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ABSTRACT

Reading Yamada Eimi

by

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The Japanese novelist Yamada Eimi has published many controversial and popular books. As she herself lives openly and controversially in the same way that she writes, Yamada Eimi the person is often confused with the narrators of her stories. This essay is not only a reading of her texts, but also an analysis of how “Yamada Eimi,” the author, is embedded into these texts and then consumed by the reader.

Starting first with two examples of diametrically opposed readings by the North American critics Richard Okada and Kuwahara Yasue, I then outline my reading which falls somewhere in between Okada’s and Kuwahara’s. Several Japanese readings of Yamada’s writings indicate that Yamada creates her own world with its own value system and then draws the readers into this system. In Chapter One, a close reading of three of Yamada’s works shows that this system is an aesthetic code that defines the behaviour, dress and attitude of the female characters in the stories. Chapter Two then shows how this code is communicated to the readers. The homosocial “sister” relationships that allow this communication are also part of how the readers are drawn in. In Chapter Three I combine the aesthetic code with the “sister structure” to illustrate how the reader is also included in a sister relationship with Yamada Eimi. Back full circle, I then show how different readings of the same texts become possible.
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Either hailed as a sexually "liberated" woman writer, or panned for sexually colonizing African-American men, Yamada Eimi is frequently in the midst of controversy. That she is a talented and proficient writer is not usually debated; her bold and beautiful style is much noted and well appreciated, as indicated by the literary awards that she has received. By the same token, the awards that she has not received indicate the controversial aspects of the content of her stories. The critics, focusing mainly on the sexual aspects of Yamada's stories, tend to mark out two extremes -- liberation or exploitation -- and then choose sides. Everyone seems to be in agreement that both racist and feminist elements can be found in the sexuality depicted in Yamada's writing, yet critical debates are largely centred on deciding which element is dominant.

Richard Okada says that he reads "the contemporary and controversial Japanese woman writer Yamada Eimi 'like' a feminist and 'like' a male ethnic academic," indicating that he considers both race and gender issues (Okada 113). He also reads the relationships in Yamada's stories as Japanese women "othering" black men. Yamada uses stereotypes about black male sexuality (using "black men" as things to prove her sexual power) and therefore assumes a subject position "analogous to that of Said's Orientalist scholars" (117). This position is "white" because the object of her vision is "black," and we are reminded "that

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1 Yamada won the 1985 Bungei New Writer's Prize for *Beddo taimu aizu* (Bed Time Eyes), the 1987 Naoki Award for *Sōru myūjikku - rabōzu onri* (Soul Music, Lovers Only), the Hirabayashi Taiko Award in 1988 for *Fūso no kyōshitsu* (Burying Them in the Wind), and the 1991 Women's Literature Prize for *Torasshu* (Trash).

2 Yamada has been nominated for the Akutagawa prize three times (1985 for *Bed Time Eyes*, 1986 for *Jesshi no sebone*, and 1987 for *Chōcho no tensoku*) but has yet to win.
post-war Japan has positioned itself as a kind of 'West' to much of the non-Western world" (117). In short, Okada claims that Yamada assumes the role of coloniser when she has her characters have sexual relations with African-Americans. While he does admit that she might be seen positively as a "daring woman writer," overall, she is doing more damage than good. He explains that Yamada Eimi is not an individual woman but an "ojōsan," a leisured and affluent Japanese “princess” who has the power to consume "ethnic" men (119). Not only is she a "colonist," but she is also a failed lesbian: "There is nothing subversive in Yamada's primarily heterosexual mode, which actually serves to perpetuate patriarchal notions of sexuality...especially when the 'personal' desire she represents is to a large extent the product of a modernized image of sexuality that she simply relocates in trendy ethnic and subcultural contexts" (121). In describing relationships with black men (the trendy ethnic context), by taking the power to gaze at them, to other them, she is assuming a western (national) position. Furthermore, instead of subverting the status quo with lesbian love (the trendy subcultural context), because the female-female relationships are never consummated she ends up supporting patriarchy.

Kuwahara Yasue takes the opposite view. She finds that Yamada's work is extremely critical of the patriarchal status quo in Japan and that it gives women an active and independent sexual vision. She states that Yamada's characters choose black men because black men, unlike Japanese men, will accept strong women who are older and experienced and do not want to get married. Kuwahara seems to think that Yamada is using black stereotypes to strengthen her protest against the Japanese female stereotypes that discriminate against aspiring women, by making their rebellion more noticeable. Yamada allies herself with
black resistance: "Amy [sic] continues her struggle to be accepted as a human through her literary work. Amy's work exemplifies the feeling independent women have toward Japanese society today -- 'make me sick'" (Kuwahara 115).

I would argue that while these two positions are very different politically, they are very similar in logic. Both are based on a decision to champion either race, or gender and both assume that sexual positions can be pure (pure victim or pure victimizer). Whether it is post-colonial one-upmanship or feminist one-down, both arguments use the same vertical, black or white logic -- either eat or be eaten. The arguments are over the author's intention and the conclusions that the critics draw tend to tell you more about the critics' political agendas than Yamada Eimi's. Whether or not Yamada is inadvertently recreating stereotypes about sexual domination or using such stereotypes to make a point about stereotypes, as both Okada and Kuwahara have accurately pointed out, the stereotypes do exist in her stories. That there is not enough information in the texts to clearly decide who is dominating and who is being dominated is very telling. Leaving value judgements aside, that both arguments can be supported by the same texts is the basis, the starting point for my argument.

I think that it is possible to argue that the extreme positions are there for structural, as well as political reasons. The stories are set up so that the characters are never in one position for long enough to make them “pure” anything. The motion, the vacillation between extremes, creates a tension that drives the plot in most of her stories and, I would argue, rather than a static “or,” I think that the world that Yamada creates in her writing is based on a fluid “and.” The author and her characters live in a state of flux in the interstices, the “ma” (間) between the stereotypes. Drawing the readers into the system, she uses
the closeness between the main character's voice and the author's voice to play with her audience. This is made explicit in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Kneel Down and Lick My Feet*. One of the main characters, an s/m queen turned writer, like Yamada herself, talks to her mentor about how much she has learned through her work at the s/m club:

I actually have both 'S' and 'M' elements, too. I'm glad that I have enough self-awareness to see it. *I think that the people who aren't aware or who can't get in touch with it are probably incredibly boring people.* You can really see this in novels, I think.... *I think this is because [the writers] just don't understand how the mix of 'S' and 'M' elements, or delicate and rough emotions are combined inside people.* I think that it's necessary for everyone to understand the fact that, for example, there are people who can say 'kneel down and lick my feet' at the same time as there are people who can say 'please let me kneel down and lick your feet.' I absolutely want to be the kind of person who can say both of these things .... I wonder how many people there are in this world who are aware of the two elements within themselves and have managed to strike a proper balance. KD 303-4 [emphasis mine]

私にも、SとMの二つの要素がちゃんとある。それを自覚出来て、よかったと思うよう。それを知っていない人間、それに することの出来ない人間って、もしかしたら、うんとつまんない人じゃないかと思うんだ。小説にしたって、そう思うなあ [....] 人間の内には感情と乱暴な感情がどんなふうに組合わさっているか、解ってないか
According to this character, good interesting novels and good interesting people have both extremes -- rough and delicate -- and balance their expression. This kind of instability, or playing with roles, seems to make readers/critics uncomfortable (which may be exactly what the author is intending) at the same time that it attracts them. Yamada’s stories make the readers vacillate between love and hate, attraction and repulsion. The ambivalence created by Yamada’s writing has been noted by various Japanese critics. Kuritsubo Yoshiki states:

Satisfied with the warmth of a small family in a small house, carefully using the spare change, urged on by the larger forces, the petit bourgeois reader notes the difference between him or herself and the narrators in Yamada Eimi’s novels and feels yearning. If you think of the narrators as a kind of machine that makes the normal in people’s everyday lives seem different, it is easy to understand. People think that Yamada Eimi is the narrator depicted in the stories. As they vacillate between contempt and yearning, they slowly get caught up in the Yamada literary world. (Kuritsubo 136)
In order to make the readers question what normal is, they are made to feel excluded and different. They need to be convinced of the "value" of Yamada and her narrators' "culture," and then shown how they don't belong yet. While this subversion of the normal can be seen as liberating, it also creates different restrictions elsewhere. Yamada moves the lines, she does not destroy them. If you do not fit into Yamada's shoes, then you cannot fit into Yamada's world, even if you want to. The commentary by Junko Sakai in the paperback edition of Freak Show explains this alienation well:

I have never met Yamada Eimi but like all women who have ever read even one of Yamada Eimi's works, my head is full of images of her. I think that Yamada Eimi, while in the same world, must move in completely different circles, socialize with completely different people, and have completely different conversations than I do. Most of Yamada Eimi's readers probably do too. Why? Because after reading Yamada Eimi's Bedtime Eyes, I have and always will think of her as a cool, stylish person who knows how to
have fun. I have for a long while now, considered this fun-loving type of person with a complicated mixture of yearning, jealousy and fear. (FS 215)

The writer of this commentary does not consider herself sufficiently “cool” or “stylish” to live like “Yamada Eimi” does. She is measuring herself against the narrators, whom she assumes to be Yamada, and openly holds in high estimation.

