18 literary prize), which is awarded to the best submitted work that falls under the *kannō shōsetsu* (erotic stories) genre.<sup>88</sup> Although the emergence of the genre can be traced to primarily male-authored works, *kannō shōsetsu* is now dominated by female writers.<sup>89</sup> Japanese-language media refer to *Fifty Shades of Grey* as *kannō*

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<sup>88</sup> Mitsuno Momo and Yamamoto Fumio, “Taidan Mitsuno Momo X Yamamoto Fumio – Onna ni yoru onna no tame no R-18 bungakushō” 『対談 光野桃×山本文緒-女による女のための R-18 文学賞』, *Nami* 波 35(September 2001): 52-57.

<sup>89</sup> “'Shin kannō shōsetsu' wa josei ga kaite josei ga yomu” 『「新官能小説」は女性が書いて女性が読む』, *Themis* (April 2004): 104.



*shōsetsu* although publisher Hayakawa Bunko has categorized the work under the genre headings *bungei* (literature), *eigaka sakuhin* (works made into movies), and *renai / seishun* (love/youth).<sup>90</sup> Yamamoto and Mitsuno, who served as adjudicators for the R-18 prize in 2001, discuss the reasoning behind the establishment of the R-18 prize, and the types of works they expect and hope to see from contributors. Mitsuno suggests that women are able to provide a truer representation of women's eroticism when they write without the interference of men.<sup>91</sup>

However, the exclusion of male involvement from women's erotica is not guaranteed. While the success of e-publications has facilitated access by women to erotic works, it has also made it easier for men to read erotic fiction that purports to be targeted towards women. I have already discussed how creators of women's erotica could include men writing under pseudonyms or otherwise involved in the publication process. Men may now also find it easier to be part of the readership of these and other examples of women's erotic writings, as e-formats do not require them to enter a physical space in order to access the material, and they will not be seen intruding on the women's-only space where this material resides. As a result, women's sexual fantasies expressed within women's erotica could become a commodification of men's desires, just as mainstream pornography is.

While men's production and consumption of erotica/pornography that entails

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<sup>90</sup> "Eibei de baku hatsuteki ni ureteiru *Fifty Shades of Grey* no 3-bu saku" 『英米で爆発的に売れている「Fifty Shades of Grey」の3部作』, *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞, July 30 2012, Kikuzo II Visual; "SM kannō shōsetsu, Ōbei no hahao ya sedai de dai hitto denshi shoseki atooshi" 『SM官能小説、欧米の母親世代で大ヒット 電子書籍後押し』, *Sankei Shinbun* 産経新聞, October 30, 2012, <http://www.iza.ne.jp/news/newsarticle/books/breview/602487/>; "Fifti sheizu obu gurei jyō: Hayakawa onrainu" 『フィフティ・シェイズ・オブ・グレイ上：ハヤカワ・オンライン』, Hayakawa Online, <http://www.hayakawa-online.co.jp/product/books/125701.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Mitsuno and Yamamoto, 54.

women's submission is widely viewed as negative, reading the same type of storyline created "for women by women" may be viewed as the trait of a considerate lover. The *Dr. Oz Show*, a medical television talk show, dedicated an April 2012 episode to the subject of *Fifty Shades of Grey* entitled "Is this the Prescription for the Female Libido?"<sup>92</sup> In a post appearing on the show's blog, Paul Hokemeyer tells readers how much he has learnt through reading the novel, stating, "... I gained great insight into what women want out of men and how we can be better lovers." He goes on to list five main points that he cites as takeaways from the book, including "sex is a whole lot more than penetration," and "sex is an important communication tool in a relationship."<sup>93</sup>

In her *Woman's Hour* interview, James also mentions receiving correspondence from men who read *Fifty Shades of Grey* and "have taken certain things away from it" even though "it's not written for men, it's written for women." In addition, BBC presenter Jane Garvey informs listeners that some men claim to kiss their wives' copies of *Fifty Shades* "before leaping into the marital bed."<sup>94</sup> These observations are supported by a recent study that revealed that male consumers currently account for 20 percent of the purchases of the work. Although it is possible that these purchases include gifts for women, this statistic demonstrates that *Fifty Shades* does not have an exclusively female readership.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, from 2006 to 2008 a series of Japanese manga entitled