This measuring, and the resulting feelings of inadequacy, indicate that Sakai has been drawn into the Yamada literary world. In this thesis, which is my reading of Yamada Eimi, I will first show what it is that readers, such as Sakai, measure themselves against. Following this is an
explanation of how this is communicated through the text. In conclusion, I will outline the different types of relationships readers have with Yamada Eimi's texts, and explain how some readers are drawn and why some are not. I have chosen to include the citations from Japanese sources in both English translation and in the original Japanese. I did not transliterate these citations because Japanese written in roman letters is an inconvenience to readers who can understand Japanese, and those who do not will not be reading the Japanese citation in any case. The Japanese characters on the page serve as a reminder that the novels being read are not English, and are not, for the most part, available in full translation. The spaces between the English and the Japanese are both literal and figurative. Only two of Yamada's books have been fully translated: *Hokago no kiinoto*, translated by Sonya Johnson and published as *After School Keynotes*; and *Torasshu* and *Jesshi no sebone*, also translated by Sonya Johnson, have been compiled and the translation published as *Trash*. The first chapter of the novel *Hiza mazuite ashi wo oname* has been translated as “Kneel Down and Lick My Feet” and published in a collection of short stories called *Monkey Brain Sushi: New Tastes in Japanese Fiction*. I have included Japanese citations for all texts that were originally written in Japanese. The English translations for *After School Keynotes*, and *Trash* quotations are Sonya Johnson's; in all other citations that have both Japanese and English, the translation is mine. Please note that abbreviations of the texts' Japanese title are used in citations in Japanese, while the abbreviations for English versions are a form of the translated title.
CHAPTER ONE  THE AESTHETIC

As mentioned above, the overriding theme of Yamada's work concerns how to have fun. The ideal woman -- in terms of physical appearance, clothes, hair, make-up, perfume, accessories, music, boyfriends, lifestyle, job, food, drink, and spoken language -- is systematically mapped out over Yamada's literary repertoire in the semi-journalistic, semi-confessional how-to tone of a fashion magazine. Like such magazines, "lifestyle" is defined not only in terms of tastes and goods consumed but also other behaviours and the requisite feelings, morality, attitude, and values. Taking details from various writings, it is possible to draw a composite picture of the ideal Yamada woman and her lifestyle. In *Hokago no kiinoto* (After School Keynotes), a collection of short stories that was, not coincidentally, serialized in a young women's fashion magazine called Olive, "the Way" is made much more explicit. True to its context, Yamada explains to high school girls how to be a cool stylish woman, like herself. The line separating Yamada from her readership (the measuring line) is drawn clearly between "adult" and "child" with both terms precisely defined. Even though the same aesthetic runs through all of Yamada's works, because the rules are made so patently clear in the stories in *After School Keynotes*, I quote from them extensively.

The most important aspect of what I consider to be Yamada's aesthetic, is a general tendency to combine opposites or extremes or to emphasize contrasts, contradictions or paradoxes for appreciation. The enjoyment of that which is not...
normally held to be enjoyable, such as sadness, pain or fear, or the enjoyment of
transgression (that which is not socially acceptable), is valorized. Describing the
relationship between a high school teacher and his student, the narrator of “Salt
and Pepa” in After School Keynotes states: “It was something that wasn’t
supposed to happen. And because of that, it was all the more beautiful.” (ASK 131) いけないから、よけいに美しく見えるという種類のものだった。(HK 141)

Beauty is often connected to sadness, as the girl having the affair with her
teacher explains to the narrator in “Salt and Pepa”: “You keep saying ‘beautiful,’
‘beautiful,’ but beautiful love brings sadness with it, too.” (ASK 142) あなた、素
敵素敵って言うけど、素敵な恋は、悲しい気持ちをいつも引きずっているのよ。(HK 153) In this passage, the Japanese word “suteki” (素敵) is translated by Sonya
Johnson as “beautiful,” but it can also mean “great” or “grand” and I have, in other
places in this thesis, used the colloquial “cool” as an equivalent because I think
that Yamada often uses it in a different context from words like “utsukushii” or
“kirei” which also mean “beautiful”. Beautiful sadness is a recurring theme, and it
is often used to poeticize or elevate what would otherwise be just another doomed
dead-end relationship. It seems to me that this exaltation of casual relationships
is being used to justify promiscuity -- call it serial monogamy, convince yourself
that you are in love, and everything is morally sanitary. Interestingly enough,

“Amy” and when written in English is spelled “Eimi” or “Amy” interchangeably. Both
eastern and western, Yamada’s new first name symbolizes not only that she has recreated
her “self,” but that she is a professional writer. The character for “Ei” in “Eimi” means “to
write poems” while “mi” means “beautiful.”

“Setsunai,” which can be translated as “sad” but is probably closer to a more literary “pathos,”
seems to be a favourite word of Yamada’s. She has edited a collection of short stories in Japanese
called Setsunai hanashi (Sad Stories) by a variety of western and Japanese writers such as Setouchi
Harumi, Tanabe Seiko, Murakami Ryuu, D.H. Lawrence, Camus, Miller and Baldwin. In an essay
that closes the collection she claims that experiencing “setsunai” feelings through reading stories is
an adult luxury. (S 382)
appreciating this sadness, or having experienced this sadness is described in one of the After School Keynotes stories as indicating maturity: “Sadness separated [sic] the women from the children.” (ASK 20)  悲しみは女を大人と子供に分ける。（HK 19） Yamada seems to use the word “kanashii” (sad) interchangeably with the word “setsunai” (see footnote 4) when she is describing the requisite feeling connected to falling in (properly doomed) love, which, in the following case, is eloquently described as, “the feeling you get when you’re in love of wanting to cry.” (ASK 128)  恋する時の泣きたいような気持。（HK 139） In many ways, Yamada’s aesthetic approach is very conservative and traditional. It is very closely connected to the “mono no aware” (sensitivity to pathos) aesthetic which is an intrinsic part of classical Japanese literature. The tradition prevails to the present day, and can be seen very clearly in “pure literature” (junbungaku). A very good example is Kawabata’s last novel, Beauty and Sadness. Yamada, though, puts a new spin on the age-old fascination with images of beautiful women destined to early ends:

[It] frightened me, not knowing much about things between men and women. And it also attracted me. It felt kind of dangerous, I thought. Even so, I was captivated in the same way a beautiful woman smoking a cigarette strikes you as elegant, even though you know it’s bad for the health. (ASK 13)

それは男と女のことをよく知らない私を恐がらせ、そして、ひきつける。少し、危ない気がする、と私は思う。それなのに、体に悪い煙草を吸う女が、柔軟に見えるのと同じように、私をとりこにしてしまうのだ。（HK 12）
Fear and attraction, danger and elegance (the word in Japanese is "suteki" again) are paired to produce what is obviously meant to be a positive description.

Following the "and" rule, it seems only fitting that Yamada would also enjoy breaking the traditions, or using traditional literary forms to valorize the radical or taboo. The ideal woman, the role model for the narrator, is a beautiful, mature, self-confident, independent, straightforward individual who knows what she likes and knows how to get it. Needless to say, this is not the traditional ideal woman in Japanese society or letters, and because it is at such variance with the norm, its glorification causes strong reactions. In readers, as per Sakai Junko, it causes ambivalence, or derision, but in the narrator/protagonist, it causes admiration:

Kana had no younger sister or any particular group of friends she went around with. She was always alone -- independent. She didn't suck up to anyone and no one pulled her strings. She didn't have any sticky relationships like that. God, she was tremendous. I was filled with admiration for her. Even people older than us need to entwine themselves around others in order to confirm their own existence. (ASK 11)

彼女は、妹のような存在や、どこかに連れだって歩く仲間のような友だちを持たない。彼女はいつもひとりで、独立している。他人に自分をすり合わせて、糸を引かせ
Kana is being extolled for a strong sense of self and the ability to survive outside the group. Uniqueness and difference are often praised by Yamada, and groups pose a threat to this kind of value system: “It was times like these I felt groups were frightening. From the outset, groups smothered the fact that there were people different from them.” (ASK 118) こんな時に、私は集団って、少し恐いと思う。自分たちと違う人間がいるという事実を初めから消してしまっているのだ。(HK 127) This individuality is usually connected to “maturity” (especially in After School Keynotes): “It made me wonder peevishly if maybe you had to wait until you were grown-up to have individual tastes.” (ASK 110) 大人にならないと個性なんて出て来ないものなのかしら、なあんで思ってしまった。(HK 119) Taste and style are key to being a unique individual according to Yamada. In and out of the stories, many of those who are excluded from the Yamada group, those who do not have taste or style, envy and dislike those who do. The narrators, while presently lacking the ideal attributes, are at least able to appreciate their value in a straight-forward manner:

They would all run Mari down behind her back at some time of other, but I liked her. Mari was every bit as frank and forthright as her style suggested. She was
the kind of girl who didn’t suck up to anyone and that’s why people got the wrong impression about her. (ASK 68)

有時々、マリの悪口を言ったりするけど、私は彼女が好きだった。彼女の格好を見ても解るとおり、彼女は、とても率直な女の子だった。だれにも媚びたりしない、だから誤解を招いてしまう、そういう種類の女の子だった。（HK 74)

There are types of girls, and certain types are good while others are unequivocally bad. Women who flirt, or “suck up to people” (媚びる、媚を売る “kobiru” or “kobi wo uru”) are of the very worst category in Yamada’s hierarchy of values. One of the narrators in After School Keynotes gets accused of trying to act adult because she was wearing perfume, and she responds indignantly: “The way I saw it, the fragrance of a morning shampoo was much more of a come-on. You felt like the person was making a production out of being natural and I didn’t like it at all.” (ASK 153)

Here, “kobi wo uru” is translated as a “come-on,” which very accurately reflects the derision with which it is used in the text. This word is used in a similar manner in other of Yamada’s works. The narrator in Kneel Down and Lick My Feet, who is very defensive about her value system, explains that she has had sex for money at various times in the past, but that she did not feel that it was wrong at all because she set her own limits; she only
slept with men she liked. To her, faking that you liked someone, ("kobi wo uru") was a much worse crime: "What I felt guilty about was not selling my body, but selling my favour." (HA 20) 定悪感を覚えたのは、体ではなく媚を売った時。(HA 20) Defining who you are by setting limits or creating your own morality is part of being “beautiful” (suteki).

As mentioned above, there is a proper way to fall in love. You must be aware of this before you start relationships: "In other words, a woman who isn't confident that it is all right to fall in love at any moment shouldn't go around liking anyone indiscriminately.” (ASK 151) 言い換えればね、いつ恋に落ちても大丈夫っていう自信のない女は、むやみに人を好きになくてちょっといけないんだ。(HK 164) There is also a proper way to fall out of love (which fits well into the justification of promiscuity model): “It's important for there to be a conclusion to love. We girls cannot proceed to a new love without putting an end to the old one. Love is a stern obligation for girls, requiring every ounce of our strength.” (ASK 101) 恋の結着をつけるって大切なことだ。私たち女の子は、前の恋をきちんと終わりにしないと次の恋に進めない。恋って、いつも、女の子にとっては全力投球のハードな義務なんだ。（HK 109）This applies when the girl initiates the parting process, “The smarter a girl is, the more she tries to end it simply.” (ASK 156) 賢い女の子ほど、あっさりした言葉だけで、関係を終にしようと思うんじゃないかな。(HK 170) There is even a proper method for dealing with getting dumped: “The girls I liked all dealt with being dumped quietly. They would dig a tiny grave in their hearts and gently, ever so gently, bury their love in it
Another part of the ideal woman's self-definition is the clothes, make-up, and accessories that she wears. But it is not in having certain specific brands of clothing or anything so obvious. It is not being part of the majority and having the confidence to pull it off that makes you beautiful. Having style means following your own values, not following the crowd:

Sometimes I felt our lives were dictated too much by details. Like working an after-school job because we want an outfit by such-and-such a designer. Or so-and-so is cool because she goes to such-and-such a boutique all the time. But aren't those simply subjective judgements? [But those are not words that come from your own value system --] Saying "that brand" or "such-and-such a boutique" -- that's pretty much a world where the majority rules. How many fabulous people would there be left around me, I wondered, if it weren't for such useless accessories? (ASK 82)

私たちの生活って、色々なディテイルによって動かされすぎているんじゃないとか、時々思ってしまう。たとえば、あそこのブランドのお洋服が欲しいからアルバイトをするとか、誰々は、どここそこのお店に出入りしているから格好がいいとか。でも、それは自分の価値観から出した言葉じゃない。「あそこのブランド」とか、「どこそここのお店」のようなので、ほとんど多数決の世界だ。
In order to be a true and fabulous individual, one must avoid being trendy ("torendi" is another of Yamada’s favourite derogative words). That Yamada counsels not to follow the fashion magazines like all the other girls is extremely ironic considering that Yamada is trying to start a new trend (the be-unique-like-me trend) through publishing her stories in a fashion magazine. Although she does not advocate any brand names or specific “looks,” she is equally prescriptive. It is as if the fictional aspect of the directives somehow makes them different.

Real style means that what you wear expresses your uniqueness, and once you have found that, you protect it. When the narrator of “Sweet Basil” asks the girl that she is jealous of what her perfume is, she refuses to tell: “It’s a secret. It’s a scent that suits me perfectly, so I don’t want anyone else wearing it.” (ASK 39)

In a very similar manner, likes and dislikes are tied to self-expression, and uniqueness:

Truly, one perfume dictated a lot of different things.
When I’d made that perfume my own, I’d be able to choose things I liked. After deciding on one’s likes and dislikes, as a final touch one chose a perfume to

---

5The opposite is apparently true too. When something you like becomes popular, you are supposed to stop using it. Yamada herself stopped using the perfume *Poison* after it got really trendy in Japan, as she says in the essay “Sutairu e no doryoku” (Trying for Style) in *Meiku mi shikku* (Make Me Sick) (MMS 208)
represent one’s essence. (ASK 152)

ひとつの香水は、実に色々なものを選択するんだわ。その香水を自分のものにした時、自分の好きなものは、おのずから決まって行くのだ。自分の趣味を決めてから、最後のエッセンスとして香水を選ぶ。(HK 166)

Not just perfume, but lipstick also symbolizes sexual maturity and self-confidence: “Without supreme confidence in the sparkle of one’s eyes, one couldn’t leave them bare while wearing red lipstick.” (ASK 97) 瞳の光に自信が持てなきゃ何も塗ってないとところに赤い口紅なんて引けやしない。だから、そういうことの出来る大人の女の人に、私はいつも憧れる。(HK 105) When her boyfriend is stolen by an older woman who wears red lipstick on a bare face, Kazumi, in the story “Red Zone,” is despondent until she realizes that one day she too will be an adult with the proper self-confidence for red lipstick:

I'm waiting for myself. When red lipstick looks good on me, I'll show you. I'll get Saeki-kun. I'll make him my own when my heart grows into its true, beautiful self. (ASK 105)

私、自分のことを待ってる。赤い口紅が似合うようになったら、サエキくんをものにしてみせる。とても素敵な心で彼を自分のものにする。(HK 113)
Again, the essential self is emphasized and is connected, along with consumer goods, to sexual maturity (however poetic).

Independent and strong women know what they want and like sexually also. This is marked by their gaze. While feminine (sexy), they act like men because they are aggressive. This contrast (between their outward appearance and their behaviour) is again depicted as stylish. In *Kneel Down and Lick My Feet*, Chika describes how she enjoys looking at "brothers" (African-Americans):

If there's a good looking man, I'll look at him like I'm licking him from head to foot. And I'll whistle or I'll wink at him. I'll also tell him that I want to sleep with him. It's honest. It's also aggressive. And the man will act as if it's completely natural for it to be this way. Women who are like men. I can't tell if this is progressive or regressive, but I don't think that it's bad for women like this to exist. (KD 40-41)

It is important to note here that being sexually aggressive does not preclude being “feminine”; the women described here are not trying to be men, but are only acting like them. The same character in *Kneel Down and Lick My Feet* who enjoys looking also enjoys being looked at:
I didn't spend money to get black men. I bought dresses and accessories to make them happy. It was really young of me, but it felt good to dress up and walk by them. They're so straight-forward, they'd all look at once. I could tell that their gaze was glued to my body. I wanted money so that I could taste that. (KD 102-3)

In After School Keynotes, as shown above, sexual initiation is often connected to the discovery of certain objects that symbolize entry into the adult (sexually active) world. Make-up, jewellery and various articles of clothing like sexy dresses, stockings, and high heels are regularly used as indicators of sexual maturity or availability, but you only really know that you've become a woman when a man notices: "It's fantastic to enjoy being a woman. Wearing an open backed dress with a slit up the side, having all the men turn around and look at you. Nothing could be more fun" (ASK 120-1). In Japan, because high school girls are not allowed to wear them, these objects are fairly standard "adult" markers, the wearing of which literally allows access to another world.
While Yamada Eimi is (in)famous for writing about sex, the sex scenes in her novels are not as explicit as her reputation would suggest. There are, however, many candid and titillating details strung together to evoke a kind of sexually charged atmosphere. These details tend to be highly visual, or fetishistic descriptions of certain objects or body parts (usually female) which appear repeatedly throughout all of her stories. Gold anklets showing off slim ankles, hands holding cigarettes or drinks, saliva, wrinkles on bedsheets, high heels, and lipstick stains lead to an aesthetic rather than pornographic experience of sex. The sexual scenes are not abstract or alienated (either temporally or spatially) from the rest of the narrative though. They are obviously describing sexual intercourse yet do not focus on mechanics. Not unlike romance stories, the basic details of the act are glossed or euphemized and affective or other circumstantial details are emphasized. The language that Yamada uses to describe such scenes is a combination of tersely beautiful Japanese and bold English smut. In many ways, this is reminiscent of Tanizaki and his foot fetish and the beautiful precision with which he balanced the tension of descriptions of shocking sexual transgressions with the anticipation of these events.