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<sup>92</sup> "Is this the Prescription for Female Libido? *50 Shades of Grey*," *The Doctor Oz Show*, April 25, 2012, <http://www.doctoroz.com/episode/prescription-female-libido-50-shades-grey>

<sup>93</sup> Hokemeyer, Paul. "Why Men Should Read *50 Shades of Grey*." <http://www.doctoroz.com/blog/paul-hokemeyer-phd-jd/why-men-should-read-50-shades-grey>

<sup>94</sup> "Woman's Hour, Erica James."

<sup>95</sup> "Who's Really Reading *50 Shades*?"

*Dokumento uwakizuma taiken hōkoku* ドキュメント浮気妻体験報告

(Documentary: report on cheating women's experiences) was released by Mediox, a publishing house primarily involved in the male-oriented erotic manga market. The *Dokumento uwakizuma* series overtly exploits the ladies' comics genre for the enjoyment of its male readership. The cover of volume six in the series reads:

オール実体験!!

All real experiences!!

体験報告

Report on experiences

レディコミ誌上に激白した人妻の淫らな冒険

The lewd adventures of wives revealed in ladies' comics magazines

The cover picture features a woman looking straight at the reader with a speech bubble that reads:

女流漫画家が人妻の愛と性を描く！

Women manga artists depict the love and sexuality of wives!<sup>96</sup>

The terminology used is very similar to the cover page of Kishida's anthology in which *Toraware no yoru* appears. The emphasis is on confession, true stories, and female authorship. Further, the title page for each story within the anthology includes information on the *kokuhakubito* (confessor). Her age, profession, and female pseudonym are also provided. This information sits at the far right of the page as round, seal-like text art, while the female manga artist's name is featured prominently at the bottom of the page.

The stories included in the volume depict rape scenes or express some type of

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<sup>96</sup> *Dokumento uwakizuma taiken hōkoku* ドキュメント浮気妻体験報告, 6, Mediox メディアックス, 2008.

initial reluctance on the part of the female protagonists. By indicating that the stories are created by women, the male readers see the plot as stemming from the female fantasy world and not their own, thus enhancing the perception that the scenarios in the text would be enjoyed by women. At the same time, women's reading and writing of sexually explicit content becomes fetishized, it is therefore not only the depictions of women that are being consumed by the male readership, but the female readers and writers of ladies' comics that also become commodified for male sexual enjoyment.

*Dokumento uwakizuma taiken hōkoku* is a print publication that is clearly targeted towards a male audience. This is apparent through the work's advertisements of cell phone sex chat services for men. Therefore, the volumes would be made available within the physical space alongside other male-oriented manga. However, in the virtual context, there is no need to re-package ladies' comics for a male audience in order for it to be easily accessible by the male reader. Male consumers can covertly purchase and read the material for their own enjoyment. The availability of ladies' comics like *Toraware no yoru* in digital format may therefore result in an increased male readership for the genre.

Friday's *My Secret Garden* describes a predominantly negative reaction from men to women's sexual fantasies. Friday recounts her own personal experience where her lover was put off when she shared a fantasy that did not include him.<sup>97</sup> The fact that *My Secret Garden* was published decades previous to the contemporary works discussed in this thesis suggests that men's attitude to women's fantasies

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<sup>97</sup> Friday, 2-3.

may have shifted. However, the fantasies introduced in Friday's work were collected by Friday herself, and there was no opportunity for the reworking of the stories by men, and therefore more directly signified the exclusion of male participation in the retelling of sexual experience and enjoyment. In the case of e-books and online writing communities, male readers have the ability to influence the texts, either through their buying power (purchasing material that is of interest to them and influencing future publication decisions) or through direct contributions to online texts (through pseudonymous online identities). Friday suggests that the men she encountered were intimidated by the fact that they sometimes were not included in their partners' fantasies. By gaining control over the production of women's erotic texts, male readers are able to manipulate the fantasies and allay the discomfort of being excluded from women's sexual fulfillment.