The writer, Chika, in Kneel Down and Lick My Feet states that she dislikes pornography because it shows too much. (KD 176) Books are better because with reading you can exercise your senses. (KD 177) She also draws a line between physical and emotional sex, or “sekkusu” and “meiku rabu”. Sex is like eating, sleeping and defecating -- an animal

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The impact of such words on Japanese readers is different than on native speakers. Instead of shocking the readers, English obscenities taken out of English context lend romantic aura -- not to mention authenticity.
function -- while making love is conceptual and special to humans. The writer Chika preaches to Japanese men who are obsessed with penis size: "You don't understand women's bodies at all [if you think that penis size matters to them.] If it is just moving your hips, it's the same as animals. If you're human, try having sex that uses your brains more." (KD 33) それでいいんだよ。解ってないね。女の体。腰、動かすだけなら動物と同じだよ。人間なら、もっと脳みそを使ってセックスしてごらん。(HA 33) When Chika is asked about the preponderance of sex in her novels, she replies that it is not sex, it is making love: "I'm not interested in sex. That's something that even animals can do. ... We should be doing what only humans can do, making love." (KD 169) 私は、セックスには何の興味もないよ。動物にだって出来るものだものね。... やっぱりねえ、人間でなければ出来ないメイラブをしなくちゃいけないよねえ。(HA 169)

Of course, Yamada contradicts herself by frequently connecting sex (organs and act) with food. The metaphor of sex as eating, as animals consuming or devouring each other is present in almost all of her stories. One of the more infamous lines from Bed Time Eyes is the description of her Afro-American lover's "dikku" (dick) as looking like her "favourite sweet chocolate bar." (BTE 10) 私は好物のスウィートなチョコレートバーと錯覚した。（BA 10）The parallels that Yamada draws between sex and other forms of consumption bring upon her charges of sexual colonialism. Because the

She does the opposite (eating as sex rather than sex as eating) in her essays. In the collection of essays called Watashi wa hen on doubutsu there are numerous examples. Essays such as "Oshii mono" (Delicious Things), "Fui shu furai ni ikou" (Let's Go to a Fish Fry), "Purofessonaru uitaa" (Professional Eater) and "oashi de meiku mi kamu" (Make Me Come With Chopsticks) are all about eating as a form of sexual self-expression, or just plain sexual pleasure.

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men that her narrators choose are often African-Americans she also gets accused of racism. If you focus on the act of choosing rather than the object chosen, the same phenomenon becomes liberating. If sex really were to become just another form of recreation (rather than patriarchy’s sacrosanct procreation), like wine, or books, or food, then sexual taste would be simply like other forms of consumption. Chika in Kneel Down and Lick My Feet takes her friend and co-worker Shinobu to a disco where Japanese women go to meet Afro-American soldiers. She justifies their actions and their view of the world:

But you know, if Japanese men came to a place like this they’d be really surprised. They wouldn’t be looked at as men. Well, because people have different preferences. I hope they don’t get depressed and keep trying though, because if there are women who say they like black men, there are women who only like white men, and there are lots of women who aren’t happy unless they’re with Japanese men. It’s a waste of time to curse the women here. Right? In the same way that people have different taste in food, there’s different tastes in men and women, that’s all. (KD 38)
Even though most of Yamada's stories are told from a woman's point of view, it is not always women eating men; a consuming-all love is reciprocal: “I guessed when they fall in love, men and women become something for each other to eat.” (ASK 61)

Consumption is not just oral, it is also visual (like reading books). Being looked at is like being eaten. The passive “being looked at,” as a self-confirming and enjoyable experience, can also be consumed: “I tasted all kinds of things on that island. Sweet sugar. Bitter living things from the ocean. Salty seawater. But the most delicious thing was that gaze of his on me.” (ASK 85)

In this case, “being looked at” is described using a positive noun, “his gaze,” and thus becomes something that can be tasted and judged delicious. Both “eating” and “being eaten” can also then become evidence of good taste. In the same time that “being eaten” can be self-affirming, it can also symbolize a loss of self because it means that someone else has control over you. Self is given and is simultaneously taken away, causing ambivalence:

Somehow I dreaded the idea of someone having that kind of influence over me. Eat me. I’ll eat you, so eat me. I wondered if when humans became adults they went back to being animals. After all, this whole
business smacked of cannibalism, did it not? I yearned for romantic love, but to have such grotesque desires be part and parcel of it[?] (ASK 62)

なんだから、そんなふうに他人に影響をあたえられてしまうのが恐ろしいような気がする。私を食べて。あなたのことも食べるから。そんなことを人生の中で言う時が来るのって問題だ。人間は、大人になると動物に戻ってしまうのかしら。だって、これって、まるで食肉人種の会話みたいじゃない？ロマンティックな恋には憧れるけど、それにそんなグロテスクな欲望がつままとうなんて。
(HK 66)

A very representative sample of the main oppositions that appear throughout most of Yamada's writing can be found in this passage: child and adult; sexual immaturity and sexual knowledge; self-control and sexual abandon; human and animal; mind and body ("romantikku" (romantic) love and "gurotesuku" (grotesque) desire). Again in a very representative manner, the oppositions are tied together with the narrator's fear and yearning (憧れ or "akogare") for the yet unknown sexual side. The ambivalence and vacillation caused by the conflicting emotions of fear and yearning are, as mentioned above, an intrinsic part of the plot structure. Assigning the various elements of the oppositions their values, or creating an aesthetic that maps out what is beautiful and desirable, draws the reader in and makes the plot possible.
CHAPTER TWO THE SISTER STRUCTURE

Underlying the aesthetic described in Chapter One is a system of relationships that allows this aesthetic to be communicated. One of the reasons for being beautiful is to attract men; stylish sex is something that a stylish adult woman has in Yamada's universe. One of the other reasons for being beautiful is to attract women; seeing envious looks (akogare) in the eyes of other women is the ultimate compliment. In order for anything to be stylish, it must, by definition, be seen or otherwise judged from outside. Stylish relationships require a third party. A structural constant, in Yamada's stories all couplings have a third party connected -- either a confidante, mentor, witness or even participant. This triangular structure tends to consist of two women and a man, though there are exceptions. Considering that social life in Japan is for the most part gender-segregated, this is not surprising. Heterosexual women spend a lot of time with their female peers.

The triangulation of relationships puts into clear relief another duality that is inherent in much of Yamada's writing -- that between sex as act and sex as sign. In most of her stories sex is divided into two components: having sex and talking about sex. As most of the sex is off the page (the reader only hears about it through the conversations of the narrator and a close female friend and does not actually get to "see") it is apparent that the sex itself is less important than what it stands for -- having the ability to choose, and the style to be chosen. In other words, with whom, when, where and in what manner the sex occurs is more important than the act itself (however pleasurable it may be.)
In this sense, sex is commodified. Considering that, for the most part, it is sex with black men that is being "sold", it is easy to miss the second half of the metaphor. Heterosexual sex is being packaged and dressed up by women to make it palatable and pleasing for women. It is not just rich spoiled Japanese women objectifying men, it is exclusive, stylized heterosexual sex in a sophisticated, educated, and demanding homosocial market. The competition is not over the men, for this is not a marriage economy; it is more an identity economy with competition over the expression of individual taste. It is easy to get distracted by the interracial, promiscuous, paid, or s/m sex, but the female-female relationships are the centre of the stories and the characters' lives. Attracting men of a certain size, shape or colour is something almost any woman can learn to do; impressing other women is infinitely more difficult.

*Hokago no kiinoto* (After School Keynotes)

The sister structure is very apparent in the stories in *After School Keynotes*. All of the stories are narrated in the first person and are centred around the relationship between the female narrator and a female friend. The gradual awakening of the narrator to the attraction of the adult sexual world forms the basic plot line which is revealed through the narrator's monologue which reports conversations between the narrator and her girlfriend. The narrator is always naive, yet incredibly sensitive and curious, whereas the girlfriend is worldly and detached from high school life, yet willing to divulge her expertise to the narrator. The relationship is always described in older sister - younger sister, or "sempai - kōhai" (senior -- junior) terms, even though in most cases the girls are
the same age, suggesting that there is a hierarchy within the peer group. The older sister/sempai is shunned by fellow classmates for being “different”, and it is the younger sister/narrator’s secret yearning for this difference, or sexual maturity, that draws them together.

In the story, “Body Cocktail”, the relationship between the narrator and a fellow classmate named Kana fits perfectly the description above. The narrator notices that Kana is quiet and somewhat distant from the other students, and this attracts her attention. When Kana reciprocates, the narrator can not quite believe or understand why she has been selected for the honour. She conjectures: “Anyone -- man or woman -- who likes you, really and truly, must look cute. I guess Kana thought I was cute. Anyway, she was kind to me.” (ASK 13) They talk often and a relationship is formed, but it is not between equals: “As I talked excitedly, my cheeks flushed. Kana looked at me with fondness, just like I was a younger sister.” (ASK 15) Part of being a younger sister is being privy to the older sister’s secrets. Kana tells the narrator all about her affair with an older man. Following the aesthetic, this relationship is already ending which makes Kana sad and all the more beautiful in the narrator’s eyes:

I liked looking at Kana. The other kids kept their distance because she was too mature, but my eyes would always fix on her. Whenever I looked at her, I felt I was reading a French novel. It was sweet, but it
wasn't sugary like candy. It was soft, but not like cream. And it was bitter, but it was different from the bitterness of chocolate. (ASK 20)

Again, being looked at is valorized, things are ambiguously different, and food is involved along with the adjectives “bitter” and “sweet.”

The narrator is often in a middle position between the precocious sexual *sempai* and the peer group. This makes her different and makes her stand out somewhat which is usually how a relationship with the older sister is initiated. In “Crystal Silence,” a group of girls at a coffee shop discuss their summer vacations. The narrator notices that the group is making fun of one girl, Mari, because she dresses differently (sexy rather than cute) and feels sorry for her: “I was the only one who was upset.” (ASK 69) 私は、ひとりだけあせってしまっていた。(HK 75) Only the narrator is sensitive enough to care and admonishes the other girls. In turn, this makes Mari notice the narrator: “Then she looked at me and smiled. She seemed well aware of my liking for her. My heart beat faster.” (ASK 70) そして、私の方を見て笑いかけた。彼女は、私が自分に好意を持っていることを充分に知っているみたいだ。私は、少しどこまきする。(HK 76) The *sempai*, Mari in this case,
sees the *akogare* in the narrator's eye and rewards her by sharing confidences about her “other” life as an adult woman. She lets the narrator be her friend, setting up a separate meeting after they leave the coffee shop. This thrills the narrator and prompts her to relate the following: “I wasn’t meeting a fastidiously dressed man, either. I was meeting a fabulous girl with a liberal length of leg showing under her shorts.” (ASK 70) それも、きちんととした格好の男の人とではなく、ショートパンツから僅しそもなく脚を出している素敵な女の子と会うのだ。 (HK 77) This shows that she is able to appreciate Mari's style, even if she could not yet imitate it. During the ensuing conversation where Mari tells the narrator all about her wonderful summer romance, the narrator asks why Mari thinks that she is different from the other girls in their class, and Mari answers: “I have a teeny bit more of a past than the other kids. I think in a little while you’re going to be really terrific.” (ASK 72) 私、他の子たちより、すこおしキャリアがあるもの。と思うだけさ、あんたもう少ししたら、すごく素敵な女の子になると思うよ。 (HK 78) The word used is again “suteki” and this is implicitly taken to mean “terrific like me.” In the meantime though, the narrator is told that she is good enough to hang out with Mari, even though Mari does not usually have girlfriends, because Mari wants to tell her story to “an intelligent girl who knows how to appreciate something beautiful.” (ASK 72) 美しいものを知る才能のある女の子に。 (HK 78)

The younger sister/narrator's role is often to listen, as she does not yet have her own relationships. In the story “Brush Up,” the narrator makes friends with Masami who has just returned to Japan from a childhood spent in the United States. Masami was getting tormented because she spoke English really well, and the narrator felt sorry for her: “I guess how I felt about Masami communicated
itself to her naturally. Masami would often talk to me about her problems and ask for advice. I'd listen and encourage her.” (ASK 47) そんなふうに思っていた私の気持ちが自然に通じたのだろう。雅美は、私によく相談をするようになった。私も、それを受け入れて、彼女を励ました。(HK 51) Masami compliments the narrator and explains why she has been chosen: “That's why I like you, you’re straight. You don't have prejudices.” (ASK 55) だから、あんたのこと好きなんだ。正直さき、ちょっと偏見がないもの。 (HK 59) At the end of the story, the narrator has completely turned to the stylish side, seeing her peers as immature and repressed because they overreact to a question about sex: “It occurred to me that these girls were lewder than Masami with her free and easy talk about sex.” (ASK 62) 淡々とセックスについて話をする雅美より、彼女たちの方が、ふと嫌らしいんじゃないかと思ったのだ。(HK 67)

Stylish girls know what is attractive. Part of the sister contract is that the older sister trains the younger sister in the details of fashionable love. The younger sister is chosen for this because she has shown promise. She, without knowing exactly why, is attracted herself to the older sister: “Kayoko knew things that I didn’t know. I looked up to her with a mixture of curiosity, admiration, and longing. Maybe that feeling was something close to love.” (ASK 143) 彼女は、私の知らないことを知っている。私は、そう思って、好奇心と憧れを混ぜて、先輩を見詰めた。それは、もしかしたら、恋に近い気持ちだったかもしれない。(HK 154)

Because these girls have never had a relationship with a boy, they often “sort of fall in love” with their female role models. The older sisters know that you cannot learn what attractive is (and by extension how to be attractive) without first
having felt attracted. Same-sex sexual initiation is thus a fairly common theme in Yamada’s writing. According to Yamada, boys just have to feel, they do not need to know. Girls though, through a combination of instinct (talent) and instruction, learn “the way”. Thus boys and girls have different standards: “But these girls would be able to accept it if the girl they lost their boyfriends to was really terrific, in other words, if it was to a girl even a girl would consider wonderful.” (ASK 108)

The girls, the normal average members of the peer group, often ostracize the heroine (the older sister figure) because she has actual physical relationships with boys rather than romantic “crushes.” In one of the stories, “Jaywalk,” the older sister is not a quiet demure type, and she calls her peers on this contradiction:

So what’s so weird about being attracted to the opposite sex, huh? You people pretend you don’t get the hots, but you have boyfriends. If your love is so pure, why don’t you have girlfriends instead? Why does it have to be a man, huh? You guys should put that in your cud and chew on it. For a woman, getting interested in a man signals the beginning of her heat. Let me put you straight. That’s not dirty or anything. It’s natural. And wanting to sleep with the person you like is wonderfully romantic. (ASK 121)

8The translation is inaccurate. It should read: [If love] was just about emotions then your phony little friendships would be good enough. If you ask me, the way you all fuss or moon from a distance over some guy you think is cute is really disgusting. Why does it even have to be a guy, huh? Think about that one.
The argument here is over the definition of romantic. This shows how the narrator is in-between because she romanticizes the older sister in the same way that the peer group romanticizes male-female relationships. It also shows how the heroine is able to overcome another set of extremes, the mind-body split in this case. The heroine just redefines romantic as the contrast of mind and body.