Lorde's "power of the erotic" encourages women to share and be empowered by their erotic experiences, and to infuse this power into their everyday lives. James's work is remarkable in that it has reached such a large number of women through book sales, and has instigated discussion amongst an even broader audience. In her *Publisher's Weekly* article, Rachel Deal demonstrates how *Fifty Shades of Grey* has influenced mainstream publishers to pay more attention to erotic titles. Deal's interviews with publishing industry representatives reveal that *Shades of Grey's* success is being attributed to the work's ability to remain in the romance genre while still attracting readers who would not normally read romance fiction. While Deal's article suggests that the high sales of *Fifty Shades* will mostly facilitate the publication of other romance works that include similar sadomasochistic

themes, there is still potential for the trilogy's success to also favourably impact writers of other types of women's erotica, and increase their chances of getting their works published.<sup>98</sup>

Although there is no multi-million dollar bestseller in the ladies' comics world, the influence that readers of this genre have on the content and direction of publications is no less relevant. Ladies' comics have come into the e-book marketplace alongside other manga and mainstream titles, and readers' input regarding the direction of earlier print publications has ensured the variety of storylines and sub-genres available in today's e-book environment. The relative lack of commentary on the ladies' comics genre in the Japanese media may indicate that there is decreased stigmatization of the works, making them less newsworthy.

By reaching a large number of women and by encouraging dialogue, both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru* would seem to have fulfilled in part Lorde's hope that women would continue to share their erotic experiences. However, both works assert power through their categorization within female space, and not through the content of their stories. Through female authorship and consumption the works differentiate themselves from material found within male space; however, any incursion by male creators or readers into the realms of women's erotic fiction and ladies' comics will dissipate whatever power they exert.

At the same time, freely available writing via the Internet does provide opportunities for a raw exchange of stories by women who are unrestricted by the codes of romance and male-created pornographic formulae, effectively building new

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<sup>98</sup> Deahl, 8-9.

spaces and categorizations. In his book *The Erotic Engine*, Patchen Barss discusses how pornography has instigated several technological advancements, such as the development of discrete access to material that would be difficult to obtain physically by users. He states:

Pornography was such a massive force on the early Internet for several reasons. Anonymity and convenience were part of it – you could get porn piped directly into your living room without ever having another person see your face, hear your voice, or even know your name. The global scope of the Net meant that people who lived in places where pornography in traditional media was illegal or unavailable could now acquire it. And at the same time, people were no longer limited by geography when it came to connecting with others. The Internet opened up entirely new possibilities for friendship, romance and passion.<sup>99</sup>

Several of the aspects that Barss mentions here come into play for both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru*. The works are available to anyone with Internet access, and connections can be made via the Internet with other readers of the material. In addition, while anonymity of purchase is complicated by banking requirements that involve providing first and last names, readers can still search for and acquire these titles without the exposure intrinsic to buying the material from a physical space. There is also no need for readers to identify themselves by name or gender in order to participate in reader communities.

Barss quotes *Star Trek* creator Rick Berman as saying, “Without porn and Star Trek, there would be no Internet.”<sup>100</sup> While pornography may have propelled the development of the tools that make up the e-marketplace, the *Star Trek* imagination helped broaden the possibilities vis-a-vis what the Internet could offer to non-commercial realms. Similarly, although *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Toraware no yoru*

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<sup>99</sup> Patchen Barss, *The Erotic Engine* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2010), 123.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 117.

reflect many disempowering characteristics, they have also established and solidified venues for online dissemination of women's erotic texts. These advancements in publication and distribution may facilitate and encourage the growth of a women's erotica that empowers through the content of its stories. This could simultaneously result in the availability of a broader and more subversive array of erotic writing, and threaten the publication norms of the type of women's erotica that aligns itself with romantic fiction.

When the ultra-powerful, omnipotent being "Q" encounters a young female of the same species on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, he warns, "If this child does not learn how to control her power, she may accidentally destroy herself... or all of you... or perhaps your entire galaxy!"<sup>101</sup> It remains to be seen whether the next generation of women's erotica will be bound within the restraints of patriarchy, or whether it will chart a new course, and wreak havoc on the galaxy.

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<sup>101</sup> "True Q," *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Paramount Television, October 24, 1992).



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