*Hizamazuite ashi wo oname* (Kneel Down and Lick My Feet)

In the full-length novel, *Kneel Down and Lick My Feet*, the triangular structure is also apparent although it differs slightly from *After School Keynotes*. There are two main characters, Shinobu and Chika, and the story revolves around their relationship. Shinobu is the narrator and the “older sister,” while Chika is “the younger sister.” Both women have relationships with men (past and present) that they tell each other about but Chika is the stylish one and Shinobu is the foil:
"I have normal morals so I get flustered by the outrageous things that Chika sometimes says." (KD 272) 私は、普通のモラルの持ち主だから、ちかの時々口に出す、とびな言葉には、そのたびに慌てちゃう。（HA 272） The irony of this is that they are both sex-workers -- they met while working at a strip club and the novel begins with Shinobu introducing Chika to a job at an s/m club. Even though Shinobu has had the same boyfriend for years and is strictly monogamous (outside of work), she is not what anyone would ever expect the possessor of normal morals to be. She has already called into question the definition of "normal" though: "After seeing as many so-called perverts as we have, you can't help wondering what the hell 'normal' is." (KD 11) 私たちみたいにこれ程大勢のいわゆる変態たちを見てもっと、いったいノーマルって何なんだろうと思っちゃう。（HA 11）

Shinobu plays the naive narrator well though, providing the straight talk that accentuates Chika's stylish transgressions. After Chika explains why she spent money buying clothes to impress black men, Shinobu comments: "I said to Chika that that was all fine and everything, but that I thought that it made you happier to be loved by just one man." (KD 103) それよか、ひとりの男に愛されてる方が幸せだと私は思うけどなあって私はちかに言う。（HA 103）

It is also ironic that the roles are reversed. The younger sister is the one who introduces the aesthetic while the older sister, as the possessor of very similar values, is empathetic. Whenever Chika has a new conquest/disaster to show off, she runs to Shinobu. When Chika phones up and needs to talk, Shinobu kicks her boyfriend out of bed and sends him home. He gets jealous and Shinobu explains to him: "Sorry, sometimes female friends are more important than men." (KD 26)
He worries that he is being replaced in bed by Chika, but he does not need to because Chika is clearly interested in talking only. She uses her male friends for physical comforting:

It is precisely times like this when male friends are good. I told everything to this guy that I've known for a long time -- even moaned about wanting to die. So he slept with me. Male friends are great because they can do this for you. This is part of the reason why I talk to my female friends after I've calmed down. Even though I am exposing my insides to them, I can't share physically with them because I'm not gay. (KD 272)

True to form, there are almost no sex scenes after the first chapter, which, ironically, is the only part of the novel that has been translated into English\(^9\). The first chapter leaves a very lasting impression though, as it is a graphic description of Chika's first day at the s/m club. It provides perfect contrast and lends authority to the remaining thirteen chapters which consist entirely of Chika and

Shinobu's discussions about sex, morality and the writing of stories about sex and morality. The social commentary is sharp and bitter and is made all the more so by the fact that Yamada herself has worked in an s/m club and that the novel is considered to be "semi-autobiographical." Shinobu explains why she thinks her job is valuable to society: "I like this job. I think that it is the pinnacle of the service industry. I feel like a therapist." (KD 196)

Chika, too, discusses how she feels that she has learned a lot from working in the s/m club, and that this has affected her writing: "The interesting thing [at the s/m club] is that people who have a really strong 'S' component also have an equally strong 'M' component. I was really interested in the instant where one crosses into the other." (KD 302)

Whether or not Chika, as a writer, is meant to be taken for Yamada herself, this quote very neatly encapsulates the Yamada aesthetic; it denotes two extremes and an interest in switching between them. In a sometimes bitter and cutting play on the contrast between sex as act and sex as sign, the novel is structured around two young, beautiful, single, and happy commercial s/m queens telling stories to each other about their sexual experiences and discussing the current state of sexual ethics in Japan.

*Beddo taimu aizu* (Bed Time Eyes)
**Bed Time Eyes** is Yamada’s first book, and perhaps the best known. It caused a commotion when it was first published, perhaps because it won the Bungei New Writer’s prize despite the language used to describe the sex scenes and the interracial relationships which were very shocking at the time. While the public may have just gotten used to Yamada’s themes and language, it seems to me that **Bed Time Eyes** is slightly more graphic and contains more English slang than any of her following publications. The most interesting feature of the movie version (which, incidentally, never did very well) was that the conversations between the narrator and her African-American lover were in English with Japanese subtitles. It did not matter that the heroine’s English was barely comprehensible as just the fact that it needed subtitles made it incredibly stylish.

The triangular structure in **Bed Time Eyes** is in many ways a much more traditional lover’s triangle. The narrator, Kim, is not in the middle between the reader and the role model, she is in the middle between her man and her mentor. The narrative stays close to Kim and is not split into a Glaucon - Socrates pseudo-dialogue as in **Kneel Down and Lick My Feet**, or **After School Keynotes**. There is a didactic element to the story, it is just not directed at the reader. While the story seems to be about Kim’s relationship with an African-American soldier, Spoon, everything that happens is carefully measured against Kim’s relationship with her “older sister,” Maria. It does not read as a “how-to” book, but rather outlines Kim’s growth to selfhood and her separation from her “sister” through her relationship with Spoon.

The story starts at the end. The reader is told that the narrator’s relationship with Spoon is over and that Maria will not explain things. The story then moves to the past, and the Spoon - Kim - Maria triangle unfolds. In what
appears to be a fairly common marketing technique, the first chapter is a graphic
description of Kim and Spoon’s first sexual encounter (which is also their first
meeting). Immediately following this, though, is the description of Kim’s
subsequent visit to Maria to tell her about Spoon.

Maria works at a strip club, and as Kim is waiting for Maria to finish work, she watches Maria’s show:

As soon as I saw Maria’s pussy as she opened her legs
to the blues music, I would get overwhelmed by the
sense of its existence. Sometimes, thinking about how I
sell my own for a cheap price, I would fall into self-
hate. What was between my legs didn’t even come
close to what was between Maria’s -- mine would never
be “art.” I all of a sudden remember what Spoon spray-
painted on the bathroom wall, “PUSSY IS GOD!!!”
(BTE 18)

ブルースの流れる中で足を開くお姉さんのブッシュを見
る度に私はその存在感に圧倒される。時々、自分のそれ
をチープな値段で売ってしまう私を思い、私の足の中
にあるものはマリア姉さんの足元にも及ばず、決して私の
それはアートにはなり得ないと自己嫌悪に陥る。私はふ
とスプーンがパステルームにスプレーした落書きを思い出
す。PUSSY IS GOD!!! (BTA 18)

This passage clearly indicates that Kim is caught between Maria’s world (“pussy
as Art”) and Spoon’s (“pussy as God”). That she feels inferior or unable to live up
to either of their expectations is also evident. Kim’s lack of self-confidence is the
major theme of the novel. Kim’s state of self-confidence is intrinsically connected
to her relationship with Maria:

Maria’s act was the same as the tests I studied for back when I still had expectations for a future. I would think ‘this time I’ll do it,’ but as soon as the answer sheet was in front of me I would start to shake for some reason and couldn’t grip my pencil. Then, when the test was returned, I would look at it and lose my confidence all over again. (BTE 19-20)

マリア姉さんのステージは、昔、少しは将来に期待を持っていた頃の試験勉強に似ている。今度はいい点がとれそうだ。けれど答えを目の前にして私は何故か震えてしまい、鉛筆がうまくつかめない。そして、返って来た答え用紙を目の前にして私は自信を再び失くすのだ。（BTA 19-20）

The exam metaphor, and the failure cycle show Kim’s inability to break away from Maria’s authority. Kim is always measuring herself against Maria, and coming up short. This leaves her completely dependent on Maria: “Always, when it seemed like I was about to love a man, I would beg her to love him with me, because doing it alone was terrifying.” (BTE 21) いつも私は男を愛そうとする時、彼女に懇願して来たから。一緒に彼を愛して。ひとりじゃこわいの。（BTA 21）The fact that she has always needed Maria (her teacher) to “proofread” her sexual relations has had profound effects on her self-image: “I felt like I was deformed.” (BTE 21) 自分を不具者のように感じた。（BTA 21）With Spoon though, things

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10The names themselves hint at the women’s roles. Maria suggests a mother figure, while Kim, a diminutive of Kimiko, is very child-like.
change. Kim, surprising even herself, does not want Maria to sleep with Spoon. She is still not sure of herself, or why this time is different, but attempts to tell Maria anyway. Maria appears to understand: “Anyways, you’re saying that, this time, I don’t need to be your strange counsellor.” (BTE 25) と taxonomy 今回は、あなたのかんなカウンセラーにならなくてもすむってわけね。 (BTA 25) Again the relationship between Maria and Kim is described in didactic terms.

The teacher/student metaphor is extended through the novel. The next time she meets Maria, Kim realizes that their relationship has been profoundly altered by her feelings for Spoon: “Maria -- my textbook. It’s strange, but I didn’t want her grading him like she did the men before.” (BTE 63) マリア姉さん、私のデキストブック。けれど不思議な事に私は彼を採点してもらいたくなかった。昔のようには。 (BTA 63) It is clear that Kim is starting to resist her role as little sister/student. This resistance, or self “growth” is described simultaneously as “breaking up” and “graduating,” indicating a connection between the erotic and the pedagogic: “Just like breaking up with a man, I felt kind of sad. ‘Give me my diploma,’ I muttered in my heart.” (BTE 63) まるで男と別れる時のようなで私は少し寂しくなった。卒業証書をちょうだい。私は心の中でつぶやいた。 (BTA 63) Kim herself draws parallels to her relationship with Maria and her relationship with Spoon: “She taught me lots of things, just like you do. She’s pretty isn’t she?” (BTE 64) 彼女は私に色々な事を教えてたわ。まるで、あんたが私にそうするように。 綺麗な女でしょう？ (BTA 64) Not only does Kim draw a parallel between the didactic and the erotic, she draws Spoon's attention to Maria, creating the very triangle that she is trying to avoid.
Evocative of *junbungaku* (pure literature) where the mother/son relationship is strongly eroticized, in Yamada’s texts, forms of *amae* relationships such as the teacher/student relationship, or the older sister/younger sister relationship are eroticized. By not defining the women in terms of maternal roles, Yamada avoids the trap of “women’s stream writing” (*joryūbungaku*) or becoming the alter-ego (“other”) of pure literature where women define themselves in terms of their roles as eroticized mothers or wives. This allows women to have the active role, the subject or the narrative position. In this case, the already openly and literally erotic relationships are described in pedagogical terms, in an extended metaphor.

The point at which Kim finds her two teachers in bed with each other is the point at which she starts to form her own identity. First, she feels jealousy: “I got a strong taste of the jealousy that up till now I had never known.” (BTE 70) 今まで私が持った事のない嫉妬という感情を強烈に味わった。（BTA 70）A series of “firsts” leads to a series of life-changing realizations for Kim. Because of the jealousy that she feels, she gets angry at Maria and calls her “anta” (you-informal) for the first time: “It was the first time in my life that I called her using a term of equality.” (BTE 74) 生まれて初めて私は彼女を「あんた」という対等の呼び名で呼んだ。（BTA 74）The realization that she could be equal to Maria causes her to review her dependency on Spoon too: “I realized now that the self-satisfaction that I got from being controlled by Spoon could really be nothing other than the satisfaction of owning Spoon.” (BTE 74) スプーンに支配されているという自己満足は実はスプーンを所有しているという満足にほかならなかった事に今、私は気づいた。（BTA 74）She is then able to ruminate on the concept of dependence itself. She realizes that an inferior state, is also an easy state because it is free of
responsibility: “I would always get intoxicated by her eyes and then see my own ugliness. I would put my men in her hands, ask her to check them for me and rest easily in my inferiority.” (BTE 75) 私はいつもこの目に酔わされ自分の醜さを思い、自分の興った男を彼女の手に委ね、確認を頼み、自分を劣等生のように感じ安息を得た。（BTA 75）She learns that she has tried to replace her dependency on Maria with a dependency on Spoon because she has not, till this point, noticed that she “needed someone to lead [her].” (BTE 75) 指導者を必要としていた。（BTA 75）

The next step in Kim’s self-education occurs when she starts to question both Maria’s and Spoon’s intentions and motives. Once she notices that she was looking for someone to lead her, Kim no longer understands what “I love you” means. Kim asks Maria why, and Maria explains that it is because Kim is in the middle, not Spoon. Maria’s erotic interest in Kim is made explicit. Even though finding Maria and Spoon in bed together is a big deal for Kim, Spoon is very nonchalant. His attitude indicates to Kim that she is just another love affair. Now that she knows Maria has been nice to her because she is sexually interested, she worries about what it means for Maria to be in bed with Spoon: “I couldn’t bear to think that the situation with Maria -- where I had yearned for her so much, and had even at one point desired her -- could have been [trivial] like that too.” (BTE 77-8) 私のあれほど憧れ、一度は切望した事すらあるマリア姉さんとの情事が、そんなものだったなんておもしろくなかった。（BTA 77-8）Maria alleviates these fears by saying, “I love you Kim.” (BTE 78) 愛しているのよ、キム。（BTA 78）Kim is shocked because she had believed that the relationship was one-sided. Kim had been sexually attracted to Maria also: “I couldn’t believe my ears. The woman I had yearned for so long said the words that suited her the least.
Moreover, she said it after I had stopped loving her.” (BTE 78) Japanese critics do not seem to find Maria and Kim’s relationship to be an issue. I am not sure if they are unwilling to see it as a lesbian relationship, or that they are just assuming Kim to be heterosexual overall. While heterosexual initiation through same-sex relationships may not be so unusual in gender segregated Japan, it is hard for western critics to conceptualize. Richard Okada sees it as failed lesbianism:

But rather than allow the lesbian potential to effect a fundamental transformation in Kim’s relationship with Spoon -- or in attitudes concerning sexuality and sisterhood -- the narrator retreats, again, into stereotypes: in a climactic scene, Sister Maria confesses her love to Kim when Kim finds her in bed with Spoon. As a result, even though women can occupy the position of ‘actor’ as well as ‘acted upon’ in Yamada’s texts, the female-female bond that could have further complicated the Kim-Spoon relation is left basically unexplored. (Okada 118)
I disagree. I think that if the aesthetic and the sister relationships are there to provide a self that defines fun, and allows for relationships that are not permanent -- letting people define their own sexual taste, and control their own bodies -- then the lesbian relationship between Kim and Maria has not "failed." Okada's view of a "successful" relationship as one that involves intercourse seems very phallocentric to me. Perhaps in Yamada's economy, sexual consummation counts for less than sexual consumption, which would make the labels "heterosexual" and "homosexual" simply a matter of taste, like interracial or s/m sex.

Development of an individual sense of taste is part of becoming an adult according to Yamada's aesthetic. Kim notes that for a strong person like Maria, both loving and crying were humiliating. She then states that: "I [am] glad that I have absolutely no resolve and am a failure as a person." (BTE 80) 私は忍耐強いのまったくない出来そごないの人間である自分を有り難く思った。(BTA 80) This is a very important turning point for Kim. Although she ironically defines herself as a "failure," it is apparent that she has finally re-evaluated the standards that Maria is setting, and decided that she does not want to live "up" to them. She has become a "self" in her own right.
CHAPTER THREE CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the aesthetic and the "sisters" who live and learn by it lies another level of relationships: those between the reader and the text, the reader and the narrator, and the reader and the author. Simultaneously giving and taking away, the aesthetic shows the readers what they are not while the sister structure teaches what they could become. Like a fashion magazine, Yamada's stories sell self-doubt; they make readers feel bad about themselves at the same time that they give them a self to feel bad about. The readers are thus drawn into a cycle of never-ending self-improvement whereby the expression of self becomes part of the consumption that creates the self.¹¹

The reasons why readers are drawn in are myriad and complex. On a fundamental level, the Yamada aesthetic plays on basic insecurities. Readers have to want or have wanted to some degree at some time to have uninhibited fun. This includes wanting to be beautiful, popular, or sexually desirable. It encompasses fluency in a foreign language and confidence about what to wear, what to drink, what to say. To be a reader who does get drawn in, you have to have known what it feels like to be self-conscious and to not fit in, to feel ugly and undesirable, to be alone and bored, or, in short, to be at home on the weekend reading a novel instead of going out and having your own good time. Yamada

¹¹Pasi Falk, in his book The Consuming Body, explains that this kind of consumerism is a result of modernity and urban lifestyles. He talks about clothes and other signs that concern bodies:

The public-social part of the city, especially its street life, forms a stage on which people perform to one another as façade bearers. Outward appearance, exterior and outlook act as a means of expression. The body and 'the body's body', that is clothing, now act as expressions of social and personal identity, but at the same time also as creators of identity. (Falk 54)
captures these feelings -- the desire and the derision the desire produces -- and harnesses them into a kind of perpetual motion machine. As the characters move from paroxysms of pleasure to the pits of despair and back and forth again, the readers too enjoy their own agony. The lifestyle of the beautiful ones is held out like a proverbial carrot making the readers feel hopeful and hopeless all at once.

The gap between the extremes, and the motion between, has been noted by Kuritsubo Yoshiki. He calls this motion a “drift” and conjectures that it is caused by the characters’ need to repair a mind/body split, or the need to focus on the difference between loving and being loved. With specific regard to Bed Time Eyes he states:

[The narrators confession about how she can love but is unable to be loved] is where the drift starts. An empathetic reader cannot help but pay close attention to the heroine’s gaze, and what she is staring at -- the gap that flows along the bottom of the monologue form. It is possible to say that what draws us to Yamada Eimi’s novels is the sense of difference that she is focusing on and the feelings of agony that they produce. (Kuritsubo 133)

そこから漂流が始まっているのである。心ある読者は、丁寧にその独白の形式の底に流れる＜隙間＞を凝視するヒロインの眼差しに注目せざるを得ないであろう。彼女が視つめている差異の感覚と、そこから生ずる身悶えのような感覚、私たちが山田詠美の小説にひきつけられるのは、それらのせいであるといっている。(Kuritsubo 133)
Seeing the gap in terms of mind and body extremes adds a very interesting twist to the aesthetic and sister structure. Aestheticizing sexual relations effectively turns a bodily experience into a cerebral one. The narrator in the novel Trash explains this well. She notices that the women she knows are all trying to bridge the gap between physical pleasure that ends, and an affective pleasure that should last forever:

No matter how many loves her friends went through, they shut their eyes to the fact that love, especially passionate love, always came to an end. They’d see the guy over and over, even when it wasn’t fun any more, always thinking there was a ‘soul connection’ with this man that would keep them together forever. (T 27)

Unable to reconcile the mind/body split the women construct a very complicated method for getting around their needs (which may be a need to justify behaviour that feels good but is “immoral” or perhaps even a need to justify heterosexuality in a homosocial environment). They set up an economy, a sisterhood, consisting of relationships with men that produce stories, dramas, or emotions which are then consumed by their female friends:
As she met more and more people, she selected some men for serious loves and a few women for friends to talk to about them. These carefully chosen confidantes were fine women who shared a liberal worldview with Koko. Her lovers were progressive, modern men. They'd share good times and a few tears. When love ended, Koko would confide to a woman friend, tears in her eyes, about how wonderful it had been. 'I took a lot and I gave a lot,' she'd say. 'We're even.' Her friend would listen earnestly, then say, 'He's not a bad guy. You two just weren't meant to be, that's all. You didn't have that soul connection.' (T 27)

It is easy to get distracted by the sex (or talk thereof) but setting aside content, it remains that the central structure of the narrative is provided by the female relationships. Whether or not the relationships between the women are sexually
consummated, it is indisputable that the female relationships are as important to
the aesthetic as the male lovers. It is not unlike Japanese tourists taking
photographs of themselves at famous places around the world. They spend very
little time there, but afterwards spend hours looking at the photos, showing them
to friends, and enjoying their vacations in retrospect. In this model, sex becomes
production not consumption. The sisterhood that is created has many possible
readings also. It could be a black sisterhood where the men come and go and the
women support each other. It could be feminist solidarity against patriarchal
oppression (they just create their own world and meet their own needs). It could
also be female amae -- a kind of Dead Poets' Society for women replete with
homosexual underpinnings -- which, with its inherent eroticism, would make it a
form of lesbian sisterhood.

The sisterhood works because the reader is implicated. This is where the
hope comes in. Basically a didactic structure, the “older sister,” in telling her story
to her carefully chosen apprentice, teaches the “younger sister” who then passes
the teaching on to the reader (a carefully chosen apprentice?). The aesthetic is
transmitted twice. The readers believe what has been taught (and feel the
balancing hopefulness) because they know that Yamada Eimi lives according to
the aesthetic. Yamada is married to an African-American military officer, she
lives near an American base in Japan, she has been a bar hostess, she has worked
in an s/m club, and she has had an African-American boyfriend who was arrested
(Spoon's end in Bed Time Eyes) which she has confirmed herself in numerous
interviews and essays that, along with photos showing that she dresses as per the
characters in her novels, have been published in reputable mainstream
newspapers and magazines. Yamada has worked very hard to create a public
persona, and this is sold along with her novels.

This is most evident in the “semi-autobiographical” Kneel Down and Lick My Feet. Chika, the character who is the writer, responds to a comment about how writers are noble and above the everyday world:

Ha ha, isn't that more like, pretending to be noble?

Everybody has to eat, and everybody wants to be admired. I never believe the people I see who talk big about how they write novels for self-this and self-that. I mean, if that were really true, then they'd never bother to haggle with editors over deadlines, it'd be enough just to sit alone and write depressing novels that nobody else would ever want to read. I think that writing is the kind of job for people who really want to stand out -- for their inward qualities and not their outward appearance. I think writers want to stand out much much more than the people who try to stand out by dressing up. And they also really hate to be told so. I don't mind though. I want to show everybody what I have inside me. I want to tell all kinds of people how I see things [...] everything I write has to be read by people. (KD 166-7)

あはは、高尚な振りしてるだけなんじゃないの？誰だって食ってかなきゃならないし、認められたいと思ってる皆だよ。自己の何とかとかととかのために小説を書くなんで、ごたいそうなごと言う人見ると、私なんか、へって思っちゃう。思うだけだし、作家って、すごく目立ちたがりの人間がなる職業じゃないかな。それでも、外面じゃなくて、中味で目立ちたいっていう、ね。派手な格好をして、目立とうって思う人達より、はるかに目立ちたがりの人種だと思うよ。でも、そう
It does not matter if this voice is really Yamada Eimi's or not because readers "learn" that there is an author behind what they are reading who is communicating her insides to them. They are made to see "Yamada Eimi" as they are taught their role as reader. Texts are Yamada Eimi's playroom and she, the author, is the queen, the dominatrix. Her values, her tastes, her aesthetics rule between the covers. She is on every page, larger than life, telling the reader what to think, what to do, how to act in order to be like her. You cannot read her texts without reading her along with it; the author's image is imprinted everywhere. Whether or not Yamada is the narrator or the older sister or some combination of both, the readers know that they are meant to be the younger sister to the author. That this author is not exactly Yamada Eimi, but is something that Yamada Eimi is constructing through writing, is part of the aesthetic that she is selling. Readers take it in hope that they too will eventually be able to write themselves.

Somewhere in the gap between the narrators in the stories and the writer is the self that Yamada Eimi is expressing. Foucault calls this self the "author-function" rather than the "author" to separate it from the (physical) writer. He explains this in his essay, "What is an Author":

51
Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, nor the present indicative refer exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he [sic] writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him [sic] with the fictitious speaker; the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance. (Foucault 152)

Because of the I-novel tradition and a long history of biographical literary criticism, Japanese readers are trained to look for the author-function in fictional stories. The details of the writer's life are part of reading. That they do separate the author from the writer is apparent more in the way that the experiences are separated out from the writing of them than in any direct reference to an "author-function." In Yamada Eimi's stories, this separation is made explicit; the same way that the characters in the stories have sexual experiences (fun) and then tell their friends about it, Yamada

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I-novels are an autobiographical fictional form that began in the Taisho period after the introduction of Western novel forms (and the Western concept of the self) to Japan. Edward Fowler has written extensively on the I-novel form and he explains how the focus on the writer's personal life came about:

Writers now faced the task of formulating a new poetic vocabulary and repository of associations on which to draw. Unable to rely any longer on the 'worlds' and associations of classical literature nor in any coherent way on an alien literary tradition, they began exploring the possibility of using their own lives as 'world.' Once the writer established his persona as a legitimate subject of literary discourse, he was working, as far as he and his audience were concerned, with familiar material and could allude to it in subsequent works in the knowledge that readers would be conversant with it. This 'world' gained further legitimacy as its author gained a name; and personal experience, as presented in the work, became part of the public literary domain. Fowler 21
Eimi has fun (sexual experiences) and then writes about it.

A very good example of this is in Sakai Junko's comments on her reaction to Yamada's collection of short stories *Freak Show*. After reading the story, "Lucy," in which the narrator learns how to do the disco scene and is rewarded with an opportunity to sleep with an African-American man, Sakai says that she realized that if given the same opportunity, she too would take it. This is a revelation for her because she has always looked down on people like Yamada Eimi and the narrator of "Lucy" for their taste in men. This long citation illustrates most of the main points mentioned above. Sakai writes about the difference between her and the Yamada types (the author-function), explaining her jealousy and why she likes to read stories that make her feel jealous:

At this point, I feel better about these beasts [women who are good at getting men] that I both aspire after and am jealous of. I am the same as they are, except that they can say "I want..." when they want something, and can get it by decorating themselves and speaking English. People who can express their feelings openly are usually the object of envy of people who can't. [...] That's why Yamada Eimi is envied so much. She's chic and has fun. Then she puts it neatly into words. Of course I felt jealous while I was reading *Freak Show*. Probably other people who want to have fun, and who want to write feel jealous too. But somehow the jealousy is pleasurable. It feels good to have my unreleased [desires] pointed out by the voice at the edges of the text saying, "Look, you want to do this, don't you." [...] We're jealous because even though
we look up to her, she doesn’t look back at us. That Yamada Eimi is fully aware of our looks and our jealousy and still doesn’t look back makes me even more jealous. (FS 218)

Sakai carefully distinguishes between wanting to act like “Yamada Eimi” (the author-function) and wanting to write as Yamada Eimi (the physical writer) does. Both are connected to self-expression though. The different levels of jealousy that Sakai outlines above correspond to the different levels
of self-expression in the Yamada world: the self that has experiences (the sex with men, the sex with black men); the self that talks about such sex (the conversations with girlfriends); the self that writes about such conversations (the narrator); and the self that writes about writing them (Yamada Eimi) which creates the self that also writes about how to have the experiences ("Yamada Eimi"). It turns completely around on itself -- as does the self-improvement cycle -- in perfect contradiction calling into question that which it proves.

This brings my argument back full circle also. The racism is not in having sex with black American soldiers as the liberation is not in wearing red Chanel lipstick; the "othering" and the "selfing" are in the writing and the reading, the producing and consuming of these signs. Both sides are there in the same story. The way you call it, whether you see it as racist, liberatory or even as not worth reading, depends on who you are when you read (the reader-function) which may or may not be who you (the reader) "really" are. Of course, what you read could change who you are.
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